SILVER SPRING, Md. (AP) — One of George C. Wallace's doctors said Wednesday there is "less than a 50-50 chance" the Alabama governor ever will walk again.

"Even if he can walk, it will probably be only with the aid of leg braces, the doctor indicated.

Meanwhile, Wallace continued in good spirits, chatting with hospital visitors and eagerly reading newspaper accounts of his primary election victories in Maryland and Michigan.

Dr. James Galbraith, a University of Alabama neurosurgeon who has been attending Wallace, said a bullet which cut him down at a campaign rally Monday is lodged in the spine but is causing no pressure on the spinal cord.

He said the bullet wedged itself between two vertebrae, protruding into the bony canal that shields the nerve cord but not obstructing the flow of fluid that nourishes it.

Galbraith, speaking at a late afternoon news conference, said that although the bullet didn't shatter any bone in the spine, the shock of its impact caused the present paralysis and this might ease in time.

But he said Wallace hasn't regained any feeling in his legs, and the longer he goes without improvement the worse are chances for an eventual recovery. "There is less than a 50-50 chance," he said.

Galbraith said surgery will be performed to remove the bullet within another week or 10 days, and that it will be a full three months or more before Wallace can recover to whatever extent is possible.

He said none of his patients had ever recovered fully from such an injury, and that at best such patients walk with the aid of a leg brace.

Official word of his condition came in a morning medical bulletin from Dr. Joseph Schanno, his surgeon.

"The governor spent a comfortable night," Schanno said. "He is very alert and aware of his surroundings. He is reading the paper avidly. He is continuing to improve."

Schanno said also the Alabama governor's legs remain paralyzed and that "the exact nature of injury to the spinal cord cannot be determined until surgery is performed."

One visitor to Holy Cross Hospital said Wallace showed tremendous vitality and had a firm handshake Wednesday. "He was more coherent than I was," said the friend, Robert Lichenstein.

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Lichenstein, who is a New York real estate man and a cousin of Wallace's wife Cornelia, recounted reading aloud newspaper accounts of Tuesday's Democratic primary elections, and said Wallace became impatient and asked to read them himself.

Wallace won 51 per cent of the Democratic votes in Michigan, 39 per cent in Maryland.

He expressed hope "that his campaign would go on to Oregon, New Mexico and California," Lichenstein said. Wallace's campaign manager Charles Snider said Tuesday that future efforts will be in Oregon, New Mexico and Rhode Island.