

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FEBRUARY 25, 1975

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY
(Hollywood, Florida)

THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESS CONFERENCE
OF
CARLOS ROMERO BARCELO
MAYOR OF THE CITY OF SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO
MOON LANDRIEU
MAYOR OF THE CITY OF NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA
JOHN FORD
MAYOR OF THE CITY OF TUSKEGEE, ALABAMA
DAVID KEATING
MAYOR OF THE CITY OF HOLLYWOOD, FLORIDA
AND
RON NESSEN
PRESS SECRETARY TO THE PRESIDENT

DIPLOMAT HOTEL

10:50 P.M. EDT

MR. NESSEN: We brought four mayors down to see you. They are Mayor Carlos Romero Barcelo of San Juan, Puerto Rico, who is the President of the National League of Cities; Mayor Moon Landrieu of New Orleans, whom many of you know; Mayor Johnny Ford of Tuskegee, and Mayor David Keating of Hollywood, Florida, the host city here, who told the President he had nothing but good news to report tonight.

To sort of set the stage for what happened tonight, there was a brief discussion of the President's energy program. I will talk to you after you have talked to the mayors and give you some quotes from that. Basically, though, the discussion involved issues which are of great interest to the mayors in their own local cities -- things like trash and garbage collection, noise pollution, housing, police protection, community development, revenue sharing, the Federal bureaucracy and so forth.

I would say that the President did more listening than he did talking, and I would say that when he did speak, it was mostly to ask questions.

Q Who did most of the talking?

MR. NESSEN: I said the President did more listening than talking, and when he did speak, the President tended to ask more questions than to make statements. I will give you a little further fill in on the energy part of this, but I know you would rather ask questions of the mayors, so we have Mayor Romero Barcelo and Mayor Ford and Mayor Keating and Mayor Landrieu.

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(OVER)

MR. BARCELO: My name is Carlos Romero Barcelo, Mayor of San Juan, Puerto Rico, Mayor Moon Landrieu of New Orleans, Louisiana, and Mayor Dave Keating, right?

MR. KEATING: Hollywood, Florida.

MR. BARCELO: Hollywood, Florida --

MR. KEATING: World's finest city.

MR. BARCELO: -- world's finest city, and Mayor Johnny Ford of Tuskegee, Alabama.

Do you want us to start off with a briefing?

Q Yes, sir, tell us what happened.

MR. BARCELO: We had the dinner meeting with the President and some of his members of the Cabinet and some members of his Administration. He asked us to give him a story about the problems in the cities. I told him that was a big mistake, he was going to get a lot of problems, and he did.

Many mayors spoke about the individual problems of the cities, but we are all very concerned about the problems, the energy problems and the high cost of energy and what this will do to our economies. We are also very concerned about the economic problems and the high unemployment and the industries falling off throughout the Nation and in our communities. We discussed the different alternatives. I think, towards the end of the meeting, everyone spoke their piece.

We reached a consensus that, even though there might be some flaws or some things that we might not like about the President's energy solution, it is still the best one we have and there has not been offered a better alternative than the one proposed by the President.

I, for one, feel that, if there is no other better alternative, we just cannot leave the burden to him to try to convince the Nation that that is the best. If we are convinced that is the best alternative, it is also up to us to go back to our communities and help convince our people that the President offered the best solution.

As far as the economic package, we also might have questions on some of the specific alternatives and solutions offered by the President, but I also, for one, feel that the President's solutions, at this time, are the most acceptable and that it is, of course -- also, we do feel if that is the case, to go back to our communities and convince our people that in these troubled times everyone has to suffer a pinch here and there, but that we have to suffer together in different areas to come up with the best solutions for our Nation.

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Q How do you know; would each of you tell us what your unemployment rate is?

MR. BARCELO: I can tell you the latest unemployment figure for the City of San Juan in the month of January is up to 11.4; the unemployment figures for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico are up to 17 percent.

Q How do you know that was the consensus that everybody had?

MR. BARCELO: That was the impression I got from everyone's words after the President spoke and after we spoke and after we talked. That is the impression I got.

Maybe, if I am mistaken, the other three mayors here might give you their impression.

Q Mayor Barcelo, are you a Democrat or Republican?

