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**The White House**

Office of the Press Secretary

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For Immediate Release

April 11, 2011

**Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 4/11/2011**

**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.

\*General McChrystal and his wife will attend the First Lady and Dr. Jill Biden's launch of a national initiative to support and honor America's service members and their families.

12:46 P.M. EDT

MR. CARNEY: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Just before I get started taking questions I would like to remind you, because it was such a busy end of the week last week, that the First Lady, Michelle Obama, and Dr. Jill Biden are launching a national initiative to support and honor America's service members and their families tomorrow, April 12th, at the White House. The initiative aims to educate, challenge and spark action from all sectors of our society -- citizens, communities, businesses, nonprofits, faith-based institutions, philanthropic organizations, and government -- to ensure military families have the support they have earned.

Many of you saw this press release. I just wanted to remind you of it. It's an important event tomorrow that will begin several days of focus on this by the First Lady and Dr. Biden. You also are aware, of course, that General McChrystal has been asked to -- and accepted -- the job of leading the advisory panel that will oversee this effort.

With that, I will start with your questions. Ben.

Q Thanks, Jay. A couple questions on the spending debate. I want to come back to this quote that then-Senator Obama had in 2006, when he voted against extending the debt limit, and he called it a sign of leadership failure in terms of potentially raising the limit, and it's a sign of the country's financing the U.S. government's reckless fiscal policies. Now, of course, he and the administration are saying it's urgent to extend that debt limit again. Can you explain, since this is back in the news, why that is not hypocrisy?

MR. CARNEY: What I can tell you, Ben, is the President, as David Plouffe said yesterday, regrets that vote and thinks it was a mistake. He realizes now that raising the debt ceiling is so important to the health of this economy and the global economy that it is not a vote that, even when you are protesting an administration's policies, you can play around with. And you need to take very seriously the need to raise the debt limit so that the full faith and credit of the United States government is maintained around the globe.

The consequences, as Secretary Geithner and many others, including the Speaker of the House, Senator Minority Leader, Congressman Ryan have pointed out, the consequences of not -- of failing to raise the debt ceiling would be Armageddon-like in terms of the economy on -- the impact on interest rates, on job creation, on growth would be devastating. Others outside of government, including former Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, S&P chief economist David Weiss, for example, said that it could cause significant and long-lasting financial and economic disruption. JPMorgan Chase head Jamie Dimon said, "If anyone wants to push that button -- i.e. fail to raise the debt ceiling, which I think would be catastrophic and unpredictable, I think they're crazy."

The point is that the President, through his actions both in the first two years in office when he demonstrated through the way he created the health care recovery -- rather the health care act, the Affordable Care Act, with its deficit reduction built into it, through his signing -- or rather his agreement on Friday to enact the deepest discretionary spending cuts in history, has shown that he is committed to deficit reduction. And we do not need to play chicken with our economy by linking the raising of the debt ceiling to anything. We should do that right away.

Q He cast that vote five years ago and issued those strongly stated views, and as recently as earlier this year, I believe, Jake asked your predecessor about this and we didn't hear that it was a mistake. When did the President come to realization this was a mistake?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we asked him and he made clear that he now believes it was a mistake. And he understands that when you're in the legislature, when you're in the Senate, you want to make clear your position if you don't agree with policies of the administration. But there are many other ways to do it and -- I would say. And also, there is the fact in this case that the efforts to link this to the President's commitment to deficit reduction are unnecessary precisely because he has demonstrated his commitments so clearly, and will again on Wednesday when he lays out his vision for long-term deficit reduction.

So the President's commitment is established. The economic impact of holding hostage the debt ceiling vote to other considerations would be catastrophic, so I think the need to move on this is quite clear.

Q One question about that speech you just mentioned. To the degree you're willing to frame it at this point, should the American people expect this to be a speech in which President Obama literally lays out a plan with specifics akin to the budget for Representative Ryan, or should we expect more a speech about principles and goals and not specificity?

MR. CARNEY: What I'd like to do, Ben, is not preview the speech in any detail. I'd like the President to speak for himself on Wednesday, but he will very clearly lay out his vision for deficit reduction -- the need for it to be balanced; the need for it to be bipartisan; the need for it to address the long-term drivers of our debt and for everyone to share in the burden of bringing our fiscal house into order. Beyond that, I'd rather not get into the details; I'd rather him do it on Wednesday.

Q So, Jay, staying with the debt and the deficit, on the debt limit, are you explicitly ruling out attaching any specific spending cuts, since Republicans have clearly said that they will be seeking large spending concessions to agree on raising the debt limit?

