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Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 4/1/2011

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

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MR. CARNEY: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the first briefing of April, 2011. Before I get started, I have a statement from the President I would like to read -- from the President:

"I condemn in the strongest possible terms the attack on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan today. Together with the American people, I offer my deepest condolences to those injured and killed, as well as to their loved ones. The brave men and women of the United Nations, including the Afghan staff, undertake their work in support of the Afghan people. Their work is essential to building a stronger Afghanistan for the benefit of all its citizens. We stress the importance of calm and urge all parties to reject violence and resolve differences through dialogue."

That's what I have to start the briefing, and I will take your questions. Ben.

Q Thanks, Jay. In Libya, the rebels are apparently talking about the prospect of a ceasefire if Colonel Qaddafi concedes to certain provisions. While there is no sign that Qaddafi would agree to those conditions, including allowing peaceful protests, I'm wondering of the White House's position on that concept. Is it something the President could support -- a ceasefire that would keep Qaddafi in power?

MR. CARNEY: Well, Ben, as you know, the President's position is that Muammar Qaddafi is no longer fit to lead. He has lost legitimacy in the eyes of his people and the world. So, no, it is not his position that Qaddafi should stay in power.

As we've discussed and tried to make clear, there is the mission undertaken under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973, the military mission, which is designed to protect civilians -- protect Libyan civilians from Qaddafi's forces; and then there is the policy of the United States and the efforts undertaken unilaterally and multilaterally that are aimed at pressuring Qaddafi, the Qaddafi regime, and -- in a way that we hope and believe will produce the result of him leaving power.

Q But if the people of Libya decide this is an agreement that they could live with?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the people -- well, okay, let me step back. Of course, the future of Libya should be decided

by the Libyans. And that is true -- we believe that the Libyan people do not want -- no longer want Qaddafi to remain in power as the leader of Libya.

But I don't want to speculate about outcomes of potential ceasefires or negotiations. It remains the President's position that Qaddafi should not lead Libya and that the Libyan people should decide their future. And we support a democratic transition, free and fair elections, and a government that arises out of that process that is responsive to the aspirations of the Libyan people. And that remains our position.

Q Okay. One question on the budget, pivoting off of some comments the President just had in Landover, sounding somewhat optimistic about being close to a deal, at least on the number to be cut, but the details to be worked out. Can you give us any update on where that stands? Is it in fact close to a final deal, or is the sense that this might come down to the deadline of April 8?

MR. CARNEY: The process of negotiating a budget compromise continues. It is a complicated one. And we are engaged in that process. It's an appropriations process, the bill itself. So we are -- the House and Senate appropriators are the ones who are actually constructing the pieces. And we are there to advise and assist and consult and engage at the leadership level, as you know we have. The Vice President recently, on Capitol Hill, also speaking with Speaker Boehner and Majority Leader Reid.

Whether we're -- how close we are I don't want to speculate. Obviously, we have a fairly short window here before this continuing resolution expires. People need to get to work and work diligently to try to find that common ground, to work out the details, so that we can reduce spending, cut spending of \$73 billion, the target that both sides have agreed is the target we can reach.

But we need to find -- we need to agree on the details of how we get there. And we need to do it in a way, as the President has said, that cuts deeply, but does not cut the very investments that we need to make in education, infrastructure, research and development that will guarantee our success, job creation, and economic growth in the future.

Q So a follow-up on the budget, and also another question on Libya. What prompted the President today to sort of speak out so forcefully on the budget, on the budget compromise efforts? And is he basically trying to put the screws on both sides to get something done here?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the President was speaking on an economic issue today, as you know, about the National Green Fleets Initiative -- a partnership with private businesses, those shipping companies that have large car and truck fleets, and our goal to have -- part of the process that the federal fleets are doing, as well -- of greening those fleets so that we can -- in ways that will help build towards that goal of reducing our dependence on oil and diversifying our -- the sources from which we get our energy.

So it was an economic speech. He also was very glad to report the encouraging jobs numbers that we received today, the rather strong economic -- rather jobs growth that we got in March -- 230,000 private-sector jobs net; 216,000 total. As the President said, that's 13 straight months of job growth, job creation, private sector job creation, for a total of 1.8 million jobs over 13 months. And as you know, a full 1 point drop in the unemployment rate in just four months, which is the steepest decline since 1984. All good news.

Not good enough. Rate still too high. But in speaking with him about this yesterday in a meeting, it forces everyone to focus on the fact that we are in the midst of a recovery; the economy is showing signs of strength. We should not do anything to jeopardize the recovery. We should not do anything that halts the growth in the economy or halts the progress we're making in job creation.

