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Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 9/7/2011

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

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MR. CARNEY: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Oh, I've done it again -- wrong book. Thanks. Sorry. I'm going to shuck and jive. Time to shuck and jive. That's the super-secret book with all the information that I can't share with you. I do know that I can -- I wanted to tell you at the top that -- well, I'll wait for the book. But I'll start with a question. Go ahead.

Q On the speech tomorrow night, why won't the President tell the public how many jobs the plan that he's going to present will create? Isn't that an important figure for building support on the Hill and among the public?

MR. CARNEY: Well, first of all, you're presuming that he won't do something.

Q You said yesterday you'd leave that up to --

MR. CARNEY: I also made clear that I'm not going to get into the line-by-line details of the speech.

Q So he still could present a number --

MR. CARNEY: The President feels that the proposals he puts forward tomorrow night will be judged by independent, outside economic analysts to positively affect job growth and economic growth. Full stop. And he will make that case himself. He will certainly -- he certainly understands that added validation will come from those who don't work for him, who aren't affiliated members of his party, but whose job it is to crunch the numbers and to make assessments about whether or not the proposals he put forward do the things that he says they will do.

So he will make the claim that these are the measures that will -- that can be taken, that have historically had bipartisan support, can be acted on very quickly by Congress, and can have a very quick and positive impact on the economy and on employment.

Specific predictions about how much growth and how much job creation I think will come from outside observers who analyze the proposal. I'm not saying that we won't make them as well. I think that the issue, however, will be -- in terms of their credibility will be reinforced by the fact that outside economic analysts, we believe, will assess them that way.

Q But he could make the case himself.

MR. CARNEY: He'll make the case. I'm just not --

Q Specifically on job numbers?

MR. CARNEY: You're getting to individual sentences in the speech, which I don't want to preview for you. He will make the case very aggressively that measures he puts forward tomorrow night are the kinds of things that will help spur economic growth, that will lead to greater and faster job creation in the United States. And those are the two things that Americans across the board are demanding. And they believe that Washington, of late, has, rather than being helpful in achieving those goals, has been detrimental, especially this past summer during the debt ceiling fiasco. So he will be very aggressive in making that case.

Q When you talk about the plan being able to be scored by CBO, or have any specific dollar amount attached to it, does that mean the President is actually going to send a bill to Congress? Or is he going to leave legislative language to lawmakers?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I don't want to get into the specific elements of the speech in too much detail. It will be a -- he will put forward, both in his speech and in supporting material, a very detailed series of proposals to grow the economy and create jobs. How the process moves forward in terms of engaging Congress and working with Congress to pass those measures I will leave for a later date. But you can be sure that they will be specific, they will be measurable, they will be paid for, and they will be, by any objective standard, the kinds of measures that have enjoyed bipartisan support in the past.

And I think that is a real test here. It is one thing, as we've seen in the past, to say here is my plan, which everyone out here knows has no chance of clearing Congress because the elements in it don't have bipartisan support, there's no evidence of historical bipartisan support -- or you can put forward ideas that meet that test and create jobs and grow the economy. That's what the President will do.

Q Can you tell us how long the speech is going to be?

MR. CARNEY: I think it will be engrossing from start to finish. (Laughter.)

Q On another topic, the Pentagon today announced that it was raising security levels at military bases out of precaution because of the 9/11 anniversary. Is there anything that the White House or the President specifically is doing to deal with potential threats or security precautions out of this anniversary?

MR. CARNEY: As a matter of fact, I can tell you that yesterday the President convened a meeting in the Situation Room with senior members of his homeland security team to ensure that all necessary homeland security measures, precautions are being taken in advance of the upcoming 10th anniversary of 9/11.

As you mentioned, you've seen the report about the Department of Defense. I think they've spoken to that and the measures they're taking regarding military installations in the United States. This is a precautionary measure, and we don't have any specific, credible threats. But obviously, this is a significant anniversary. Al Qaeda and others have expressed interest in anniversaries in the past, so we remain ever vigilant through the anniversary and beyond.

So the meeting chaired by the President in the Situation Room occurred yesterday. This is part of a series of meetings that have happened over the past four months, some involving the President, others run by John Brennan -- his Homeland Security advisor, counterterrorism advisor -- all working up towards this anniversary, to ensure that we're doing everything we should be doing to safeguard the homeland.

