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FOCUS - 1 OF 4 STORIES

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December 2, 1992, Wednesday

LENGTH: 1185 words

HEADLINE: KANSAS FARM BOY MARLIN FITZWATER READY TO LEAVE WHITE HOUSE

BYLINE: By Polly Basore Elliott, States News Service

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

KEYWORD: FITZWATER

BODY:

In 1965, a Kansas farm boy moved to the nation's capital hoping to land a job as a reporter on a big city newspaper. When no editor would hire Marlin Fitzwater, the Abilene native went to work for the federal government.

A 28-year career that began as a second choice will end next month for Fitzwater, 50, who has gone from writing press releases at the Appalachian Regional Commission to serving as spokesman for two Republican presidents.

"There will be a psychological letdown I am going to have to deal with," said Fitzwater, whose words have carried the weight of the White House and presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush.

The Jan. 20 inauguration of President-elect Bill Clinton will end Fitzwater's job as presidential spokesman and begin a tour of the lecture circuits, publishing houses and corporate personnel offices.

In an interview Wednesday, Fitzwater discussed the unlikely turns of fate that brought him from a Kansas farm to a west wing office on the first floor of the White House.

Fitzwater didn't imagine he'd be speaking for presidents. "I don't know very many people who when they are 21 say they want to be president -- except maybe Bill Clinton," said a reflective Fitzwater, recalling when he came to Washington decades ago, never expecting he would end up at the White House.

Sitting behind a neat, circular desk that wraps the earthy, robust Kansan, Fitzwater spoke of a fondness for life in Washington that has never eclipsed a love of his hometown.

His words are evidenced by an office clock marking time in Abilene, where his parents and brother still live. It hangs alongside clocks that show the time in Moscow, Paris, Beijing and Washington.

Born in 1942 in a hospital in Salina, Kansas, because snow blocked the road to the Abilene hospital, Fitzwater's life detoured from the family farm south of Abilene where his family raised wheat, corn and alfalfa, plus a few head of cattle, 100 chickens and 25 pigs.

States News Service, December 2, 1992

FOCUS

To pay tuition at Kansas State University, Fitzwater took a series of newspaper jobs that spurred a lifetime love of news.

After working for the Manhattan Mercury, Topeka Capitol-Journal, the Lindsberg News-Record and the Abilene Reflector-Chronicle -- all while working toward a journalism degree in 1965 -- Fitzwater thought he was ready to leave home for the big time.

Unfortunately, he says, Washington editors took a different view.

"I like to remind all those editors today that they turned me down 30 years ago and said, 'Go back to Kansas and get some experience, kid. You're too young for Washington,'" Fitzwater recalled with a hearty chuckle.

Undaunted by defeat, Fitzwater searched for government work. Spotting a small newspaper article about the newly created Appalachian Regional Commission in Washington, he went to the public affairs director and asked for a job.

The director gave him a copy of the act that created the commission and told him to write a 250-word story that said what the commission would do.

"I'd never read a law before with all the 'therefores' and 'be enacted thats.' I was scared to death," said Fitzwater who nonetheless clanked out the story on a portable manual typewriter at home at the kitchen table to get the job that launched his career as a federal government spokesman.

Soon realizing he preferred "being on the inside" to life as a reporter, Fitzwater stayed with government, working a series of public relations jobs for the secretary of transportation, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Treasury Department and the White House. He became Reagan spokesman in 1987.

It was as Bush's spokesman that Fitzwater made his most memorable statement: "The liberation of Kuwait has begun," he said on Jan. 16, 1990, declaring to the world the entrance of the United States into the Persian Gulf war.

Fitzwater recalled: "That was probably the most famous line I've ever uttered because it's historic and it was the first word to America and to Kuwait, Iran and the Middle East that we were indeed going to attack Iraq in defense of Kuwait."

Speaking on military actions has been the most difficult part of the spokesman's job, Fitzwater said, "because it's (my) job to explain it to the public who have sons and daughters directly involved."

While most people think of Fitzwater issuing statements from behind a podium against the blue backdrop in the White House press briefing room, his job has been one of round-the-clock demands that follows him into his office and home to bed.

