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

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PRESS BRIEFING  
BY  
LARRY SPEAKES

Bethesda Naval Hospital  
Bethesda, Maryland

July 14, 1985

5:32 P.M. EDT

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MR. SPEAKES: We'll make this fairly quick so we can all go home. All in all, the President has had an excellent day. The doctors -- Dr. Oller and Dr. Hutton, just spent a few minutes with the President just moments ago. The President has been up and walked about his room briefly today. He spent about 45 minutes sitting in a chair and reading. He is now sitting very comfortably in bed and reading; he's reading Louis L'Amour's new book. Vital signs are good.

Mrs. Reagan has been here since 10:00 a.m. this morning. She was in and visited with him for a fair amount of the morning and through the noon hour and then she left him alone for mid-afternoon to read and hopefully nap. But I don't think the President has taken a nap. If it has, it's been very brief. I think he's looking forward to a good night's sleep, but he's been enjoying his reading in the afternoon.

Near as I can tell, that's the list.

Q Who wrote the book again?

MR. SPEAKES: Louis L'Amour's book -- that's one of his favorite writers. He writes western -- right? Western novels?

Q Yes.

Q -- name of the book?

MR. SPEAKES: What's the name of the book?

MR. ROUSSEL: I don't know. He's got a bunch of them.

MR. SPEAKES: Get today's Times -- I think it's the newest book.

Q Was it the Medal of Freedom he gave Louis L'Amour two years ago or --

MR. SPEAKES: I think it was. Yes.

Dale?

Q Did Mrs. Reagan have lunch with him?

MR. SPEAKES: She had lunch, but he didn't eat.

Q Is she well?

MR. SPEAKES: Is she well? Yes. She's fine.

Q Well, it was reported that she looked kind of wobbly.

MORE

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MR. SPEAKES: Also it was reported that she brought in a picture of John Wayne. That was Duke Reagan riding horses, not John Wayne. So -- no picture of John Wayne, sorry.

Q Larry, any other business today -- budget, foreign policy discussions?

MR. SPEAKES: No, not really. Don Regan went home shortly after noon -- 1:00 or 2:00 p.m. this afternoon -- maybe it was closer to 2:00 p.m., and he's talked in here by phone. He talked to Mrs. Reagan to check on the President. But, other than that, there has not been any major business.

Q Did the President talk to --

Q Any plans for any visits tomorrow, or what's the outlook --

MR. SPEAKES: Chances are that the -- some of the members of the staff will be out early in the morning to chat with the President and get kind of marching orders for the day.

Q -- the ones you talked about this morning?

MR. SPEAKES: I'm not sure who'll come, but we'll have it in the morning for sure.

Q Will the Vice President take over the Congressional meeting and some of the other things.

MR. SPEAKES: I really haven't talked to anybody about that. No Congressional meeting scheduled tomorrow, I don't believe.

Q Tuesday.

MR. SPEAKES: So, Emery?

Q As near as you can tell, what time do you expect results tomorrow on the tests being conducted?

MR. SPEAKES: Can't be specific, Emery? They told us 48 hours and whether that would be early afternoon, late afternoon or whatever, I just don't know.

Q And as near as you can tell, about what time, approximately, might you brief the first time tomorrow?

MR. SPEAKES: I think about 10:00 a.m. As soon as I get a chance to chat with the doctors in the morning and see the President briefly. It may run a little later than that because we'll be coming out here after our meetings at the White House in the morning.

Sheilah?

Q You said earlier that the President was virtually pain-free this morning. Have you talked to him about how comfortable he is since then?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, he is very comfortable. Hasn't had any major complaints about any discomfort. He has had no further pain medicine.

Q Did the President talk to anyone on the phone today?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't think so, John.

Q Larry, what is your reaction to the London Observer piece today that said the President may have elected not to have surgery last year on his colon -- or at least exploratory surgery -- because of the election. Do you know that story that I am talking about?

MR. SPEAKES: No, I didn't get my London Observer before I left home this morning -- (laughter) -- but, no, I wonder how the London Observer would know that?

Q They quote medical sources close to the White House medical team.

