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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:30 A.M. EDT

OCTOBER 18, 1976

MONDAY

MR. NESSEN: I want to hurry because I want to get over to the Medal of Science ceremony. It is at noon in the East Room. The President is planning to have some remarks at that time about the large number of Nobel prizes that have been awarded to the United States, and I think it might be something you want to hear.

Q Does he take credit for it?

MR. NESSEN: The other public event for today is the swearing-in of Edward Aguirre as the new Commissioner of Education.

Just to keep you posted on where we stand with the large number of bills that Congress sent to the President just before adjournment, there are 80 now remaining to be acted on. The deadlines are the 23rd for 78 of those bills.

Q How many of those are private bills, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have a breakdown for you on that. Obviously a lot of these are private bills or routine bills.

Q Before you get away from the bills, I am pretty sure that today is the deadline for a bill expanding the Indiana National Dunes Lake Shore. Is the President going to sign it or not?

MR. NESSEN: Whatever bills he signs or vetoes today we will announce it as he does it.

Q You mean in the afternoon?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, if he signs or vetoes any today-- and if the deadline is today--obviously he will have to act on it today. If he acts on it late this evening, we may announce it tomorrow morning.

Q On those bills, can you have them put in whether they are signed on a specific day they are put out or were signed earlier?

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MR. NESSEN: I thought we normally did that.

Q Well, it has "signed," but that could be any time.

MR. NESSEN: Okay.

A little bit on travel. The Al Smith dinner in New York on Thursday, the President will go up for that, departing in the late afternoon and returning the same evening. I don't have an exact departure time or the details of the trip right now.

Q Will he speak there?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Will that be political?

MR. NESSEN: The departure for Williamsburg on Friday I am now looking for as late morning. As most of you know by now, when we leave for Williamsburg, we will then begin a final series of campaign stops and not return to Washington until election day, the 2nd.

Q Overnight in Richmond?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the exact details of that last ten days, but as we get it we will announce it.

Q What about Friday night?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have it to announce right now.

Q Does that mean he will be in Washington election night?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. The plan is to spend the night of November 1 -- in other words, Monday night -- in Grand Rapids, and vote in the morning and come back during the day of the 2nd and be here for the election returns.

Q Do you have any idea what time of the day on the 2nd he will be back here?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't.

Q That is just for our own voting purposes.

MR. NESSEN: We have some people here who are wondering the same thing. The consensus I got this morning was that most people were going to take the chance and vote in the late afternoon after they got back from the trip. But, ever the pessimist, I mailed my absentee ballot in this morning.

Q How did you vote?

MR. NESSEN: That is one of the great American traditions --

Q You don't want us to know how you voted?

MR. NESSEN: It is a secret ballot.

Q Where is he going to stay in Williamsburg?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have those details yet.

Q Surely you know.

MR. NESSEN: Well, when we get it, I will give it to you.

Q Do you have some notion yet of what the schedule will be like in the first few days after Williamsburg? I mean, what places is he going to?

MR. NESSEN: It is not locked up yet.

Q Are there any more train trips?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think there are any more trains.

Q Is he going to stay on the East Coast, do you know, or is he going to the Midwest the first few days after Williamsburg?

MR. NESSEN: Why don't you wait until we get it all together, Mort.

Q Is it 100 cities in ten days?

MR. NESSEN: It is 100 cities in ten days, as Aldo will tell you. (Laughter) It is not -- don't write that down.

Q Will you have the underwear stores listed for us?

MR. NESSEN: We are going to have coin-operated washing machines installed on the press plane.

Q Ron, could you give us some guidance on when the President is going to announce his nuclear nonproliferation thing that is imminent?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have a date on that.

Q What is the President's remarks on General Brown's comments?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything from the President for you at this time. What I do have is this: I understand that a transcript -- I know a complete transcript of the interview has been made. It is being checked against a tape recording of the interview that was made by a Pentagon information officer, and until we find out the full contents of the interview, I don't have anything now. It is very possible that I will later in the day have something to say about it.

Q Any contacts with Brown and the President?

MR. NESSEN: No, there has not been.

Q No telephone calls, nothing?

MR. NESSEN: No, there has not been.

Q Is the President aware of the story?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he is.

Q Has he seen the interview?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure whether he has seen the full transcript yet. He will.

Q Has he asked for the tape recording?

MR. NESSEN: No, he has not.