MR. CARNEY: Without negotiating from here I will say that we support -- we believe that we should move quickly to raise the debt limit and we support a clean piece of legislation to do that. Concurrently -- not linked, but concurrently, the President is going to demonstrate on Wednesday his commitment, again, to deficit reduction. We believe that having -- that he has established that and he will again. He looks forward to working together with members of Congress in both parties to find a resolution to our long-term fiscal issues that is bipartisan and can be

supported by the American people and that is good for the American economy and the American people. And he believes, separately we should raise the debt limit so that all the good work that has been done to move this economy forward, to create an atmosphere now where we are growing regularly now -- quarter by quarter, where we are creating jobs month by month -- that all that progress is not put into jeopardy because that is what would happen if we were not to raise the debt ceiling.

Q So specifically on the strategy, would you envisage a bipartisan process; you have the Gang of Six out there?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the President has said as he noted in his State of the Union and has noted since that there has been a lot of good work on the issue. He believes that the fiscal commission that he set up last year and that reported its findings at the end of last year helped create an environment unlike any we have seen in Washington in recent years that creates the potential for bipartisan cooperation and compromise on these very difficult issues that require -- in the way that compromise is defined -- require everyone to give a little bit, to not get 100 percent of what they want. So he looks forward to working with members of Congress of all kinds, and he thinks that there are -- there is ample evidence that the potential for finding common ground is there.

Q And just on the deficit speech, why Wednesday? Why didn't he lay out his plan in the budget proposal? Republicans are saying this is evidence of failure of leadership. Are they wrong?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I appreciate the question because leadership is not about, in the President's view, laying out positions to score political points. He made a very deliberate decision as we looked forward to this year and as the year began that he would -- because he was serious about the need to address long-term deficit reduction and debt, that he would put forward the 2012 budget that makes a serious down payment, that demonstrates his commitment to deficit reduction -- more than \$1 trillion in deficit reduction, which I think we need to remind everyone who is watching and reading -- that the President laid forward that plan, that 2012 plan two months ago, and does it in a balanced way with spending cuts, tax expenditures, and in a way that protects the very investments that will help us grow in the future in education and innovation, research and development.

And he also said that he looked forward to working in a bipartisan way, to having a conversation with those lawmakers who are committed to doing something about this in a reasonable -- taking a reasonable and calm approach. And the decision was putting up a specific plan at that time with a lot of details was a way to reduce your chances of success.

The environment for the speech he will deliver on Wednesday is -- we are now in a situation, having accomplished what was accomplished on Friday in reaching an agreement on fiscal year spending in 2011 that includes the deepest spending cuts in history -- discretionary spending cuts in history -- and the greatest spending cuts as a percentage of GDP since 1982, Ronald Reagan's first term -- we have an environment now, having dealt with last year's business, where we can move forward and tackle some of these long-term issues.

But the 2012 budget that he put forward is very much a down payment on that. It's very much a blueprint for the kind of balanced approach he believes needs to be taken.

Yes, Jake.

Q Speaker Boehner says there's not a chance -- to quote him -- not a chance that that ceiling will be raised without significant spending cuts attached to it. So your position that you want it to be clean seems to be a non-starter on Capitol Hill.

MR. CARNEY: Well, I will remind you of something that the Speaker said earlier this year: "If we were to fail to increase the debt limit, we would send our economy into a tailspin." He also said, "financial disaster not only for our country but for the worldwide economy. You can't create jobs if you default on the federal debt." We could not have said it better. That is a vivid description of why this is such an important vote and why you cannot hold it hostage to something else.

Again, the President's commitment to deficit reduction has been established -- was established on Friday, was established in his 2012 budget proposal, was established in the midst of the worst recession since the Great Depression in the way he drew up and worked with Congress to pass the Affordable Care Act -- which it's important to remember when we're talking about the drivers of long-term debt we're talking in many ways, at least in sizeable measure, health care spending -- and that measure as scored by independent economists reduces the deficit by \$200 billion in 10 years, and more than \$1 trillion over 20 -- again, demonstrating the seriousness with which he takes the need to address the deficit and the long-term debt.

Q These spending cuts that you're heralding, the biggest spending cuts since the Reagan years, that won't even pay for what we're borrowing this month.

MR. CARNEY: I agree that the reality of our one-year -- our six-month now -- continuing resolution is that it is but a portion of the problem and a small slice. That's an argument that we were making for a long time in urging Congress to get done with that work.

What it does do is demonstrate a commitment to spending reduction, spending cuts -- and a commitment to making tough choices that are not the kinds of choices in an ideal world the President would want to make or that Democrats would want to make. But it shows his willingness to compromise and find common ground; that it can be done if we all work together, we're all reasonable and we're all willing to retain our principles, retain our priorities, but be willing to negotiate on the issues in a way that allows us to reach an agreement.

