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Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 8/10/2011

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MR. CARNEY: Why don't we start? I don't have any announcements to make at the top.

Mr. Feller.

Q Thanks, Jay. Three topics today -- I'll go quickly. On Syria, does President Obama think that President Assad should step down? And should we expect President Obama to explicitly address that this week?

MR. CARNEY: Ben, I can tell you a few things about the situation in Syria. I think we've made clear that we believe -- the President believes that Syria will be better off -- would be better off without President Assad. The international community is increasingly speaking with one voice on Syria in unified condemnation of Assad's brutality against his people. Through his own actions, President Assad is ensuring that he and his regime will be left in the past and that the courageous Syrian people who have demonstrated peacefully in the streets will determine its future.

We have said that Syria will be a better place without Assad, as I just mentioned, and that he has lost legitimacy. The most important thing that we can do right now is ensure that our actions back up our words. A democratic transition would be better for Syria, the region and the world, and we intend to help the Syrian people achieve the dignity and freedom they have demanded and for which too many have died.

We continue to call on the regime to immediately halt its campaign of violence and arrests, pull its security forces back, release the many thousands of detainees, and to respect and act upon the clear demands of the Syrian people for a peaceful and democratic transition.

We will keep up that pressure. We will work and coordinate with our international partners, and I think it's been noted by all of you that that pressure is increasing every day.

Q So you won't say whether President Obama will go further in explicitly calling for him to step down?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I will simply point out that we've been very clear about our position on the actions that President Assad has taken against his own people, the fact that we believe Syria would be better off without him. We've taken action through sanctions, and we'll continue to increase the pressure through a variety of means, working with our international partners to do so. And any future announcements or things that the President might say I'll leave to that time.

Q On a domestic issue, the President has called for Congress to take the debt commission and that process very seriously. Now that we know the members, I'm wondering what the President's reaction is, particularly to the Republican members, whether he sees them as the kind of serious people who he thinks will be open-minded.

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think every member of Congress who's elected and sent to Washington to represent his or her constituents has a responsibility to act seriously when asked to deal with such a serious issue. And the President expects that the appointed members of this select committee will do so, both Republicans and Democrats. And I think that the Speaker of the House's statement expressed a sentiment that we share, which is that we need to take action collectively to come together, Democrats and Republicans, to further reduce our deficits and get our long-term debt under control.

We strongly believe that the way to do that is to take a balanced approach -- and we are not alone. The American people overwhelmingly support the balanced approach that the President supports. And Republicans and Democrats, together, support the balanced approach that the President supports. And I would think that when we're looking at the things that have created the deficits and debt that we have, it's very instructive to remember that we have to look into every area.

I mean, for those who were in Congress in the last decade who voted for massive, historically large tax cuts that were unpaid for and have contributed mightily to the debt that we have now who voted and put two wars on the credit card without paying for them, who voted, for example, to extend a Medicare prescription drug benefit that was unpaid for and that has added massively to our deficits and debt -- I think that, knowing that, having participated in it, there should be an acknowledgment that we need to look broadly at all ways to reduce our deficits and debt.

Q So does he have faith that the Republicans will take that kind of an open-minded --

THE PRESIDENT: We believe that the committee needs to -- the President believes the committee needs to

take its work seriously, and that it has been mandated by a law passed by Congress to do that and to act before Thanksgiving, and to come together around a series of proposals that can get bipartisan support, get through Congress in a fast-track way, to ensure that we have additional deficit reduction.

Q Last question, quickly -- going back to the Dover visit yesterday. The media, as you, of course, know, were not allowed to cover that directly, were not allowed to see what the President saw. Can you explain why the White House put out a picture of the President in a very presidential mode, saluting, and the free press was not allowed to cover that?

MR. CARNEY: Well, there are a variety of reasons why the press was not allowed to cover the dignified transfer of the remains of those servicemen who perished in Afghanistan. And I think you know them, and the Pentagon described them. It has to do with, normally, the families would have to give permission. In this case, because of the state of the remains, the policy was that the press would not be allowed, and that's the Defense Department's standing policy.

