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

PRESS BRIEFING
BY
LARRY SPEAKES

Bethesda Naval Hospital
Bethesda, Maryland

July 14, 1985

10:17 A.M. EDT

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MR. SPEAKES: This morning the first words the President spoke when we saw him were, "I am amazed at how good I feel."

At 8:15 a.m. this morning the President was back in his room here at Bethesda Naval Hospital after spending the night in the recovery room. As he left the recovery room, he expressed the desire to walk to his room but doctors intervened and he was wheeled down the hallway.

He asked for the newspapers first off, but quickly added, "I've got them only for the comics."

Dr. Dale Oller, who remained overnight with the President and saw the President through the night, has the following information, and these are quotes: "The President is on a post-operative course that surpasses by 99.9 percent all patients who undergo this type surgery. That includes all patients, much less one who is 74 years old.

"So far," Dr. Oller says, "it is a spectacular post-operative course. Vitals are rock stable. That includes temperature, pulse, and blood pressure, and lab studies are totally as expected.

"The President has required no pain medication overnight, and in fact this morning he is virtually pain-free. The nasal-gastric tube remains, and will do so possibly for four or five days.

"Today the President's -- we'll simply monitor the President's condition and administer IV fluids."

Last night the President slept well, except like in all hospitals, he was awakened through the night by some of the attendants.

The entire surgical team visited with the President this morning at 7:30 a.m. They conferred briefly and then all went home for a rest with the exception of Dr. Smith, the White House Physician, and Dr. Hutton, the Assistant White House Physician, who remain at the Hospital.

As I said, the President was back in the suite this morning. We visited with him. He looks well. He is sitting up -- in more or less a sitting up position in his hospital bed. He is full of good humor.

Mrs. Reagan is expected to arrive shortly.

Don Regan, the White House Chief of Staff, spent ten minutes with the President this morning. He gave the President

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overnight national security developments, and they talked over congressional affairs. The President expressed a strong desire to see action on the federal budget this week, and the President said -- and this is a quote -- "I want to emphasize this week."

The President has received a number of get-well wishes from foreign leaders from Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Central America.

For those who are keeping the historical record, the second letter last night, in which the President reassumed the powers of the Presidency, was delivered to the offices of the Speaker of the House and to the President Pro Tempore of the Senate. The details are, Douglas W. Chirdon, who is Assistant to the White House Executive Clerk, delivered the letter to the offices of Speaker O'Neill and Senator Thurmond. They were delivered at 9:05 p.m. to the Senate side, and 9:10 p.m. to the House side.

That is all I have. Questions?

Q Did the President have anything to say about the way the Vice President acted yesterday?

MR. SPEAKES: No, but he certainly has no complaints, and I am sure when the two visit that they will talk about it.

Q When will that be?

MR. SPEAKES: Helen -- don't have a schedule.

Q You said he is not on any medication. He still has the morphine theacal spine --

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, he does. The inter-theacal device is still there and has some effect. It takes one to two days to wear off. To clarify that, it is an injection of about .10 of a normal dose of morphine into the sac around the spinal cord -- lower spinal cord.

Q Is he eating at all?

MR. SPEAKES: No, he is getting IV fluids and probably will not have any change in that for, you know, a matter of a few days here, and then he will go onto a liquid diet, and then he will begin to go into bland foods and solid foods.

Q Is that residual morphine the only medication -- the only treatment other than antibiotics the President is receiving right now?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, that is, and I am not -- I don't know about the antibiotic treatment.

Q Does all this good news change the prognosis for how quickly he can get out of the hospital?

MR. SPEAKES: No, we still expect it to be the full seven-day period.

Q Larry, is he going to do any work at all today -- paperwork today, or is he putting that off until --

MR. SPEAKES: No, chances are that he will see some White House briefing papers, and, as he already has, has begun to discuss congressional matters and so forth. So he will be on the job to some extent today.

The doctors did say they expect that he will be up in a chair for brief periods of time for the day, that he will be ambulatory, that he will do some reading, and so forth.

to wait and see. Mrs. Reagan is due, and for the moment, that's it. But if there are others that come, we'll let you know. Let me get Norm, then I'll work on back.

Q What about Bruce's question on any discomfort other than just --

Q From the tube.

MR. SPEAKES: He didn't complain of any this morning. I mean, you know, he does have a tube -- a nasal tube. But there was no specific complaint on his part about it. Seemed to be tolerating it very well.

Owen?

Q Can you tell us if the Vice President performed any function during the period he had power that --

MR. SPEAKES: Not to my knowledge, no. And I think his staff has said the same thing.