And -- which brings us to this budget deal, and one of the things that we have spoken out so clearly about is that while we need to cut spending, we need to reduce the deficit -- we agree with Republicans on both those goals -- that we have to do it in a way that is responsible and that does not jeopardize the recovery. And certainly one thing that we have said that would jeopardize the recovery is if we allowed the government to shut down because of the economic uncertainty it would create.

So he wanted to address within the context of his remarks both obviously the jobs numbers and the broader economic picture, but also these negotiations that are ongoing. And he spoke optimistically about the capacity to find common ground that he believes exists, and that that's the right thing to do. That's what the American people want us to do.

Q Okay. On Libya, today as you know, Qaddafi's forces are making advances against the rebel stronghold in the west, in Misurata. Each day we seem to have a shift in the movement of forces and who's on top. Is there any concern in the White House, or what's the level of concern in the White House, about the possibility of a -- of this settling into just a bloody stalemate that -- with no chance of actually dislodging Qaddafi and over the near term, if not the midterm?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think it's important to step back and broaden the perspective a little bit and not judge the course of the conflict based on advances and retreats day-by-day or hour-by-hour -- which is not to dismiss your point, but just simply to say that the overall trend here is positive in terms of the conflict. The success that the NATO coalition has had in -- or the broader coalition has had in decimating Qaddafi's forces, air assets, air defenses, and forcing him to retreat from Benghazi and other civilian -- other places where they threaten to do great harm to civilians.

But it's obviously an ongoing situation there, and the NATO mission continues. The NATO now -- NATO-controlled mission, NATO-commanded mission, continues to protect civilians, to enforce the no-fly zone and to enforce the arms embargo.

On a separate track, we are also working very diligently to continue to put pressure on the Qaddafi regime. And I would note, as I did yesterday, that there are a variety of ways to measure Qaddafi's relative strength in this situation, or weakness. And I think one measure is to look at what's happening to the circle around him. And as you know, one of his most trusted aides defected, flew to United Kingdom with no immunity, and has abandoned the regime -- abandoned what we think is a sinking ship. And we think that's an important development.

Q Thanks, Jay. A couple of questions on Libya. Republican senators, specifically McCain and Graham, are being highly critical that the United States is pulling U.S. assets out, kind of putting them out of commission as we move into a supporting role, at the same time saying that it remains a priority that Qaddafi must go. Where's the disconnect there?

MR. CARNEY: Well, look, Senator McCain has also been very supportive of the action the President has taken in general. We simply disagree that -- with the idea that the United States should be militarily decapitating the Qaddafi regime; that it should use military force, unilaterally -- which is what it would mean -- to pursue the policy goal of having Qaddafi no longer rule Libya.

We believe that the course the President took here in building this coalition, in working with not just our NATO allies, but the Arab League and other partners, to build a broad consensus behind military action in a remarkably fast timeframe to protect Libyan civilians at a dramatic moment when the potential for a terrible humanitarian catastrophe existed was an important, important development, and it's ongoing.

Another important aspect in this, as the President I think spoke very clearly about on Monday night to the American people, was that he believes that while this is a situation -- he believes that he retains an absolute right, as the Commander-in-Chief and the President, to use military force unilaterally when the United States is threatened, when American citizens are threatened, when our core interests are threatened, when our allies are threatened.

In other circumstances, when our general interests are affected, when -- and general interests that we share with international partners -- it is better to pursue the avenue that we pursued, which is to build a coalition to share the burden, to share the cost, to share the risk. And also, not just because of the -- those goals are important in and of themselves in a time when we have a lot of commitments around the world, but also to do that because it enhances the prospect of a good outcome; that working with our coalition partners here makes the possibility of a good outcome in Libya greater because it makes clear that the unrest in Libya, the revolution, if you will, has come from the ground up, is driven by the desires and aspirations of the Libyan people, as it has been by the peoples of different countries, and it is not an America operation, it is not American- or Western-inspired.

And we think that is very, very important when the President takes the long view about what all these development means -- all these developments mean in the Middle East and what posture we should take to best ensure that our national security interests are protected and that the outcome in the region is as positive as possible for the people of the region and for the people of the United States. And I apologize for giving you such a long answer.

Q No problem at all, but you talk about it coming from the ground up, and we know that -- we've heard over the past many days that you're assessing who these rebels are, what they're about, their differing agendas. Our people on the ground say that the opposition is a ragtag group of people with more heart than they have military training and than they have in weapons, quite honestly. So is this -- are these people the people that the administration is relying on to go towards the end goal, toppling Qaddafi?

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, our goal of having Qaddafi step down, take himself out of power or be removed from power, is a nonmilitary goal. We support the aspirations of the Libyan people. The opposition to Qaddafi is driven by the fact that Qaddafi was such a brutal leader and did not respond or answer to the desires and aspirations of the Libyan people.

