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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

March 30, 1981

PRESS BRIEFING BY
VICE PRESIDENT BUSH, LARRY SPEAKES, DAVID GERGEN

Press Briefing Room

8:20 P.M. EST

MR. SPEAKES: The Vice President will be in the Briefing Room shortly. For your information, the Vice President landed at Andrews at 6:30. He came to the Situation Room at 7:00 which he presided over a meeting of some members of the Cabinet. He will make a brief statement and will not take questions, but I will follow and take some questions.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I have a very brief statement that I'd like to read. I am deeply heartened by Dr. O'Leary's report on the President's condition, that he has emerged from this experience with flying colors and with the most optimistic prospects for a complete recovery. I can reassure this nation and the watching world that the American government is functioning fully and effectively. We've had full and complete communication throughout the day and the officers of the federal government have been fulfilling their obligations with skill and with care. I know I speak on behalf of the President and his family when I say that we are very grateful to all -- the many people from across this country who've expressed their concern at this act of violence and finally, let me add our profound concern on behalf of two brave law enforcement officers who served to protect the President and then, of course, for a friend of everybody here, dedicated public servant, Jim Brady. We're going to watch their progress with all our prayers and with all our hopes.

Now, I'm going to walk over and speak briefly to Mrs. Reagan who's returned to the residence. Thank you all very much.

Q Larry, who was in the Situation Room?

MR. SPEAKES: Let me go over what I know to be the situation as I saw it here. As I said, the Vice President arrived in the Situation -- at Andrews at 6:30. He came to the Situation Room at 7:00, was present in that meeting and this does not necessarily mean the order, but it's more or less the way they were sitting at the table. The Vice President, of course, Ed Meese, Richard Allen, Secretary Lewis, Attorney General Smith, Secretary Weinberg, Secretary Regan, Admiral Murphy of the Vice President's staff, Jim Baker, the White House Chief of Staff, and Secretary Haig. Also Secretary Block, Secretary Baldrige, Secretary Watt and CIA Director Casey. In addition, there were other staff members present such as Martin Allin, David Gergen, and Max Friedersdorf and Fred Fielding.

The meeting continued for about 30 minutes. At which time the medical press conference from the hospital came on the television and we watched that basically to its conclusion and the Vice President then went to his office, drafted the statement and came here. Mrs. Reagan has returned from the hospital as the Vice President said and he's now going over to visit with her.

As far as tomorrow, we will basically continue with the schedule as the President had planned. There is a plan for a brief meeting of the Cabinet. A plan for a brief meeting with the Congressional Leadership and then a continue with the schedule which includes a meeting and a working luncheon with the Prime Minister of the Netherlands.

MORE

Q -- working luncheon?

MR. SPEAKES: The Vice President.

Q During the meeting in the Situation Room, what subjects were discussed?

MR. SPEAKES: I really don't want to go into that, except to say that the general situation was discussed. The Vice President received the very latest information on the President. Jim Baker and Ed Meese had been at the hospital and they returned some time earlier. So, they were up to the minute.

Q Larry, was the question of Poland discussed?

MR. SPEAKES: I'm just not going into the subject matter --

Q Larry, has the President turned over control or authority to the Vice President?

Q What was the question?

MR. SPEAKES: Has the President turned over control or authority to the Vice President? There has been no cause for that to take place.

Q The President will be under sedation until tomorrow morning. Can't we assume that the Vice President would have to be able to take charge in that case, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, there is, for your information, an automatic assumption of command authority that requires no steps be taken. It goes first on the Vice President and second on the Secretary of Defense.

Q Why did the Vice President wait six hours to reassure the country that things were under control?

Q Doesn't it go to the Speaker?

MR. SPEAKES: Question about --

Q Larry, please answer this. How come it goes to the Secretary of Defense?

MR. SPEAKES: Let me get started here so you can understand it. There is a succession. That goes from the President to the Vice President, to the Speaker, to the President Pro Tem. There is another one called the command authority which is an automatic assumption and that's the only thing that happened at this time.

Q What is the line up in the automatic assumption, then? What is that?

MR. SPEAKES: I just gave it to you. The Vice President and the Secretary of Defense.

Q Larry, what triggers that?

Q Not the Secretary of State? Secretary of Defense?

MR. SPEAKES: It is an automatic assumption.

Q Larry, where will the Vice President have his working headquarters while the President is in the hospital?

MR. SPEAKES: I would assume the Vice President would remain in his office in the West Wing as he operates --

Q Larry, who is the Commander in Chief tonight at this hour?

MR. SPEAKES: Certainly the President is the Commander in Chief. If any actions are required, I'm sure that it will be taken by the appropriate official in the government.

Q Larry, why did the Vice President wait six hours to reassure the country that everything was under control?

MR. SPEAKES: The Vice President came directly back to Washington, as I understand it. There was a 30-minute meeting and then it's been followed by less than an hour after the conclusion of that meeting that the Vice President made the statement. I think we were constantly reassuring the nation through Secretary Haig and through the statement that we could make here at the time. We were all awaiting the outcome of the surgery and we were confident throughout it and the reports, as the Vice President said, have been excellent and that's --

Q Then why reassure us with Haig rather than the Vice President?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes?

Q Larry, then what you just said about the succession of command authority, Haig was completely wrong when he thought he was in command here when Weinberger was in the building?

MR. SPEAKES: The Vice President was in the Situation Room, the President's Chief of Staff and the Counsel of Mr. Meese and Mr. Baker were at the hospital. They were conferring with Secretary Haig. Secretary Haig talked to them and offered to be helpful. He was in charge of the situation in the Situation Room and that's basically it.

Q Larry, when you talk about command authority, are you talking about what specifically? Military command? Specifically what?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q But can you say that Vice President Bush is now the Acting President of the United States?

MR. SPEAKES: No. There is no move --

Q Larry, what triggers the command authority?

MR. SPEAKES: It's automatic.

Q I mean, upon what conditions?

Q How is Jim Brady?

Q Does Haig still make any foreign policy?

Q How's the condition of Jim Brady, now?

Q Could it be set off by anesthesia, for example?

MR. SPEAKES: It was my understanding from the legal people that it's an automatic situation.

Q Larry, where does Secretary Haig --

MR. SPEAKES: You aren't letting me finish my answers. It's an automatic situation and if there's a need to act, there is a capacity to act here. And I don't think it needs any further explanation.

Q Larry, how is Jim Brady?

MR. SPEAKES: You saw the television reports and that's the latest we've heard.

Q What about foreign policy? Is Haig still handling that?

MR. SPEAKES: The situation is the same as it has been before the incident and after the incident.

Q Larry, may I follow up on my question? What conditions however set off the automatic assumption of authority that you're speaking of?

MR. SPEAKES: I can't address that specifically.

Q Does it have to be a declaration of incapacity?

MR. SPEAKES: No. There does not have to be a declaration.

Q Has it been assumed, is this trigger -- are we in that process now with the Vice President?

MR. SPEAKES: It isn't. If need be, it could be. But there's been no need for that.

Q Could you explain --

Q To respond to a military threat, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: You're putting words into my mouth and I'm not going to accept it. If there's a need for the Vice President to assume command authority, he will.

Q Larry, -- this interval -- Secretary Haig was here. Secretary Weinberger was in the White House in the Situation Room at that time. Now, under this automatic assumption, goes from the Vice President to the Secretary of Defense. How did it happen that Secretary Haig said he would be charged until --

MR. SPEAKES: Let me make a statement and hopefully I'll cut off this line of questioning. The President's staff was at the hospital. They were talking to the President. Secretary Haig was in the Situation Room and they were talking to Secretary Haig and Secretary Weinberger who were there. We have just come through a very serious situation as far as the President's concern. We have come through with a very optimistic outcome. I think that's the important thing to dwell on. I can assure you that there were no problems with succession and there were not problems with command authority. And, frankly, that's all I'm going to say on it.

Q Larry, could you tell us --

Q Who asked Haig to come down here, Larry? Larry, who asked Haig to come down to brief us?

MR. SPEAKES: I'm just not going to discuss it any more. I think everything is obvious.

Q Did he mispeak himself when he said he was in command of the White House?

MR. SPEAKES: I'm just not going to discuss it any more. I've made a statement. I think you're looking here when you should be looking here.

Q Larry, can you tell us why it took -- the President came out of surgery at 6:20. The briefing at the hospital wasn't until 7:30. Can you tell us why no where in the White House command structure could assure the nation that the President had survived surgery and that he was all right?

MR. SPEAKES: Not having been there, I don't know the situation at the hospital. I know that once the Vice President was here that he moved very expeditiously.

Q What's the crisis management system that's been so talked about. Was that invoked today?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know in a formal sense, but there was no problem with what was going on --

Q So, what assembled in that room was not his crisis management team? Is was just the Cabinet --

MR. SPEAKES: It's my judgement that it was most of the Cabinet who happened -- who was in town at this time.