The reason why we were able to release a photo is -- it was carefully done so that none of the transfer cases that contained remains were in the picture. It's also the case that because of the units that were involved, there were members of classified units whose identities cannot be revealed publicly, who were in the ceremony and we -- it has to be -- they cannot be shown in a photograph.

So we are able to put those restrictions and control the White House photographer so that the photograph that we released does not cause any of those problems. And obviously we couldn't, for the variety of reasons, bring in the press for the ceremony itself.

Q As you know, U.S. and global stock markets are taking another serious hit today. And this time it's been tied to French -- investor concerns about French banks' exposure to European debt problems. Has the President spoken to, or will he be speaking to, either President Sarkozy or other European leaders to get some reassurance that they've got this in hand?

MR. CARNEY: The President has, as you know, spoken in recent days with a number of European leaders -- with Chancellor Merkel, President Sarkozy, Prime Minister Berlusconi, President Zapatero. He has also, this morning, spoken with Prime Minister Cameron, and is in regular consultation with European leaders on these matters. Secretary Geithner is in regular consultation with his counterparts in Europe. So we obviously are monitoring these events very closely and we continue to believe that the Europeans have the capacity to deal with this problem and encourage them to continue to take actions that deal with it.

Q That conversation this morning with Prime Minister Cameron, was that specifically crisis related, or did he also talk to him about --

MR. CARNEY: I don't have a readout on the details of the conversation. I'm sure there were a number of topics, but I'm sure that this is one of them.

Q Did they discuss the rioting in London --

MR. CARNEY: Again, I don't have a further readout on that. We might have that for you later today.

Q Okay. And another thing is the Fed painted a particularly gloomy picture yesterday. He said the economic growth was weaker than expected, it would stay that way, and that unemployment would only come down gradually. Do White House economists agree with the Fed's assessment?

MR. CARNEY: We, broadly speaking, recognize that the economy has slowed down, that the growth has not been where outside economists as well as inside believed it would be at this stage this year. There have been a variety of reasons, contributors to the headwinds that have caused that to happen, and we're experiencing some of them now that have to do with our first question.

We also continue to believe, as we believe outside analysts continue to believe, that the economy will keep growing, and we need to do what we can to ensure that it does and to ensure that it creates jobs at the fastest pace possible, because this President will not rest until he is confident that every American who wants a job can find a job. And there is no greater focus of his work, of this administration's work, than the economy.

Q Specifically, does the administration agree with the Fed's assessment?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have -- I don't think we've put out our own analysis or forecast for growth going forward since the last time it was done, and obviously, there have been some events that would be taken into account as a new forecast were put together, so I don't have a new forecast for you.

Yes, Jake.

Q Tavis Smiley and Cornell West's Poverty Tour has rolled into D.C. They've been very critical of President Obama with his handling of poverty and joblessness, particularly in the most -- well, in the most destitute communities. Specifically, Tavis Smiley has said that the President has forgotten about the poor. Cornell West has

called the President a "black mascot of Wall Street oligarchs" and a "black puppet of corporate plutocrats." What's the White House -- sorry -- what is the White House view of -- what is the White House view of this criticism from Smiley and West?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would simply say that this President, again, is focused on the economy every day and he is focused on those who are struggling in this economy. Every economic measure that he has proposed and every one that has become law because of his leadership has been geared towards helping those folks who are in the greatest distress because of the recession that we were in, the great recession, worst since the Great Depression, and those who are struggling as we emerge from it.

His focus on the most vulnerable communities was evidenced when he negotiated with congressional leaders late last year on the tax cut extension deal by insisting that, in addition to the payroll tax cut that he insisted be in it so that every American family -- working American family would have on average an extra thousand dollars this year, he insisted on an extension of the earned income tax credit, an extension of the child tax credit -- which disproportionately helps those who are disproportionately in need.

It is why he insisted in the recent debt ceiling deal that Pell Grant funding be protected because those who deserve and qualify for quality higher education but are struggling to be able to pay for it because of their economic circumstances need the assistance that those Pell grants supply.

So this President is very focused on every American who is suffering during these turbulent economic times, and the policies that he's espoused and that he's pushed take into account very seriously those who are most affected.