Q Who then asked for the check to be made against the tape recording?

MR. NESSEN: The Pentagon is making the check against the tape.

Q At whose request?

MR. NESSEN: At Don Rumsfeld's request, I guess.

Q I guess what everybody is leading up to is, did the President send the word out saying let's find out what this is all about?

MR. NESSEN: I think Don Rumsfeld on his own decided over the weekend to find out exactly the full text of General Brown's interview.

Q Did he talk to the President about that?

MR. NESSEN: He either has or will.

Q Does the President regard American military arrangements or practice with Israel -- does the President regard Israel as being a burden on the United States?

MR. NESSEN: Dick, until there is an opportunity to look at the full transcript of what General Brown said, I am not going to comment. I may later.

Q You are implying there will be some action today?

MR. NESSEN: No, I simply said that after the full text of the interview is read, I may have something to say later today.

Q I think Dick's question is legitimate. Does the President regard Israel as a burden on the United States?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I am just not going to say anything until the full transcript is read.

Q Aside from the full transcript, in its own context, just isolated, does the President regard --

MR. NESSEN: Bob, we are not going to go anywhere until we have had a chance to read the full transcript.

Q Is the President going to read the transcript? Is it going to be sent over here?

MR. NESSEN: I think I said earlier that he either has or will have a chance to look at the transcript.

Q Has he scheduled a meeting with General Brown?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Was there a huddle here yesterday or the day before on the --

MR. NESSEN: Helen, until we have had a chance to look at the transcript, we are not going to go anywhere. There was not a meeting here yesterday.

Q Is consideration being given to asking for Brown's resignation?

MR. NESSEN: We are going to look at the full transcript and then we may have something to say later today.

Q Has the President talked to Secretary Rumsfeld on the subject?

MR. NESSEN: I think I said he either has or will, Dick.

Q Do you have any idea what time you may have something later in the day?

MR. NESSEN: Only after the transcript is read and checked against the tape.

Q Is the White House at all suspicious about the publication of an interview six months after it was given? Since the timing is so close to the election, is the White House at all suspicious about the timing of this release?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to look at motives.

Q Did I understand you to say the Pentagon is reviewing the transcript?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, and there is a copy of the transcript at the White House.

Q Who at the White House is reviewing it?

MR. NESSEN: Dick has it, and others have seen it.

Q What others?

MR. NESSEN: I said, before the day is over the President either has already or will see the transcript.

Q Will you release the transcript?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it is my job to release the transcript.

Q What is Ford doing to get elected today?

MR. NESSEN: I think he is doing his job as President.

Q What does that consist of?

MR. NESSEN: I told you he has 80 bills to sign. He is giving out the Medals of Science. These are not things he is doing to get elected, Andy. These are things he is doing because it is his job.

Q But he is a little more than two weeks from the day of decision. How is he campaigning in the White House as it were?

MR. NESSEN: He is not.

Q Ron, are you satisfied that the expenditure report given to FEC is full enough to meet the law?

MR. NESSEN: You mean the Carter contribution thing?

Q No.

MR. NESSEN: What is that?

Q The list of expenditures made by the President Ford Committee.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know anything about it. You have to ask Greener. I have not seen the list.

Q Do you want to make a comment on the Carter contribution thing released?

MR. NESSEN: No, I should not do that from here.

Q Did Carter answer the President's telegram to him?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't seen any return telegram from Carter.

Q Is there any possibility of any out-of-town travel before the Al Smith dinner?

MR. NESSEN: The only travel this week will be up and back to the Al Smith dinner and Friday to Williamsburg, and on for the rest of the campaign. But there will be no other travel this week.

Q Did the President see Kissinger today?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure if he did or not. I will check the schedule.

Q Did he meet with William Safire today?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I didn't ask him.

Q What is the meeting with Anne Armstrong for?

MR. NESSEN: The President saw Kissinger today.

Anne Armstrong was called back by Kissinger for consultations primarily about the Southern Africa situation.

Q How long has she been back?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q Can you find out?

MR. NESSEN: You can ask the State Department that.

Q Do you know where the President is going to overnight on Saturday?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't know at this time.

Q Do we need warm clothes or cold clothes?

MR. NESSEN: Both. Take a full range of clothes on this trip.

Q Has the President received a message from the new Chinese Government, from the new Premier?