Yes, sir.

Q Jay, will the President's job package tomorrow night be worth more than \$300 billion?

MR. CARNEY: I am not going to get into specific numbers about the cost of the proposals he puts forward. I will say, as I've said before, that they will be paid for; that he will put forward measures that Congress can take as part of passing this jobs and growth package to ensure that those measures are paid for.

The important factor here is not the top line number; it is the substance underneath the number. And as I was just telling Julie, the substance here will be a series of measures that should have and have had in the past bipartisan support; that have been judged in the past and will be judged beginning tomorrow night to have the kind of positive economic impact that we absolutely need right now to spur growth and create jobs. And he will call on Congress to act.

Because I don't think, and he doesn't think, that members of Congress, whether they're in the House or the Senate, are coming back this week, having heard from their constituents that they don't want any action taken on the economy, it's not a problem, let it go. I think they've heard the opposite. And they're also enormously frustrated when Washington doesn't just do nothing, but actually causes harm to the economy, which is exactly what happened this summer when a slice of the Congress held Washington hostage in pursuit of an ideological victory.

Q Can you say without getting specific whether that number might be in the right ballpark?

MR. CARNEY: I cannot.

Q When you say that the proposal will be paid for, what does that mean exactly? Will it be paid for over 10 years --

MR. CARNEY: As part of his proposal, the President will identify specific, scorable measures that will ensure that the jobs and growth measures are paid for.

Q Over a certain period of time or --

MR. CARNEY: Well, everything is over a -- everything is obviously over a certain period of time. The growth -- I'm not going to get into the specifics about how that plays. But obviously every ounce of economic growth won't happen the day after it's passed, and every job will not be created in the week after. The plan that the President puts forward, the proposals will be aimed at the most impact that can be achieved in the earliest possible time in terms of effect on the economy, effect on jobs.

As I said in the past, the President is committed to -- as you saw this summer during our trials and tribulations with the debt ceiling negotiations -- the President is absolutely committed to significant deficit and debt reduction. He remains so. And while he will identify elements that -- will make clear that the jobs and growth package can be acted on, should be acted on, right away, and can be paid for and should be paid for right away, he will also make it clear that this is part of his longer-term vision about getting our deficits under control, getting our debt-to-GDP ratio under control, because he believes that is vital to our long-term economic growth -- not because it is in and of itself a good thing, although it is in terms of global and domestic confidence in the economy, it is also essential so that we can ensure that we are able to make the kinds of investments and invest in education, infrastructure and innovation that will allow us to grow and compete.

So this is all part of package. And what he will make clear is that you don't -- this is not an either-or proposition. We must, and we can, act to grow the economy and create jobs now. And we must, and we can, in a responsible way, pass the measures that will ensure that we reduce our deficits and get control over our debt in the long term.

Q That second part -- just a final follow-up -- tomorrow night is focusing on the jobs package. When will he lay out his proposal for the super committee on debt and deficit?

MR. CARNEY: I think I've said from here, relatively soon, and I'll stick with that. I don't have a date certain for you.

Q -- next week?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have a date certain for you yet.

Q So on the debt and deficit super committee, a lot of Democrats are concerned that he's going to propose some deep cuts or changes to Medicare and Medicaid. What's the White House say to Democrats? These are key Democratic priorities.

MR. CARNEY: This President has been and remains absolutely committed to protecting Medicare, Social Security, Medicaid, rather than ending it as we know it. He has also made clear that we have to make some tough choices in order to get our deficits and debt under control. He demonstrated his willingness to make very hard choices in his negotiations with the Speaker of the House in pursuit of a sweeping so-called grand bargain that included -- had it come to fruition -- that included revenues, as well as entitlement reform. And broadly speaking, that remains his commitment.

I'm not going to get into specifics about what will or will not be in the President's proposals on deficit reduction. But his approach to this is we have to do -- this is an important issue because it goes to our long-term economic health. We have to do it in a balanced way to ensure that no single segment of society is overly burdened by it; that it is simply unfair in order to preserve or extend or deepen tax cuts for the wealthiest, the most fortunate Americans, that we have to end Medicare, turn it into a voucher program. That's not fair. He doesn't believe that's fair.

