

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

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Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 9/15/2011

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.

*White House officials contacted Speaker Boehner's office to inform him of the President's plan to travel to the Brent Spence Bridge shortly before the trip was publicly announced.

1:00 P.M. EDT

MR. CARNEY: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thanks for coming to the briefing today. Before I take your questions, I have a quick announcement.

On Thursday, September 22nd, the President will travel to Cincinnati, Ohio, to deliver remarks at the Brent-Spence Bridge, urging Congress to pass the American Jobs Act now, so that we can make much-needed investments in infrastructure projects across the country and put more Americans back to work. The Brent-Spence Bridge is on one of the busiest trucking routes in North America, yet it is considered "functionally obsolete" because it is in need of so many significant repairs. If Congress passes the American Jobs Act, we can put more Americans back to work, while getting repairs like this one done.

We'll have more details for you as they become available.
With that --

Q You haven't arranged for it to collapse during the event, have you? (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: Certainly not.

Ben.

Q Jay, thanks. I have three topics, so I will go quickly; try to. On foreign affairs, the Palestinians said today that they plan to press ahead with their bid for statehood at the Security Council, rebuffing efforts by the U.S. and others to prevent that, for reasons that you all laid out before. Is the White House now conceding that that's the state of play? Or is there a view that there's still some time to change minds?

MR. CARNEY: Ben, as you know, we have two envoys in the region, as we speak, who are engaged in concerted diplomacy to try to get both parties to -- down the road again, and together again, at least on the path towards direct negotiations. Because the President firmly believes -- and, in fact, we believe it is self-evident -- that the only way to resolve the issues between the Palestinians and the Israelis and to ultimately create a Palestinian state is through direct negotiations.

The Palestinians will not, and cannot, achieve statehood through a declaration at the United Nations. It is a distraction, and, in fact, it's counterproductive. That remains our position. We continue to be focused with great intensity on the need to get Israelis and Palestinians together again in direct negotiations, because that is the path towards a two-state solution and Palestinian statehood.

Q On the economic front here, you guys have made clear that Social Security is not going to be part of the President's recommendations to the super committee. Previously, as part of the default debate, the President had talked about being willing to make changes to Medicare, raising the eligibility in the future and also deeper means testing. Are those now scrapped as well, or is it possible that they could be part of this package?

MR. CARNEY: What I want to make clear is the -- on Social Security, the President, from the beginning, has stated that we need to take measures to strengthen Social Security for the long term, but it is not a driver of our near-term deficit problems, and it can be pursued on a parallel track.

As to the other programs that are contributors to our deficit and debt issues, that are a focus of negotiations to find a substantial package of proposals that will deal with our deficit and long-term debt, the President discussed that in his speech last week to Congress, and he will be putting forward a series of proposals on Monday that will deal with a number of areas that are essential to be dealt with if we want to get our deficits and debt under control.

Q Does that include --

MR. CARNEY: Well, I'm not going to --

Q But you're not waving us off --

MR. CARNEY: -- negotiate a way -- I mean, I'm not going to discuss the details of that proposal. I'll let the President do that on Monday. The point is -- the distinction here is that Social Security we have never seen as a driving factor in terms of our near-term deficit problems. And that's why it is separate from the other entitlement programs and other issues that are a part of that, including spending through our tax code.

Q I had one question for you on Solyndra. I know you've talked about how the White House is cooperating with investigations, and yesterday you took questions about it and said it was a matter of scheduling. But I guess my question is perhaps bigger picture -- is the President at all chagrined or embarrassed by this? I mean, this is something of a mess here, regardless of the cooperation with the investigation. What are his personal feelings about this story?

MR. CARNEY: The President is absolutely committed to the idea that the United States must compete in the cutting-edge technologies of the 21st century. We have a choice to make as a nation -- because we will be buying renewable energy products, whether it's wind, biofuel, solar, advanced battery technology -- we're going to be buying that stuff. Do we want to buy it with a stamp on it that says, "Made in America," or are we going to buy it from the Chinese or from other countries?

We have to be aggressive in competing in the global economy. And high-tech, clean-energy industries are going to be key to winning this century economically. So he is absolutely committed to doing that.

The necessity of doing that, the necessity of having the federal government involved in that, was seen even by the previous administration. What we did is increase our commitment through the Recovery Act to that same goal, because it is just indisputable, if you look at what other nations are doing -- the nations that are likely to be most competitive economically in the 21st century -- even with the investments we're making and committed to make are, in the case of the Chinese, investing twice what we are in this. So we will not cede those industries to our global competitors.

Q Does he agree that legitimate questions are being raised, or does he think this is politics?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I haven't -- I think there's always an element of politics in these things. I haven't discussed with him this particular issue, but I know his commitment to clean-energy technologies, cutting-edge technologies, the need for the United States to compete, the fact that if we do, we will, as with the advanced battery industry, quickly move up and get a bigger and bigger share of the marketplace.

We're on track to go from just a 2 percent slice of the advanced battery market to a 40 percent slice by 2015. We're on track to double our renewable energy production by 2012. These are important achievements that will ensure that the United States is a global economic power -- a dominant global economic power in the 21st century.

