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Press Briefing by Press Secretary Robert Gibbs, 6/29/10

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.

* The fund is administered by BP. How that fund is distributed, whether through a foundation, a charity or through Ken Feinberg is for them to decide.

3:00 P.M. EDT

MR. GIBBS: Good afternoon. Take us away.

Q What was the President's reaction to the arrest yesterday of the suspected Russian spies?

MR. GIBBS: I'm just going to leave this at -- I mean, obviously the President was fully and appropriately informed. This was a law enforcement action, and law enforcement acted appropriately. And he did not have a personal reaction that I know of.

Q Was he aware of the possibility of these arrests before yesterday, or was yesterday the first time that --

MR. GIBBS: No, he was -- he's been briefed on this a number of times.

Q Going back how far?

MR. GIBBS: Not something I'm going to get specific on.

Q And this comes, obviously, less than a week after the meetings here with Medvedev. Is there any concern that this hurts the chances of resetting this relationship, given that there are allegations that the Russians were spying against us?

MR. GIBBS: No, look, I think that if you -- I do not believe that this will affect the reset of our relationship with Russia. We have made great progress in the past year and a half, working on issues of mutual concern from a New START treaty to working together on things like in the United Nations dealing with North Korea and Iran. So I do not think that this will affect those relations.

Q And if I could just ask about McChrystal quickly, has there been any decision made on whether he is going to be allowed to retire as a four-star?

MR. GIBBS: Well, as you know, General McChrystal, I think, alerted the Pentagon yesterday that he would be leaving active duty. As you also know, he has not been in the position, a four-star position long enough to retire as a four-star.

The President believes -- and has talked with Secretary Gates about this -- and we will do whatever is necessary to ensure that he, somebody who has served the country as ably as he has, can retire at a four-star level.

Q So you will try to allow him to retire as a four-star?

MR. GIBBS: Yes, absolutely.

Q Thank you.

Q Robert, does the White House support removing the bank tax from the financial regulation bill in order to gain 60 votes?



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MR. GIBBS: Jeff, obviously we are working with the conferees on removing any hurdles to passage of strong financial reform legislation, which we're on the cusp of doing. So I would leave it at we're working with them to ensure that we have 60 votes to move this legislation forward.

Q Do you see that tax as one of the hurdles that could be removed?

MR. GIBBS: Well, obviously that's certainly a discussion that is going on amongst those on Capitol Hill.

Q And if those on Capitol Hill went that way, is that something that you would support?

MR. GIBBS: Well, again, we're working with them to look for any solution that might be needed.

Q And on climate change today, after the meeting the statement said that the President was open to other approaches aside from putting a price on carbon to get several different goals like reducing U.S. dependence on foreign oil. What other approaches would he be open to specifically?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, I don't want to narrow or open up our legislative bidding from up here. The President reiterated his position that putting a price on carbon, he believes, is the right policy. I think science has shown why that's important. I do think that you had a bipartisan group of legislators here who understand the need to move this legislation forward and get something done this year. And I think the President was hopeful after that meeting that we can find common ground on a lot of different subjects.

Q And does he think that the legislation can be passed this year?

MR. GIBBS: Yes.

Yes, Ann.

Q Tom Balanoff is a local labor leader in Chicago and in testimony today at the Blagojevich trial he talks about a phone call that he got from Barack Obama on Monday evening before the Tuesday election, at which he quotes Mr. Obama as saying that he thinks Valerie Jarrett should be a United States senator, that she fits the criteria; "I would prefer that she remain working for President Obama, but she does want to be Senator." And Balanoff said he told the soon-to-be President, "I said, 'Thank you, I'm going to reach out to Governor Blagojevich with that.'" Did the President make that phone call?

MR. GIBBS: You're telling me about this testimony. I'm not going to get into commenting on obviously an ongoing trial. And I have had not had an opportunity to see that.

Q But you've said before that the President did not get involved with the suggestions or the conversations with Blagojevich.

MR. GIBBS: Ann, I'm just not going to get into commenting on an ongoing trial.

Dan.

Q Yes, Robert, when the President met with President Medvedev, did they discuss at all the Russian spy ring?

MR. GIBBS: No.