He believes that if you approach this issue in a balanced way, you can ensure that no one is unduly burdened, that everyone shares in the burden and shares in the ensuing prosperity that comes from getting our fiscal house in order. That remains his overall set of principles.

Q And then just to revisit something from yesterday that you left open-ended -- any plan now to meet with Boehner and Cantor tomorrow ahead of the speech?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have any meetings to announce or phone calls to announce. I think that the -- look, the President has a good relationship, a fine working relationship with the Speaker of the House, other members of leadership, obviously, of both parties. He has met on numerous occasions with those leaders throughout this year. I think that he demonstrated his commitment to working with Congress to try to achieve big things this summer, and he will continue to demonstrate a willingness to do that.

He will, tomorrow night, put forward a jobs and growth package that he is quite certain responds to what the American people are demanding and is responsive to what the American economy demands. He will call on Congress to take up those proposals because they are sensible, they are bipartisan and they are paid for. He obviously understands that there may be other ideas and he will be willing to hear them and want to hear them.

And I'm sure those conversations and meetings will continue through the fall. But I do not believe that anyone out there in the country thinks that the answer to getting Washington out of gridlock is having another round before this speech of meetings in the Cabinet Room.

Jake.

Q You talked about the meeting yesterday in the Situation Room with senior members of the national security team. Can you tell us who was there?

MR. CARNEY: Obviously Homeland Security Advisor, assistant to the President, John Brennan; I think head of the NCTC; others -- Janet Napolitano, the Secretary of DHS. I can give you the full list. But it would be everybody who has -- all the senior people with areas of responsibility on homeland.

Q Panetta?

MR. CARNEY: I can get -- I could make a lot of assumptions, get 95 percent of it right and then get one wrong, so I don't want to list them here.

Q Can you tell us any other steps taken other than the military installations in the U.S. put on alert?

MR. CARNEY: There's no specific steps that I can tell you about. I refer you to -- I think DHS has talked a little bit about this. Again, there are no specific threats to which we are responding. But we are obviously very vigilant and are taking all the precautionary measures, both seen and unseen, that we believe are necessary around this

are taking all the precautionary measures, both seen and unseen, that we believe are necessary around this anniversary.

Q Picking up on the point that Jessica was just talking about, I understand the feeling that nobody out there would feel like more meetings in the Cabinet Room would necessarily lead to any progress when it comes to negotiating on the Hill. But is it the contention of the White House that the best way to introduce a package that can get through Congress is to not reach out and talk to them?

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, I have not said that the President won't reach out. I simply have no announcements to make about meetings or phone calls at this point. My point is that he will put forward a series of proposals that, by any objective measure and observation by you and others, are the kinds that have enjoyed bipartisan support in the past. That will be evident upon the delivery of the speech.

What is not required is for the President to negotiate in advance the elements of a jobs package with members of Congress -- any more than you all called on, or your colleagues up on the Hill called on, House Republicans to negotiate with the White House or House Democrats on HR1 prior to its release, or on the Ryan budget proposal, or on the proposals that have been put forward recently by the House. So I mean, I think that you have to -- the standard has to apply here.

I think whether or not a proposal is seriously designed to garner bipartisan support can be judged by the elements of the proposal. If you put something on the table and say, here's our plan; no, we didn't talk to anybody about it but judge it as you will, and everybody looks at it and understands that it has no chance of getting support in Congress, then you can make your analysis accordingly.

You will see in the proposals that the President puts forward that he is very serious about taking measures that are responsible, that have enjoyed bipartisan support, and are the kinds that have direct and quick impact on the economy and on jobs.

Q I would think the argument is that obviously we're not in the same time than we were in the past --

MR. CARNEY: There were Republican proposals that have come out in the last couple of weeks. So, again, there were no invitations to -- by the press that we should --

Q No, no, no, I'm trying to make a different point, I'm sorry. I mean the idea that a lot of what the President is going to propose, all of which has enjoyed bipartisan support in the past, but we're not in the same time --

MR. CARNEY: Again, you all will be able to judge whether or not the kinds of things the President is proposing, which all will be paid for, are the right answers and are the kinds of things that if Congress were serious about taking action, Congress would act on.

