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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

PRESS BRIEFING
BY
LARRY SPEAKES
February 26, 1985
The Briefing Room

9:13 A.M. EST

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9:36 A.M. EST

#1341-02/26

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LARRY SPEAKES

February 26, 1985

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MR. SPEAKES: GOP leadership meets at 9:30 a.m. They'll meet for an hour. The subjects before them are: farm situation, budget and MX. Secretary Block will make a presentation; Director Stockman and Bud McFarlane will make presentations. And the President, as usual, will call on the leaders -- Dole and Michel -- to give the schedule and their reaction on the Hill. Others will speak.

We'll bring them in the Briefing Room a little after 10:30 a.m. as usual.

At 12:00 noon, the President is having lunch with Secretary Bennett, Department of Education, and the President of the University of California System, and he was the Chairman of the Commission on Excellence in Education -- David Garner. Opportunity to present ideas in a discussion about where the President wishes to carry his Excellence in Education Program from this point.

Q This guy -- Garner -- was the President's --

Q -- President --

Q Yes -- Commission.

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, that's what I said.

They'll be discussing the new basics, things such as computer literacy, moral character and values, school discipline and perhaps looking at the future role of the President in improving higher education.

Cabinet meeting this afternoon. It'll be the first opportunity that a number of new Cabinet members will be on hand or those that are in a new role. Secretaries Herrington and Bennett will be taking their seats for the first time. Secretaries Baker, Meese and Hodel and Chief of Staff Regan will be in new chairs at the Cabinet table today. Subject matter there is farm credit -- the short-term farm credit -- and Secretary Block will be making a presentation; and foreign affairs, Secretary Shultz will be making a presentation, talking about mainly Middle East and Central America.

And late this afternoon, a 4:30 p.m. meeting with the members of the Senate Armed Services and Appropriations Committees. Subject is MX. The MX time clock will probably start running next week and -- give the opportunity to meet with this group.

There are no photo ops of any of this today, although I'm sure a lot of them will be available afterwards.

A 12:00 p.m. briefing here.

Announcement to finalize the dates for Spain. The President will be traveling to Europe, as you know, from May 2nd through 4th for the economic summit in Bonn. After that, he will

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remain in the Federal Republic of Germany for a state visit on May 5th and 6th. And the Spanish government has probably announced this earlier, but the President will pay a state visit to Spain from May 6th through the 8th.

He will address the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France on May 8th and later that day will arrive in Lisbon for a state visit to Portugal. We'll be in Lisbon until May 10th in which time he'll return to Washington.

The President looks forward to these visits which will provide an opportunity to strengthen the traditional ties of our friendship.

CPI is out this morning. It was a --

Q Larry, which of those dates are new?

MR. SPEAKES: The Spanish dates only are new. Everything else has been out. So, Spain -- 6th through 8.

Q That's all Madrid then?

Q -- departure date for Bonn --

MR. SPEAKES: Pardon?

Q Isn't the actual departure date for Bonn earlier?

MR. SPEAKES: -- 30th.

Q The 30th?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, the departure date's the 30th. There's -- what -- a one- or two-day layover probably for bilateral meetings.

Q Larry --

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q -- why was the announcement so late in regard to the former ones because more than 10 days have passed --

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, working out the dates with Spain, we did change some dates from what we had originally projected, and we were working this out with the Spanish government.

Q Could you give us a list of the bilaterals at this point?

MR. SPEAKES: Don't have them yet, no.

Q Where are they going to be, Larry? Do we leave here on the 30th --

MR. SPEAKES: Yes. Don't we leave on the 30th, Bob?

MR. SIMS: Yes.

MR. SPEAKES: And --

Q Where do we go?

MR. SPEAKES: Go to Bonn. Everything's in Bonn, yes. You're going to have a long time in Bonn.

Consumer prices this morning increased by a very, very low 0.2 percent in January. This was the

same rate of increase in November and December.

These three successive months of low inflation is particularly good news at this stage of the business expansion. Over the past twelve months, the Consumer Price Index has increased only 3.6 percent. Looking back, the Producer Price Index for January was reduced -- was released a few weeks -- a couple of weeks ago, showed no increase in inflation at the wholesale level.

So our two basic inflation measures provide good news for our economic future. Prices are down and are staying down, and the recovery has been sustained since November of 1982 -- I believe that's 27 months of the recovery -- and the hallmark has been low inflation.