MR. NESSEN: Not to my knowledge, but I will check it for you.

Q Ron, can you tell us anything more about the circumstances under which Director Kelley's speech was revised last weekend?

MR. NESSEN: I thought we talked about that on Saturday. I guess the New York Times called my office at the White House after seeing an advance text and asked about it, and just called it to our attention. Phil Buchen, I guess, independently asked for a text of it, and then there were a series of phone calls back and forth, and I don't know the full scenario because I think Phil may have been operating partly on his own. But then it was indicated to Attorney General Levi that what the FBI Director planned to say did not really match up with the President's attitude toward the press or what he thought his Administration's attitude toward the press should be.

Q Who called Levi?

MR. NESSEN: Buchen did. That is the normal contact between --

Q Do you know who wrote the speech?

MR. NESSEN: I assume Clarence Kelley wrote the speech.

Q No, he does not say that.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. You have to ask him. But that was basically it. It was a two-track system -- Buchen partly acting alone, and then I got into it on the road.

Q Ron, beyond the speech there has been some report that the policy has already been put into effect at the FBI. Has the President told Kelley how he thinks the press ought to be handled there?

MR. NESSEN: I wasn't aware of that. I thought what Kelley said afterward -- I thought Kelley had issued a statement saying he intended to follow the open press policy of the Ford Administration.



Q There were reports following that, Ron, that the FBI Director was through, that he is going to be dumped, jettisoned, in light of this.

MR. NESSEN: I saw one story to that effect.

Q Is he being dumped?

MR. NESSEN: Certainly not.

Q How about jettisoned? (Laughter)

Q Ron, has the President asked OMB for an explanation as to why Federal spending this year so far has fallen \$15 billion short of projections?

MR. NESSEN: I think we talked about that quite a lot last week. It is a very complicated answer, but Jim Lynn or Paul O'Neil could give you the answer.

Q What does Mrs. Armstrong have to do with Southern Africa? Is some sort of conference being arranged in London?

MR. NESSEN: I think you know the deep involvement of the British in the solution of the problems.

Q But what does she have to do with it?

MR. NESSEN: She is our representative to the British Government.

Q Will the President continue to say that Governor Carter advocates a tax increase for middle income taxpayers?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q That was the gist of the telegram saying that is a distortion of his position, and the President said it any number of times in the past week, and Mr. Carter denies that he advocates a tax increase.

MR. NESSEN: I think the President's telegram in response cites all the specific episodes where Carter said the things he said he didn't say.

Q I understand that. My question was, will the President continue to say that Governor Carter advocates a tax increase for middle income taxpayers?

MR. NESSEN: I can't give you the text of what he is going to say in the next two weeks.

Q What is the President doing today to get ready for the debate? Anything?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q You said before he is not campaigning today. Will he be campaigning tomorrow or Wednesday or Thursday other than this Alfred E. Smith dinner?

MR. NESSEN: No, and I would not call that campaigning. I said he does not have any travel this week aside from the trip up and back to New York, and then off on Friday.

Q He can campaign in Washington.

MR. NESSEN: Sure he can.

Q Will he have any campaign events before the debate?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of any.

Q Ron, is it the President's position that he ended the war in Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: What brings that up?

Q One of your TV ads.

MR. NESSEN: What does it say?

Q I don't have the transcript with me.

MR. NESSEN: I don't, either.

Q Does the President feel that he ended the war in Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q Why, on one of the President's TV ads last night, did Kleppe keep shaking his head no? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q Ron, UPI reported over the weekend that you told Walter Cronkite in New York that Barbara Walters had been promised an exclusive interview and Walter asked if he could be photographed talking to the President and then the technicians turned on the sound. Do you believe Mr. Cronkite was wrong to do this, and who promised Barbara Walters an exclusive interview?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, Les, let's not do that number today.

Q This is important enough to be featured on United Press International, Ron -- (Laughter) -- and you are an important figure, Ron. Now I know it is a little difficult to comment on either Mr. Cronkite or Miss Walters, but could you tell me, is this report true and who promised Barbara Walters an exclusive interview this close to the election?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to review the bidding and see how all that came about.

Q You didn't have anything to do with this?

MR. NESSEN: With what?

Q With promising her an exclusive interview?

MR. NESSEN: I help to arrange all interviews, Les, that the President has.

Q Is the UPI story accurate?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I have to look at it.