Q Peter King, the congressman, is calling for an investigation based on a report in Maureen Dowd's column today saying that Sony Pictures moviemakers doing the OBL raid movie have been given top-level access to the most classified -- classified mission in history from an administration that's tried to throw more people in jail for leaking classified administration than the Bush administration. I think Mr. King is less involved, less concerned about the last part. But what's your response to that report -- both King's interest and also the inherent criticism that Maureen Dowd is --

MR. CARNEY: Well, I do have a response to that. First of all, the claims are ridiculous. When people, including you, in this room are working on articles, books, documentaries or movies that involve the President, ask to speak to administration officials, we do our best to accommodate them to make sure the facts are correct. That is hardly a novel approach to the media.

We do not discuss classified information. And I would hope that as we face a continued threat from terrorism, the House Committee on Homeland Security would have more important topics to discuss than a movie.

The information that this White House has provided about that mission has been focused on the President's role in -- there is no difference in the information that we've given to anybody who is working on this topic from what we gave to those of you in this room who worked on it in the days and weeks after the raid itself. In fact, the most specific information we've given from this White House about the actual raid I read to you from this podium. So it's simply false.

Q And last question. You said the President will not rest until the joblessness and the economy are worked out. But the President is obviously going on a vacation. And I'm wondering is there any concern about -- I understand it takes two to tango and you need the Congress to be in Washington. We went over that the other day about whether or not you guys should call Congress to come back. Is there any concern about the impression that the President going to Martha's Vineyard for nine or 10 days might leave with the American people? And also, if this is such an important issue for Speaker Boehner, for Harry Reid, for President Obama, why the R&R?

MR. CARNEY: Well, let me -- because there's a couple of questions embedded in that, let me go to acknowledge that, yes, the President does plan to travel with his family at the end of August to Martha's Vineyard, as he has in the past. And I don't think Americans out there would begrudge that notion that the President would spend some time with his family.

It is also, I think -- as anyone who has covered it in the past, either in this administration or others, there's no such thing as a presidential vacation. The presidency travels with you. He will be in constant communication and get regular briefings from his national security team, as well as his economic team, and he will, of course, be fully capable, if necessary, of traveling back if that were required. It's not very far.

The broader issue is that this President is doing what the American people expect Presidents to do in circumstances like this. Whether the markets are up or down, whether there's volatility or relative stability, this President is focused every day on the economy. And he's -- let's talk about what the American people and Republicans and Democrats expect their Presidents to do. They expect their Presidents to consult with policymakers in circumstances like this. This President is doing that regularly, both on his own team -- I can tell you that later this afternoon he has a meeting with Chairman Bernanke, for example, as he does on a regular basis, to discuss the economy.

He consults -- in a situation where the volatility we're seeing in the markets has to do with a global economic situation and specifically with Europe, he consults with international leaders. As I just mentioned, in recent days he has spoken with the Chancellor of Germany, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, the President of France, the

has spoken with the Chancellor of Germany, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, the President of France, the President of Spain, the Prime Minister of Italy. And he will continue to do that.

He meets with business leaders. Later this week, he will meet -- have another meeting, one of a series he's been having with CEOs, business leaders to discuss the economy. And then he will also -- they expect their President to travel and meet with folks who are actually engaged in the economy in their communities. Tomorrow, he'll go to Holland, Michigan, to highlight something very positive in the economy, which is the investments that, with our assistance, this country is making in clean energy industries that have led to advances in the advanced battery market, which is an important segment of an important area of the economy for the future.

He will, as you know, next week go out into the country, into the Midwest, to three different states where he will meet with small business owners and workers and others to talk about what's happening in their economic -- economically in their communities.

And he will -- and they expect their Presidents to pose specific ideas for what we can do to create jobs now, things that have bipartisan support and won't get or shouldn't get hung up in Congress. This President has done that throughout his presidency, and right now is making clear that there are things that we can do together that have bipartisan support that could create jobs right away, including passage of the free trade agreements, the three of them that are up there; passage of patent reform to unleash entrepreneurial innovative spirit in our economy; extension of the payroll tax cut; extension of unemployment insurance -- things that economists say could create hundreds of thousands of jobs, up to a million.

So there are -- and he will continue -- and they expect their President to continue to look and hunt for new and better -- new and good ideas for economic growth and job creation. This President is doing that.

Yes, Norah.

