

Ronald Reagan Presidential Library

Digital Library Collections

This is a PDF of a folder from our textual collections.

Collection: Press Secretary, Office of the:
Press Releases and Briefings: Records, 1981-1989

SERIES: II: PRESS BRIEFINGS

Folder Title: 11/15/1984 (#1224)

Box: 31

To see more digitized collections visit:

<https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/digitized-textual-material>

To see all Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Inventories, visit:

<https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/white-house-inventories>

Contact a reference archivist at: **reagan.library@nara.gov**

Citation Guidelines: <https://reaganlibrary.gov/archives/research-support/citation-guide>

National Archives Catalogue: <https://catalog.archives.gov/>

Last Updated: 09/30/2024

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

PRESS BRIEFING
BY
LARRY SPEAKES

November 15, 1984

The Briefing Room

9:17 A.M. EST

INDEX

SUBJECT

PAGE

ANNOUNCEMENTS

President's schedule.....1-3

FOREIGN

Arms control.....3-7

Nicaragua.....7-9, 10

DOMESTIC

Budget.....9-10, 11

#1224-11/15

9:41 A.M. EST

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

PRESS BRIEFING
BY
LARRY SPEAKES

November 15, 1984

The Briefing Room

9:17 A.M. EST

MR. SPEAKES: This morning I have a schedule to review, and I've got some information, brief as it is, on the Soviet's statement in The Washington Post about umbrella talks, and the report of resuming bilateral talks with Nicaragua, and that outstanding story today about Deaver pushing Percy for Education. First of all --

Q Where was that?

Q First -- at the top of the news --

MR. SPEAKES: -- the schedule: at 8:40 a.m. this morning, between 8:40 a.m. and 8:44 a.m. the President spoke to the space shuttle, to the crew of Space Shuttle Discovery. We'll have a --

Q 8:40?

MR. SPEAKES: From 8:40 a.m. to 8:44 a.m. The President --

Q -- have it?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes. We will have a transcript of that for you shortly. The crew, as you know, is beginning to conclude their mission to return home shortly.

This afternoon the President meets with the Cabinet at 2:00 p.m. It is a two hour meeting. During the meeting the President will hear reports from Ed Meese, Secretary Regan, and Director Stockman. Ed Meese will give a policy overview -- policy directions that the budget working group has been exploring. Don Regan will talk on the economic outlook, which is mainly economic assumptions. And David Stockman will give a budget overview.

The specific budget decisions will not be made by the President until after Thanksgiving, but this session will give an opportunity to introduce the context in which the budget working group is moving forward.

Q Does that mean that he won't set any kind of broad targets before --

MR. SPEAKES: Don't know. This afternoon also the President is meeting with the new commander of the American Legion, Clarence Bacon, who is from Maryland. He took office in September at the American Legion convention in Salt Lake City.

Also this afternoon the President will receive a report from the Council -- the Advisory Committee -- Presidential Advisory Committee on Small and Minority Business Ownership. The Committee was created by Congress, and is mandated to report to the President and Congress on their activities each year. Last year the Committee, which is headed by Al Cardinas, who is a Miami attorney, held hearings from April of '83 to April of '84 talking to chief executive

MORE

#1224-11/15

officers, purchasing directors, entrepreneurs in minority business, minority trade associations and others from the public. Their report, which we'll make available to you at 3:00 p.m. this afternoon -- be sure that report's okay at 3:00 p.m. -- and they will present their findings which are contained in this report.

And finally this afternoon at 5:00 p.m., the President meets with the American Security Council's Coalition for Peace Through Strength. This is a group which is headed by John Fisher, who is from Reston, Virginia. Mr. -- I'm sorry, Boston, Virginia. Mr. Fisher has headed the effort that promotes the President's strong national defense policy. During the year they've talked to a number of national organizations, universities, think-tanks, and members of Congress --

Q -- mumbling -- could you talk up --

MR. SPEAKES: There will be about 350 -- anybody having -- are you having trouble?

Q Could you talk a little -- up a little? You know, you're talking into your nose there -- (Laughter.)

MR. SPEAKES: Do you think it's me or you?

Q You. Up -- a little?

MR. SPEAKES: Do you think it's me or you?

Q -- on your hearing aid --

Q What? (Laughter.)

Q Enunciate.

Q What?

Q What'd you say, Larry? (Laughter.)