"It's a 24-hour-a-day problem," Fitzwater said.

"Somewhere in the world it is daylight and there is always a reporter working, and they have no qualms about calling me from Japan or Europe or Africa to get a response on world events," he said with mixed emotion, noting the

shock he expects when the phones stop ringing next month.

"I will miss the information flow. I have in the White House within arm's reach the experts on almost every world problem. When that is cut off, it will be traumatic," Fitzwater said.

On the good side, Fitzwater looks forward to the chance to read newspapers leisurely, rather than professionally.

"My reading habits have been dictated by my job," he said. "I come in and read all the big stories I know I am going to have to respond to, and read them critically in terms of what are the issues, what is our position, what is our opponent's position and what do I have to say about it.

"I've gotten so I can go through a lot of stories pretty fast that way. So I look forward to being able to read (news) for what I am interested in," he said with a measure of optimism and enthusiasm for a future that remains uncertain.

When his \$125,100 annual salary ceases, Fitzwater hopes to cash in on his experiences on the speaker circuit. Phone calls from potential clients kept his phone busy Wednesday.

The framed photos of Fitzwater with Bush, former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and troops in the desert that line the spokesman's office wall offer a clue to what the spokesman will talk about.

"I hope to make some speeches, talking very in-depth about things like Iran-Contra, the summits to the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, the Yeltsin government and what that means to the rest of the world, and the New World Order, the role of the United Nations as well as the economy and Reagan and Bush economic policy."

And for those who don't get to hear him: "I may write a book, as well."

That should keep him busy until the job offers start rolling in, he joked, explaining that his ideal job would be as vice president of communications for a major corporation.

Pondering his desire to return to Abilene, where he visits each August for the county fair ("You can't keep a good farm boy out of the cow barn, you know."), Fitzwater offers the perfect solution:

"My dream job would be to move IBM headquarters to Abilene, Kansas," he said with a grin.

A spokesman for IBM headquarters -- which at press time was still based in Armonk, N.Y., -- when told of Fitzwater's wishes, laughed and replied, "Knock yourself out, Marlin."

Proprietary to the United Press International 1988

November 28, 1988, Monday, BC cycle

SECTION: Washington News

LENGTH: 745 words

HEADLINE: Personality Spotlight :Marlin Fitzwater, White House spokesman

KEYWORD:
Transition-Fitzwater-

BODY:

Marlin Fitzwater, a warm and witty veteran bureaucrat, will have the unusual but not unprecedented role of serving two masters in the Oval Office.

President Reagan's chief spokesman was tapped Monday by President-elect George Bush to remain in his high-profile job, this time with the title of press secretary that he has lacked for the past two years as he served officially as a deputy to James Brady, crippled in the 1981 assassination attempt on Reagan.

Fitzwater was praised by Bush as a trusted friend who will bring immediate experience to the task -- and indeed, Fitzwater is a veteran government media officer who spent two years as Bush's vice presidential spokesman before moving to the White House amid the Iran-Contra scandal Jan. 12, 1987.

Nonetheless, in the thoroughly modern era of "press secretaries," Fitzwater's retention is comparable only to Pierre Salinger's brief service with President Lyndon Johnson after the president who hired him, John Kennedy, was killed.

Fitzwater clearly had expected to follow tradition by leaving the White House when Reagan steps down Jan. 20. Monday's news, therefore, was received almost as a belated gift for his 46th birthday, which he celebrated Thanksgiving Day.

"I think the job has been a wonderful experience," he told reporters with a broad smile. "I'll run as long as I can and as fast as I can."

The challenge is certainly different from when the portly, personable Fitzwater took over his White House duties from Larry Speakes, who took refuge in Wall Street's Merrill Lynch investment firm as the Iran-Contra scandal ponded away at the White House.

Fitzwater inherited not only the task of coping with continuing disclosures in Reagan's worst crisis but also with the deep public skepticism that damaged Reagan's most valuable political asset -- his credibility.

Fitzwater acknowledged the administration faced "difficult times" during the revelations of secret U.S. arms sales to Iran and the diversion of profits to Nicaraguan Contra rebels.