Q Jay, the President mentioned that he was going to make recommendations to the super committee. Has he made those yet?

MR. CARNEY: No. I mean, he has not. I can assure you that he will. As you know, the committee hasn't formed yet. In fact, not all the members have even been named, although we're getting there. But the President will, as he said, have very specific ideas about where he thinks the committee could come together in a balanced way to significantly reduce the deficit.

I mean, I think it's important to remember that the bipartisan approach that he was working on with the Speaker of the House -- I think the Speaker or somebody else -- I think the Speaker mentioned that had the House-passed budget become law, that it would have solved the S&P's call for \$4 trillion in deficit reduction. But that's wishful thinking. That thing had no chance of passing and coming into law.

What did have a chance on a large scale of passing and becoming law and being signed by this President was a bipartisan compromise -- not a partisan ideal, but a bipartisan compromise that he was working on with the Speaker of the House. And I think that you can expect that the ideas that the President puts forward will be in that spirit. They will be designed to draw bipartisan support because the purpose here is not to say this is what we would do if we controlled everything or we could simply mandate an outcome, and it shouldn't be the approach that the Republicans take either.

Q Has the President been involved with the Democratic leadership in selecting the members for the committee?

MR. CARNEY: I think that we here in the White House, senior members of the team, the President consult regularly with leaders in Congress -- both parties, Democratic leaders -- I don't believe that there's been any specific engagement on that issue.

Q It's solely the choice of the leadership in Congress?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we've made clear that we believe that it's important that whoever is selected take the responsibility seriously, and we are optimistic that that will be the case.

Q And then last me ask you -- Helene, had this in her piece this morning -- but what did -- I wasn't covering the White House then. What did the President mean --

MR. CARNEY: Shout out to Helene.

Q -- when he said that he would rather be a good one-term President than a mediocre two-term President. What does that mean?

MR. CARNEY: This President believes very strongly that you're elected President, a very challenging job, to make tough decisions that are right for the American people and for the economy and for the national security of this country, and that that is your responsibility. You make those decisions according to what you see are the best interests of the country. And it's simply a way of saying that the purpose of being President is not to be reelected,

but to serve your country well.

Yes.

Q When you were mentioning the Fed Chairman's meeting, is that combined with Treasury Secretary Geithner coming in? Are they all meeting together to discuss the economy?

MR. CARNEY: Secretary Geithner does have his regularly scheduled meeting, his weekly meeting with the President later in the afternoon. There is -- the meeting with Chairman Bernanke is a little earlier, although Secretary Geithner will participate in that, as well as Gene Sperling and Bill Daley.

Q Okay. So this coming -- Senator Rand Paul, a Republican, is out saying he wants to have a no-confidence vote in the Senate on Secretary Geithner's leadership. What's the White House response to that, since the President said he wants him to stay on? There are some Republicans who say this is a time for a change; this is a time for, after all this happened, a clean break.

MR. CARNEY: Well, the President has great confidence in Secretary Geithner's substantial capabilities and is glad that the Secretary is staying on at Treasury. I think that a statement like that doesn't really amount to much, because obviously they'd like a different President to be in office. In fact, the leader of the Republicans in the Senate said that that was their number-one objective, right? So the idea that they want members of his team to go shouldn't be all that shocking.

Q On the question of Martha's Vineyard, you seem to dismiss that idea that there is an image problem for the President. But I've noticed in the last couple of days a lot of liberal columnists are starting to come out -- I'm sure you've seen Richard Cohen was in The Washington Post yesterday saying that as the stock market was dropping heavily last week, he said that -- his quote was, "the President was whooping it up at his birthday party and the juxtaposition seemed inappropriate. He does not seem to care." That's Richard Cohen's words.

Maureen Dowd this morning was hitting the President for not coming home from Camp David this weekend to deal both with the downgrade and with the soldiers being so tragically killed. And she said that he, quote, "tacked on his condolences for the soldiers' families to his economic pep talk, in what had to be one of the most inept --

MR. CARNEY: Hey, Ed, I read the paper.

Q Okay, so you read the paper, okay. The question is, is this just liberal carping, or do you think there's constructive criticism and adjustments the President can make here to respond to some of that?