MR. BARCELO: I am President of the New Progressive Party in Puerto Rico. Officially, the New Progressive Party is not affiliated with any party in the Nation, but our party works closely together with the Republican Party.

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Q Would you tell us, do you agree there was a consensus in favor of the President's program there?

MR. LANDRIEU: I think what was expressed was the feeling the President has come forward with a very specific and, we hope, an effective program. It does not mean there won't be or should not be some alterations to it, and I am not prepared to offer at this moment those alterations.

I think there is a general feeling of confidence in the President and certainly an expression of warmth was expressed at his openness, his honesty, his fairness, his candor, his willingness to listen, and his willingness to discuss.

I might say the mayors selected here are not representing either the U. S. Conference of Mayors, nor do I think the National League of Cities as organizations. Through those organizations we express official positions.

The positions here tonight are being expressed as the individual positions of the mayors who are present, and I certainly do not speak for those who were present. I do think it is fair to say there was a general feeling, as I expressed, about the personal warmth and candor of the President and also about the fact that we do have to indeed do something about the energy and the economy.

I can personally say I said to the President that those of us at the city levels, speaking now of the individual cities and not of the organization, really do not have the capacity to develop energy programs, and we essentially are foot soldiers in domestic politics, and that the constituencies that we represent are affected first and foremost and most adversely by any hardship which this country faces.

In any energy proposal certain care should be taken to see that the cities -- I am not speaking just of the government, but of the people -- that the cities' tax bases and revenues are protected. Obviously, any increase in energy cost reflects itself very quickly in municipal budgets.

The President added, I think quite appropriately, that some provision had been made in the \$2 billion distribution on a revenue sharing formula to the local governing authorities of the United States.

We expressed some feeling that perhaps that formula might not be the most equitable formula. So far as my city is concerned, it will probably return more money to me than any other formula, but in terms of getting money back to those communities that are most severely impacted by the energy program, it may not be the most equitable, and I think that will be reviewed.

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It was pointed out, however, by the President and by his staff, that that is the one singular national formula that makes some equitable redistribution of funds to all the governmental units in the United States, freely admitting that someone, some genius somewhere might come up with a better, more acceptable formula.

We touched on those things that affect most directly the individual cities and the individual mayors. It is difficult, frankly, for individual mayors to talk of national policies or international policies. Things that affect us mostly day to day and those that affect the constituencies of the mayors present are unemployment, inflation, crime, garbage collection, street maintenance, fire protection and the day to day things that mayors are involved in.

We are more inclined to react than we are to propose as individuals. I can say to you, however, that we retain a very high level of confidence in the President, and we are enthusiastic about the manner in which he is going about the country seeking out advice and bringing his program to the public.

We are very grateful and honored that he invited those of us that were there tonight.

Q Mr. Mayor, is there anything that you would like to see the President do to help the cities that he is not now doing, and is there anything that you or any of the other mayors asked him to do that he is not doing?

MR. LANDRIEU: We expressed to the President our appreciation, first of all, for the passage of the community development bill, secondly -- but not necessarily in order of importance -- for the mass transit bill.

Both of these bills passed in the last six months and acted into law have been very significant aids to the cities. I do not think the President feels that those urban problems have been solved. They will take a long time to solve, but every step we take in that direction at least is a step in the reversal of a national policy which heretofore has added to the burdens of the cities and created some of the urban crises that we here so often discussed.

We certainly would like to see more money put into the cities. Community development is a great step, mass transit is a great step in the right direction, but it does not begin to solve the problems, and we are faced with enormous national deficits. Programs which add to that deficit add to the burdens of all of us.

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Yet, on the other side of the ledger, if we do not accommodate the rising cost of operating municipal governments, if we do not make provisions for redistribution of some of the funds back to those local governments, the net result is going to be the national debt rising, and by the national debt, I not only refer to the Federal debt, but that of the state and local governments.

It is true most of us, if not all of us, operate on balanced budgets because our state constitutions and city charters require it. It nonetheless exists in every city of this country, service deficits, and that is a reduction of services below those levels which any reasonable man would consider to be adequate.

So, we would like to see more money put back into the cities. I am not quite sure \$2 billion is going to solve the problem, but by putting my hands out and simply saying Mr. President, give us more, is not really offering a solution. It might be asking for more money, but it is not offering a solution.

