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**Press Briefing by Press Secretary Robert Gibbs, 8/3/2010**

**James S. Brady Press Briefing Room**

See below for an answer to a question (marked with an asterisk) posed in the briefing that required follow up.

\*To date we have billed BP and other responsible parties \$222 million for response and cleanup activities. The next bill should be delivered next week and we will continue billing them until all the costs are covered.

12:42 P.M. EDT

MR. GIBBS: Wow, look at this, Sunday best, everybody in their new seats. Church is full today, that's good to see. Ms. Ryan, you're going to ask that gentlemen in front of you to sit down a little bit because he's -- (laughter) -- he's a little on the tall side, Ms. Ryan. I'm just saying that it's --

Q I'm vertically challenged.

Q She'll put a phone book in her seat.

Q Oh, come on now.

MR. GIBBS: There's a gizmo up here if you want to use that.

Q A booster seat?

Q Seriously.

MR. GIBBS: But seriously? Is that -- are you trying to bring us down a little bit here?

Q What's the big deal about all this?

MR. GIBBS: Brother, you're asking the wrong guy.

Take us back to seriousness.

Q In the Gulf, obviously the static kill procedure, trying to move forward with that. And I know you've said before that the President gets updated daily, I think. I assume that's still true, right?

MR. GIBBS: Yes, it is.

Q Is there anything special about now that they may be coming to the end of the leak -- anything special about how he's getting updated, by whom?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I know Secretary Chu and others are down in Houston today. I think he will likely touch base with them at some point -- I don't have the schedule in front of me -- but likely at some point today speak with Secretary Chu and others that are in Houston and are monitoring the activities.

I think it is important to know the static kill, injecting the mud into the top of the well, is certainly one part of the long-term effort to finally kill the well. That will be followed by activities at the bottom part of the well. And then ultimately, as we've talked about, the permanent solution is still the relief well that is ongoing.

Q So you guys wouldn't be sort of declaring victory on this until you get the relief well done?

MR. GIBBS: No, no. Again, I still think that -- and the science -- the scientists believe that the long-term



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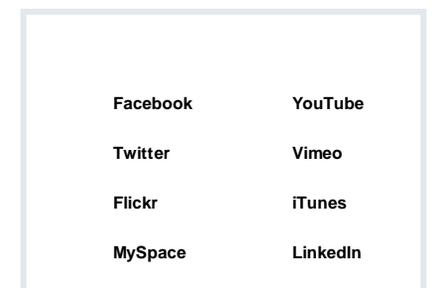
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permanent solution is still ultimately the relief well.

Look, I would touch on a few things over the past couple of days. Obviously it's always good news that since the sealing cap went on some weeks ago now, oil has not been flowing into the Gulf. I would point out the release put out by EPA yesterday on toxicology tests, which are important, surrounding dispersants, and that -- and their findings, and their continued testing by EPA, NOAA and others to ensure that we're monitoring that environment, all of which is tremendously important as we move forward.

Q Let me just switch topics quickly. We had the Iraq speech yesterday, the first of several, I take it, planned on that topic. We have a second round tomorrow on the developments in the auto industry. What are some of the other topics that we should expect to see the President focusing on as success stories, good news, achievement kind of --

MR. GIBBS: Well, let's say that -- now that you mention those, let's just touch a little bit on them. I mean, obviously the President -- and I think many of you that covered the campaign, regardless of which campaign you covered -- without a doubt, I think it is safe to say that the President's plan to remove our combat forces was among the most hotly debated in both the primary and in the general election.

And I'll be honest with you, I think if you look back at what was said over the course of many months both during the latter part of the general election, during the transition in the first part of the administration, I think many people believed that having -- changing the mission away from combat by August 31st, 2010, was likely not doable. That we know now is on pace to happen. Some 90,000 troops will be pulled out, along with 2 million pieces of equipment -- pulled out of Iraq by the end of this month.

You mentioned the President visiting on Thursday the Ford facility outside of Chicago --

Q Thursday, not tomorrow -- getting ahead of myself, aren't I?

MR. GIBBS: Right. And, look, we've spent a lot of time on autos here both in the briefing room and certainly in the West Wing. And I think we are still encouraged by what we see in a newly revitalized auto industry. We're getting auto sales figures today. GM's were out earlier and showed an increase in sales, not just from last month, but a more than 24 percent increase year to year, which I think also gives you a sense of making overall economic progress, because the discussions that we were having about the auto industry was in many ways predicated on an economic environment where you were selling -- going from a height of selling 17 to 17.5 million cars a year down to selling, during the height of our economic downturn, sales that approached 9 to 9.5 million. Now we're closer to -- on track for closer to 11 to 11.5 million, which means that the investments that the President and the team made in the auto industry and the hard work of the workers in those facilities has led to a strongly revitalized auto industry.

Look, I think that the President will continue to talk about the steps that we took to revitalize the economy, the steps that have been taken to make us safer and more secure, all of which he'll spend some time over the course of the next several months reminding people.

