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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

PRESS BRIEFING
BY
LARRY SPEAKES

February 19, 1985

9:20 A.M. EST

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9:35 A.M. EST

#1333-02/19

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

PRESS BRIEFING
BY
LARRY SPEAKES

February 19, 1985

The Briefing Room

9:20 A.M. EST

MR. SPEAKES: This afternoon at 1:30 p.m. the President is presenting high technology -- national technology awards. These are the outstanding innovators whose technological contributions have advanced U.S. competitiveness in world markets, created jobs, and improved life for people everywhere. There are eight people receiving it -- I'm sorry -- fourteen recipients. Members of Congress -- in the East Room. We'll put out a list of them. They include people like Joseph F. Sutter of Boeing Commercial Airplane Company for his technical and managerial contributions to the development and introduction of generations of jet-powered commercial aircraft which have made the United States the predominant supplier of passenger transport aircraft.

Q This isn't the day to do that.

MR. SPEAKES: There will be writing pool and photo coverage of that.

At 4:30 p.m. there are the sophomore House Republicans coming in --

Q Says freshmen --

MR. SPEAKES: And they are the freshmen of the 98th Congress. The sophomores are the 99th -- all one and the same. Twenty-four new Republicans who were elected in '82 -- they're coming in to have a photograph made with the President in the Cabinet Room.

And then at 4:45 p.m. the President will speak to the members of the 28th Marine Regiment. These are veterans of the battle of Iwo Jima. This is the period of the 40th Anniversary of Iwo Jima. It actually -- landing occurred on February 19th, 1945 -- I'm sorry, not the -- yes, the landing. And there will be a couple hundred veterans and their families in the East Room. There will be writing pool and photo coverage of that.

At 10:00 a.m. this morning we will have a backgrounder on the visit of Prime Minister Thatcher. The background briefer will be Rick Burt, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs.

At 12:00 noon we'll have the regular briefing.

I have an announcement concerning travel by the Vice President. At the request of the President, Vice President Bush, accompanied by Mrs. Bush, will travel to Sudan, Niger, and Mali, African countries affected by the drought and famine, between March 3rd and March 10th.

The Vice President will then travel to Geneva, Switzerland where he will address the United States -- a United Nations Donors Pledging Conference on March 11th.

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The Vice President's trip will help direct international attention to the magnitude of the current African drought and famine crisis and, along with his visit to Geneva, focus world attention on the need for increased, long-term humanitarian assistance through agricultural research, land management training programs, and policy reform.

In addition, the Vice President will address the National Press Club on February 25th on the drought and famine crisis in Africa.

One another announcement: housing starts -- housing starts were released at 8:30 a.m. this morning. They increased in January about 14.9 percent, to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.8 million units. This is the highest rate of starts since February of '84. Building permits, which indicates future housing starts, increased 2.3 percent in January to the highest rate since June, 1984. This remarkable January surge in housing starts reflects recent drops in the prime interest rate and mortgage interest rates. Housing is a historic barometer of economic activity because it reflects cost and availability of money as well as consumer confidence in the economy. Right now that barometer's rising. Housing and the economy are off to good starts in the new year.

Q You say that's good news?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes. Tell them good news -- go with it, top of the show.

The Ambassador, or Assistant Secretary of State Murphy, is in Vienna this morning. He has met with the Soviets. We will not be commenting on that meeting except what is said in Vienna, if anything.

The President will today be calling Jeremy Levin, the CNN Bureau Chief who has returned, and speaking with him about his release or escape from the terrorist held there.

Q Which is it?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know, Sam.

Q Talking by phone? Telephone?

MR. SPEAKES: By phone. Call by phone.

Q Video? Photo?

Q What time?

MR. SPEAKES: Don't have a time yet.

Q Will you tell us when it's been done?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes. Pete, if you'll check before noon on that?