Q What is your unemployment, as an average?

MR. LANDRIEU: I would guess at this moment it is close to 8 percent, and in the center city and the heart of the city and the minorities it is probably twice that. If you speak of those that are in the teenage group -- 18, 19, 17 -- it probably is up to 20 to 25 percent. It is rather severe.

That points up a problem which we focused on in Washington, D.C. not too long ago; that is, that there has to be some liberalization of the Federal unemployment program. They have been Godsend in many, many ways.

But, some of the restrictions on those programs ignore some of the very basic problems faced by us. There is money, for instance, to put bodies on, except that those bodies in many instances are replacing people who are being discharged because the city cannot maintain its normal work force through its general operating budgets.

For instance, in Newark, New Jersey, to give you an example -- this is not the only city -- people who are being laid off at the same time at least are being hired on emergency employment programs, and at the same time there is a general cutback in municipal employment, which means you are swapping one body for another, but you are really not solving unemployment programs.

That is not the fault of the Administration. It just means the program has to be altered a little because the programs are frankly very productive and efficient.

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There has to be some provision made in those programs for capital equipment. You cannot really take bodies and put them to work unless you have typewriters and paper and equipment that they can manage.

You also have to have supervision for them, but those objections and suggestions have been brought to the Administration. I am satisfied they are giving them very serious consideration.

Q Do you have any problems with the \$17 billion in budget cuts that President Ford has proposed, and did you raise that issue or that point at the meeting tonight?

MR. LANDRIEU: No, the budget cuts were not raised tonight. We did not speak to the budget. The U.S. Conference of Mayors and National League of Cities have issued a position paper on that, which I know is public and available to you.

Q Mr. Mayor, can you tell me how the four of you were selected to come out here? Did the four of you volunteer or did the White House ask you to come out?

MR. LANDRIEU: I think it was by virtue that two of us were seated on the righthand side, two on the lefthand side, and they asked us to come forward. It wasn't done by any party affiliation or anything that we particularly contributed to the meeting.

Q Was it the President who asked you?

MR. LANDRIEU: No, it was not the President who asked. I think it was Mr. Ron Nessen and Mr. Jim Falk who asked us if we would come and represent the group, and I did not find objection from the other mayors.

Yes, sir?

Q Are you going back to New Orleans with any specific change of mind or any advice to your Congressional delegation?

MR. LANDRIEU: No, I have not thought it through to that point. I certainly find that unless another program surfaces -- and I have not seen a total program yet -- let me tell you, I am a Democrat, and I would hope that the Democrats do come up with something constructive. I do not mean a counter program. I mean a constructive program, one that might be grafted on to what the President has, and perhaps some items can be substituted.

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I do not think this is a partisan issue. I think it is one that faces this country in the starkest of terms, and I believe the President expressed that today.

It is not a question of pride of authorship. It is not a question of partisan politics. It is a question of the President of the United States trying his level best to bring forth a program he feels is comprehensive and will help solve the economic and energy crisis facing this country.

I believe that is the duty of all of us in public life, whether Republicans, Democrats or Independents.

Q May I ask, Mayor Ford, was there any quarrel with the House Ways and Means tax cut?

MR. FORD: The President did not express that position tonight at that meeting.

Q Can we ask Mayor Ford what the unemployment rate in Tuskegee is and also his view of the President's program?

MR. FORD: Approximately 8 percent. I feel it is really instrumental for the President of this country to come forward and in a very open way sit down with local officials because indeed, this country is really facing some severe problems.

Those of us who face problems of unemployment, of poor housing, of people who need jobs and health services and other resources on a daily basis, we are in a much better position than those in Washington to be able to relate to the President and to his key advisers just what those problems are facing the people in our cities.

I feel that this kind of open dialogue between the President of the United States and local officials is instrumental. One of the things we need to happen in this country is for this country to restore its confidence in government, to restore its confidence in its Chief Executive, and I think that is the kind of leadership our President is exerting.

We, as mayors in our cities, have the responsibility of delivering goods and services to our people. We cannot deliver these goods and services unless we join forces with state and national government, and that is the kind of leadership that the President is exerting.

