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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

PRESS BRIEFING
BY
PETE ROUSSEL

February 25, 1985

The Briefing Room

9:18 A.M. EST

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#1339-02/25

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

PRESS BRIEFING

BY

PETE ROUSSEL

February 25, 1985

The Briefing Room

9:18 A.M. EST

MR. ROUSSEL: Mr. Speakes has a bad toothache.

Q What's wrong with him?

MR. ROUSSEL: The schedule for today is, at 11:15 a.m., the President meets -- 11:30 a.m., the President meets with the National Governors Association in the East Room. That will be available for writing pool and open photo coverage.

At 2:00 p.m., the President drops by a briefing for the Grace Commission in Room 450 of the EOB. That, too, will be available for writing pool and open photo coverage.

The rest of the day he has personal staff time, he has some Congressional photo time late in the afternoon. And that's pretty much it for the schedule.

Q Can I ask you a question about the Governors Association?

Q No.

Q Is he just going to speak or is he going to take questions and have a dialogue with them?

MR. ROUSSEL: He's going to do both.

Q How long will he be in there with them total?

MR. ROUSSEL: He will be in there approximately about ten minutes total. (Laughter.)

Q Do we --

MR. ROUSSEL: I'm sorry. Wait a minute. He takes -- he speaks for about ten minutes and then takes questions. So he'll be in there about 30 minutes.

Q Are we in for the Q & A?

MR. ROUSSEL: No. You'll leave after the remarks.

Q We want to be. We'd like to cover that.

MR. ROUSSEL: Your request is so noted, but that's the way it is.

Q Why?

MR. ROUSSEL: Just is.

The National Governors Association is holding its mid-winter meeting in Washington.

Q Pete, is that stuff going to be piped in here?

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MR. ROUSSEL: Yes. Well, the remarks, yes.

Q Not the Q & A?

Q But not the Q & A? Why not?

Q Reagan is not staying for the Q & A? (Laughter.)

MR. ROUSSEL: Yes. I just said he'd be --

Q Yes, he's going to answer questions --

MR. ROUSSEL: He'll be in there for 30 -- he'll make remarks -- Let's try it again. He goes in, he speaks, the press leaves, he does Q & A, that's it.

Q Well, if he's in there for Q & A, why can't we --

Q Why the censorship? It's so silly.

MR. ROUSSEL: It's not censorship.

Q Sounds like it.

Q Often he doesn't know what he's talking about --

MR. ROUSSEL: Censorship is in the eye of the beholder, Helen.

Q -- and they don't want anyone but the Governors to know that.

Q Censorship is not in the eye of the --

Q Everybody knows that already, Sam. They saw the news conference.

Q Was Meese sworn in?

Q Are they going to have any pool coverage of the Q & A, or not even that?

MR. ROUSSEL: No.

Q Can you tell me the reason?

Q I don't think that's it.

Q You don't?

Q No. Everybody --

MR. ROUSSEL: It's just the way it is.

Q Do you -- has the United States made representation

--

MR. ROUSSEL: Wait a minute, wait a minute.

Q Oh, I'm sorry.

MR. ROUSSEL: Anything else? Ed Meese will be informally sworn in this morning in the Oval Office by the Executive Clerk.

Q Who's that?

MR. ROUSSEL: We're checking, we might -- to see if we might have a White House photo release on that.

Q We need to know the exact time for history.

MR. ROUSSEL: It's supposed to be at 9:45 a.m.

Q Who is the Executive Clerk?

MR. ROUSSEL: Who is it? Geisler? Is it Geisler? Ron Geisler --

Q Who? Ron --

MR. ROUSSEL: -- is his name. Yes.

Q Now we know.

Q Will the President be present?

MR. ROUSSEL: We'll get the exact spelling on that.

Yes, he will. The President will be there. It will be an informal ceremony. Ed has indicated that probably in about two weeks, he'll have a more formal swearing in.

Q Why? (Laughter.)

MR. ROUSSEL: This is not without precedent in this government, I would say, at this point.