We make -- we are making a lot of assessments about the composition of the opposition. We have -- the Secretary of State has met, as you know, with the leader of the National Council in Paris and in London, and we were -- we view positively the statement that was put out by the council about what their vision is for the future of Libya, and the fact that it is inclusive and tolerant and envisions free and fair democratic elections.

So we're working very closely with the contact group that was stood up after the recent conference in London -- broad group of international partners that are participating in that -- to look at ways we can assist the opposition and help imagine with them what the future of Libya will look like. But in the end, it's up for -- up to the Libyans themselves to decide that future for themselves.

Q Real quick, Jay. I think that it's lost a little bit that many -- like the American people hearing that it's a political goal that Qaddafi should not be leading, but that we're pulling these military assets out, and that it should then be kind of driven by the opposition -- who the administration acknowledges they're not trained to do, to take on such a fight at the moment. So we're in it, but we're not in it. I think the American people don't see a big difference -- if you want Qaddafi to go politically, why don't we do it?

MR. CARNEY: I think what the American people understand very clearly is that this President did not believe

that unilateral military action to remove an Arab leader from power and basically to own that country for the United States was the right course of action in this case. It wasn't right for the United States. It wasn't right for the region. It wasn't right for Libya. And we have some experience with that and the costs associated with doing that. And moreover, the course that he is pursuing with our partners, he believes very strongly, it creates a better opportunity for success in the long run for the Libyan people, for the United States, for the other countries in the region, and for all our allies.

And the issue of removing assets, I mean, he made very clear his position that we would take the lead initially in the military operation because of our unique capacities to shape the battlefield, if you will, but that we would then step back, still remain part of the coalition, but make that transition to a NATO lead. We are still very much a part of the coalition, but we are not in the lead of the coalition. That means that the burdens and costs of this operation are shared, which we think is a good thing and we think the American people probably think is a good thing, as well.

Jake.

Q Regarding the massacre at Mazar-e-Sharif that you read the statement from the President about, I'm wondering -- that began as a protest against Pastor Terry Jones burning the Koran or involved in a protest that burned the Koran. And I'm wondering how much the President feels that Terry Jones and his team played a role in what happened in Mazar-e-Sharif, or how much of this is to be viewed as violence in Afghanistan in and of itself?

MR. CARNEY: Well, my understanding is there were protests around Afghanistan, and that we are still assessing what the cause of the protest was, what the motivation behind them was, and specifically this protest that led to this horrific action that was taken. And we strongly condemn the violence that took place there. But I don't -- we don't have any -- we don't have enough information about what was the cause to make a comment on it. We have obviously -- well, I'd just leave it at that.

Q In terms of Libya, given the emphasis that you and the administration have been giving to the diplomatic and other efforts to remove Qaddafi from power as opposed to the military ones, is there any update you can give us on information coming from the foreign minister who defected or other efforts to get others from his inner circle to defect, any information about -- information about Qaddafi's state of mind?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have anything specific on that for you except that the outreach is ongoing and the broad reports of outreach in the other direction from people in the Qaddafi regime to various folks on the outside has also taken place, as Secretary of State Clinton has mentioned and talked about. But we are not -- it is not clear yet in our mind what that means in terms of Qaddafi's view of his situation, in terms of him personally.

Clearly, from Mr. Koussa's decision to leave, that's an indication -- at least gives us some insight into the sort of state of the circle around Colonel Qaddafi, but I don't have any hard information about his state of mind or how he views his own predicament right now.

Q And lastly, could you give us your best assessment of the capabilities of the Libyan rebels?

MR. CARNEY: I would leave specifics to those who know better at NATO or the Defense Department. But we don't dispute the idea that this is not a formal military force. I mean, that is part of its -- I mean, it is opposing what was a former military force that is still loyal, parts of which are still loyal to Muammar Qaddafi, precisely because that regime was so brutal.

And so it is made up of, in many senses, untrained, unexperienced people who are fighting for the right to be more free and to participate more fully in their country's future and to create more economic prosperity for their children. I

mean, that's my understanding, without -- as I discussed yesterday, obviously there are elements of this very broad opposition that we either don't know a lot about or we assume that not everybody who opposes Qaddafi is necessarily a friend of the United States. But that the -- that it is not a professional military I think is a notion we can agree on.

Chip.