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I think it was a very good meeting, a frank meeting. It was not all rosy. The President has presented a comprehensive program, and I certainly am going to try, as a black mayor -- one of the 78 black mayors throughout the South -- to try to encourage our Congressional leaders from the South to really get some action from Congress.

Indeed, there are still a lot of things about the President's program that the American people do not understand. I do not understand. But the challenge that is on the back of Congress now is to come up with something that is more constructive because this country really does have a problem.

Specifically, I am always concerned about what happens in Alabama. We are very pleased that we are trying to work with the Administration in building 150,000 barrels per day refineries in the city of Tuskegee, which will do much to ease the oil shortage in the Southern part of our United States.

So, I think it was a good meeting.

Q Can we ask Mayor Keating the unemployment rate in Hollywood, Florida, if any, and what his opinion of the meeting was?

MR. KEATING: My opinion of the meeting and the Conference was very beneficial, also the dinner. You know, in honor of the President coming here I went out and bought a new car and I bought this new suit. I also proposed this morning at the Conference that we start a "buy now" program, and I think you know the government can do so much, but private enterprise has to do its part. Even though in Hollywood and Broward County we have 9 percent unemployment, we also have 92 percent who are gainfully employed.

So, what we have to do is get the other 9 percent on the payroll and get them working. I think if we start a buy now program and get the factories working, everybody buy a new car that needs one and everybody start to buy what they need and what they have been putting off buying, I think we can get that 9 percent back.

The President's program, I think, is a good program. I think the Conference was very beneficial, and I think in the next six months I think you are going to see a lot of improvement in the economy.

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Q What kind of car did you buy, what kind of suit did you buy? I am serious.

MR. KEATING: Last Saturday I bought a new Nova that was delivered here today. I have not even been in it yet. It is outside waiting for me to drive it home.

Q How much was it?

MR. KEATING: I think it was \$3,700.

Q Will you get a tax rebate?

MR. KEATING: I got a \$200 rebate.

Q Are you going to deduct it from your income tax?

MR. KEATING: I don't know. I don't know if I can or not.

Q And the suit, Mayor?

MR. KEATING: The suit I have on.

Q How much was it?

MR. KEATING: It is a two-pant suit. I paid \$120 for it.

Q Was it on sale?

MR. KEATING: No, it was not on sale. I went to get one on sale, but I liked this one better. But really I did not have any intention of buying a new car this year, but since President Ford was coming to Hollywood, we were so honored to have him here, I went out and bought a new car, and I bought a new suit, and I am now going to have to buy my wife a new dress, of course.

Q Were you concerned or upset at all, Mr. Mayor, that the White House brought its own dishes to eat on here in Hollywood? Do you think you could have afforded a separate set of dishes for them?

Q And somebody to wash them? (Laughter)

MR. KEATING: If you got a good meal, you can eat on any kind of dishes. It doesn't make any difference if it is White House dishes or the Diplomat dishes or the Royal Castle or the hamburger dishes.

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Q Who is washing them?

MR. KEATING: Any other questions?

Q Do you have any unemployment here?

MR. KEATING: I say we have about 9 percent unemployment, but we have 91 percent employed in Hollywood.

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MR. NESSEN: Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

I think you got a pretty fair idea of how the meeting went. If you are curious about the section on energy, I can give you a couple of quotes about that. The President opened the meeting after dinner by saying that "This is a time of adversity for the economy," and, talking about his anti-recession tax cut program, he said, "Our program is a good one." He said the tax rebate that he has proposed and what he called "the responsible lid on Federal spending --"

I guess we could get rid of the lights here.

He said, "The biggest problem we face is the dilatory tactics by Congress delaying a tax cut." He said, "We simplified the tax cut proposal so it could pass quickly. Now it is being made complicated." He said he understands that the House is considering adding a controversial amendment, which will delay it in the Senate. He did not spell out what that was, but I believe what he is talking about is a proposal to tack on a provision on the oil depletion allowance to the antirecession tax cut. Then, he asked the mayors, "Anything you can do to get Congress moving will be helpful. We need tax stimulant right now. I hope Congress will not delay."

And at that point, he said to the mayors, "I invite you to raise any issues and to be critical." Then, I think, the mayors gave you an idea of some of the individual issues that they did raise.