Q But just for the government to continue functioning until the end of next year the debt ceiling will need to be raised about \$1.9 trillion. And you're heralding \$38.5 billion -- or let's make it \$78.5 billion -- either way, what you're talking about as representing a commitment by the President is a drop of water in the ocean. It's nothing. And so I don't understand how you can say this demonstrates a commitment.

MR. CARNEY: Well, Jake, I would say -- first of all, your disinterest -- or dismissal of the size of the spending cuts is remarkable given the intense interest in every half billion dollars as recently as last week on the hour.

So all of these things are difficult. And what was established on Friday was that if the leaders stay focused on the need to do what's right for the American economy and what's right for the American people, they can reach an agreement that is good for the American economy and good for the American people.

And these things build on themselves, we hope. We believe that the bipartisan tax cut that the President signed into law in December -- which no one in this room I daresay would have predicted in the wake of the midterm elections as a possible outcome -- has done, A, laid a predicate for that kind of bipartisan cooperation that we need in divided government; and, B, had a great deal and has had a great deal of positive impact on the economy.

Economists independent from the White House, independent from Congress, will tell you that it has added significantly to our growth so far. So that lays a predicate. The agreement that we reached on Friday -- that the President reached on Friday laid a predicate. All of this stuff is hard. All of these negotiations will be difficult. But what I think the American people should take away from what they've seen happen in recent days is that there is

reason to hope that we can work together and get the work done that the American people expect us to get done.

Q Just one last thing. Could you -- does the White House have any comment on the latest from Libya, the negotiations with the African Union and Colonel Qaddafi, and then also, about the latest from the Ivory Coast in terms of Gbagbo being imprisoned? I don't know if you have comments on either one of those.

MR. CARNEY: Well, we are glad to see that Mr. Gbagbo has been arrested, because, as you know, we have made clear that he was no longer the legitimate President of the country, that the elections that displaced him were free and fair. And we have supported the efforts of those who would bring him -- convince him to remove himself from power. And we have been very involved in the effort at the international community level to help make that happen. So we welcome that development.

And on Syria, I would say that --

Q Libya.

MR. CARNEY: I'm sorry, on Libya.

Q Feel free to add Syria, too. (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: I can also -- you can tell that the unrest in the region is broad, right? But in Libya, our response to the "cease-fire" is that what matters here are actions and not words.

And Colonel Qaddafi and his forces, his regime know full well what they need to do. They need to stop menacing the civilians -- citizens of Libya. They need to pull back from the cities. They need to garrison themselves, the forces, and then that would be a good development.

But we are in no way pausing. We are in no way letting up. The implementation in every aspect of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 continues, and will continue as long as necessary. And we continue to pursue our diplomatic and economic measures to tighten the noose around Qaddafi and those members of his regime who continue to try to cling to power in order to achieve the result of having him step down from power, so that the Libyan people can decide their future and pick a government and leaders who will respond to their aspirations.

Q When you talk about the drivers of the nation's debt, David on the talk shows said, well, Social Security is not one of them right now, not driving up the numbers. The President is open to having that be part of the discussion. When the fight is already going to be hard enough in getting some things moving, why add a hot-button issue like Social Security to the discussion? Why add it into the mix if the fight is already going to be hard enough without this element?

MR. CARNEY: I think what Mr. Plouffe said was that the President has, for a long time and certainly in the State of the Union speech, made clear that, A, we do not believe that Social Security is driving our deficit problems in the near and medium term, and that -- but he also welcomes efforts to further strengthen Social Security for the long term. That's the President's position and that's the position David Plouffe was echoing yesterday on the Sunday shows.

Q And on Congressman Ryan's plan -- I know last year -- last week, rather -- when asked about it, you kind of said let's get past 2011 and then we can talk about 2012. So on the 2012 budget, are there any elements, is their

any aspect that the President agrees with of the -- that he can agree to in the Ryan plan?

MR. CARNEY: Well, he agrees with the goal that we need to address our fiscal issues, the things that are driving and creating debt and driving our deficits.

We strongly disagree with the lack of balance in Congressman Ryan's approach. It's simply -- we believe it's not appropriate and it would not be supported by the American people to have a fiscal plan that relies on dramatic restructuring reform of the kind of programs that provide security and health security to seniors and to poor people and disabled people, and at the same time gives enormous tax relief, tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans.

Again, we understand that people will come to the table with different views. But the President believes that we have to have balance, we have to -- and that we have to be sure that we protect the most vulnerable in this nation as we approach this problem. And the plan that Congressman Ryan laid out does not do that. It fails the test of reaching that balance.