So -- Johanna?

Q Can you tell us a little something about how the White House will operate from this point forward?

MR. SPEAKES: The White House will operate -- Don Regan is again here this morning. As you know, Sundays are not normally a full staff day at the White House and they will not be today. The normal National Security functions -- and security functions and communications functions continue at the White House today.

Tomorrow we will have our regular 8:00 a.m. morning senior staff meeting at the White House presided over by Don Regan. Shortly after that, Don Regan, Bud McFarlane, the National Security Advisor, and myself will come here, meet briefly with the President, maybe stay for awhile and then go back to the White House much as we can as usual.

Q Who will be filling in for the President at the Finance Committee functions that are on the schedule?

MR. SPEAKES: At Finance Committee functions? That hadn't been determined. I don't know whether Don Regan will do it, whether the Vice President will do it, or whether we'll simply reschedule. They're on the tax legislation which could -- is not something that's going to be acted on this week.

Q After the '81 assassination attempt, the Vice President filled in for the President on many occasions.

MR. SPEAKES: And I'm sure he will on -- at this time.

So -- Bernie?

Q Is there any further word on when you'll have the full extent of the polyp biopsy examination?

MR. SPEAKES: The what -- any what?

Q Any time on when you will have --

MR. SPEAKES: Not specific, no. The doctor pretty well described the -- in detail the steps that we'd taken through the day today and through tomorrow and don't expect a final report until some time after noon tomorrow. It could be -- in the afternoon.

George?

Q Where would he give that?

MR. SPEAKES: Pardon?

Q Where will he give that report?

MR. SPEAKES: Probably give that report right here. Our method of operation will be that we will remain in -- here at Bethesda tomorrow and we'll do a midmorning briefing about this time and an afternoon briefing which, chances are, will include the pathology report. And then on Tuesday morning we'll shift back to the White House -- probably not briefing early because I'll be coming out here, but briefing at noon probably.

George?

Q Are there any preliminary pathological reports?

MR. SPEAKES: No. There are none that have been relayed either to me or to the Reagans.

Helen?

Q What does Dr. Oller attribute this abnormal spectacular -- not feeling any pain when you have an abdominal operation?

MR. SPEAKES: I think he attributes it to several things. First of all, as he said before the President's surgery, that he was in superior physical condition. And, as Dr. Rosenberg pointed out yesterday, that once they had -- made the incision and had an opportunity to look at the President's vital organs, his blood vessel structure, that they were amazed. In fact, the doctor said it was the internal workings of a 40 year old -- they were really, really surprised about how well the President looked and as he said, he looks great on the outside and he can now attest he looks great on the inside.

I'd better do a little back. Otto?

Q You said the President discussed some inside matters and expressed some concern about the budget. Bob Dole was on the radio again this morning complaining about the -- lack of interest in the White House on the deficit. -- with Don Regan or --

MR. SPEAKES: Haven't seen the Majority Leader's latest blast from today. But, I can assure you that it has been noted at the highest echelons of the White House and -- I'm talking the Bethesda White House. It is -- yesterday's statements by the Majority Leader were noted by the President and then, today very quickly this morning he brought up the same subject. So, it's very much on the President's mind.

Q Larry, what did he say about it?

MR. SPEAKES: I think the President feels very strongly that he has dealt in a straightforward manner with the Congressional leadership through the whole budget process, that he believes it's important that Democrats and Republicans alike work together because the deficit is important. The emphasis now should be placed, in the President's mind, on the House of Representatives conferees because the Senate has made courageous and deep budget cuts -- taken courageous steps to make deep budget cuts. And they have come a long way.

Now it is up to the House conferees to meet them -- I -- frankly, the Senate has gone more than halfway, but the House has got to meet them on non-defense budget programs in order to cut them, in order to get a credible budget.

So -- Otto?

Q Can we continue on this? Bob Dole said -- yesterday's statement that he was going to deal less with the White House and more with -- Senate colleagues after being left out in the cold on the budget -- and there's some speculation that you're going to -- your dealings with Hill are going to be a lot harder as a result of this turn of events on the budget.

MR. SPEAKES: I think the American people will be the ultimate -- will put the ultimate squeeze on Washington. And we're prepared to make the hard choices and I think the Senate is prepared to make the hard choices. It's now up to the House conferees. We'll be working with Congress as we always have. I think this President probably has dealt more closely with Congress than most.

Q Larry --

MR. SPEAKES: Bob?

Q You said that you wanted this to be done this week.

What does the President or anyone else in White House anticipate doing this week to ensure that you meet that deadline on the budget?

