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THE WHITE HOUSE  
Office of the Press Secretary

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PRESS BRIEFING  
BY  
LARRY SPEAKES

February 26, 1985

The Briefing Room

11:07 A.M. EST

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11:14 A.M. EST

#1342-02/26

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MR. SPEAKES: I think they pretty well covered all of the President's statements and positions in the meeting.

The President was very strong that he did not think any additional farm legislation, debt legislation, was necessary and that he wanted to make clear that he would not accept any add-ons to the farm legislation package that we proposed and already put into motion.

Q Are you talking about the credit relief, right?

Q What was the question, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: Credit relief.

Q If, as Senator Dole and Michel said, that there's no cap on this farm legislation and they would consider coming back, where is the restraint on it?

MR. SPEAKES: There's been a lack of understanding about the \$650 billion. The \$650 billion is basically a farm entitlement program.

Q Billion?

MR. SPEAKES: Million. \$650 million is basically a farm entitlement program which is required to be funded. The \$650 million figure is an estimate based on last year's farm draw-down.

Our program has, in the past, the one we announced two or three weeks ago, was designed to loosen the qualifications for this. If, indeed, it goes over \$650 million, I think there would be a requirement that we fund it through a supplemental or through some rearrangement of funds in agriculture.

I think we can do it and I think Secretary Block is confident we can do it without adding any new funds or adding to the deficit.

Q So that estimate's based on the looser qualifications and you believe you can work within that --

MR. SPEAKES: It's hard to say. It just depends on how many farmers apply, and that's what it amounts to.

Q This is in loan guarantees, right?

MR. SPEAKES: That's right, loan guarantees.

Q Do you know how much of that \$650 million has been committed at this point?

MR. SPEAKES: No, I don't.

Q Could you go and -- through what you were saying?

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MR. SPEAKES: Yes. The President made a strong appeal for favorable action on the MX.

The timetable for the MX, which now I finally understand, is this. We will send the report, as required by law, to Congress probably Monday. At the time that it goes to Congress, it starts this clock running. It goes to the Armed Services Committee, both in the Senate and the House, where it stays not less than 15 -- not less than 8 nor more than 15 days before those two committees.

At that time, it will come to the floor where it will be pending business. If it goes according to that rough timetable, about March 20th, the MX

legislation would be on the floor. There are four votes that are required in each House -- or four votes -- two votes in each House, one on authorization, one on appropriations. They must take place within a 24-hour period. So, conceivably, we could have an action on the MX at the -- in the March 20-21st time.

The President strongly believes that the pace and quality of the negotiations in Geneva, which begin on March 12th, will be related to the outcome of the MX vote.

Q Is the reporting to the floor inevitable?

Q Would you repeat that, "President believes -- " what?

MR. SPEAKES: Pardon?

Q Is the reporting to the floor from the committees inevitable?

MR. SPEAKES: I think that's required --

Q They can't vote it out. They can't vote it down --

MR. SPEAKES: I believe it's required under the last year's legislation that we do have --

Q They must vote it out --

MR. SPEAKES: -- an up and down favorable vote from both Houses on appropriations and authorization.

Bob.

Q Would you repeat that? Believes what?

Q -- you were saying this morning that --

Q Please.

Q -- you needed a -- you were looking for Senate vote by March 12th, a date that's inoperative, given the --

MR. SPEAKES: No, no.

Q -- understanding that --

MR. SPEAKES: That's right, yes. But we would hope to be able to have some favorable sentiment there.

The pace and quality of negotiations in Geneva are related to the outcome of the vote in the Congress.

Q What kind of vote before March 12th --

MR. SPEAKES: I don't think there will be any vote before March 12th. It will be introduced and will be before the committees then.

Q What -- some sort of sentiment, you say?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, I think we would like to see a favorable sentiment toward MX. I think it would be important as we start the talks.

Yes.

Q What's the nature of the report that goes up to the Hill? Is that just a formal request --

MR. SPEAKES: A report required by law that spells out how we feel about the system, how it effects other systems, how it fits in to other systems.

Q This quote that you gave us about the pace and quality, that was from you, that wasn't --

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q Could you tell us where he stood on defense and Social Security and the other things --

MR. SPEAKES: Exactly where it's stood from day one. He does not favor a reduction in defense and does not favor Social Security COLAs. He believes that the -- if he or the Republicans propose a freeze in Social Security COLAs that the Democrats would take it up and use it to demagogue it in the strongest terms.

Q Larry --

MR. SPEAKES: Evidence of that he cited and -- as Bob Michel did -- is this fund-raising letter that Tip O'Neill sent out.

Q The President cited that?

Q On defense, did they specifically discuss the four percent figure? And did the President react to that figure?

MR. SPEAKES: No, David Stockman outlined the President's growth figures, which are, I think, 5. --

Q -- 9, 7.

MR. SPEAKES: -- 5.9 and -- 5.9, 8.2 and 8.8 in '88. There was some discussion about the need to reduce defense spending, or the fact that the Congress would want to do so. The President does not think that is necessary and would, therefore, be opposed to it.

Q Did he say so?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q Were there any shifts in position on anything urged by either side? By either --

MR. SPEAKES: I think the members of Congress indicated that they would like to reduce the defense spending and also move toward a COLA freeze, or there was that possibility. But the President indicated that he does not favor either.

Q Larry, did they discuss the Dominici figures that suggest they would have to cut \$10 billion more to stay on track with what Congress had intended to reach on deficits?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes. Senator Dominici mentioned that he believes that our baggage cut of \$50 billion will not achieve what we want, that it is more in the nature of \$61, -2, -3 billion. I think we stand -- are standing by our figures. We would be hopeful that we could get the \$50 billion, which I think would be a substantial step in the right direction.

Owen.

Q -- clarify something on what you just said, when you said members of Congress indicated they would like to see some reduction of defense spending. That was both Houses? Members of both Houses?

MR. SPEAKES: Mainly the Senate because that's where the action comes first.

Q What about on touching the Social Security COLAs, was that also just the Senate, or did any Republicans in the House --

MR. SPEAKES: Senate. Senate, for the major part.

That enough?

THE PRESS: Thank you.

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