

News conference described as "impromptu" (over).

Transcript of the President's News Conf

WASHINGTON, Jan. 31—Following is the White House transcript of President Nixon's news conference at the White House today:

THE PRESIDENT: Won't you be seated. In view of the announcement that has already been made this morning, I know that you will have questions on that and other matters, so we will go right to the questions. I think Miss Thomas has the first question.

1. Thieu Meeting and Kissinger Trip

Q. Can you tell us whether you are going to meet with President Thieu some time this spring and also give us a better feel on Dr. Kissinger's trip, the purpose and so forth?

A. At some time this spring I do plan to meet with President Thieu. I have discussed the matter with him in correspondence, and I also discussed it yesterday in my meeting with the Foreign Minister. It will be at a time mutually convenient.

The U.P.I. story, incidentally, was on the mark except for the location. The location we have agreed on will be the Western White House this spring.

Importance of Trip

As far as Dr. Kissinger's trip is concerned, this is a matter that we feel is very important in terms of developing the postwar relationship with North Vietnam. When we look at this very intricate agreement, which Dr. Kissinger so brilliantly briefed for the members of the press, and if you have read it, you will see why I use the word intricate, we can see that insofar as its terms are concerned, if the agreement is kept, there is no question about the fact that we will have peace in not only Vietnam, but in Indochina for a very long period of time. But the question is whether both parties, in fact, all parties involved, have a will to peace, if any have incentives to peace, if they have desire to peace.

Now, on this particular point, it is necessary, of course, for us to talk to the South Vietnamese as we are. It is also vitally important that we have a direct communication with the North Vietnamese. And Dr. Kissinger will be going to Hanoi to meet with the top leaders of the Government of the D.R.V. There he will discuss the postwar relationship. He will, of course, discuss the current status of compliance with the peace agreement which we have made and he will also discuss, in terms of postwar relationships, the matter of the reconstruction program for all of Indochina.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 1973

erence on Foreign and

Domestic Matters

Reconstruction Program

As the leaders probably reported after my meeting with them, the day after I announced the cease-fire agreement, I raised with the leaders the point that the United States would consider for both North Vietnam and South Vietnam and the other countries in the area a reconstruction program.

I, of course, recognized in raising this with the leaders that there would have to be Congressional consultation and Congressional support. In terms of this particular matter at this time, Dr. Kissinger will be having an initial conversation with the North Vietnamese with regard to this whole reconstruction program.

I should also say that I have noted that many Congressmen and Senators and many of the American people are not keen of helping any of the countries in that area, just as they are not keen on foreign aid in general. As far as I am concerned, whether it is with the North or South or the other countries in the area, I look upon this as a potential investment.

In peace, to the extent that the North Vietnamese, for example, participate with us and with other interested countries in the reconstruction of North Vietnam, they will have a tendency to turn inward to the works of peace rather than turning outward to the works of war.

This, at least, is our motive, and we will know more about it after Dr. Kissinger completes his talks with them, which we think will be quite extensive and very frank since he has already, obviously, paved the way for it.

* IN CONGRESS ...

2. Release of War Prisoners

Mr. President, Dr. Kissinger is going to Vietnam and is due there in Hanoi on Feb. 10. Is this related in any way with the first prisoners of war to come out of Hanoi? A. Not at all.

Q. I mean, is the date a coincidence?

A. The date is a pure coincidence, and Dr. Kissinger will not be meeting with the prisoners of war. Incidentally, speaking of the P.O.W. question, I have noted some speculation in the press, and it isn't speculation, I should say, that is justified because I understand there was a Defense Department report to this effect, that I was going out to Travis Air Force Base to meet the first P.O.W.'s when they came in.

I do not intend to do so. I have the greatest admiration for the prisoners of war, for their stamina and their courage and the rest, and also for their wives and their parents and their children who have been so strong during this long period of their vigil.