MR. SPEAKES: We'll be working very closely with the conferees. We have made some suggestions to them about potential areas for reduction in spending. That's where we want the House conferees to make a maximum effort in order to reduce some of these programs. The Senate has, in their version of the bill, eliminated, as you know, entirely 13 programs. The House does not go nearly that far. They have got to come up with a number of budget cuts in order to meet them that way.

Q Well, does this -- I'd like to follow up -- does this hospitalization diminish the White House ability to press that case?

MR. SPEAKES: No, it should not.

Joanne?

Q Larry, will the President be working the phones? Do you anticipate him --

MR. SPEAKES: Working the phones today? He might make some telephone calls, but customarily he wouldn't ring Congressional leaders up on a Sunday afternoon to talk budget. But --

Q -- you anticipate him being able to start that tomorrow?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, sometime this week, certainly, he'll make calls.

Jerry?

Q Back on the medical situation, were there any developments or complications over the night that had not been anticipated? Any --

MR. SPEAKES: No, they do not -- there were not any unexpected developments overnight. As I say, all the vital signs, all the laboratory tests were very good throughout the night and again this morning. And the President has made no complaints. And the doctors feel very good about everything. So --

John?

Q Ach-choo.

MR. SPEAKES: Bless you.

Q Thank you. Larry, back on something we talked at length about yesterday: Was there any recommendation by any of the doctors who consulted on the President's case that he undergo a colonoscopy -- a complete colon exam -- a year ago?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, John, you had the five physicians, including Dr. Cattau who has participated in both of these examinations. He answered your questions extensively, and I think that's the best you can do. He has been certainly more intimately involved in it than I have. So --

Mike?

Q Larry, following up a little bit on the same subject, can you tell us whether the President, learning that his brother had colon cancer, was related to the timing of his decision to have a follow-up?

MR. SPEAKES: No. It's my understanding that this was

made before -- the decision for -- roughly this timing was made before they were aware that the President's brother had had the same type of a polyp removed.

Helen?

Q Larry, I'm a little confused. Does the President agree with Dole -- and when you say, you know, he had some thoughts on it -- the highest echelons and so does he think that the criticism is valid?

MR. SPEAKES: No, I would think, in my opinion -- and I judge I reflect the President's view -- that the Majority Leader's pointed remarks were rather unfortunate. But the President, while noting those remarks, is willing to proceed. He's made his position known to the Senate -- is exactly -- and they've known it all along. They've been involved in it. The emphasis, though, has to go to the House of Representatives and those conferees who must meet the Senate on deficit reduction.

Q Why does he think they're unfortunate?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, they seemed a bit pointed and seemed to -- not to put the problem where it is. I don't think you can fault the President or the White House for this at all.

Q Can you tell us what the President did say about Dole's comments? You said he took note of them?

MR. SPEAKES: He took note of them.

Norm?

Q -- Do you deny Dole's remark, though, that the President has backed away from one of the major items in the deficit reduction package which is Social Security?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, we've been through this.

Q Well, I mean when you --

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, we have indicated that the President -- there's a firm body of Presidential statements concerning Social Security and the President's approach to Social Security. And there is also a considerable amount on the record about how we came to endorse the Senate compromise. Then, there is a considerable amount on the record about when it became evident that the House and the Republicans in the House were not going to buy Social Security COLAs, that we sought to make some changes in order to get deficit reduction. And that's where we stand.

Yes?

Q Did you mean to say the President and the President's brother had exactly the same type of polyp? Did you mean that? I --

MR. SPEAKES: I'm not familiar with the President's brother's case in the detail that I am the President's, but I think it was in a similar location. And --

Q And the same pathological --

MR. SPEAKES: I'm not sure.

Emery?

Q Will there be photographs released of the President? And what's your briefing schedule today? I --

MR. SPEAKES: Briefing schedule is come back very late this afternoon after I talk with the doctors and kind of get a review of the day and wrap it up. Don't know of any plans to release any photos today, Emery, but if we do, we'll get to you pretty quickly.

Bruce?

Q Have you discussed with the staff or with the doctors how you're going to pace the President's return to his full workload, how gradual it'll be, what kind of things that he might have gotten in the normal course of the day before this that you might filter out now and not bring --

MR. SPEAKES: We've had those type discussions because, obviously, we do develop the President's schedule out for several weeks in advance. He'll be at the hospital 7 to 10 days. Once he gets back, it'll be very normal for what any patient would do with this type of surgery. He'll be easing back into his Presidential schedule. Perhaps he'll have some meetings in the Residence for a few days and come over to the office and conduct some meetings there. He'll certainly get his rest because that's certainly important to his recovery. But specifically, no definite plans. But the schedule will be somewhat lighter for a few weeks.