MR. SPEAKES: You've seen my mouth moving. That concludes the President's schedule. There are no photo ops in that group today.

Q You said 350 -- what? People will be there?

MR. SPEAKES: Three hundred and fifty people will be attending.

Q Will there be remarks there, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, there are remarks there.

Q That we'll get an advanced text on, and that we can hear?

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q Is there pool coverage?

MR. SPEAKES: No. No coverage -- of anything today.

Q Is there a possibility that we could have a photo op of the Cabinet session like we did --

MR. SPEAKES: We'll entertain that idea, and see if -- if those in response for the Cabinet would object --

Q What's going on -- what was that last --

MR. SPEAKES: Cabinet photo.

Q Larry, 350 people -- and no coverage? How come?

MR. SPEAKES: What's the relationship between the number of people and the coverage?

Q Normally, the President --

Q -- meets with a large group of people, he gets covered there.

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q Depends whether it's before the campaign or --
(Laughter.)

Q We haven't seen the President in two days.

MR. SPEAKES: The Vice President is in Atlanta today to attend the funeral of Martin Luther King Sr.

Tomorrow the President will receive the annual Thanksgiving turkey.

Q Oh, good --

MR. SPEAKES: On Saturday the President leaves at 12:20 p.m. from Andrews for California. The departure for the press plane, check-in is at 10:45 a.m., and departure at 11:30 a.m. for the press plane.

The Soviet Union called in Mr. Oberdorfer yesterday to speak to him on the umbrella situation -- (Laughter.) Our position on the overall picture of the arms control proposals is that we believe that this is a time in the U.S.-Soviet dialogue at which a broad exchange of the type proposed by the President in his speech before the United Nations on September 24th would be useful.

The purpose of a broad exchange, as the President outlined it, would be to promote better understanding; hopefully lead to a renewal of talks, and progress in those talks. We think it would be timely to discuss relations -- the relationship between offensive and defensive systems, and also to look toward the possibility of renewing the long-range and intermediate range missile talks as well as continuing talks in a number of other areas.

End of statement. Any questions on that?

Q Did the comments reported in the paper this morning reflect the response that you've gotten from the Soviets through diplomatic channels?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, we have --

Q Or is there any indication that they have gone any farther in the public statements --

MR. SPEAKES: I don't want to discuss the diplomatic exchanges. We have had some, and we will have others, and we're hopeful that they can move forward along these lines. We would like to continue to outline to them our proposal for the umbrella approach to these talks. It's the President's position that we are seeking ways to be as helpful as we can toward pushing these -- the relationship into an area where we can begin to have a serious dialogue on weapons reduction.

The umbrella proposal was an idea of his that, if acceptable to the Soviets, could provide a key. And that's what we want to do.

Q Has there been a specific proposal that these talks get underway with a meeting between Shultz and Gromyko in Moscow in January?

MR. SPEAKES: There have been reports of Secretary Shultz taking part in talks in January in Moscow, but there is nothing scheduled at the moment.

Q Does the White House consider this -- these remarks by -- apparently Dobrynin -- as an opening?

MR. SPEAKES: I cannot pass judgment on it. We certainly welcome any dialogue; and we would welcome one that would be a private dialogue on the diplomatic level that could lead to some results.

Q But you don't know if it's a signal or not, or whether it was just --

MR. SPEAKES: I don't want to interpret it, no.

John?

Q I was just going to ask -- not for an interpretation -- but how do you view the Soviets in this kind of context -- bringing somebody into the Embassy? Is this a serious -- serious signal --

MR. SPEAKES: No. I don't quarrel with the method, no.

So -- Roy?

Q Are you suggesting that you haven't had enough private talks with the Soviets yet?

MR. SPEAKES: That was the President's initiative in his U.N. speech -- that we would like to continue exchanges -- and that was the result of the Gromyko talks, that we'd like to keep in touch and perhaps escalate it to higher levels and more detailed talks; but, we

would like to have more. What's enough, I don't want to say.

Q -- haven't had enough detailed talks yet, we'd like to --

MR. SPEAKES: We would like to have more, yes.

Candy.

Q Without going into the specifics of your diplomatic exchanges, can't you tell us whether anything in The Post story took you -- this administration by surprise, anything new in it?

MR. SPEAKES: I wouldn't say it was anything surprising in it, no. That's been basically their approach. But I think the senior Soviet official's comments would lead us to feel that there is a need for more discussion. And we would certainly welcome it.