This is a time that we should not grandstand it; we should not exploit it. We should remember that it is not like astronauts coming back from the moon after what is, of course, shall we say, a very spectacular and dangerous journey,

but these are men who have been away sometimes for years. They have a right to have privacy, they have a right to be home with their families just as quickly as they possibly can, and I am going to respect that right, of course, to the extent that any of them or their families desiring to visit the White House can be sure that they will be very high on the list.

3. Amnesty for Draft Evasion

Q. Mr. President, do you have anything specifically in mind to help heal the wounds in this country, the divisions over the war, and specifically, anything down the road much farther in terms of amnesty?

A. Well, it takes two to heal wounds, and I must say, when I see that the most vigorous criticism or, shall we say, the least pleasure out of the peace agreement comes from those who were the most outspoken advocates of peace at any price, it makes one realize whether some want the wounds healed. We do.

We think we have taken a big step toward ending a long and difficult war which was not begun while we were here, and I am not casting any aspersions on those Presidents who were in office who can no longer be here to speak for themselves, for the causes of the war. I am simply saying this: That as far as this Administration is concerned, we have done the very best that we can against very great obstacles, and we finally have achieved a peace with honor.

I know it gags some of you to write that phrase, but it is true, and most Americans realize it is true, because it would be peace with dishonor had we —what some have used, the vernacular —“bugged out” and allowed what the North Vietnamese wanted: The imposition of a Communist government or a coalition Communist government in South Vietnam. That goal they have failed to achieve. Consequently, we can speak of peace with honor and with some pride that it has been achieved.

* See "Amnesty Strategy Parley Set for Paris," George Vecsey, NYTimes 6 Feb 73, this file.

** Anthony Ripley, NYTimes 30 Jan 73, this file: "The word 'amnesty' itself is legally ill-defined. It is not in the Constitution. It means granting 'oblivion' a general pardon for a past offense and is generally used to cover a whole class of citizens. Pardon, in contrast, removes only the penalty for a past offense and generally is defined as being offered to a single individual."

All Pay for Mistakes

Now, I suppose, Mr. Sheldon, that your question with regard to amnesty may deal with the problems of healing the wounds. Certainly I have sympathy for any individual who has made a mistake. We have all made mistakes. But also, it is a rule of life, we all have to pay for our mistakes.

One of the most moving wires I received, of the many thousands that have come into the White House since the peace announcement, was from a man who was in prison in Michigan, I believe it is, and he spoke about a group of his fellow inmates. They are in a work camp, so I suppose they are being rehabilitated to come out.

He wrote very emotionally about what we had done, and he felt it was an achievement they were very proud of. I feel sorry for that man; on the other hand, it is not my right, and I should not exercise such a right, because he so wrote to me, to say, "Now you are forgiven for what you did."

Now, as far as amnesty is concerned, I have stated my views, and those views remain exactly the same. The war is over. Many Americans paid a very high price to serve their country, some with their lives, some as prisoners of war for as long as six to seven years, and, of course, 2½ million, 2 to 3 years out of their lives, serving in a country far away in a war that they realize had very little support among the so-called better people, in the media and the intellectual circles, and the rest, which had very little support, certainly, among some elements of the Congress, particularly the United States Senate, but which fortunately did have support among a majority of the American people, who some way, despite the fact that they were hammered night after night, and day after day, with the fact that this was an immoral war, that America should not be there, that they should not serve their country, that morally what they should do was desert their country.

Certainly as we look at all of that, there might be a tendency to say now, to those few hundreds*who went to Canada or Sweden or someplace else, and chose to desert their country because they had a higher morality, we should now give them amnesty.

Now, amnesty means forgiveness. ** We cannot provide forgiveness for them. Those who served paid their price. Those who deserted must pay their price, and the price is not a junket in the Peace Corps, or something like that, as some have suggested. The price is a criminal penalty for disobeying the laws of the United States. If they want to return to the United States, they must pay the penalty. If they don't want to return, they are certainly welcome to stay in any country that welcomes them. Mr. Theis.