Q And can you tell us anything more about the President's speech on Thursday on immigration? What will be the main message and who will it be aimed at?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, as you know, the President met with groups that believe, as he does, yesterday that a comprehensive solution to immigration has to be sought and passed. Obviously the President has worked on that for many years. He has additional meetings on that topic today, and will reiterate again his desire to move forward on that comprehensive reform, that we can't have -- as we have seen, we cannot have immigration reform passed individually by each state through a patchwork of laws.

So he will reiterate that, and, Dan, will certainly take the opportunity to reiterate that what in the past has been something that members of both parties have worked on, that one party alone cannot solve this problem. Only with Republican support can -- and that Republican support has certainly been there in the past -- only with Republican support can we move forward on immigration.

Yes, sir.

Q Thank you. On financial reform, how confident is the President that he is going to get the 60 votes? And does he think he could have it on his desk by July 4th, as they had originally hoped?

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MR. GIBBS: Look, we -- Chip, our hope is to get this done as quickly as possible. I do think, whether or not it is done by the end of this week, obviously there are some logistical hurdles that are going to have to be met in order to do that.

I will say that if you go back to January or even many of the months between January and now, there was always a question as to whether this was going to get done. I don't think there is a question now whether it will get done. It will either get done more likely the week -- the next week that they're back than this week, but the President will very shortly sign comprehensive financial reform legislation that puts in place rules that prevent the type of activity and the type of effect that happened in September of 2008 from ever happening again.

Q And has the President had -- reached out to or had any conversations with any of the Republicans who they hope to --

MR. GIBBS: Let me check and see the last time he made -- has made calls.

Q And if I could ask a quick question on -- there's confusion over the \$100 million fund in the Gulf right now. Ken Feinberg said yesterday that the White House and BP had agreed to give him jurisdiction over claims from individuals and businesses harmed by the six-month moratorium. In fact, he said he was just finding out that that was the case. Then we contacted him today about that and he put out a statement saying until it is determined who will hold the \$100 million, it is unclear who will oversee and process the individual moratorium claims. Can you clarify this?

MR. GIBBS: Let me -- I was -- my understanding was that the first statement that he -- that was money that was to be dispersed by him was not the way I understood it. But given the fact that there is confusion on that level, let me take that question and I will get an answer around in our transcript.*

Q And is there any confusion on the \$20 billion? Is it still the case that the \$20 billion is not for people affected by the moratorium?

MR. GIBBS: That's my understanding, right. That's my understanding.

Chuck.

Q A few follow-ups -- one, did the President know about this Russian spy deal before he met with Medvedev?

MR. GIBBS: Yes.

Q Okay, that wasn't -- that wasn't the hard one. So he did know about it. Second, on fin reg, if you don't get the bank fee, is this something you will continue to pursue further if it does not -- it's not a part of --

MR. GIBBS: Yes, the President outlined in his State of the Union address earlier in the year the need to repay the taxpayers fully for the Troubled Asset Relief Program. So this does not close the door on that.

Q So if it's not in here, you could --

MR. GIBBS: It doesn't close the door on doing that at a later date.

Q On energy, can you make an argument that you can price carbon without it looking like -- without it being a tax?

MR. GIBBS: Yes. I mean, obviously there are a number of different ways that you can -- and I'm not an expert on all of the different proposals that are in front of the Senate right now in terms of how -- of how one -- each of the proposals and how they do it. I will say this, Chuck, we understand that -- and the President has met with a countless number of CEOs over the past many months that discussed the need for greater certainty in how they do business that have advocated this type of approach.

So obviously there are a number of different ways to do it. I think the President felt encouraged by the meeting in trying to move all of these proposals forward.

Q Can you say definitively -- now on the oil spill -- can you say definitively that you guys are fulfilling every skimmer request that's been made by all four states that are affected right now?

MR. GIBBS: Yes, we are -- look, there's -- there are -- one of the things that's happened most recently, there are for clean water -- for sites that are governed by the Clean Water Act, there are certain federal and state requirements to have response capabilities on hand in the event that something happens at a facility. We have asked on an emergency basis that some of these rules be waived.

Q And have they been?

MR. GIBBS: Yes.

Q We're not waiting on a rule to be waived right now?