Q But basically what you're reading is being reflected in the diplomatic exchanges as well.

MR. SPEAKES: I just don't want to say that.

Ben.

Q How do you anticipate, you know, being able to outline to them further details about the umbrella approach? I mean, would it be Shultz or --

MR. SPEAKES: It could be a variety of diplomatic levels.

Q You don't want to be specific about it.

MR. SPEAKES: We don't have anything specific at the moment, no.

Pat.

Q Are you saying that if the Soviets were serious that you'd be hearing from them privately, as well as publicly, in the future?

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q You haven't heard the same message privately?

MR. SPEAKES: No, I just -- I don't imply any criticism here.

David.

Q When this umbrella idea was floated recently, it was described as a proposal for -- not only for Shultz-Gromyko, but also for some secondary level discussion between technical experts. Has the administration made such a proposal or described that secondary level to the Soviets? Or have we only talked about it in terms of a Shultz -- a ministerial level?

MR. SPEAKES: The entire idea has not been fleshed out in talks with the Soviets, no.

Q So we have not kind of laid out to them what the details of the proposal would be?

MR. SPEAKES: But we'd like further opportunity to do so, yes.

Q When we get that opportunity, would we sketch in this idea of a secondary level --

MR. SPEAKES: No. I just don't think it's that far along for me to lay out the agenda.

Helen and then you.

Q The New York Times quotes a State Department official, unnamed, as we often have around here, saying that --

MR. SPEAKES: Not too often around here.

Q -- the President has to either get rid of Weinberger and Perle in order to have a cohesive policy because there still is a big split.

Q That'd be a start.

Q What is your reaction to that? Does the President really think that there is no policy difference?

MR. SPEAKES: That's what he said.

Ann.

Q How can he say so, though?

MR. SPEAKES: With his mouth. (Laughter.)

Q You said, we would like further opportunity to flush out this idea. What's preventing you from moving forward on it? I don't quite understand --

MR. SPEAKES: I think opportunities to talk to the Soviets and to schedule --

Q Well, what's preventing it?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, we're ready. And I think when the Soviets are ready to talk, they will. But --

Q Are they not returning your calls or --

Q -- they're reluctant to talk?

MR. SPEAKES: We're not talking by phone.

Q Are you suggesting they're reluctant to talk or --

MR. SPEAKES: I'm just indicating when they're ready and this has moved far enough -- and we knew that when Gromyko met with the President and the President had long hours of discussions with him -- and we thought the President made a favorable and proper impression on Gromyko, and we knew that impression would be transferred to the Soviet leadership and that it would take time to discuss this among themselves, and when they were ready, they would come back to us. And that's the status -- state of play.

Q When we were in Santa --

Q Are you saying they haven't come back to you?

MR. SPEAKES: There have been some exchanges; but there will be others and, hopefully, there'll be more --

Q When we were in California, a senior official said the United States was ready and would like to move forward with these talks as soon as possible. Is that basically our position, that we're prepared --

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q -- as soon as possible?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes. We would like to, of course, move on all levels, but particularly on this umbrella idea. I think that may

be a -- hopefully, it's one of our suggestions as a key to getting the talks moving forward in a number of areas.

Q There have been reports that, because of Shultz' opposition, the idea of an arms control czar has been dropped. Is that true?

MR. SPEAKES: Shultz' opposition? The paper says Weinberger's opposition.

Q No, Shultz', too, because --

MR. SPEAKES: No, the President answered in the Time Magazine interview on election day in Los Angeles, in which he basically said that it is something that has been discussed. We've not discussed it among ourselves in detail and that it would be something that if the Russians -- if that -- that idea would help the Soviets in moving forward with the talks, then that's something else we'd like to explore.

Q So that still is a live option?

MR. SPEAKES: I would think so, yes. There would be something to talk about.

Want to move on to Nicaragua? Story this morning indicating that we will continue bilateral talks with the Nicaraguans. Yes, we will. We've had several meetings --

Q Can I just go back to one thing?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q You said the President made a favorable impression on Gromyko? How do you know that?

MR. SPEAKES: We just know our man.

Q What?

MR. SPEAKES: We know our man and have great faith in him.

Q Well, I mean, is this an impression or do you have something concrete to back that up?

