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THE WHITE HOUSE  
Office of the Press Secretary

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PRESS BRIEFING  
BY  
LARRY SPEAKES

January 29, 1986

The Briefing Room

9:50 P.M. EST

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10:13 A.M. EST

#1674-01/29

THE WHITE HOUSE  
Office of the Press Secretary

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BRIEFING  
BY  
LARRY SPEAKES

January 29, 1986  
The Briefing Room

9:50 A.M. EST

MR. SPEAKES: This morning the President, at 9:45 a.m., is meeting with his personal representatives who are in discussions with the summit nations in regard to the Tokyo economic summit. It takes place at 9:45 a.m. The group is headed by Allen Wallis of the State Department. They're known informally as Sherpa. They will be going to meet with other summit representatives in Hawaii. The President wanted an opportunity to get an update and specific instructions to them before they depart.

At 10:00 this morning, the President will announce a new Member of his Cabinet in the Oval Office. There's writing pool and photo coverage of that.

Q Ling?

MR. SPEAKES: Have to wait and see.

The President's Blue Ribbon Commission on Defense Management met in closed session yesterday. They reviewed materials prepared for the Commission's first report to the President.

Commission Chairman David Packard opened the meeting with a moment of silence in memory of Commission Member Ernest Arbuckle who died with his wife in an automobile accident on January 17th in Menlo Park, California. Closed sessions will continue today and will break briefly before resuming on the 5th and 6th. The Commission's first report to the President is due on February 28th.

We have with us this morning from NASA Public Affairs, Mark Hess, who is going to be with us at least through the day here to serve as our liaison with the Cape, with Houston and with NASA Headquarters here. Mark is experienced in the space program having spent nine years at the Cape before joining the staff here in the Headquarters just recently.

We have had very good public affairs contact with Tom De Cair who heads the operation in Washington and Shirley Green who is at the Cape today.

A number of things that are going on in connection with that -- first of all, at 9:00 this morning the Vice President reported to the President on his visit to the Cape last evening. The Vice President was back in Washington about 10:00 last night. Many of you have seen his own statements on television.

He gave the President a very detailed report on the briefings that NASA provided him during the evening last night at the Cape, as well as his meetings with the families of the astronauts that died onboard the space shuttle.

The Vice President -- I know you have seen his report -- the wife of the shuttle pilot indicated to him please do not let this stop the space program. That was one of the things he relayed to the President.

MORE

Second, the President will be placing phone calls through the day to families of those who died in the shuttle Accident and will be calling them as he's able to reach them through the day today.

Third, a number of --

Q -- pictures?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't think so.

Third, the President has received -- the United States government has received messages of condolences from a number of foreign countries regarding that. As of 9:00 a.m. this morning -- and I'll read them to you -- we have a list so you don't have to make notes -- Cameroon, Canada, Chile, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, NATO, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Spain, Taiwan, United Kingdom, United Nations, Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics and Zambia.

Q United Nations?

Q -- the Soviets message from -- was it from a leader or from the --

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know. Do you know, ED?

We can check and see what that is.

MR. DJEREJIAN: It's a statement -- the official statement.

MR. SPEAKES: Now, fourth -- we've just talked to Shirley Green at the Cape and she indicated to us that NASA will be holding a press briefing possibly this morning, certainly before day's end, to update you on whatever information they have.

And fifth, a lot of questions about a memorial service. We have talked with Dr. Graham in that regard. NASA will be consulting with the families and NASA and the President will abide by the families' -- the wishes of the families as far as when and where a memorial service would be held. The President will certainly attend. No place, nor time, nor date has been set for a memorial service. And that's pending hearing from them.

Now, as far as --

Q Have you made any suggestion as to --

MR. SPEAKES: We have not made any suggestions. It's -- as I say, we'll abide by the wishes of the families where they wish to have it held.

Now, as far as the President's rearranged schedule with the postponement of the State of the Union, here's the way it looks for next week: Tuesday, State of the Union -- it's in the evening; Wednesday the budget will be submitted to Congress, that's the 5th as originally planned; on Thursday, the President will attend the Executive Forum which is a gathering of Presidential appointees, it's the President's birthday.

In addition, he will send his legislative message that day and the CEA's economic report will go that day.