4. Peacetime Reconstruction

Q. Do you have any floor or ceiling dollar figure in mind for the rehabilitation of North Vietnam or the rest of Indochina?

A. Mr. Theis, that is a matter that the members of the Congress raised with me, as you might imagine, and they raised it not only with regard to North Vietnam, but with regard to South Vietnam and Cambodia and Laos in this period as we move into the cease-fire and, we hope, peacetime reconstruction.

I cannot give you that figure now, because it is a matter that has to be negotiated and it must be all part of one

pattern. The figure, of course, will come out. The figures will come out, but they must first be discussed with the bipartisan leadership because, with all of this talk about the powers of the Presidency, let me say I am keenly aware of the fact that even though I might believe that a program of reconstruction for North Vietnam, as well as in South Vietnam, is an investment in peace, the Congress has to believe it. The Congress has to support it. And this is going to be one of the more difficult assignments I have had as President, but I think we can make it if the Congress sees what the stakes are.

5. Interest on Farm Aid

Q. Mr. President, sir, Senator Hollings said on a recent trip to Southeast Asia he discovered that we are letting some countries, including Japan, have 2 per cent money, yet we have denied our own farmers in rural cooperatives 2 per cent money. We are telling them they have to have their loans at 5 per cent. Would you comment on this and how this might relate to your upcoming program of aid to Southeast Asia?

A. Well, as far as the program of aid is concerned and the percentage of interest that is paid, we will, of course, have in mind the interest of the American people. We want to be fair, of course, to those who have been our allies and in the great tradition of America when it fight wars, to those who have been our enemies, like Germany and Japan, who, with America's help now have become our two greatest competitors in the free world.

Now, when you get down to whether the percentage will be 2 per cent or 5 per cent or 3 per cent, that is a matter to be negotiated, but we will be fair and we will see that our farmers also are treated fairly.

Let me say, if I could, with regard to R.E.A.—and Miss McClendon, because you are somewhat of an expert on this—I have always supported R.E.A. [Rural Electrification Administration] because I used to represent the old 12th District. When I lived there and represented it, it was primarily agricultural, orange groves; now it is primarily people, subdivided. But as one who came from that area, I naturally had a great interest in this matter of R.E.A. and the rest, and supported it.

But what I have found is that when I first voted for R.E.A., 80 per cent of the loans went for the purpose of rural development and getting electricity to farms. Now 80 per cent of this 2 per cent money goes for country clubs and dilettantes, for example, and others who can afford living in the country. I am not for 2 per cent money for people who can afford 5 per cent or 7.

6. Nixon Trip to Europe

Q. Mr. President, you and people in your administration have been quoted as calling 1973 the year of Europe. Could you tell us exactly what that means to you, and specifically, will you be making a trip to Europe in the next month or so?

A. I will not be making any trips to Europe certainly in the first half of this year. Whether I can make any trips later on remains to be seen. As a matter of fact, so that all of you can plan not to take shots, I plan no trips whatever in the first half of this year outside the United States. The meeting with President Thieu, if it does work out, at a time mutually convenient, will take place in the spring.

Now, the fact that I don't take a trip to Europe does not mean that this will not be a period when there will be great attention paid to Europe, because it just happens as we complete the long and difficult war in Vietnam, we now must turn to the problems of Europe. We have been to the People's Republic of China. We have been to the Soviet Union. We have been paying attention to the problems of Europe, but those problems will be put on the front burner.

Problem of Trade

There is the problem of trade, for example. There is the problem of the European security conference which we must discuss. There is the problem of mutual balanced force reduction. All of this will require consultation with our European allies, and in that connection that is one of the reasons that the Heath visit is so enormously important.

I am spending more time with Mr. Heath than I have with some other visitors. I mean by that not that time proves everything, but not only will we have the usual dinners and luncheons and so forth, but I am spending a full day with him at Camp David because I want to get his thoughts about what the position of the United States and our European friends should be with regard to the European security conference, with regard to the M.B.F.R., and, of course, what the position of the United States should be and the new, broader European community should be in this period when we can either become competitors in a constructive way or where we can engage in economic confrontation that could lead to bitterness and which would hurt us both.

