

The NIH Record

Vice President Bush Visits Clinical Center, Gets AIDS Update From Experts

Vice President George Bush paid a surprise call on the Clinical Center Apr. 8, spending an hour and a half learning about AIDS from physicians and patients and fielding questions from a large media turnout.

"This has been a fantastic educational experience," said Bush after touring NCI labs and being briefed by members of NIH's AIDS Executive Committee. "You're doing the Lord's work to fight this disease."

Fifty reporters and eight television camera crews were among the audience that packed the CC's 11th floor solarium for a briefing led by Dr. James Wyngaarden, NIH director. In quiet, measured tones, Wyngaarden gave Bush a synopsis of NIH involvement in the fight against AIDS. He was followed by NIAID Director Anthony Fauci, who told Bush that AIDS attacks patients' T cells, "the Defense Department of the body." Dr. Flossie Wong-Staal of NCI briefed Bush on the natural history of HIV—the virus that causes AIDS.

"If there is a silver lining in AIDS, it is that it hit us now rather than 30 years ago," said Wong-Staal, emphasizing recent strides made in knowledge of retroviruses, of which HIV is an example. Two bottlenecks face current efforts to create an AIDS vaccine, she said: the genetic variability of AIDS isolates and the unavailability of an appropriate animal model.

"I must say I'm most impressed with what I've seen in the short time I've been here," Bush said. "I sense a certain optimism in the long run. Dr. Wyngaarden's assurances on the safety of the blood supply is good news for this country."

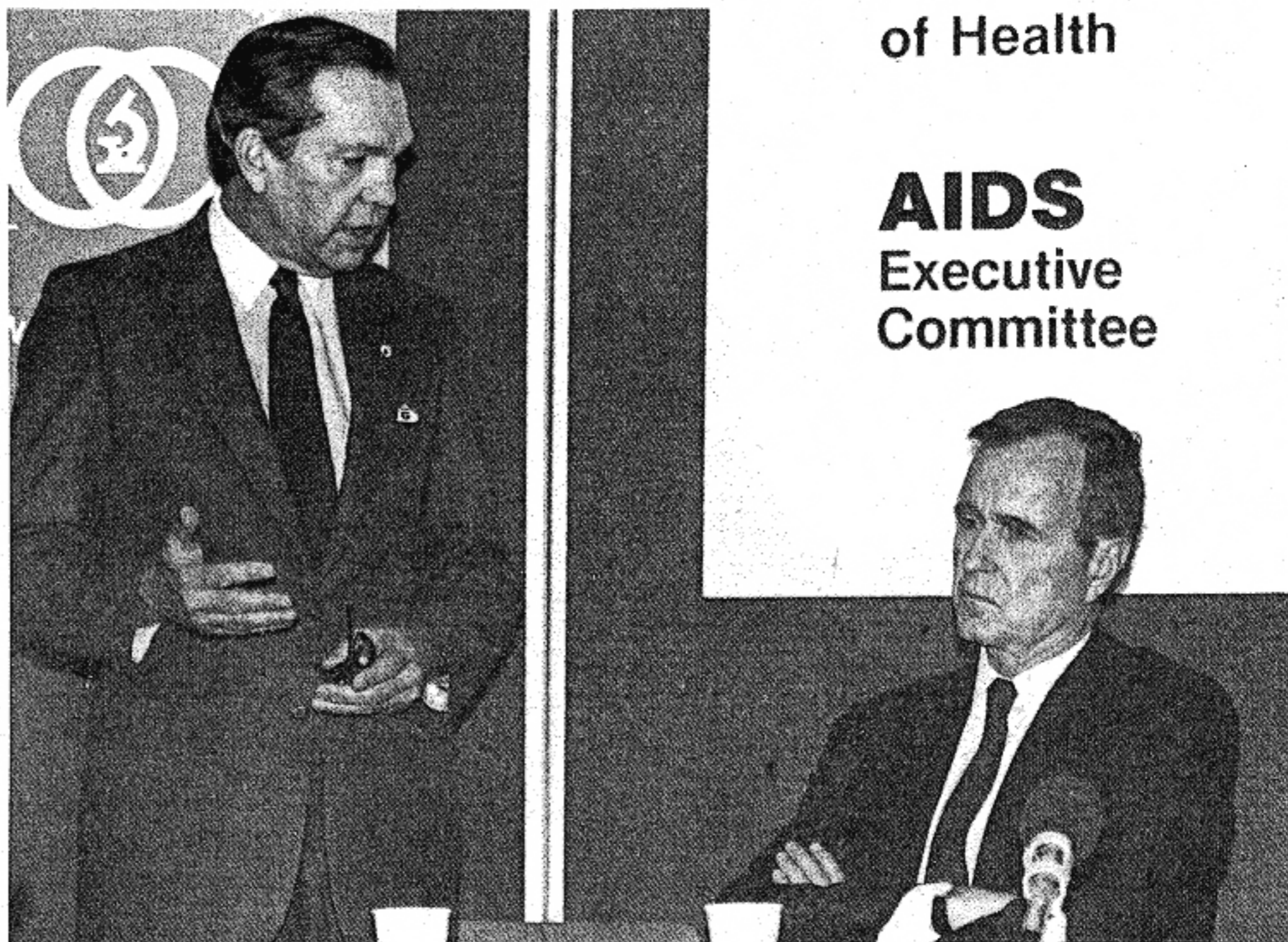
Bush described AIDS as both a moral and medical problem. "I'm deeply troubled by some of the moral aspects of it and clearly troubled by the medical aspects," he said. Pressed by a reporter to be more specific about his moral qualms, Bush cited dirty syringes used by drug abusers as a prominent avenue of AIDS infection.