The New Zealand Prime Minister has indicated he's coming to the United States. Yes, he is. Enroute to Great Britain, he'll be stopping in Los Angeles. At the moment I don't know of any specific plans for him to stop in Washington. There's no meeting scheduled with the President. And whether he will be meeting with others or the State Department has not yet been determined.

Q Would he be welcome? At the White House?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, he hasn't asked for an opportunity and there's no meeting scheduled.

Q You say there are no plans for him to stop in Washington?

MR. SPEAKES: I'm not aware of any plans. As far as we know, it's only a Los Angeles stop for him.

Q I have another question about today. Is there a Cabinet Council meeting today on Japanese auto imports?

MR. SPEAKES: Cabinet Council is meeting and that is among things that are being considered. It does not include the President. There has been no decision, contrary to a story out of Detroit City over the weekend, that there was a --

Q The President is not attending to this meeting?

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q What time is that, do you know?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know. There's been no decision. The matter has not come before the President. That's about the size of it.

Q Larry, on the New Zealand visit, is there an outstanding U.S. invitation for him to visit?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know whether there is or not. Have we -- yes, we've met with him before. He was here recently -- in the last year or two, right?

Q What are you talking about, Larry? Bob, do you know --

MR. SIMS: I don't think he's been here since he was elected.

MR. SPEAKES: Oh, okay. Mike, I just don't know the answer to that -- whether there's one of those pending, in principle, or something.

Ben?

Q Larry, I couldn't hear. When is the Cabinet Council meeting scheduled on auto --

MR. SPEAKES: Today. The Cabinet Council's meeting without the President today.

Q Have you got a time for that, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Ira?

Q What's it on, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: Auto imports.

Q Given the President's call to Assad the other day, does the United States still feel that Syria is a terrorist-backing state, and hold it responsible for the Marine bombing?

MR. SPEAKES: Ira, I'd have to look back at our statements on that. There's been no change in our policy, in our viewpoint, in our statements made then --

Q The viewpoint hasn't --

MR. SPEAKES: However, we're hopeful that the Syrian

government can be helpful in the release of the other hostages held by terrorists in Lebanon. We would be hopeful that the Syrian government would take a new outlook on terrorism and the practice of terrorism in the Middle East, and be a constructive force in abating terrorism in the Middle East.

Q Well, did the President express that view to Assad in their phone call?

MR. SPEAKES: Won't go into the details of the conversation.

Q Well, when the President thanked Assad for his help in the Levin case, what was it he was thanking him for?

MR. SPEAKES: For his assistance once that Jeremy Levin arrived at the Syrian Army location and was taken and promptly turned over to U.S. authorities.

Q So the President was not suggesting that he was thanking Assad for some hitherto undisclosed assistance prior to Levin's showing up in bare feet.

MR. SPEAKES: He was not. No.

Q Well, is it still considered possible that the Syrians had something to do with getting Mr. Levin's captors to loose the chain that day?

MR. SPEAKES: We have not said either way --

Q Well?

MR. SPEAKES: -- and we will not.

Q Oh.

Q Has Murphy reported to Reagan yet on the -- the President yet on the Vienna meeting?

MR. SPEAKES: I would feel certain that there is cable reporting traffic, now that the meeting, the first session, I believe, has concluded, back to the State Department and to the NSC. But the President will probably be updated briefly this morning when Bud meets with him in his customary meeting.

Q Back on autos for just a second. Various administration officials have said that while a decision has not been firmly made, what they weigh and what they observe is the huge profits by the domestic auto industry and the argument of competitiveness versus some of the union considerations, job loss, that sort of thing. What does the President -- how does the President view -- in what terms does the President view this issue?

MR. SPEAKES: General.

Q What does that mean?

MR. SPEAKES: About the same thing your question means.

Q Well, my question is getting at what administration officials are looking at and sizing up and they seem to be leaning away from continuing quotas in the terms they are right now.