Q That's a good question --

Q Two swearings-in for everyone.

Q Yes. Why?

Q What is the purpose of these informal swearings-in out of the public eye and then later, some formal swearing-in?

MR. ROUSSEL: Just the way they want to do it.

Q But what's the -- why are they doing it?

Q What's the purpose?

MR. ROUSSEL: One reason, I would assume, so he can get on with the business of doing his job.

Q Why not just have the formal one right now?

MR. ROUSSEL: Sometimes there are other factors involved, such as they want to get -- bring in family from other parts of the country and things such as that.

Q His family has been waiting in the wings every day here.

MR. ROUSSEL: I know in the case of Jim Baker, he wanted to get other members -- have the other members of his family present.

Q Well, would you exactly know -- let us know when he is sworn in?

MR. ROUSSEL: Dan Marks is the Deputy Executive Clerk who will perform the ceremony.

Q Dan Marks?

MR. ROUSSEL: Yes.

Q How do you spell Marks?

MR. ROUSSEL: M-A-R-K-S.

Q The Deputy Executive. What happened to the Executive?

MR. ROUSSEL: I don't know. Maybe he either had a gallstone or a bad tooth.

Q Or his family is so --

Q He's waiting for the formal swearing-in.

Q Right.

MR. ROUSSEL: Yes, that's --

Q Well, I for one, would like to attend Ed Meese's swearing-in.

MR. ROUSSEL: The First Lady will host -- the First Lady will also host a lunch today for the Governors' wives around noon. You can check with her press office for further details on that.

Q Is there coverage of that?

Q Another question on Meese, Pete. Who else is going to be there?

MR. ROUSSEL: Yes. Check with her office.

Q Who's going to be at this swearing-in --

MR. ROUSSEL: The President and -- I don't know if Don Regan might possibly be in there. I don't know.

Q Will the Vice President be there, or is he out of the country?

Q Joe Biden?

Q Any family members?

MR. ROUSSEL: Don't know of any, Owen. I think it will just be staff --

Q You mean Mrs. Meese isn't going to be there?

Q And then will he move out of the White House?

Q Is he going to -- is Meese going to --

Q H&R Block? (Laughter.)

Q Is Meese going to take up office immediately? And is he also going to keep an office here at the White House?

MR. ROUSSEL: My understanding is that he's going to -- there'll be a transition period here, approximately two weeks in which he'll be working out of both places. But it'll be a gradual transition into Justice.

Q Will he keep an office here at the White House?

MR. ROUSSEL: I assume he will.

Q He will keep an office --

MR. ROUSSEL: Some kind of working office --

Q -- at the White House?

MR. ROUSSEL: Well, he's got to move his things out, so

Q No, after the two-week period.

Q No, after the two-week --

MR. ROUSSEL: Oh, no. During that period he will, yes.

Q Has William French Smith departed for California?

MR. ROUSSEL: I don't know. You check with Justice. They could --

Q Who's going to get his office?

MR. ROUSSEL: They could tell you.

Q Who's going to get whose office?

MR. ROUSSEL: Who's going to get whose office?

Q McFarlane.

Q McFarlane.

Q Meese.

Q Well, is Mrs. Meese going to attend this morning's ceremony?

MR. ROUSSEL: I don't know. We'll check on that, Sam. Can you get somebody to check? Why don't you ask his office if they

Q What was your other question? It sounded better.

MR. ROUSSEL: Yes, what was your other question, Sam?

Q Are you ready for general questions?

MR. ROUSSEL: Let me see if I had anything else. Trying to give you all the news I can give you. (Laughter.)

Q What's the Grace Commission meeting here for?

MR. ROUSSEL: That is -- They're going to talk about the progress being made on implementation of the Grace Commission recommendations. This week a -- It's mainly to go over the status of their recommendations and to talk about --

Q Is there progress --

MR. ROUSSEL: Certainly hope so.

And that's pretty much where we stand.

Q By noon, can you see if you can get us something on

MR. ROUSSEL: On Grace?

Q Yes, and how they've done in terms of implementing that.

