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Office of the Press Secretary

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Press Gaggle by Deputy Press Secretary Bill Burton Aboard Air Force One en route Austin, Texas, 8/9/2010

Aboard Air Force One
En Route Texas

10:29 A.M. EDT

MR. BURTON: All right, thank you for joining us on our trip to Texas. Any questions?

Q Bill, I do -- a couple quick questions about today. How does the President view a day like this, in which he spends a lot of his time raising political cash? Does he actually enjoy fundraising, or is this more of just a necessary part of the job?

MR. BURTON: I would say the President -- a couple things. For starters, the President is doing a couple different things today. He's going to be raising some money. He's going to be talking about the importance of education for our long-term economic outlook.

And as it pertains to campaigning, I would say that the President -- what the President does like about it is having the opportunity to go out to the American people and explain the choice that they're going to have this November between some of the policies that the President and Democrats have been putting forward to get our economy back on track, and what the Republicans stand for, which is the same policies that got us into the economic crisis to begin with.

So he does like talking plainly to the American people about the issues that we face and the choices that they have. But he's President of the United States, so every day there's something new and several different challenges he has to take on, and he takes them on as they come.

Q As for the education speech itself, from the White House perspective, will the education community, will college students hear anything today from the President that they haven't heard before?

MR. BURTON: What they'll hear is the President talking about the goal to, by 2020, to get America -- to have America as the country with the largest share of college graduates of any country in the world. He'll talk about some of the steps that we've taken to get there, for example, taking \$60 billion that would have gone to big banks and lending institutions and putting it towards -- directly towards helping students complete their college educations. And he'll talk about Race to the Top. He'll talk about what we need to do in order to improve community colleges, where a lot of students are getting their higher education.

So in that sense, yes, there will be some new things that maybe folks have not heard before.

Q Bill, two quick questions. Can we expect the President to make an announcement on Christy Romer's replacement before he goes to Martha's Vineyard? And two, who are the candidates? Who's on your short list?

MR. BURTON: There's no -- the timeline that we're on is that by September 3rd, when Dr. Romer leaves her post is to have that position filled. She'll obviously have a big say in who gets that position.

Q She'll have a big say in it?

MR. BURTON: Yes, she'll have a big say. But right now the President is examining candidates and taking a look at who the right person is.

Q So we don't expect an announcement before Martha's Vineyard then?

MR. BURTON: I don't know about that necessarily. There won't be one this week, though.

Q On the Texas visit, what do you make of the fact that Bill White, the nominee for governor, is making himself scarce? What does that say about the President's coattails and image and popularity?



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MR. BURTON: I don't think that it says anything broadly about the President's coattails. I think it says that Bill White had something else going on today that he would rather do than campaign with the President.

Q Well, does the President take that as an insult?

MR. BURTON: No, he thinks that candidates should make their own decisions about how best to spend their time. He definitely does not take that as an insult.

Q How do you respond to the Republican argument coming out of Texas that Texas is in such better shape than most of the country because it has lower taxes, lower spending, run by Republicans? I mean you're not going into friendly political turf today exactly.

MR. BURTON: Well, Texas is obviously a great state, one of the greatest states in the country. But like every other state, they've gone through this economic crisis, and they've lost a lot of jobs, which the President is doing everything he can to help create an environment where more jobs are being created.

They're a state that also has had a very tough time with the issue of health insurance. I know it has one of the lowest rates of health insurance in the country. So health insurance reform that the President signed into law this year I know will have a big impact on helping Texans get insured.

So I would say that you can have different competing economic philosophies, but the President is doing everything he can to help the Texas economy, just like the United States economy, get back on track.

Q Bill, the President has told Democratic candidates that he'll do what he can for them, and if you want me by your side, I'll be there with you, but if you want me to stay away, I'll also stay away. Is he sort of reconciled to the fact that some Democrats like Bill White just really don't want to be seen with him?

MR. BURTON: I think that there has never been a President in the history of this great country who has been wanted by every single candidate across the country to come and campaign for them. President Obama has said plainly that he is going to go out and be helpful where he can be most helpful and spend his time doing things that are helping Democratic candidates across the country. And in the sense that he's come to grips with that, it's a historic fact of life.

Q But how does he balance those needs? Because he's being helpful by raising money for Democrats in Texas, but he may also, in fact, be hurting the White campaign by showing up there at this time. So how do you sort of balance those competing needs?

MR. BURTON: I don't think anybody's campaign is being hurt by the funds that the President is raising for the effort today. The President balances his time by taking a look at a map and seeing where he can be most helpful and when.

Q The President this morning at his event talked about the success of the cement plug. Who is briefing him? Did he receive his briefings over the weekend or this morning on the cement plug?