We want to avoid that, even though it has been predicted by some in this country who really fear the new Europe. I do not fear it if we talk to them and consult at this time.

7. G.O.P. Nominee for 1976

Q. Mr. President. A. Mr. Deakin.

Q. You are quoted as telling a recent visitor that you believe Governor Con-

nally will be the Republican nominee of 1976. Is that correct? A. I had thought we had just completed an election. (laughter)

Q. Just a little foresight there. A. Having just completed one, let me give some advice, if I can, to all of those who may be thinking of becoming candidates in 1976.

I have a considerable amount of experience in getting nominations and winning elections and also losing them. So, consequently, I would suggest that as far as the Presidential candidate is concerned, he is out of his mind if he allows any activity in his behalf or participates in any activity in his behalf, running for the nomination before the elections of 1974 are concluded.

If I were advising people who are interested in becoming and running for President, for the nomination in either party, I would say the best way to get the nomination now is not to go out seeking it. The best way to get it is to work as hard as you can for the success of the candidates of your party, be they for the House or the Senate or Governor and do it in a selfless way until after 1974 and immediately after 1974 take off and run as fast as you can. And I have always done that and with mixed results. (Laughter)

But as far as Governor Connally is concerned, you all know my very high respect for him. I have stated my belief that he could handle any job that I can think of in this country or in the world for that matter, but I would be out of my mind if I were to be endorsing anybody for the Presidency at the present time when there are a number of people who have indicated—or whose friends have indicated—that they might have an interest in the position and that is just fine.

You have Governor Connally, and, of course, many have suggested that the Vice President would be interested. I assume that several Governors might be interested. In fact, one of these days, perhaps right after the '74 elections, I will give you my list and it will be quite a long one because I am not going to make my choice until after they have been through a few primaries.

8. Shooting of Senator Stennis

Can you give us your reaction to the shooting of Senator Stennis?

A. Well, I called Mrs. Stennis last night, as I am sure many others of his friends did, and it is just one of those senseless things that happens, apparently. Then she told me that all they got was his billfold, and his Phi Beta Kappa key and also his watch, apparently. So, it is one of those things that happens in our cities today; fortunately not happening as much as it did previously.

The point that I would make with regard to Senator Stennis, and this is what I told her, is that I just hope that the doctors did the most superb job they have ever done. I hope that his spirit would see him through this physically and in every other way, because of all the Senators in the United States Senate, Democrat or Republican, in terms of our being able to achieve the honorable peace we have achieved, John Stennis was the most indispensable.

9. Stand on Gun Controls

Q. Mr. President, I would like to ask you, along those lines, you said it was such a senseless thing. The White House, this Administration has not spoken out very strongly against gun controls, particularly hand guns. I would like to know perhaps if maybe you are going to have second thoughts about that now?

A. Well, as you know, the problem with that is not so much the White House speaking out on hand guns, and Saturday night specials, which I think this may have been. I haven't seen the latest reports, but the doctor last night told me it was a .22-caliber cheap gun kind of a thing, and Mrs. Stennis said it sounded like firecrackers. Obviously if they had had a .45, he would be dead.

We have, and I have, as you know, advocated legislation to deal with what we call the Saturday night specials which can be acquired by anybody, including juveniles, and apparently there are some suggestions that juveniles were those involved in this case. I am not charging that, incidentally. I am saying what I read in the papers, most of which, as you know, is true.

So, under the circumstances, I feel that Senator Hruska, who introduced the bill before and then it came a cropper in the Senate Judiciary Committee, will now work with the Judiciary Committee in attempting to find the formula which will get the support necessary to deal with this specific problem, without, at the same time, running afoul of the rights of those who believe that they need guns for hunting and all that sort of thing.