Q So with Social Security reform excluded from the package of recommendations the President will be making to the deficit panel next week, is it still possible in the administration's -- in the President's view, to get to the \$3 trillion or more savings? Is that still a goal, the grand bargain?

MR. CARNEY: The goal is to do substantial deficit reduction and debt control. I'm not going to throw out numbers about what that figure will look like because I don't think it's a good idea to have everything my President -- this President wants to say on Monday out before he says it.

So I will leave it to the President on Monday to give you the details. And he will do that with a broad array of proposals that he believes the Congress and the committee could use to substantially reduce our deficit and debt.

Q And you mentioned the two U.S. envoys who are in the Middle East now holding meetings, Hale and Ross. Can you give us a sense of what, if any, progress has been made in these meetings they've had with both sides, and are they looking at fallback options that would counter the Palestinians' intent on taking their statehood bid to the United Nations?

MR. CARNEY: It wouldn't be productive or helpful for me to give you a status update of diplomatic efforts that are ongoing, so I'm not going to do that. I just can assure you that we are focused on, as we have been from the beginning, on the need for direct negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians because that's the only way for them to resolve the issues that remain unresolved and for them to reach a two-state solution.

Q The President, Prime Minister Netanyahu, President Abbas will all be at the United Nations next week. Is there any thought being given to a meeting -- either bilaterals with the President, even a three-way meeting -- either in New York or in Washington?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have an update on the schedule yet for the President's visit to the U.N. General Assembly next week. We will do that for you tomorrow, so I don't have specifics in terms of the various meetings, bilaterals as well as group meetings he might have.

Q You say the only way the administration believes to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian situation is through direct negotiations and can't achieve statehood through the U.N. Can you explain why the administration thinks Palestinians should back down from their position, given that negotiations seemed stalled?

MR. CARNEY: Because not only will they not achieve statehood through a declaration by the United Nations, the effort itself will be counterproductive to the goal, which is to return to direct negotiations between the two parties.

Q Congressman Eliot Engel said that President Obama has a problem with Jewish voters in his Bronx, New York district. Why do you think -- or why does the administration think there's a perception problem?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would disagree with that. I don't know about the congressman's district itself. I think as recently as last week or the week before, the Prime Minister of Israel made an incredibly strong statement about the remarkable commitment, unshakeable commitment, that this President has to Israel's security, and the unprecedented assistance that this President has provided Israel. Both -- he has said this when I was with the Vice President in Israel and visiting with the Prime Minister, with regards to our overall -- this administration's overall efforts and commitment to Israeli security, and he said it again just in recent days with regard to President Obama's specific assistance to the Prime Minister of late.

So this President's absolute commitment to Israel's security is, I think, demonstrated and unshakeable. The fact is that he is committed to the process of trying to get the two parties to negotiate, get the two parties to go back to direct talks, because he believes it's in the interest of Israel and in the interests of the Palestinian people for them to reach peace in a way that ensures Israel's security and allows them to resolve their issues. That, in the end, will ensure that the Jewish state of Israel survives and prospers.

Q Is the administration concerned that you've let it get to this point, that we're on the cusp of UNGA and they may be facing a statehood vote?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we've been talking about this off and on for weeks and months that -- if this problem were not complex and difficult it would have been solved a long time ago. Many administrations have made significant efforts to deal with it. And we are completely focused on it, committed to it. And we are convinced that the only way that Israelis and Palestinians can reach the goal that they share is through direct negotiations. So we will keep on that.

Jake.

Q The House subcommittee has looked into the Solyndra matter to a degree. I'm just wondering, is it normal for the White House to show such interest in a Department of Energy loan? Is that a regular --1637

MR. CARNEY: I'm not sure what -- you're referring to the --

Q All the emails back and forth --

MR. CARNEY: The emails, as have been amply demonstrated because we provided them as part of our cooperation, had to do with trying to schedule whether or not the Vice President was going to make an announcement. And it was a scheduling issue. That was the focus of the White House's interest in this.

Q Well, I mean -- okay, I understand that. But it does seem like the White House --

MR. CARNEY: If you're asking me is the White House interested in the overall program and making investments --

Q Well, is it normal, is it standard operating procedure for the White House to get so involved in a loan that the Department of Energy is --

MR. CARNEY: Well, I have to correct you because there's no evidence that the White House was involved in the loan. This was the White House involved -- because they weren't. The White House was involved in trying to find out when a decision would be made so they could make -- staff here could make a decision about the Vice President having an event.

And, yes, as you know, and anybody who travels with us or understands the sort of complexity of scheduling White House events involving the two principals, the President and the Vice President, that process engages a lot of people and there's just a whole series of decisions that have to be made regarding scheduling, whatever the nature of the event.

Q Just a few days before the loan was approved, the chief investor, George Kaiser met with Rouse, Jarrett, and Goolsby. The White House has said that they think that meeting was largely about some of his charitable work. Have you determined what entirely the meeting was about and whether or not the loan was brought up or discussed?

MR. CARNEY: I would point you simply to what George Kaiser himself has said, that he did not lobby or discuss -- he did not lobby administration officials with regard to this, with Solyndra. He was involved in a lot of charitable efforts and it's our understanding that, while we haven't looked into every meeting that he might have had here, that that was the focus of his conversations, generally speaking, at the White House.