Q Walter Mondale. (Laughter.)

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, probably so. I didn't know the London Observer had any sources close to the medical -- I don't know how they got that.

No, the President didn't. That is not true. That is all poppycock, as the British would say. (Laughter.)

Q Could you describe the President's frame of mind today?

MR. SPEAKES: The President's frame of mind is excellent. He feels well. He, you know, is always cnonping at the bit to do a little bit more than the doctors want him to do, but he has had a good day. All in all it has just been a first-rate first day after surgery.

Q What about messages from foreign leaders?

MR. SPEAKES: There have been a number. We don't have a total to give you because they have come in from -- at a number of different places. Some have come directly here to the hospital, and others have come through the diplomatic things at the White House. But there are a goodly number of European, Pacific Rim, Central American nations. I don't know about the Soviets. Did we ever get anything?

MR. ROUSSEL: I don't know.

MR. SPEAKES: Somebody check with the services.

Q Could you try to have a posting on that either tonight or tomorrow morning, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: We will try to get something tomorrow morning. We just want to be all-inclusive because somebody may have sent one and if we don't mention it, then they might be put out that we didn't mention theirs.

Q Are you releasing a picture of the President?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, I am glad you mentioned that. There is a photo and we will have them here -- how soon do you think?

Where is Mark? He may be working on it at the moment.

MS. BRISLEY: The driver is on the way.

MR. WEINBERG: Twenty minutes.

MR. SPEAKES: Twenty minutes, okay.

Q One picture?

MR. SPEAKES: It is a photograph of a First Family kiss. The President is in bed. He is more or less seated. He is raising up in the bed, puckered, and gives Mrs. Reagan a kiss on the lips. It is the instant before the kiss, not quite as good as --

Q Vanity Fair.

MR. SPEAKES: Not quite as good as Vanity Fair.

Q When was it taken? Was it taken --

MR. SPEAKES: It was taken shortly after she got here this morning.

Q Larry, is there any sign of fever or infection?

MR. SPEAKES: Not that I am aware of. It is quite common for, in the post-operative first couple of days -- in fact it is almost normal -- to have a slightly elevated temperature. The President's may be up just a notch, but well under 100 and there is no problem -- nothing unexpected.

So, Dale.

Q I think you said this morning that the President would quite likely be reading some briefing papers during the day. Did he do that?

MR. SPEAKES: I think he got his national security briefing paper, but that is about the extent of -- he knows everything else, so he doesn't need to do any reading.

Q Larry, could you be a little bit more specific about that temperature? You said, "nothing I am aware of,"

but then you said, "Under a hundred." We were told this morning, "rock stable." Could you tell us what his temperature has been?

MR. SPEAKES: I really don't have a count -- a number on it, Mike, but slightly over the 98.6 that is normal for some people. But it's certainly normal in a post-operative period to have an elevated temperature. Doctors have not -- rarely have a patient that doesn't have a bit of temperature in the first couple of days. But it's well under a hundred, and there's absolutely no problem. That's normal.

Q And they do not believe that there's any infection at this time?

MR. SPEAKES: No, they do not. The doctors listened to his lungs this afternoon, very good shape.

Q Still no other medication?

MR. SPEAKES: No other pain medication, antibiotic medication continues.

Q Larry, were there any photographs taken during the operation --

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q -- for historical purposes?

MR. SPEAKES: No, there were not. These are the first photographs made of the President since he walked in Friday afternoon and snook hands with the doctors at the door before his examination.

Sheilan and then I'll come back --

Q Do the doctors, after seeing the President again this afternoon, are they still so impressed by his recovery?

MR. SPEAKES: Absolutely. Absolutely, totally. They become more impressed by the hour.

Medical lady there, yes, ma'am, you.

Q Yes, does the President have any side effects from the pain medication he's been given in the spine?

MR. SPEAKES: None whatsoever. None whatsoever. And none are expected from it. They're just --

Q Sometimes happens --

MR. SPEAKES: Not very often.

Q He have round-the-clock nurses?