Q Right. But when you say that -- the point I'm trying to drill down into is the idea that they will be paid for as opposed to previous stimulus plans in the last 10 years, 20 years, that weren't necessarily paid for. When you say it's going to be paid for, how, specifically, is it going to be paid for? Is it going to be paid for by contemporaneous cuts and tax increases? Is it going to be paid for by -- and do we expect Congress in five years to raise this much money, in --

MR. CARNEY: No, it will be specifically paid for.

Q Okay, thank you.

MR. CARNEY: Norah.

Q On that very question -- it will be paid for with immediate cuts?

MR. CARNEY: I didn't say -- I said it would be paid for.

Q Or long-term deficit cuts?

MR. CARNEY: I'm not going to get into the specifics. Again -- "immediate" means what exactly? And the fact of the matter is, is they will be -- the President will make clear and the supporting material that we supply to you will make clear that he is proposing both policies that Congress should act on that will help the economy grow, will create jobs, and a mechanism to pay for them that's credible and measurable. And I think that meets a standard that the American people expect him and Congress to meet.

Q Can you address, then, the concern that's been raised that if the \$300 billion-plus that the President is going to propose, if that's the amount, that if it were not immediately paid for, it runs the risk of busting the debt ceiling early before next year's election?

MR. CARNEY: Again, it will be paid for. We're not going to bust the debt ceiling. It is important to remember throughout these analyses as you go forward -- because there are a lot of complexities involved in short-term measures, long-term measures. Let me take you back, painfully I'm sure, to the summer when we were discussing

grand bargains and other proposals to get a hold of our deficits and debt. There were upfront, near-term discretionary cuts involved in all of the proposals, big and small, and the ultimate one that was agreed on and signed into law by the President when a grand bargain fell through. There were also discussions of entitlement reforms and tax reforms, balancing of revenue and other measures, cuts and revenues, that obviously did not take effect immediately and relied on a duration, on triggers, and that sort of thing.

So it is a false assumption to say that, well, wait a second, where's your -- why aren't you reducing the deficit and debt by \$3 to \$4 trillion tomorrow? That was never envisioned by anybody who was engaged in the serious negotiations, either outside through Simpson-Bowles or Domenici-Rivlin, or on the inside with the Speaker of the House and the President of the United States.

Q Is the President hopeful that he can consult members of Congress before he delivers this address tomorrow night?

MR. CARNEY: I think -- I feel like I've answered this about a half dozen times. I don't have any announcements to make about phone calls or meetings. When I do, I'll make them. The President consults regularly with, has spent more time with, the leaders of Congress in recent months than he has with a lot of folks, including those much closer to him. And I think that he will continue to meet and consult with rank-and-file members and leaders as we go forward as he pushes Congress to act responsibly and do something that the American people want done, which is to get our economy growing and get jobs created.

Q It was reported today that the White House team briefed Democratic strategists and lobbyists about details of the President's plan, jobs plan. Is that true?

MR. CARNEY: We have meetings regularly with a variety of groups from the outside. And I would steer you away from the idea that we briefed anybody in great detail about the plan from the outside.

Q And did the President's press team brief columnists from newspapers about specifics of the President's plan exclusively?

MR. CARNEY: Again, we have meetings regularly. We have meetings with you, members of the White House press corps, as well as others in the press with some regularity, with different levels of ground rules in terms of the information and how it can be used and when it can be used, and that's an ongoing process.

Q Jay, just a practical question of how you get it done by the end of the year, since the President is going to tell the American people it's urgent, we got to get it done. Normally you do a joint session speech in January or early February, State of the Union. Now you're doing it in September, different timetable, and you've got the super committee, as you've been talking -- you want to do job creation and you want to do deficit reduction. They're going to be busy in November, December, trying to do deficit reduction. You've just laid out a moment ago in answer to a lot of these questions about how the debt ceiling negotiations on that one piece took months. How can you expect the super committee to get its work done and this jobs plan to be acted on in essentially four months, by the end of the year, when Congress can't seem to get --

MR. CARNEY: You mean they can't do two things in four months?