MR. CARNEY: It is the nature of the job that criticism comes in. I think that has been true for any President who's ever held the office, including from the left and the right and the center. We don't spend a lot of time focusing on that, because if you did, you'd spend all your time focusing on it.

The President is focused on what he can do to help the economy grow, help it create jobs, protect America's national security, protect Americans in general -- provide them economic security as well as national security. And that -- again, I would just say that criticism is part of the -- comes with the deal.

Q Okay. Last one on this. Your narrative on Sunday on the shows and then Monday here at the podium was that this was a tea party downgrade. But my question is that the liberal columnists seem to not be jumping on it, and instead they're saying there's a leadership problem here. And it's not just that they might disagree with the tea party on individual issues, but they're saying there's a leadership problem and that it needs to be dealt with here.

MR. CARNEY: Ed, again, I would just repeat what I said, which is that criticism comes in from different quarters, different times. The fact is, when we're talking about the debt ceiling deal and the aftermath, this President made sure as a bottom line that the number-one Republican demand that we go through that charade again within six months, causing even more harm to our economy, was absolutely not acceptable. He said no and he ensured that that will not happen, this debt ceiling will be extended, and using it to play chicken with the full faith and credit of the United States will not happen again through the end of 2012.

He also ensured that we paid down -- made a significant down payment on deficit reduction because he believes this is important. And it's important for the economy, and it's important for progressives to realize that you have to acknowledge that we need to get our deficits under control, because there will not be -- it is not -- we will not be capable, if we can't do that, to ensure that we make the investments we need to protect the most vulnerable Americans and to invest in innovation and other areas of our economy -- education -- to ensure that we grow and create jobs in the future.

There is no question that the reaction to the debt ceiling deal, both with the S&P action and some of the other reaction, has to do with the concern over the apparent dysfunction in Washington that this process demonstrated to Americans and people around the globe. Now, in the end, I think it's important to note that despite everything, we were able to come together and reach an imperfect deal but a deal that ensured that we would not default on our obligations, ensured that we would make a down payment on deficit reduction and set up a process for further deficit reduction.

But there is no question that had there not been a willingness by some in Congress to threaten the full faith and credit of the United States government or hold that hostage to an agenda, we never would have been in that place.

Yes.

Q Thanks, Jay. As you know, Leader Reid's pick of Patty Murray to the bipartisan committee has gotten some criticism. People say that she chairs the Senate Democratic Campaign Committee and therefore it's a conflict of interest. What's the President's reaction? Does he think it's a conflict of interest?

MR. CARNEY: Look, I think that these are small-bore political issues. Elected members of Congress are responsible -- they take an oath; they are responsible to serve their constituents and their country. We expect every member on the committee to take that responsibility seriously, and the mandate that that committee has to be taken by Democrats and Republicans.

And I think that it's just silly criticism. Again, the Senate Minority Leader who's appointing Republican senators to this committee said quite explicitly that his number-one objective in office was to have the President of the United States defeated in 2012. I don't think that Americans around the world think that's what the leaders of their -- of Congress should have as their primary objective. I think they think the leaders in Congress, as well as the leader in the White House, should be focused on the economy.

But you know what, that's okay because we know that we can put aside a lot of the partisan rhetoric and focus on what needs to get done. And we do that, the President does that in this dealings with Senator McConnell and Speaker Boehner and other leaders in Congress. And he expects and believes that members of both parties who are on this committee will do the same.

Q But does he think that she should stop fundraising? Or will he --

MR. CARNEY: No.

Q Going back to Syria for a second. You've stepped up sanctions on Syria. Why not just call for Assad to step down?

MR. CARNEY: Kristen, I think -- I gave a, I think, incredibly eloquent, prolonged answer to that question moments ago. (Laughter.) I don't have anything to add to it.

Q But given that there is ramped-up violence there, at what point does that become a serious --

MR. CARNEY: We have taken a number of actions to increase pressure. And I think that one of the things you have seen in recent days is the international community, including important voices in the region, adding to that pressure. And you can be sure that we have worked towards that goal. So the kind of growing chorus, the growing chorus of criticism aimed at President Assad for his heinous actions is not an accident. It is because we are all watching with horror what he is doing to his own people, and we are working with our international partners to ensure that pressure continues to be placed and is ramped up on President Assad, and we'll continue to do that.

