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**Record Group/Collection:** George H.W. Bush Presidential Records  
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**Folder Title:**  
Regional Press Drop-By, 9/17/90

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# Bush is the real 'great communicator'

WASHINGTON — George knows press conferences.

Regardless of whether one agrees with President Bush on a variety of issues, it can't be denied that this president is a master at handling question-and-answer sessions with reporters.

That's a relief after Ronald Reagan, who, during the rare times that he permitted himself to be questioned, turned on that disarming smile of his while refusing to let the truth get in the way of a good story.

Reagan's aides cringed as the chief executive mangled facts and sallied into minefields against which his advisers had expressly warned him immediately before the session began.

When Reagan spoke at a press conference, it was only half of the White House performance for the day. The other half was frantic scurrying by his staff attempting to correct his bloopers, misstatements and unintended misinterpretations.

Watching Jimmy Carter press conferences was no picnic either. Carter knew much more than Reagan, but he often seemed unsure how to apply that knowledge. The president remembered for the infamous "malaise" speech appeared to take a perverse delight in suffering and wanted to make sure the rest of the country was fully as miserable as he was.

(Carter, once he left office, learned how to relax. He uses the clout of his former office to open doors. Once inside he uses a sense of humor and well-documented empathy to employ his intelligence to best advantage. Relieved of the weight of the Oval Office but bolstered by his once having inhabited it, he can handle question-and-answer sessions now with the best of them.)

As for Bush, it's well-known that he's sensitive to criticism from the press or any other



RICH HOOD

quarter, but in spite of a few well-publicized snits (including at least one on board Air Force One during which he threatened to cancel future encounters with the press) he has not let that shut-off the flow of presidential information.

Bush can and does have press conferences on virtually no notice. It's probably not coincidental that there are fewer leaks from the Bush White House than there were during Reagan's time there because Bush keeps telling his own story, pre-empting leakers who would like to pressure the president into following their own pet plans.

Bush was busy telling his own story last week when he invited about 50 political journalists not assigned to Washington to a White House briefing and press conference.

This president is never going to be accused of consistent eloquence, and he proved that again with his introductory comments before he took questions. He hurried through a recitation of his reasons for drawing a line in the sand against Iraq's Saddam Hussein in the Persian Gulf. The president's arguments were adequate if not inspiring.

He raced through a repeat of his call for negotiators to agree on a federal deficit reduction compromise that would prevent massive budget cuts Oct. 1.

Neither his international affairs comments nor those on the domestic situation began to match the eloquence of his one

outstanding address, his acceptance speech at the 1988 Republican National Convention. But, of course, they weren't expected to.

What he did do was excel in answering 31 questions in 38 minutes.

The subjects were varied — everything from his views on Iraq's leader to the war against drugs to layoffs in the defense industry in Missouri. The president talked about the environment, his reluctance to use the strategic petroleum reserve to hold down gasoline prices and whether the federal government is doing enough to halt the AIDS epidemic in this country.

It was a splendid and reassuring performance.

There were answers that reporters from various parts of the country didn't like and that the citizens in their coverage area won't like either. For example, Bush said he wouldn't change his mind and ban offshore oil drilling even though his decision to permit that drilling is damned by environmentalists.

He said the private economy, not the federal government, must make up for the loss of jobs in defense cutbacks as a result of the U.S. victory in the Cold War with the Soviet Union. That's not a popular answer for Missouri or any other area hit by defense layoffs.

He praised the work of doctors and nurses in working with AIDS patients but made no promises for increased federal funding.

Like the answers or not, there was no doubt that Bush knew what he was talking about and that he has a firm grip on himself and the sentiments of the country he leads.

We didn't have to wait around for the hasty corrections of the president's misstatements because there weren't any.

When he spoke as the commander in chief, he

reminded us that he has been in war and knows its cost in human terms. He also made it clear that he is not eager to commit American troops to a shooting war, but he will do so if the Middle East crisis requires it.

The president repeatedly displayed an excellent sense of humor, reassuring during a time when war could be imminent. He smiled when asked about Iraqi response to his televised address a week ago today:

"It got good exercise for the demonstrators who had been notified to demonstrate before they even heard what I had to say. So it kept them hustling around, jumping up and down, screaming about the United States. And if that helped them vent their frustrations, fine."

And the president was not afraid to say he didn't know the answers to some questions. In some ways those were his best answers. If we had more politicians on every level willing to admit their ignorance and their limitations, there would not be such an explosion of mistrust and disgust with the political system in this country.

## Hood winks

● Jackson County Executive Bill Waris could be the next superintendent of the troubled Kansas City School District.

I laughed when I first heard that.

But the district does need someone who won't be intimidated by a meddlesome school board. Try to imagine board members intimidating Waris, the soon-to-be former county executive.

As for qualifications, Waris is a former educator. And he has a doctorate in the school of political hard knocks.

● The latest examples of Bushspeak: "Incentivize the economy" and "condonation of crime."

Grant/Grossman  
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A: regional

OPENING STATEMENT: REGIONAL PRESS BRIEFING  
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 1990  
2:00 P.M.

12:30  
1:00  
I understand you've just heard from Dick Cheney and Roger Porter with the latest on the international situation and the domestic budget scene, and if I may, I'd like to add a few comments of my own. Then I'll be happy to take questions.

As I told the American people Tuesday night in my address to the Joint Session of Congress, the level of world cooperation in condemning Iraq is unprecedented. [Twenty-two nations have joined us, and now armed forces from countries spanning four continents have taken up defensive positions at the request of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia. Over the last several days, we've seen Japan and Germany announce that they will contribute billions to the cost of the multinational effort; Great Britain will send a full armored brigade and the famous Desert Rats. And just this weekend, the United Nations Security Council has -- once again -- strongly condemned Saddam Hussein for his outrageous break-ins at diplomatic premises in Kuwait.]

Saddam Hussein's brutal bullying must not -- and will not -- be tolerated by the world community.

For America to maintain its responsibilities abroad, America must remain strong and vital. Again, as I said last week, our world leadership and domestic strength are mutual and reinforcing. That is why I am calling on the budget negotiators

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"Our...  
at home"

from the Congress and the Administration to redouble their efforts to get a budget agreement.

I want to see a budget agreement which contains growth-oriented tax incentives and of course, the capital gains tax cut.

The Congress must enact real spending cuts, not blue-smoke-and-mirrors tricks that don't get the job done. Congress must ensure

that budget process reform takes place, and its five-year plan absolutely must be enforceable. And most important of all:

Congress must enact a multi-year defense budget that meets our needs -- not only in terms of the improvement of East-West relations, but also our broader responsibilities in other parts of the world.

Earlier, I asked for an up-or-down vote on my budget proposal -- with or without a budget agreement -- by September 28 at the latest. That has not happened. And should a budget agreement not be reached, the nation stands only 13 days away from the drastic consequences of a mandated sequester.

We in the Administration stand ready to do our part, and I am confident that the Congress will do its part. While I have been happy to see that we've made some headway recently in the budget talks, it's time to get an agreement -- now. We owe it to the American people and to our allies.

Now I will take your questions.

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