

Ronald Reagan Presidential Library
Digital Library Collections

This is a PDF of a folder from our textual collections.

Collection: Press Secretary, White House Office of
the: Press Releases and Press Briefings
Folder Title: Press Briefings: #1619 11/19/1985
Box: 40

To see more digitized collections visit:

<https://reaganlibrary.gov/archives/digital-library>

To see all Ronald Reagan Presidential Library inventories visit:

<https://reaganlibrary.gov/document-collection>

Contact a reference archivist at: reagan.library@nara.gov

Citation Guidelines: <https://reaganlibrary.gov/citing>

National Archives Catalogue: <https://catalog.archives.gov/>

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Geneva, Switzerland)

PRESS BRIEFINGS
BY
LARRY SPEAKES

November 19, 1985

Hotel Intercontinental

5:32 P.M. (L)

MR. SPEAKES: I've got a few routine announcements and then I will give you times and so forth on this afternoon's meetings.

Housing starts have been released in Washington this morning, Washington time. We're releasing a statement on that which indicates that housing starts are up by 11 percent, which is a substantial increase after a drop in September. The housing sector is healthy and continues to grow, as does the overall economy. We expect a strong fourth quarter growth and an even stronger performance in 1986. We have a more complete statement that's written that we've put out.

The USIS is offering to post telephone messages for reporters on the board outside the USIS office. So check and see if your messages are there. There are a number of them that are pending. Your offices may be sending you a check and you're not aware of it.

The schedule for the President for the remainder of the evening is they are expected to arrive at the Soviet Mission at 8:00 p.m. They will have cocktails and dinner. The dinner is to conclude at 9:35 p.m. There'll be a period for coffee and informality. The Reagans leave at 10:00 p.m. They're back at their residence at 10:10 p.m. And there's full coverage of the Reagans' arrival at the Mission and as they proceed to dinner and are seated.

Tomorrow morning, the President will meet with his advisers at the Pometta Residence at 9:10 a.m. and then proceed to the Soviet Mission, arriving there at 9:55 a.m. Pool coverage of that event.

Tomorrow's session begins at 10:00 a.m. and goes until 12:15 p.m. Pool coverage at the beginning of the meeting. And that takes care of tomorrow's schedule.

Today's sessions, in the afternoon, began at 2:35 p.m. and the session with the larger group continued until 3:45 p.m., an hour-and-ten-minutes. At 3:50 p.m. -- at the conclusion of that meeting, the President suggested that he and the General Secretary walk outside the Residence toward Lake Geneva. They did. The President, of course, in his coat -- blue coat with scarf, and General Secretary Gorbachev in his coat and hat that you have seen earlier today. They walked for about five minutes to a pool house, which is located just a few yards away from the shores of the lake and went inside and sat before an open fireplace in which a fire had been lighted. And they talked there from 3:55 p.m. to 4:44 p.m., 54 minutes. The second meeting lasting roughly an hour privately between the two with only interpreters present.

The President then escorted the General Secretary back to the drive where you saw him arrive and the General Secretary left at 4:50 p.m.

We note this morning that the Soviet spokesman

MORE

#1619-11/19

characterized the meeting this morning as a good atmosphere. That tone was continued, in our judgment, through the afternoon meeting between the two individuals.

Participating in this afternoon's meeting were, besides the President, Secretary Shultz, Chief of Staff Don Regan, the Foreign Policy Adviser Bud McFarlane, Ambassador Hartman, Jack Matlock and Ambassador Nitze. At the start of that meeting, the President introduced Ambassador Nitze to the General Secretary and the General Secretary introduced an individual who was new and participating in their afternoon session, to the President.

I believe that ends my characterization of the meeting.

Barry.

Q Larry, there's, I guess, a little confusion about what the Soviet spokesman may mean -- and of course, it would take a mutual act -- when he says, very likely the meeting will be extended into Thursday. Is that a reference to the possibility of additional negotiations, or is it some sort of a wind-up appearance?

MR. SPEAKES: In my judgment -- well, first of all, these decisions have not been made, and I think he was speculating, as I would be. My judgment is that any session that would take place on Friday would --

Q Thursday.