Q Do you reject the suggestion that the emails seem to imply that the visit by the Vice President -- which I

Q Do you reject the suggestion that the emails seem to imply that the visit by the vice president -- which I guess ultimately was a satellite visit and not an in-person visit -- but that that played a role in whether or not the loan was approved? You have an OMB official saying that the announcement should be postponed -- "this is the first loan guarantee; we should have four of you with all hands on deck to make sure we get it right" -- but the announcement was not postponed.

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, if you look at the emails, the issue that involved the Vice President having this event did not drive the loan process. The loan was made -- the loan guarantee was made on a merit-based -- as a result of a merit-based process by career professionals over at the DOE. The same process has been used, has been in place for all of these investments.

Q So it did not -- it did not play a role?

MR. CARNEY: Correct.

Q Okay. And then, lastly, on the jobs plan, the Speaker's office says there has not been any outreach to them, even though -- from the White House on the jobs bill, even though last week they requested a meeting. Is that true? And, if so, why hasn't there been?

MR. CARNEY: Well, first of all, the President spoke a week ago. There will be ample time going forward for continued consultations with leadership and rank-and-file members of Congress as Congress takes up the American Jobs Act and hopefully passes it, so that we can do the things we need to do to grow the economy and create jobs. I don't have any specific --

Q He said "pass this bill now" more than a hundred times in the last week --

MR. CARNEY: Yes. Well, that's because it's so urgent. He is reflecting --

Q Not urgent enough to call the Speaker, though.

MR. CARNEY: He is reflecting the urgency that the American people feel. And there will be, I'm sure, conversations between the White House and the leadership about this as we progress. But what we have -- what you know about how Congress works and how Washington works is you need to keep people focused on the task at hand -- because there's so many other issues that can distract attention from the main, which, in this case, are the things we need to do to grow the economy and create jobs. And I'm sure the President will be, and members of his staff will be engaged very directly with Democrats and Republicans in the House and the Senate as this process moves forward.

Q Don't you think he should call the Speaker before he reaches, say, 200?

MR. CARNEY: I didn't know you were working for the Speaker on his scheduling. The fact is -- he will talk to the Speaker, but it is -- the President has put forward a detailed piece of legislation. The elements of that plan are very clear. The Congress can and should act on it very quickly. It's not complicated. The proposals are very simple. And they reflect -- they are the kinds of proposals that have gained bipartisan support in the past. So it's not --

Q I understand -- this is your thing now that when a reporter asks a question you impugn whether or not they have a political motive. But if the President --

MR. CARNEY: No, no, no, no, no. And I apologize. I simply meant --

Q The President goes out there -- the President goes out there and says 100 times, "Pass this bill." I'm asking has he called the man in charge of passing the bill in the House? It seems like a reasonable question --

MR. CARNEY: The President --

Q -- and not one that is Republican-motivated.

MR. CARNEY: Jake, the President spoke with the Speaker on the day that he delivered his speech. I'm sure they will be speaking many times in the coming weeks and months about this and many other issues. It doesn't --

Q But he doesn't want it passed in weeks and months. He wants it passed now.

MR. CARNEY: He does. And it doesn't require --

Q And he still hasn't called the Speaker.

MR. CARNEY: Congress doesn't need a phone call from the President to vote on legislation. That's a myth. I mean, you know that this is -- going back to these questions, the insistence about why isn't he meeting with the Speaker beforehand, when I hadn't noticed anybody asking Republican leaders why they hadn't invited administration officials or the President in to negotiate the details of the Ryan budget, or to negotiate any of the

Republican proposals that they've put forward.

We put forward our plan. It should be debated, and, we hope, voted on in the House and the Senate, and turned into law. Because that's what the American people want. They want Congress to take action. And we welcome -- as the Speaker has said about considering the ideas the President has put forward in the American Jobs Act -- we welcome other ideas, other proposals. We will certainly -- we're looking for the answers that will get the economy growing and creating jobs. And we welcome Republican ideas; we welcome Democratic ideas. The President has put his ideas forward. They happen to be ideas that have traditionally enjoyed bipartisan support, and we hope and expect Congress will act on them.

Yes, Norah.

Q The President says the jobs plan should be passed immediately. Does he have a sense that the Democrats in the Senate agree with him?

MR. CARNEY: He has a sense -- and it's amply demonstrated by all the statements of support that have come out since the President spoke -- that Democrats broadly support the American Jobs Act, yes.

Q And why are Gene Sperling and David Plouffe briefing the Democratic caucus today? Was that something previously scheduled, or has it been in response to some of the criticism that the White House has received from Democratic senators?

MR. CARNEY: Members of the White House go up and brief senators and members of Congress, members of the House, all the time on our initiatives -- going to the exchange I just had with Jake. It's part of communicating with Congress about what action we hope they'll take, and why our priorities are what they are. So that's a normal part of the process.

Q The reason I asked about whether the Democrats agree, I mean, you know Leader Reid has some other more immediate and pressing items that he's going to bring up. Senator Casey today --

MR. CARNEY: Let's be clear about the fact that on transportation and FEMA, these are issues that have to be resolved within a matter of days so there's not an expiration of funding. So that's completely understandable.

But go ahead.