MR. ROUSSEL: Yes.

Q Has the United States made any protest or formal representation to the Mexican government over what the DEA chief charged was one element of the Mexican Police allowing a prime suspect in the kidnapping of Agent Camarena to leave Guadalajara.

MR. ROUSSEL: I'm not aware of any official protest. The President has talked to President de la Madrid.

Q Did he raise this matter in his talk?

MR. ROUSSEL: They talked on the phone on Friday for about 15 minutes.

Q About this?

MR. ROUSSEL: They talked on the need -- they both agreed on the need to work together. President de la Madrid expressed his concern regarding the border searches.

Q Did they talk about this specifically?

MR. ROUSSEL: I'm telling you what they talked about.

Q Well, does that mean no?

MR. ROUSSEL: The President said he understood the problems that they were causing.

Q Who initiated the call?

MR. ROUSSEL: President de la Madrid. Right, Bob?

MR. SIMS: Yes.

Q And he only called to complain about border searches; but at that point, did the President complain about the lack of --

MR. ROUSSEL: The President expressed concern for the safety of Americans in Mexico and asked the Mexican government's cooperation in searching for the missing agent.

Q But on this specific matter that I --

MR. ROUSSEL: It was a cordial conversation.

Q -- that I've raised, was it raised in that conversation?

MR. ROUSSEL: I don't know that it was, Sam.

Q Or, more likely --

MR. ROUSSEL: I've told you what I know about the conversation.

Q -- has there been any other avenue of protest?

MR. ROUSSEL: Official protest? I'm not aware of any.

Q Do you know what I'm talking about? Do you know what the DEA Chief Mullen said?

MR. ROUSSEL: Right. Right.

Q All right.

Q Well, do you know of any, Bob?

Q Did this -- Was this man whisked out of Guadalajara after the President talked to de la Madrid?

MR. ROUSSEL: Was he what?

Q Was he allowed to leave Guadalajara after the President spoke to de la Madrid?

MR. ROUSSEL: I don't know if it --

Q It was the previous week.

Q What?

MR. ROUSSEL: Yes, that's --

Q It was the previous week. We're talking about Caro Quintero.

MR. ROUSSEL: Yes.

Q Ooh, nice --

Q Or that's his last name. I've forgotten his first name.

MR. ROUSSEL: Good pronunciation.

Q Yes, very --

Q But, Bob, we know of no contact between the two governments on that subject?

MR. SIMS: We're had a number of contacts with them. I don't have the specifics. I don't think anyone here could answer that.

Q Say, Bob, would you talk a little louder, please?

MR. SIMS: You ought to talk to DEA or Justice --

Q Could you talk so we could all hear you, please?

Q What did Bob say? (Laughter.)

MR. ROUSSEL: He said there has been contact between the governments on this; but for further details you should check with DEA.

Q Or Justice or --

Q Did Mullen tell the President what he said out loud yesterday?

Q Who?

MR. ROUSSEL: I just don't know, Helen, if he's --

Q -- was the President aware when he talked to the President of Mexico about this?

MR. SIMS: The President knows everything.

MR. ROUSSEL: The President has discussed it with the President of Mexico. I'll just leave it at that.

Q He discussed it with de la Madrid?

MR. ROUSSEL: No, discussed what I just told you.

Q Did he discuss this particular incident?

MR. ROUSSEL: Well, I'll just leave it at what I've said.

Q Was he aware of the incident when he spoke to the President of Mexico?

MR. ROUSSEL: Was who aware of it?

Q Was the President of the United States aware of the incident we're talking about --

MR. ROUSSEL: I don't know. I don't know.

Q You said the President knows everything. Does that mean he knew about this?

MR. SIMS: He's got all the information that's available to the DEA.

Q And he did, when he spoke to the President of Mexico?

Q Bob or Pete, you say he has all the information; but is that like saying, yes, he has the tax reform study from Treasury, which he has yet to read, unless he happened to read it yesterday.

I mean, when we ask if he's aware of it, we mean do you think he actually knows? To say he has the information in this administration means nothing.