Q Larry, on the automatic assumption -- after you get through with the Vice President and Weinberger, then what happens? Does anybody else --

MR. SPEAKES: Sarah, I don't know the specifics on that. I'm sure a legal person can tell you that.

Q Larry, did the Attorney General either provide or was he asked to give an oral opinion during that 30-minute meeting on the formal constitutional succession particularly the incapacitation provision?

MR.SPEAKES: I just don't want to go into the details of the meeting.

Q Haig says the crisis management is in effect and you say not? So, there is a contradiction there.

MR. SPEAKES: No, there's not a contradiction.

Q Larry, how long does -- how long does the Vice President have this -- holds much of this command authority?

Q Until tomorrow morning?

MR.SPEAKES: It is not a thing that is -- it's an assumption.

Q I understand.

MR. SPEAKES: It's not a thing that requires an act. It is just if the need arises -- there is an authority that moves automatically.

Q For how long if the need arises? Tomorrow morning when the President will presumably be free of the effects of --

MR. SPEAKES: We'll just have to cross that bridge when we get to it.

Q Where is the man with the black bag? Is he with the President or is he with the Vice President?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, I can assure that -- I don't want to discuss that. Because, of course, we don't discuss security matters of this type, but I can assure you there were certainly no problems in that direct capacity.

Q Larry, is the Vice President going to spend the night at the White House? Or at his own residence?

MR. SPEAKES: I trust he'll go to his residence.

Q Are they stuffing up security protection on everyone more?

MR. SPEAKES: I won't comment on security.

Q Larry, was there any consideration of invoking the disability provisions of the 25th Amendment?

MR. SPEAKES: There has been no need for it nor any cause for it because the information we're receiving was optimistic almost from the first, so there has been no need for it.

Q --Bush was advised of the --

Q I wonder, if there has been made a check of the background of the assailant of the President to see where that --

MR. SPEAKES: Can I have the question again?

Q This is an act of terrorism against the President of the United States. I wonder if there has been a check of the background of this gentleman to see where that kind --

MR. SPEAKES: I have your question. I think anything, you know, discussing the background of the individual who is in custody should come from the Justice Department.

Q Is there any reason to think anybody else was involved, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: That kind of information, law enforcement information, should come from the Justice Department.

Q Could you tell us when Bush was advised of the shooting? Where he was and what he did immediately thereafter?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't have the timetable, but the White House staff and the Situation Room were in full contact with the Vice President during the entire period and Mr. Meese and Mr. Baker talked with him in route to Washington while he was airborne.

Q When didn't Meese and Baker become aware that the President had, indeed, been shot? Was that Deaver's call over here?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes. I presume -- yes. They -- I went to the hospital with both of them and with Lyn and --

Q What? About 2:40 roughly?

Q Larry, could you describe what you saw when you got there at the hospital?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, I think you've had -- Lyn and I were side-by-side through that and I think you've had it from Lyn except the note that the President was in the emergency room.

He was transported to the operating room, and that is about the extent of it.

Q Why was he not carried inside, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: Carried inside of --

Q Why did he walk into the hospital? Wasn't that rather dangerous when he was shot?

MR. SPEAKES: I think he was --

Q Was he being offered the stretcher?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, I was not there, so I really do not want to go into it.

Q Larry, has anyone spoken to the President since the operation or is he able to talk?

MR. SPEAKES: Mrs. Reagan has visited with him. I don't know whether she has spoken with him.

Q Larry, was there a decision made to delay for maybe ten or fifteen minutes the announcement that the President had been shot to give time to inform either Mrs. Reagan or the Vice President? There seems to be a time gap there between the time that you people heard that he had been shot and the time that the rest of the world heard about it.

MR. SPEAKES: Well, I think that we moved as quickly as we could with accurate information.

Q But did you say, "Well, let's first tell the Vice President and then we will make the announcement"?

MR. SPEAKES: I am not privileged to know what was going on because I was in one place and things were going in another place. I don't know of any purpose of delaying for notification. Let me clear up -- to be absolutely certain that you understand this command of authority. Early in the afternoon Haig was informally helping to coordinate activities in the Situation Room through regular communications with the Baker, Meese, and the Vice President. The command authority is simply an agreement whereby if the President is temporarily unavailable, then the Vice President has command authority. It is not a constitutional delegation and no formal declaration is required.

Q Was this operative under the Carter and before that administrations or is this something new?

MR. SPEAKES: I do not know.

Q Where did this exist?

MR. GERGEN: This is not an agreement.

Q Well, when did it originate?

MR. SPEAKES: We will get the legals.

Q How long do you expect the President to be unavailable?
A week or --

Q Is that what happens? The Vice President decides that he needs command authority and he takes it?

MR. SPEAKES: As I say, we will get the legal end of it for you.

MR. GERGEN: It is clearly not statutory.

Q If it is not statutory then how did it get to be in effect?

Q Shh. Let him finish.

MR. GERGEN: There are arrangements which I think that are-- conferring with the attorneys on this matter, I think that the -- frankly we have not been spending the whole afternoon researching the law and the Constitution.

Q Well, you should have been.

MR. GERGEN: Well, our concerns were with the President's health and we thought that the arrangements were working rather smoothly in here, frankly, and I think that there will come a time that we can give you more information on this. It is my understanding, in conferring with the President's counsel, that this command authority is nonstatutory. There is an arrangement whereby in the event that the President is not available, say under sedation as he has been this afternoon, that the command authority resides with the Vice President.

But I think the thing to be -- aside from the fact that all of us take heart from the President's progress and prognosis -- I think the thing that I would raise and press upon you is the fact that this administration pulled together and there was a very smooth operation. Frankly, it was fairly informal.

Q We are a nation of laws, are we not?

MR. GERGEN: That is correct. But I wouldn't -- I cannot describe for you because I am not exactly sure how these arrangements work. The more important thing was that people gathered here spontaneously. They came because of the situation that we were in. And the Vice President was in contact and the Chief of Staff and Mr. Meese and others were in complete contact and we, frankly, did not spend a great deal of time sorting through the statutory book and that sort of thing. Fred Fielding, the lawyer, was there constantly and the Attorney General was there. But as to describing these arrangements in great detail --

Q The Justice Department was supposed to have sent things over. Why didn't they --

MR. GERGEN: The Justice Department was here. I don't think that we are equipped tonight to describe this for you. We really didn't come out here to talk about the law and the Constitution, frankly, and I think that that is a subject --

Q Well, sir, if it is there, you ought to be able to find it in a few seconds.

MR. GERGEN: This is a subject that we can address in greater detail at an appropriate time, if you don't mind. We are really out here to let the Vice President make a statement.

Q Would you just give us an idea of what "command" encompasses? What is command?

MR. GERGEN: Well, I think that you have asked that question as to whether it had military aspects in it, and I think that you got an answer on that.

Q Could you tell us who gave Haig the authority to come and talk to the administration?

MR. GERGEN: Frankly, we were all very appreciative that he was here.

Q Was it Meese and Baker?

MR. GERGEN: He was here before Jim and I went over. He was here in the building.

Q Did they ask him to come and show that there was someone in charge?

MR. GERGEN: No, he came here. I am not sure what the information flow was, but frankly, a lot of people came here spontaneously and some may have been called. But frankly most people showed up spontaneously.

Q Did Haig talk to Bush on the plane?

MR. GERGEN: I do not know the answer to that.

Q What precautions are being taken that Haig is not going to try a coup d'tat?

MR. GERGEN: I think that we have exhausted --

Q Will there be further briefings?

Q Are there any plans yet for the recuperation? Anything said about --

MR. SPEAKES: WE are just not that far along. The house-keeping situation -- I think, if it suits you, we will remain open through the night. We will staff here. I would anticipate a regular briefing at some time during the day tomorrow as soon as we see how we are cleared to do it. Hopefully we can do it around noon. Lyn has made an announcement, I understand, about an 8:30 briefing --

Q 8:30?

Q 8:30 in Room 450. Will that be cancelled?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know. Was that a medical briefing?

MR. GERGEN: Yes, he said that he would bring doctors over. We are going to work on that tonight and we will try to get an advisory out tonight on that.

Q Larry, will be photo coverage tomorrow on the Vice President's schedule?

MORE

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know. We'll put the schedule out --

Q Will there be another briefing tonight?

MR. SPEAKES: We will be available tonight but I don't anticipate the need for another formal briefing.

Q What will Mrs. Reagan do, Larry?

END

8:45 P.M.

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

March 31, 1961

PRESS BRIEFING

BY

LARRY SPEAKES AND
DR. DENNIS O'LEARY AND
AND DR. DANIEL RUGERoom 450
Old Executive Office Building

8:40 A.M. EST

MR. SPEAKES: We have with you to answer questions this morning, Dr. Dennis O'Leary, the Dean for Clinical Affairs at George Washington University and Dr. Daniel Ruge, the White House physician, after which I'll be available to answer questions.