Q And while we're not getting into the details, Medicare and Medicaid are on the table in part of the discussion. Our polling shows that any kind of cut to Medicare and Medicaid is overwhelming -- they're overwhelmingly against, Americans are. Forget about convincing Congress. How does the President convince the American people it's worth taking on?

MR. CARNEY: Kate, I'm not going to get into specifics about the vision the President will lay out on Wednesday. What I can say is the President understands very well that health care spending is a major driver of our deficit and debt problem. And he has shown his understanding of that by the way he addressed it in the Affordable Care Act and achieved savings in that that will save over a trillion dollars over 20 years. He has shown it in his 2012 budget proposal, which achieves another \$60-plus billion in reductions. He believes that we can do that. We can achieve those savings in ways that protect the people that these programs are supposed to and were designed to support and help.

Q And even more than that?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I don't want to preview the President's speech. What I will say is that it will be a balanced -- that he believes that we have to have a balanced approach; that these things have to be on the table and we have to approach them in a balanced way and make sure that the programs that -- or the approach that we take in the end, in this bipartisan compromise that he hopes we achieve, is balanced in terms of the sacrifice it requires, and that it protects the very things that we need to invest in, in order to continue to grow in the 21st century -- because growth is one of the most important things in terms of creating the economic environment that allows us to drive down the debt and the deficit.

You're not going to get very far, no matter how many times you -- how many programs you cut, if you don't grow -- if the economy doesn't grow and jobs aren't created. It makes it very, very difficult. So that's another reason, going back to the debt ceiling, that it would be a catastrophic folly not to raise the debt ceiling at a time when growth and job creation are moving forward and helping us pull ourselves out of this recession, put people back to work, and create an economic environment that will allow us to address our deficit and debt issues.

Q Jay, just a point of clarification. I just want to make sure -- is the President telling the Republicans that he will not sign a debt limit bill unless it's clean?

MR. CARNEY: What I'm saying is that we support a clean piece of legislation to raise the debt ceiling. What I won't

do from here is pretend that you're John Boehner and I'm the President and hash it out. But our position is clear for all the reasons that I've laid out, that Speaker Boehner has laid out, that Congressman Ryan has laid out, economists and other have laid out -- that we cannot play chicken with the economy in this way. It's just too darn risky. It is not -- it's not appropriate.

Q Isn't that exactly what you're doing, setting up a game of chicken by saying you want a clean bill?

MR. CARNEY: No, we're saying that this is an issue that everyone agrees -- every leader in Congress of both parties agrees has to be done. So it will be done.

Q Why not compromise? Just like the budget bill you just did, that you started at -- you started at zero, they started at 61, and you worked your way to a reasonable compromise. Why not just say --

MR. CARNEY: And what I'm saying is that --

Q -- just say that's what you're going to do here?

MR. CARNEY: What I'm saying is the effect on the economy of playing that kind of brinksmanship would be too severe, too catastrophic. It would send all the wrong signals to the markets and to those who --

Q Are you suggesting to compromise would send the wrong signals?

MR. CARNEY: No, to hold hostage a vote in return for an exchange for some proposal that one party wants is not the way to treat this issue. It's too dangerous to do it that way.

Q I'm just confused by that. Isn't the dangerous thing to play chicken rather than compromising?

MR. CARNEY: Yes. And the danger --

Q Aren't you --

MR. CARNEY: No, no, we're saying -- and we can do this four or five times, but I think your colleagues would probably get a little disappointed if we did that, especially since I've done it already. But the dangerous thing would be to hold hostage the simple raising of the debt limit, which everyone agrees has to be done regardless. In those statements I read you, they were not linked; they were not equivocal; they were, regardless, we have to do this.

So we should do it. And we are, at the same time, showing how serious the President is -- the President is showing how serious he is about moving off of Friday's agreement towards having a serious conversation about the long-term deficit and debt.

Q One last question. On the deal that was reached on Friday night, we still haven't seen much in the way of details. Dan Pfeiffer did post a piece and said that there will be \$13 billion in cuts from Labor, Education and HHS, for example. Do we have any details? Or do the details exist, and you're just not telling us what they are?

MR. CARNEY: No, no, what was agreed upon on Friday night was a fairly detailed framework that includes some of the things that -- I mean, that includes the things that Dan laid out, and the leaders agreed on it and now up on the Hill the fine print is being worked out. But the outlines of the agreement were very clear and were agreed on by

the leaders, and that process is now proceeding up on the Hill.

The reason why we needed a short-term CR was because of the way the Hill works and legislation is written, and it takes a little bit of time. So that's what's happening now.

Yes, Mike.

Q Should we expect the President to embrace the work of Simpson-Bowles and their team on Wednesday?