But he told reporters then: "I have served in the government for the last 20 years. And every day in that job, I have tried to keep one thought in mind -- that we are doing the people's business here and we should be able to explain

what we're doing.''

Fitzwater became 'assistant to the president for press relations' at an annual salary of \$77,400. He declined to answer when asked one of his first tough questions -- whether he thought a news spokesman had the right to lie -- but he later told United Press International the answer was 'no.'

In April 1988, Speakes published his memoirs. The book, 'Speaking Out,' contained the admission that he had fabricated presidential quotes and passed them on to reporters on at least two significant occasions.

Fitzwater responded to that disclosure angrily, saying Speakes 'casts aspersions on the presidency and on my position. ... It's a damn outrage.'

The balding former journalist has been far more popular with reporters than Speakes, frequently using humor to skirt questions he does not particularly want to answer. Fitzwater's favorite jokes involve his latest diet -- or his inability to stick to one.

He has struggled with his personal battle of the bulge since joining the vice president's staff in 1985. This year, he put himself on a boiled-egg-and-water regime but the rigors of the campaign caused him to stray. Aboard Air Force One Nov. 5, he planned the dinner menu -- to include beef Wellington and apple pie -- and told reporters he would go back on his diet after the election.

Fitzwater was born Nov. 24, 1942, in Salina, Kan., and grew up in Abilene, the hometown of Dwight Eisenhower. He received a bachelor's degree in journalism from Kansas State University in 1965 and worked for several local newspapers, including the Topeka Capital-Journal, Manhattan Mercury and Abilene Reflector-Chronicle.

He served in the Air Force from 1968 to 1970 and then became a speechwriter for John Volpe, the transportation secretary, from 1970 to 1972. He directed the Environmental Protection Agency's press office until 1981, when he left to become the deputy assistant treasury secretary for public affairs.

Fitzwater moved to the White House in 1983, serving as special assistant to Reagan and deputy press secretary for domestic affairs until April 1985, when he became Bush's spokesman.

He is divorced and has two teenage children, Bradley and Courtney.

Proprietary to the United Press International 1987

January 12, 1987, Monday, AM cycle

SECTION: Washington News

LENGTH: 603 words

HEADLINE: Reagan decides Marlin 'Fitz' as chief spokesman

BYLINE: By HELEN THOMAS, UPI White House Reporter

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

KEYWORD:
Fitzwater

BODY:

President Reagan tapped veteran government press officer Marlin Fitzwater as chief White House spokesman Monday, prompting a hearty round of applause from reporters.

'Don't expect it to last,' quipped a reporter as the smiling Fitzwater, 44, stood beside White House spokesman Larry Speakes, who made the announcement.

Fitzwater has been press secretary to Vice President George Bush since April 1985. He is expected to assume his new post in February when Speakes leaves for his new six-figure public relations job with Merrill Lynch investment company on Wall Street.

'I welcome Marlin Fitzwater as chief spokesman for the administration,' Reagan said in a statement read by Speakes. 'He is an outstanding individual of the deepest integrity, whose 22 years of service in Washington have earned him the respect of the press and of the public.'

Speakes, who served six years in the White House, called Fitzwater 'the ideal choice.'

James Brady, who was shot and wounded in the 1981 assassination attempt on Reagan, retains the title of press secretary.

Fitzwater will become 'assistant to the president for press relations' at a salary of \$77,400 a year.

Before the announcement, Speakes was asked about the possibility that the stocky, balding Fitzwater would succeed him.

'If it's Marlin I'll put his shiny head right out here,' Speakes grinned, hastily adding that the description 'wouldn't bother him at all.'

No slouch himself, Fitzwater wisecracked, 'I think it's obvious the president wanted an anchorman type.'

Fitzwater declined to answer when asked whether he thought a press spokesman had the right to lie, but he later told United Press International the answer

is 'no.'

Fitzwater said he had been assured of direct access to the president, but expects to report through White House chief of staff Donald Regan, for whom he worked at the Treasury Department.

He said the president 'assured me I would have direct access and report to him. And I assured him of my personal commitment to him, the first lady and the administration.'