An announced -- some additional words on the Polish-U.S. situation regarding the attache. Last night, the State Department announced the expulsion of the Polish military attache here in Washington in response to Polish actions against our defense attache, Colonel Frederick Myer, and his wife. The Polish attache's name here is Zygmunt Szymanski.

Furthermore --

Q Does he have a rank?

MR. SPEAKES: Colonel -- military attache. Furthermore, we are postponing talks on a science and technology agreement with the Polish government that were to have begun this week. That is new. We would consider repetition of the actions by the Polish government like those taken in the case of Colonel Myer as a reason for even more serious action on our part.

Q Where were these talks supposed to take place?

MR. SPEAKES: Bob, do you know that?

MR. SIMS: No, I don't.

MR. SPEAKES: Wait until Bob --

Q Do you know any details beyond science and technology?

MR. SIMS: This is an agreement that we had agreed as a part of our easing of sanctions on Poland to resume discussions on. And we're postponing them.

Q I know, but can you tell me, you know, what specific --

MR. SIMS: Science and technology.

Q Could you repeat what you said. "We consider repetition of" --

MR. SPEAKES: Repetition of actions by the Polish government, like those taken in the case of Colonel Myer, as a reason for even more serious action on our part. If they do it again, we'll really get tough. (Laughter.)

Q Have you had any -- no, seriously, have you had any hints that they're going to do this again?

MR. SPEAKES: No, Ralph, we don't and we hope they won't.

Q Just wondered why you are sort of warning them in advance.

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, that's really what it amounts to.

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Q Larry, can you give us any view of how the United States views the facts of this situation? What prompted --

MR. SPEAKES: Whether they made the woman undress or not?

Q -- what prompted it? Well, not just that part, the -- I mean, obviously, he was taken into custody for a -- I mean, he wasn't just picked up blindly from what we understand.

MR. SPEAKES: They have publicly stated that he was, I believe, making photographs. We emphatically deny that and say it's absolutely not true, just doesn't hold water.

Q Are you denying that he took photographs or that he took photographs in a place he wasn't supposed to?

MR. SPEAKES: The latter.

Q What's the difference between this and the two American diplomats kicked out of Spain three weeks ago who were thrown out for taking photographs?

MR. SPEAKES: I think we probably made similar representations to the Spanish government also.

Q We didn't kick out any Spanish diplomats, though, did we?

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q Larry, what would you mean by "really get tough"? Going back to some of the sanctions that have been dropped, reinstating them?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't think I want to spell out any specifics, but we will certainly regard this as an unwelcome development, should it happen again.

Q Larry, do you have an answer for their spokesman who denied that she was mistreated in any way?

MR. SPEAKES: No. I don't know the facts on that yet.

Candy?

Q I forgot what I was going to ask.

MR. SPEAKES: That's okay. You're probably better off.

Q You want to know about her undressing --

MR. SPEAKES: There's a story about that an ASAT test was postponed from March to June for technical reasons.

Secretary Baldrige has -- and this was yesterday's news -- declined to send a delegation to Japan on telecommunications, opening telecommunications markets. And he explained that it was for reasons of -- that the Japanese were not ready and no need for us to go until they get ready.

Q Larry, go back to the ASAT. We thought --

Q Were you going to say something there, or --

Q -- I thought Baldrige was -- something to do with ASAT. Would you repeat the ASAT thing?

MR. SPEAKES: ASAT -- postponed from March to June, true -- technical reasons.

Q Not having anything to do with trying to set up a good atmosphere at the talks?

MR. SPEAKES: Ira?

Q Back to the meeting with Bennett this afternoon. Does the President or Secretary Bennett, as far as you know, regret having made what many people considered a flip remark about college students having to give up their stereos and vacations?

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q Is that generally the administration's belief that everything will work out with the lower college student loan rates if they'd just tighten their belts? He's speaking, in that press conference --

MR. SPEAKES: Well, Ira, it's a lot more detailed and complex thing than you seem to --

Q Right, but the Secretary seemed to make it very uncomplex by saying to give up --

MR. SPEAKES: No. He was using this as an example. He later explained that in full. I think the President's program in education speaks for itself. It's quite an adequate program that presents a good funding.

Ira?

