



The President's New Press Secretary

Can He Serve Two Masters?

Having set himself a precedent, President Ford again dipped into the ranks of the White House press corps for a press secretary.

He chose veteran newsman Ron Nessen, a network television White House correspondent who had quickly made friends with Ford while covering him during his vice presidency.

"He's a respected newsperson," said Helen Thomas of UPI on the day of Nessen's appointment. "I hope he does as well as Jerry terHorst. I think Jerry set an excellent example that Ron will follow."

TerHorst's final example as press secretary was his resignation for lack of cooperation from the White House in informing him of goings-on. Would Nessen consider such a step?

"I will never knowingly lie to the White House press corps. I will never knowingly mislead the White House press corps. And I think if I ever do, you would be justified in questioning my continued usefulness in this job," he said during his first briefing.

Asked his opinion of the resignation, Nessen hedged, "Well, I think Jerry spelled out himself what his problem was, and I really shouldn't speak for Jerry." Several reporters moaned. "Back to the old way . . . back to the old Ron [Ziegler, President Nixon's press secretary]," two reporters sighed.

Later, he told *The QUILL* it would depend on the situation. "I'd want to find out who misled me and why," he said.

But Nessen insists that he will have full access to information at the White House. He is not worried that aides might try to mislead him as they did terHorst.

"I have the distinct impression that they don't want another terHorst episode on their hands. People here are now much more conscious of the need for the press secretary to be fully informed," he told the *Chicago Tribune's* Gary Deeb.

"I don't consider myself a salesman for President Ford's policies and I don't feel I have to agree with all his policies.

"The President assured me that I'll be an observer at all Cabinet meetings and any other meetings I want to attend, except one-to-one, face-to-face, sessions between the President and, say, Gromyko. I'll have a regular meeting with the President every morning and I'll be one of his five or six senior advisers."

Nessen is held in fairly high regard by his colleagues. But he drew much criticism from some for his coziness with Ford. Nessen and his wife gave a party for reporters and invited Ford shortly after he became President.

One Washington correspondent, criticizing the cheerleading atmosphere among the press corps, called Nessen the "head pompon waver."

Nessen's new job pays \$42,500 and includes a liberal expense account. Nessen declined to reveal the NBC salary he gave up. "Let's say it's something I'm willing to do and let it go at that."

Press corps members hope Nessen will display the same high ideals terHorst brought to the job. "There's no way to tell by questioning somebody what kind of press secretary he will be," said *Newsday's* Marty Schram.

Some of his friends gave Nessen a gift before his first press briefing — a flak jacket. He didn't wear it. ■

— Jay Gourley