Q Thanks, Jay. You said earlier this week that there's no military option on the table with regard to Syria. Is the United States simply in a position where they're an observer, with regard to Syria, or is there any option of any sword on the table? Is there anything the government can do other than watch and monitor?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we have spoken quite clearly about the need for the Syrian government to refrain from violence, to cease the arrest of human rights activists and lawyers and journalists, to act on the promises that the Syrian President made once in 2005 and made again the other day to initiate a series of reforms that the Syrian people clearly want. And the message -- it's not an observation role only. Obviously, we are working with our allies in the region and speaking directly, or rather publicly, to the Syrian government, urging them to cease the violence and to engage in national dialogue.

Q Are there any actual options -- diplomatic, economic, anything --

MR. CARNEY: Well, I'm not going to prejudge what -- I mean, there are already quite substantial sanctions in place in Syria -- have been since they were passed in 2003.

Q Anything more --

MR. CARNEY: But there's obviously always more that can be done, or potentially more that could be done, in response to a situation in any given country, whether unilaterally or multilaterally -- many measures that could be taken short of military action, but I don't have a list of specifics that are under consideration.

Q Okay, so it's too early to say that there are options on the table?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I don't have a list of the specifics. The team that focuses on the region, focuses on Syria, I'm sure is evaluating the situation. I mean, I know they are and I know that they evaluate various policy options that we might -- the President might pursue. But I don't -- I can't enumerate them or describe them to you because it's premature to do that.

Q John McCain on Libya. John McCain says he's working Senator Kerry, Senator McConnell and others to try to pass a -- I know there's been talk of this, but now there's a real -- a specific effort, we're told, to pass a -- to find a resolution that could be overwhelmingly passed by the Senate, maybe just a sense of the Senate resolution, but something that they can vote on. Is the White House discouraging that, encouraging it, involved in it?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we have said -- I don't know that -- if we've addressed the specific effort that you refer to, but we have said that we welcome congressional support for the actions that the President authorized and the mission that the United States remains engaged in, both the military mission and the diplomatic, economic, political mission, if you will, that encompasses all the other actions that we're taking with regard to Libya. So we would, broadly speaking, welcome that support.

Q And last question. John Boehner, just a short time ago, again, said that he denies there is any target number on these. Do you still say there is a target number that he agreed to?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would just point you to the statement that he made yesterday that -- and that we agree on -- that there is a target number, but nothing -- there is not an agreement until there's an agreement; that there is not -- but there is an agreement on a target, that if we -- if we can --

Q So you're saying he has agreed with the \$33 billion target number?

MR. CARNEY: -- has alternately been described in different terms depending on which baseline you're working off of. But \$73 --

Q You're saying he agreed to that as a target number?

MR. CARNEY: As a target to give to the appropriators to work off of as they negotiate the details of cuts and spending, and try to find the common ground that would allow us to get to that number in a way that is acceptable to the House, the Senate, and the White House.

Q On Libya, are we withdrawing -- the planes the U.S. is basically withdrawing from the no-fly zone activities tomorrow, will they be replaced by planes from other countries?

MR. CARNEY: Well, NATO has assumed sole command of the operation, both the enforcement of the no-fly zone and the enforcement of the arms embargo and the enforcement of the civilian protection aspect of the mission. So how that -- how they do that, obviously it involves air assets as well as other assets, and how that breaks down, I would refer you to NATO -- but, yes.

Again, the idea that it's like a withdrawal -- I mean, we made very clear, the President made very clear, that our engagement would be very intense in the beginning, would involve a lot of American assets, a lot of hardware, a lot of pilots, et cetera, and missiles that were utilized; and that we would then -- in a matter of days, not weeks -- pull back, having done the things that we can do uniquely, more effectively, more quickly, better than anyone, and then broaden the effort in terms of participation to the point where we are still obviously a partner in this, participating in this, but it is led by NATO and other coalition partners are contributing the lead assets, if you will, to the enforcement efforts.

Q On the ceasefire, Secretary Gates was asked yesterday in one of the hearings whether he could envision the conflict ending with Qaddafi in power. He said, no, but he could envision a ceasefire. And he went on to lay out some of the terms that it seems the opposition has laid out -- stop attacks on civilians, move the troops out of the cities, allow humanitarian aid deliveries, et cetera. Is there any space between the Secretary and the President on this?

MR. CARNEY: Zero space. We obviously believe very strongly that it is for the Libyan people to decide their future. We -- the civilian protection mission is probably -- and I'm not -- as he described it and as I understand it -- encompassed in the goals that the opposition talked about that any ceasefire would require the cessation of hostilities, the cessation of violence against the Libyan people.

But the overall goal -- and I think you referenced this at the top -- is that Qaddafi no longer attempt to or remain in Libya or remain in power. And how that takes place -- obviously, we are engaged and our international partners are engaged in taking measures that we believe move that process along. And, obviously, the Libyan people will and the opposition will engage in that process also.