MR. SPEAKES: -- Thursday would, in more probability, be a reporting session -- a public reporting session on each side. But right now, nothing is specifically on the schedule.

Helen.

Q Were these -- what does he mean by -- what do you mean by "good atmosphere"? Was the tete-a-tete in the afternoon preplanned? Were there any cameras there?

MR. SPEAKES: There were only the White House photographer there. We may very possibly have a release of a photo of the walk or at least the meeting -- or the meeting by the fireplace at the pool house. The session -- the walk this afternoon was not preplanned, but the President, I think, felt at a certain point in the meeting that it was a desirable time for the two to continue their talks alone, which, as we said, the atmosphere was good in those talks this morning, and there's a like tone this afternoon.

Q What do you mean, "good"? You mean, they're getting along, or you mean they're reaching -- they have rapport or what? Are they reaching any kind of common ground on issues?

MR. SPEAKES: No, I don't want to go any further than that in characterizing. I think I would just say that the -- the tone was good, the exchanges were good, the opportunity for both to talk with each other concerning these major issues was carried on in an atmosphere which the General Secretary has described as businesslike, which we agree is the appropriate description of it.

So, John.

Q Larry, not to nit-pick, but you said the walk to -- and the meeting at the pool house was not pre-planned, but didn't someone tell them to light the fire there ahead of time because the President might want to walk the General Secretary down there?

Q Repeat the question.

MR. SPEAKES: No. Did someone tell them to light the

fire ahead of time. I would judge it's probably one of those pool houses that has a 24-hour a day fire in it. (Laughter.)

David. It wasn't very preplanned. John.

Q The leaders seem to be spending more time on these one-on-ones than at least we were told in advance would be the case, has the President expressed a feeling to his people that he feels he can -- he is doing this because it can be more effective in this smaller setting. Why is -- has he given any idea about why he's decided to do more of this?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't think the President has given an explanation for that. Clearly, this is an unexpected development that the two are spending more time personally together one-on-one than had originally been thought. But, I think that contributes to our feeling -- overall feeling about the meetings. Now, the President I think just feels personally that that's the way he would like to do it. He hasn't expressed any reason.

Q No note-takers.

Q If I could follow just -- is -- since there are not note-takers present in the formal sense, have -- is there a method for reporting for posterity after the fact what happened?

MR. SPEAKES: The President generally tells his advisers the content of the meeting and the discussion that went on between the two.

Q Larry?

Q Larry, do you have any problem with Secretary Gorbachev's very public exchange with Jesse Jackson in terms of violating the spirit, if not the letter, of the news blackout?

MR. SPEAKES: No, we don't. It would -- that Jesse Jackson is not a government official and certainly it's within the General Secretary's prerogative to receive someone of that type just as it would be in the President's prerogative.

While we're on that subject, this afternoon the -- Jesse Jackson presented a petition on the nuclear test freeze to Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Charles Thomas -- rather, this morning at 11:00 a.m. -- at the U.S. mission. He was accompanied in his meeting with -- by Cora Weiss, Bruce Kent, Bella Abzug and representatives of the Women For A Successful Summit. The meeting was characterized by Secretary Thomas to us as friendly and serious and the Gorbachev meeting followed.

Q Larry, back -- just -- if I may follow up though, please. Jesse Jackson met with Gorbachev saying that he represented the voices that are not heard -- throughout the world, actually. Does the President have any plans, for example, to meet with Mrs. Scharansky or someone who might represent voices in the Soviet Union that might not otherwise be heard?

MR. SPEAKES: The President does not have --

Q Please repeat the question.

MR. SPEAKES: -- on his schedule --

Q What's the question, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: -- a meeting with Mrs. Scharansky. Who's shouting back there while I'm talking?

Q Reporters.

MR. SPEAKES: Oh --

Q They're asking you to repeat the question.

Q They couldn't --

MR. SPEAKES: I thought it might be the Dutch lady.
(Laughter.) Repeat the question -- does the President have any plans to meet with anybody from the Soviet Union or might speak for others in the Soviet Union such as Mrs. Scharansky? It's not on his schedule.

Q Larry?

Q Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: Lou?

Q Based on what transpired today, do you look forward for more such personal conversations between the President and General Secretary tomorrow?