Precise Definition Needed

Let me say personally, I have never hunted in my life. I have no interest in guns and so forth. I am not interested in the National Rifle Association or anything from a personal standpoint, but I do know that in terms of the United States Congress, what we need is a precise definition which will keep the guns out of the hands of the criminals and not one that will impinge on the rights of others to have them for their own purposes in a legitimate way.

Incidentally, the legislation that we

originally suggested or that we discussed with Senator Hruska, I thought precisely dealt with the problem, but it did not get through the Senate. My guess is that Senator Stennis—everything perhaps has a down side and up side; I guess everything really does. But the very fact that Senator Stennis was the victim of one of these things—we thought this was the case when Governor Wallace was—but in this instance, it was apparently one of these small hand guns that most people, most reasonable people, except for the all-out opponents of any kind of legislation in this field—most reasonable people believe it should be controlled. Perhaps we can get some action. I hope the Senate does act.

I have asked the Attorney General—had asked incidentally before this happened—as one of his projects for this year to give us a legislative formula, not one that would simply speak to the country, and not get through, but one that can get through the Congress. That is the problem.

10. Use of Executive Privilege

Q. Mr. President. A. Mr. Mollenhoff.

Q. Did you approve of the use of executive privilege by Air Force Secretary Seamans in refusing to disclose the White House role in the firing of air cost analyst Fitzgerald? It came up yesterday in the Civil Service hearings. He used executive privilege. You had stated earlier that you would approve all of these uses of executive privilege, as I understood it, and I wondered whether your view still prevails in this area or whether others are now entitled to use executive privilege on their own in this type of case?

A. Mr. Mollenhoff, your first assumption is correct. In my dealings with the Congress—I say mine, let me put in a broader sense—in the dealings of the executive with the Congress, I do not want to abuse the executive privilege proposition where the matter does not involve a direct conference with or discussion within the Administration, particularly where the President is involved. And where it is an extraneous matter as far as the White House is concerned, as was the case when we waived executive privilege for Mr. Flanigan last year, as you will recall, we are not going to assert it.

In this case as I understand it—and I did not approve this directly, but it was approved at my direction by those who have the responsibility in the White House—in this case, it was a proper area in which the executive privilege should have been used.

On the other hand, I can assure you that all of these cases will be handled on a case-by-case basis, and we are not going to be in a position where an individual, when he gets under heat from a Congressional committee, can say, "Look I am going to assert executive privilege."

He will call down here, and Mr. Dean, the White House counsel, will then advise him as to whether or not we approve it.

11. Expansion of Executive Privilege

Q. I want to follow one question on this. A. Sure.

Q. This seems to be an expansion of what executive privilege was in the past, and you were quite critical of executive privilege in 1948 when you were in the Congress—A. I certainly was.

Q. You seem to have expanded it from conversation with the President himself to conversation with anyone in the executive branch of the Government, and I wonder can you cite any law or decision of the courts that supports that view?

A. Well Mr. Mollenhoff, I don't want to leave the impression I am expanding it beyond that. I perhaps have not been as precise as I should have been. And I think yours is a very legitimate question because you have been one who has not had a double standard on this. You have always felt that executive privilege, whether I was complaining about its use when I was an investigator, or whether I am now defending its use when others are doing the investigating—I understand that position.

Let me suggest that I would like to have a precise statement prepared which I will personally approve so that you will know exactly what it is. I discussed this with the leaders, and we have talked, for example—the Republicans, like Senator Javits and Senator Percy are very interested in it, not just the Democrats, and I understand that. But I would rather, at this point, not like to have just an off-the-top of my head press conference statement delineate what executive privilege will be.

I will simply say the general attitude I have is to be as liberal as possible in terms of making people available to testify before the Congress, and we are not going to use executive privilege as a shield for conversations that might be just embarrassing to us, but that really don't deserve executive privilege.