Q Are there are other sorts of achievement areas or specific achievements that he intends to kind of pluck out and talk about in a way that he has these as we get closer to November?

MR. GIBBS: Yes. I mean, look, I don't have the schedule in front of me, but I anticipate that we will spend, as I said, a bunch of our time over the course of the next several months or at least some of that time reminding people of where we've come from. That will definitely be a big part of our fall.

Yes, sir.

Q A couple questions. On the international front, Israeli and Lebanese forces clashed on the border there, five dead. What, if any, message does the President have for both sides?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, obviously it's a -- it is an enormously tense region. I think we have seen, over the course of the last several months, real progress in proximity talks and in building towards what we hope can soon be direct talks on a comprehensive peace. And we hope that the conditions -- conditions certainly throughout the region don't change that.

Q Is there any call for restraint on the part of the U.S.?

MR. GIBBS: Well, obviously I think that is something that I'm sure you'll hear out of the State Department today as well.

Q And on the domestic front, Treasury Secretary Geithner was speaking today about Elizabeth Warren as a potential candidate for the Consumer Financial Protection Agency chief. How much closer is the President to making a decision on that? Will he do so before he goes off to Martha's Vineyard for vacation?

MR. GIBBS: I don't know whether he'll make a decision on that before the 19th of August. I do not expect

anything this week on that topic. I don't think anything is imminent.

Yes, ma'am.

Q Robert, two questions. First of all, President Zardari told Le Monde today that "the international community to which Pakistan belongs is losing the war against the Taliban. Above all, it is because we've lost the battle for hearts and minds." When a partner like that -- a supposed partner says something like that, what does that say about where we are in Afghanistan?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I don't think the President would agree that -- with President Zardari's conclusion that the war is lost. I don't -- again, I haven't seen the interview. I don't know what he -- why he's come to that conclusion. But I think it is safe to say that the actions and the efforts that the coalition, international forces and American forces, have taken over the last several months have very much the hearts and minds of the Afghan people at the forefront.

And I would say this. The Afghan people know of the brutality of the Taliban, just as the Pakistani people, on the actions that their extremist counterparts were taking in Pakistan last year to move on the capital of Pakistan is why the country of Pakistan started to take more direct action against safe havens.

So I think that the hearts and minds of those in Afghanistan and Pakistan are obviously a key part of our strategy, as well as the hearts -- what is in the hearts and the minds of the extremists that seek to do Afghans or Pakistanis harm.

Q Just to follow up?

MR. GIBBS: Let me go around.

Q I just wanted to ask something a little off topic, a little more fun. The President's birthday is tomorrow.

MR. GIBBS: It is.

Q Any special plans?

MR. GIBBS: Obviously we travel to Chicago later tomorrow afternoon. We'll probably have more information on this later, but I assume that -- I think his plans for tomorrow are dinner with some friends in Chicago. And I think he is looking forward to spending the night in his house for a change.

Q He's been referencing his age a lot lately. He did it at the sub shop, talking about his slowing metabolism. He did it yesterday, talking about his graying hair. Does he feel like the weight of the presidency is perhaps accelerating his aging?

MR. GIBBS: I can't imagine that the weight of the job doesn't take a toll physically and mentally on anybody that does it. But at the same time, I think he's still -- I would say he's still in pretty good shape and is having -- is enjoying the job even with its many challenges. He knew what he was getting himself into in deciding several years ago to undertake this.

There's no doubt that it takes an enormous physical and mental strain on making the decisions that you make, on sending young men and women off to war or tackling the greatest economic calamity our country has faced since the Great Depression. But I know he greatly enjoys it, and it will just require him to get more frequent haircuts.

Yes, ma'am.

Q There's a debate that's taking --

MR. GIBBS: Likely I'm going to hear about that. (Laughter.)

Q There's a debate that's taking place in New York City whether or not it's appropriate to build a mosque, an Islamic cultural center, near the site of Ground Zero. What is the administration's position on this?

MR. GIBBS: Suzanne, I've been asked about this a couple times. I think this is rightly a matter for New York City and the local community to decide.

Q The President takes a position on religious freedom, on tolerance. Why wouldn't the administration weigh in on this?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I think we have -- I think you've heard this administration and the last administration talk about the fact that we are not at war with a religion but with an idea that has corrupted a religion. But, that having been said, I'm not from here going to get involved in local decision-making like that.

Q Do you think the Anti-Defamation League has a correct point of view in saying, out of the sensitivity to some of the victims of 9/11, it's not appropriate?

MR. GIBBS: Suzanne, again, I think it is a decision that is appropriately debated at the local level.

Q On another topic -- McCain, Coburn report that cites economic stimulus money they say has been mismanaged or wasted. They cite 97 projects out of 70,000. Do you believe that this is good news, bad news? Is there some acknowledgment that some of those projects actually might not be well managed?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I think there was an acknowledgment on their part, in pulling a couple of their projects out of their report that weren't ultimately recovery projects. I think this has, Suzanne, much more to do with politics. I think maybe the best person for Senator McCain to debate on this would be the chief economic adviser of his own presidential campaign, who not only weighed in on the President's recovery plan, but has in the last week written an analysis of what our economy would look like without the steps that we took.