Asked why he chose to visit NIH, Bush said, "The more exposure this heroic work can get, the better it is for the American people."

Bush said he was heartened that a "good network" of international cooperation exists in the fight against AIDS, noting briefly that French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac had recently met with President Reagan to discuss the amicable settlement of a patent dispute between French and American authorities over an AIDS antibody test.

"We've got global responsibilities in this battle," he said.

(See BUSH, Page 2)



NIH Director James Wyngaarden (l) reviews the history of AIDS research for Vice President George Bush at a briefing Apr. 8 in the Clinical Center. Bush also met an AIDS patient and toured NCI laboratories.

of Health

**AIDS
Executive
Committee**

AIDS From Blood Transfusions; 'Same Odds As Lightning Striking,' Says Klein at Grand Rounds

By Anne Barber

"The risk of getting AIDS through a blood transfusion today compares with the odds of being struck by lightning," says Dr. Harvey G. Klein, chief, Department of Transfusion Medicine, Clinical Center.

"There are 18 million donations of blood and blood components made each year," he said. "In 1984, it was estimated that 0.04 percent of blood donors might be carrying the virus but in fact, fewer than 10 percent of the predicted number of blood recipients have developed AIDS."

At CC grand rounds recently, Klein reported that 1 to 2 percent of all AIDS cases are transfusion related. However, transfusion is a factor in 10 percent of all AIDS cases in women and in about 13 percent of all cases of AIDS in children.

In 1982, the first evidence was presented that suggested human beings receiving blood transfusions could develop AIDS. In 1984, the CC began several studies on the subject. Dr. Harvey J. Alter, chief of DTM's Immunology Section, had for more than 15 years saved blood

specimens from persons receiving transfusions here at NIH. He had samples of their blood before surgery and at specific intervals following surgery.

When the anti-HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) test (a test for exposure to the virus associated with AIDS) became available, Alter checked his samples and found that two CC donors turned out to be positive. Samples from recipients of these units also tested positive, indicating infection. The department then went back and traced the patients who had previously received blood components from these donors.

One patient had been diagnosed as having T-cell leukemia and received 33 donor-exposed transfusions with one containing HIV. The patient went on to receive chemotherapy and his leukemia went into remission. But, in 1985, he was diagnosed as having AIDS.

A second patient who had open heart surgery received blood donated by the same donor. This patient had nine donor exposures includ-

(See TRANSFUSIONS, Page 8)



A radio reporter for ABC News waits with tape recorder at the ready for the vice president's briefing.

BUSH

(Continued from Page 1)

Though Bush only stayed on campus for about 100 minutes, his visit tested NIH's ability to manage a major media event. Notified just 48 hours prior to Bush's arrival, employees scrambled to prepare. The CC Housekeeping Department rushed to clean the floors Bush would visit, advance men from both Bush's staff and the Secret Service scoured each room, and a bomb-sniffing German shepherd dog rummaged through all press equipment prior to the briefing. Brown-blazered Secret Service agents wearing earphones eyed the reporters just as warily as the reporters eyed Bush.

"It began as an educational event and ended as a press event," said Thomas Flavin, NIH special projects officer. Flavin and his staff got high marks from the visiting officials for the quality of their preparations. About the only guff NIH took was from TV technicians frustrated about the long time they spent on the 11th floor waiting in a small, hot room for the vice president.

"There's a big auditorium downstairs isn't there?" grouched one technician. Another tech, clearly a veteran of wearisome assignments, used the hiatus to borrow an NBC radio reporter's cellular phone and call his stockbroker.