MR. ROUSSEL: Thank you for your views.

Q Well, what's the answer? Do you think he knows about this?

MR. ROUSSEL: I told you what they talked about and I would prefer to leave it right at that --

Q Well, let's put it a different way. Is the United States unhappy with the kind of cooperation it has received so far from Mexico?

MR. ROUSSEL: I think I'll leave the answer to that based on the characterization I just gave you of the conversation between the President -- the two Presidents.

Q Very cordial?

MR. ROUSSEL: A cordial conversation.

Q You don't mean -- forget it.

Q You want us to say it was a cordial conversation?

MR. ROUSSEL: That's right. Yes.

Charles?

Q Have you got a reaction to Mubarak's offer to host Mid East talks, also to the five-point Jordanian-Palestinian statement?

MR. ROUSSEL: Let's see. On Mubarak, we're encouraged by the revived interests in negotiations expressed by Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. And the President looks forward to a full exchange of views on this issue when he meets with President Mubarak here March 12th.

Q What is that saying towards the specifics of Mr. Mubarak's offer?

MR. ROUSSEL: I think that's what they'll -- maybe they'll talk about that when he comes here.

At this time, we see the process as one in which the parties in the region are focusing on the need to define terms for negotiations. The time for the United States to become more actively involved would be when there is agreement among the parties that negotiations should begin.

Q Could you -- "become more actively involved" --

MR. ROUSSEL: Become more actively involved would be when there is agreement among the parties that negotiations should begin. We are prepared to work in a helpful and direct way at that time.

Q I'm sorry. "Prepared to work" --

MR. ROUSSEL: In a helpful and direct way at that time.

Q So does that mean, therefore, that you're rejecting the idea of these kind of preliminary pre-negotiations?

MR. ROUSSEL: It means the President respects his views and he'll look forward to meeting with him here.

Q Yesterday, Yitzhak Shamir, speaking, I think, for all of his colleagues in the Jerusalem government, said that this framework that Hussein and Arafat worked out presented no opening to peace, whatsoever, and they rejected it. At least one senior official of this administration two weeks previously had sounded very optimistic about it and said it was a step forward and all that. How do we reconcile these two viewpoints?

MR. ROUSSEL: We'll just wait -- why don't you wait until they meet here and you can ask that question then.

Q Who meets?

MR. ROUSSEL: When the President meets with President Mubarak here.

Q Well, I'm asking about the Israeli government's rejection, apparent rejection, of this so-called framework. Do we accept that the Israelis have rejected it and, therefore, do we agree that it offers no opening toward peace?

MR. ROUSSEL: Well, I'll just -- I just don't have anything on that. I'm just not going to get into that.

Let me just mention on the Meese swearing-in, it's the President, Ed Meese, Mrs. Meese, and members of the Meese staff.

Q Well, I thought Ursula was going to be there. I mean it would have been silly for her not to be.

MR. ROUSSEL: Yes, she wouldn't want to miss it.

Q Pete, Sam's question asked our position on the Israeli position on the Palestinian position. Let's simplify it. What is our position on the Jordanian-Palestinian proposal for the five-point --

MR. ROUSSEL: Bob, do you want to elaborate on that at all?

MR. SIMS: It has some positive elements. We have some questions about other aspects of it. And we will be talking to the parties in the region about those questions. One of those we talked to is President Mubarak to get his views when he's here.

Q What about the Israeli view?

Q Which are the positive elements?

MR. SIMS: We are certainly interested in the Israeli views.

Q Which are the positive elements and which ones do you have questions about?

MR. SIMS: I don't want to get into an item-by-item discussion of it, frankly. There's more that we need to know, and at this point, I'm not prepared to go further than the briefer did before to say it has some positive elements. The indication that there are -- there is a possibility for a framework that would lead to direct negotiations is encouraging.

Q Didn't the PLO say, though, that they still reject 242?

Q Yes.

MR. SIMS: The question of the status of 242 and how it might relate to this framework is one of those we'd like more information about.