It's a report that instead of 8 million jobs having been lost, that figure would be 16 million jobs. So I think this is a -- look, every day, the Vice President and the Vice President's staff work diligently to ensure that projects that receive funding abide by certain standards. All of that is on the Internet -- a level of transparency not seen in government programs, particularly those of the magnitude of this. And I would suggest that John McCain and his chief economic adviser during that campaign, I think the debate is probably better between the two of them.

Q Do you it's a credible report?

MR. GIBBS: From what I've read, no.

Yes, sir.

Q Following up on that, for those of us who covered the McCain campaign, I don't think anybody thought Zandi was actually the chief economic adviser. He was somebody who was consulted. And Zandi has told me that he's a registered Democrat. So, I mean, isn't it a little disingenuous to hold him out there as an example of Republican thinking?

MR. GIBBS: Because he's a registered Democrat?

Q Well, they were reaching out to people who think differently. He is not the person who formulated the McCain economic plan. He's not their chief economic adviser.

MR. GIBBS: Was he not a McCain -- okay, was it --

Q He was an outside adviser to the campaign --

MR. GIBBS: He was a key economic adviser?

Q No, he was somebody they consulted on economic issues. But, I mean, to treat him as the guy who formulated the McCain economic plan I think is just not accurate.

MR. GIBBS: Well, I -- apparently, according to you, Chip, he took part in a couple conference calls. I don't think either John McCain or Mark Zandi have portrayed their role quite as minimally as you have. I would say --

Q But I'm just saying he was not the person who formulated the core of the McCain economic plan.

MR. GIBBS: Well, needless to say he was an active participant regardless of his party registration on the campaign of John McCain. I don't think we're going to doubt that his support was for John McCain. And John McCain has apparently come into a disagreement with a guy that played a prominent role in his presidential campaign.

Q Hasn't he also advised your administration?

MR. GIBBS: Pardon me?

Q Zandi -- hasn't Zandi also advised this administration with the stimulus?

MR. GIBBS: They certainly have -- we talked to a whole host of economists.

Q Exactly, that's how they described his role with the McCain campaign, that they talked to a whole host of economists.

MR. GIBBS: One of them being Mark Zandi.

Q Just as the White House -- he is one of the people you consult.

MR. GIBBS: We're happy to list Mark as somebody who we've taken advice from. We thought his advice was so right on the stimulus that we pursued an economic recovery plan that I think Mark's own paper describes along with Alan Blinder, the former vice chair of the Fed, as having had a significant impact on ensuring that the depth of our recession didn't reach a Great Depression.

Q Do you agree then with Mark Zandi, who said the tax cuts shouldn't be allowed to expire in the middle of a recession?

MR. GIBBS: The President believes that we should not raise taxes on the middle class.

Q He says across the board.

MR. GIBBS: Right. The President believes that adding \$700 billion to our deficit for tax cuts for those making in excess of \$250,000 a year doesn't make sense.

Q So is Zandi wrong about that?

Q That includes businesses.

MR. GIBBS: We disagree with him on that.

Q And that includes businesses though, Robert, it's not just individuals, right?

MR. GIBBS: Well, understand that, again, this is the debate we had during the campaign in which we now know which way the participants line up. The number -- you'll hear this a lot during this debate -- "You're going to raise taxes on" --

Q Small business.

MR. GIBBS: Right. Just as we said during the campaign that about 2 percent of small businesses fall into that category. So when you hear -- I mean, let's be clear, this isn't about small business, because if you were for cutting taxes on small business, would you be holding up a small business tax cut in the United States Senate right now? Would you be holding up a bill that allows them to deduct more of their investment in equipment if you were supportive of small business? Would you be holding up a bill that eliminates capital gains for small business? Well, no, right, because you're for small business, except when you're not for small business.

I would say I think they use the moniker of small business when it fits their political lens. But in reality, this isn't something that is going to impact on 98 percent of small businesses. It's not going to hit a majority of families in this country. The President believes we ought to protect those in the middle class.

Q Changing topics. The President is hitting the campaign trail. Has the White House heard -- there have been these reports recently that the White House has heard from various Democrats that they prefer the President not come to their districts and campaign for them. Has the White House heard from people who have suggested that? And if so, why do you think that is and will the President honor their request?

MR. GIBBS: Chip, we'll help people where they think we can help them the most. I think that's largely been -- that's been how it was when the President campaigned for Democrats as a senator, when he was running for the Senate in 2004, and I think how most White Houses deal with political requests that come in.

Q But in 2006 and 2008, just about everybody wanted him to come to their districts and now there seem to be a lot of people who don't. Why do you think that is?

MR. GIBBS: I don't necessarily believe that in 2006 -- I think if you look in 2006 and 2008, we stayed in a certain number of states. I don't -- we never said we were going to all 50 states.