Q Will you specifically address Senator Casey's criticism that people are skeptical of big pieces of legislation, so that his preference would be to break this up?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I don't know about people being skeptical of big pieces of legislation. We have enormous regard for Senator Casey and if -- that may be the case. As I was just saying to Jake, the elements of this American Jobs Act are very clear. This is not a complex piece of legislation. They're pretty simple: Cut the payroll tax in half for all Americans who receive a paycheck. Cut it in half for small businesses, the employers' side, for those businesses up to -- 98 percent of all businesses up to \$5 million in payroll. Provide money to states that will allow them to rehire teachers. Launch initiatives that will speed up infrastructure projects, get construction workers back to work. An initiative to incentivize businesses to hire veterans -- so many of our returning heroes from Iraq and Afghanistan who fought bravely for this country who shouldn't have to be fighting to get a job.

These are all -- this is pretty straightforward stuff. So we think it could be acted on in its entirety, and that's certainly what we would like to see happen. As I've said -- and let me make clear, because Congress gets to legislate, if they sent us one part of that -- funding for teachers, for example -- the President obviously would not veto that. He would sign it, and then he would say, okay, send me the rest. And that would be true if it came in two pieces or four pieces, or one -- if he got it all at once, then that would be. But that's our approach.

Q Okay. Final question. You announced at the top of the briefing about the President's trip next Thursday -- this bridge that is in Speaker Boehner's backyard. It also happens to go into Kentucky, the home state of the Republican leader in the Senate. I assume it was intentional to choose a bridge in the Speaker's district -- yes?

MR. CARNEY: It's a bridge that's in great need of repair. It's a bridge that's relatively easy to get to from Washington. It's a bridge that goes between --

Q Why that bridge?

MR. CARNEY: Well, first of all, I think the President made a reference to it before --

Q And why the Speaker's district?

MR. CARNEY: -- and I think it's a good way to highlight the urgent need. When you have a bridge that's described as "functionally obsolete," it's pretty clear that this bridge could benefit from a little repair and renovation. So I think that bridge because I think it helps highlight the urgent need in this country for us to improve our infrastructure.

Q Did the Speaker thank you for helping to fix this bridge?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we haven't helped him fix it yet. We hope that he, together with us, will take action to help us fix it, to help the construction workers go and fix it. And this is just -- we're trying to highlight an urgent need here, and we certainly think this is a good way to do it.

The President yesterday focused on -- in North Carolina, focused on the provisions within the American Jobs Act that help small businesses grow and hire. He went -- before that, he focused on the assistance the American Jobs Act gives to renovate schools, repair schools, modernize schools, hire back teachers. Now we want to draw some attention to the element of the American Jobs Act that focuses on the need to repair our infrastructure.

Q Jay, the Solyndra bankruptcy and loan guarantee really dominated the Senate hearing today, involving three Department of Energy nominees who probably won't even be confirmed before 15 other loans have to be acted on by the end of the month. Is there any urgency, A, to review or to get those loans passed? Senator Murkowski says the bankruptcy calls into question past and future loan guarantees. Are you relooking at those loans, or is there an urgency to get them done before the spending --

MR. CARNEY: There is a merit-based process by which these applications for loan guarantees are reviewed and either rejected or approved, or sent back for further -- requesting further information. That process is ongoing. And as I said, the President remains absolutely committed to the program and to the idea that we cannot cede these industries to our competitors globally. That's not an option -- as I see it, and as the President sees it, most importantly.

Q Are you looking at the process itself?

MR. CARNEY: I think the process -- again, the process itself is merit-based, done by career employees at the Department of Energy, and that process continues. It's a -- my understanding is it's a rigorous process, and has been and will be.

Q So the Solyndra bankruptcy doesn't raise questions about the process to you -- it's just Solyndra went belly up?

MR. CARNEY: Look, again, I would refer you to the Department of --

Q Bad luck?

MR. CARNEY: I would refer you to the Department of Energy about the specifics of the process that -- of the review that leads to these loan guarantees being issued.

I would make clear, in terms of your last question, that the reason why fledgling, cutting-edge industries need this kind of assistance is because they can be high risk as well as high reward. We never thought, and the Department of Energy never thought, that every investment would succeed. But that is not a reason to simply throw up your hands and say, never mind, let's let the Chinese own this industry, this field -- or the Indians, or the Europeans -- and we'll just buy their products. That's not the way this administration, this President, views our economic needs for the 21st century.

So the process needs to be rigorous. It needs to be merit-based. It will continue to be. The need to focus our energy and our -- the need to focus on these clean-energy technologies, these cutting-edge technologies remains as strong today as it was when the President took office.

Q Senator Murkowski questions whether the government should be more focused on clean energy or cheap energy. Which would you say?

MR. CARNEY: I think, as you know, the President's energy strategy is broad and inclusive. It includes taking measures to ensure that we can produce more oil and gas here at home. It includes nuclear energy. It includes renewables, biofuels, et cetera. It is an all-inclusive approach to growing our capacity to produce our own energy so that we do not rely on other countries for our energy security.

That's the right approach. And his interest is in securing our energy future and doing it in a way that leads to industries being created and industries growing here in the United States, industries that hire people here in the United States and that have the benefit of improving our energy security.

Q Did anybody at the White House, or the President call Speaker Boehner to let him know that you guys are going to be paying a friendly visit to his neighborhood next week?