MR. SPEAKES: It's difficult for me to predict about tomorrow, Lou. The Soviets will be the host tomorrow and I think the location of the meeting or any initiative like that would be a Soviet initiative tomorrow -- my judgment.

Q I thought it would be up to Mr. Gorbachev if he wants to continue.

MR. SPEAKES: I think the President would defer to Mr. Gorbachev in that case tomorrow. But nevertheless, I think if the President felt it would be helpful, he, too, might suggest it. So I don't think either side is barred from suggesting it.

Let me work the front row a little bit and then we'll work to the back. Andrea.

Q Would it be accurate to conclude from the way things were structured today that the two have established at least some sort of rapport on a personal level? They seemed very easy with each other when we saw them in public.

MR. SPEAKES: I think for the two of them to meet alone and exchange views for over two hours in what, as I say is clearly an unexpected development, does indicate that the two certainly have the ability to converse in an even tone. And they felt it was constructive that they continue at that -- in that method.

Q The Chief of Staff said this morning that it was -- before the meetings began, that it was yet to be seen which Gorbachev would show up today. Can you say which Gorbachev was taking part in these meetings today?

MR. SPEAKES: I've never seen but -- the only Gorbachev I've seen is the one today, so I guess he's one and the same today.

Q Were they trying to get away from their advisers?

MR. SPEAKES: A non-answer.

Q Larry, a small technical question --

Q That's right.

Q You said that when they got down to the fireplace, the translators were there. Were the translators with them -- the interpreters with them all the way along that walk?

MR. SPEAKES: I believe they were for the walk. Maybe a

little distance away.

Mike.

Q Larry, could you tell us if the advisers continued discussing agenda items while the tete-a-tete was going on?

MR. SPEAKES: They did continue discussions there. I don't know whether they stayed on the specific agenda or spun off on something else, Mike.

Q Can you -- Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: Let me go here.

Q Is there also a blackout on Mrs. Reagan's meeting or can you tell us about that?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know. I have not talked to her since her meeting. We did let her know since she was away during the day that -- what our agreement had been but our agreement did not extend to the First Lady. That will be for them to decide.

Q So how can we find out what happened between the two women?

MR. SPEAKES: The two. I judge there was a pool with them that would probably report.

Q Larry --

Q Are you satisfied --

MR. SPEAKES: Let me come back to you.

Q Are you satisfied that the news blackout means the same thing to the Soviet side as it does to your side? A lot of us are under the impression that they gave a lot more information, at least at the margins, in their briefing today.

MR. SPEAKES: I've had a very complete readout on Mr. Zamyatin's meetings -- or briefing today and I don't think it -- once you examine it closely, I don't think it differs much from mine this morning.

Q Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q Before today, you and McFarlane told us what you thought the President was going to say in broad themes -- how the two sides view each other, how we view ourselves, et cetera. Can you confirm that those were the themes of the one-on-one this morning?

MR. SPEAKES: Without holding to the specific words that we discussed yesterday and previously, the President generally followed what he had told us he was going to do.

Q Let me just follow up on that. I had the impression when he said it was business-like and we talked about the things we want to talk about at the table, it might not have been those themes, it might have been more of the specific points at issue that they're going to talk about at the table in the way of trying to reach agreements.

MR. SPEAKES: Without -- I don't think I can answer that without stepping over the lines.

Q Going back to the Jackson meeting and the news blackout, now, there were a lot of reporters in that meeting as well,

and the topic, of course, was issues at the summit. Was that not a violation of your agreement to not discuss the summit?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, we have seen the statements that were made as a result of the meeting, and we don't consider it a violation. Unless I see something that's further --

Q No, but the press was there at the meeting with Gorbachev and Jackson.

MR. SPEAKES: I understand, but, I mean, the President could have a meeting with someone and have some press present and perhaps it wouldn't --

Q But wasn't Gorbachev engaging in open debate, public debate?

MR. SPEAKES: Didn't seem to be in what I saw reported out of the meeting.

Q Larry, why doesn't the President do that?

Q Larry, do you have --

MR. SPEAKES: John?

Q -- do you have any concern that Gorbachev, as a result of this meeting, will be on all the American television networks tonight?

MR. SPEAKES: No, does not --

Q Question?

Q Question?

