

Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on the President's Health May 4, 1991

President Bush is relaxed, comfortable, and having dinner with Mrs. Bush in his room at Bethesda Naval Hospital this evening. He is in good spirits and the doctors' reports are very positive.

President Bush developed atrial fibrillation, which is an irregularity of the heartbeat, while running at Camp David this afternoon about 4:20 p.m. This condition presented itself as unusual fatigue during the run. The President was evaluated by Dr. Michael Nash at Camp David, who detected the irregular heartbeat and found him to be entirely stable with no other symptoms.

The President, accompanied by Mrs. Bush and Dr. Nash, flew by helicopter to Bethesda Naval Hospital, arriving about 5:58 p.m. this evening. At the time of hospital admission, the irregular heartbeat was still present, but the President was completely alert and entirely stable, with no complaints. The President walked into the hospital on his own power.

An electrocardiogram showed no abnormalities except the irregular heart rhythm. An ultrasound examination of the heart showed no structural abnormalities and nor-

mal heart function.

The President is undergoing treatment for atrial fibrillation with the drug digoxin. Diagnostic testing and initial treatment took approximately 1 hour. The President has been consulting with Governor Sununu on various issues at the hospital. The President will remain there for observation over the night.

Physicians in attendance are Dr. Lawrence Mohr, colonel of the U.S. Army; Dr. Michael Nash, major, U.S. Air Force, of the White House Medical Unit; and Dr. John A. Williams III, Lt. commander, U.S. Navy, a staff cardiologist at Bethesda Naval Hospital.

Mrs. Bush will remain with the President at the hospital overnight. Vice President Quayle spoke with the President by telephone about 7:20 p.m. and found him in excellent spirits.

Note: The Press Secretary read the statement to reporters at 8:30 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House. John H. Sununu was Chief of Staff to the President. Later in the week, the President was diagnosed as having Graves' disease.

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The President spent a comfortable night, sleeping well. He awoke at 6 a.m., did paperwork, and spoke with Governor Sununu by phone.

The President is in great spirits, but still has atrial fibrillation. There are no signs of heart damage and no evidence of a heart attack. The President has no other symptoms and feels completely normal. This is corroborated by the blood and x-ray tests which were examined this morning.

The President continues to take digoxin for the atrial fibrillation. This is now being supplemented by the drug procainamide,

which is a normal procedure in such cases. The President will remain at the naval hospital today for observation on the drugs.

The President's Physician, Dr. Burton Lee, is supervising the team of physicians who are attending to the President. Dr. Bruce K. Lloyd, captain, U.S. Navy, chief of cardiology at the naval hospital, is directing the President's care. Dr. Allan Ross, chief of cardiology at George Washington University Hospital, is consulting on the President's case.

Mrs. Bush spent the night at the hospital and departed for the White House a little

past 7 a.m. She will return to the hospital later today.

The President received a call from Vice President Quayle early this morning, before the Vice President went to church.

The President also spoke this morning with General Brent Scowcroft, his national security adviser; Secretary of State Baker; Secretary of Defense Cheney; and Secretary of Commerce Mosbacher. These were personal calls. There have been no special security concerns.

General Scowcroft and Governor Sununu

will meet with the President about mid-morning to provide their routine national security briefing and to discuss other policy matters.

The President also spoke this morning with his son Marvin and his daughter, Dorothy.

The President has received a number of messages from world leaders wishing him good health.

Note: John H. Sununu was Chief of Staff to the President.

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President Bush's diagnosis today remains essentially the same as last night. He continues to take digoxin and procainamide for the atrial fibrillation. While there have been some indications of a positive response to the medicine, the President's heartbeat has not returned to its normal rhythm. The President is wearing a heart monitor and the doctors continue to watch his progress.

In order to allow continued observation of the President, he will remain overnight at Bethesda Naval Hospital. Mrs. Bush has returned to the White House. The President has spent a relatively active day at the hospital, conferring with Governor Sununu, General Scowcroft, his doctors, Mrs. Bush, and other friends that he has called. He visited with his son Marvin and his daughter, Dorothy, at the hospital, as well as his grandchildren Sam and Ellie LeBlond.

The President's medical team met for nearly 2 hours this evening, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., to discuss the latest test data. They report that the President is in fine condition, good spirits, and showing some response to the medicine. They will review the President's progress again tomorrow morning, perhaps as early as 5 a.m. or 6 a.m.

The doctors report that atrial fibrillation can last for varying periods of time, sometimes only a few hours, sometimes longer.

It is a condition that must be continually analyzed, but can be treated in a number of ways. Because the President is now entering his second day with this heart irregularity, there has been considerable speculation about courses of medical treatment. We want to assure the American people that the President is in a healthy condition. He has not suffered a heart attack. He has not suffered heart muscle damage.

We remain hopeful that the medication will return his heart to normal rhythm. If by morning that is not the case, the doctors will consider electrical cardioversion. This procedure is well-known and relatively commonplace. The risk is minimal, particularly in a patient such as the President who has no demonstrable heart disease. Nevertheless, it would require general anesthesia, which would be expected to incapacitate the President for only a short period of time. The final decision on this will be made tomorrow morning. During the short time that the President would be under anesthesia, the Vice President would be Acting President under the 25th amendment.

Once again, I want to emphasize that we hope that the President will respond to his medicine in a way that returns his heartbeat to normal and no further treatment will be needed. The doctors will make that evaluation early tomorrow morning.