MR. GIBBS: No, we're -- look, obviously some of these are governed by individual rules at facilities. We have begun to -- we've waived at a number of those places, and I can try to find the specific numbers in order to move greater skimming capability down to the Gulf, understanding that, Chuck, this is not -- these are vessels that are at a facility based on the requirements in the law that we have the capability at a facility to deal with any type of emergency.

So we understand right now it is more imperative that they be in the Gulf, understanding that we are assuming some amount of risk in doing that now.

Q So what you're saying is there are some boats that could be skimming that you're not sending over because you need to keep a minimum amount on hand?

MR. GIBBS: No, no, no. What I'm saying is we are waiving those rules to move additional skimming capability to the Gulf, understanding that --

Q But you've fulfilled every request for skimmers that every state has asked for?

MR. GIBBS: I can check on what the exact numbers are. Also understand, too, Chuck, that as the -- very early on, we were asked sort of how does the -- this looks different or there's different characteristics than sort of something that happened in Alaska for the Valdez. Because right now, and I think you can see this in news coverage, and I'm sure your reporters on the ground will tell you -- you guys probably saw this when we were down there -- there is not -- there isn't just one slick, right? There are smaller slicks of oil identified by planes, radioed to boats, skimmers sent to intercept those pockets of oil. And we're at a point in which obviously different capabilities are called on based on the characteristics of the spill having changed some as well. It's not one mass of oil; it's many, many --

Q Why are we hearing from local leaders that there are not enough skimmers, there are not enough skimmers? Where do you think that's coming from?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I think that's coming from the fact that this is an unprecedented emergency. We have -- we worked early on to -- and many states -- I will say, many states updated their response plans after this happened, because -- for instance, the boom requirements. Those are plans that are put in place by the states to what they think they need. I don't know whether skimmers are in those ACPs or not. But obviously as the depth of the response -- I should say the length of the response has gone on, those plans have been augmented and we will continue to move as much -- as many additional skimming capabilities as we can down to that region.

Yes, ma'am.

Q Ahead of the energy meeting today, the White House said that the goal was to find -- figure out where the common ground was on energy legislation. Afterwards Senators Lieberman and Kerry said that there was consensus to do a price on carbon, though perhaps not economy-wide, but modified in some version. Is that also the White House view of where the consensus was, and is that where you think this is headed now?

MR. GIBBS: I don't -- look, obviously Senator Reid is going to figure out the vehicle that moves in the Senate. I wouldn't disagree, obviously, with what Senators Kerry and Lieberman said as some of their takeaway from that meeting.

Q So, I mean, was that the takeaway from the White House's point of view that this is where the consensus is?

MR. GIBBS: Again, I think that's -- look, I think many people can take many different things away. I think one of the things the President took away was the encouraging notion that we can move forward and get something done this year.

Q Robert, can you say how often Ben Bernanke briefs the President on a -- at an economic daily briefing?

MR. GIBBS: I don't have all of that in front of me, Mark. He has been over here on occasion. He was over here today to speak about where we're headed in financial reform and where we are in the arc of our economic recovery.

Q Is it infrequent rather than frequent?

MR. GIBBS: Again, I don't have the stats in front of me to the degree to which -- how many times the President has talked to him or not.

Q Can you tell us about the town meeting tomorrow?

MR. GIBBS: We'll have more information a bit later today. The focus of the President's remarks before the town hall meeting will be on the economy.

Q And on the Gulf, is the President and Vice President going to alternate visits to the Gulf? Is that what today was about?

MR. GIBBS: No, look, obviously the Vice President is in Louisiana and will go to Pensacola later in the day. Obviously many in the Cabinet have been down there quite a bit. I don't know when the President's next trip would be, but, look, the Vice President felt it important to go down and both see and hear firsthand from state and local officials as well as Admiral Allen and those on the ground responding to this disaster to see where we are. Obviously Secretary Napolitano and Carol Browner were in the region yesterday as -- wrapping up some meetings that staff were down there for throughout the weekend.

Q Worried about the storm?

MR. GIBBS: Absolutely. I mean, obviously the -- I know Secretary Napolitano spoke with the governor of Texas today about upcoming preparations for the storm. I think many of you all have talked to folks here and in the Gulf about preparations that have to be taken in the event that a storm more closely comes into the area. And in preparation for the possibility of this a few days ago, obviously equipment was taken off of the Enterprise, which I think Thad Allen said yesterday would delay the next step in the containment, which is a helix device that will increase our capability off of the second line coming up from -- in addition to the top hat.