MR. SPEAKES: No, what I was indicating is that the President knew how he wanted to lay out U.S. foreign policy and its objectives and our relationship with the Soviet Union. He said what he wanted to say and he was confident that what he had laid out to Mr. Gromyko was exactly the impression he wanted to leave. In other words, we felt that there was an understanding on Gromyko's part.

Nicaragua talks: We have had several rounds of talks on a bilateral basis with the Nicaraguans. We will have more. Ambassador Shlaudeman will be meeting with the Foreign Minister of Nicaragua. We do not provide dates for these talks. I think we confirm them after they conclude. The objective of these -- this round of talks will be the same as it has been previously, that it will hopefully enhance prospects for the Contadora treaty.

The thrust of our approach to these talks has been to move the Contadora process forward and let the Nicaraguans understand our feelings about -- and our desires about some sort of an agreement with their neighbors in Central America.

Q Larry, you said he's meeting with the Ambassador?

MR. SPEAKES: No, Foreign Minister.

Q Larry.

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q Would you say that this is an effort on both sides, then, to try and ease tensions that have cropped up in the last few days --

MR. SPEAKES: I cannot describe the Nicaraguan motives in scheduling another meeting; but I can certainly say that the United States feels that it has not contributed to increasing tensions in the region.

Q -- briefly, yesterday, the -- one of the -- well, the main opposition leader in Nicaragua, Mr. Cruz, sort of gave the impression that the U.S. pressure on Nicaragua, because of the arms deliveries, has sort of helped the Sandinistas gain more power, and, also, the Prime Minister in India criticized the U.S. over its attitude toward Nicaragua in the last few days. Is there any comment on that?

MR. SPEAKES: No, not except I don't see how they can be critical of the United States for wishing to maintain some semblance of balance in the region, which is now terribly out of kilter in favor of the Nicaraguans.

Q Cruz also said, Larry, that -- lay off of Ortega for a while, let him try to consolidate power and deal with the hardliners within that government. Is any consideration being given to sort of giving them a breathing period?

MR. SPEAKES: We've given them a breathing period of six or eight months here, where we -- there has been no financial backing for the Contras, nor -- and the United States has vigorously pursued a diplomatic approach to the solution to the problems there at the same time the United States was pursuing what we thought was a major diplomatic effort, the buildup of Cuban, Soviet and Eastern Bloc weapons shipments continued unabated, and escalated, during that time period, which we feel is the major cause for tension in the region.

Q Cruz was referring to the period after their elections. I mean, saying that now Ortega's been elected, give him a chance to consolidate his power and deal with the hardliners in their government and maybe it'll work out better for the United States and for all the countries in the area and for the Nicaraguan people.

MR. SPEAKES: We would hope it would; but there are a number of principles that we would hope that Mr. Ortega could adhere to, including free elections, free press, no harassment of religious leaders and so forth, that would do more than anything else to -- in our opinion -- to help him consolidate his power and to get along with his neighbors.

Q Has anybody talked to Cruz in the administration? I mean, he is the principal opposition leader.

MR. SPEAKES: I do not know whether that's been discussions carried out.

On the story about Deaver pushing Percy for --

Q Can you tell us where that's appeared?

MR. SPEAKES: It's appeared in a newspaper you ought to read every morning, The Washington Times.

Q Oh, that's why I haven't read it.

MR. SPEAKES: A lot of stories in that paper you miss. Get on the air with them if you read them.

Q I don't care about that.

Q So, is this one true?

MR. SPEAKES: Not true. (Laughter.) Sorry. I don't want to be anymore harsh than that.

Q This is not one of the stories you should bother reading, huh?

MR. SPEAKES: The President has indicated he would like to take some time and then get a number of people to consider for the Education job, and that's what's happening now. I don't have any names.

Q It says Deaver is pushing Percy? Managing to tar them both with the same brush. That's wonderful. (Laughter.)

MR. SPEAKES: Ann.

Q -- what time's the briefing today?

MR. SPEAKES: Twelve o'clock.

Q And are you going to do any readout after this Cabinet meeting?

MR. SPEAKES: I guess I should. I don't want to lead you to hold space for anything -- (laughter.) I will come tell you generally what happened; but any specifics about numbers and so forth, you can probably get that as quick as I can out of the Cabinet -- (laughter.)

Q On this vacancy, you say --

MR. SPEAKES: We'll have David brief.

Q -- you say there are several people now being actively considered for this?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q Is Percy one of them?