MR. CARNEY: I have to take that question. I don't know.*

Q This is sort of -- it's going to be interpreted -- to follow on what was the earlier question -- as sort of a push-back, chin-music --

MR. CARNEY: I would refer you to the Department of Energy about the specifics of the process that -- of the review that leads to these loan guarantees being issued.

MR. CARNEY: I don't think it's a mystery, Mike, that we are out there, loudly and with great intensity, arguing that we in Washington need to do the bidding of the American people and take action on the economy. So, yes, he's traveling, as he promised -- the President did in his speech to Congress -- across the country to highlight this urgent need, and to engage the American people in calling on their members of Congress, their senators, to pass the bill -- to take action to grow the economy, to take action to incentivize the private sector to hire more workers. This is the number-one priority of the American people, and it also happens to be the number-one priority of this President.

So, if you're asking me if, by going to this bridge, are we hoping to draw some attention to this urgent need, the answer is, unequivocally, yes.

Q Politics -- we haven't seen you on camera since the New York 9 race. The economy, obviously, isn't very good. That does not portend well for the President's own political prospects. The man who had coined the phrase, "It's the economy, stupid," for Democrats, the architect of a winning presidential campaign, says that the President should fire a lot of people now -- he had a number of other recommendations. Norah already referred to Senator Casey. There's also Senator Landrieu, Senator Manchin raising questions about the President's legislative strategy on jobs. Is the President concerned at all about his political prospects at this point?

MR. CARNEY: Look, the President is focused on the things he needs to do as President, which, primarily -- as the top priority, is getting our economy going and creating jobs. The dual priority obviously is the security of the American people and Americans abroad, and our interests.

The President firmly believes that the American people know that he is doing everything he can to grow the economy, doing everything he can to work with Congress to create jobs, and he will continue at that. He is a long way away from having -- from an election that doesn't take place for another 14 months. So his focus is not on his political standing or his standing in the polls. It's on the need to get Congress to focus, get Washington to focus, and take action on the economy and jobs.

Because, as you point out, the American people are upset about the state of the economy and the state of unemployment, as they should be -- 9.1 percent is too high. They are also very upset at their accurate perception that this summer Washington not only didn't help, but hurt the economy, through the brinkmanship that we saw over the debt ceiling crisis. There is an absolute, measurable impact on confidence that that circus had on the economy -- on business confidence and consumer confidence. And that is a very unfortunate thing.

Americans -- the vast majority of the American people who aren't political partisans on the far side of the spectrum, on either side, simply want their elected leaders to come together and take action for them. They don't care who wins the political games. They don't care who has the best line on a cable TV show. They just want their elected members of Congress, their President, to work together to get the economy going. That's what the President is focused on.

Laura.

Q On the U.N. General Assembly next week, would it be preferable for the Palestinians to bring their request to the General Assembly versus to the Security Council, as far as the U.S. is concerned?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we don't know what the Palestinians are going to do, so I'm not going to express a preference beyond the thing we've made very clear, which we do not believe it is constructive or productive for the Palestinians to pursue a declaration of statehood through the United Nations because it will not achieve their goal for them. In fact, it is counterproductive, because -- this President has a very clear principle that both parties need to take steps that bring them closer to negotiations and closer to resolution. And he supports each party when they take those steps.

Both parties need to refrain from taking steps and doing things -- pursuing things that bring -- move them further apart. And we believe that this is not constructive or productive.

Q Going to the General Assembly is not exactly a declaration of statehood in the same way as going to the Security Council is. So I'm just wondering if you --

MR. CARNEY: Well, I was referring to, obviously, the suggestion that they could pursue a declaration of statehood through the Security Council. Again, what they're going to do, I think we'll have to see. So I don't want to prejudge other things they might do. We would certainly -- as we've made clear, we certainly think they should not pursue a declaration of statehood.

Q So the comments that you just made were all in reference to going to the Security Council for a declaration of statehood -- were not meant to apply to some other action through the General Assembly?

MR. CARNEY: When I referred to declarations of statehood, that's correct. Broadly speaking, in a variety of arenas far from New York -- in fact, in the region -- whatever steps -- and we've been clear about this on both sides. We want the -- we want each country to take steps toward resolving their differences, toward a lasting and enduring peace that allows for the creation of a Palestinian state and a secure and Jewish state of Israel. So we're for those steps that bring them together; we're against those steps that move them further apart.

Q Would going to the General Assembly be a step that pulls them further apart?

MR. CARNEY: I'm not going to get into speculating about what they may or may not do.

Q So you don't want to comment on that --

MR. CARNEY: Correct.

Q -- I'm not asking what they may or may not do. But you don't want to comment on that option at all, really, right now?

MR. CARNEY: Well, because it's pure speculation. Right?

Q Okay.

Q Well, so is going to the Security Council is pure speculation, you could say, because they haven't done that either. But you made some very strong comments --

MR. CARNEY: But I don't know what -- again -- speculate about what an alternative involving the General Assembly, what that would be.

Q -- observer status?

MR. CARNEY: Going to the U.N. Security -- U.N. Security Council resolution to declare a state is pretty clear, and we're opposed to that.

Q Do you also oppose observer status?