Q You said a little while ago that the time clock on MX starts counting down next week. Do you have some kind of specific time frame on when that first vote comes up, and what it is?

MR. SPEAKES: Let's see here -- the MX business is -- it's anticipated the Senate will have votes between March 1st and the Easter recess. The language in the last year's defense and authorization and appropriations bill required two votes of approval by both Houses after March 1st before funds could be -- funds for the 21 missiles could be released. That's about it.

Q Can you go back to Bennett for a minute?

Q Wait a minute, one more MX thing -- is this the beginning of a couple weeks of effort by Reagan to get this money? I mean, is he going to give some speeches?

MR. SPEAKES: We've had some preliminary meetings with these people on this subject. I think we're getting close to the time, and it is the Senate where the action takes place and where we're going to look for the first votes. So that's why we're starting there.

George?

Q Well, what about the speech question?

Q Is the missile -- is the MX vote coming before the Contra vote, or --

MR. SPEAKES: Yes. That's the way it appears now.

Q He asked you if there's going to be speeches --

Q Readout on the Cabinet meeting?

MR. SPEAKES: Pardon?

Q Are you going to have a readout on the Cabinet meeting?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know, I doubt it, since we'll probably -- be basically the same as the leadership meeting.

Q Speech?

Q Yes -- the MX stuff.

MR. SPEAKES: No speech at the moment --

Q Any kind of public effort to build support for the MX?

MR. SPEAKES: No specific speech planned at the moment, but I'm sure the President may take it up in one of the radio addresses -- he may mention it in the course.

Bernie?

Q Is there any further reaction to the Fedders issue?

MR. SPEAKES: I've got three or four and I'll come to that if you want to -- no further reaction now.

Johanna?

Q In light of the MX discussion, has the administration made a decision to defer Nicaragua funding until after the MX battle is over?

MR. SPEAKES: No, I think that's simply the way it is unfolding in Congress -- that the MX will come up first. We think it's important that we have an MX discussion and hopefully a favorable vote before the Geneva talks begin on March 12th.

Q But you're not planning to send up a Nicaragua package February 28th?

MR. SPEAKES: It was -- was that ever -- I didn't know there was a plan.

Q Well, that's when the Congressional -- and what I'm asking you is what the White House time table is?

MR. SPEAKES: The White House time table is to continue to try to work with the Committee leadership up there and try to figure out the best way to proceed.

Q I know, but is there a permanent decision to wait until after the MX?

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q Did you just say you're hoping for a vote on MX before the talks start?

MR. SPEAKES: Hope that there would be some votes, some favorable votes --

Q Some votes?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q Preliminary votes?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q Going back to the Nicaragua subject, there were reports this morning that the administration is considering giving aid to the Contras --

MR. SPEAKE: Yes.

Q -- through a third country --

MR. SPEAKES: I'm coming to all of this. Why don't we go through my deal and maybe you'll get all the answers here.

On the Nicaraguan question -- plan to fund Contras through economic aid to Honduras? No, not so. We plan to pursue it just as I indicated yesterday, and that whatever funding is provided down there in the economic area will be spent in the economic area; and that's where we intend for it to stay. We have an overall economic and security aid program for Central America. It is in line with the Kissinger Commission recommendations, and it does not include any diversion of

economic or military aid to countries in the region for purposes other than those for which they were appropriated.

Q Larry.

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q Does that mean there'll be no economic aid for the Contras? I mean, could some of that economic aid be diverted to the Contras for economic purposes?

MR. SPEAKES: Not that it's -- I guess there could be economic aid for the Contras, as well as security -- all stuff we don't talk about -- but not aid going to Honduras or El Salvador that they can then ship into the Contras, no.

Q What if the Contras go into Honduras? Can they be fed, clothed, otherwise --

MR. SPEAKES: I don't think so. We're not -- really, what we're going to deal with with Congress is in a spirit of providing them with all the information, not trying to circumvent Congress.

Arrest in the DEA kidnap case: That, of course, is a matter for the American authorities -- for the Mexican authorities -- but we do hope that it leads to some resolution of the kidnap case, and hopefully the safe return of our agent there.

Q Do we know that he's alive?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know that, Ira. I really don't know the status of that.

And, finally, the Fedders case: Nothing that I can add to it at all. It is -- as I indicated yesterday, Fred Fielding has kept abreast of the situation as it's developed. He has taken no active role except to be informed. The divorce matter is in the courts and apparently will be for a few more months.