MR. SPEAKES: Otto.

well, round-the-clock nurses? There's always medical people on hand there in the outer area of the suite. I don't think Dr. Otter plans to stay the evening. Dr. Hutton has stayed there in the suite. Dr. Smith and -- there's a nurse from the White House staff that's there and a couple of corpsmen.

Otto.

Q You said this morning that they thought that he would have a chance to sit up in a chair. Has he done that?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, 45 minutes. Good long stay in the chair and a brief walk around the room.

Q Okay. And did Dr. Oiler come back to see him, as you indicated he would?

MR. SPEAKES: Did he come back to see him? Yes, he came back at 5:00 p.m., spent about 10 minutes with the President, about 10 minutes with the First Lady and told her what was going on.

Q Did he make an examination of any kind, or was it just --

MR. SPEAKES: I think he just looked at the chart and talked to the President, observed the President.

Yes, sir.

Q This morning you said that the vital signs were rock stable. This afternoon, you said they were good. Did you mean any difference between the --

MR. SPEAKES: No, no. Just that the temperature is slightly elevated, but that's the only problem.

Q But that was not true this morning?

MR. SPEAKES: I think it was slightly elevated this morning, but that's -- as I say, rock stable, normal. Nothing unexpected.

Q Excuse me if this is a redundant question. Maybe I didn't hear the answer. Is there some question or was there some question



about a 22-minute period when maybe Vice President Bush did not know he had this authority?

MR. SPEAKES: It's growing. It was 12. Right, Lyle?  
(Laughter.)

Q Yes, now they're saying it's 22 minutes. Could you just kind of briefly go over your position on that and clarify that?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes. There was no 22-minute period, no 12-minute period, no period, period.

Q Well, okay. Can you clarify why there wasn't, then? Was he informed on the plane? Was he informed in the car? I mean --

MR. SPEAKES: He was informed formally afterwards, but there'd been conversations between the Vice President and the Chief of Staff in the evening. There'd been conversations shortly before Bush left Kennebunkport to go to Portland to catch a plane. The Vice President was fully aware of what the staff was discussing, and he was generally aware that -- probably which direction the President was going.

Q And he was also aware of the probable timing, which is to say that this would have gone into effect possibly while he was in the air as the President was being wheeled into --

MR. SPEAKES: That's true.

Q So, had there been some need for him to take any action at all --

MR. SPEAKES: Could have done it in a minute, Emery.

Q -- somebody around him could have just said, "You're on"?

MR. SPEAKES: That's right. "You're it, man."  
(Laughter.) "Here you go." (Laughter.) No, it was -- I don't see any problem.

Q Have you clarified exactly --

MR. SPEAKES: Can you top that, Schuster?

Q No.

MR. SPEAKES: Okay.

Q -- when the power -- you say -- do you go along now that the power was transferred when he signed the letter?

MR. SPEAKES: No. It went along when he went under the anesthetic as prescribed in the letter. So --

Q So that's different from the transmission language you used this morning?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, legally the action was taken -- the -- was put into motion then. It was there to be done then. The letter was effective. The legal action was effective at that moment. But the precise moment, as the letter specified, it's when he went under the anesthetic which the doctor told me was 11:28 a.m.

Q So doesn't that then raise some question about who was in command between the time of the letter being transmitted and the time of his going under anesthesia?

MR. SPEAKES: No, the President was.

Q There's no question about that?

MR. SPEAKES: No question about it because the letter specifies that once -- that when he signed the letter and transmitted it, and the letter was transmitted under the language of the constitutional amendment. Then it was -- then the letter -- the legal step had been taken. But, then when you read subparagraph (b)(1) in the -- under this scenario I'm putting out, then you find out that the President was specified when he went under the anesthetic. So, that's the triggering factor according to our --

Lyle?

Q There was --

Q Larry, could I follow up on that a little bit? Without regard to whether or not the Vice President might have been hypersensitive to the subject, wasn't it at least -- an affront to him to be the Acting President and not to know it?

MR. SPEAKES: No, because he knew that he was going to come pretty close to being it. I mean, he was pretty certain what was going to happen. So, I guess it would have been better, Lyle, if we had -- I guess -- the other way around was that we would have told him if he wasn't.