Q And on today's job numbers, if I may, they're getting a lot of cheers. But former Labor Secretary Elaine

Chao points out that at 216,000 net jobs a month, it would still be the end of the decade before we got back to pre-recession unemployment rate levels. So does that make this rate of job creation acceptable to the President?

MR. CARNEY: Well, what the President said today is that he wakes up every morning -- and I know this because it's on his mind when we talk early in the day and it's on his mind when he goes home at the end of the day -- that this is his focus: job creation and economic growth. He has a lot on his plate but there is no greater priority for him. And what he said today is obviously -- he will not be satisfied until every American who is looking for a job, a well-paying job, finds one.

And so the answer to your question is of course it is not acceptable -- 8.8 percent, while it is the most dramatic and steep decline in the unemployment rate since 1984, it is certainly still too high. And that is why we are focused, as the President was today, on a variety of measures aimed at continuing the economic recovery, increasing job creation, increasing competitiveness. This is the principal focus of his administration, of his White House.

Q The question was whether the creation of 230,000-plus private sector jobs is acceptable.

MR. CARNEY: What I will tell you, it is good news. And to suggest otherwise, I think is -- maybe it's an April fools' joke -- but it is rather sour to suggest that the creation of 230,000 private sector jobs and net 216,000 jobs is anything but extremely good news, the kind of sustained job creation at a high level that we have not seen in many, many years.

Is it enough? No, it is not. But what your question does I think remind people is how deep the hole is, how deep the hole was, that we found ourselves in because of this recession. Remember that in the first several months that this President took office, in the midst of this terrible recession that was here when we got here, the job loss was in the 700,000-a-month range. That's job loss. So we're now at job creation, private sector job creation, in the 200,000-plus range. That is a 900,000 jobs turnaround. Not enough, not good enough, the hole is deep, but we are very happy at the job creation we've seen, 13 straight months of job creation, the 1.8 million private sector jobs that we've seen created in these last 13 months. That is good news.

Q I'm curious about this \$33 billion/\$73 billion. You, the Vice President, have used a number quite frequently. The Speaker said flatly today there is no number. And I'm just wondering, is this -- your choosing to emphasize it, is it an attempt to sow dissension between --

MR. CARNEY: Absolutely not.

Q -- the leadership and fiscal conservatives in the House Republican conference?

MR. CARNEY: No. Our point is that there is no reason that we cannot get a deal here if everyone agrees that they will not -- I mean, I understand that as I think the actions the House is taking today, that they would love H.R. 1 to become law. But as the Speaker said I believe yesterday, this is a government -- Congress and the executive branch -- where one portion of it does not get to dictate the outcome. And the fact is that measure could not pass the Senate and would be vetoed by the President.

So it is not the end result. It may be what they wish for in an ideal world, but it's not happening. And the President's 2011 baseline budget that he proposed is obviously not happening, right? So what we have made clear is we -- the President will make tough choices. He will -- in the spirit of compromise and finding common ground, he will accept cuts that are hard, accept some details that he would not otherwise in an ideal world want to accept, but that he believes the American people expect us to find that common ground, expect us to be reasonable. Political rhetoric and shooting spitballs is not, I assure you -- and I know you know this -- is not what the American people

want out of Washington right now.

So he -- we're talking about a few billion dollars difference in terms of a top-line number, and that should not be the block over which we stumble to lead to a government shutdown or to demonstrate to the rest of America that we can't get things done, because we believe we can. And we believe -- notwithstanding the things that have been said, that there is ample common ground available to us to reach a compromise.

Q Okay, just one more. I want to follow up on something you said yesterday. You spoke very generally about U.S. intelligence assets being helped -- being used to assist the operation yesterday. I'm just wondering, are those assets being -- American intelligence assets being used exclusively for the furtherance of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973, or are they also being used for the furtherance of the unilateral American administration's goal of having Qaddafi leave power?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I cannot, as you know, speak about intelligence matters in any specific way. The conversation that we had yesterday was with regard to, as the President and others have said and I have said, regard to the things that we can continue to do in support of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973, which is, as a member of the coalition that is enforcing that resolution, that we can supply intelligence --

Q But the resolution is limited to protecting civilians --

MR. CARNEY: Well, and that's what I was -- and that -- and again, that is what I am referring to. But I will not speak about intelligence gathering or operations from this podium.

Q Well, can you say whether the American intelligence apparatus is constrained because they're working under the auspices of 1973 from helping further the American unilateral goal?

MR. CARNEY: I'm just not going to comment on that one way or the other. I will say, echoing the President, that one of the capabilities that we are still able to -- that we will still provide in our roles advising and assisting and supporting the NATO-led mission is intelligence capacity, intelligence -- the provision of intelligence. But that also includes refueling capacity, the capacity to jam signals of the Qaddafi regime. So there are a variety of ways that we continue to assist the NATO mission.