DR. O'LEARY: The President had an excellent night. The endotracheal tube which was placed in his surgery was removed at 3:00 this morning. And he was moved from the recovery room to a private area at about 5:00 this morning. He did not get a lot of sleep last night, busy night. He maintained a constant dialogue with the nurses and doctors who were in constant attendance with him, maintaining an excellent sense of humor. I'm sure you'll hear many of his remarks. My favorite one is he said, "If I got this much attention in Hollywood, I'd never have left." This went on all night. I had an opportunity to see him this morning. He is in excellent spirits. All of his vital signs are entirely normal. He's on almost no medication and at this point in time, he really probably does not require an intensive level of medical care. He's doing extremely well.

Mr. McCarthy is also doing extremely well. And he is complaining a little bit of soreness in the liver area which is a little bit understandable. He has a mild elevation of his temperature and of his white blood count which would be expected after a liver injury. But he otherwise is doing extremely well.

Mr. Brady is much improved over his initial prognosis. He still has his endotracheal tube in. However, he is responsive and is moving the right side of his body in response to command. It is anticipated his tube will be removed later today. We are guarded as to his prognosis. But his progress thus far has really been extraordinary.

Q Are you suggesting that Mr. Brady understands your directives or questions to him and responds to them?

DR. O'LEARY: Yes.

Q Dr. O'Leary, I take it then that the prognosis for the President's complete recovery is excellent and you expect it?

DR. O'LEARY: That is correct.

Q Well, how soon do you expect that then?

DR. O'LEARY: How soon for his complete recovery?

Q For that kind of person --

DR. O'LEARY: Okay, the hospital, of course, is -- does vary by patients probably in the range of a week or two. But that will depend upon his specific, of course, and then after that probably

a couple of months until he is totally back to riding horses.

Q Dr. O'Leary, has the President been using the telephone? Has he been in contact with the White House, do you know?

DR. O'LEARY: Well, there've been a number of people from the White House in to see the President. This morning he is, as I say, fully alert, joking back and forth--

Q Has he been using the telephone --

DR. O'LEARY: I don't believe so.

Q How soon do you think the President can carry out a full-time day?

Q The question?

DR. O'LEARY: Well, the question was, how soon can I put the President -- put in a full-time day. That's a little bit speculative. He's obviously able to function right now in terms of his thought process, capacity to make decisions and so forth. He can probably put in a full-time day today as long as he gets a nap this afternoon.

Q What about the chances for post-operative complications such as pneumonia or --

DR. O'LEARY: At this point in time, I would be very surprised to see such complications develop. He is doing as well as any patient who has had an operation in his chest could do.

Q Has the President at all asked or has he been told about the condition of his Press Secretary?

DR. O'LEARY: He is not aware of the other people who were shot and injured at this time.

Q Has he asked at all about them?

DR. O'LEARY: He did not ask in my presence. I can't say whether he's asked anyone else but he is not aware of it as of this morning. Yes?

Q Doctor, could you say that the President's talking so much and joking so much, is this normal or is he on some kind of high? Or why is he --

DR. O'LEARY: I don't think he's on any high and I don't think we put him there on the basis of any of his drugs. He's a very outgoing, very vital person, from what I've seen of him, this is quite in character.

Q Does the President have much pain? What is his comfort level?

DR. O'LEARY: The President is requiring almost no pain medication at all. He is tough in a good sense.

Q Doctor, are there indications that there is going to be -- brain damage that Jim Brady might have suffered?

DR. O'LEARY: Well, the bullet did -- entered just lateral to his left eye and really traversed across to the right posterior skull where it stopped and it was removed. There was fairly extensive damage of the right hemisphere of the brain. However that is his non-dominant side and the important area that

controls not only his motor movement on his right side but all of his speech and mental processes are on the left side.

MORE

There was some minimal amount of damage involving the left side of the brain. In patients like this the spectrum of possible outcomes is very, very wide. It'd be really highly speculative right now to guess at what will happen to him.

Q Dr. O'Leary, it does seem rather strange that you have not told the President of the condition of his own press secretary. Is that a medical decision? Are you concerned about Mr. Reagan's reaction?

DR. O'LEARY: No. I think you have to remember the President has been through a little bit of an experience himself and our general experience is that we don't forcefeed information to people. Rather, we respond when they feel ready to deal with an answer by asking a question.

Q In your presence did he ask any questions or make any specific requests?

DR. O'LEARY: No. I can relate to you that Mr. Nofziger related to him that he'd be happy to know that the government was running normally and he responded, "What makes you think I'd be happy about that?" (Laughter.)

Q Why do you suppose that he did stay up all night talking with nurses and doctors?

DR. O'LEARY: Well, if you've ever been in a recovery room or an intensive care setting, it's really not very conducive to good sleep because lights are on and there's a lot of activity and monitors going and people running blood tests and checking vital signs. It's not peaceful sleep. I'm not surprised he was awake. Most people would have been awake most of the night.

Q Is he concerned about his own medical condition, how soon he will recover, that kind of thing?

DR. O'LEARY: No, I don't think he seems anxious at all. He's had a few questions but nothing particularly definitive. I think he's happy with the care he's getting. He's getting a lot of attention from the nursing staff and from the doctors.

Q Doctor, are there plans to move him to a military hospital and, if so, when?

DR. O'LEARY: That determination has not been made and will be a judgment, of course, of the family and the White House Staff.

Q Doctor, the President is making a number of remarks and jokes. But you say he has not yet asked about the condition of his press secretary or anybody else, if they've been hurt in that shooting?

DR. O'LEARY: That's what I said.

Q Has the President asked about or been curious about the assassination attempt?

DR. O'LEARY: Has he been briefed about it? He has some curiosity as to who the assassin was. He was provided a little bit of information along those lines. You have to remember, he's coming out of major surgery. He's been up all day and all night and I don't think you'd expect him to have a total overview of the world at this point. I am really stunned by how alert and with it that he is.

Q What drugs is he on now?

Q Tell us some more of these quips. Perhaps you have some more?

DR. O'LEARY: Perhaps some of the others could relate those to you. There are quite a number around.

Q Could you give us his blood pressure and his heart rate?

DR. O'LEARY: His blood pressure has been running about 130 over 80, which is totally normal. His pulse rate's about 70. You and I would do well to have such a good pulse rate. His temperature's normal.

Q Could you give us an idea as to whether the President actually knew that he was hit?

DR. O'LEARY: Okay. We did chat a little bit about that this morning. He really did not appreciate that he had been shot until he was actually in the emergency room itself. As you remember, he was pushed down. He thought he might have bruised or cracked a rib and that was his belief, at least at the time he entered the emergency room. It was only after he was in the emergency room that he realized it.

Q So he didn't experience much pain or discomfort as a result of the shot itself?

DR. O'LEARY: He knew that he had been hurt in some fashion because he was experiencing some pain in the chest wall, but he did not equate that with a bullet wound.

Q Do you know of any more of his thoughts at the time that the shots were fired? Did he mention them?

DR. O'LEARY: No, he did not.

Q Doctor, could you clarify one of your earlier answers? Is the President aware at all that anybody else is injured?

DR. O'LEARY: I don't believe that he is.

Q What kind of medication is the President receiving?

DR. O'LEARY: He is receiving one antibiotic, which is a cephalosporin, and he will probably come off of that within the next 24 hours. That's routine care for the patient and he has an as-needed pain medication which he isn't needing very much, and that's it.

Q Will the President be able to walk around?

Q Was Mrs. Reagan there this morning?

DR. O'LEARY: I don't think she's there this morning.

MORE

Q Doctor, you said it'll be about a week or two weeks before he will be out of the hospital. Can you give us an idea whether he'll be walking soon or exactly what kind of progress he is expected to be making?

DR. O'LEARY: That's a little bit hard to guess, but I would not be surprised to see him up walking around within the next couple of days.

MORE

the possibility of going back to California to recuperate there? ^{What is}

DR. O'LEARY : He said he really didn't want to go back there until he could ride a horse.

Q Doctor, how do you explain a person being shot in the chest, bullets in his lung and being able to after that time, walk from the car into the hospital without somebody knowing that that had happened?

DR. O'LEARY: Well, it would seem remarkable to any of us but I think we've seen things like that before. One gets quite a surge of adrenalin under these circumstances and we do things that we might not otherwise be able to do if we realized we'd been shot or otherwise injured.

Q Can you tell us more about Brady's response -- is it to light, is it to pin pricks, is he semi-conscious? Has he shown any sign of semi-consciousness?