MR. CARNEY: I'll repeat what I said about that, which he thinks that the work they did was extremely important. He doesn't agree with every line of it, every proposal in it, but it was very important. And it helped create the environment that we're in now that -- in which we find Republicans and Democrats who are serious, willing to address this issue in a serious way, which starts with an understanding that you cannot do this unless you do it in a balanced way. The fiscal commission showed that you need to look at entitlements, you need to look at tax expenditures, you need to look at military spending. You need to look at all of these issues. You can't simply slash entitlements, lower taxes, and call that a fair deal.

So while he doesn't agree with every line of it, he thinks it was important work and helped create the ground that we stand on now that leads him to be optimistic that if we're all serious, if the leaders are all serious, as we move forward, that we can actually get something substantial accomplished for the American people.

Q Senator Reid the other night said that he would not support tinkering with Social Security. He doesn't believe it's an emergency. Does that say to the White House that Social Security as part of a debt-deficit plan may be a nonstarter in the Senate?

MR. CARNEY: Well, Mike, I'm not going to preview what the President will say on Wednesday except to make note, as I did earlier, that what the President has said is that he also believes that Social Security is not the issue when it comes to our short- and medium-term deficit problems. But he also does -- would look at ways of strengthening Social Security to ensuring that it provides needed benefits to recipients going forward.

But I'm not going to preview what he's going to say on Wednesday.

Chuck.

Q Jay, is the goal of this -- when you guys make this ask to raise the debt ceiling the last ask you're going to make? Are you going to ask for it to be raised big enough to the point where you get to the year where in your budget you get to primary balance, which I think is 2017 -- which is a zero deficit -- running zero yearly deficits? Is that the goal with this debt ceiling vote, to get to that so it's the last one he asks for?

MR. CARNEY: Chuck, that's a good question. I confess I do not know specifically what -- the Secretary of Treasury has, as early as last January, spelled out our position on this, and I'm sure Treasury would be a better place to go for the answer to that question.

Q And going back to Chip's question, I mean, you guys do -- when you want to issue a veto threat, you make it known. So if you have not issued one, isn't it fair for us to realize you have not issued a veto threat?

MR. CARNEY: Veto threat of what?

Q Of a non-clean debt ceiling extension.

MR. CARNEY: Well, I'm not aware of a piece of legislation that we need to issue a veto threat on. We are making clear what our position is, and the Secretary of Treasury has also made clear, going back to January, so there's no question that we're not suddenly paying attention to this issue. We've been talking to members of Congress about this for a number of months because it's so important. And that's our position.

So it's not a question of issuing veto threats. It's a question of making it clear to everyone in Washington and around the country how important this issue is. And I know it's esoteric to a lot of Americans, understandably, who have their own --

Q They're knee-jerk against it.

MR. CARNEY: Well, their own problems to deal with. And the best way to explain it is that the United States, the most powerful economy in the world, it needs to be creditworthy. The impact of anything that it would do, that the Congress would do that suggests that the United States was not creditworthy would be calamitous.

And I think that's something that I think Americans can understand. It's not -- it can be framed in a way that sounds bad politically, but the reality is the United States is the largest economy in the world, it is looked to around the globe as the anchor of the world economy, and must establish through this vote its creditworthiness.

Q Is it fair -- there were a lot of Republicans over the last few months on this issue of the debt ceiling, they said, look, we'll consider it if the President will talk -- get serious about entitlement reform. Is it fair to say Wednesday's speech is an attempt to -- because you said it's not reactive, but it's concurrent -- is it fair to say that that -- that you hope Wednesday's speech, that those members who called for the President to get more serious on entitlement reform that they view the speech as, okay, he gave his way, we'll give you the next --

MR. CARNEY: Well, I don't want to project upon members of Congress what action they will take after hearing the President speak. But I will say the speech will once again demonstrate the President's seriousness about deficit reduction. And he hopes that it will signal to members of Congress in both parties that he wants to work with them in a bipartisan way to address these issues that are important, that affect our capacity to dominate economically in the 21st century the way we did in the 20th -- to win the future. And part of winning the future is making sure that we have our fiscal house in order, and he looks forward to working with Republicans and Democrats to do that.

Q Any regrets that you're allowing -- that you basically threw Washington, D.C.'s government and the residents -- used them as a negotiating tool during these last-minute talks, saying, okay, you can let the budget restrict this or restrict that, and demonstrate once again to the residents of Washington, D.C. that they do not have self-rule?

MR. CARNEY: Well, Chuck, I would just say that the President made clear the lines he would not cross in the CR negotiations, and one line he would --

Q -- for 50 states but not the District of Columbia --

MR. CARNEY: -- one line he would not cross, which has been made amply clear I think in some of the reporting on the negotiations, was the insistence -- repetitive insistence by the Republicans that a measure be included that defunded a program that gives family planning services and women's health services to poor people across the country. He would not --

Q Why is it only being restricted in Washington, D.C.?