Yes.

Q I understand why extending unemployment insurance provides relief to people who need it, but how does it create jobs?

MR. CARNEY: Oh, it is by -- I would expect a reporter from the Wall Street Journal would know this as part of the entrance exam just to get on the paper -- (laughter.) But the -- no, seriously. It is one of the most direct ways to infuse money into the economy because people who are unemployed and obviously aren't earning a paycheck are going to spend the money that they get. They're not going to save it; they're going to spend it. And unemployment insurance, that money goes directly back into the economy dollar for dollar virtually. So it is -- and when it goes back in the economy, it means that everywhere that those people -- everywhere that that money is spent has added business. And that creates growth and income for businesses that then lead them to making decisions about job -- more hiring.

So there are few other ways that can more directly put money into the economy than providing unemployment insurance.

Q And why since it's been extended have we seen unemployment not drop, in fact?

MR. CARNEY: Well, look, this is "what would have happened" argument. But we have seen is, what is it, 2.4 million private sector jobs created. And this year there's -- I mean, again, this is not just -- I encourage you, and I know that you all have good contacts in that world, but economic analysts wholly unaffiliated with this administration would tell you, and told you back late last year, that the combination of the payroll tax cut and extension of unemployment insurance would have a direct, measurable impact on job creation, so that of the jobs created this year, a certain number -- however many tens or hundreds of thousands of jobs -- can be attributed to those actions

taken and pushed by the President last year, which is why he feels so strongly they ought to be done again as we continue to emerge from this recession.

So that's why he believes very strongly we ought to extend the payroll tax and extend unemployment insurance.

Q And is the best argument that you can put forward to people for these things that if we do this again, it won't necessarily get any better, but it won't get any worse --

MR. CARNEY: Laura, you know that's not how it works. You know that we have to do a variety of things to grow the economy and create jobs. This is one thing that economists of all stripes agree will directly affect growth, and a half percentage point, I believe, in growth is what economists estimate the payroll tax cut would provide. Is it half? Plus the UI? Something like that. Anyway, there's -- and up to a million jobs. So we do that, and we have that positive impact next year.

That doesn't mean that's the only thing we do. And obviously, there are other economic factors that, as we've seen this past year, some which we can control and some we can't. I mean, we can't -- we cannot estimate what a natural disaster that might happen next year, what impact it might have on the global economy. But we can take action that does have a direct impact.

Q One question.

MR. CARNEY: Sure.

Q Just one. Thank you very much. NBC's Mary Ann Ahern reported that Mayor Emanuel "positioned himself inches from my face and pointed his finger directly at my head and asked, how dare I ask where his children would go to school." My question: Is the President regretful about his former close aide's treatment of this lady, or doesn't he care about it?

MR. CARNEY: I haven't heard him discuss it, so I don't have --

Q What do you think? What do you think? What do you think?

MR. CARNEY: I think that's -- I'm sure this has been amply covered by the Chicago press, but I don't have a personal opinion about it.

Yes.

Q Thanks, Jay. The CEOs' meeting with the President, that's on Friday, right?

MR. CARNEY: Correct.

Q Can you tell us a little bit more detail about what's happening --

MR. CARNEY: No, we'll have more details. We don't have those for you yet, but I just wanted to, as part of what I was discussing at the time, mention that that's going to happen on Friday.

Q Can I go back to the Bernanke and Geithner meeting today? Did I understand you to say that the Bernanke meeting is part of a regular series of meetings between the President and Bernanke?

MR. CARNEY: He had met with -- yes.

Q How many times in the last month --

MR. CARNEY: I can get that for you. It's several.

Q And what's the thinking in doing it separately? Geithner will be in the Bernanke meeting, and then there will be a separate Geithner meeting. What's the difference?

MR. CARNEY: The Secretary Geithner meeting is a weekly meeting. I think it was scheduled for yesterday. The President had to go to -- or wanted very much to go to Dover to receive the remains of our fallen servicemen yesterday, so that was just rescheduled for today, and therefore happened to coincide -- be on the same day as the meeting he has with Chairman Bernanke. But they are separate meetings.