DR. O'LEARY: Well, I think his level of consciousness is reflected by virtue of his responsiveness. He is asked to move his right arm. He moves it. He is asked to move his right leg. He moves it. He is clearly receptive to command. He's obviously not able to talk or to reflect other levels of alertness until his endotracheal tube comes out.

Q Eyes open or closed?

DR. O'LEARY: His eyes are open and his pupils are small and reactive to light. Very good sign.

Q Have all the fragments of the bullet been removed from Brady's brain?

DR. O'LEARY: We believe so, that the whole bullet was removed.

Q You said he could move his right leg and his right arm. Is he able to move his left leg and his left arm? Is there any paralysis that has appeared?

DR. O'LEARY: Well, again, we will not be able to assess that until we get a little bit further downstream. The left side of the body is predominantly controlled by the right side of the brain, and so we're not surprised if he's going to have a level impairment, it would probably affect the left side of the body.

Q Did the President ask specifically, "Who was it who shot me?" and was there an answer given?

DR. O'LEARY: He didn't phrase it in quite that fashion, but he showed some interest as to who was the person in terms of his demographic characteristics and what have you.

Q And was he told who it was?

DR. O'LEARY: He was simply told that it was a young man who came from a good family, which was about the extent of it.

Q How did the President respond to that?

DR. O'LEARY: I can't remember his specific response. It was basically noncommittal, I think.

Q Does he have an IV or a catheter?

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DR. O'LEARY: He's still on IV to receive his antibiotic. That's all.

Q What about a catheter?

DR. O'LEARY: I'm really not sure. He will probably not need a catheter pretty shortly, if not right now.

Q One more question. Doctor, Mr. Reagan is a 70-year-old man and he received a bullet. He didn't feel it, but it was clear that he was hurt. (Inaudible.)

DR. O'LEARY: I don't think I understand all of the question. I think that his response to the injury was appropriate. He perceived that he had pain and he has really performed through all of this, as I said yesterday, like a physiologically young person. His responses have been totally normal.

Q Dr. O'Leary, if you think it is medically wise to withhold information about the other victims of this shooting, do you also feel it advisable that official information and problems be withheld as well for the President's medical benefit?

DR. O'LEARY: That's not really a judgment for me to make. That's up to the White House staff.

Q Well, then from a medical point of view, is it in the President's best interest not to have official stresses at this point?

DR. O'LEARY: Yes, I -- again, I think his primary limitation is a physical limitation because of what he's been through. But, I think he could use a little bit of sleep probably and I'm sure he get that in the course of the day. He is a very cool-headed man and what might be stressful for you or me is not necessarily stressful for him.

Q Are there any possible post-operative complications for either the President or Mr. Brady such as pneumonia or any other things?

DR. O'LEARY: Again, I think the likelihood of complications for the President is quite, quite small. Mr. Brady's had a serious injury. There are potential complications. We hope they won't develop. We're prepared to deal with them if they did.

Q Are his prospects of

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recovery better today now? I mean Brady.

DR. O'LEARY: We believe that he is going to live. We are cautiously optimistic but we have no idea where he's going to end up.

Q Who has the President seen this morning and who will he be seeing today? How many people should he be seeing and talking to during the day?

DR. O'LEARY: Well, we're trying to keep the flow of people small but obviously there are a number of people who need to be in contact with him. He was covered through the night by the director of the intensive care unit and the director of emergency services personally as well as the nursing staff and other staff. He was visited this morning by his surgeons. Dr. Aaron was in the hospital through the night. Mr. Nofziger and myself visited with him this morning. I think Mr. Meese and some of the other staff did as well.

So he's handling all of this extremely well.

Q Dr. O'Leary, would you say that the President will be able to handle the stresses of the presidency right now at this moment?

DR. O'LEARY: I think I've tried to deal with that question. I think that he is quite capable of making decisions, interacting with people. I wouldn't encourage him to put in an 13-hour day, but I am sure that he can attend to the important matters of government today.

MR. SPEAKES: Thank you, Doctor.

I have a couple of items and then I will take your questions. This morning Jim Baker, the White House Chief of Staff, and Ed Meese, the Counselor to the President, and Mike Deaver, the Assistant to the President, met at the hospital for breakfast together. They visited the President for about 10 to 12 minutes around 7:15. As they went in the President was sitting up. He was brushing his teeth. They have presented him with the Dairy Bill, which you have there, an actual copy of what he signed. As you know, the Dairy Price Support Bill had to be signed today in order to be effective on the April 1st date.

A couple of additional quotes. These are written quotes. He sent out a Winston Churchill quote which said, "Winston Churchill said, 'There is no more exhilarating feeling than being shot without result.'" Then the quote that Dr. O'Leary gave him, which is a written quote. The first one was at midnight. This one is at 2:05 a.m. "If I had this much attention in Hollywood I'd have never left."

Then to a nurse, a spoken, something he said after the tubes had been removed at 3:00 a.m. "I always heal fast." The nurse said, "Keep up the good work." The President said, "You mean this may happen several more times?"

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Then one of the questions he's had, "Will I be able to do ranch work?" And I think you've heard from the doctor that's a very positive sign on that.

Other than that, I'll accept your questions for a few minutes.

Q Larry, can you tell us what arrangement has been worked out to bring matters to the President's attention, what division of authority and what division of work has been worked out between the senior staff and the President?

MR. SPEAKES: Basically there is no division of authority. The President remains the President, of course. The senior staff, the top three senior staff members, have met with him this morning. I anticipate that the Vice President will be going out to visit the President today. The Vice President attended the senior staff (meeting) this morning and his statement there was that, "We will continue business as usual," that, "I will sit in on the meetings that the President would have normally attended and will act as if he were here."

Q Was this the deadline for signing this bill?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q This morning.

MR. SPEAKES: It had to be signed because otherwise the dairy price supports escalation would go into effect tomorrow.

Q Has the President made any other decisions aside from signing the bill, things that could be characterized as presidential decisions?

MR. SPEAKES: I'm not aware of it. Jim Baker and them were with him for 10 minutes or so but that was the immediate thing that required action this morning and he clearly took that, signing it on his breakfast tray.

Q Is there a military aide there with him now at the hospital and is "the football" there or is it with the Vice President?

MR. SPEAKES: John, we're very careful about discussing that. Yes, the military aide is present. As far as any of these other matters, they're clearly matters of national security which are classified that I can't discuss, but I can assure you that there's certainly no problem, nor was there ever any problem with that matter.

Q What kind of White House communication has been established with the hospital itself?

MORE

(. SPEAKES:

We have the White House phone system installed and certainly, as it is, wherever the President of the United States is, there's complete communications apparatus.

Q Who was the senior staff person with him at this time? Are there people there --

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, there are people there. There's a working office there and there will be people from the President's staff and there will be constant communications.

Q Then has the White House formed a recovery place and worked out where the President will remain, where he'll go?

MR. SPEAKES: No, I don't think we've gotten that far yet.

Q Who's there, Larry? Can you tell us specifically who's going to be there in that office?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, at the moment, David Fisher is there. I don't know who will work from there later in the day. I'm sure Helene Van Damm will be out there later today.

Q Not Meese or Baker or --

MR. SPEAKES: I don't anticipate them being there. I think they'll be here.

Q Mr. Speakes, has the President or any of his senior staff discussed the events of yesterday in terms of the way the President left the hotel, whether there should be changes in the future, his method of operation?

MR. SPEAKES: Sam, I don't think we've gotten into the security aspects of it or of those type things. No, I haven't heard discussion.

Q Well, Larry, how does he think the Secret Service responded in the circumstances?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't think he's expressed an opinion on that.

Q What is the feeling in terms of recuperation? The President said he didn't want to go to California until he could ride a horse. But clearly he must be doing some plans --

MR. SPEAKES: Sure, I don't think we've covered that with him. We're progressing day by day. So, I don't think we've covered specifically what happens next.

Q Larry, the would be assassinated fired from, in effect, the cover of newsmen. In other words, he was in that spot in the pool area, all right? That makes me wonder whether or not, there, first of all, is there a certain amount of bitterness on the part of the White House as to how close the press can get to the President, whether you intend now to attempt to put more restrictions on our movement, whether this will be in any way used as an example as to how close the assassin can get by working among the newsmen?

(. SPEAKES: Well, I heard no discussion of that.

Q Larry, were you able to find out if, in fact, the decision was made to withhold announcement of the fact that the President was shot to give somebody a chance to notify Bush or Mrs. Reagan or to do anything else?

MR. SPEAKES: I think our only consideration is that we move with factual information and we moved as quickly as we had the complete facts. I didn't hear of any discussion of delaying anything for any notification process. Yes, Bruce?

Q Will Bush continue to pick up the President's schedule for the duration of his hospital stay?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, for the next few days, I'm sure he will. As the Vice President said, he'll sit in where the President was supposed to sit in.

Q How much has the President's schedule been cancelled?