Q Larry, has the President read any of these reports about Fedders, and has he expressed any concern --

MR. SPEAKES: Seen the news accounts, but he won't comment.

Q He hasn't had any comment?

MR. SPEAKES: He won't comment, no.

Q Well, what about --

Q Would it be his -- is your understanding of his policies about the integrity and morality of his top officials that someone who, in fact, had admitted to these actions should not be holding such an office?

MR. SPEAKES: I think we'll --

Q -- you address that, please?

MR. SPEAKES: I would think we would have to wait until the facts are out in the case.

Q Well, aren't the facts out, though? Aren't they uncontested? I don't believe that it's a question of charges that have been denied --

MR. SPEAKES: I wouldn't see the President taking any action as long as this is a matter pending in a court.

Q Well, Larry, the way it seems to have started, in terms of the White House, is with a letter telling the White House about the abuse, and Fred Fielding, apparently, telling someone that the President wouldn't tolerate these kinds of actions from a top official in his administration. Has that changed?

MR. SPEAKES: Has that changed?

Q Yes, has the President's view on that changed?

MR. SPEAKES: No, the President hasn't changed about spousal abuse, no. Absolutely not.

Q But he seems to be tolerating it at this point.

MR. SPEAKES: Not necessarily. There's a time and a place for action, and a time and a place for action's not when a court case is pending.

Q Larry --

Q Larry --

Q -- did Fedders offer his resignation to your knowledge?

MR. SPEAKES: No, I'm not aware of anything.

Q Has he been asked by anyone in the White House to submit it to the President?

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q Larry, you say that the court case is pending, there's a case pending on a divorce action which has absolutely nothing to do with the administration or Fedders' performance of his duties or anything else. And it seems to me that's a rather silly out.

The fact of the matter is that Fedders has publicly admitted that he beat his wife. And the question is does the President believe that people like that should serve in top positions of law enforcement in his administration?

MR. SPEAKES: The President --

Q That has nothing to do with the divorce proceeding, which will not resolve the --

MR. SPEAKES: I don't accept your --

Q -- wife beating.

MR. SPEAKES: I don't accept your contention there.

The second thing is that the President --

Q Which contention?

MR. SPEAKES: The contention that it's a silly out. I think we will refrain from commenting on this case. The President will refrain from commenting on this case. We'll let the matter go forward in the courts. The President obviously does not condone or advocate or tolerate any type of abuse, whether it is children, wives, husbands, whoever.

And until this matter is fully played out and the facts are there, totally and fully for all to see, I don't think the President will take any action. It doesn't --

Q What exactly has to be played out? I don't understand -- to follow up Mike's question -- because since it's a divorce proceeding, the facts of the case may already be out and stand -- that the only thing that has to be played out is, perhaps a financial arrangement for a divorce. I don't believe under this circumstance that there is any further proceedings involving fact finding.

MR. SPEAKES: Well, there is no appropriate statement that the President should make at this time, other than what I've in a general sense, and he will not.

Q When did you all first hear of this -- when?

MR. SPEAKES: Just not commenting on the details of it.

Q Well, you won't tell us whether it was months ago? I mean there are, obviously, are reports that you were informed of this months ago.

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q No, you weren't? Or, no, you're not commenting?

MR. SPEAKES: No, I'm not commenting.

Q Does the President's reluctance to take any action now preclude the suggestion by one of his aides that Mr. Fedders resign?

MR. SPEAKES: I didn't see that suggestion.

Q So that's still an open possibility? I'm saying, you said you don't see the President taking any action, and I said that's not going to stop someone other than the President from suggesting he resign?

MR. SPEAKES: I wouldn't think so, but I don't know that that's happened.

Q You said yesterday that in normal circumstances the President and the White House would accept the recommendations of the agency head involved, but not necessarily in this case. You indicated that --

MR. SPEAKES: Oh, no -- I was confused yesterday in thinking that Mr. Fedders was a member of the SEC, and not an employee of the SEC. He is an employee of the SEC, so we would accept the recommendations.

The scientific talks are schedule in Washington on February 26th through 28th, and I'm going to miss the President's statement about how tough he's going to be on budget-busting farm bills if I don't get in there.

Anything else?

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

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