Q Were they critical?

MR. NESSEN: You just had them here to ask them.

Q There were just four of them.

MR. NESSEN: They were a good cross section.

Let me go through and you will get a feeling -- Mayor Ford, who was here, has got a plan to build an oil refinery in Tuskegee, and he asked for help with that project. And the President asked Rogers Morton and Frank Zarb to look into that.

Q What kind of help does he want?

MR. NESSEN: He did not spell it out, Helen. Mayor Landrieu said, almost word-for-word, to the President what he said to you down here. He did say he supports the President's energy program. That did begin a discussion of the energy program briefly, and the President explained his program in some detail, especially the portions of it dealing with returning the \$31 billion to the economy, because Mayor Landrieu's point was that -- he said, "We are prepared to ask our people to sacrifice, but do not give us a heavier burden than we can carry." And the President then explained that the \$31 billion would be fed back into the economy, and he listed the individual and business tax cuts, the increase in revenue sharing by \$2 billion, the special tax benefit for insulating your house and so forth.

Q You said 31 twice. I thought it was 27.

MR. NESSEN: No, 30 to 31.

Q But the Federal Government total comes to \$3 billion?

MR. NESSEN: And \$2 billion to the increased revenue sharing.

Q Ron, did the President find more sympathy from the mayors than he did from the Governors, would you say?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to make a judgment on that, Walt. I think you had a good cross-section of the Governors and could make your own judgment.

Q Finish your report.

MR. NESSEN: Then at the end of that particular discussion on the energy program, the President said, "We think it is an equitable program. Unfortunately, it has not been widely publicized, and that is our fault."

Q What?

MR. NESSEN: These details. It was clear some of the mayors and others the President has encountered along the way do not fully understand all the details. Anyhow, that is the quote. "Unfortunately, it has not been widely publicized, and that is our fault."

Mayor Hawkins of Durham talked about revenue sharing, not in a critical way. Mayor Cooper of Prichard, Alabama, who is the President of the Southern Conference of Black Mayors and also the head of the Alabama Conference of Democratic Mayors, spoke of the need for better management at the local level, and of saving small cities.

He said, "We waste your Federal money in all too many cases." The President reiterated something he said to the Governors, which is, "I strongly feel that the block grant approach is better than categorical grants. It puts the decision-making at the local level, and I favor that."

Mayor Clark of Dade County complimented the President on the appointment of Carla Hills. He complained that there was too much red tape and delay by the Federal bureaucracy, especially HUD. He called it, "The constraints of the bureaucracy," and also used the expression, "red tape."

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He also complained that sometimes grants are offered but the mayors are not given adequate time to prepare their applications and apply for the grants. He also complained that the Noise Pollution Act was hampering the building of low-cost housing near the Dade County Airport.

Then Mayor Ferre of Miami said he was enthusiastic about the Community Development Act. He said "There is room for some concern when housing starts are running at an annual rate of 600,000 or 700,000 when what we need is two million new houses a year." He said, "I question why housing is down the scale of priorities."

Then he turned to the question of crime. This is Mayor Ferre of Miami. He said, "We cannot double our police forces because we do not have enough money, and even if we could, that would not solve the problem. The answer has to come from the Federal Government."

He expressed the desire for more LEAA money. Mayor Seibels of Birmingham discussed an innovation that he has made in his city in trash and garbage collections which has saved him some money.

Mayor Keating, whom you heard, said "The only thing I have to give you is good news." He reported that he had mailed out \$55,000 in tax rebates today; that his city had finished the year with a \$3 million surplus, and \$1 million of it was sent back to the taxpayers.

He wanted to send another \$1 million back, but his city accountant told him to keep it in the treasury. He said, "I don't think we should always look to the Federal Government for everything."

Then the mayor of St. Petersburg, Randy Wedding, raised the energy problem again in the context that people in his city, who depend on about one-third of their economy on the tourist industry, were concerned that the President's energy program would affect tourism.

The President, in his final response of the evening, said "There is no question that we have a serious problem" -- speaking of the energy problem. "It is more serious in a fundamental way than the economic problem. The economic problem is more readily soluble than the energy problem."

Q What is more soluble?