Fitzwater acknowledged the administration faces 'difficult times' because of the Iran arms scandal, but said, 'They will not erase the indelible marks of pride and affection that Americans feel for our president and for our country.'

'In the broader sense,' Fitzwater said, 'I have served in the government for the last 20 years. And every day in that job, I have tried to keep one thought in mind: That we are doing the people's business here and we should be able to explain what we're doing.'

Fitzwater was born Nov. 24, 1942, in Salina, Kan. He graduated from Kansas State University in 1965 with a bachelor's degree in journalism.

He served in the Air Force 1968 to 1970, and worked for several newspapers in Kansas, including the Topeka Capital-Journal, Manhattan Mercury and Abilene Reflector-Chronicle.

In government service, he was a writer-editor for the Appalachian Regional Commission from 1965 to 1968, and a speech writer for John Volpe, the secretary of transportation, from 1970 to 1972.

He was the director of the press office at the Environmental Protection Agency from 1972 to 1981, when he left to become the Treasury Department's deputy assistant secretary for public affairs.

He moved to the White House in 1983, serving as special assistant to president and deputy press secretary for domestic affairs, Sept. 1, 1983, to April 1985, when he became the vice president's press secretary.

Fitzwater said his two children, Bradley and Courtney, were 'very excited' about the appointment.

GRAPHIC: PICTURE

5TH DOCUMENT of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

Public Papers of the Presidents

White House Office

Appointment of Marlin Fitzwater as Assistant to the
President for Press Relations.

23 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 21

January 12, 1987

LENGTH: 251 words

The President today announced his intention to appoint Marlin Fitzwater to be Assistant to the President for Press Relations effective upon the departure of Larry Speakes. He will serve as spokesman for the President.

Mr. Fitzwater has been Press Secretary and Assistant to Vice President Bush since April 1, 1985. Before joining the Vice President, Mr. Fitzwater was Special Assistant to President Reagan and Deputy Press Secretary for Domestic Affairs from September 1, 1983, to April 1985. Mr. Fitzwater served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs at the Department of the Treasury from 1981 to 1983. In recognition of his service he was awarded the Meritorious Executive Award by President Reagan in 1982. Previously he served in the Office of Public Affairs at the Environmental Protection Agency in 1972-1981. He served in the Office of the Secretary of Transportation in 1970-1972 as speechwriter for Secretary John Volpe and at the Appalachian Regional Commission in 1965-1967. Mr. Fitzwater was an advertising executive with the Manhattan (Kansas) Mercury and correspondent for the Topeka (Kansas) Capitol-Journal in 1962-1965. He was editor of the Lindsburg (Kansas) News-Record in 1962 and worked for the Abilene (Kansas) Reflector-Chronicle.

He graduated from Kansas State University (B.A., journalism, 1965) and served in the U.S. Air Force. He was born November 24, 1942, in Salina, KS. He has two children, Bradley and Courtney, and resides in Alexandria, VA.

7TH DOCUMENT of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

Public Papers of the Presidents

White House Staff

Appointment of Marlin Fitzwater as Special Assistant to
the President and Deputy Press Secretary for Domestic
Affairs.

19 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 1097

August 5, 1983

LENGTH: 218 words

The President today announced his intention to appoint Marlin Fitzwater to be Special Assistant to the President and Deputy Press Secretary for Domestic Affairs. He will assume his duties on September 1, 1983.

Mr. Fitzwater has extensive government public affairs experience, serving as key spokesman in various departments over a period of 13 years. Since 1981 Mr. Fitzwater has served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs at the Department of the Treasury. In that position he served as press spokesman for Secretary Donald T. Regan and the Department of the Treasury. In recognition of his service he was awarded the Meritorious Executive Award by President Reagan in 1982. Previously he served in the Office of Public Affairs at the Environmental Protection Agency in 1972-81. During that time he served as spokesman for three Administrators. He served in the Office of the Secretary of Transportation in 1970-72, as speechwriter for Secretary John Volpe.

Mr. Fitzwater was an advertising executive with the Manhattan (Kansas) Mercury and correspondent for the Topeka (Kansas) Capitol-Journal in 1962-65.