So obviously preparations are being made. A plan is in place in the event that vessels have to be moved, people have to be evacuated. And obviously we continue on the long-term steps through the drilling of the two relief wells to ultimately get this well capped, which would be a permanent solution that we would not be dependent on Mother Nature -- or I should say Mother Nature wouldn't dictate what our capabilities are on the surface.

Hans.

Q Robert, you just said you didn't know how frequently Bernanke is there for the morning eco briefing, but it's pretty infrequent when the President makes a statement with Bernanke by his side. Talk to us about the optics of that. What was the message there?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, again, Chairman Bernanke was here to talk of several things. Obviously the President concluded some important meetings over the weekend on the international response to the economic crisis that we've all dealt with. We're on the cusp of real and genuine financial reform. And we are continuing to move forward on steps like a small business lending facility that action was taken in the Senate today to move that proposal forward, on how we can continue to make progress in our economy. We'll see -- it's jobs week -- we'll see numbers at the end of the week.

Q But why do a statement with Bernanke by his side? He rarely, if never, does that. What's -- I mean, does he want the gravitas of Ben Bernanke? Does he want to calm markets?

MR. GIBBS: I think you heard him talk about -- where we are on our economic recovery is something that the President talks about quite frequently, and having Chairman Bernanke here to discuss those other topics seemed appropriate.

Q So it was just random that Bernanke was there next to him?

MR. GIBBS: Well, it wasn't random that he was there. I mean, he was obviously here to talk about the things that I just talked about.

Q But I still don't understand why he was there for the public statement that the President gave to us. Because if he's here frequently or infrequently --

MR. GIBBS: So that Bloomberg could have exclusive access to the Chairman of --

Q No, I mean, it's a serious question, you guys --

MR. GIBBS: No, no, I understand.

Q Right, I mean, you -- I'm trying to --

MR. GIBBS: I've tried to give you a serious answer three times.

Q Well, I'm trying to understand why the President felt that he needed to give a statement on the economy, which he does nearly every week, with Bernanke by his side -- what we should read into that.

MR. GIBBS: I don't know that you should read anything into it, despite my best efforts to describe otherwise. Again, Chairman Bernanke obviously, as you know, plays an incredibly important role; has worked for the past 17 months to stabilize our financial system, to speed our recovery; was here to meet with the President and the economic team. And I want the record to reflect this is the first time you guys have -- that Hans has complained about too much access.

Q We're not complaining.

MR. GIBBS: Okay, I'll -- 30 seconds to -- no, I'm kidding. Go ahead.

Q Arizona Governor Jan Brewer describes yesterday's meeting with federal officials about National Guard troops going to the border as "very, very disappointing." She says they're only getting a fraction of the number they really need. Are the people of Arizona being let down in this situation?

MR. GIBBS: No, look, the President has made a decision to move 1,200 National Guardsmen to the border, 524 of which will be deployed in Arizona. There obviously is and continues to be extraordinary efforts that we're taking to secure our border as part of the beginnings of comprehensive immigration reform.

Q She said she needs at least 3,000 troops.

MR. GIBBS: Well, again, the President has made a big commitment to securing the border and to Arizona.

Q Arizona Senator Jon Kyl continues to insist, despite the White House's assurances it did not happen, that the President told him, if we secure the border, you people -- being -- meaning Republicans -- will not vote for comprehensive immigration reform.

MR. GIBBS: Well, Wendell, to be fair, this appears now to be an argument that the senator is having with himself, right? A couple weeks ago he made a statement that we said wasn't the case. Then I believe on Friday, the senator said that wasn't the case. Now I think he has made a statement saying what he said about it not being the case may not now be the case.

So I refer you, Wendell, to his spokesperson saying at the beginning of this process that there were two people involved in this conversation. It appears as if the problem is one of them has three recollections.

So I'm happy to, when Senator Kyl decides which of the three stories he thinks happened in that meeting, I'm happy when he comes to some white smoke and concludes what his answer is on that.

Q Were you prepared for that question?

MR. GIBBS: No. (Laughter.)

Q Will you announce the new OMB Director with white smoke or black smoke?