MR. SPEAKES: Helen --

Q I mean travel and so forth.

MR. SPEAKES: Well, clearly, the trip to Springfield, Illinois is not on. (Laughter.) We have not made a decision about the Cincinnati trip which is announced, but you can certainly draw your own conclusions about what we'd be able to do about that.

Q How about the border --

MR. SPEAKES: I just don't know. That hasn't been discussed.

Q What items has Mr. Block brought before the President this morning by --

MR. SPEAKES: The Dairy Bill is the one I'm aware of. There could have been others. But that was the one requiring his immediate attention.

Q Larry, as far as you know, no one was definitively aware that the President was shot until he was in the emergency room?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, as you heard, the President himself was not aware --

Q Did the President on his own walk into the -- Why was he allowed to walk into the hospital when he was wounded?

MR. SPEAKES: You've had the doctor. I wasn't present so I can't really address that.

Q Larry, how was the decision made to go to the hospital? The car initially headed down Connecticut Avenue -- then diverted. Can you tell us anything about that?

MR. SPEAKES: I can't address that, Hal. I guess that would be better for the Secret Service to address, though. I don't have the particulars on the immediate movements.

2 Larry, is there any explanation as to how this

assassin got so close to the President, in what they call a secure area. Somebody said that there was the media and a few others who were considered well wishers. Usually it is the people with the White House clearance, who have a White House pass, are given a prior hassle, and if people are there -- just float in?

MR. SPEAKES: No, I'm not in a position to discuss the security matters of what was happening there. I'm sure that will be --

Q Is there any enquiry under way to determine the facts of this other than what the Secret Service would normally do and FBI, and in terms of the White House itself?

MR. SPEAKES: I'm not aware of any.

Q Larry, are there any other plans to tell the President about the chance of the others or are you waiting for the advice of doctors?

MR. SPEAKES: I would judge we're waiting the advice of the doctor.

Q Larry, the meetings that Bush is going to sit in, that normally would be chaired by the President, are they now going to be discussion meetings or action meetings? And if action is taken at these meetings, will the Vice President have decision-making power?

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MR. SPEAKES: The President will make all the decisions, as he always has.

Q So if a decision has be made at this meeting, it will be by reference to a call to the hospital?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, I don't know the mechanism but I can assure you that whatever decisions are required the President will make them and he'll certainly be consulting with the Vice President and they will meet today.

Q Will the Secretary of State be in the Situation Room all day today, do you know?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know the Secretary of State's schedule.

Q Will the crisis management group or the same group or something like that be in the situation room today?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know that they will assemble today.

Q Larry, to follow up on that, was the President advised of Secretary Haig's efforts at crisis management yesterday?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know that that's been transmitted to the President.

Q Larry, what's the purpose of the Cabinet meeting today and the meeting with congressional leaders? Is this a normal meeting or is this to assure them as a result of the shooting?

MR. SPEAKES: No, we wanted to bring the Cabinet in. Most of them were here yesterday but they wanted to bring the remainder of them in that are in town to give them an update on the President's situation and to discuss whatever other matters they may have on their mind.

The meeting with the Republican leaders was scheduled. The meeting with the congressional leaders was a Republican leadership meeting which, of course, has been expanded to include a bipartisan group.

Q Larry, is it true that the President's signature that you've given us here on this bill to show his first act since the incident is not his normal signature, that it does reflect a weakened man who's in the hospital?

MR. SPEAKES: I wouldn't agree with that at all.

Q You would think that is his normal strong signature?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, sir.

Q Larry, was the President questioned about the shooting by the FBI or the Secret Service or will he be in the near future?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know. All of the law enforcement aspects should probably come from the Justice Department. I just won't be able to get into it.

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Q Larry, are there any other staff members staying in the hospital and is there going to be a press room in the hospital?

MR. SPEAKES: I think we've closed our press operation down and everything will come from here, although there will be members of the President's immediate staff there.

Q Larry, that's not the President's normal signature. Is it? It's not like that. I mean have you looked at it? It's a little wobbly.

MR. SPEAKES: I will let you be the handwriting experts today.

Q Larry, could you clarify the command authority arrangement that you described yesterday, whether that is a carry-over from past administrations or whether that's a standing order for this administration?

MR. SPEAKES: I think every administration establishes it.

Q Was it different? Was it the same one?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know.

Q Larry, in the Situation Room yesterday, right after this happened, can you tell us was there any confusion about that order?

MR. SPEAKES: No confusion whatsoever.

Q Who was in that room and who made the decision and who pulled out the documents?

MR. SPEAKES: Sure. I did account for you yesterday who was in it. I don't have my list here but that's available. It was a cooperative effort completely. There was an open line from the President's senior staff who were talking with the President, an open line from the hospital to the Situation Room. Both the hospital and the Situation Room were in contact with the Vice President.

Q Larry, was Secretary Haig asked by the White House Staff to make the appearance at the White House yesterday afternoon or did he do that on his own?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, I'm not sure. I was in the Briefing Room at the time. The Secretary came up because he thought, and it was certainly -- the entire meeting was a spirit of cooperation -- he felt that it was important to reassure the American people and our friends abroad and that's what he did.

The important thing to note on that is that the White House did not skip a beat. The government did not skip a beat. The White House performed effectively. There was not a single ripple. It was a complete spirit of cooperation. It was a real teamwork effort and I think it's a commendable effort.

Q Was there contact with Speaker O'Neill?

MR. SPEAKES: I'm sure there was some contact with Speaker O'Neill, but not anything specific.

Q Who was asking for those assurances? What allies were expressing concern about authority over the government?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't think anybody had asked for any. Let me take one more question so we can get over to those meetings.

Q Larry, if the President didn't know he was injured until he got to the hospital, why did he go to the hospital?

MR. SPEAKES: He knew he was injured.

Q Is the White House under crisis management right now, today?

MR. SPEAKES: I think the White House is operating very normally. As close to normal --

Q Will you hold a briefing this afternoon or noon?

MR. SPEAKES: Why don't I try to get out maybe after 12:00, 1:00 or 2:00 just to take what questions --

Q Here?

MR. SPEAKES: No, I'll do it in the briefing room.

END

9:12 A.M. EST

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

March 31, 1981

BRIEFING FOR REPORTERS
BY MR. BAKER AND MR. GERGEN

Mr. Baker's Office

12:30 P.M. EST

MR. BAKER: I have a couple matters that I want to cover. We are on the record. First of all, there was some report that the President had not inquired about the health of others who were with him. Last night, and I can't pinpoint the exact time for you, he inquired about the one person that he saw on the ground before the car pulled out, that he thought was a Secret Service agent. And he was given an answer that I cannot -- that I do not have. I mean I don't know what the answer was but he did make the inquiry.

Perhaps more importantly, he was told this morning at 12:16 -- I mean this afternoon at 12:16 by Dr. Ruge about Jim Brady and about the extent and nature of the injuries to the other two people. Dr. Ruge told him that the reason he didn't tell him last night or early this morning was because of the tube that would have prevented --

Q What was that?

MR. BAKER: The tubes in his nose and mouth that would have prevented him from talking about it. He has slept a fair bit since we were there this morning.

Q What was his reaction when he was told?

MR. BAKER: Yes, I'll get back to that. Since we were there this morning. His reaction when told by Dr. Ruge was, I think he said, "Oh, damn. Oh, damn," and his eyes welled up with tears. He then asked, "Did it go into the brain?" And was told that it did. He said, "Oh, dear. What is the prognosis?" He was told that there might be some weakness on the left side. Mrs. Reagan, who was in the room, then told him that last night that many people didn't think that Jim was going to make it at all, and his response to that was, "Oh, dear, we must pray," or something like that.

He then asked about the agent, once again about the agent. He was told that he was fine, recovering. He then was told by Dr. Ruge about the policeman and he said, "That means four bullets hit. Good Lord."

Now, turning to the activities of yesterday, I'd like to suggest that the activities that took place in the hospital, here in the Situation Room, and on the Vice President's plane, reflected a spirit of cooperation and dedication toward one goal, the goal of keeping our government running smoothly during a time of distress.

A point that I think has been made but that I would like to reiterate is that we at all times had full communication between the hospital, the Situation Room here at the White House, where the Cabinet or at least a majority of the Cabinet were, and

MORE

the Bush airplane. Within about the first 30 minutes after arrival at the hospital -- it may have been 45 -- but there were White House phones and communications in place --

Q At the hospital?

MR. BAKER: At the hospital. Excuse me, let me go through all this, Mike, and then you can come back and ask me whatever questions you want.

Q How many minutes?

MR. BAKER: Thirty to 45 minutes, I would think, on the outside. We were using commercial phones for the first 45 minutes.

When news of this first broke here it was probably 2:30 in the afternoon, around that. At that time I conferred twice with Secretary Haig by telephone.

Q You called him?