MR. CARNEY: I'm not getting into the details because we don't even know -- the Palestinians have made clear that they might do this at the Security Council. I'm not going to get into details about what they may or may not do outside of that.

Q I have one other question on this topic, and that is -- so the President -- slightly different way of looking at this -- the President has taken, arguably, some pretty tough political risks on his own to try to be tough on Israel, to try to move this process forward in a way that you could argue should be helpful to the Palestinians.

Is there any -- I'm talking about not related to this U.N. situation, but over the last two and half years. Is there any sense that the Palestinians are sort of not showing much appreciation for the President's efforts to condemn the settlements and to be tough on a close ally like Israel by essentially going -- potentially going in the face of the United States to take this action?

MR. CARNEY: Look, we think that, again, each side needs to take constructive steps towards direct negotiations. Actions that make that harder are not helpful. Actions that make it easier we support. And that's been true -- the principle this President has applied since he took office and focused very early on, a lot of effort and attention to this problem.

So he believes it's in the interest of the Israeli people and the Palestinian people that they -- that a peace is reached, that allows for a secure Jewish state of Israel and a Palestinian state that can exercise true self-determination. It's in not just in the interests of those people; it's in the region's interest, it's in the United States' interest.

Q What I was trying to say is, is the United States annoyed that the Palestinians are potentially doing this, given what the President has done for them?

MR. CARNEY: We're not -- this is not about feelings. It's about taking whatever actions we can, diplomatically, to help the process move forward, to help bring the Israelis and Palestinians to the negotiating table, into direct negotiations that will ultimately lead to a resolution that meets the objectives of both sides.

Yes, sir.

Q Just want to clarify -- are you saying that the White House is satisfied with Senator Reid's timetable for bringing up a jobs bill when he says they might get to it next work period?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we certainly hope and expect that Congress will act as soon as possible. We want this bill passed now. And by "now" we mean as soon as Congress can take it up and pass it.

In response to Norah's question, I simply am stating what is I think obvious to all of you, which is that there are some things that Congress needs to move very quickly on before expiration dates are reached in terms of the surface transportation bill and FEMA and other things. So we understand that. But we obviously are urging Congress to move quickly.

Q And also, in response to Norah, were you saying that it is accurate for us to say that the selection of the Brent-Spence Bridge is not a coincidence?

MR. CARNEY: It's not a coincidence in that it's a bridge that is one we can get to and highlight from the White House on a day trip that absolutely illustrates the problem we have with infrastructure in this country -- roads, bridges, and other forms of infrastructure.

Q Once the President unveils his recommendations to the super committee, to what extent will he be involved publicly in trying to push those specific measures? Will he be talking about it at events where he's also pushing the jobs bill?

MR. CARNEY: That's a scheduling question that I don't have an answer to for you, if you're talking about in the weeks and months beyond Monday. He will continue to talk about it because it is part of his overall economic vision here, which he believes requires Washington to take action to address our short-term economic challenges, and that is represented by the American Jobs Act, and it also requires us to take action to address our medium- and long-term deficit and debt problems.

Q But as he talks about the American Jobs Act, he talks about specifics there. When he's -- once he unveils the super committee recommendations, will he talk about the specifics as he's out there also talking about the specifics of the American Jobs Act?

MR. CARNEY: I think he will talk about it within the context of the need to get our economy going. And he believes that getting our deficits and debt under control are part of that, about a part of getting our foundation strong for future growth and future job creation. And he believes that our urgent task right now is to take measures that -- including tax cuts and tax incentives, as well as infrastructure investment and putting teachers back to work -- that get the economy growing and people back to work in the near term.

So both -- these are component parts of a broader economic vision. They happen to reflect the testimony of the director of the Congressional Budget Office. The other day when he was asked, what's the right recipe for economic policy right now, what do we need to do -- short term investments, tax cuts and spending to get our economy growing, to get people back to work; medium- and long-term efforts to get our deficits and debt under control. That's the President's approach as well.

Q And just -- I want to see if you can react to something that Speaker Boehner said in his speech today. He said, "Tax increases I think are off the table, and I don't think they're a viable option for the joint committee." Do you have any response to that?

MR. CARNEY: Well, look, we will see what the joint committee does. The public overwhelmingly -- overwhelmingly -- agrees with the President that to get our long-term fiscal house in order we need to approach it in a balanced way.

If the answer is the Ryan budget, we know what the -- how Americans feel about that. They do not believe that we need to end Medicare as we know it to get our deficits and debt under control -- because we don't. We think that -- I mean, these are about choices. These are about choices. We don't have unlimited resources. We're a great and powerful country with enormous resources, but they are not unlimited. And you have to make choices about do we provide tax breaks to the wealthiest Americans, who over the past 10 to 12 years have done far better than any other segment in society, or do we make sure that responsibility for solving this problem is shared and that we have a balanced approach? The President feels that we have to take a balanced approach. The American public feels the same way.

I would simply note that the Speaker of the House made clear that in the negotiations he had with the President, he put, in his words, "revenues on the table." We believe revenues have to be on the table if we're going to solve our deficit and debt problems. We believe it; scores of prominent Republicans believe it; the members of the Gang of Six, the members of the Simpson-Bowles commission, Domenici-Rivlin commission. I mean, this is not -- again, these are not all that -- it's just not that hard, because there aren't that many options. You can't pull new stuff out of the sky. We know what the problems are in terms of our deficits and debt, and we know what the answers are.