MR. CARNEY: He also has said from the beginning that we have to make tough choices and he has to agree to things that he doesn't agree -- in an ideal world would not want to agree to. That's the nature of compromise. You don't get everything you want. But if you know what you're about and you know what your priorities are, you protect the very essential things that are so important to growing the economy and making sure we out-compete the rest of the world in the 21st century.

Q You said that the Republican budget, which cuts entitlements and lowers taxes is not a balanced approach. By a corollary, is it also not a balanced approach to have a budget that increases taxes on the wealthy but does not reduce entitlement benefits?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I think that's an effort to try to get me to preview what the President's going to say, except that I would say that balance includes shared sacrifice. And the President has made clear that -- by his actions that he understands that health care is one of the major driving factors in our deficit and debt. He's shown he understands that by the deficit reduction he has already put into place.

It says a lot about the environment that we work and live in and the tumult we've been through in the past several years that the fact that this President signed into law a bill that reduces the deficit via health care savings by over a trillion dollars doesn't get acknowledged as often as it should for its deficit reduction. But he continues to show in his 2012 budget proposal that savings in health care are essential to any balanced approach.

Q So additional savings?

MR. CARNEY: Savings in health care are essential to any balanced approach. You're asking me to say something specific about what the President is going to say, which I'm not going to do. I think "savings in health care are essential to any balanced approach" is pretty clear.

Q Also, just returning for a moment to the debt limit issue. Yesterday on Meet the Press, David Plouffe said that, when he was talking about raising the debt limit, he said, we're going to have to raise the debt limit. Everybody has said this, so we're going to do it. But in that process we should be able to reduce the deficit -- was how he put it. And that was read by some as an openness to linking the two together. Was that a misread?

MR. CARNEY: Right, and he was not linking the two. What he was making is the point that I've made, which is that the President's demonstration of his commitment to deficit reduction continues. It has been made already in the first few years he's been in office. It was demonstrated with his 2012 budget proposal, a trillion -- a more than a trillion dollars in deficit reduction. It was demonstrated again when he came to an agreement with Speaker Boehner and Senator Reid to cut discretionary spending more significantly than ever before. And it will be demonstrated again amply on Wednesday when he gives a speech -- Wednesday, as I said, early afternoon at George Washington University.

Q So Wednesday at GW, early in the afternoon?

MR. CARNEY: Yes.

Q We are still waiting.

Q Do you have a time?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have a time. We'll have the details for you.

Q Jake, when did the President decide he needed to give a speech on deficit reduction? Was it during the final days leading up to the agreement on Friday?

MR. CARNEY: No, it's been long planned. And this is a question that I appreciate, Mark, because as I've had this job and been up close to the President and the way he thinks about these issues, this is very instructive, because sometimes in a way that doesn't satisfy the press and doesn't satisfy others in Washington, he approaches his engagement in these issues always with an eye to where do I want to go; what is the result I'm hoping to achieve? And he has been thinking about this for a long time. He telegraphed that in his State of the Union address. And he was thinking about it beforehand in the discussions that led up to how he would approach this year.

He would have, under any circumstances, whether there had been -- if there had never been a showdown over a shutdown, if there had never been a dispute over fiscal year 2011 spending, he was committed to addressing our deficits and debt this year, this spring. And he will do that.

And he will continue to engage in the way that he engaged in the CR negotiations, which is to view every phone call he makes and meeting he has and public appearance he makes as an opportunity not to score political points, not to win the day, but to advance the cause of finding a way to do the business that the American people want us to do. And that might sound corny, but it really is the way he approaches it. And he will do it while protecting the principles that he thinks are so important.

But to answer your question, he's been thinking about this for a very long time.

Q I think I'd be on safe ground with this because we're talking about kind of the President's thinking on this and not previewing what he's going to say -- but who all has he consulted with outside the White House on this? His jobs council? His export council? Some of them have been pretty clear that the deficit is a long-term deterrent to growth. I mean, you just talked about some of the phone calls he's made. Who's he talking to?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I don't want to reveal the phone calls and meetings that we haven't read out, but I can tell you that he has had discussions about this with a number of people and stakeholders beyond the circle of Congress and his administration. It's --

Q And that includes the business community?

MR. CARNEY: Of course it includes the business community. And it includes labor and it includes all sorts of individuals and groups that he comes into contact with. And as part of his -- part of the way he conducts his presidency, he has those conversations about this issue and a variety of others.

Q Has he gone back to Simpson or Bowles?