MR. BAKER: He called me the first time, and I told him that I would keep him advised. You see, our first report here was that the President had not been hit.

Q Where did you get that report?

MR. BAKER: I got that report from Mike Deaver at the hospital.

Q Mike didn't get to the hospital -- he didn't ride with the President, did he? He went in a separate car?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't believe he did. But when he first called me he was of the view that the President had not been hit. He quickly called me back. At that time almost immediately the call came in from Al. We agreed that it was very important how we handled this in terms of foreign perception.

Q This was before Haig knew that he was hit and before you knew?

MR. BAKER: No. This was after I had gotten the second call from the hospital telling me that the President had received a wound. They weren't sure of the extent of it.

Q Who called?

MR. BAKER: That was Mike again. But he had walked into the hospital on his own, under his own power, and fallen, sort of passed out there in the emergency room.

Q He passed out?

MR. BAKER: Well, he collapsed.

Q Collapsed?

MR. BAKER: He was then given transfusions and his condition was restored, stable.

Back to the telephone calls.

Q He collapsed from a standing position?

MR. BAKER: I can't answer that for you. I was just simply told that he collapsed when he got to the emergency room. No one knew that he had actually been hit until he was examined.

Q Why was he taken to the hospital?

MR. BAKER: Because he was complaining of a soreness in his ribcage. It was thought at first, Sam, that he had been injured when the agents pushed him in the car and agent Jerry Carr at first ordered that the limo. proceed to the White House. It's my understanding that he changed that order and directed that they go, after the President complained of -- and I think he may even have complained of a difficulty in breathing -- ordered that they go to George Washington.

Q One point, Jim. His jacket was off when he got out of the car and walked into the hospital. They couldn't see the blood on his shirt?

Q No, it wasn't.

Q Are you sure?

Q Yes.

Q The eyewitness said it was on but that he saw a little bit of blood.

MR. BAKER: I cannot answer that for you.

Q He was holding his left side, some blood.

Q A little bit of blood.

Q Coming down.

Q Okay. All right.

MR. BAKER: I shouldn't really be speculating on this, but I believe -- and I don't know this of my own personal knowledge -- but I'm not sure that they recovered a whole bullet in there. I mean there's a question of whether it was a ricochet or whether it was a fragment of a bullet as opposed to a whole bullet.

Q They said it was mangled.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

Q Is there some theory that it might have hit the car first and then hit him?

MR. BAKER: That is -- there was -- obviously, you can see on the car window right there, the door that was open, you can see where one bullet hit. I suppose it could have hit and gone -- I don't think they have a -- you'd have to go to the Secret Service and to the FBI for that.

When I told Al that the President had in fact been hit he left to come over here. I told him that I would be in touch with him and left to go to the hospital.

Q He volunteered that he'd come here or you asked him to?

MR. BAKER: Yes. (He volunteered.)

But this was done by agreement. I want to make that very plain. This was an agreed upon thing. It wasn't something that was debated or with respect to which there was any disagreement. We wanted to get all the Cabinet, as many of the Cabinet over here as we could.

Q But you made the second call?

MR. BAKER: From the hospital.

Q Oh, from the hospital you called him and said he had been hit?

MR. BAKER: I don't know whether I made the call or whether he made the call but I did say that we would be in touch as soon as I got to the hospital. We talked almost as soon as I got to the hospital and agreed that he, as the senior Cabinet officer present, would serve as the chief contact point between Ed Meese and me at the hospital and the Situation Room and he did so, and this arrangement -- this arrangement existed in numerous conversations after that. I can't tell you how many but we had a number of conversations during the course of the surgery.

Q You agreed. Who proposed the arrangement?

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(Pages previously issued as pages A through M pick up here.)
(Pages will be renumbered as pages 5 through 17 in later complete transcript.)

(In progress.)

MR. BAKER: I think it was probably just mutually understood. I don't recall anybody specifically proposing it. I mean, it was an understanding that we readily arrived at.

Q Where were you when he called you the first time knowing that the President had been hit?

MR. BAKER: Had been hit. That's correct.

Q He knew it as quickly as you did?

MR. BAKER: That's correct.

Q Did he know it before you?

MR. BAKER: No, he didn't. No, he learned it from me. I'm sorry, Judy. I misunderstood your question. He learned it from me.

Q Oh, then he called you to find out --

MR. BAKER: Yes.

Q -- what was going on?

MR. BAKER: What was going on. And he called right after I got the second call.

Q Did you also call Weinberger at that time?

MR. BAKER: No. Others did, though. We put out word to notify the Cabinet to come to the Situation Room. I clearly agreed with Al that he should be the point of contact and he was. He was the senior Cabinet officer present in the Situation Room.

Q "Point of contact". Would you define that phrase further as you understood it yesterday?

MR. BAKER: Well, my understanding of it was he was the senior person, senior Cabinet officer aboard here in the Situation Room with whom those of us at the hospital would coordinate actions. After all, the President was alert and conscious until he actually had anesthesia.

Now, moving to the briefing that the Secretary conducted, and I was not here so I don't speak from personal knowledge on this, but it's my understanding that at some point during the afternoon -- I believe it was right after Larry left the hospital to come back over here -- a question arose about the alert status of American forces and our overall security. Secretary Haig at that point felt that it was important to reassure our allies that there was continuity of government here in the United States.

He did so. Certainly we support his doing so.

Q He felt it was important?

MR. BAKER: That's correct. I think we all believed it was important.

Q You say you support his doing so.

MR. BAKER: Absolutely.

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Q You suggest that he made the statement and you support his making of it.

MR. BAKER: That's correct.

Q But he did not consult with you prior to making it?

MR. BAKER: No. That's correct.

Q Speakes took the question to him?

MR. BAKER: But you have to remember, Sam, that we had the press room here and we had a large contingent of press at the hospital to whom we were speaking with respect to immediate developments there, the President's condition and that sort of thing.

Q I think that some people look at the phraseology that he used. Do you have any problem with it?

MR. BAKER: Let me just finish and then I'll get into that. I just want to point out that at all times, I think it's fair to say that officials of the administration were prepared to deal with any contingency. We had the appropriate Cabinet officers in place in the Situation Room. We had instant and direct communication between them and the President and the Vice President's airplane. Had any decision been required we were in a position to take such action. If the President had not been able to make it, we were in a position to immediately take the action which might have been required.

Q You mean the 25th Amendment?

MR. BAKER: To take a decision. Either the 25th Amendment or the national command authority, either one. We were in -- remember now, we're in constant communication not only with the Situation Room but with the Vice President's airplane.

Q When he was going into surgery, was he there beforehand?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

Q Did he say anything about, "I'm going into surgery. Call the Vice President and tell him to take over..."

MR. BAKER: No, it was never -- he said, "Honey...", he said to Nancy, "Honey, I forgot to duck," winked at -- he winked at me as he went in there, and he --

Q But there was no question? He didn't have any feeling of transferring authority?

MR. BAKER: He did not say -- no.

Q Mr. Baker, when that confusion arose, or uncertainty, in the minds of reporters who, after all, are citizens, residents, as I am --

MR. BAKER: Sure.

Q -- was Mr. Haig's remark, "I am in control here."

Q The phraseology.

MORE

MR. BAKER: Well, I don't think that there's any dispute over there. He was in control in the Situation Room. And this was by agreement. I mean this was an understanding that we had. As the senior Cabinet officer present it would be normal that he would be the control person in the Situation Room until the Vice President arrived.

Q That's an agreement of the Cabinet?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

Q And the command authority would not have taken effect?

MR. BAKER: Command authority only applies under very -- it's unfortunate that we -- not unfortunate but it's -- that's confusing to people. The command authority only applies in a narrow set of circumstances, range of circumstances. It's classified. It is -- I don't want to discuss it any further. But it's basically as it was outlined.

Q Before we get into all that, do you have one more point or two that you want to make with us?

MR. BAKER: No, that's basically it.

Q That's basically it.

MR. BAKER: Yes, more or less.

Q Okay.

Q If it's classified, did somebody let --

MR. BAKER: Well, I would only say this: We feel here and we took pains at the senior staff meetings this morning to congratulate the Cabinet and the staff for what we think was pretty good teamwork during this thing. It went, under the circumstances, about as smoothly as I think any reasonable person could have expected that it would. There were no hitches. I think even if a presidential decision had been required the proper procedures and processes could have been followed so that it could have been attained.

Q Well, going back to the command authority, which you say is classified, but can it be said that whatever it is, it was established prior to yesterday?

MR. BAKER: That's correct. It was established at the inception of the administration, as it always is.

Q So whatever line of command authority exists under those set of circumstances was not a reaction to any events of the last several days --

MR. BAKER: No.

Q -- or the crisis management flap.

MR. BAKER: No.