Q Can you give us any sense, in terms of the regular meetings between the President and Bernanke, kind of what the point is or what gets done?

MR. CARNEY: They discuss the economy. They discuss the global economy. Obviously, the Fed is an independent body that takes independent actions and so they speak broadly about the economy.

Q And about how often do they try to do it?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I'll have to get to you on the number of meetings they have.

Q Thanks.

Q Thanks, Jay.

MR. CARNEY: Ari.

Q The President is going to be in New York tomorrow night, and I wonder whether he'll have a message specific to Wall Street leaders about the turmoil in the markets this week.

MR. CARNEY: I don't have a preview for his remarks tomorrow. Again, I would just say that we don't -- the President's focus is not on the daily ups and downs of the market, which can be substantial down and can be substantial up. And the focus is on what we can do to grow the economy and create jobs -- what he can do, and what he can do working with Congress to grow the economy and create jobs. And I'm sure that's broadly going to be the focus of any remarks he makes about the economy.

Q Also can you explain why the trip to Dover was kept secret until he landed?

MR. CARNEY: In terms -- that's a good question. I can tell you that it was something that we were advised to do, and I refer you to the Secret Service for issues about presidential security.

Q But it was security-related, not about the narrative, communications?

MR. CARNEY: That's correct. That's correct.

Q Just related to that question, can you just state publicly when you knew -- when you guys knew that the President would be going to Dover, around what time?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I know the President very quickly said he wanted to go, internally, after we learned of the events in Afghanistan and the loss of life. And then it was just a matter of finding out when the remains would be brought back. But we knew for a while that he was -- we were going -- that the President was going to or wanted to go and was going to try to go.

Q And then just the Secret Service advised that you could not make that public until he actually --

MR. CARNEY: Again, I don't want to get into this from the podium about it, but I can assure you that it does not have to do with -- I mean, the President was very proud to go. On Marine One, flying back, somebody on the helicopter said -- somebody who was in the service, in the military service, thanked the President for making the trip. And he looked up and said, "It was my honor to talk to those families. I can think of nothing better to have done today."

So it was -- for anybody who was there -- well, obviously, I guess that would be me in this room -- but it was an incredibly powerful experience. And the courage and sacrifice that the families demonstrated was really remarkable.

Yes.

Q Jay, around the country, there really seems to be a feeling that there is a need for urgency to get something going to get the economy back on track. Given that, can you give us any kind of specific timetable on when the President might be coming up with these ideas that he talked about? Or is it the plan to just wait until Congress has an epiphany and sees the error of their ways?

MR. CARNEY: You can be assured -- I'll go back to what I said before -- that this President is working every day on his top priority, which is the American economy. And there are a variety of ways that Presidents can do that and that the American people expect him to do that, which is consult with policymakers; in this case, because of the global effects that we're experiencing, consult with international leaders; meet with business leaders; travel around in the country to talk to job creators, if you will, out in the country about what they're experiencing; and then propose specific and concrete ideas for growth and job creation -- which he has done throughout his presidency and which he has mentioned recently in speaking with you some ideas that can be acted on, should be acted on right away, that would directly affect economic growth and job creation; and to continue to work on ideas and look for new ideas for increased economic growth and job creation. So he is doing all of those things tirelessly.

Q But there's no feeling that there's any urgency?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have an announcement to make on when -- yes, there's a great feeling of urgency, which is why he's doing that and working around the clock on these issues. And in terms of new proposals that he may announce, I don't have a time to give you, but I can assure you he is working very hard on those issues.

Ann.

Q On the joint committee, has the President asked for or will there be any White House presence, at least observing the operations?

MR. CARNEY: I don't know that we've had that discussion. I think the committee is still being formed and I don't have any information on that.

Yes.

Q Thank you, Jay. As one who stayed up late to report the results on Wisconsin last night, I was dying to know, did the President follow the results in Wisconsin and have any opinion at all on the final result?

MR. CARNEY: I haven't asked him. I don't know. So I don't know that he followed it last night, in any case. I'm sure he's read the paper this morning. But I didn't have a conversation with him about it, I don't know.