Q Well, in Tunis, on Friday I think it was, or Thursday, they rejected outright the idea that they were embracing 242. They said that.

Q Does that make it -- if they do reject 242, does that make it unacceptable to us?

MR. SIMS: What we're looking for is something that would be an Arab negotiated -- among themselves -- arrangement that would allow King Hussein to enter into direct negotiations with Israel. Insofar as this framework moves in that direction, it's helpful. Insofar as it doesn't, then we'd like to explore it more with the parties and see what else could be done.

Q You're saying, though, at some point the U.S. would be interested -- I mean, would go along with being involved directly?

MR. SIMS: After the parties of the region, Israelis and the Arabs, have agreed that negotiations could proceed.

Q Then what?

Q You mean direct negotiations?

Q Then they would be mediating or what? The U.S. would mediate, or what?

MR. SIMS: I wouldn't say, until we have a point in which we have something to talk about, what we might do. We're ready to be helpful. But first the parties in the region have to be willing to sit down at a table and negotiate with each other. That's been -- that's step number one.

Q But you're not willing to say that we're discouraged by the pronouncements? I mean, if we were encouraged a week or so again, you're not ready to tell us today that you're not as encouraged now that the PLO is turning down 242? Do you want to give us a sense of not feeling so hot any more, or what?

MR. SIMS: No. I don't want to say anything new.

Q Still gruntled?

Q No longer gruntled, right?

MR. ROUSSEL: There was a report -- it's about Nimeiri coming here this week, too; and contrary to that report --

Q Who?

MR. ROUSSEL: Nimeiri. He's going to meet with -- he changed his plans in view of the Vice President's trips, and he'll meet with the Vice President over there.

Q Say that one more time.

MR. ROUSSEL: President Nimeiri?

Q Yes.

MR. ROUSSEL: There was a report that he was coming here.

Q Yes, and he's not.

MR. ROUSSEL: Right.

Q Well, in fact, you announced it --

Q Well, Larry, announced it on Friday.

MR. ROUSSEL: He's going to meet with the Vice President over there. The change is a result of the Vice President's trip there.

Q The Governors --

Q What is the --

Q The Governors say that President Reagan is wrong if he believes they have surpluses in their budgets which can take up the slack of programs that might be cut from the federal budget and money that they now receive. Is the President going to reexamine his thesis or does he stick to the idea that they do have these surpluses that they can use for that matter?

MR. ROUSSEL: Well, the President's budget's out there and they're going to discuss that in this session over there today.

Q I'm not asking about the President's budget. I'm asking about the President's view -- was the question I put. I'll rephrase it if you need it.

MR. ROUSSEL: His views are reflected in his budget.

Q There's a group of state legislators that apparently is trying to arrange a meeting with the President. They aren't satisfied just meeting with the Vice President, for some reason. (Laughter.)

MR. ROUSSEL: Yes.

Q Is there any action there to accommodate them?

MR. ROUSSEL: They may have had some contact with somebody here in the White House. I don't know. I'd have to check about setting up a meeting; but there's nothing on the schedule right now.

Q Nothing planned? Nothing in the works?

MR. ROUSSEL: Nothing right now, no.

Q Why not? I mean, you've got -- if you've got --

MR. ROUSSEL: Well, they made -- I don't know that they've made an official request to meet with the President.

Q Well, I know they've sought one.

MR. ROUSSEL: -- check -- see if -- Ask them if they've

--

Q They tried to deliver a letter yesterday and were told that they couldn't submit something on a Sunday.

Q Being the Lord's Day, I suppose.

MR. ROUSSE: I was in here Saturday and they didn't come.

Q Well, that's the Lord's Day for some others.

Q But, I mean --

MR. ROUSSEL: We accept mail at Room 45, so --

Q Yes, I guess it was closed yesterday. Can you see if you can find out at noon if there's any plan underway --

MR. ROUSSEL: Yes. We'll check on it.

Q -- to see them or else not to see them?

MR. ROUSSEL: Right. As of now, there are no plans.

Yes.