Q Once more, can we ask you for a little bit more about tomorrow's town hall, other than --

MR. GIBBS: We'll have more on that a little bit later today.

Q You can't even say who's going to be there tomorrow? Is it going to be a friendly audience? Have you guys chosen who's going to be there?

MR. GIBBS: We've never chosen any of the questioners at our town halls that I think, Anne, you've been coming to for three years.

Q Can you talk a little about Thursday, and why now? Why is he giving -- we've heard him talk about immigration repeatedly. Is there going to be anything new? And any news out of the Justice Department?

MR. GIBBS: Well, for news out of the Justice Department I would direct you to them. In terms of -- I think, look, this continues to be a very important national issue, and will reiterate, again, his support for doing this in a comprehensive way, but also in reiterating what he said to the Republicans when he visited the Senate caucus. He cannot do this alone. He worked in 2005 and in 2006 with senators from across the aisle in making comprehensive -- in trying to make comprehensive immigration reform the law of the land. The only way we're going to do that now is to do that working with the other side of the aisle.

Q So this will be a reiteration, largely.

MR. GIBBS: Largely, yes.

Q Robert, in the past when Russian spies have been caught in the United States, the United States has registered its displeasure with this in some diplomatic form or another. When Robert Hanssen was arrested, the

United States government kicked out 50 Russian diplomats. Are you all contemplating anything like that?

MR. GIBBS: Well, obviously I'd point you to the Department of State about the conversations that have taken place and continue to take place between State Department officials and Russian officials.

Q Do you find this to be something that is offensive, or simply business as usual?

MR. GIBBS: Look, obviously this is something that was -- that is important and was treated as such yesterday.

Q Can you -- I'm sorry, can you elaborate a little bit, though? I mean, the President did just invite the President of Russia here to visit with him -- brought him for burgers and the whole bit. There's no --

MR. GIBBS: Peter, I really do not want to get into talking about active law enforcement investigations or intelligence matters.

Q Well, but it's also about the relationship between two countries, and you don't find it offensive that this other country you're trying to build a new relationship with is still spying on you?

MR. GIBBS: I said that -- I said earlier that I did not think that this would affect our moves to reset the relationship, and we believe that.

Q Do they have license to do whatever they want without any consequences?

MR. GIBBS: Obviously that's not the case, because there were multiple arrests that were made.

Q Robert, thank you.

Q Stay on the same subject.

Q All right.

Q About -- about, yes, about --

MR. GIBBS: He had a feeling you might not ask about the economy.

Q Well, I'll ask about the economy, but next time if you give me the question. (Laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: Take it up with Mark later, because he might seek to reclaim his time.

Q All right, this one, this one, I want to stick with this subject. The timing -- the timing. Was the President completely satisfied by whoever organized the operation this week that this was the time that it needed to be done, right after the summit?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, again, I'm not going to get into the specifics of discussing the law enforcement or the intelligence portions of this.

Q I'm just saying, the President --

MR. GIBBS: No, no, I understand. Let me finish my answer. This was an action that was taken by law enforcement, handled that way, handled appropriately, and done in a timely manner. So --

Q The Russians --

MR. GIBBS: Good luck trying to get -- (laughter.)

Q I feel obliged, since I'm the only Russian here, to raise the point -- (laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: Now I'm like the straight man for a bunch of people standing on the side.

Q But I am the only official Russian here. (Laughter.) And as such, I want to raise the point that is being raised by my government officials who say this is a deliberate attempt to undermine, frankly, the President's policies, and some people even say the President himself. What's your response?

MR. GIBBS: The President of Russia, I assume you're talking about.

Q The President of the United States and his policy of reset.

MR. GIBBS: Oh, well, I see.

Q You say it will not affect the policy of reset.

MR. GIBBS: This will not.

Q But what about an attempt to do that?

MR. GIBBS: I can't speak to that. There are -- again, I described this, I think accurately, as a law enforcement activity. It was handled as such. It was done correctly. I do not -- again, I do not believe that this will have a great effect on our efforts to reset our relationship with Russia.

Q Just to follow up, the President had absolutely no influence over the timing of the arrests, one way or the other?

MR. GIBBS: This is -- again, this is dictated by law enforcement.

Q Was that a yes or -- that was a no, he did not? I want to be clear about it.