Look, Chip, again, I think it's a fairly well worn adage that we will go to places where candidates think that that's helpful. We will raise money for places -- in places where candidates and committees think that that's helpful. We'll be in mail, we'll be in --

Q Will you stay away from places if it's not helpful?

MR. GIBBS: Well, of course. Absolutely. No, we're not going to go to places where people think it's unhelpful that we go. That would be crazy. (Laughter.) I mean, I -- breaking news alert, but, you know --

Q Are there are a lot of those places, you think? (Laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: I don't think so. I don't --

Q Can you name them?

Q Which districts?

Q Could you name those places?

Q Could you get back to us with a list?

MR. GIBBS: Yes, I think I've broken new ground here. We will not go places where candidates think it is unhelpful for us to go. Story and film at 11:00. (Laughter.)

Q On the Gulf, in the Oval Office address, the President talked about a Gulf restoration plan eventually that BP would pay for. Where are we on that? Is there going to be an announcement of that at some point?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I would say this --

Q And what kind of money are we talking about?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I would say -- I don't think we've reached that point yet. There are a series of -- there will be a series of fines. There will be a fine that the government requires BP to pay that will be based off of the amount of pollution put into the Gulf, which I think by any accord will be a substantial fine.

In addition to that -- and I can check on where the exact process is -- natural resources damage assessments will be made -- BP is liable for the damage that it's caused to the environment above -- that's different than a penalty for the pollution that's been emitted.

Secretary Mabus is working through the process of Gulf Coast restoration. And we expect I think his report to the President sometime the latter part of September.

Q And are we talking about a fund of billions of dollars that BP will be --

MR. GIBBS: Well, I think maybe --

Q -- paying into this?

MR. GIBBS: I think that the penalty on the oil emitted, if I'm not mistaken, that is a penalty that goes to the Treasury. The natural -- the damage assessment, I think will, be without having a lot of backing on this directly in front of me, I think will be a substantial penalty based on the damage that the pollution has caused.

Q And the last question. Is the President upset at all that his family is not going to be with him on his birthday?

MR. GIBBS: Well, you get a long answer about -- I think it's safe to say that of course he will miss them. He has a daughter at camp that I know he's already talked to a couple of us that obviously he dearly misses. But they'll be all back together soon.

Q Has he called camp?

MR. GIBBS: I'm not going to get into that.

Wendell, welcome to the front row.

Q Thank you.

Q Can we get a readout of that? (Laughter.)

Q If I can follow on Jennifer -- if I can follow on Jennifer's question, in Secretary Geithner's op-ed, "Welcome to the Recovery," he cites a number of statistics, including the auto industry recovery and increased savings rates. And I wonder if the President believes there is enough good economic news to get people past the 9.5 percent unemployment rate?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, I think before and after Secretary Geithner's op-ed, I don't think Secretary Geithner in his own op-ed believes that 9.5 percent unemployment doesn't present serious challenges. And I don't think anybody -- the President and the Secretary included -- believe that despite the progress that we made in where we were and where we've come to, I don't think anybody is satisfied that we're -- that we've made enough or that we're out of the woods.

We'll get jobs numbers at the end of the week. I will stipulate, as I have many months in a row, that I don't see those numbers before they're announced. I don't know what this week's -- or this month's numbers will show. But

our hope is that we will build off of positive private sector job growth heading into the seventh month in a row as a positive sign.

Is the economy adding jobs fast enough or as fast as we would like to see it? No, of course not. I think one of the things that would be a good antidote to where we are is the Senate passing a small business bill that would spur investment by small businesses and provide them the credit they need to expand and hire.

Q Given the economic difficulties, pollsters Pat Caddell and Doug Schoen say the tone of the President's comments, especially in political circumstances recently, seems to have abandoned the politics of hope to be appealing more to the Democrats' base. Are they --

MR. GIBBS: How so?

Q More negative. For example, yesterday at the DNC fundraiser, talking about, as he has in the past, whether or not we should give the keys to the Republicans and put the car in reverse or drive. One, has he abandoned the politics of hope, at least for the midterm elections? And two, does R and D stand for reverse and drive, or Republican and Democrat?

MR. GIBBS: Both. An analogy he used during the campaign in which I think we were criticized as being too much about hope. I don't -- I can't divine what Pat Caddell and Doug Schoen -- what their agenda is. I will say this, Wendell. The President believes that there is a choice that will be made, and it is exemplified in the analogy that he uses -- are we going to go backwards to the type of policies that led us to the greatest economic calamity that most of us have ever known, or are we going to continue to make progress and go forward?

Understand the agenda of those on Capitol Hill. Let's take, for instance, the last piece of -- the last piece of reform that the President put into place was financial reform, new rules for the way Wall Street and banks operate. The Republican plan for that: repeal it. That seems like a fine thing to debate come this fall.

Q Is he concerned that he might turn off independent voters?

MR. GIBBS: No, I think independent voters want rules in the road for -- new rules in the road for --

Q Looking at the poll, not just talking about this specific legislation.