MR. SPEAKES: Do we have any concern that the General Secretary's meeting with Jesse Jackson would be on all the American television networks? No, we don't.

Q Well, you had no understanding with them, is that correct, that neither the President nor Gorbachev would give any interviews or do anything that would result in their -- being questioned directly on the American networks during the summit?

MR. SPEAKES: That's right.

Q Larry --

MR. SPEAKES: The two leaders can do what they wish, I think, as a result of the meeting.

Mike?

Q Yes. Are the two leaders on a first-name basis? Can you tell us that?

MR. SPEAKES: Not that I'm aware of, no.

Q And one other question: Was the translation, do you know, simultaneous in the beach house?

MR. SPEAKES: The private meeting? Mike, I don't know. I'll have to ask either the President or the interpreter there what it was because there are two guys sitting there -- it's not an earphone situation as I described to you so aptly the other day. And whether they're whispering in their ear at the same time or there's a pause, I don't know.

Lesley?

Q Larry, no, I was going to ask, if Mr. Gorbachev is going on television, if there's a consideration to have the President have some meeting where we could be --

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q -- there taking pictures? And why not? Why are you allowing them that --

MR. SPEAKES: He'll have a meeting tomorrow with General Secretary Gorbachev, and you're invited there.

Q Can you just say whether the arms control was the subject this afternoon, as you --

MR. SPEAKES: No. I think we generally agreed not to discuss subjects.

Q Larry --

Q Larry, what time do you show in your notes for the end of the first regular business session in the morning?

MR. SPEAKES: I gave it to you this morning. I can't remember exactly what time it was.

Q -- it's not the tete-a-tete, the other one.

MR. SPEAKES: I think it was about 12:15 p.m. or 12:20 p.m., somewhere in there.

Q Larry --

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, Johanna?

Q Two questions: First, who's coming to dinner? Is this just the principals? Will Shultz and Shevardnadze be there as well?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, they'll be there: Shultz, Shevardnadze, Bud, and Regan, and others from the Soviet side.

Q Also, what meeting specifically was Ron Reagan, Jr. invited --

MR. SPEAKES: Pardon?

Q What specifically was Ron Reagan, Jr. allowed to see?

MR. SPEAKES: Ron Reagan was there, and he was there because he told his father that he wanted to be a witness to history. And as I understand it, he's not there as a journalist. I think he saw the photo ops and saw the -- (laughter.) Don't laugh because he's writing about Sam. And he's bound to be serious if he's writing about Sam.

Q Sam's already done "Playboy."

Q The only things he saw --

MR. SPEAKES: And he was just outside the meeting -- in the house, but not in the meeting and saw the photo ops, yes.

Q He only saw what the pool saw?

MR. SPEAKES: That's it, yes. Of course, he was around his father both before and after the meeting, but not in the meetings.

Q Do you have an arrangement that he will not report on what those private conversations were?

MR. SPEAKES: It's my understanding that he does not plan to report.

Q Larry --

MR. SPEAKES: Ambassador Hartman is at dinner also tonight.

Andy.

Q Can I ask you whether there's any possibility that after the dinner, when the moon rises, as it were, some second-level people might be meeting with their counterparts on the Russian side to try to draft some language and move things forward and use that time?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know, Andy, whether that's scheduled or not. It has not taken place today. So whether there would be anything late night, I don't know.

John.

Q Just a detail for color, the translator that the President used was he from the State Department?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q It was a State Department staff person?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q Larry --

MR. SPEAKES: Barry, and then I'll --

Q When you're checking out this translation business, could you see if they ever spoke entirely in English?

MR. SPEAKES: They did not speak in English. We had the question this morning as to what the conversation was between the two at the greeting. And it was -- there was -- the President spoke English and Gorbachev spoke Russian.

Q But, I mean, that applies to the walk and the fireside chat and all?

MR. SPEAKES: Oh, yes. This morning, Gorbachev did not speak any English.

Owen.

Q Since you had said that the President --

Q Do you know what they were talking about --

MR. SPEAKES: The President was basically saying that -- "Stand here," and "Go this way."

Q There seemed to be some mention of the fact that Gorbachev was wearing a coat and the President wasn't.