Q You've said --

MR. CARNEY: It's hard if you don't work more than two days a week, I understand, but -- (laughter.)

Q You've said from this podium --

MR. CARNEY: That was just a joke. (Laughter.) No, look -- Ed, I think there's an important part of your question that I want to address. You're absolutely right -- the super committee's timetable is: Come up with a product by Thanksgiving and then Congress act on it by December, before the holidays in December -- which is precisely why the President will come and say, we need to act on measures to grow the economy and create jobs sooner than that. And so he will propose to Congress that they need to act sooner on jobs and economic growth.

He will also, relatively soon, put forward his specific ideas for how we -- to the super committee, and Congress in general -- for how we go big on deficit reduction and debt reduction -- bigger, in fact, than has been mandated for the super committee.

So they are linked but they are separate. So he expects that if Congress comes back to Washington with a seriousness of purpose, a sense of urgency about the need to do something on the American economy, do something for the American people, they will act quickly -- before Thanksgiving, hopefully -- on jobs and growth. And the super committee will go about its business with great seriousness and sense of purpose, will take his proposals into account, and produce a balanced, bipartisan product that Congress can then act on that represents significant deficit and debt reduction.

Q But you've been mentioning they only work two days a week -- maybe in jest -- but the President on the bus tour was talking -- suggesting they can't walk and chew gum normally, that they have a hard time getting stuff done. Ray LaHood was at this podium a few weeks ago; they couldn't get the FAA bill done. Isn't this kind of a lot for them to do in

four months when they usually --

MR. CARNEY: Well, no, it's not. There have been periods when Congress has done even more in that period of time. I understand that these are significant measures. The proposals the President will put forward tomorrow night will be very clear, very specific, very measurable, and can be evaluated and then acted on every quickly.

The package of proposals -- the ideas around anybody's proposals for balanced, long-term deficit and debt control obviously contain a lot of elements, which is, I assume, why Congress, in its infinite wisdom, gave the super committee more time to try to digest that and try to come up with a product.

But going to jobs and economic growth, look, Washington needs to act. The American people outside of the beltway are tired of excuses. They want action. And there will be no reason that Congress can't act on this unless politics gets in the way.

Q Republican Senator Roy Blunt today said that he thinks the President raised expectations too much with a joint session speech, and he had a quip saying that the President -- said of the joint session -- he should have gone to a truck body shop like Mitt Romney to unveil his plan, go out into the country and do it. And you have a growing number of Republicans who say they're not even going to the speech. You set the framework last week by saying he's doing a joint session because he wants to go to Congress and put it on their agenda. A, how is he going to do that when a growing number are not even going to bother to show up, the Speaker is not going to have an official Republican response? And, B, are they being disrespectful to the President by just not showing up?

MR. CARNEY: The American people will judge. The American people expect Washington to take sensible measures to grow the economy and to create jobs, and to pay for it. The President will put forward a proposal to do that. He'll do it in front of Congress because he is calling on Congress to act.

And I don't think you can -- do you really think outside in the country that Americans think we're raising expectations too high because we think the American economy is the most important subject to talk about right now? I don't think so. Now, maybe members of Congress don't think so, but they'll have to answer to their constituents on that.

We believe it's imperative for Congress to act. We believe the American people are demanding that Congress act and pay for its actions, and do it -- and take measures that positively help the economy and create jobs.

So it's for you guys to decide and to judge Congress as to whether or not -- how they respond to this and what they're going to do, because I can guarantee you, come December, if Congress hasn't acted and members go back for that recess, they're going to get an earful, because of the expectations I think that are out there that people -- this is an anxious time. People are concerned about the economy, they're concerned about jobs, and they want Washington to stop causing problems, and to start -- to get with the program and help the situation.

Q Very last, quick thing. A colleague is doing a story on Gibson guitars. You probably heard about this story.

MR. CARNEY: I used to have one.

Q There you go. You can bring it here one day. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seized a million dollars' worth of exotic woods they were going to use to make guitars. And the company is saying that basically if the wood had been sent to India to be finished and then was imported here, it would be legal. So they think the Obama administration is encouraging jobs to be shipped to India, number one. And number two, there's been an allegation that because the CEO is Republican that the government is targeting the company. What does the administration say?