MR. GIBBS: I was. The timing of this was dictated by law enforcement.

Q Thank you, Robert, just two questions.

Q No, Lester -- Lester, Lester.

MR. GIBBS: I'm going to go to Mara and then we'll -- go ahead.

Q On the Saudi visit, I'm wondering if the President plans to ask the Saudis again for more gestures to Israel. He's done that in the past -- hasn't gotten a whole lot of results for it.

MR. GIBBS: I was not in -- Mara, I was not in the statements that were just made. Obviously, the topic of Middle East peace, the topic of the Saudi support of the Arab Peace Initiative -- all of those topics -- again, I was not in there, but I know those did come up. And I know that the President reiterated his desire to push for this comprehensive peace. And obviously we've got Prime Minister Netanyahu coming soon as well to continue to make progress.

Q But should we assume that he still wants the Saudis to make the same -- the gestures he asked them to earlier in the administration?

MR. GIBBS: And, again, I was not in there. But the readout I got was that the Saudis reiterated their support for the Arab Peace Initiative, which is an important aspect of it.

Yes, sir.

Q Robert, does the President hold open the possibility for passage of immigration reform this year, given that we don't have a single Republican co-sponsor and no legislative language in the Senate?

MR. GIBBS: Obviously there are proposals that are being worked on. Peter, that's a better question for Republicans that have believed this was an important issue when they were in power. It is no less an important issue now that there is a Democrat in the White House. And the President will continue to work with anybody that desires to work with he and others on a comprehensive solution.

Q Is he actively making calls to Republicans to try to round up support?

MR. GIBBS: He made calls -- I don't remember the exact timing of this -- obviously reached out to I think half a dozen folks not too long ago on this topic.

Margaret.

Q Thanks. When the senators came out of the energy meeting today, I believe it was Senator Lieberman who talked about the President's belief that this legislation should be the legislative vehicle for all of the -- for some of the BP stuff or all of the BP stuff. Can you just clarify what oil -- what BP-related stuff would be on the energy bill and what you're willing to separate?

MR. GIBBS: Let me -- I did not hear that portion of Senator Lieberman's thing, but let me find out.

Q It's hard to ask follow-up questions in the atmosphere.

Q Can you at least tell us what the President said in that meeting about BP?

MR. GIBBS: I was not in the meeting, but, again, I will clarify what part of -- whether energy legislation that will

move through the Senate, I think you're asking me is the vehicle for some of the changes that we have sent up and some changes obviously proposed by others in dealing with --

Q Is the effort to link it so that people feel obliged to vote for it, or are there some things you're willing to separate because they need to be passed --

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, on a number of occasions there have been -- Senator Menendez has on a number of occasions brought up lifting the liability cap, which obviously we're -- we've made significant progress on with the BP escrow account. But there certainly have been attempts at doing this in a standalone way or doing this as an amendment to a piece of legislation that's being considered.

Q It sounded like he was talking about -- like he knew something. I just wasn't clear what --

MR. GIBBS: Let me check with those guys.

April.

Q Robert, on Elena Kagan, could you give us a little tick-tock about the President watching her? We didn't have a briefing yesterday. I suppose he was probably watching some of the statements. And today, was he watching?

MR. GIBBS: I have not heard him talk about watching. I know he met with her briefly before going up to the Senate, wishing her luck in the hearings, and continues to believe that she is -- will be a very capable Supreme Court justice, believes that she will have the support that's necessary to be confirmed. And I think if you look at -- I think -- I have not talked to him about this, but I think certainly my view of the hearings is that she is providing full, open and forthcoming testimony about issues in the law.

And I think, despite efforts by others to create a pattern of fact that doesn't exist on military recruiting at Harvard, she has explained why news accounts, why documents that were released by the Pentagon, and why students that were at Harvard and are now serving this country overseas continue to believe, as she has said, that the military had full access to the campus at Harvard.

Q But do you believe that those are legitimate concerns to be raised? I mean, you're saying --

MR. GIBBS: I think they've been raised. I think they've been answered. I think there are -- look, these are Supreme Court hearings. There are no shortage of games that are being played.

Q And also, on another topic that I continue to ask -- the Black Farmers. Today is June 29th, and the 30th --

MR. GIBBS: The 29th.