MR. GIBBS: Look, I think if you look at the tone of the President's remarks in the auto factories in Detroit and Hamtramck on Friday, I think the President -- the President said don't bet against the American worker. I think that's the tone that he'll have a lot during the fall.

Any interesting emails, Ms. Guthrie? (Laughter.)

Q Oh, sorry. (Laughter.) Gosh, that was embarrassing. On taxes --

MR. GIBBS: I didn't ask you to read them, I just -- (laughter.)

Q You might want to.

MR. GIBBS: Bill, stop emailing Savannah. (Laughter.)

Q It's from my boss. On letting the Bush tax cuts expire, given the continuing economic difficulties, would the administration be open to a compromise position of having the Bush tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans be phased out over time?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, our viewpoint is that for the wealthiest Americans -- I don't think the wealthiest among us have -- well, they certainly haven't felt the type of economic downturn that the middle class not only experienced during that economic downturn, but in the years that led up to it. And, again, as we've said, adding those tax cuts on, continuing those tax cuts, likely adds another \$700 billion to our debt.

Q So no room on compromise, on letting them expire at the end of this year?

MR. GIBBS: I think the President -- the President's viewpoint is protect our middle class -- protect the middle-class tax cuts and let those for the wealthy expire.

Q On the judge's decision yesterday in the Virginia lawsuit -- I know it's procedural in nature, but he did say that one of the strongest claims the government made in defense of that health care individual mandate was that it derived from the government's power to tax. By pressing a legal argument in court that that individual mandate is a tax, is the administration acknowledging it's basically passed a tax on everybody and would violate your pledge not to tax the middle class?

MR. GIBBS: No. Again, I'd go back to something like the car insurance example. I think we all pay a tax when

all of us don't have health care, right? We pay a tax in your health care premiums, because instead of having health care that pays for the bills if you're in an auto accident, if you don't have insurance you go to the emergency room and the rest of us pay it.

The President believed -- and this was not a position he originally took in the campaign, but believed that if we're going to bring down health care costs, you have to have everybody in the system.

Q But you're acknowledging it's a tax?

MR. GIBBS: Again, I think that the President believed that if we're going to have the type of savings that we need, if we're going to have the type of benefits we all know can come from health care, everybody has to be in the system.

Q Is it a violation of the pledge not to raise taxes on the middle class?

MR. GIBBS: No.

Q How come?

MR. GIBBS: Again, I think the President has spoken pretty clearly to the reasons for making sure that each of us has coverage.

Q Okay, one last thing real quick. Just to get it on the record, the First Lady's trip to Spain with Sasha, what portion of that is paid by taxpayers and what portion by --

MR. GIBBS: I would point you over to the First Lady's office. It's a private trip and is being paid for that way.

Q The President tomorrow meets with the AFL-CIO. Is he going to reassure them that trade pacts -- excuse me, free trade agreements with Korea and other countries have strict labor rules in place to protect American workers?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, the President believes that we ought to have rules in place that make sure that trade works for everybody here in America. That's why the President has pledged before going to Korea in the fall that we'd present an agreement that made sense for the auto industry, made sense for the beef industry, and not just simply passing along a free trade agreement that existed before. The President believes that -- and I think if you look at either the GDP numbers or any reasonable economic growth plan for the future, it involves having to increase our exports.

Here's a good example, and it's sort of in the realm of some of the concerns that were had about the free trade agreement under the Bush administration were about autos. And, look, because of help that Ford is getting from the Department of Energy, the factory the President will visit outside of Chicago got money to help retool. That retooling allows the new Ford Explorer not to be built on a truck frame but to be built on a car frame, which means the car itself is more fuel efficient, and that is a gateway for -- and Ford's business plan calls for specifically marketing this car not just in this country but overseas. That helps -- they just added 1,200 jobs, by the way, at that facility, so that helps put people to work; that helps grow our economy; that helps with our trade deficit and our increase in exports.

Q Will he make any new assurances of things that he wants to see?

MR. GIBBS: I have not seen the draft of the speech in total yet. I think the President will talk about the economic decisions that we have made and where we go -- where we're going forward.

Peter.

Q Robert, following up on a couple questions you took earlier about the Gulf situation, what kind of reassurance can the administration offer to people who live there who are worried that once you do have the ultimate solution with the relief well that the government and BP are not going to be there for the long haul on the environmental cleanup?

MR. GIBBS: It's a very good question, and, look, I think if you go back to the answers that I gave around BP's decision to change CEOs, I think certainly Thad Allen, Carol Browner and others have at every opportunity taken the chance to both tell BP they can't leave, and reassuring people that we're in the Gulf for the long haul.

Capping the well, though for the past 100 or so days has been our most immediate project, that does not, as you say, that does not allow us to, and this government will not, walk away from the obligations to continue protecting the coastline, continue cleaning up the damage that has been done, billing BP for that damage, as we talked about in both the cleanup activities themselves as well as the damage assessments that will be made about that damage, and continuing to work to implement the escrow fund that will pay for not just the environmental but then the economic damages caused by the spill in that region.