MR. SPEAKES: The President is not leaning in any direction. He will hear both those arguments presented to him. He will receive the full facts and will discuss them with his aides and then make a decision. But he just has not made a decision because the matter has not been presented to him.

Q What is the President's view of the Westmoreland withdrawal?

MR. SPEAKES: I doubt if he has one.

Q Is he aware of the story?

MR. SPEAKES: Sure, he's aware of the story. But I don't know why that's a government matter.

Q I don't think it's a government matter; but I think the President's view of major events is always of interest.

MR. SPEAKES: I'm sure he would have a view on it; but --

Q Well, could you ask him? Maybe we could get it at noon.

MR. SPEAKES: Oh, I don't think it's appropriate.

Q And Mr. Buchanan's view. I'm interested in that. I'll call him direct.

MR. SPEAKES: Call him.

Q Just back on the car quotas for a minute, do you have any --

Q Let us know what he says.

Q Sure.

Q -- sense of process as to how that's going to go and at what point you think it does go to the President for a decision?

MR. SPEAKES: Hasn't been a timetable set. There's no Cabinet Council meeting or Cabinet meeting this week with the President. Whether the Cabinet Council finishes it and is prepared to make a recommendation, we'll have to wait until the end of their meeting. I would look for it to be decided in the next couple of weeks; but I don't know of any specific timetable to have it decided this week.

Q Larry, did you say no Cabinet Council meeting with the President or no Cabinet meeting?

MR. SPEAKES: No Cabinet meeting or Cabinet Council meeting with the President this week.

Q Is the Cabinet meeting at all?

MR. SPEAKES: Not this week, no.

Q Why not?

MR. SPEAKES: Just not. There's not one every week.

Q Going to be a news conference this week?

MR. SPEAKES: Wait and see. We got one, we'll announce it.

Q Larry, one of the papers said that -- and the White House --

Q Sounds promising.

Q -- as they were screening --

Q Hum?

Q Sounds promising.

Q -- 100 judges --

Q -- Thursday.

Q -- I hadn't heard.

Q -- candidates for 100 judges for the -- federal court judges that among those who were participating in the screening now was Ed Rollins. Is that true?

MR. SPEAKES: I'm sure that -- Ed Rollins just reported for duty today. I don't know whether he's been screening before he got here. But we have always had an opportunity for our political people to look at candidates for Presidential appointments, top to bottom, including federal judges, yes.

Johanna?

Q Larry, since this is the first opportunity we've had to ask you about the President's radio address on the record, I wanted to ask you what the White House documentation is for the President's statement that the Sandinistas have sworn to attempt to spread communism to El Salvador and Costa Rica, Honduras, and elsewhere.

MR. SPEAKES: Continuing statements -- we could probably look at the record and produce it for you. Not only continuing statements, but continuing actions, continuing buildup. I gave you the figures on background the other day of tremendous buildup, so, they ain't --

Q -- a statement --

MR. SPEAKES: -- they ain't getting those tanks for scrap iron down there. So --

Q Well, they say they're getting them for self-defense. They have a right to self-defense, don't they?

MR. SPEAKES: A lot of self-defense going on down there, Sam, more than is necessary.

Q Heck on 'em, too, you understand -- (Laughter.)

MR. SPEAKES: John?

Q Larry, would you give us the rest of the week, please?

MR. SPEAKES: Pete, you got your rest-of-the-week?

Anybody got anything else?

Bob?

Q The two East Room events today -- are the President's remarks going to be piped in?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, always.

Frank?

Q -- come back to autos for one quick question. When the President met with Nakasone, was there -- I don't recall -- was there a request or any discussions specifically of the auto --

MR. SPEAKES: -- that matter came up at all, I don't think so.

Jerry?

Q Larry, isn't there a deadline of around April 1st on these voluntary restraints?

MR. SPEAKES: March 31st the Japanese voluntary restraints run out.

Q So, in a sense the Cabinet and the President also have a deadline for expressing their views --

MR. SPEAKES: Well, yes, for expressing their views. Sure. Once again, keep in mind it's a voluntary quota system on the part of the Japanese, and we have -- (laughter) --

Q Right.