12. Fitzgerald Case

Q. The specific situation with regard to Fitzgerald, I would like to explore that. That dealt with a conversation Seamans had with someone in the White House relative to the firing of Fitzgerald and justification or explanations. I wonder if you feel that that is covered and did you have this explained to you in detail before you made the decision?

A. Let me explain. I was totally aware that Mr. Fitzgerald would be fired or discharged or asked to resign. I approved it, and Mr. Seamans must have been talking to someone who had discussed the matter with me. No, this was not a case of some person down the line deciding he should go. It was a decision that was submitted to me. I made it, and I stick by it.

13. Impoundment of Funds

Q. Mr. President, how do you respond to criticism that your impoundment of funds abrogates power or authority that the constitution gave to Congress?

A. The same way that Jefferson did, and Jackson did and Truman did. When I came in on this, Mr. Mollenhoff—he is one of the few old-timers around here who will remember it—you remember when Senator Symington, who has now turned the other way on this, but you remember when we were talking about the 70-group Air Force. You remember that on that case I voted as a Congressman to override President Truman's veto. I think it was 70-wing or 70-group Air Force, where we insisted on a 70-group Air Force and he said the budget would only provide for 48.

Despite the fact that the Congress spoke not just as the leaders spoke to me the other day, but by veto, overwhelming in both Houses, President Truman impounded the money. He did not spend it. And he had a right to. The constitutional right for the President of the United States to impound funds and that is not to spend money, when the spending of money would mean either increasing prices or increasing taxes for all the people, that right is absolutely clear.

The problem we have here is basically that the Congress wants responsibility, they want to share responsibility. Believe me, it would be pleasant to have more sharing of responsibility by the Congress. But if you are going to have responsibility, you have to be responsible, and this Congress—and some of the more thoughtful members of Congress and that includes most of the leadership, in the very good give-and-take we had the other day—this Congress has not been responsible on money. We simply had this.

There is a clear choice. We either cut spending or raise taxes, and I made a little check before the leaders' meeting. I checked on the campaigns of everybody who had run for office across this country, Democrat and Republican. I didn't find one member of Congress, liberal or conservative, who had campaigned on the platform of raising taxes in order that we could spend more.

The point is that the Congress has to decide does it want to raise taxes in order to spend more, or does it want to cut, as the President is trying to cut. The difficulty, of course, and I have been a member of Congress, is that the Congress represents special interests.

The Interior Committee wants to have more parks, and the Agriculture Committee wants cheap R.E.A. loans and the H.E.W. committee or the Education and Labor Committee wants more for education and the rest, and each of these wants we all sympathize with, but there is only one place in this Government where somebody has got to speak not for the special interests which the Congress represents but for the general interest.

The general interest of this country, the general interest, whether it be rich or poor or old, is don't break the family budget by raising the taxes or raising prices, and I am going to stand for that general interest. Therefore, I will not spend money if the Congress overspends, and I will not be for programs that will raise the taxes and put a bigger burden on the already overburdened American taxpayer.

14. Prisoners in China

Q. Mr. President, there are two American flyers still being held prisoner in China, and they are sort of in limbo—well, three Americans, but two flyers. I wonder if you could give us their status, and do you expect them to be returned with the other prisoners?

A. This matter we have discussed when we were in the People's Republic of China, and we have every reason to believe that these flyers will be released on the initiative of the People's Republic of China as the P.O.W. situation is worked out in Vietnam.

I won't go beyond that because this is a matter that should be left to the People's Republic of China, but we have, we believe, every assurance that will happen.

15. Case of C.I.A. Agent

Q. Downey, also? A. Downey is a different case, as you know. Downey involves a C.I.A. agent. His sentence of 30 years has been, I think, commuted to five years, and we have also discussed that with Premier Chou En-lai. I would have to be quite candid. We have no assurance that any change of action, other than the commutation of the sentence, will take place, but we have, of course, informed the People's Republic through our private channels that we feel that would be a very salutary action on his party.

That is a matter where they must act on their own initiative, and it is not one where any public pressures or bellicose statements from here will be helpful in getting his release.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.