I think that we would all agree, we do all agree, that what has happened requires our continued focus long past capping that well and our commitment is to continue to do so.

Q Is there any initial dollar estimate or time estimate on the cleanup? How much it's going to cost and how long it's going to take?

MR. GIBBS: Let me see if they have -- without me sort of guessing on this, let me see what type of updated figures. I assume partly, too, what I said earlier in the question where I answered about Secretary Mabus, I think some of that will likely also come in his report again to the President later in September.\*

Yes, ma'am.

Q Senator McConnell said in an interview today that the President's immigration lawsuit against Arizona was a "blatant political move to help his reelection." He said it was more about helping the President get reelected in 2012 than helping the Democrats in 2010. Do you have any reaction to that?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I think later in the interview -- didn't later in the interview then he surmise that we ought to take a look at the 14th Amendment? So I guess -- I don't know if that was based on 2010 or 2012, but my hunch is it's based purely on politics.

The President and the Justice Department were concerned about the law creating a patchwork of environmental -- I'm sorry -- of immigration policies. The case that we made to the court in Arizona was just that, and the court ruled indeed that Arizona and other states can't and shouldn't create a patchwork of immigration laws throughout the country. So it wasn't an argument that was based on anything other than a legal argument, and honestly a legal argument that the Justice Department prove to a judge.

Q So the idea that this will have a long-term benefit for Democrats --

MR. GIBBS: I will say -- I've said this before, I'll say this again -- it builds off of Chip's political question. The President has made a lot of decisions in this White House. I think if you were to -- I think if you look at the polling on the particular decision, the numbers aren't exactly with us, right? If we were making decisions based on politics, or on polling, we'd get a new pollster. I don't think -- no, the DNC has a pollster. We wouldn't -- those decisions are made on what's best for the country, not on politics.

Q He also said that Elizabeth Warren would be a very controversial nominee to the Consumer Protection Agency. Do you have any comment on that?

MR. GIBBS: Based on what?

Q That's what he said during the interview.

MR. GIBBS: I don't know what he bases -- it would be interesting to know what he based his comments on.

Q A lot of people have said that she could be a controversial pick.

MR. GIBBS: Based on?

Q I mean, Senator Dodd has said that she might not get enough votes to be --

MR. GIBBS: Based on?

Q Okay, the AFL-CIO event, can I just ask one thing -- is it at the White House tomorrow?

MR. GIBBS: I believe it's at the Convention Center, yes.

Q And why is the President meeting with them? Do you have any background on the meeting tomorrow?

MR. GIBBS: We can get it. It hasn't been put out yet. But we'll send it out. I mean, look, I think working men and women are an important part of this country. And the President looks forward to speaking tomorrow with the executive council as he's done on a number of occasions.

Ari.

Q Human rights lawyers are challenging the administration's assertion that an American citizen can be targeted for killing overseas. Should Americans worry that if they go overseas, their own government could target them to be killed? Anwar al-Awlaki is the person in question, but the legal principle --

MR. GIBBS: Okay, let's -- let me just for the point of -- I don't know what I would make -- I think you just largely

said a tourist going overseas and Anwar al-Awlaki are somehow analogous in nature. I'm not a --

Q But if the U.S. decides that an American citizen is affiliated with a terrorist group --

MR. GIBBS: No, no, let's be clear, let's be -- no, no, let's be clear.

Q Is there any legal process?

MR. GIBBS: Let's be clear about Anwar al-Awlaki, okay? The United States hasn't decided that Anwar al-Awlaki is aligned with a terrorist group. Anwar al-Awlaki has in videos cast his lot with al Qaeda and its extremist allies. Anwar al-Awlaki is acting as a regional commander for al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. So let's not take a tourist that might visit Italy overseas and equate him to somebody who has on countless times in video pledged to uphold and support the violent and murderous theories of al Qaeda. There --

Q The U.S. has mistakenly identified people as terrorists in many instances in the last eight years, and if Americans can be targeted for killing --

MR. GIBBS: Ari, it's hard to imagine an issue in which two things have been conflated more than your question in the past 18 months of me taking questions here. I think the notion that somehow anybody in this country confuses traveling overseas and the role that Anwar al-Awlaki has in inciting violence -- they're not even in the same ballpark.

Q Are you acknowledging that Awlaki is on the assassination list, then?

MR. GIBBS: I just answered his question about comparing Joe the Tourist to Anwar al-Awlaki.

Q Just a quick follow to that. U.S. citizens are entitled to a certain judicial process when it comes to questions like this, when it comes to sentencing to death. And is there a process in place that we don't know about?

MR. GIBBS: There's a process in place that I'm not at liberty to discuss.

Q Thank you. Returning to the tension in the Middle East, if it begins an all-out war involving Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran, the countries around -- would the U.S. come to Israel's defense militarily?

MR. GIBBS: It's hypothetical day here at the White House. I'm, Connie, not going to obviously get into discussing what if there was an all-out war in the Middle East. Obviously the President has since the moment he walked into the Oval Office taken steps to pull us back from those type of tensions. I have on countless times stated our long-held, countrywide position of protecting the security of Israel and its people, and the White House and this country will continue to do so.