Q Yes, okay, good, I'm right. All right, June 29th, tomorrow is the 30th. The deadline, again, comes --

MR. GIBBS: Well, again, this is part of legislation that continues to be blocked in the Senate.

Q Lieberman said it was Republicans, how are you going to get Republicans to come in?

MR. GIBBS: Well, we're continuing to work with them. We're continuing to make attempts to -- look, we were talking about the economy earlier. Contained in the tax extenders bill are tax cuts for small businesses, tax cuts for research and development, unemployment benefits for those who as a result of this recession find themselves as part of the long-term unemployed. I think the President has on every one of those occasions weighed in for the importance of that legislation passing.

Q Is it the right economic climate for this to happen?

MR. GIBBS: Which part?

Q The Black Farmers, the \$1.25 billion.

MR. GIBBS: Again, this does not depend on the economic climate, this is dependent upon a settlement that has been reached.

Savannah.

Q Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Phil Gordon said today that President Obama said in this reset of the relationship with Russia there would be areas of agreement and disagreement and we should see this spying issue in that context. Does the administration agree with that assessment?

MR. GIBBS: Savannah, I'd want to look at Phil's full remarks before I comment on it.

Q Is the administration considering any diplomatic consequence to Russia's spying?

MR. GIBBS: Well, again, as I said, there are -- I will let the State Department read out the conversations that have been had on this issue.

Q Well, is it being considered?

MR. GIBBS: The State Department can give you that answer.

Q Robert, just two questions, Robert.

Q Robert, House Minority Leader John Boehner today likened your approach to financial regulatory reform to "killing an ant with a nuclear weapon."

MR. GIBBS: If I understand the analogy correctly, I think it's important, Glenn, that we understand that he apparently believes that the financial crisis -- I think the ant in that is the financial crisis. Now, I don't know whether opening one's mouth and removing most of the doubt that you're completely out of touch with America in thinking that a financial crisis that caused 8.5 million jobs to be lost, the savings of tens of millions of Americans wiped out in a financial crisis, to have lives altered forever, to make that type of analogy I think demonstrates -- well, I will say it demonstrates how out of touch you are currently and it demonstrates exactly the type of mindset that he would bring to leading the House of Representatives. It's led him to oppose an economic recovery plan that has grown our economy and brought us back from the brink of a Great Depression.

It has -- he has voted against strengthening the rules that govern Wall Street. Maybe he thinks that the rules that we had in place that caused what happened in September of 2008 are just the type of regulation Wall Street needs. The President doesn't believe that, and I think the majority of Americans don't think that.

Q One quick -- Bill Clinton has apparently endorsed Andrew Romanoff in the Colorado Democratic primary. How do you respond to it? Are you amused, dismayed, infuriated? (Laughter.)

Q Those are your choices. (Laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: D, none of the above. (Laughter.)

Q And one last thing on that? Did you guys get a heads up? Did you know President Clinton was doing that, the White House?

MR. GIBBS: I will check with the political department. I don't know the answer.

Q You did not know this?

MR. GIBBS: But that's not to say --

Q Somebody in the White House might have gotten --

MR. GIBBS: I will check.

Q Will it affect the reset with Bill Clinton? (Laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: I'm going to -- I want to -- I want to, Mark, I promise.

Q Come on, come on.

MR. GIBBS: But I'm not going to. Go ahead, George.

Q Speaking of infuriated, I wanted to return to your remarks on Senator Kyl. Is it fair to say that the White House was angry at the way he reacted after that meeting? And is it also fair to say he's not about to be invited back for any meetings soon?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, he's a member of the leadership of the Senate. We'll deal with him as a member of the leadership of the Senate. I don't know if it was anger. It was just that what he said wasn't true. And then, if you -- don't take my word for it, take Friday's Jon Kyl word for it.

Now, I can't speak to what's happened now -- between now and Friday. But even in Toronto, I think -- I was in Toronto; I think many of you were in Toronto. We read the story that he told an outlet that that wasn't exactly what he said. So, again, I'm happy to return to this topic if and when the senator from Arizona gets his story straight.

Q Robert, just two questions, Robert.

Q I want to repeat a question that was asked earlier, because I'm not sure I heard the answer. Did the President or White House staff give any guidance as to the timing of these arrests?

MR. GIBBS: None that I'm aware of, no.