MR. SPEAKES: -- it's a decision they would have to make.

Q Larry --

Q By when would we have to make a decision so that they can determine what their voluntary response will be?

Q Quote unquote.

MR. SPEAKES: No deadline for us.

On tomorrow, at noon the President has a brief private meeting with Margaret Thatcher followed by a 12:15 p.m. working lunch and an hour and 15 minute meeting. Departure statements at 2:30 p.m.

On Wednesday, he drops by the leadership of the National Conference of State Legislators --

Q Tomorrow is Wednesday --

MR. SPEAKES: -- Thursday -- in the State Dining Room.

Q Could you repeat that, Larry? Thursday what?

Q Where are --

MR. SPEAKES: Leadership of National Conference for State Legislators. Lunch with the Vice President.

And, then, on Friday has -- I don't see anything that I've got specifically I want to reveal at this time.

Probably will go to Camp David on the weekend.

Comes back Sunday night, Governors State Dinner. That's the prelude to the annual Governors meeting in Washington. Traditionally, we have not had coverage of these state dinners. He will be meeting with the Governors in the East Room at 11:30 a.m. on Monday.

Q They do cover the Governors Dinner.

Q Is the Governors State Dinner here?

Q You had a pool there last year.

Q We have covered the Governors Dinners before.

Q You had a pool at the Governors Dinner --

MR. SPEAKES: Anyway, he'll be covering on -- he will speaking to them on Monday.

Q Is that in the House, the Governors State Dinner?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q Larry --

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q -- do you have any firm dates for the President's trip to Spain in May?

MR. SPEAKES: No, I do not.

Q When do you think you might have them?

MR. SPEAKES: Shortly.

Q Do you happen to know when Bill Brock might be making his next trip to the Far East?

MR. SPEAKES: I think he's just returned, right? Is he back yet -- Brock?

MR. SIMS: I don't know.

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know whether he's back or not. He's been in the Philippines or Malaysia or somewhere and Japan.

Q Larry, has the President --

MR. SPEAKES: Dave?

Q Speaking of state legislators, the entire legislature from South Dakota, I believe, is coming to Washington to plead with the government about the farm situation. Have they asked for a meeting with the President? And if so, is he going to --

MR. SPEAKES: I'm not aware of anything. We haven't heard anything on that. We can check, Dave, to see. I don't know of anything.

Q Was the President asked for a conference with the farmers when they plan their march on Washington -- is it by March the 4th or 5th?

MR. SPEAKES: No, I don't believe so.

Q Larry, has the President made any comment on what happened in South Africa yesterday?

MR. SPEAKES: No, but we certainly deplore the violence.

Q But he -- you mean, he deplores it but he hasn't said it, has he? Really, he hasn't --

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q -- made a public statement? He just deplores it in his mind? (Laughter.)

MR. SPEAKES: -- in his heart.

Q -- we can't read that.

MR. SPEAKES: In his heart and in his mind.

Q It's easy to read.

Q Are you expecting any meetings with Senate Republicans on the budget this week?

MR. SPEAKES: David, it seemed like there was a -- I thought I saw it somewhere. There was an afternoon meeting here with Senate Appropriations or something, but I don't believe it shows on that calendar. So --

Q Since the restraints by -- on Japanese exports to the U.S. are voluntary, that would suggest that the President doesn't have to make a decision at all.

MR. SPEAKES: Exactly --

Q Is it possible that Mr. Brock has already conveyed our views to the Japanese government -- informal views on --

MR. SPEAKES: You'd have to ask Mr. Brock. I just don't know.

Q Well, is it possible that there simply will be no decision out of here?

MR. SPEAKES: It's possible, sure.

This thing's about to play out here.

Q Then what happens? The Japanese can do what they want?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, still do what they want.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

9:35 A.M. EST

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