Q Jay, one of the cuts that the President himself made in the NASA budget was a funding for the Destiny satellite, which is an earthquake detection capability. Now, given the tremendous turbulence, unprecedented turbulence in this Pacific Ring of Fire that we saw come out in Japan, isn't it total folly to begin taking down some of these NASA capabilities, given that perhaps solar flares and other things are affecting the magnetic field of the earth, when we can, if not prevent them, at least warn the population in good time to deal with them? Isn't that verge on criminality when we're faced with this kind of a situation in that region?

MR. CARNEY: You're asking me whether or not some position we took that I confess I have -- I'm not -- is a criminal action or just folly?

Q It's the Destiny -- the Destiny satellite --

Q Which is it?

Q -- which would allow us to give some lead time, maybe an hour, maybe an hour and a half in, say, San Francisco. If such an earthquake were to hit, you could at least warn the people in time so they weren't caught totally by surprise. That has been axed out of the budget.

MR. CARNEY: Sir, I confess that I don't -- I do not know the specifics of that, the budget line that you referenced. I'm happy to take that question or if you want to get back in touch with me or my office, we'll try to get an answer for you.

Q I think there are 40 scientists who are protesting the --

MR. CARNEY: And I certainly think you might ask NASA about it. But I'm happy to take that question and provide my answer, but I just don't have one right now.

Q NASA is dependent on the President.

MR. CARNEY: Thank you, but I will -- as I said, I would happily answer that question if I had more information on it. But I will get more information for you if you contact my office after the briefing.

Mark.

Q Jay, back to the budget talks, Harry Reid said the EPA riders are off the table. The White House, he said -- neither the White House nor Senate Democrats will accept EPA riders. Is that your position?

MR. CARNEY: Well, what the President has said and what I have said and others have said is that we do not believe this process is the right forum for injecting politically charged or ideologically driven agenda items that are highly contentious, the injection of which seem to us to be designed to derail this train that needs to move forward into the station. I'm not going to negotiate line by line what items are acceptable or unacceptable, but our position on that broad basket of issues is clear.

Q Because, I mean, when you discussed this yesterday, it seemed like you were not specifically taking anything for that matter off the table, and it sounds like he is just taking it off the table.

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, I don't want to -- I mean, I don't want to refine Senator Reid's words. But I will tell you what our position is, which is not to negotiate the items of the hoped-for compromise and resolution from here. Those negotiations are ongoing, and the confidentiality of how that -- of those negotiations is something I will not breach from here.

But our overall position about the need to remove from the process those things that seem to us to be wholly unrelated to a deficit reduction and spending cut and funding bill should be removed in order to allow this process to move forward. And if lawmakers have -- feel passionately about a specific issue, they should write legislation, bring it to the floor, and have it debated on the floor.

Mr. Knoller.

Q Jay, can you tell us what the White House thinks of the government shutdown bill that the House is working on this afternoon?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would just say what I said earlier, which is that the -- H.R. 1 passed the House, did not pass the Senate. If it had miraculously arrived on the President's desk, we made clear in a statement of administration policy that the President would veto it. So it will not become the law of the land. I understand that that is the ideal for one segment of Congress, but nobody is going to get everything they want in this process. We have acknowledged that and many others have acknowledged that on both sides.

So it's an interesting exercise. It is not an exercise that brings us any closer to accomplishing what needs to be accomplished for the American people and what they expect us to do. And so we hope that it will not distract attention from the work that needs to be done very quickly to find resolution on funding for the rest of this fiscal year so we can move on to these bigger issues. We are talking about a funding bill for a year that is already almost half over. It needs to get done.

Q And earlier today, you said the President sees a need to agree on details that cut deeply, but not education, R&D, infrastructure. Can you tell us what are the programs in which you want to cut deeply?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would refer you to the substantial cuts the President proposed in his fiscal year 2012 budget, and there were substantial cuts in that, including to programs that he said when he put forward that budget proposal he cares a lot about and would not want to cut in the manner that he is cutting them in an ideal world. And a number of those cuts have been incorporated into some of the proposals that are on the table that are cuts that we can agree on and that Republicans can agree on.

So he has put forward a series of substantial cuts in a series of areas. And again, I don't want to negotiate on specifics, but the point is that there are lines beyond which he feels he cannot go and will not go because the future economic growth of this country depends that those lines not be crossed.

Q And last question. On his directive, the greening of the federal fleet, does he want to see his limousines made hybrid or all-electric vehicles?