Q Can you comment on a report in The Washington Times that the administration is considering some kind of limited recognition of the Contras to have an overt aid --

MR. ROUSSEL: I saw that story. Bob, is there any --

MR. SIMS: Don't have anything.

Q Beg your pardon, Bob?

MR. ROUSSEL: Nothing on that.

Q Nothing on that? So you're not denying it or confirming it or --

MR. SIMS: We'd go back and say everything that we've said about Central America, Nicaragua and repeat all of that; but -- which is our position. I'm not going to comment on that story.

Q Well, but you've never said anything -- in all that background -- that got to the issue of whether you would change your diplomatic relations with the Contras in a way that would allow for an overt aid program.

MR. SIMS: No, that's right. We never have.

Q Can you comment specifically on that? So what is your comment on that? Are you considering --

MR. SIMS: We never suggested that.

Q So that story is erroneous?

MR. SIMS: I'm just -- I'm not commenting on the story.

Q Never suggested --

MR. SIMS: I'm just saying we --

Q -- what?

Q Does that mean that you are considering --

Q Overt aid?

Q No, no, recognizing the Contras, the government in exile.

MR. SIMS: I think that everything the President said makes it very clear that he'd like support for democratic forces --

Q Well, that's irrelevant to my question.

MR. SIMS: Well, your question --

Q My question is --

MR. SIMS: -- is irrelevant to my answer. (Laughter.)
My answer is -- (laughter) -- that you know our policy on Nicaragua,
and we've restated it many times, the President has, and --

Q I know your policy, but that doesn't --

MR. SIMS: -- I'm not going to comment on that story.

Q Well, but your policy on Nicaragua has nothing to do
with a further elaboration. If you would just give me a direct
answer of either yes or no --

MR. SIMS: The answer is no comment.

Q So then we can assume that there may be some truth
to that, is that correct?

MR. SIMS: My answer is no comment --

Q Well, Bob, in California --

MR. SIMS: -- and you can assume whatever you want.

Q Do you have any legal status in the hypothetical to
recognize the Contras as any form of legitimate representatives of
the Nicaraguan people?

MR. SIMS: I'm just not going to comment on that.

Q Who could comment on that?

Q The President.

Q Is the President aware of these developments?

MR. SIMS: -- no comment -- The answer is no comment.

MR. ROUSSEL: The answer -- no comment.

Q You can get him to say it. If we get hold of the
President, he'll say almost anything about the Sandinistas.

Q If I can just ask one question on that --

Q No, wait, you're not Helen. Did Helen -- Okay.
Thank you, Helen.

Q Wait. He --

Q No, I wanted to ask a question.

Q Chris has a question.

Q Larry, how does the President reconcile his strong
stand in Nicaragua with what -- what he's doing in South Africa? He
doesn't call them "freedom fighters" and he doesn't denounce the
government of South Africa. Would you explain --

MR. ROUSSEL: We've addressed all that and we've had
highest officials from the State Department out here.

Q You what?

MR. ROUSSEL: We've had the highest officials from the
State Department address that out here.

Q The State Department didn't do all this announcing that the President does for Nicaragua. Why doesn't the President say anything? I'm tired of being referred to the State Department. I can go down there anytime I want. I want to know why President Ronald Reagan hasn't said something.

Q Who?

MR. ROUSSEL: So be it.

Q No answer, as usual. Well, then, would I be right in saying it's because this is a white supremacist government -- black Africa, and it's racism?

Q Yes.

Q Is that what I should say?

MR. ROUSSEL: No, that would not be correct.

Q Well, then, give me the correct answer.

MR. ROUSSEL: I would disagree with that statement.

Q Well, then, give us one that I can --

MR. ROUSSEL: Well, I'll tell you, Alfreda, we've had people here that have been willing to address this for you.

Q Well, will you repeat to me what they --

MR. ROUSSEL: I'll be glad to get the transcript for you from previous briefings.

Q I want something from Ronald Reagan.

Q Thank you.

Q Thank you, Helen.

Q Don't we all.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

9:41 A.M. EST

#1339-02/25