Ebola vs. AIDS, Obama vs. Reagan

October 21, 2014 By Peter Staley

Compare and contrast: Ebola vs. AIDS, Obama vs. Reagan. Anyone who continues to defend President Reagan's response to AIDS is ignoring a history of gross negligence compared with the response to other disease outbreaks in the U.S.

Here's the first time President Obama's press secretary was asked about Ebola, on July 30, 2014. Ebola had yet to reach U.S. shores, but two Christian aid workers from America had become infected in Liberia.

Q: Is the President being briefed on the Ebola outbreak in Africa? And will it be addressed at the Africa summit and/or alter the Africa summit in any way?

MR. SCHULTZ: Yes, we continue -- well, no, it will not alter the summit, but we do continue to monitor the outbreak of the Ebola virus in Guinea, in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria closely. The President is indeed receiving regular updates, including speaking with his Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Advisor Lisa Monaco as early as yesterday before departing Washington.

The U.S. government, including the Departments of State, Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease

Control, USAID and the Department of Defense, continue to provide a range of support and assistance to those countries and multinational organizations responding to the outbreak.

This includes the provision of personal protective equipment and other essential supplies, public health messaging and technical expertise. We've actually been engaged in this outbreak since March.

The press waited until Oct. 15 , 1982 -- 17 months after the first reported AIDS cases -- to ask President Reagan's press secretary about the "gay plague." By that time, there had been 593 reported cases in the U.S., and 243 deaths.

Q: Larry, does the President have any reaction to the announcement -- the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, that AIDS is now an epidemic and have over 600 cases?

MR. SPEAKES: What's AIDS?

Q: Over a third of them have died. It's known as "gay plague." (Laughter.) No, it is. I mean it's a pretty serious thing that one in every three people that get this have died. And I wondered if the President is aware of it?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't have it. Do you? (Laughter.)

Q: No, I don’t.

MR. SPEAKES: You didn’t answer my question.

Q: Well, I just wondered, does the President --

MR. SPEAKES: How do you know? (Laughter.)

Q: In other words, the White House looks on this as a great joke?

MR. SPEAKES: No, I don’t know anything about it, Lester.

Q: Does the President, does anybody in the White House know about this epidemic, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: I don’t think so. I don’t think there’s been any --

Q: Nobody knows?

MR. SPEAKES: There has been no personal experience here, Lester.

Q: No, I mean, I thought you were keeping --

MR. SPEAKES: I checked thoroughly with Dr. Ruge this morning and he’s had no -- (laughter) -- no patients suffering from AIDS or whatever it is.

Q: The President doesn’t have gay plague, is that what you’re saying or what?

MR. SPEAKES: No, I didn’t say that.

Q: Didn’t say that?

MR. SPEAKES: I thought I heard you on the State Department over there. Why didn’t you stay there? (Laughter.)

Q: Because I love you, Larry, that’s why. (Laughter.)

MR. SPEAKES: Oh, I see. Just don’t put it in those terms, Lester. (Laughter.)

Q: Oh, I retract that.

MR. SPEAKES: I hope so.

Q: It’s too late.

(Crying.)

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