Q I want to ask you about the classified. Now that this is out that there is a command authority and what the line is, have you told us a military secret? No? That there is one?

MR. BAKER: I think the fact that there is one is not

Q What about the order?

MR. BAKER: The order is but we haven't really gone -- we're not going to go into that any more.

Q But you've already told us it goes Vice President to Secretary of Defense.

MR. BAKER: I haven't told you where. We haven't told you everywhere it goes. And it can be changed at any time.

Q Are we right to assume that this is a dire -- this would be implemented in a dire military situation?

MR. BAKER: That's correct.

Q An emergency of real import?

MR. BAKER: That's correct.

Q Every administration sets a new one, is that what you're saying, and they do it at the beginning and it can be -- you can change it today?

MR. BAKER: That's correct. It's the President's decision, though.

Q Even though Mr. Haig, as you pointed out, was the senior Cabinet minister -- officer -- here and took control by agreement with you, Larry said last night that under the command authority Mr. Weinberger would be in line after the Vice President. Is that also part of this classified --

MR. BAKER: That's correct. That was a correct statement. But that applies only in a very narrow, narrow, limited range of circumstances, none of which were even approached in this --

Q Why did, then, why did Weinberger have a big fight with Haig?

MR. BAKER: I can't discuss that with you because I was not over here.

Q You didn't witness it?

MR. BAKER: No. I didn't get back here until about an hour --

Q Hasn't anybody told you about it?

MR. BAKER: -- about an hour or so -- yes, but whatever was told, whatever was said to me.

MR. GERGEN: I was there and there was no big fight between Weinberger and Haig.

Q There was not a big fight?

Q A small fight?

MR. GERGEN: No, there was not.

Q How would you describe it, then?

MR. GERGEN: I think that there were discussions all during the afternoon as to this -- there were discussions both before and after the Secretary's statement about what steps ought to be taken. There was no row. There was no shouting, as some people are alleging. And I think if you -- I received word, I think both the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State are both saying that today.

Q There was a disagreement, there was a difference of opinion of some sort.

MR. GERGEN: I would say that there were discussions during the day. There was no disagreement over who was in command or who was in charge.

Q What about what the Secretary of State had said in that statement?

MR. GERGEN: No, there was -- it's been our view during and after that, those meetings down there, that they did deal with delicate subjects. Some of the matters were matters of national security, and that it's inappropriate to discuss what was actually said or not said, but that I can just assure you there was no row down there.

MR. BAKER: Let me say this. I -- after it became apparent that the operation was successful and that the President was in absolutely no danger and perhaps -- this was perhaps 45 minutes to an hour before the statement over at the hospital because the doctors were unwilling to make any statement until they'd actually completed the operation -- I came back over here in the Situation Room and I can assure you that there did not appear to me to be -- to have been any row.

Q Why did you talk to Weinberger today?

Q Did you talk to Ed Meese about this? Has either one of you? Do you know what his view is?

MR. BAKER: Well, Ed stayed at the hospital longer than I did, so he wasn't here. When I left to come back to the Situation Room Ed left to go meet the Vice President.

Q Why are some State Department people saying that their impression is after talking to people at the White House that there was unhappiness over the way Haig handled this?

MR. BAKER: I don't know. I do not know and we saw that in the -- we saw that, Diane Sawyer's report today. That's one reason I wanted to get all of these facts before you, because I can't speak for the State Department but there's no unhappiness on the part of White House Staff.

Q There was not?

MR. BAKER: There is not. There is not unhappiness.

Q On any facet of how Haig conducted himself last evening?

MR. BAKER: With respect to any of the events that I have outlined for you.

Q Have you carefully --

MR. BAKER: I cannot speak for the Secretary of Defense. I am not carefully omitting anything, no. We think, as I just said before, that all elements of the government pulled together on the same oar at a difficult time and that the performance was good.

Q May I ask you something on a different subject? There appeared to many of us to be a huge time lag between when you were notifying other people in the government, on the Hill, and past presidents, and other people like that, before you were telling the American public, through us. Why did you decide to have that lag and go through that huge notification process before you addressed the public on the President's condition and other --

MR. BAKER: We thought it important to notify former presidents. We thought it important to notify the Hill. But the real reason, Lesley, was because the doctors were appropriately unwilling to come out and make a statement, notwithstanding the fact that they would tell us, "Things are --", "He's doing extremely well. The operation is successful. There will be absolutely no complications." They were, nevertheless, unwilling to go out before the cameras and before the entire press and take the questions that they took, in great degree and for a long period of time, yesterday afternoon, until the operation had actually been completed.

Q But if you were notifying these other people, couldn't you have notified us of the end of the operation?

MR. BAKER: We thought it was important that you hear it from the horse's mouth. We thought it was important that the American people hear it from the horse's mouth and that we think that the briefing that Dr. O'Leary did over there went a long way to calm all the fears that might have existed out there about the President's well-being.

Q I think we're getting to the point, what you would call a discussion someone else might call a little bit of a tiff. Okay?

MR. GERGEN: Yes, I think that could be in the eyes of the beholder.

MR. BAKER: I agree.

Q Well, what was the nature of the discussion?

MR. GERGEN: Well, that's what I defer.

Q So there was a little dispute?

MR. GERGEN: There were discussions and there were different points of view at various times in the day, as one would expect in a group of 10 to 15 people in the room.

Q Right. But was it, without getting into anything that's Top Secret, was it on a modus operandi or was it in terms of how the U.S. would deal --

MR. GERGEN: It was not over who was in charge or who was in command. That's very clear. It was not over who was in charge or who was in command. It was not over that kind of issue. The discussions that took place -- I think that people are arguing or suggesting that there was some sort of argument over who was in charge, and I think that's basically incorrect.

MR. BAKER: I don't think I've even heard that as a

rumor, that there was any argument over --

Q Did that come before or after Haig's appearance in the press room?

MR. GERGEN: There were different points of view both before and after, but I would --

Q On substance?

MR. GERGEN: On some substantive issues. But let me just say this: I think that you have to see it in the context of what I thought was a remarkably harmonious meeting to last for six hours down there. The overall context of that meeting and the view that, if I can only echo what Jim said there, the view of people I talked to, certainly from the White House point of view, after it was over, was that Al Haig did one hell of a job down there and we really thoroughly appreciate what he did.

It's been a great surprise to us, frankly, to have this question arise.

MR. BAKER: And to have it come out of the State Department.

Q Well, they say it's coming from here.

MR. BAKER: I know but all I can tell you is that there is absolutely no dissatisfaction on the part of certainly senior staff over here and they were the only ones, for the most part, involved with the conduct of the Secretary of State yesterday and what he did he did, in terms of being the senior officer present in the Situation Room, he did by agreement.

Q But you've made it plain that he suggested the agreement.

MR. BAKER: I suppose that we could have said no, we don't like that agreement. The fact of the matter is we liked the agreement. It was a good agreement. It was one that we, had he not suggested it, we probably would have.

Q But you didn't because he suggested it first.

MR. BAKER: Well, that just happens to be the fact of the matter, yes.

Q When do you think we'll be able to see the President in front of cameras?

MR. BAKER: But, Sam, it was an appropriate agreement and we promptly agreed to it and were happy with it.

Q When do you think we'll be able to get in and see the President on camera?

MR. BAKER: I can't answer that for you. I would not think it would be for a few days, a number of days.

Q Are you going to show us his operation? Scar?

Q How long before he gets out of there?

MR. BAKER: His scar? (Laughter.) You had a president once that used to do that.

H

Q He was from Texas.

Q Do you know why he did it? He actually did it on the first picture taking. So we're really --

MR. BAKER: I can't tell you when that'll be yet.

Q Senators Laxalt and Baker both said that they think this president will go out in public again, will not be a prisoner on the White House, will not change his method of mingling with the general public. Is that your view? Is that the view of the staff here?

MR. BAKER: That would be my view today.

Q Meaning -- what do you mean? You might rethink it?

MR. BAKER: Well, obviously there will be other -- we will have, I'm sure, recommendations from the Service and it may be that those could be convincing. We'd just have to take a look at them and see.

Q How soon do you think the --

MR. BAKER: The President, obviously, didn't have on a bullet-proof vest.

Q Has he ever worn one since he's been President?

MR. BAKER: Yes, he -- since he's been President? Not to my knowledge.

Q But during the campaign?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

Q Can you tell us, do you know when?

MR. BAKER: Several times. Usually large rallies where you -- where it's very difficult to see the crowd, see the people that make up the crowd. I remember him, on a number of occasions, putting it on in the airplane.

Q Has the Service ever suggested it since he's been President and he said no?

MR. BAKER: No.

Q There's a report that we know something about, or the authorities know something about, the motive of the suspect. What was the motive of the suspect?

MR. BAKER: You'd have to talk to the Justice Department.

Q Are they going to brief today on this, do you know?