Q Can you describe what this --

MR. SPEAKES: I don't think so. But I --

Q What's the Meese policy overview that's going to take place during the --

MR. SPEAKES: Meese has -- and the Office of Policy Development under Jack Svahn has spent several weeks reviewing the basic programs in the government -- a number of wide range of programs in the government -- and why they exist, what the history of them is --

Q Is this going to include the big-ticket items -- entitlements, the farm program?

MR. SPEAKES: I think he's looked at everything from top to bottom, but there are -- the Meese proposals, the Meese study has been more or less a review of delivery systems and why we do what we do and if we can do it better. That's what the --

Q Do you expect him to talk at all about possible areas for cutting that he may have worked up?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know. There could be, yes. But I'm not going to at all be specific now after the Cabinet meeting because we just won't go into the details of numbers nor policies, programs and so forth.

Candy?

Q Can I just ask you, the breathing space that you say the U.S. gave Nicaragua -- what -- could you -- what --

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know that it was a -- I wouldn't characterize it as breathing space --

Q We gave them breathing space --

MR. SPEAKES: Well, that was in -- Roy asked a question --

Q Okay.

MR. SPEAKES: -- would we do that?

Q Could you tell me what --

MR. SPEAKES: In the last six or eight months, as I pointed out, there's been no funding for the Contras. And there has been a major diplomatic effort on our part, both through the Contadora process and the bilateral talks with the Nicaraguans.

Q Yes, but it wasn't a voluntary breathing -- I mean, you were fighting with Congress to get it, and the President's on record as saying he wants it in January --

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, but you ignored the second part of what I said, and that part is that we've had a major diplomatic effort, both on a bilateral and on a regional basis. And I don't know how much time Shlaudeman spent in the area, but he's been there an awful lot.

Ambassadors have been active in all of the countries. The OAS meeting is going on in Brazilia. Now, Secretary Shultz has been there. We have other people. There's Motley -- I would guess Motley's there.

So, there's a major thrust going on on the diplomatic front, and we'd hope to reach some results.

Ben?

Q Larry, why would the President cancel the Sperling breakfast this morning? And also when will he hold his next -- when is he going to hold a nationally televised news conference?

MR. SPEAKES: I would judge we'll have a nationally televised news conference sometime in December. We had two interviews, one being the Sperling breakfast scheduled this week. We decided to postpone them until after Thanksgiving. At that time, the President would probably have a lot more to say on the direction that he's going to take with the budget and policy and so forth.

Q If I can just mop up on one other thing -- you were saying that he's not going to present even broad ideas as to where to go in terms of targets until after Thanksgiving?

MR. SPEAKES: The targets are obvious: that we're going to reduce spending.

Q But I mean in more -- more specific than that.

MR. SPEAKES: No, I think that will all come through the process, Chris. I don't think that the President will do that.

Q Is he going to meet with the budget working group tomorrow?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't -- that has not been scheduled. And that could take place.

Q I thought you said earlier that the OMB was going to provide the targets to the departments.

MR. SPEAKES: They will. That's what I'm trying to say -- is that OMB will go through the normal budget process of providing the targets which -- have they -- has that already been done?

MR. FITZWATER: On a general basis, but on a specific program-by-program basis it hasn't been done. And it will be part of the director review process that starts next week.

Q So, the President isn't going to provide any direction at this point at all? I mean, it really just goes through the process?

MR. SPEAKES: He's a big man. He does what he wants to in there. Right now, there's -- I think the President will be getting reports. Now, I would certainly say he would lay down the law as far as reducing spending and reducing personnel and continuing what we came here for and throwing rocks in the creek. So --

Q But he will do that in a general way --

Q Larry, does he have any plans --

MR. SPEAKES: What?

Q Does he have any plans --

Q -- before he leaves?

Q -- for meetings at his ranch?

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q Conducting government business or is this going to be chopping wood and --

MR. SPEAKES: It'll be a vacation for him except the -- as a great man once said, "No President's ever on vacation."

Q What about for us?

Q Who's going to be with him out there of the senior staff?

MR. SPEAKES: Deaver will be there the first part of the week. Meese will be there the latter part of the week. And Mr. Fitzwater will represent me ably during the course of the trip.

Q You won't be there?

Q Did they drop a whole new load of brush from an airplane -- (laughter) --

MR. SPEAKES: What?

Q -- so that he'll have something to clear?
(Laughter.)

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

#1224-11/15

9:41 A.M. EST