Q Where will that executive forum be?

MR. SPEAKES: In the Departmental Auditorium, I think.

And then Friday --

Q Is that the one that's always held around the anniversary of his inauguration?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes. We've been through this last week. And then on Friday -- probably the visit to the high school.

Q Also on Thursday visit the high school?

Q Friday.

MR. SPEAKES: Friday.

Q Does that mean that the Treasury visit and the HHS visits are off then, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: No, it doesn't. They will take place probably Wednesday, but that hasn't been set for sure.

Q What about the --

MR. SPEAKES: Okay, now the photographers and those going into the Oval Office should be squared away over there. Be quiet while you're doing it.

Q What about the trip to the Hill on Friday? Is that off?

MR. SPEAKES: That has not been decided yet, as to whether we will go to the Hill on Friday or whether that would be postponed.

Q And what about the Thursday night speech to CPAC?

MR. SPEAKES: Thursday night's speech to CPAC is on.

Okay, let's hold the racket down if you're going to do it, else you'll --

Q Is that on, did you say -- CPAC?

MR. SPEAKES: Until the people get quiet in the back, we won't proceed, nor will you proceed to the Oval Office.

Okay, CPAC is on. Everything for the remainder of the week is on. More schedule questions, Colonel?

Q I'd like to know who told the President first about the accident -- whether it was Buchanan or whether it was --

MR. SPEAKES: I've seen conflicting reports. I was present. There was a group that came in virtually at the same time -- several people spoke at the same time. I don't think it's -- You know, what good does it do to assign credit to who got to tell the President about a disaster?

Q I'll tell you. Buchanan told some of us that he was the one.

MR. SPEAKES: I understand he did, but the Vice President was also present and also spoke, so I don't know who spoke first. I wasn't keeping score.

Q Schedule, Larry?

Q Schedule for --

Q What happens as far as the budget briefings?

MR. SPEAKES: The budget briefing will be held just like they were. It'll be at 11:00 a.m. on that day.

Q And what about the Regan report -- excuse me, the background briefings that were supposed to precede the statement?

MR. SPEAKES: Background briefings will take place just like they were.

Q And the legislative submission? Will that be -- will there be a briefing that morning and an Oval Office ceremony?

MR. SPEAKES: Chances are they will. Chances are they will, but all that can --

Q And that's next Wednesday?

Q Thursday for the legislative part?

MR. SPEAKES: I was trying to give you a little of just the top of it, but not to enable you to plan your schedule minutely for next week.

Q Do you still anticipate the President will personally open the budget briefing with a statement?

MR. SPEAKES: Don't know yet, David. Since some of those events have been compressed, he may not need to go over there.

Q Is there any thought about the President sending some sort of special message or talking to the kids who were at the school where McAullife taught?

MR. SPEAKES: We have a number of ideas that we are discussing. Certainly we are mindful of the trauma that must be being experienced there in Concord, but as of yet we don't have anything specific.

This morning the interim board that is investigating the tragedy of yesterday convened at 8:00 a.m. Jesse Moore, who is NASA's Associate Administrator for Space Flight, announced the board last night to investigate the explosion. They are Richard G. Smith, the Director of the JFK Space Center; William Lucas, Director of the George C. Marshall Space Flight Center at Huntsville; James C. Harrington, who is Director of the Space Lab Program; Walter Williams, a former NASA management official and NASA consultant; and Arnold Ulrich, who is from the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas.

This group will be working with a very large amount of information in a very thorough and detailed investigation. They will first of all work with the departments and agencies who are associated with NASA in the space program. They will be working with the Congressional oversight committees who are involved in that. Some of the information collection that will take place as quickly as they can do it will include the telemetry from the launch site and from the mission control in Houston. They will include the voice tapes, both from the shuttle and from all of the management team, both in Florida and in Houston. They will include historical research into individual elements

and what NASA calls the pedigree of materials used to construct the shuttle and the other elements -- eye witness accounts, visits to contractor plants to review records, and so forth. So all of that, just simply to tell you that this is not an overnight undertaking, but it is quite an extensive type of undertaking that will take some time.

As soon as possible, there will be a permanent review board named, but this group was on top of it immediately after it and that is the group that is assembling now.