MR. CARNEY: I don't want to get into individual conversations he's had or meetings he's had. I think I pointed out that he appreciates greatly the work that Erskine Bowles and Senator Simpson did and feels like it created a framework that may help us reach a deal and a compromise. Beyond that, I don't want to get into it.

Q Jay, do you have Tom Donilon's trip to Saudi Arabia?

MR. CARNEY: Yes. The National Security Advisor, as you know, is traveling to the region, to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, to meet with key leaders in each country and discuss regional issues. Obviously, there's a lot going in the region, and he looks forward to meeting with King Abdullah in Riyadh, and in Abu Dhabi he will meet with the Crown Prince, Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan. And it underscores the importance of the relationship we have with both countries. And one of the things he'll be able to do certainly with the Crown Prince is discuss its participation, the UAE's participation, in the coalition, its active participation in the enforcement of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973. And he looks forward to the trip.

Q How is the relationship with Saudi Arabia?

MR. CARNEY: Our relationship is very strong with Saudi Arabia. It continues to be, and it's an important relationship. This is part of the kind of conversations we have with leaders of Saudi Arabia regularly. Other leaders of the administration have visited and we've had meetings and phone calls on a regular basis.

Q And just on the timing of the speech and when the President considered and when he thought it was best to give it, did you ever give any consideration that giving the speech after his own presentation of his budget for 2012, but before the Republicans did their long-term one is -- having him second to the Republicans makes it sound like he said, well, let them lead on this issue?

MR. CARNEY: But, Mark, here's the point -- he wasn't second. He put forward a 2012 budget proposal that reduced the deficit by over a trillion dollars and included within it the kind of balance that he thinks is essential to deal with our longer-term deficit and debt issues. He made clear that it was a down payment towards the longer-term goal.

Q He said he was going to be talking later about Medicare and some of these issues.

MR. CARNEY: And he believes that the approach he took was the smart one to create -- to help foster the environment that will hopefully enable us to reach bipartisan compromise on an admittedly very difficult issue.

Q He doesn't think that by letting Republicans touch the third rail first he's made himself look less than leader-like?

MR. CARNEY: I think he has demonstrated ample leadership. I think that the compromise that was reached on Friday would not have occurred without President Obama's leadership, as I think has been made clear by some of the reporting on the process. I think the bipartisan deal that gave tax cuts to working Americans, including a payroll tax holiday that is helping Americans deal every week with higher gas prices and helping drive economic growth in 2011, would not have been reached without presidential leadership.

None of these things happen without presidential leadership. And how you decide to use your political capital, use your capacity to lead, is very important. And what he decided he did not want to do was draw some lines when he felt at the time that the best way to approach it was to call for a bipartisan conversation and to create an environment where real compromise can be achieved, and not to win a political argument.

Q Thank you. Could I thank you for your kindness to --

MR. CARNEY: Lester, let me get to a few others.

Q No, wait, it was my turn next. Everybody on this row has --

MR. CARNEY: Let me get to -- but that row is --

Q But I just wanted to thank you for your kindness --

MR. CARNEY: I appreciate your -- let me call on --

Q This question is about the President's trip to Chicago on Thursday. There are no official events on the schedule that I see, but I see now that he's staying overnight. So is there -- do you expect that something will be added?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have any more scheduling events to announce at this time.

Q Does the DNC pick up the costs for that trip?

MR. CARNEY: Why don't I take that question -- I don't have the answer to that.

Q And do you also know, will the First Lady be coming to Chicago also --

MR. CARNEY: I'll have to take that. I confess that I spent most of my time preparing for this briefing, focused on putting on a green eyeshade and becoming an economist. (Laughter.)

Q But you're not an economist, you said.

Q The whole speech -- I know he hasn't given the speech yet, but what kind of strategy do you see him -- or how do you think he'll approach this in terms of getting an agreement with the Hill? Will he deputize Lew and others? I mean, what will his approach be after that? And what is his goal in mind in terms of when he -- if it's not this, if it's not the debt limit, what is that endgame for him in terms of getting something from Congress?

MR. CARNEY: I think that precisely his desire to reach a result prohibits me from playing out our strategy from the podium before he's even given his speech. He will speak to this on Wednesday, and obviously we will continue to fill in details in terms of how we're approaching it and how we believe the process should work in the days going forward.

April.

Q Jay, two things. One, when has the President talked to Ban Ki-moon about the Ivory Coast? Did they talk about things leading up to the events today?

MR. CARNEY: I'll have to get back to you. Maybe you could check with Tommy or Caitlin about conversations specifically with the U.N. Secretary General about the Ivory Coast. He is -- the President is engaged on this virtually every day during this time, and has -- you know about the video that he taped and the calls we have made and the engagement we've had with the United Nations, which, by the way, you know has a security presence in the Ivory Coast.