MR. NESSEN: "There is no question we have a serious problem. The energy problem is more serious in a fundamental way than the economic problem. The economic problem is more readily soluble than the energy problem. We would be victims of decision makers totally outside the United States. To make our system invulnerable, we have to show courage, sacrifice, and vision."

"Our plan" -- referring to the energy plan -- "is less harmful to the tourist industry than any of the other alternatives. The 16 cent gas tax could be devastating."

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Q Ron, did the President --

MR. NESSEN: I have about two more sentences, Norm.

"Your people --" and he was speaking to the Mayor of St. Petersburg -- "Your people should not oppose our plan. They should support it." And then he gave a few closing remarks about "The problems we have heard tonight are indicative of the diversity of our country. Decision-making at the local level is infinitely better than decision-making that comes from on high in Washington." And then he spoke of -- rather movingly, I would say -- of how he hoped to leave this country better for his children and the mayor's children than the way he found it and hoped to be worthy of the trust of his children in solving the country's problems.

Q He hoped to leave his country better than when he found it?

MR. NESSEN: What was that quote?

Q Which was he on the Nina, the Pinta or the Santa Maria?

MR. NESSEN: He hoped to leave the country in a way that his children would have greater opportunities than he had had and the mayor's children would have greater opportunities than their parents had had. And he also said he was proud to be an American and that there were greater opportunities here than anywhere else in the world. That was the peroration.

Q Ron, when he said, "The 16 cent gas tax would be disasterous," he was referring to the tourist situation in Florida?

MR. NESSEN: Specifically, in that particular answer, yes. The word was "devastating."

Q Ron, did he say why the Democratic proposals for a 16 cent gasoline tax would be worse on the tourist industry than his plan to move to increase the price of gasoline by 15 or 16 cents?

MR. NESSEN: No, his plan is not to boost the price of gasoline 15 or 16 cents. It is to boost it about 12 or 13 cents and to spread it equitably through other products.

Q I thought you were going to tilt?

MR. NESSEN: That is a tilt, Jim. The average cost will be 10 cents, so if you put 12 cents on gasoline, you will come in on heating oil about seven or eight.

Q Can you explain, why did the President leave out the toughest part of his speech this afternoon?

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MR. NESSEN: I don't think it was anything deliberate, Helen, as you can hear from his remarks tonight in which he says, "The biggest problem facing the country is the dilatory tactics of Congress in delaying a tax cut."

I think what happened this afternoon, as you all saw, was, he always prefers to speak what he feels rather than what is written down, and he began to speak. He departed from the speech and began to speak, and when he returned to the speech, he did not pick up at exactly the place where he left off. There was no hidden motive in that deletion. As always, we stand by the text of the "as published."

Q Ron, it did seem he was changing the content of it. What he was saying was the Democrats at least were actively considering proposals. Now, it seemed to me, by leaving out that paragraph, "Congress had not come up with the program," he was acknowledging that, and I detected a real change in the context. Was I wrong?

MR. NESSEN: I would say the President said what he believes, and I do not see any need to add to his words.

Q How close a look has he gotten at the Democratic proposal for a 16 cent per gallon increase?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think he has seen a piece of paper with it written down on there.

Q On what has he based his assessment, then?

MR. NESSEN: He read the story in the Star, coming down on the plane. He also -- without regard to the specific gas tax proposal -- had reviewed the general proposition of increasing only taxes on gas and not on any other petroleum products when he put his program together, and I think you know his feelings about a gas tax.

Q Ron, Mayor Ford said a few minutes ago that tonight's session was not all roses. What part of the session was not all roses?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think you had the Mayor of St. Petersburg expressing concern about what an energy program would do to the tourist business there. I think you had Mayor Ferre saying that more housing is needed, more help with fighting crime is needed. You had Mayor Cooper of Prichard saying that the government needed to tighten up, enforce local governments to use the money more wisely and to have better management. You had Mayor Landrieu raising some points about how much sacrifice was going to be demanded of people.

I think there was a good deal -- if you are suggesting there was no criticism there, I think, from what the mayors said and this little read out, you can see there was considerable.

Q Ron, for clarification of the quote, "the 16 cents gas tax could be devastating," was that reference to devastating to areas that depend on tourism or devastating to the country?