MR. CARNEY: You know, the limousines are part of -- I believe run and operated and commissioned by the United States Secret Service, so I would refer you to them on that.

Q Yes, but it's his directive.

Q Can "The Beast" go green?

MR. CARNEY: Can "The Beast" go green? I honestly don't know. Obviously security matters are not ones that I tend to address from here, but I'd refer you to the Secret Service for that.

Mr. Thrush.

Q Jay, virtually every news outline is reporting, citing the police chief in Afghanistan, saying that demonstrators were at least partially motivated by Terry Jones burning the Koran. Two questions. Do you think he has, to some extent, blood on his hands, this pastor? And the second question is, does this administration have a message to Afghans and other Muslims talking about how they view the burning of the Koran and its -- and the significance of what it says about the United States?

MR. CARNEY: Glenn, I'm not -- I am going to refrain from now from commenting on what may or may not have been the cause of the demonstrations that led to this horrific act, which is in no way justified no matter -- regardless of what the motivation was. But, again, on the cause, the motivation behind it, I don't want to speculate because it's important that we get it right. So we are looking into that, investigating it. And I'm sure when we have some conclusions about that that we make, as opposed to others, I'm sure we -- we'll have a comment on it and you can -- and I'll comment on it from here if you like. But I'm not going to say anything about it now.

Q Is there any reason to believe the Taliban instigated this?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I don't -- I just don't have enough information -- we don't have enough information and we're still getting that information.

Kara.

Q Thanks, Jay. The Colombian government announced this week that its free trade agreement with Canada is going to be going into effect in July. And the President has obviously said that he wants to finish work on the U.S.-Colombia agreement. But I was just wondering, can you point to any evidence of progress, that progress is actually being made on that front?

MR. CARNEY: I can. I was in a meeting this morning with Ambassador Kirk, and that he's working extremely diligently to try to make progress on the Colombian trade deal. And the President is committed to getting it done, and we have done a lot in the past weeks and months to intensify that activity and -- so that we can get a trade deal that is good for American business, good for American labor, good for America, and move forward and get some of these important trade deals completed and passed, as the highly significant trade deal with South Korea has been completed and awaits passage -- approval from Congress.

Q Any estimate for any goal, any timeline?

MR. CARNEY: Sooner than later.

April.

Q Jay, the White House is very upbeat about the unemployment numbers, but there is a concern that the black unemployment numbers inched up two-tenths of a percent to 15.5 percent. And I spoke with Mary Frances Berry earlier, the former head of the Civil Rights Commission, and she said that there needs to be some type of targeted approach for those who continue to be in that number of -- the large unemployment number, and she said an anti-poverty approach, a poverty agenda, per se. Is the White House looking at a targeted approach now as the overall numbers are going down but minority numbers are still going up?

MR. CARNEY: Unacceptably high. The overall number is unacceptably high; the minority number is unacceptably high. And there is no question that is discouraging news that that number ticked up, as you mentioned. It also has come down overall in the last months when -- as the overall rate has come down.

But the President, as I noted earlier, wakes up every morning focused on this issue and goes home every night focused on this issue. And he believes very strongly that the economic measures that he has taken have been beneficial to staving off an even worse economic calamity, an actual depression as opposed to the worst recession that we've ever seen -- in generations, rather, since the Great Depression; and that there were very -- there were programs within the Recovery Act and other measures that we took that were -- by their design would help communities that were hardest hit.

And those -- we believe those programs have been effective -- not enough, but effective. And we're always looking for ways to address -- as the economy recovers, address those areas which are not recovering as well or fast enough, whether they be parts of the economy or communities or regions. And I don't have a specific new proposal from the President for you, but this weighs heavily on him.

Laura.

Q Thanks.

MR. CARNEY: What's going on here? You've been ousted.

Q I'm out of position. No, you should actually call on Ryan because he was here because I was late, so --

MR. CARNEY: On Ryan, maybe.

Q Will you yield?

Q Yes, I'll yield to Ryan. He was here on time.

MR. CARNEY: Ryan.

Q Thanks, Jay. Ryan Tracy, Dow Jones, and the Journal. I want to ask -- I know you don't want to refer to specific policy riders in the budget negotiations, but can you talk generally about whether the administration would accept cuts to health care implementation, for example, or Planned Parenthood?

MR. CARNEY: Look, I think the President has made clear -- first of all, if you're talking about the Affordable Care Act, the answer is we believe this is an essential element to reducing the deficit, to ensuring far greater access to health care, to reducing costs for businesses and individuals, so that is an important area to protect.

On other issues, it is simply not the place to have those contentious fights on social policy or other types of policy that have nothing to do with funding the government, reducing spending, cutting the -- cutting spending and reducing the deficit.