He graduated from Kansas State University (B.A., journalism, 1965). He was born November 24, 1942, in Salina, Kans. He has two children and resides in Arlington, Va.

7TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

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August 1, 1992, Saturday, Final Edition

NAME: MARLIN FITZWATER

SECTION: STYLE; PAGE C1

LENGTH: 1458 words

HEADLINE: Attack Of the President's Flack;
Marlin Fitzwater, Spokesman With Spin

SERIES: Occasional

BYLINE: Howard Kurtz, Washington Post Staff Writer

BODY:

Marlin Fitzwater was a bit surprised when his verbal mugging of Al Gore became big news.

He was standing around chatting with some wire service reporters who were looking for an 8 a.m. story -- just some "filler" to hold them until the daily briefing, the White House press secretary says. So Fitzwater obliged by opining that the Democratic vice presidential nominee is an "environmental extremist" and, for good measure, "Mr. Sellout America."

"I've used that many times in the past," Fitzwater says. "For some reason, the press chose to play it up."

After 5 1/2 years as the man on the presidential podium -- first for Ronald Reagan, then for George Bush -- the portly Kansas native is well aware that an ill-chosen phrase can instantly reverberate around the world. But this is his first presidential campaign -- Reagan was a lame duck in '88 -- and Fitzwater is finding that his partisan blasts explode with much greater force than he might have anticipated.

"I pay his salary," snaps Paul Begala, an adviser to the Clinton-Gore campaign. "He's supposed to be the official flack of the president of the United States, not the official attack dog."

A wisecracking former bureaucrat who is popular with the White House press corps, Fitzwater, 49, has a knack -- some would say a weakness -- for the highly personal dig. This is the man who called Mikhail Gorbachev a "drugstore cowboy." Who declared that Pat Buchanan had gone "Looney Tunes." Who ripped into Ross Perot as "a dangerous and destructive personality" and a "monster."

Fitzwater was at it again this week, accusing Bill Clinton (whom he has described as "Slippery Bill") of being "reckless" in calling for a more aggressive approach to halting the violence in the disintegrating Yugoslavia.

Fitzwater later admitted he had reacted to an "incomplete" report of Clinton's remarks -- which weresimilar to the position of leading Republicans -- but he did not withdraw the recklessness charge.

The Washington Post, August 1, 1992

Many of these rhetorical slaps are not coordinated with campaign officials, who are left shaking their heads in bewilderment.

At campaign time, says Jody Powell, the former spinmeister for Jimmy Carter, "there is a tendency to become more partisan, and I probably did it a little more than most. You want to be careful not to become the presidential hatchet guy. It undermines your effectiveness on more serious matters. There's a tension there that I suspect Fitzwater is aware of. He doesn't want to become the Dan Quayle of the campaign."

Fitzwater concedes that he sometimes goes too far. "I try not to be partisan, but when the president is being attacked by Mr. Clinton, Mr. Gore or anyone else, I feel I have to respond," he says. "Sometimes that is partisan. I don't know any way to avoid that."

"I do try as the president's spokesman to stay out in front in terms of making the political points he wants to make. That's the traditional role of a spokesman, going back to Pierre Salinger [under President Kennedy]. It is a fine line between being a spokesman and becoming a political operative. In a political campaign, that line gets raised pretty high."

As for calling Gore "Mr. Sellout America" last week, he says: "I probably wouldn't use it again and I certainly regret any suggestion I was questioning his patriotism. However, I will make the argument again that he's an environmental extremist and cares more about the environment than protecting jobs."

Bush, for his part, has shown no signs of dissatisfaction with his chief spokesman. "The president is very understanding of my problems," Fitzwater says. "A couple of times he will say, 'You might be a little ahead of my position there,' or 'I'm not sure I'd use exactly that language.' "

Begala sees the relationship differently. "Mr. Fitzwater is clearly following the president's directives," he says. "I don't fault him for saying hysterical and ridiculous things. Bush says, 'Okay, Marlin, it's time for you to look stupid so I can look good.' "

The balding, ruddy-faced Fitzwater has become a familiar television sight, ambling into the briefing room with his leather-bound notebook. He enjoys bantering with the press, and generally exhibits great patience with obnoxious reporters whose main goal is to provoke him into saying something outrageous.

