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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
(Bethesda, Maryland)

PRESS BRIEFING
BY
LARRY SPEAKES

July 13, 1985

Bethesda Naval Hospital
Bethesda, Maryland

7:40 P.M. EDT

INDEX

SUBJECT

PAGE

DOMESTIC

President's Medical Update.....1-6

7:58 P.M. EDT

#1497-07/13

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July 13, 1985

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MR. SPEAKES: At 7:22 p.m. tonight the President signed the following letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate:

Dear Mr. Speaker or Mr. President Pro Tempore,

Following up on my letter to you of this date, please be advised I am able to resume the discharge of the constitutional powers and duties of the office of the President of the United States. I have informed the Vice President of my determination and my resumption of those powers and duties.

Sincerely,
Ronald Reagan

The President signed the letter in the recovery room at 7:22 p.m. in the presence of Don Regan, Chief of Staff, and Fred Fielding, the Counsel to the President, and Dr. Olier.

The doctors' report on the President --

Q Could you go back? That last -- he says, "I am determined --"?

MR. SPEAKES: I'll give you a copy of it. "I have informed the Vice President of my determination and my resumption of those powers and duties."

Q Well, during the time that George Bush was Acting President, do you know whether he actually took any action?

MR. SPEAKES: His staff said that he did not take any of the constitutional powers of the President.

This evening Dr. Olier has advised us that the President is generally without pain. He is conversant and oriented. His vital signs are good. He has no fever, that his lab values are normal, that he has virtually worn off the effect of the anesthetic, that he is sleeping off and on, and he said his advice to us if the President was needed to make a decision, he could make it.

After that briefing -- after briefing to the Chief of Staff, they went to the recovery room at which time the President signed the letter -- 7:22 p.m.

The President told his staff, "I feel fit as a fiddle."

At 7:35 -- at 7:29 p.m. the Chief of Staff informed the Vice President of the President's signature on the letter. At 7:25 p.m. the Chief of the Staff spoke to the President Pro Tempore of the Senate --

Q Wait a minute --

Q Twenty-nine, you said.

MR. SPEAKES: At 7:29 p.m. he spoke to the Vice President. At 7:35 p.m. he spoke to the President Pro Tempore of the Senate. He is in the process of calling the Speaker of the House.

Q How long did he have the temporary power?

MR. SPEAKES: He had it just under nine hours, from 10:28 a.m. until 7:22 p.m. in the afternoon.

Q Twenty eight?

Q I thought it was 10:32 a.m.

MR. SPEAKES: Ten thirty-two -- I am sorry.

Q Yes, but I thought it took effect when he went under anesthetic.

MR. SPEAKES: It takes effect when he goes under anesthetic, so let me, for those of you who are keeping timetables, the President was in the operating room at roughly 11:15 a.m. Dr. Oiler says that the anesthetic was started and the President, for all practical purposes, was under anesthetic at 11:28 a.m. this morning.

Q So it was a little under eight hours, right?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q A little under eight hours?

MR. SPEAKES: From 11:28 a.m. until 7:22 p.m.

Q Larry, was that Dr. Oiler who pronounced him -- if the President was needed to make a decision, he could -- that was Oiler?

MR. SPEAKES: That was Dr. Oiler.

Q Larry, did the doctor give the President an update or describe how the operation was going? Did he tell him what he thought of it?

MR. SPEAKES: The President has been briefed on his condition and now the operation has gone. In fact, he told Regan and Fielding that -- he had praise for the medical team, saying "These fellows did a good job," as Doctor Oiler was standing at the foot of the bed.

Q The President said that?

Q How does he know?

Q Is he still getting any morphine or painkiller or anything?

MR. SPEAKES: This morphine, as we have once explained -- I can give it to you in some detail -- it is called an intra-thecal. It is a device that is interjected in the sac surrounding the spinal cord. As I explained earlier today, it is a device that makes -- that is a time release, and it will continue over perhaps as long as two days or so. It provides -- using a very small amount of pain-reduction drug, it provides more or less a local painkiller by providing its effects up and down the lower part of the back -- the middle part of the back -- which is where the nerve endings are that control the nerves in the wall of the stomach.

Q You said that was morpnine earlier. Is it still morpnine?

MR. SPEAKES: It is still morphine, yes.

Q Larry, does this mean the President will not be requesting or not needing any more painkillers?

MR. SPEAKES: That is the opinion of Dr. Oller. He says that more and more, as time goes by, it is less obvious that he will need anything else. He is not having any pain to any extent whatsoever now. He is virtually free of pain.

Q Larry, did the Vice President formally acknowledge the turnover of power back to the President?

MR. SPEAKES: He did so by saying, "How is he feeling?"

Q How is the President feeling?

MR. SPEAKES: Correct.

Q Fit as a fiddle. (Laugnter.)

MR. SPEAKES: That is right.

Q Let's take this on the road.

Q Are you done for the night?

MR. SPEAKES: Are you? (Laugnter.)

Q It depends on you. You go first.

Q Do you know how long the incision was in the operation?

MR. SPEAKES: No, we didn't get a measurement on it. I think it begins in a mid-section of the stomach and extends straight down, but I don't know --

Q Can we see the scar?

Q Was this letter --

MR. SPEAKES: -- how far it is. He wants to show you the point of entry of yesterday's test. (Laugnter.)

Q Was this letter -- prepared -- yesterday or today?

MR. SPEAKES: It was prepared this morning.

Q It was prepared this morning? And they just took it in -- the President was in bed --

MR. SPEAKES: The President read it and signed it.

Q He had never seen it before?

Q That's the best one of the day.