Q Well, who will name the permanent review board? Is that named by NASA, the President?

MR. SPEAKES: In the Apollo, it was named by NASA. It has not been determined exactly how it will work.

Now, the search, as has been reported in the news, continued overnight with ships in the area and again this morning with additional intensity. It's an extremely large area to be covered, beginning about ten miles east of the Cape. The water in the area is up to 200 feet deep.

Mark points out to me that there has been experience in underwater and deep water recovery. Part of NASA, on the fourth shuttle -- one of the solid rocket boosters was -- fell into the ocean and was -- a robot was used to retrieve it. Whether that will be used this time has not been determined or we don't have that information here.

That concludes all of my information. Let me say this to you -- that as far as the White House is concerned, we will certainly keep you abreast of the President's activities. We will not have the information here on an investigation; we will not be in a position to chase rumors or source stories that come from the Cape. All those type questions will be directed to NASA and they will answer them as best they can. But we will not -- you will not be able to report on the aftermath of the explosion from the White House press briefing room. You have to do it in Florida and later in Houston.

Bill?

Q Larry, apropos to that, can you give us an idea of if you have set up a briefing schedule or anything like that for the President, anything formal along those lines, or is this going to be an ad hoc --

MR. SPEAKES: It will be probably a daily type of a briefing situation. This morning, it was the Vice President who had been there personally. In the future, it will probably take place from one of the specialists on the NSC staff. There is a person that is involved in the space programs that is a liaison on the NSC staff. I'm sure at other times he may hear directly from Dr. Graham. But at the moment, that's the way it shapes up.

Q Was the Vice President given and then did he pass along to the President any preliminary information which at this point NASA does not wish to make public concerning the possible cause of the explosion?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know the answer to that.

Q Who's the specialist on the NSC staff, do you know?

MR. SPEAKES: What's that fellow's name? I met him yesterday.

MR. DJEREJIAN: Mike Bonn is the one who's keeping --

MR. SPEAKES: No, that's --



MR. ROUSSEL: Gil Rye?

MR. SPEAKES: What?

MR. ROUSSEL: It used to be Gil Rye. I don't know --

MR. SPEAKES: No, Gil's gone. There's a new fellow there. I don't know his name.

Q You might know later?

MR. SPEAKES: I met him last night, but I don't know his

--

Q Is the State of the Union speech going to undergo any substantial rewrite because of this accident?

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q Can you give us any guidance on when a decision might be made on the visit to the Hill on Friday?

MR. SPEAKES: I would think after we talk with the Hill sometime today. It's not so much directly connected to the space shuttle incident as it would be simply to the President wanted to use it as a follow-on to the State of the Union and he hasn't made the State of the Union. So it's a question of whether it might be better to do it next week or whether it's convenient for them to do it next week.

Oh, Gerry May is the man on NSC.

Q Do you want to tell us who the new Agriculture Secretary is?

MR. SPEAKES: The President will do that.

Q Yesterday, the National Security Adviser -- the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs finally published a statement late in day which suggested, contrary to a lot of information, that there

is no defector that we know of, either held by the United States or by any other government. Is that the final position of the administration?

MR. SPEAKES: That was the position, you note, that I took initially here Monday morning.

Q That's right.

MR. SPEAKES: And that was the position that the National Security Adviser took yesterday afternoon at 5:00 p.m. -- 6:00 p.m.

Q In between times. I mean, a senior official, for instance, told some of us yesterday, and I quote, "Well, of the people of the government who ought to know, half of them say yes and half of them say no," which is a kind --

MR. SPEAKES: Didn't notice that in the transcript, that "half yes and half no."

Q I could produce tape recordings, if it's necessary.

MR. SPEAKES: I really didn't notice that "half yes and half no" business in there. Was it in there?

Q Yes, it was said at the end of the table by a senior official.

Q What about the other --

Q And then you know what the -- Yes, the other senior official, at the same briefing, who seemed to suggest that we didn't have the defector, but there may be a defector.

MR. SPEAKES: Oh, well, once again, the same senior official that has later spoken on the record is the one that made that --

Q You've identified him.

MR. SPEAKES: -- the statement at 6:00 p.m. last night.