MR. BAKER: I don't know.

Q Has the President been briefed --

MR. BAKER: They're going to be very cautious about what they say in order not to prejudice the case. I know that.

Q How soon do you think you'll be able to get out of the hospital and do some work in the office?

MR. BAKER: I think you'll have to ask the doctors. Did they give you a timeframe on the --

Q They said two or three weeks in the hospital and they didn't know --

Q He's fully able to make decisions today, carry on the duties of the presidency.

MR. BAKER: He made one today. He signed the Dairy Bill. Some people -- some people -- questioned whether the signature was genuine. But I want to tell you, here's the pen he signed it with.

Q Ah, the very pen.

Q The very pen.

MR. BAKER: And it was genuine. And he could make decisions. He's not -- I don't think he's heavily sedated. He's still drowsy because he's been up off and on all night.

Q Are you all going to try to go see him every morning and talk about the day's events?

MR. BAKER: We really haven't gotten into that yet but I assume we will, maybe more than just in the morning.

Q Did you all sit around yesterday at any time and talk about the 25th Amendment, whether --

MR. BAKER: That was discussed here in the Situation Room. It was discussed -- Ed and I talked about it at the hospital. And I think it was the view of all concerned that if the President were in a position to make decisions and if the period -- if we were looking only at the period of time during which he was under anesthesia or recuperating from anesthesia, that there would not be any even preliminary steps taken toward the 25th Amendment, that the best approach as far as the country and the American people were concerned would be business as usual, to the extent that that could happen.

Q Is that why you gathered the Cabinet here?

MR. BAKER: We had the Cabinet here in the event we needed them for the purpose of the 25th Amendment. Absolutely.

Q Right.

MR. BAKER: That, by the way, was George Bush's view too and that's what he announced when he arrived in the Situation Room.

Q Who was that?

MR. BAKER: George Bush. That based on the medical reports we'd received at that time, that there did not appear to be any cause to consider invoking the 25th Amendment. This was the

unanimous view, I believe, of all concerned. I had personally spoken to Al Haig to that effect from the hospital before I left to come back over here.

Q That there was no need to invoke it? This was after the report on the surgery?

MR. BAKER: Well, there was on need because no presidential decision was called for during that period of time.

Q He would have had to decide his own disability, wouldn't he?

MR. BAKER: No. There's another -- if the President cannot decide his own disability and, of course, you cannot when you're under anesthesia, then the Vice President and a majority of the Cabinet make that determination. But there was never any question in the Vice President's mind.

Q Is that why it was important to mention that there was a majority of the Cabinet present in the Situation Room?

MR. BAKER: Yes. Yes. Frankly, we were positioned to take whatever action we needed, whether it was under the 25th Amendment, whether it was under the normal chain of command responsibilities of Cabinet officers, or whether it was under the national command authority, to deal with whatever contingency happened. And there was complete and instant communication between those three places.

Q Was there any effort made or were any assurances sought from the Soviets that they would not seek to take advantage of the situation?

MR. BAKER: I don't want to get into that. You'd have to ask other -- somebody else that.

Q You trailed off. What'd you say?

MR. BAKER: That's not a question for me to answer.

Q Because you don't know or because you --

Q Did you suggest someone else would be better for it?

Q Was there any warning given to them not to make a move?

MR. BAKER: I don't want to get into that.

Q Was the hotline used?

MR. BAKER: You should ask the Secretary of State that.

Q Was the state of U.S. forces, the readiness state, ever changed? Was the state of readiness --

MR. BAKER: I don't want to get into that either, Sam.

Q Tell us about the President's curiosity about the shooting.

MR. BAKER: You can ask the Secretary of Defense that and you can ask the Secretary of State that.

K

Q The President's curiosity about the shooting?

Q Of the Cabinet government?

MR. BAKER: The Cabinet government, that's right.

Q The President's curiosity about the shooting, himself? It seems he was very interested in who the young man was and --

MR. BAKER: Yes.

Q Did he ask you what the motive was and --

MR. BAKER: I'm told that he did. I was not there when -- he asked who it was and I don't remember specifically what he was told other than that he was an unlikely gunman, that he came from a fairly well-to-do family in Denver, Colorado -- originally Lubbock, Texas.

Q Was it Evergreen or Denver?

MR. BAKER: I'm sorry, Evergreen, Colorado. Recently from Lubbock, Texas. I don't know. What else was he told, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know.

Q You don't know what specific questions he asked about it, what the President's questions were?

MR. BAKER: No, I was not there. I was not there when he was carrying on.

Q Do you think he saw the man? Do you think he saw him?

MR. BAKER: I don't know.

Q He only saw one agent fall, saw one agent fall. But he didn't see Brady fall, did he?

MR. BAKER: I don't know. He saw one person on the ground as he left and that's why his inquiry last night -- he assumed it was an agent and he inquired last night at some point about the welfare of that agent. And I believe it was the agent, not Jim, that he --

Q He was aware that the firing was going on when he was being pushed in the limousine?

MR. BAKER: Yes. Yes.

Q By that time he heard the fire?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

MR. SPEAKES: May I prevail on you for a loan of your tape so that we can pick up the first part?

MORE

Q Do you think he'll have to wipe out the border trip, San Diego?

MR. BAKER: I don't know.

Q You know, I wish you would reconsider telling us what this discussion, this discussion between Weinberger and Haig was because it simply now will be part of the rumor. I mean we will think of all kinds of things which will be worse, probably, than the fact.

MR. GERGEN: Well, I know the rumor.

Q Can you give a hazy idea?

MR. GERGEN: No, I think we've talked with the principals involved and they really do not believe there was any row.

Q Was it over invoking the 25th Amendment?

MR. GERGEN: Oh, no, no.

Q See, by not telling us we're now going to have to think of all sorts of things.

Q Wasn't it over the suggestion that Haig had opened the bag on this national command authority?

MR. GERGEN: I think it's really better that -- I think the critical thing from our point of view was that there was -- from our perspective and from the perspective of the individuals that there was no row. I can't tell you how other people will characterize any conversation.

Q I wonder why it got out like that.

MR. GERGEN: Well, you never know what other people do.

Q They're known in recent days not to have great -- there's a problem, you see.

MR. GERGEN: That's what we would suggest to you that there is not.

Q A week ago Monday we had a little problem here involving Haig and the White House Staff. If it weren't for that --

MR. BAKER: That's the point I'm trying to get across to you, that the White House Staff is not displeased at all with the Secretary's performance yesterday. We think the entire government functioned well yesterday. We particularly think he functioned well yesterday here as the contact in the Situation Room. Now, just because there was some difference of opinion between Secretary Haig and Secretary Weinberger, we now have a story out there that the White House Staff and Secretary Haig are feuding once again. We are not. We agree on this procedure.

Q Which he suggested?

MR. BAKER: Which he suggested, which, as I told you, we probably would have suggested had he not suggested it. And to which we readily agreed. Readily.

MR. GERGEN: It's the natural order of things, after all, given his senior status.

Q Forgive me if I missed one of the comments. Just because there was a difference of opinion, I think, just because there was a difference of opinion between Secretary Haig and Secretary Weinberger, we now have stories that they have been feuding again.

MR. BAKER: No, that Secretary Haig and the White House Staff is feuding.

Q I beg your pardon.

MR. BAKER: I'm really hopeful that I can lay that one to rest. We are not. This arrangement was agreed to. It was originally his suggestion but if it hadn't been, Sam, I think it would have been ours. It just happened like that. And before I even left this -- left the premises to go to the hospital, I said, absolutely, "I will be in touch with you the minute I get to the hospital," and he was the point of contact during the entire situation.

Q Medical update? Are we going to get another one?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

Q No late word on Brady?

MR. BAKER: Brady's doing a little better.

Q Has he shown any conscious signs?

MR. BAKER: Yes. His pupils are good. They say, "Wiggle your toes." He wiggles his toes. His arm.

Q But he has not spoken?

MR. BAKER: No, but they think he might speak this afternoon.

Q He doesn't speak?

MR. BAKER: He can't speak until they take out the endotrachial tube.

Q Oh, I see. So they really don't know whether he can speak?

MR. BAKER: Haven't you ever had an endotrachial tube? You can't even breath. It does your breathing for you.

Q Are they telling you that they think he's going to be able to function and --

MR. BAKER: Well, they're cautiously optimistic that he'll be able to regain a lot of it. They're certainly now saying, as they were not yesterday afternoon, that he's going to live. A, he's going to live. B, they think that the mental capacity will be there and that there may be some weakness on the left side of the body. Whether that's a total paralysis or just weakness -- mostly it's the arm, they think. But, I mean, it's incredible because they told us when he first came -- when they first brought him in there that people just normally don't recover from this kind of a wound. That was the first thing they said when he walked in. They said, "We hold out very little hope." So maybe some of those people are doing some good.