MR. NESSEN: That specific quote referred to the tourist business of St. Petersburg or Florida in general. I think you know the President's views on the gas tax and he feels it would more generally be an unfair tax that would both hurt -- it would hurt other regions which depend on tourism and would hurt certain classes of people, also.

Q Is there any indication yet of any suggestions the mayors might have made that the President is taking back with him?

MR. NESSEN: As I told you, he asked Frank and Rog to look into the oil refinery at Tuskegee. He was asked to look into this problem of red tape by HUD. He promised to look into the red tape at HUD and also the complaint that HUD often offered grants but did not give mayors enough time to apply. There was also a somewhat technical question that I did not entirely understand concerning the procedure on revenue sharing, which he promised to look into.

Q Ron, there seems to be an inconsistency here. Granted we are talking about energy as opposed to the economy, but this afternoon the President talked about joining hands and working together with the Congress. He said he was looking forward to joining hands and meeting with the House and Senate, Republicans and Democrats, in order to solve present and future difficulties and in discussing the veto, he called it "a little problem."

Tonight he goes back on the other end of the stick and says the biggest problem we face is dilatory tactics by Congress in delaying the tax cut, and so on and so on. I understand the inconsistency is not yours, but isn't he being inconsistent in his approach in dealing with the Congress?

MR. NESSEN: Walt, I think it is important to remember that his remarks apply to specific programs. There is an economic program, which is a tax rebate to fight the recession, which is his first priority, as we have said.

There is an energy program which is far more complex and requires more time for Congress to deal with it.

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Now, what he was complaining about tonight in the use of the phrase "dilatory tactics" was what we have talked about before at the White House, which is what he feels is an unconscionably long time it is taking Congress to pass a program on which nobody differs.

On the energy program, he is really only using other words to say what he said from the very beginning, which is that when and if there is another energy program that meets the goals, he will take a look at it and see what areas can be accommodated, and I see either no inconsistency or shift in policy in that.

Q Why is he talking about dilatory tactics now when he knows the House is going to vote by Thursday or Friday at the latest?

MR. NESSEN: As we said yesterday, there were Democratic leaders talking about a tax cut in 30 days, which is well past now, and it is a program on which there is no argument. He also is concerned about the report he heard today of a possible effort to tack on an oil depletion amendment of some kind which would seriously delay it and confuse it, and I think you know when we announced this program the President said that he wanted to keep the tax cut simple and not complicate it with extraneous amendments or reforms.

He believes in tax reform, but he feels this is not the vehicle for tax reform, that it will simply slow down and delay the anti-recession tax cut.

Q Ron, has the President proposed any tax reform?

MR. NESSEN: Let me hear Lou.

Q Did the President in his explanation to the mayors use this 12 or 13 cent figure that gas tax will rise under his program. You have given us here in comparison 16-1/2 cents.

MR. NESSEN: No, he did not spell out that particular part of his program tonight.

Q Ron, could I change the subject briefly to ask about --

MR. NESSEN: You want to talk about dishes, right, Bob? (Laughter)

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Q I want to talk about Kissinger. A story that came out of London today that the new Ambassador, Elliot Richardson, seems to feel he might have a good chance to replace Mr. Kissinger as Secretary of State. Could you straighten that thing out for us?

MR. NESSEN: I am aware that Ambassador Richardson had an interview with the BBC, the transcript of which nobody here has seen, and I would be a little reluctant to comment since we have not seen the transcript.

Just in a sort of general response to the idea that you raise, there is no validity to those reports.

Q Ron, are you sure that was an interview with the BBC or was it a background with a number of correspondents?

MR. NESSEN: There were six British correspondents --

Q There was no interview.

MR. NESSEN: -- including BBC. As I understand it, Tom Ross interviewed someone who had interviewed Richardson, which is the basis of the story that was in the paper today.

Q You don't know if BBC's version is in fact the correct version, do you?

MR. NESSEN: We have not seen a transcript of any version, and I would rather, as a general idea, as far as the area you raise, say there is no validity in those reports.

Q Have you contacted Richardson to find out what he actually said?

MR. NESSEN: I have not, Helen.

Q Has anyone?

MR. NESSEN: What?

Q Someone has.

MR. NESSEN: Frankly, I am not aware that anybody here has contacted Ambassador Richardson.