Q Can you just explain what that little bit of --

MR. SPEAKES: Midday business was?

Q Well, you know, why --

Q Yes, huh.

Q -- why he would suggest that there might be one and why some people --

ON BACKGROUND

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Let me speak on background --

Q Yes.

Q All right.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: -- on that. As we make judgments about happenings in the world of espionage around the world, we take many things into consideration. There were some judgments and indications that were very -- very inconclusive that perhaps somebody somewhere did have a major KGB defector.

Re-checking yesterday after that, through our entire system of intelligence agencies, we found that there was no one that

could indicate to us that any country anywhere did have a KGB defector. We watch a lot of signs. We do a lot of observing worldwide. And there was at least some feeling that perhaps somebody somewhere did. But there is no concrete evidence of it. We don't have any feel that there is. So whether that was -- U.S. News got a leak from one of these agencies and went with it in that fashion. But a complete rundown of these fellows yesterday afternoon, in all of the agencies indicated that there was nobody that felt at all comfortable in saying that some country somewhere had him. So that's the simple --

Q Did you --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: And our friend yesterday was simply mindful that there was some thought there might be somebody somewhere that might turn up -- might be produced at some future date, and he was making sure that he didn't mislead you in that fashion, which wasn't fully explained, in order -- led you to speculate.

Q And in his instance, we understand his need for caution at this point.

Q You're not suggesting that there was a check of foreign intelligence agencies --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, no. We didn't check --

Q You're only saying our own agencies.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Our own intelligence agencies.

ON THE RECORD

Colonel.

Q Was somebody or some group of people designated -- pointed out in the seats at the House of Representatives -- (laughter) --

Q What?

Q Where are they?

Q -- last night during the State of the Union speech, had it taken place?

MR. SPEAKES: You mean somebody that wasn't there?

Q Some -- No, some person pre-arranged like the hero of the Air Florida crash or the --

MR. SPEAKES: You mean was there to be a hero there last night?

Q Yes.

MR. SPEAKES: I think we'll have to wait until Tuesday night and see.

Q Are you paying his hotel bill for the week? (Laughter.)

Q Well, you told us --

MR. SPEAKES: That's a sexist remark. Could be a her. Right? Get that, Lesley?

Q Is it also possible that the hero or heroine might change between now and next week?

MR. SPEAKES: We'll just have to wait and see what's happening.

Q Could you give us the White House version of the tenor of the meeting yesterday morning that involved the allegedly sharp exchange between the Speaker and the President?

MR. SPEAKES: I really don't want to talk about it. I guess it was sort of a "let Tip be Tip," and that's about all I'll say on that.

Q Well, has Tip grown in office in five years?

O Oh, boy, has he. (Laughter.)

Q But you're basically saying the account is true, you just don't want to add to it?

MR. SPEAKES: I'm just not commenting on it.

Q You're not disputing it?

MR. SPEAKES: I'm not commenting on it, period. It wasn't entirely accurate.

Walter?

Q Also, it may have been said in this background session with a senior administration official yesterday that the President's request for Contra aid will not go up now until the end of February. Is that your understanding at this time?

MR. SPEAKES: I haven't looked at it. Our friends on the front row are saying yes. End of February?

Q After the recess.

Q After the February recess.

MR. SPEAKES: The background -- I'm trying to figure out how to leave that on background. I wouldn't quarrel with the backgrounder's statement.

Okay, Dale?

Q To clear up the confusion about who first informed the President about the --

MR. SPEAKES: The Colonel asked that. There was a group that came in the Oval Office including the Vice President, it included Pat Buchanan, it included David Chew, it included Peter Roussel -- who else, Pete?

MR. ROUSSEL: That's about it.

Q Poindexter.

MR. SPEAKES: Sunny in the Mess. (Laughter.)

Q Poindexter.

Q Who went in first?

MR. SPEAKES: And Poindexter, yes. But, Dale, the group all spoke in general conversation. I didn't keep score on who went first.

Q Are you suggesting that the door burst open, this whole bunch came running in -- (laughter) -- yelling the space shuttle had an accident or something?