Norm?

Q Is there any change in the plans scheduled for August for California?

MR. SPEAKES: No, no change yet.

John.

Q I believe we were told earlier that Mrs. Reagan will host the diplomatic reception. Will that include the Boston Pops and --

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q -- beforehand and so forth?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q And, second, will you attempt to have a doctor with you when you present the pathological report?

MR. SPEAKES: We'll see.

Q Thank you.

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q Mr. Speakes, the President went under anesthesia at 11:28 a.m. And Mr. Bush was informed by Mr. Regan at 11:40 a.m. that he had taken over. During that 12-minute period, was no one in charge of the government and did that process reveal to you any imperfections in the process of transfer?

MR. SPEAKES: No, your conclusion there is a bit off. When the President signed the letter and it was effectively delivered to Congress -- and that means when delivery starts -- that, in effect, the Vice President was in charge. So, I don't think there was any moment there that the Vice President was not fully aware and fully empowered to operate.

I think that we spent considerable time in looking at the ramifications and our decision, our letter, as you know, was very carefully worded. And I think, quite frankly, it went off like clockwork. And I don't know that anybody would have -- it's going to be difficult to second-guess how that worked.

Q Could I follow up on that? Even though the Vice President was, in fact, in charge at that moment that the letter was delivered, he was unaware of that, I take it, and could not have exercised any authority -- let's say, emergency authority -- had the need arose at that time?

MR. SPEAKES: No. You're wrong, is what I'm trying to say.

Bernie.

Q Is it right to assume -- this is in follow-up to Johanna's question -- that full White House operations will resume tomorrow from the White House with people shuffling up here to tell the President -- or to talk to the President?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, the full White House will resume. Really, we just took the weekend off to have surgery, and we're -- We were in full business on Friday and we'll be in full business on Monday.

The group that comes out here will be very small, and we won't stay that long, and we'll confer by phone as necessary.

This just in: Mrs. Reagan has arrived at the President's suite. She brought a number of pictures, in addition to the ones she brought in yesterday, to decorate his room, make it more comfortable and to lend a more personal air to it. The pictures are both of the

family and of California scenes.

She talked to all members of the family, all of the children, including talking to Maureen twice in Nairobi. All of the children have been following closely the progress and are obviously pleased to get the reports.

She'll have lunch with the President today, and they'll go over the many telegrams and messages and good wishes they've received from heads of state that include Europe, the Far East and Central American leaders.

Joanne.

Q Any response from Gorbachev --

MR. SPEAKES: Any response --

Q Has he gotten any communique or --

MR. SPEAKES: From whom?

Q From Gorbachev?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know. We don't know that, do we, Ed? We will keep a watch and -- we'll stand by the post office to hear from the Soviets.

Q Since the President -- the Vice President wasn't notified until 12 minutes after the President went under anesthetic -- that he didn't get the letter until 12 minutes afterwards -- was he notified in some other way? By telephone --

MR. SPEAKES: I think maybe the telephone call didn't go until then, but when the President signed the letter, and the notification was made to the Hill, and the letter was started on its way, which was done very promptly, it's the opinion of the Attorney General that once we start -- the 25th Amendment says, "transmit to the Speaker of the House and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate," it is the opinion of the Attorney General that transmission is satisfied under the Constitutional Amendment when it begins. And it began very promptly after the President signed it. As you know, the President signed it, roughly, an hour before that, a little over an hour before that. So, I think everything was intact and I don't think we had any -- there were no problems.

As I say, it's going to be very difficult for anyone to be able to second-guess it.

Mike.

Q But, nonetheless, Larry, wasn't there some confusion in the President's own letter by saying that he wanted it to begin when he went under anesthesia, when, in fact, legally it begins at a different time?

MR. SPEAKES: No. I think the President stipulated -- we were very careful to word our belief in the 25th Amendment and how it was -- and we were fitting this letter into the 25th Amendment requirements -- but the President stipulated that when he went under anesthesia -- and that's when it was effective, and I think everybody was in the ballgame and knew what to do.

Otto.

Q The bigger question when did the Vice President know he had the ball. You said yesterday he did not tell the Vice President before he left Maine that he was going to become Acting President. He was not informed that he was until something like 11:40 a.m., when he hit the ground here. That's where the 12-minute,

supposedly -- gap comes in.

MR. SPEAKES: That's true --

Q He may have had -- but nobody had told him.