Q The other thing I wanted to ask you was, you said at the beginning that the tax cuts in the early part of the last decade contributed mightily to the deficit. Yet figures from the Office of Management and Budget show in the two-year period, 2004-2006, there was a 20-percent jump in revenue over the previous cycle, and that was the largest increase in revenue, OMB said, since the 1965 through '67 cycle. How does -- how do those figures from OMB --

MR. CARNEY: Well, it's a very convenient slice of a figure when what we absolutely know about the OTS, the period under which these tax cuts were instituted, is it was the slowest period of economic expansion in modern time; that middle-class incomes stagnated or declined; that the wealthiest Americans got substantially wealthier; and that overall in that eight-year period there was substantial -- there was rather anemic job creation.

So to the contrary, in the '90s, under the tax rates that preexisted, we saw the largest peacetime expansion in our history and 22 million jobs created. So I would take issue with that analysis.

Q You take issue with the analysis of OMB?

MR. CARNEY: I would take issue of taking that slice and suggesting that somehow, A, the massive tax cuts did not contribute to our deficit, because they unequivocally did; and that those tax cuts created -- or were responsible for what, by any measure, was an anemic period of economic growth.

Yes, Peter.

Q Thank you, Jay. Given the severity of the problem, the economic problem, I think what many of us are asking is, could the President, or should the President, do anything extraordinary -- for example, convene a summit meeting, cut short his vacation, call Congress back into session? Everything you've described shows an attention to the economy but also sort of fits within the normal pattern of presidential action. He often travels the country and talks about the economy. He often meets with Tim Geithner.

MR. CARNEY: I think what the President -- it's a fair question -- what the President is very interested in is those things that will actually be effective, and he's very focused on the things that he can do that can be effective towards helping the economy grow and helping the economy create jobs. And he is doing those things, and he has tasked his team and he is working with his team to look at ideas for further job creation and economic growth.

When you say "extraordinary," I mean, if you're looking -- if you're talking about a stunt, I don't think a stunt is what the American people are looking for. They're looking for leadership and they're looking for a focus on economic growth and job creation.

Yes, in the back.

Q Thank you, Jay. A spokesman for President Saleh of Yemen said today that he will be returning to Sana'a soon. Does that mean that Jon Brennan's efforts to persuade him to stay in Saudi Arabia and to sign a deal has failed?

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, I think -- I don't have a comment on what he said he was going to do. Our position on Yemen and the need for a transition there hasn't changed.

Q He's returning, and you wanted him to sign a deal.

MR. CARNEY: Well, we continue to believe that he should honor the obligations he made and the promises he made to begin that transition.

April.

Q Jay, following up on what Jake asked, what does the President take away when he meets with black leaders like Ben Jealous of the NAACP, Marc Morial of Urban League, and the CBC? It seems like they all have the

same theme -- the urgency for job creation in the black community. What does he take away from them, from those meetings?

MR. CARNEY: Well, he absolutely appreciates those meetings and those conversations, and he conveys what he takes away, which is an incredible passion for and focus on the need to grow our economy and create jobs, and the amount of suffering that is occurring because of the deep recession that we went through and also because of the falling back that the middle class experienced, as well as others, in the previous decade.

So he is -- again, I think I answered this when I responded to Jake's question about what he has fought hard for precisely because of the need to ensure that those who have been hit hardest by hard economic times are getting the support that they need. And that's why he fought for the extension of the Earned Income Tax Credit. That's why he fought for the extension of the Child Tax Credit. That's why he recently instituted the extension of the housing loan forbearance program, because those who have been -- who are struggling to stay in their homes, been unemployed, he believes it was essential to help them. So I think those kinds of efforts do help those in communities that are hardest hit by economic hard times.

Q Congresswoman Marcia Fudge of Cleveland said something that the President had been saying throughout his campaign for the Oval Office. She said that the CBC's job fairs -- traveling job fairs -- were basically a sign of hope for the black community. Does that ring a bell with the President as the black unemployment rate is 15.9 percent, when the overall rate has just peaked above 9 percent?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the differential between African unemployment rate and overall has always been unacceptable to this President. And he -- high rates of unemployment are unacceptable, and that's why it is his focus to do everything that he can and that we can here in Washington to address the need for greater job creation for everyone. And this is his primary focus every day.

Thanks very much, guys.

END 1:34 P.M. EDT