Q I don't understand.

MR. SPEAKES: In other words, he pretty well knew what was coming down the pike and I don't think it would have been any surprise to him if they'd had said you're it in the course of that flight. I think the surprise to him would have been if you say you ain't it. (Laughter.)

Q So, in effect, even though the letter was discussed in the suite here sometime between 10:15 a.m. and 10:30 a.m., the Vice President -- are we to understand -- knew the contents of the letter and the substantive terms of the transfer of power?

MR. SPEAKES: I think all of those ramifications had been discussed. Some T.V. people who need pictures should get them promptly so you can make your shows. You guys -- getting your picture?

Q Yes, I have a question though. Could you, not through White House Communications, have contacted Bush on his airplane when it happened?

MR. SPEAKES: They did. Yes.

Q And told him that, as Emery says, you're on?

MR. SPEAKES: No, I don't know that anybody told him at the precise moment until Don called him. But, we certainly were in contact in the air just as the President is when he flies on Air Force One.

Dick?

Q Larry, the President will be told tomorrow whether or not there were cancer cells in the specimen removed yesterday -- what's his attitude about that? Is he concerned or apprehensive --

MR. SPEAKES: The President is pretty much of an optimist -- he's an upbeat person, he's very well prepared for any eventuality. He's -- when you get to know the man, you know that he can handle anything that comes down the pike. I think he'll have a good attitude about whatever comes out.

Like that, Bruce?

Q Yes.

MR. SPEAKES: Fit in the Daily News Headline?

Q Did the President ask for me?

MR. SPEAKES: "RR Ready." Okay.

Q Larry, -- the feeling of the staff or does the President have any feelings about whether this will translate into any sympathy on the Hill -- political --

MR. SPEAKES: We're not asking any. (Laughter.) We think the budget -- the President's budget proposal, the President's tax proposal and anything else he's done is -- stand on its own merits -- deserves to be overwhelmingly passed simply on its merits.

Otto?

Q Did you say he was getting antibiotics?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q He's had no other medicine but antibiotics?

MR. SPEAKES: He is getting antibiotics, yes.

Q Do you know which one --

MR. SPEAKES: I do not know which one. I presume it's going through the I.V.

Q You indicated that we might hear from the pathologist tomorrow when the report is in. Have you decided yet --

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q -- if the fellow will appear? And, not only that, will there be another appearance by the medical team? Because some other questions have been raised about the management of the case.

MR. SPEAKES: You had about an hour of them yesterday. What -- do you want to ask me anything?

Q Well, yes, okay. There has been some question about the fact that there was a biopsy taken of the tumor on Friday, when it was obvious that the tumor would have to be taken out anyway. And some doctors are saying it's risky to take biopsy because that might spill some cancer cells into the system and possibly cause a recurrence of the tumor within six months to a year. Has that question been discussed at all?

MR. SPEAKES: No. I'm getting tired of second guessing by doctors who don't know the case.

Wendy.

Q Is Mrs. Reagan still here?

MR. SPEAKES: I think she is. She planned to leave shortly, but she was there when I needed this way.

Q Did you get the name of the L'Amour book? Title?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, I'll try to. I didn't look at the book, and Mrs. Reagan said it was the new one, and I know he does have out a new one, but I -- the title doesn't -- but I'll try to get it. That's probably the biggest news to come out of this press conference.

Two AP people.

Q Do you --

MR. SPEAKES: Senior person first.

Q Go ahead.

Q Go ahead. He hasn't had one yet.

Q Has Mrs. Reagan decided whether to go through with that trip to the aircraft carrier?

MR. SPEAKES: I didn't ask her. I don't know, Dale. I think she -- I know she wants to keep as much of her schedule as possible, although she does try to plan to be out of here every day, unless she does go off on Wednesday.

Mike.

Q Do the doctors anticipate a substantial weight loss as a result of the -- you know -- the lengthy time on I.V.s and so on?

MR. SPEAKES: -- without food?

Q Is that normal?

MR. SPEAKES: I haven't asked them that. I don't know.

I really don't. It has been a while since he's had a steak.

Had enough?

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

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