Q They weren't -- you weren't given any guidance? You didn't know about it?

MR. GIBBS: No, no, no.

Q Did you give any guidance --

Q Oh, oh, oh.

MR. GIBBS: No, no -- obviously, yes. Let me -- now that the -- obviously we were aware of --

Q Then you'll come back?

MR. GIBBS: Obviously we did not -- I am not aware of any guidance that was given to change that.

Q So you were aware -- hang on a minute. You were aware that these arrests were going to be made, you just didn't know about the timing?

MR. GIBBS: We were aware of the timing.

Q Thank you, Robert. Since eight members of the U.S. Senate -- just two questions -- since eight members of the U.S. Senate wrote the President strongly opposing the possibility of his using executive power to grant amnesty to more than 10 million illegal aliens in the U.S., is the President still planning to extend any such amnesty?

MR. GIBBS: Through what means in that letter?

Q Well, he could pardon -- he could pardon them, couldn't he?

MR. GIBBS: But there are no pending 10 million pardon requests, Lester. I can clear that up.

Q Okay. What is the President's reaction --

MR. GIBBS: It would be a heck of a fine.

Q -- to the unanimous jury decision in the U.S. District Court for eastern Pennsylvania in support of the Boy Scouts and against the Philadelphia City Council who tried to bar them from their long-time headquarters?

MR. GIBBS: You're going to find this surprising, but I'm not aware of the details of the case.

Q It was widely reported.

MR. GIBBS: It missed my desk. It missed my desk.

Q You don't read very much.

MR. GIBBS: I think it's safe to say, Lester, you and I probably don't read the same things, yes. Go ahead.
(Laughter.)

Q Was General McChrystal fired partly because of a very pessimistic briefing that he gave to NATO a few days before the Rolling Stone article?

MR. GIBBS: No. First of all, obviously the President accepted General McChrystal's resignation last week. I think General McChrystal has always provided in the Situation Room the best information that he has available to him about developments in Afghanistan. That obviously played -- whatever was said in that briefing played no role in the actions that General McChrystal came in and provided his resignation to the President on.

Q So this very negative briefing that he gave to NATO did not play into it at all?

MR. GIBBS: Again, it did not play into it at all. I think it is safe that the President has heard both encouraging and discouraging news and hears that each and every day about Afghanistan. We have always said that this was going to be quite difficult. So that obviously has played no role in anything that's happened here, and again, I would say to you, going back to the premise of your question, I think the events of last week played out I think quite clearly for the world to see -- General McChrystal came in and offered to the President, and the President accepted, his resignation as our commander in Afghanistan and ISAF's commander in Afghanistan.

We sent General Petraeus -- we sent his name up. His hearings are ongoing, and I believe he will be confirmed as both our -- the commander of our forces and ISAF forces, and will soon head to that region.

Q Are you concerned if General Petraeus wants to free up the troops to be able to use more force more liberally in Afghanistan that the ensuing possibility of civilian casualties might turn the Afghans against us?

MR. GIBBS: Again, I think that I'd let General Petraeus's comments on the rules of engagement -- I'd refer you to what he said on that. Obviously anybody that is commanding troops is going to take into their thought process a lot of different aspects involving rules of engagement.

Q Thank you, Robert. During the joint press session with President Medvedev on Thursday, the President made reference to the fact President Medvedev had opened a Twitter account, and as the President himself has one, that some day they would be tweeting and possibly replace the red phones that they're using. Have they been in touch at all since the events that happened on Saturday either by Twitter or the phone?

MR. GIBBS: That was quite the lead, wasn't it? (Laughter.) I'm not entirely sure where the whole beginning of that was going. I do not know the nature of how many times they might have spoken Sunday in Toronto. They have not been in touch, that I'm aware of, yesterday or today.

Q Are there any red phones in the White House? (Laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: None that I have found.

Q Were you aware of the timing -- I don't mean to -- just to close up one loop. Were you aware of the timing of this arrest before the Medvedev visit?

MR. GIBBS: I don't know the answer to that. I will consult everyone's --

Q So you don't know if you were aware of the timing of the arrests before Medvedev's visit?

MR. GIBBS: I don't know the answer to that. I will check his Twitter account.

Thanks, guys.

END

3:50 P.M. EDT

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