So we -- without getting into specifics, because I don't want to negotiate it from here, it is very much the President's position that this is not the vehicle to have those debates. And it is certainly not appropriate, and the American people will not be happy to learn if this thing founders because of an insistence that something be inserted in the bill that is highly contentious and has nothing to do with the fiscal year 2011 funding of the government.

Q Just to follow up on that, what -- is there any difference with the EPA riders in that sense? I mean, that's --

MR. CARNEY: Again, I'm not going to get into the specifics, Ryan.

Yes -- sorry.

Q Jay, when you were -- in response to Ryan's question just now and then earlier you were talking about shooting spitballs, is that a characterization that you would talk about in terms of a segment of Congress exclusive to their attitude with regard to policy riders, or is that a generally cavalier or less-than-serious attitude toward the --

MR. CARNEY: I like the second part. (Laughter.) I just -- I meant as a general statement. I wasn't aiming that specifically at anyone, and in Washington there have been spitballs delivered from all sides.

But the point is, is that this is not a time -- if there ever is a time, this is certainly not one, where the public wants its leaders in Congress, in Washington or in the White House, for that matter, to engage in a lot of heated political partisan rhetoric. When the opportunity for compromise is there, we have shown and the leaders of Congress have shown a capacity to work together in a bipartisan way to compromise and get things done for the American people at a time that when doing that a lot of people would have predicted was impossible -- I'm talking about the lame

duck session last year.

There is no reason, given what we know about what the elements of the various proposals are in terms of reducing the deficit and cutting spending in the fiscal year 2011 funding process that we cannot reach a compromise. Not 100 percent of what we want, not 100 percent of what Republicans want, Senate Democrats -- everybody is going to have to give. But there is ample room to find common ground.

Q But you don't see that attitude coming from one area or another?

MR. CARNEY: Yes, we just think it's not a good approach in general, and I don't think -- we don't think it's good for the process, we don't think it's what the American people want to hear.

Q Week ahead, Jay?

MR. CARNEY: I do have a week ahead. I'm going to read the week ahead and get out of here, if I could.

Q Does this include filing with the FEC?

MR. CARNEY: On Monday, the President will --

Q File with --

MR. CARNEY: Wait for it, Chip. On Monday, the President will attend meetings at the White House. (Laughter.)

On Tuesday, the President will welcome Israeli President Shimon Peres to the White House for a working lunch. The President looks forward to discussing with President Peres the full range of issues of common concern, including U.S.-Israeli security cooperation, recent developments across the Middle East, and the pursuit of peace between Israel and its neighbors.

On Wednesday, the President will --

Q Coverage? (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: I don't have anything on coverage, but get back to me on that.

Q Will it be a kosher option? (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: That was good. I like that. (Laughter.)

On Wednesday, the President will -- I'm sorry, will travel to the Philadelphia -- (laughter) -- travel to the Philadelphia area to discuss his long-term plan to prevent -- or rather, to protect consumers against rising oil prices and decrease oil imports, as well as key components of his broader energy plan. You may have noticed that we are -- he is, rather, speaking quite a bit about this in these days and weeks.

The President will visit Gamesa -- I hope I'm pronouncing that right -- Gamesa Technology Corporation in Fairless Hills, where he will hold a town hall discussion with workers about building a 21st-century clean energy economy to win the future.

On Wednesday -- also Wednesday, the President will travel to New York, New York, to deliver remarks at the National Action Network's 20th anniversary and national convention.

We will have more details about Thursday and Friday's schedule, including -- well, who knows -- early next week.

Thanks very much.

Q Just one on Japan?

MR. CARNEY: Yes, I'll take one on Japan.

Q On Tuesday, the President spoke with Prime Minister Kan about just the continuing commitment in the long and short term. If maybe you could flesh out some of that long-term support? Has there been any discussions on whether that would include decontamination of soil or water?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have the specifics on that. I think maybe the Department of Energy might or the NRC. The commitment -- I mean, the longstanding commitment is embedded in the nature of the relationship with our very close ally. And we will do, as the President has said, everything we can and provide any assistance we can to help Japan in this incredibly difficult period.

Q Can you comment, then, on the roughly 150 Marines or so that are either arriving or have arrived today to support with decontamination?

MR. CARNEY: I just don't have those details. If you want to check back with me later, I can help you get more information. But it is something that the President is briefed on every day and updated on the situation we have. As you know, Dr. John Holdren is the director of the Office of Science and Technology who is all over this all the time, and making sure the President is kept abreast of developments. And then, as you noted, he himself has engaged with the Prime Minister regularly on this.

Thanks a lot.

END

2:10 P.M. EDT

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