MR. SPEAKES: That was mentioned this morning early, in the early arrival.

Q That's what I'm talking about.

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, he said, "You don't have your coat on." And Reagan said, "I left it -- "

Q Gorbachev said that in Russian?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q Larry, since you had said that the President generally said what he had intended to say, can you tell us if they at least generally followed the agenda that they had --

MR. SPEAKES: Really should --

Q Question.

MR. SPEAKES: Did they follow the agenda we had outlined. I just should not go into that. We've agreed not to and I shan't.

Q The area where the President and Mr. Gorbachev walked today, towards the lake pool house, is that a grassy area or --

MR. SPEAKES: No, it's a gravel walk.

Q -- are there woods -- Are there woods there?

MR. SPEAKES: It's a gravel walk that's -- the woods are 15 or 20 yards away along the border of the property. In the center of the property there are some evergreen trees along there -- scattered out. It's landscaped, grassy.

Q -- wouldn't characterize it as a walk in the woods?

MR. SPEAKES: No, it's a walk at the edge of the woods, maybe. (Laughter.)

Q -- understand what you're saying. Are you saying that the -- we should not assume that they are following the same general topics that you gave us for each of these sessions --

MR. SPEAKES: No, I wasn't saying that. I just wasn't giving any guidance at all on the agenda.

Q But Nitze was there.

MR. SPEAKES: Nitze was there, right. Except, a reporter says, Nitze was there.

Q Larry, all of the briefers who briefed us in advance of the summit put a very high priority on the President wanting to talk at some length with the General Secretary about the Strategic Defense Initiative, the space shield. Can we assume that that was the subject of some discussion during the private meeting here this morning?

MR. SPEAKES: I think, John, we would be once again stepping over the line if we tended to talk about what was talked about in the meetings.

Q You said that you basically agreed with the characterization that the talks were calm, pleasant, business-like, which were the words that Gorbachev used. Can we then assume that there was not the kind of vigorous interruption, argumentative Gorbachev that U.S. officials met in Moscow? Was there none of that?

MR. SPEAKES: It was not the same as the Moscow talks. I would prefer to put it in my own words rather than accept yours though.

Q Well, what are your words then?

MR. SPEAKES: It was not the same atmosphere as the Moscow talks.

Q Is the dinner this evening envisaged as a purely social occasion or could it provide yet another opportunity for a fireside chat?

MR. SPEAKES: It could provide another opportunity. There is not a structure or a topic scheduled, but there is ample opportunity for the two to talk about issues and substance if they desire.

Q Larry, when will you decide whether or not there is going to be a picture released, and if so, when will it be released?

MR. SPEAKES: I would say I'd look at them in the next hour or so, and we'll get an announcement down here from the podium when that happens.

Q There is no video of the walk?

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q Was that strictly a U.S. decision on releasing the picture?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q If in the middle of a -- if in the middle of these talks Mr. Gorbachev meets an active American politician which is a known and declared enemy of the President and that politician afterwards briefs the press about what Gorbachev has said to him about these talks, is not that a breach of the agreement and doesn't that mean that Gorbachev and Jesse Jackson between them are running rings around you Americans?

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q Not having a pool house on my property at home, I was wondering if you would give us a little more information about it.

MR. SPEAKES: What for? About the pool house?

Q Is it beside a swimming pool? Is that what he's talking --

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, there is a small swimming pool and from there there is a walk that continues down to the shore of Lake Geneva and there is a boat dock there. No boat at present -- it's out of the water. The pool house is a little larger than your ordinary pool house. (Laughter.) It has a --

Q What size is your --

MR. SPEAKES: Not as big as the one there. It has a center -- you might call it a living room type thing with a tile floor, a large fireplace with a hearth, and two rather comfortable chairs there -- soft chairs. And on either side of the living room part of it there are changing rooms. I think there is a small kitchen there. So it's quite a nice pool house. Not that rustic.

Q Old or new? Is it --

MR. SPEAKES: Sort of middle-aged.

Q Well, I mean, is it the same age as --

MR. SPEAKES: I'll check.

Q Yesterday.

MR. SPEAKES: Yes. There's no plan for us to release it, but we will check and see.

THE PRESS: Thank you very much.

END

6:00 P.M. (L)

