

Beat: Vips

Reagan spokesman James Brady who survived 1981 assassination attempt dies

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USPA News - James "Jim" Brady, the former White House Press Secretary who was seriously wounded in an assassination attempt on U.S. President Ronald Reagan in 1981 and later became a prominent gun control advocate, has died after an illness, his family said Monday. He was 73. "We are heartbroken to share the news that our beloved Jim 'Bear' Brady has passed away after a series of health issues," the family said in a statement, which did not disclose the cause, time, and place of death.

"His wife, Sarah, son, Scott, and daughter, Missy, are so thankful to have had the opportunity to say their farewells." Brady was injured on March 30, 1981, when 25-year-old John Hinckley, Jr. fired six shots in quick succession as President Ronald Reagan walked from the Hilton Hotel in Washington, D.C. to his waiting limousine outside. The shooting also wounded Reagan, Secret Service agent Tim McCarthy and D.C. police officer Thomas Delahanty. "We are enormously proud of Jim's remarkable accomplishments - before he was shot on the fateful day in 1981 while serving at the side of President Ronald Reagan and in the days, months and years that followed," the family said. "Jim Brady's zest for life was apparent to all who knew him, and despite his injuries and the pain he endured every day, he used his humor, wit and charm to bring smiles to others and make the world a better place." Nancy Reagan, the widow of the former president, said she was "deeply saddened" to learn of Brady's passing. "Thinking of him brings back so many memories - happy and sad - of a time in all of our lives when we learned what it means to 'play the hand we're dealt,'" she remarked, calling Brady a "wise counselor" whose judgment was relied on by the president. Mrs. Reagan added: "In the short time he was able to serve as White House Press Secretary, Jim brought sharp instincts, integrity and energy to one of the most demanding jobs in Washington. What a shame he was not able to serve as we had hoped for longer. I still remember vividly that day in March 1981, when Sarah and I sat together in a tiny room near the emergency room at George Washington University Hospital, trying to comfort each other while we both were gripped with unspeakable fear." President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle also sent their "deepest condolences" to Brady's family, and the president said his legacy will endure. "Our thoughts and prayers are with Jim's wife Sarah, who has been Jim's steadfast partner in advocacy, and their children Scott and Melissa," he wrote in a statement released by the White House. After the 1981 shooting, when Reagan was told that his assistant and press secretary had been severely wounded by a bullet to the head, the president's eyes filled with tears, according to newspaper reports at the time. "Oh damn, oh damn. ... Oh dear, we must pray," Reagan was quoted as saying. The serious head injuries left Brady partially paralyzed for life and meant he would never return to work as press secretary, although he formally kept the title for the remainder of Reagan's presidency. Brady had been appointed Assistant to the President and White House Press Secretary only two months before the shooting. After leaving the White House, Brady spent countless hours lobbying with his wife Sarah to establish stricter gun control laws. His campaigning led to the "Brady Handgun Violence Protection Act" that was signed into law by President Bill Clinton in November 1993 and required that every gun sale by a licensed dealer must be referred to law enforcement for a background check. "Jim transformed his own personal tragedy into an opportunity to inspire change - for more than three decades he and Sarah encouraged all of us to create a more just and secure nation, free from handgun violence," Clinton said in a statement Monday. "I was proud to sign the Brady Bill into law in 1993, honored to award Jim the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996, and grateful to call this good and courageous man my friend." Obama also hailed Brady's bill, saying "an untold number of people" are alive today who otherwise wouldn't be. "Jim is a legend at the White House for his warmth and professionalism as press secretary for President Reagan; for the strength he brought to bear in recovering from the shooting that nearly killed him 33 years ago; and for turning the events of that terrible afternoon into a remarkable legacy of service through the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence," he said. In September 1996, Clinton awarded Brady the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian award, for being a "courageous, outspoken" leader for responsible gun control. Clinton also named the White House Press Briefing Room after Brady in February 2000, and a plaque honoring him still hangs in the room. "This room is named in honor of James S. Brady, White House Press Secretary from January 22, 1981 until January 20, 1989," the plaque reads. "Mr. Brady served his nation with honor and distinction, strengthening the bond between government and press. May his courage and dedication continue to inspire all who work in this room and beyond."

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