It is probably just as well that NIH learn now to adapt to visits by national leaders and reporters—President Reagan may be here in October for the close of the centennial. □



All eyes were on the door as Vice President Bush arrived for his AIDS briefing. Attendees included Dr. Flossie Wong-Staal of NCI (l), Dr. Joseph E. Rall, NIH deputy director for intramural research, and an unidentified Secret Service agent (adjusting his earphone).

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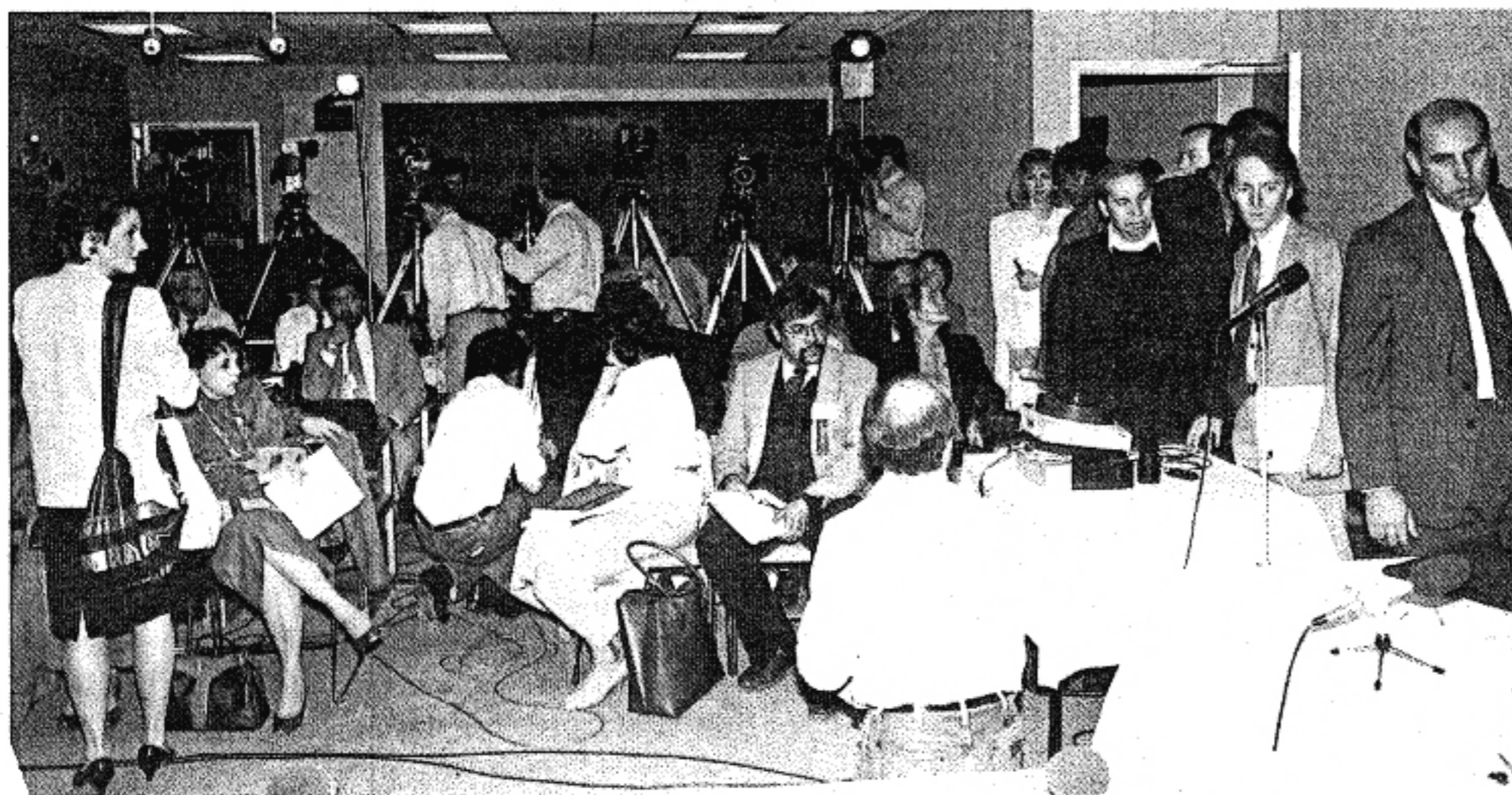
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Members of the media packed the 11th floor solarium in the CC for Vice President Bush's half-hour briefing with AIDS authorities at NIH. Fifty journalists covered the event.