MR. SPEAKES: I think if a decision had been presented to the Vice President, I think he would have, probably in the next breath, or perhaps even before the question was asked, "What do you want to do, Mr. Vice President?" I think somebody would have said something, "You've got the power to do it."

Q How could you communicate with him? He was in the air at the time, wasn't he?

MR. SPEAKES: That airplane is very sophisticated as far as communications. I can assure you that from the time the Vice President left here on Friday, until he returned, and throughout, that he had a very sophisticated communications systems, and we were completely and totally in touch with the Vice President throughout. And any action required by the Vice President at any time could and would have been done without hesitation and without a hitch.

Gerald.

Q Why didn't someone just pick up the phone and call him to avoid this in time?

MR. SPEAKES: Pardon?

Q Why didn't someone just pick up the phone and call him and let him know in time while he was in the air, or --

MR. SPEAKES: I think -- he was in good shape. I haven't heard any complaints.

Q Why are you going to come back to the White House tomorrow -- and then are you coming back to brief us here? Or --

MR. SPEAKES: Sure.

Q You're going to --

MR. SPEAKES: What I'll do is --

Q -- have -- meet with the President, go back to the White House, come back --

MR. SPEAKES: No, no, no, I won't have to go back to the White House then. I'll just go in for the morning meeting at the White House, come out here and get up to speed out here and then see you all out here.

So, you can really count on --

the White House Press Office will operate totally from here tomorrow. We will have a staff there, but any statements or news will come from here.

Q Two briefings out here tomorrow?

MR. SPEAKES: Probably, yes.

Q Could you just give us a ballpark time for the briefing this afternoon?

MR. SPEAKES: Dick, I hesitate to because it depends upon what time the doctors get back -- come back this afternoon, what time they visit with the President, because I do want to have the benefit of that before I come back. So I think Dr. Oller said he would probably not be back until 5:00 p.m., so that would put me a little after 5:00 p.m. But we will try -- we will put on a lunch lid today from about 12:00 p.m. until about 2:00 p.m. also.

Yes, ma'am, in the red dress.

Q I do understand that everything that was said yesterday is to the effect that there is very little chance, if there is a malignancy, that it has spread. However, have the doctors talked to the President and Mrs. Reagan about what the treatment might be if those lymph nodes, which were also taken -- samples of them taken, as well as the tissue -- do show any spread of the malignancy, small as that probability is?

MR. SPEAKES: That has been discussed. I don't know how extensively it has been discussed with the President, but certainly the President has been briefed on his surgery and he is fully aware of the pending pathological report.

Q Can you share any of that with us? So much has been said to the effect that there is very little likelihood of any additional treatment beyond continuing checkups.

MR. SPEAKES: Dr. Rosenberg addressed that yesterday, and Dr. Cattau. Number one, they said that the surgery could be curative in itself, and then Dr. Cattau said that he would probably recommend a continuing bowel examination on a periodic basis -- I think he said six months out -- and then each year thereafter.

Q Did the President get any get well messages from foreign leaders in the Middle East?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, he did.

Q Can we have a list of them?

MR. SPEAKES: We will try to. We want to make it an all-inclusive list, and they have come in at a couple of different locations.

Q Have the President or the First Lady expressed any anxiety while they are waiting for this report tomorrow?

MR. SPEAKES: No, I think they were fully aware that the study would be done and that it would take 48 hours, and so they fully recognize that it just takes that much time.

Q Larry, as you said, Rosenberg said yesterday that this could prove out to be totally curative, even if the polyp proves to be malignant. But has the President been advised that that eventuality could require him to stay in the hospital longer, or go back in for an additional battery of tests to ensure that the cancer has not spread to other areas?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't think that is anticipated, Norm,

because the testing has been done. It included the CAT scan, it included the actual examination of the vital abdominal organs yesterday -- the liver and the other organs. It included the testing of the -- Mark, what is the term -- of the ends of the specimen that were taken out?

Q The frozen section.

MR. SPEAKES: Well, the ends of the specimen in laymen's terms were tested, and so it showed, as far as the section of the bowel that was taken out -- they tested both ends of it, so that indicates that there is nothing, as near as they can tell, moving along the bowel.

Q So there is no expectation or anticipation that a finding of a malignancy would require the doctor to go back in for additional tissue samples or anything else?

MR. SPEAKES: No. As you know, they had the opportunity to do that yesterday, and they chose not to because they looked so well to the eye in the surgery.

That may do it, Helen.

Q Did you say that Oller spent the night in the recovery room?

MR. SPEAKES: He was in and out of the recovery room. He slept somewhere in the hospital. He remained in the hospital overnight and he checked on the President a couple of times.

Okay.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

10:48 A.M. EDT