Q Just to follow up on that -- when the President proposed his job bill he did something new -- not necessarily unprecedented, but pretty unusual, which is he laid out the specific detailed piece of legislation. On Monday, when he sends up his recommendations, how specific is he going to be about entitlements, for instance? Or is he going to lay out broad principles?

MR. CARNEY: I will simply cite the President's words back to you, which is he said he would put out detailed proposals. So he will.

Q And that means specifics on entitlements as well as tax reform?

MR. CARNEY: The whole thing will be specific proposals, to quote the President.

David.

Q In terms of the President going to Ohio again for his jobs bill, is it just also a coincidence that the first -- the four trips that he's making outside the city on behalf of the jobs bill happen to be the swing states that he won in 2008 but that George Bush had won in 2004? Or is that intentionally considered --

MR. CARNEY: I can assure you -- first of all, this bridge spans Ohio and Kentucky, so if we were flying into Kentucky and driving to it from the other side, would that render your question moot? Because the bridge is where it is, okay? And it's -- although we certainly hope to win Kentucky in 2012, but we concede that it's a steep climb. (Laughter.)

The point is he's focused on the problem. And you know as well as I do that presidential travel is -- a lot of logistics involved in it, and we go places that are reasonably easy to reach, that can accept the presidential aircraft and all the things that come along with presidential travel. And we obviously are interested in focusing people's attention on the urgent need to take action to grow the economy and create jobs.

Q Can I --

MR. CARNEY: Sure.

Q Does the President favor cutting aid to the Palestinian state, especially if there is a declared Palestinian state?

MR. CARNEY: Again, that's a speculation about what may or may not happen, so I don't have a response.

Q Do you have a tally on how much aid this administration has given to the Palestinians?

MR. CARNEY: I'm sure somebody does. I don't have it on the top of my -- in my book here or tip of my tongue.

Q And on the Iranian situation, can the U.S. forbid the Iranian President from coming to the U.S. if those two hostages are not released?

MR. CARNEY: I haven't heard any discussion of that. We're obviously focused on the need to get those hikers released and home.

Q Any update on that?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have an update on that.

Q A couple of quick things. Republicans on the Hill are very interested in regulations and reducing the regulatory burden. Obviously, the Speaker has talked about that. The President obviously has done his look-back. He's interested in putting a hold on the smog rule. What does the President believe is wrong-headed about the conservatives' concept of having Congress review the most expensive rules? Are they heading in the wrong direction?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think the concept -- whoever -- putting aside who reviews them, because I'm not -- I don't know the answer to that specifically -- the concept of reviewing rules and deciding whether they're obsolete rules or ones that unnecessarily hamper business growth and job creation I think is one the President agrees with, as demonstrated by his own look-back.

I would note that the cost of the regulations in the first two years of this administration are less than the cost of the regulations in the last two years of the Bush administration.

Secondly -- going back to the broader picture here -- the President shares that goal. As long as we ensure that we are not compromising the safety of the American people, or safety of our children, the air that we breathe, the water that we drink, we need to be wise and prudent about regulation.

And as the Speaker has said about the President's jobs plan, we look forward to examining and considering the ideas that the Speaker puts forward, or that any other members of Congress put forward. I would simply say that it's important when we're looking at the task at hand, which is growing the economy and creating jobs, that the same standard be applied.

We made clear that we felt the proposals we would put forward would be judged by independent analysts and economists to, if passed, have a quick, positive impact on the economy and job creation. Those same economists -- the independent economists should be asked to judge others' proposals and to see what impact they may have on the near term. Because we have a near-term need. We're very interested, too, in taking measures that solidify the foundation of this country's economy for the years going out. And this President is committed to the measures that he has already put in place and will announce on Monday to building that foundation.

But we also have a task now, which is to get this economy growing at a faster pace, get it producing jobs at a

raster pace. So we hope that whatever proposals or ideas that others have are looked at through that lens, because that's what the American people are asking us to do -- justifiably. They are not -- they are interested in, of course, measures that will help us in the long term, and we are very interested in -- the President is very interested in that. But he also has made clear that we have a short-term need that we need to address.

Q I have a quick clarification. On Social Security, if the President, on Monday, is not going to speak to that directly, that shouldn't be interpreted that he won't weigh in later on, as the super committee gets further ahead in its work, right?

MR. CARNEY: Speaking to Social Security? Well, that's making an assumption that the super committee will address Social Security. I mean, we will obviously have something to say about whatever approach the super committee takes and product that it puts forward. And the President will, I'm sure, speak to that, as will others.

Q So are you suggesting that you're anticipating the super committee won't go near Social Security?

MR. CARNEY: No. I'm not presupposing anything about what the super committee will do. I'm simply saying that you're assuming that it will, and if they -- whatever product they come up with, we will be, I'm sure, engaged and commenting on.

Q Okay. So, on Monday, the President will obviously put forward his ideas, but in what format? A speech here?

MR. CARNEY: We'll have an announcement on that, I'm sure, before the end of the week.

Christi.