Q Do you mean there is no validity to the report that Mr. Kissinger might be replaced next year by Mr. Richardson?

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MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

I would not quite sharpen it up that much, Bob. I will certainly say that in answer to that specific question there is no validity to the way you phrased that, and also I know of no plans for Secretary Kissinger to leave his post.

Q How about Secretary Simon?

MR. NESSEN: I know of no plans for Secretary Simon to leave his post.

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Q Ron, just to clear up this golf tournament thing -- in your answer to Bob Schieffer's question today, do I understand the President had agreed in principle to come here -- he agreed last October in principle to come here at this present date, but he did not give a firm commitment at that time? Is that right?

MR. NESSEN: I was not aware of the letter that Bob showed me -- Bob Schieffer -- a letter that the President sent to Jackie Gleason, I guess, in October, and I read the letter and it struck me as the precise wording that the President always uses for long-range invitations, when he is really not sure whether he will be able to go or not. I do not recall the exact wording of it, but it was to the effect, "I hope to be able to be with you, but, of course, there could be many unforeseen events in the meantime, and I will have to get back to you later with a more definite answer."

Q Can you give us the text of that letter?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is printed in -- I forget what newspaper Bob showed me today.

Q The text was not printed.

MR. NESSEN: Hunks of the text were printed.

Q Could you get us a copy of the actual letter?

MR. NESSEN: We don't have the files down here, but when we get back to Washington, we can look it up.

Q Did the President take any action on the information that he received on the Kissinger-Richardson story? That is to say, did he tell anyone to get to the bottom of this? Did he express any interest in it? Did he have any reaction to it?

MR. NESSEN: You mean, any personal reaction?

Q My first question was, did he tell anybody to investigate the report; did he tell anybody to get to the bottom of it? The second question was, did he have any personal reaction to it?

MR. NESSEN: The answer is no to both of those, Walt.

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Q Ron, tournament officials told the local press that in middle or late January the White House reconfirmed or assured them that the President indeed still planned to be here. Do you have any word to the contrary?

MR. NESSEN: Be here for the golf tournament or be here for the White House Conference?

Q Be here on Wednesday, February 26.

MR. NESSEN: For the purpose of playing golf?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any information like that. I don't know whether there was such a reassurance or assurance. Jack suggests again the normal procedure for dealing with long-range invitations is that people keep coming back and coming back and saying are you coming, are you coming and then another sort of standard letter goes out saying, "We are still hoping to be there."

Q Ron, was the White House Conference scheduled at a time convenient for the President to come here and play golf? Was that given any consideration in the timing of the White House Conference he attended today?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of, John. I think you all know -- maybe you don't -- I told some of you privately today when this question came up that one day in the White House briefing -- in fact, the very first day that we announced this barnstorming tour -- somebody said, "Does he plan to go around the country to try to explain his program," and I said I would not be surprised.

At that point, the areas that he planned to go to were Atlanta, somewhere in the Houston-Dallas-New Orleans area -- that was not completely locked up, as far as cities go -- New England and the Midwest. The far West was also going to be put off until later, and Miami and the Miami area, and that was also on the list of cities that he planned to go to, and that was about six weeks ago.

When precisely the Conference was locked up, I don't know. You would have to talk to Baroody, but it was not something that was thrown together because he wanted to come here and play golf.

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I think you can see that to get 600 or 700 people, as they had today, and the rest of it is, I just don't see how you could think that would be something the White House would put together just as an excuse to come and play golf.

Q The timing of it, given the fact you were coming to Miami, I wondered if the timing was such that it was that he could come here to play golf also, or was it just a happy coincidence?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, John, if it was a question of having the White House Conference two days before the golf tournament or two days after the golf tournament or on the day of the tournament, I would not be surprised if that was not an influential coincidence.

Q Ron, how long did the meeting last?

MR. NESSEN: There was a brief initial sort of reception up in the suite beginning at about 7:30 and they came down to dinner at 8:30, and we left directly after the dinner and came here, which must have been probably shortly before 11 o'clock. So, say from 8:00 to quarter of 11, something like that.

Q Are the dishes being washed? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Do we have any volunteers? (Laughter)

I think somebody is doing the dishes.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 11:40 P.M. EDT)