Q And anything new from Iran -- on the three hostages in Iran?

MR. GIBBS: Nothing new. Obviously it's been -- Friday and Saturday represented a year of them being wrongly held by the Iranian government. And the President on Friday called for and continues to call for the release of three people that are wrongly held.

Q Thanks, Robert, two questions. One, the President has been trying his best to bring those who do not support the U.S. on terrorism and also who does harbor and finance terrorists in the Afghanistan region. Does the President now believe Pakistani intelligence, Pakistani military, and Pakistani civilian governments, that they will not -- they will support the U.S. from now on?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I will give you largely what I gave last week on this, and that is I think if you look at the progress that we have made with Pakistan on safe havens, on confronting terrorists, I think that is a record that they and we can be proud of. Is it -- does more have to be done? Unquestionable. We have tough work ahead in Pakistan and in Afghanistan. And together with our partners, we'll make progress.

Q And second, on immigration -- and, first of all, my happy birthday to the President in advance.

Q Oh, boy. (Laughter.)

Q My second question is on immigration.

Q I have a follow-up. (Laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: I'm going to put George and Peter down as no happy birthday for the President.

All right, go ahead. I'm done. (Laughter.)

Q Thank you. Second on immigration, most of the police chiefs around the country are against the Arizona immigration law. What they are saying is that if this spreads around the country, it will bring more violence and it might be out of the hands of the police around the country. So where do we go from here?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, obviously the court ruled and stayed many of the provisions that were set to go into effect last Thursday around this law. I think police chiefs in Phoenix and Tucson -- the two largest cities in Arizona -- have, as you said, Goyal, expressed many reservations about what they believed this law would intend for them to do, and along with others, spoke out and filed briefs with the court.

Where it leaves us is the same place that it leaves us -- left us last week. And if -- Senator McConnell brought up immigration earlier. If Senator McConnell would like to solve a problem rather than to continue to talk about one that we haven't solved at a federal level for many years -- it's time to bring together Democrats and Republicans to do just that.

That's the only way we're going to make progress on comprehensive immigration reform, is to do it together and to do it in a way that's bipartisan.

Q Thanks, Robert. With the Kagan vote coming up this week, I wanted to ask, on July 19th, written answers to the Judiciary Committee, she said that she had ceased doing her full duties as Solicitor General after the May 10th nomination. Has she been receiving her full salary as Solicitor General since then, or should she?

MR. GIBBS: I'd point you over to the Department of Justice on that. I don't know what the pay records are.

Q Do you think she should receive --

MR. GIBBS: I'd point you to the Department of Justice.

Glenn.

Q Robert, over the last couple of weeks you folks have put the President out there and brought folks to the briefing to emphasize sort of the things that you have accomplished in the past 18 months. We had the -- an update on the auto bailout; we had his Iraq speech yesterday. A lot of this doesn't seem to be getting through to voters in general. We saw a Gallup poll today that has the President at 41 percent, which is low, I think, on their scale for the administration. Is it frustrating --

MR. GIBBS: Leaving aside that the other Gallup poll showed it at 45. But I'll leave Gallup to explain the margin of error.

Q Gallup versus Gallup. Or is it Gallup versus Zandi?

MR. GIBBS: I guess. I think Gallup is with -- kidding. (Laughter.) Go ahead.

Q Is it frustrating to the President that these messages on these accomplishments don't seem to be getting through to people, and why do you think they're not?

MR. GIBBS: Look, I would say, Glenn, I don't think the President spends a lot of time -- the President spends a lot of time worried about how we make progress, not worried about whether people are giving him enough credit for the progress that's been made.

I'll be honest with you -- and I said this last week, Glenn -- I don't think people -- I don't -- I wouldn't hold the auto investment against the American people because I don't think the story has been told. I don't think that the American people knew that for the first time in 10 years we were adding jobs to the auto industry, and had added 55,000 jobs since GM emerged from bankruptcy; or that for the first quarter since 2004, all three companies at the same time posted an operating profit; or that the money invested by this administration was very likely to be repaid in full.

I don't -- I think in many ways the auto story where we started -- or where it began in late March of 2009, and where we are now in late July and early August of 2010 is in a much different place. I think the President believes that, and hopes that people will, whether it's adding jobs in the auto industry, whether it's taking 94,000 soldiers out of Iraq, I think that the President only hopes that people look at what he's done and base their conclusions off that.

I get the --

Q How much of it is the unemployment rate?

MR. GIBBS: A lot of it.

Q I mean, you can send him out on a sales pitch every day, but as long as the product includes 9.5 percent, can you get around that?

MR. GIBBS: I think as the President has said before, if a pollster called you and you thought your economic situation was not as good as it could be, it was too expensive to send your daughter to college, your neighbor had just lost their house, and your -- somebody else in your family just lost a job, and the pollster asked you how they thought the President was doing, I don't think he would be surprised that the American people would answer to a pollster that they're concerned.