MR. CARNEY: I honestly don't -- this is the first I've heard of the story so I'll have to take the question, Ed.

Q Senator Sessions just came out today, Jay, and said that he was concerned about some of what he had heard about the plan so far, even though it hasn't been announced yet. But what does that say about the prospects of this plan actually having bipartisan support, ultimately?

MR. CARNEY: That Senator Sessions has concerns about it? Again, I think what you will hear from the President are a series of proposals that have historically enjoyed bipartisan support and that Congress should, can, and we think must act on. And if senators or House members have other ideas about what we can do to grow the economy in the short term, to improve the employment situation in the short term, they should put them forward. And we will be absolutely glad to hear them, as will other members of Congress.

So, again, I don't think one senator's opinion of a plan that he hasn't even heard is necessarily indicative of how it will be handled by Congress.

Q And I spoke with an economist who said that the ugly truth -- those were her words -- is that it really is hard for policymakers to create jobs in an economic climate like this. How would you react to that?

MR. CARNEY: Well, this is a good point. We have been digging ourselves out of this hole since the moment the President was sworn into office, even as the hole was still being dug, caused by a series of policy decisions and other economic factors that led to the greatest recession since the Great Depression. I believe there's one senator today who really must think the American people aren't very smart because he was making allegations or

suggestions about net job loss since the President took office. Every American understands that the 8 million jobs that this economy lost during this recession came because of a recession that began and was caused by policy decisions made prior to this President coming into office.

And since his policy proposals have taken effect -- you can argue with whether they were right, you can argue with whether there were other policy proposals that may have been more effective, that's a fine argument to have -- but since they have taken effect, this economy has created over 2.1 million jobs, private sector.

But going to your point, this is a deep hole. And there is no silver bullet. There is no measure that can be taken by Washington that will solve the problem. This is an all-hands-on-deck proposition. It involves ways that we can help partner with the private sector, that we can encourage private -- I mean, really, this is mostly about encouraging private sector growth; encouraging, through the payroll tax cut, for example, that we've talked about in the past that's been in effect this year, giving American families more money to make ends meet, which gets injected back into the economy, which helps small businesses that receive that money, which encourages them to hire and to grow.

That's how -- we're not talking about the government creating jobs here. We're talking about Washington taking positive actions so that the private sector can create jobs, as well as take action so that we can mitigate the impact of job loss in other areas.

Q Looking ahead to a year from now, what do you think will -- the White House will be able to point to, to say that this plan really did work, really did have an impact?

MR. CARNEY: I think that if we can say that Congress took these proposals, acted on them swiftly, and the President signed them into law, that those measures collectively will have had a measurable, positive impact on economic growth, and a measurable, positive impact on employment. That has been the case with some of the measures we took in December, in conjunction with Republicans. It is certainly the case with the measures that we took in 2009, including the Recovery Act. And we expect that to be the case if Congress decides that it shares the sense of urgency that the American people have.

Q And finally, I know it's the night before the speech, but does the President plan to watch the debate?

MR. CARNEY: I haven't asked him.

Q Will any of the President's proposals -- or will all of his proposals need to be acted on by Congress, or are there some actions he can take?

MR. CARNEY: I think that's a good question. I've said in the past, and some people followed up, and I want to make clear that I wasn't trying to hint slyly at something -- but obviously the President has within his power the ability to take certain actions administratively that can help the economy in different areas, whether that's in housing -- I pointed to some of the measures he took this summer to assist unemployed folks in their efforts to stay in their homes. That has a positive economic impact, obviously. There are other measures that he can take.

But the reason he's going to Congress -- to go back to Ed's question -- to give this speech is because there are big parts of his jobs and growth package that require congressional action, that require legislation, that require Washington to work in the way that the American people overwhelmingly expect it to work, in a sensible, pragmatic, bipartisan way.

Q Will there be some -- just to put a little finer point on it -- will there be proposals, without getting specific, that he'll discuss tomorrow night in front of Congress that won't need congressional approval?

MR. CARNEY: I encourage you to --

Q Listen in.

MR. CARNEY: -- listen in -- yes.