MR. SPEAKES: No. In reality, what happened is that Kathy Osborne, the President's secretary, cracked the door, motioned to me to come, and before I could get up and get around the chairs -- couch and to the door the door opened and about four people came in, one behind the other, very orderly fashion, walked before the President in the center of the two couches. The President remained there and there was a general conversation.

As I say, I did not keep score on who spoke first, and I don't think that's important.

Q Well, it's only important, if I may -- in that we got official sounding information and some of us looked wronger than others.

MR. SPEAKES: As I said in the briefing yesterday, the Vice President and the National Security Adviser reported to -- and others -- reported to the President. As simple as that. I was not keeping score, nor -- I didn't know there were points awarded for who told the President first.

Q No, but there are for accuracy.

MR. SPEAKES: That's true, and as I say, I can't -- I don't have an instant replay. It wasn't available to me. And so I don't know who spoke first.

Q The President was quoted as saying in a couple of publications today, "Is that the shuttle with the space teacher on board?" Is that --

MR. SPEAKES: I don't recall that either. I don't know whether he did or not.

Q Some of us were told that he said, "That's the --" -- I mean, rather than asking the question, he made a statement.

Q "That's the one with the teacher on board."

Q -- was his first remark.

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know. I'm sure that was in his mind, but, as I say, I reported it as accurately as what I saw and what I didn't know or didn't recall, I didn't report.

Q Larry, did the senior administration official tell the television people yesterday that there was uncertainty about a defector, and are you saying now that --

MR. SPEAKES: No, his specific statement was that -- what was it? It was something about --

Q "The United States does not have one, but there may be one."

MR. SPEAKES: Do you have your page? Yes, "There may be one," he said. That was his statement.

Q "We do not have this defector."

Q Yes, that's right.

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, this is as the senior official said, "We do not have a defector. There may be a defector."

Q Then there is another line after that, Larry.

MR. SPEAKES: There is another line that says -- the question is -- "Is it possible that the CIA hasn't told you?"

"No, that's not possible. We don't have a defector."

"Are you in effect saying Larry was wrong?"

"No."

Question: "'We' means any entity of the United States government, does it not?"

"That's true. The United States does not have a defector."

"Do you know there is a defector?"

"I don't know that. There may be a defector."

"Does this defector exist?"

"I don't know that."

And then finally, in the last gasp, "I should have stuck with 'no comment.'" (Laughter.)

Live and learn. (Laughter.)

Q He said that.

MR. SPEAKES: Okay, Susan?

Q The man's getting an education.

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q Has the meeting been held -- been held or been scheduled between Regan and Meese and Brock on affirmative action?

MR. SPEAKES: There are ongoing conversations among those who are involved in that. I won't go beyond that.

Q Is there anything at all on the President's schedule relating to this space tragedy? Phone calls, letters --

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q Could you tell us?

MR. SPEAKES: What are the phone calls the President is making in relation to the space tragedy today?

Q Beats me.

MR. SPEAKES: Anybody know?

He's calling the families, Pat.

Q Throughout the day.

Q Larry, I missed something. Are you saying that Brock and Meese are now not going to come in this week?

MR. SPEAKES: No, no. I said there are ongoing discussions between those involved in it. Nothing further.

Q Is there anything else the President is --

Q What about the meeting? You said it would take place this week.

MR. SPEAKES: Ongoing discussions is a very encompassing term.

Q You mean telephone calls.

Q Is there anything else the President --

MR. SPEAKES: They don't have to be.

Q -- to the best of your knowledge, is going to do today with regard to the shuttle? Will he be having any further briefings the rest of the day?

MR. SPEAKES: I think you've got it. If he does, I'll report them to you instantly.

Q Was there anything reported to the President that reflected whether or not the delay -- the obvious delay on the shuttle program -- will affect Strategic Defense research?

MR. SPEAKES: I think all that is being assessed. As you know, Defense has a roll in the space shuttle -- the Air Force does the tracking, Defense has had payloads on various shuttles, and had future plans -- right, Mark? And that would have to be assessed.

Let me go to the Oval Office.

Q Yes, go on.

Q Has anyone asked the President?

Q Be sure he gives us a good statement, Larry.

Q Who's going to shut him up when we get in there?

Q Briefing at noon?

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

10:13 A.M. EST