Q How does he get around that, though?

MR. GIBBS: Well, two things: continuing to tell people what we're doing, and to continue to tell people the choices that we have to make. And I think, as I said earlier -- again, I don't think a lot of people had the totality of what the auto story was. I don't know how many people know that we're at the lowest point in I don't know how many years in our troop level in Iraq, or that if you look at civilian deaths -- what are likely to be the number of civilian deaths in Iraq in 2010 and what they were at the height of the Iraq war, we're talking about a reduction of 92 percent.

But that's what the President's job is to continue to tell people what's been done.

Ms. Ryan.

Q Robert, on the crack cocaine sentencing law, it's down from 100 to one to 18 to one, but some on Capitol Hill feel that the fight still needs to continue to bring the disparity down to one to one. What is this administration's efforts on that push? Are you leaving it here and just accepting this, or moving forward, still trying to bring the disparity down?

MR. GIBBS: Well, let me see if there's any guidance on it. I will say this, April, I think the signing of today's bill into law represents the hard work of Democrats and Republicans coming -- this is a good example -- of coming together and making progress on something that people had identified as a glaring blight on the law.

Look, I think if you look at the people that were there at that signing, they're not of the political persuasions that either always or even part of the time agree. I think that demonstrates the, as I said, the glaring nature of what these penalties had -- the glaring nature of what these penalties had done to people and how unfair they were. And I think the President was proud to sign that into law.

Q And also, Senate Republicans are being blamed again for holding up or delaying the stand-alone vote for the Black Farmers. And John Boyd, the head of the National Black Farmers Association, wants a meeting with the President and wants assurances that the Black Farmers will be paid their settlement monies. And he's likening it to the assurances that were given to Blanche Lincoln -- Senator Blanche Lincoln for \$1.5 billion farm relief subsidy payments.

MR. GIBBS: Well, again, this administration has worked a lot over the past several months to try to get this to a point where we can make good on the judgment that was handed down, and the administration will continue to try to do that, April.

Q Will he meet with -- will the President meet with John Boyd at all?

MR. GIBBS: I think he met very recently with Valerie Jarrett.

Q He wants to meet with the President to express his concern.

MR. GIBBS: I don't have any knowledge that that's on the schedule.

Q Thank you, Robert.

MR. GIBBS: Margaret.

Q Robert, thanks. Do you have any information, any detail about what's on deck for Friday? I checked the schedule and it said something about news.

MR. GIBBS: Off the top of my head, I don't. I'm trying to conjure that up, but let me see if there's any guidance for Friday.

Q And then quickly, this is probably preface to Ari's question earlier, but there is a lawsuit that the Center for Constitutional Rights and the ACLU is bringing today regarding the policies or lack -- perceived lack of policies as they relate to Mr. al-Awlaki. And what I wanted to ask is -- I mean, you just told us there is a process in place that you're not at liberty to discuss. Is that going to be the government's position, or are you going to disclose what the policy is? Do you think there's any merit to this lawsuit?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, again, there is -- I'm just not at liberty to discuss intelligence matters, Margaret. I would say -- I will repeat that Anwar al-Awlaki is someone who has sworn allegiance to al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula,

is a regional commander for that group in Yemen, has and continues to direct attacks there and, as we know, against innocent men, women and children in this country.

And this President will take the steps necessary to keep our country safe from thugs like him.

Q I understand that. But the President is also a lawyer with constitutional law training. He made clear during the campaign that sort of dotting the i's and crossing the t's mattered, even if you're going after bad guys.

MR. GIBBS: And I think it's safe to assume that if -- without getting deep into this -- the President understands the process and the President will do all that is necessary to keep this country safe from people like him.

Richard.

Q Just quick on the tax cuts. Does the President want the middle-class tax cuts to be extended permanently or --

MR. GIBBS: Yes, permanent.

Q He wants permanent?

MR. GIBBS: Yes.

Yes, sir.

Q The British Prime Minister last week said that he would not tolerate export of terrorism from Pakistan. Does the President agree with the views --

MR. GIBBS: I'll let Mr. Cameron deal with that.

Yes, sir.

Q President Ahmadinejad of Iran said that he was ready for face-to-face talks with President Obama. I was wondering if the White House has an initial reaction to that?

MR. GIBBS: I would say this, that obviously Iran has on any number of occasions changed their position based on I think largely the pain that they're feeling on sanctions, based on the decisions that their government has made that don't jibe with where the people are. We have always said that we would be willing to sit down and discuss Iran's illicit nuclear program if Iran is serious about doing that. To date, that seriousness has not been there. Iran has obligations that it needs to meet, and failure to meet those obligations will continue to result in unilateral sanctions by this government, U.N. sanctions that have been passed, European Union sanctions that have been passed, and other countries beyond this taking unilateral action. I think those sanctions are beginning to have an impact, or else the Iranian government would not be changing its position so often about discussing its program.

Thanks, guys.

END 1:39 P.M. EDT

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