Q And then just a logistical question, which is -- (laughter) -- I know --

MR. CARNEY: I promise it will be done before kickoff. So the President, you, I, and so many other Americans can watch the start of the NFL season.

Q Will there be any -- when the super committee meets for its first meeting tomorrow and then subsequent meetings, will there be any White House people in there? I know with -- I know when Biden was leading the talks -- that's different. Obviously, Vice President Biden was there, his staff members. But how will the White House, just logistically, get updates about what's discussed in the meetings? Will there be --

MR. CARNEY: Sorry, in which meetings?

Q The super committee meetings.

MR. CARNEY: I don't have an answer to that. I'm sure we -- obviously there will be members of Congress in the meetings who we'll be able to talk to and get updates. I don't know whether -- what the staff presence will be, either congressional staff or administration staff.

Q All right. Thanks, Jay.

MR. CARNEY: Anybody? Kate.

Q Does the President agree with Cantor and Boehner, this idea that the 10 percent -- states have to set aside 10 percent for certain highway construction projects that are lower priority, and so their point in this letter that they sent to the President yesterday was that the 10 percent should be freed up for big projects?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would simply say without getting into specifics about -- that were outlined in that letter, that as I think I mentioned yesterday, that the spirit of compromise that was evident in that letter is welcomed here at the White House. The idea that there are things we can and must and should do together to address the need to grow the economy and create jobs is welcomed. And we obviously read their letter with interest.

Q But does he agree with that specific --

MR. CARNEY: Again, I'm not going to get into the specific proposal at this time.

Q And also, on the speech tomorrow night, we know that education is going to be a big part of it. Can you give some indication of how big a part the aid to governments will be for --

MR. CARNEY: I'm not going to get into specifics about the elements of the speech, beyond those that the President has already mentioned.

Q And just finally, on Libya, does the administration plan to send U.S. personnel to Libya to look at missiles and secure chemical weapons, as House Intel Committee chair Mike Rogers has suggested they should?

MR. CARNEY: We are obviously -- we and NATO have been monitoring both the chemical weapons and the -- the chemical weapon stocks and the conventional weapons regularly, and we're talking with the TNC. I don't have any announcements to make about personnel being dispatched.

Q Can I follow up? Jay, can you make any further comment or update us on this administration's outreach effort to Niger and other countries in the region in an effort to arrest the Qaddafi loyalists -- the fugitive loyalists who are seeking safe haven?

MR. CARNEY: We're obviously monitoring the reports about Niger. We would remind anyone approached by the Qaddafi family seeking refuge that U.N. Security Council Resolution 1970 imposes a travel ban on Qaddafi, his family members and several other regime officials. The sanctions committee must be notified immediately if anyone on the travel ban list has entered another country. I'm not confirming any reports about Niger, but I would make that point more broadly.

Our ambassador and her team in Niamey are in regular contact with senior Nigerien government officials. The ambassador also relayed our concerns at the highest levels yesterday, and we have urged the Nigeriens to detain regime members subject to prosecution and to adhere to U.N. sanctions that prohibit the travel of Qaddafi, his family members, and the sanctioned -- and his sanctioned funds.

Q Thank you.

MR. CARNEY: Steven.

Q The President has spent a lot of time in this administration engaging Turkey, so what is his view of the estrangement right now between Turkey and Israel? What U.S. interests do you see at stake, and what role is he playing to try and ease the tensions?

MR. CARNEY: You're correct, the President has engaged with Turkey, has a good relationship with his counterpart there. The President believes -- I'll just take it back to the broad principles here about what needs to happen in the overall peace process, which is that the two sides here -- I mean, the fundamental issue here is the need to resolve the dispute between the Palestinians and the Israelis, which goes back to our view that both sides need to return to direct negotiations, and that a two-state solution and a long-term peace can only be achieved through direct negotiations. I think that is what we remain focused on.

Q At the beginning of the summer, Jeff Zients at OMB submitted recommendations for reorganizing trade agencies. Is that part of the President's job plan, or where is that --

MR. CARNEY: I don't remember announcing that from here. (Laughter.) I don't have any -- again, I'm not going to get into specifics about -- any more specifics about the President's speech tomorrow. And I don't have any update on the process being led by Jeff Zients.