So in terms of specific conversations with the Secretary General, we'd have to get back to you on that.

Q All right. And also, on the budget, leading into everything that was happening Friday, Americans were very concerned, Americans were speaking out, they were very upset, they were scared about budget cuts; they were scared about losing jobs; they were scared about not being able to get their IRS checks, possibly. Do you know if they mailed them?

And then we saw Saturday, the President reached out to America for about 10 minutes at the Lincoln Memorial, understanding there was a concern. Wednesday, what is the President going to promise Americans? After all of this emotional mish-mosh over the budget, what is he going to promise America Wednesday at G.W.?

MR. CARNEY: Without getting into the specifics or previewing the speech, I will tell you that he will promise to approach this issue the same way he approached the CR, which is he wakes up every morning thinking about what can I do to advance the cause of growing the economy and creating jobs? What can I do to make sure that Americans who are looking for work can find work? And what can I make sure I don't do that would in any way jeopardize those goals?

And he will -- there's nothing more than -- there's nothing that matters to him more than this. And for those who have doubted -- for reasons that I can't quite understand -- the President's commitment to deficit reduction, it has been amply demonstrated -- because he sees it not as a goal unto itself; he sees it as part of his overall vision for growing the economy and making sure that America in the 21st century is as great and as strong and prosperous and fair as it became as we worked so hard -- as Americans worked so hard in the 20th century to make it what it is.

And that's -- that animates everything he does when it comes to domestic policy, and it's going to animate his speech on Wednesday.

Yes, Margaret.

Q Thanks, Jay. Two questions. Number one, has the President, or will the President sit down or meet in person with Stan McChrystal as part of his re-engagement with Mrs. Obama on this thing?

And then secondly, I wanted to -- my question was sort of like Carrie's, but I'm going to give it another shot anyway -- because it's more basic. Given the makeup of the House Republican caucus right now and the nature of the CR fight that's past, the nature of the debt ceiling fight that's looming, does the President really expect that whatever he lays out on Wednesday is going to yield any actual legislative action by the 2012 elections? Or is this more that he feels it's important to try to move the ball forward, moving it forward, looking into 2013 before --

MR. CARNEY: I know he very much hopes and believes that there's a possibility for -- if everyone approaches it in a responsible way, with a commitment to try to get something done and to compromising, he very much believes that this can produce real legislation, tangible results.

Q Before the election?

MR. CARNEY: Correct, before the 2012 election. Absolutely. I'm not saying it's going to happen. I'm saying that he very much believes it can and should happen.

Q And on the McChrystal question?

MR. CARNEY: I'll have to get back to you on that. I should know, but I don't.\*

George.

Q What efforts are you making, if any, to get information on or to secure the release of the four journalists, two of them Americans, who were detained in Libya last Tuesday? Three of them including Atlantic's Clare Gillis were last seen Thursday in a Libya detention center?

MR. CARNEY: George, we've very aware of this issue, and I know the State Department is working very hard in order to do what it can to facilitate those journalists' release. But obviously I don't want to go into detail about what they're doing, but they would have more information in terms of what they could discuss. But be assured that they are working on it and that we take this very, very seriously, as we did when other journalists were detained.

Q Is there concern in those past cases that you cited, they've always let the journalists talk to a Western embassy or something -- that hasn't happened in this case.

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, I don't want to in any way say something that prejudices this situation. But there is great concern. We call on -- around the world, but specifically in this case, for the release of any journalist detained, any human rights activist, anyone detained unlawfully or inappropriately, and in this case, specifically with those journalists in mind, we call on and demand their release.

Q Jay --

MR. CARNEY: Andrei, kak dela.

Q Tomorrow is the 50th anniversary of Yuri Gagarin's flight into space. Can we expect anything from the White House on that? (Laughter.)

Q -- a Sputnik moment. (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: I wish I had the great one-liner, in Russian or in English, but I don't. I'm not sure what we have on that, but we certainly congratulate the Russian people on that historic accomplishment. We got to the moon first, but -- (laughter.) You have to check the transcript. No, it's -- really, it's an amazing thing, and I know from having lived in Moscow the way that Yuri Gagarin was revered for his tremendous accomplishment.

Q Can you deny reports that the White House has been quietly urging Israel to withdraw from the Golan Heights?

MR. CARNEY: Lester, I don't have anything for you except that we believe very firmly that --

Q You can't deny it?

MR. CARNEY: -- the two states need -- in order to achieve a two-state solution to this, where Israel and the Palestinian people live together side by side, peacefully and securely, the two sides need to sit down and negotiate a compromise.

Q Does the President --

MR. CARNEY: That's all I have. Thanks, Lester.

END

1:37 P.M. EDT

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