Q Ron, will the President continue to say that Governor Carter advocates a \$15 billion cut in defense spending?

MR. NESSEN: Ted, I think those issues were addressed in the President's telegram back to Carter. And as far as what he is going to say in future speeches, I think you have to wait and see what he says in future speeches.

Q No decision has been made on that, as far as you know?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what decision you are talking about.

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Q It is a decision having to do with credibility, when the President has said repeatedly that Governor Carter advocates a \$15 billion cut in defense spending and that Governor Carter advocates an increase in taxes for middle income taxpayers, when Governor Carter says he does not. So, the American people have to judge who is credible and trustworthy.

MR. NESSEN: I think the President made his points in response to the Carter telegram, in his own telegram back, and as for what will be said in future campaign appearances, I think we have to wait and see.

Q Ron, is the President aware that Henry Kissinger -- at least according to some of his aides -- is reported to be telling individual reporters and diplomats that the U.S. supports majority rule in South Africa?

MR. NESSEN: I never heard that before.

Q It is American policy, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: I think it is American policy often stated that the United States favors majority rule, not only in Africa but everywhere.

Q Ron, does the President agree with Senator Dole's description of World War II as a Democrat war?

MR. NESSEN: I have to look at what Dole said in the debate. I have not seen the transcript.

Q You did not watch the debate, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I did, but I don't know what words he used in that regard.

Q Ron, you must have seen that. What about it? Does the President, when he said "you did real good" or whatever he said to Dole -- does he mean that he supports this idea that World War II was the fault of the Democrats or a Democrat war?

MR. NESSEN: I will look at the transcript and see what Dole said.

Q Ron, after you look at the transcript, will you ask the President if he does agree with what Senator Dole said on that and give us an answer?

MR. NESSEN: As soon as I find out what Senator Dole said.

Q Will you also ask him whether he agrees with Senator Dole that the Democrats are kicking Richard Nixon around?

MR. NESSEN: I suspect that my answer to all of this is going to be it is not my normal policy to approve or disapprove or have the President approve or disapprove of every sentence that every official or candidate says.

Q It is his running mate, Ron.

Q Ron, Mondale said he did not hesitate to disagree with Jimmy Carter. You mean the President would hesitate to disagree with Senator Dole?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, I don't normally make it a practice -- I mean the President doesn't -- to approve or disapprove every day with what officials say.

Q Will there be a text on the Medal of Science remarks?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think we will have an advance text.

Q When can we find out about George Brown?

MR. NESSEN: At some point I may have something later today.

Q Ron, why can't you answer the question whether the President takes credit for ending the war in Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: Why in the world would that question come up on this particular Monday?

Q Because of his ad on the particular Sunday, the day before.

MR. NESSEN: If you are asking me does he stand by the text of his ads, the answer is yes.

Q Does he take credit for ending the war in Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: That is such a nonsense question that I don't know what the answer could be.

Q Ron, about General Brown, could you tell us a little bit more, to this extent. Have you had protests about the Brown statement addressed to the President? Senator Percy, for example, said in Illinois he has asked the President to have Brown fired.

MR. NESSEN: Until I have had a chance to review the transcript of everything he said, I am not going to have anything further to say. I may later today.

Q In respect to statements which have been made to the White House about General Brown, have you anything to say about that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of any protests that have come in.

Q Have you yourself reviewed that transcript?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to have anything to say until the transcript --

Q Could you just answer the question yes or no?

MR. NESSEN: I have seen the transcript.

Q Will you answer one more question. Another yes or no question. Did General Brown say that the United States does not have the stomach to stand up to the Soviet Union?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to have anything further to say until we have had a chance to review the full transcript.

Q Has the President talked with General Brown?

MR. NESSEN: We are right back where we started about 25 minutes ago. The answer then, as now, is not.

Q Ron, is the President aware that Henry Kissinger has stated U.S. policy will be not to recognize the homeland of Transkie when it becomes independent on the 26th?

MR. NESSEN: I am not a Transkie expert, but we can get somebody to talk to you, if you would like.

Q Ron, do you think by tomorrow you could get answers to these questions.

MR. NESSEN: I always try. Sometime we get them in the afternoon, Les, and give them out the same day.

Q On a technical question, how will the statement on Brown come out if it does come out? Will you come out and announce it?

MR. NESSEN: If we have anything to say, it will be later in the afternoon.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 11:55 A.M. EDT)