MR. BURTON: He -- I missed the last part of your question, but if I don't answer it just let me know. He's been briefed regularly by Carol Browner and other staff, and he continues to receive updates every single day even on the weekends.

Was there any other part to your question?

Q Well, a food-related Gulf question. Number one, he -- there's two events where they've served seafood from the Gulf -- the shrimp last night and then I guess po' boys at an event today. Can you tell us like exactly those two things came from?

MR. BURTON: I had that same question and I'm tracking it down. I will let you know as soon as I hear.

Q Do you have any update on who will head the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau? And what's the White House's reaction to Senator Dodd last week saying that Elizabeth Warren will cause a fight if she's the nominee?

MR. BURTON: Well, for starters, I would say that there is no update on the timing. It's not going to happen this week.

But in terms of Senator Dodd, I think that we've litigated what he has had to say, and a lot of folks have opinions about Elizabeth Warren and other candidates. It's the White House's view that Elizabeth Warren would be confirmable. And I think that -- I think we've addressed that.

Q Can we expect an announcement before -- again, before he goes to Martha's Vineyard?

MR. BURTON: Check back at the beginning of next week.

Q And of the actions of North Korea firing 110 rounds of ammo in disputed waters, any White House reaction?

MR. BURTON: Well, obviously the President wants to make sure that everybody is doing what they can to make

sure that region is stable and there's security for folks all over the region. But on that particular incident, no, not particularly.

Q The President is going to have a brief conversation with Governor Perry about border security. What is he going to tell the governor, and does he feel like -- that enough is being done to secure the border?

MR. BURTON: For starters, the President has done -- the President has put more assets on the border to secure the border than has ever previously been there. That includes National Guard troops, technology, things he has done on enforcement. That's something that he is working very hard on.

I think that -- you know these tarmac greets with elected officials, Governor Perry will be there. It will probably be a very brief conversation.

Q Why not a substantive conversation of an issue of tremendous importance to border states?

MR. BURTON: This is something the President has been working hard on. And we've been in contact with Governor Perry. I know that our staff has contacted him for meetings and briefings to discuss the matter, and it's something that we will continue to work on with them. Today, the schedule just didn't allow it.

Q Any other announcements for Texas, anything specific? We're still waiting for U.S. Attorneys.

MR. BURTON: No, nothing in particular on that, not at this point.

Q What's the holdup?

MR. BURTON: I think we're working with the delegation on the appropriate nominees.

Q And one last question. In some of his fundraising speeches, the President has been quite critical of George W. Bush. Can we expect him to criticize the former President today again on his home turf?

MR. BURTON: I think you'll hear from the President on a lot of the messages that you've heard in the past about the kind of policies that he and Democrats have been promoting, and about what Republicans have been promoting, which are some of the same policies that got us into the situation that we're in right now. So I don't think that there will be a marked difference from what you've heard in some of the other events.

Q Why no meeting with President Bush? He'll only be a couple of miles away.

MR. BURTON: You know -- I think that the President will obviously see him at some point in the future. I don't know if there was a request for a meeting.

Q The Justice Department says negotiations with BP had been completed to establish the \$20 billion fund. Do you have any details on those arrangements?

MR. BURTON: There's going to be some more details this morning, maybe even happening on the ground right now, but I would check in with the Department of Justice on that.

Q Anything you could tell us?

MR. BURTON: Not at this point.

Q Bill White had suggested that if the President wants to talk to him he can call him. Does the President have any plans to call Bill White, or has he called him?

MR. BURTON: There are no plans to call him, no.

Q Okay. And can you talk a little bit about why the choice of education as the topic today?

MR. BURTON: Sure. Education is a critically important issue as it relates to the competitiveness of our country with other countries. And as the President has said before, people who out-educate us today are going to out-compete us tomorrow, and we simply are not going to be in a position where the United States is falling behind other countries as it relates to higher education. So the President thinks this is an important economic issue, and thought it was important to talk about it today.

Q I'm just wondering, is there a feeling that it's gotten kind of lost in the shuffle with all the talk we've had this year about health care reform and financial regulatory reform, that people haven't been paying attention?

MR. BURTON: Well, there's a lot of things that the President focuses on every single day that the average American probably doesn't have the time to pick up the newspaper and read about every single thing that's happening. And reporters don't even have time to cover all the things that we're doing every single day. And we're respectful of the fact that people are busy and average Americans are trying to get their bills paid on time, get their kids ready for school in the fall, and this is just an opportunity for the President to talk about something that's very important to him.

Q Thanks.

MR. BURTON: All right, thank you.

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10:41 A.M. EDT

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