MR. SPEAKES: Had not seen it before. We asked him, did he want us to come back later, perhaps, to sign? He said, "No, gimme a pen."

Q He wanted his power back --

Q He said --

MR. SPEAKES: "No, gimme a pen." G-I-M-M-E. (Laughter.)

Q -- into this.

Q Bye.

Q What did you --

Q Yes --

MR. SPEAKES: Tomorrow's -- Oh, go ahead.

Q There was a reference in the President's initial letter to a long-standing arrangement with Vice President Bush. Does he have some sort of informal arrangement with the Vice President as previous Presidents have?

MR. SPEAKES: They have talked about it, yes. I don't know whether previous Presidents have had it, but he and the Vice President have talked about it, the latest a week or so ago.

Q Is there a written arrangement?

MR. SPEAKES: Not that I'm aware of.

Tomorrow, we'll open our office here at 8:00 a.m. and I say we'd brief no earlier than 9:00 a.m., probably no later than 10:00 a.m. I think we'll get out here in the morning and sit down with the doctors and get the overnight report, talk to the President a bit, come out and brief. I'd say we'd brief again mid-afternoon tomorrow -- just an update, and pretty well close down late in the afternoon.

And then on Monday maybe we'll operate out here part of the day and shift back downtown later.

Q Will it just be you tomorrow, or doctors tomorrow?

MR. SPEAKES: I think so, unless we seem to need a doctor tomorrow.

Q Was the President told that there are still results to be had from the --

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know whether Dr. Oller said that or not.

Q Larry, where is Mrs. Reagan and what has been her position and -- or talk with the President?

MR. SPEAKES: She talked with the President very shortly after he returned to the recovery room. Do we have a time on that, Mark?

MR. WEINBERG: She left here at 5:00 p.m. and was back at the White House at 5:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKES: So, she left at 5:00 p.m. -- got back at 5:30 p.m. So, sometime between 4:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. she and her brother went in and talked to the President and then she went back to the White House where she'll remain overnight at the White House.

Yes?

Q There have been some questions raised about the quality of care at Bethesda. Was there ever any thought for the President not coming here for the operation?

MR. SPEAKES: No, we have no complaints. It's been very good.

Q Even after the report that the barrium enema should have been done earlier?

MR. SPEAKES: What report?

Q There have been suggestions that doctors have said that in May when he had the original polyp removed that a barrium --

MR. SPEAKES: I know all that. We had five doctors here that tell you -- explained that earlier.

Yes, ma'am.

Q You said earlier something about when they would be removing the device the morphine is being injected through.

MR. SPEAKES: I don't really know whether it requires removal or not. I'm not sure that it's a device. I don't know quite how it works. I know what it's called but I don't know how it works.

Q Larry, why such a hurry if the President's still in the recovery room? You said he's virtually out from under anesthesia which suggests not completely. Why the necessity of getting him to assume -- reassume the responsibilities of the Presidency while he's still in recovery?

MR. SPEAKES: As the original letter said, it would be briefly and temporarily and it was briefly and temporarily. The President's prepared in the doctors' terms and in the terms of his top staff members. He's fully capable of making a decision. They had a conversation with him that included not only the letter, but included, once again, legislative matters. A few quips back and forth. So the President's in fine form and well on his way to being back to his usual self.

Q Are you still looking at the timetable of the President being here from seven to ten days at this point?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, there's no change in that.

Q And he has expressed no curiosity to the doctors about the resulting biopsy on the polyp?

MR. SPEAKES: No. I don't think that's uncommon in a recovering patient, no.

Q What are the arrangements tonight should there be any change in his condition?

MR. SPEAKES: Are you prepared to stay? Weinberg will be here tonight and he will be just doors away from the doctors and he will notify me if anything comes up and we'll call you all if anything comes up. Otherwise, we won't keep an office open.

Q How will the President be conducting business over the next few days?

MR. SPEAKES: The President will be conducting business, probably take a look at some paperwork tomorrow. Don Regan will be out here tomorrow at 8:00 p.m. and remain through the bigger portion of the day, I think. The White House staff will operate on its usual Sunday staffing. There won't be -- other than the normal people that are required to be in on Sunday, be there.

Monday, it will be virtually -- with one, big exception, it will be virtually business as usual at the White House. I think Don Regan will be coming out here mid-morning and spending some time with the President each day during the stay. Later in the week, he'll probably have visitors, use the telephone, and so forth.

Q Has he cleared the desk now on the schedule in terms of wiping out all travel and -- I know he only had one trip, but --

MR. SPEAKES: Yes. We haven't firmly made those decisions, but certainly, the President will have a normal post-operative recovery period -- seven to ten days here, a few days of easing back into the schedule at the White House. The doctor, I think, said this afternoon three to four weeks he should be doing pretty much business as usual. But I think it -- it just takes a while to get over surgery of any type.

Q Any thought of going out to the ranch early?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't think so, Sam. I think we'll probably go out about when we planned. What the doctor did, as he told you, so he could get in the saddle about August 14th.

Q Getting back in the saddle's important. (Laughter.)

MR. SPEAKES: Back in the saddle again. (Laughter.)

Q Oh, god.

Q How many medical personnel is with the President at any given time?

MR. SPEAKES: I think it varies. Probably three or four there in the area around the bed and half a dozen more in the recovery room suite.

Q Is there a doctor there all the time?

MR. SPEAKES: I would assume there's -- I don't know whether the doctor's there. He's certainly in the immediate area.

Enough?

Q I just want to ask one other question that may seem -- did this paper the President signed today and then reclaiming part, did he have to have witnesses, signing witnesses?

MR. SPEAKES: There's no co-signing necessary.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

7:58 P.M. EDT

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