Although he meets with campaign strategists twice a day, Fitzwater sometimes seems to be singing from a different sheet of music. After the Los Angeles riots, Fitzwater blamed the Great Society programs of the 1960s for the conditions that produced the violence, prompting days of White House backpedaling. And when critics were assailing Vice President Quayle for his slap at Murphy Brown, Fitzwater veered off course by offering to marry the already-married Candice Bergen.

Staffers sometimes try to save Fitzwater from himself. "A lot of times he would say, 'I'm going to go out and say this,' and the deputies would say, 'Don't even think about it,'" an administration official says.

The Washington Post, August 1, 1992

The long campaign year has taken its toll on Fitzwater. In March, he grew so upset about negative coverage of Bush's campaign appearances that he lashed out at the beat reporters as "lazy bastards." A few weeks later, Fitzwater told associates he was exasperated enough to quit and abruptly left for a Bermuda vacation.

"It totally frustrates him when decisions aren't made, when the direction isn't clear," the administration official says. "He hands in these communications strategies that don't get implemented because nobody's making decisions."

A divorced father of two teenagers, the cigar-smoking Fitzwater has come a long way since he was running the News-Record in Lindsborg, Kan., where he took his own pictures. He arrived in Washington in 1965 as a \$ 5,300-a-year speech writer for the Appalachian Regional Commission, later moving to the Transportation Department, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Treasury Department and the White House.

"He's very helpful because he really knows what's going on," says Timothy McNulty, who covers the White House for the Chicago Tribune. "He's often, if not usually, in the room when decisions are made."

"He's been able to walk the line between loyalty to the president and maintaining enough credibility with reporters to be effective," says Ann Devroy, a White House reporter for The Washington Post.

Others accuse Fitzwater of favoring a select group of reporters. "He seems to be enormously helpful to some people and not at all to others," says Michel McQueen of the Wall Street Journal. "At his best, he's sort of ideal as a press secretary. At his worst, he may make decisions that have less to do with stories than how he feels about a particular reporter that day. There are times you cannot get him on the phone for days."

Some of Fitzwater's most important work takes place off the podium. "He talks to the four networks every night around 6," the administration official says. "Every Wednesday he sits down with the newsmagazines. He spins these people hard."

When discussing matters of state, as he did during the latest U.S. confrontation with Iraq, Fitzwater employs the careful language of the diplomatic spokesman. He may have learned his lesson after calling Gorbachev a "drugstore cowboy," meaning a man who makes promises he can't keep. Fitzwater thought that about described the Soviet leader's diplomatic performance.

"Unfortunately, I miscalculated the personal quality of the term, and I was roundly criticized in the press for calling him a name. It was my worst mistake," he says.

Marlin Fitzwater can bob and weave with the best of them. Pressed last week about reports that Secretary of State James Baker would take charge of the Bush campaign, Fitzwater told reporters that "it's all speculation, no decisions have been made." This led to the following exchanges:

Q. Are the stories about Baker perhaps more credible than the ones about the vice president [leaving the ticket]? Are you willing to give us that much?"

The Washington Post, August 1, 1992

A. I don't do comparisons.

Q. Would you acknowledge that might be one scenario?

A. I acknowledge nothing.

"Marlin knows that Baker's coming back," an associate says. "He looks like a jerk standing there denying it when his entire clientele knows he knows. That's the farce you've got to play along with."

Fitzwater's fame would be even greater if, like State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler or Pentagon PR man Pete Williams, he allowed his briefings to be taped for television. But Fitzwater has continued the White House tradition of allowing the networks only a brief bit of silent footage each day.

"I don't want to give them a sound bite they can play over and over again when you say something dumb," he says.

GRAPHIC: PHOTO, WHITE HOUSE SPOKESMAN FITZWATER: SPINNING, OCCASIONALLY SNAPPING. MARGARET THOMAS

TYPE: BIOGRAPHY, NATIONAL NEWS

SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS; GOVERNMENT - PRESS RELATIONS

NAMED-PERSONS: MARLIN FITZWATER

ENHANCEMENT: AGE