Q Jay, it's been more than two years now since the President gave his speech in Cairo, and I wonder how you analyze the change, if there is a change, in the U.S. relationship with Muslims around the world. Is it better? Is it worse? Can you tell?

MR. CARNEY: I wouldn't want to claim myself as an expert on this. What I know -- because I know there's polling data and other things by which you can judge this -- what I do know is that, broadly speaking, around the globe, this President, when he took office, engaged in a process by which he sought to -- and we believe has succeeded in -- strengthening America's position around the world by improving its relations around the world. And that's not specific to one region, necessarily, or one people, but globally. And it includes our allies, as well as others around the world.

We think that our ability to affect change in a positive way, globally, is enhanced when we have strengthened our ties with our allies, strengthened our ties around the globe, and increased our influence.

Q And you're saying -- wait a minute, so wait, was that yes? (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: Again, I don't have a measure for it. We believe that to be the case.

Q That relations with U.S. allies is stronger?

MR. CARNEY: We believe that the approach the President has taken has strengthened our position, has enhanced our stature, and increased our ability to act collectively, around the world, in ways that protect and enhance U.S. interests.

Q Okay. And, so, specifically to -- since the President did -- I mean, there was a big spotlight on this speech and the intent of it was clear -- it was mostly directed to Muslims around the world, as he said. What do you think is the likely effect of casting a veto at the national -- at the Security Council?

MR. CARNEY: We have made clear our position on that. And we have taken the position we've taken because we do not believe it is ultimately in the interest of Middle East peace -- of the process. It doesn't bring the two sides closer together. It doesn't bring the -- it would not bring the Palestinians any closer to statehood. And we believe it would be counterproductive to that goal. So our approach is one that we think is in the interests of helping the Palestinians reach their ultimate goal, and the only way they're going to reach that goal is through direct negotiations with the Israelis.

Q Just a quick question about Solyndra. Has the President been briefed about what has developed on that? Just has he been briefed at all about the questions being raised, or just what his administration --

MR. CARNEY: I think he's probably read some news accounts of it. I'm not aware that he's been briefed. I mean, what happened here is an investment did not pan out. There are a variety of reasons for that that have to do with the international marketplace and the price -- the cost of solar panels, and the Chinese pricing of their competitive products.

And beyond that, it's a story that has to do with an inquiry by the Hill. So there's not a lot to brief him on.

Yes, I'll take one more. And then, Chris, I'll take you, too.

Q Following on Christi's question on threatening the veto. The Palestinians have accused the United States of appealing to Israeli interests abroad and here in pursuing the veto -- or threatening the veto. Are you worried at all about losing the U.S. standing in the region, or as an honest broker in the region?

MR. CARNEY: This President, this administration, is focused on the long-term goal here. The reason why we oppose an effort to have statehood declared by the U.N. is because it's counterproductive and it won't bring them any close to statehood. We believe that the Palestinians and the Israelis need to reach an agreement through direct negotiations. So it is in support of those aspirations that we have taken the stand that we've taken.

Sam. I'm sorry -- Sam and Chris. Chris and Sam. Chris. And then I'll go, because Ben has told me I need to go.

Q Back in 2008, during the debate over Proposition 8 in California, both sides of the debate utilized various elements of what they saw as the President's position on marriage equality in their campaign literature. North Carolina decided earlier this week that they're going to be having a marriage amendment on the ballot in May 2012. When asked for a comment on it, the White House only talked about the fact that the President has long opposed similar measures in the past. Does the White House have a position on the North Carolina amendment specifically?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I'm going to disappoint you here because I haven't -- and I'll take this question -- but I think our position on similar amendments has been clear. I don't have a specific one on this, but I think you can -- our position is clear on this, the President's position is clear on this. But I can take your question for greater clarification.

Q As a follow-up, does the President have any plans to, in any way, memorialize the end of "don't ask, don't tell" on September 20th?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have a scheduling update for you on that.

Sam, and then I've got to go.

Q Another state policy-related question. Yesterday, a lot of news reports about Pennsylvania's plans to divvy up the electoral college votes from the state. Obviously the President is running for reelection; this could affect his path forward. What does the White House think of this proposal?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have an answer.

Q Can you get --

MR. CARNEY: I can get back to you.

Q Since you don't have an answer on that one, can I ask a different question, then, which is that -- (laughter) -- Senator John --

Q -- to someone else.

Q No. Senator John -- (laughter) -- Senator John Kerry has decided to forego fundraising during his time on the super committee. Others have not made that choice, obviously. This White House has always, in the past, applauded sort of transparency and lack of conflict of interest. I'm wondering if they would appreciate other members of the committee to make that same pledge.

MR. CARNEY: I certainly commend Senator Kerry on his stand, but I think the issue here is the members of that committee are obligated to fulfill the mandate that Congress gave them. And we certainly believe that they will only be able to do that if they take an approach that is essential to reaching the kind of resolution that will get support in Congress and become law, which is an open-minded approach, an inclusive, balanced approach, that acknowledges that we need to -- the only way we can get our fiscal house in order is if we ensure that the responsibility for that and the burden for that is fairly shared across the spectrum.

Q You don't think fundraising might complicate that goal?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I think that members of Congress need to focus on the tasks that they were, in this case, appointed to perform.

Thank you.

END 2:00 P.M. EDT