Mark.

Q Thanks. Jay, what does the White House think of the Republicans' foregoing an official response to the President's speech tomorrow night?

MR. CARNEY: I think this might have been mentioned by Ed in his question, and I would simply like to say that we are focused on the main event here, not on the sideshows. There is an inordinate amount of attention here in Washington paid to the stuff that doesn't matter, the stuff that Americans don't care about, the stuff when they're forced to listen to it and hear about it drives them crazy, understandably. And this is one of them.

It is -- look, there will be ample opportunity for members of Congress to express their views on the President's proposals, to put forward their own proposals if they have constructive ones that might garner bipartisan support and be signed into law, that will have an immediate, significant impact on the economy and job creation. The President is focused, we are focused, on the speech he will give tomorrow on his proposals and on the urgent need for Congress to get its act together and do something.

Q Then you disagree with Leader Pelosi when she said the Republican decision is disrespectful?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I think that Republicans will have ample opportunity to express their opinions about the package, hopefully to express positive opinions about the package, because as I said, the elements of it will have enjoyed bipartisan support in the past, and will be, by any objective analysis, reasonable, pragmatic and effective, and paid for, and where they do that -- the venue is really -- doesn't matter to us.

Q May I follow on that?

MR. CARNEY: Sure. Oh, Christi, sorry, I got confused. Christi first -- first Christi, because I promised.

Q Thank you. Back on the top-line number of the jobs plan, whatever it may be, would it be higher if the President thought it stood a chance of passage, or is that the number that, independent of all political considerations, he wants?

MR. CARNEY: The President will put forward a series of proposals that he believes will have -- are the right answers to the most important question, which is, what can Washington do to help the economy grow and to help the private sector create jobs and to help those who have lost their jobs deal with that situation.

So the size of the package is -- meets that test. In other words, it is not -- the number doesn't drive this. It's what can we do that's responsible, pragmatic, that's paid for, that's reasonable, that should have bipartisan support, that could have a direct impact.

I mean, there's not an infinite universe of things you could do even if you had endless amounts of money, right? So these are thought-through proposals that we believe, and we believe others will analyze, have direct positive impact on the economy and on jobs in the short term.

Q To follow up on a few questions -- will the President make a genuine outreach to Republicans or does he expect continued stalemate? And is he dismayed by the hyperpartisanship going on now in Congress?

MR. CARNEY: The President has addressed the second question I think fairly often in the last several weeks. And you know what, it's not about him. It's about the American people being frustrated by the political posturing, the hyperpartisanship, however you describe it, the sideshows, the desire to score political points over the desire to do something that's right for the American economy and the American people.

On the other -- he will call on Congress, which is obviously a Republican and Democratic institution, with one house controlled by one party and another controlled by the other, to take action, collectively, in a bipartisan way. So the answer is yes, he will reach out to Republicans to act on his proposals because they're the right thing for the American people, the right thing for the American economy.

Q Thanks, Jay.

Q Jay.

MR. CARNEY: Abby, one more.

Q Anything on the bombing in India?

MR. CARNEY: Sorry -- Abby.

Q Thanks, Jay. Quick question on the pay-for question. You mentioned a lot that the proposals themselves are going to be bipartisan, perhaps things that Republicans have supported in the past. Will the pay-fors also meet that bipartisan criteria?

MR. CARNEY: Well, look, I think that I will leave that for you to judge. The issue is the President will put forward a series of proposals that, by any standard, grow the economy and help the economy create jobs. They will be paid for, which is what the American people expect and what the President believes is the right thing to do. And we believe that his pay-fors will be -- to use inside-the-beltway congressional language -- will be supported by the American people.

Now, as I've said in the past, our interest is in taking action now because the economy needs it; the American people demand it. We are open to other ideas. If they're constructive and they're not about political posturing -- and if they're not proposals that have no immediate effect on the economy, even if you judge them to be good -- that's not what we're looking for here. We need to have something that has an impact in the near term -- and if they're not retreats of the very policies that got us into this mess. I don't think the American people are looking for that.

So, having said that, again, you guys will be the judge. Outside economists will be the judge of the merits of the program.

Thanks very much.

END

2:33 P.M. EDT