

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

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Press Gaggle by Press Secretary Jay Carney en route Detroit, Michigan

Aboard Air Force One
En Route Detroit, Michigan

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MR. CARNEY: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for joining us on our trip to Detroit. You all have the information we handed out about the visit, what we're doing there, so I won't go over that with you here. Instead I will move straight to questions.

Yes.

Q Jay, the Speaker yesterday had a conversation with the President. He said that he was interested and was willing to consider infrastructure, but wanted to do it in a fiscally prudent way. How does the President interpret that? Does the President see that as an opening? Or is there another way to pay for infrastructure that's not taxing millionaires?

MR. CARNEY: Well, let me say two things about it. The President called, as you know, the Speaker to thank the Speaker for his assistance in seeing the free trade agreements -- the three free trade agreements and TAA passed in a bipartisan way in Congress, in the House. That achievement is an absolute demonstration of the President's continued desire and willingness to work with Republicans as well as Democrats on those ideas that they agree on and that are focused on, in this case, job creation.

As for their discussion about other matters, including the President's jobs act agenda, I would simply say that we have always been open to alternative ideas for funding, for pay-fors, as long as they meet the President's principles. Any economist worth his or her salt will tell you that contracting spending in the near term, in the next -- in this current environment would not have a positive impact on growth or job creation.

That is why the President's proposals are designed in -- one of the reasons why they're designed the way they are, to ensure that the American Jobs Act delivers on what it was meant to do, which is grow the economy and create jobs now in the short term, 2012. And one of the problems that we've seen, and I think perhaps there seems to be some heat being felt by Republicans by the simple observation that they have yet to put forward a plan that meets those simple goals: affects positively economic growth in the near term and helps create jobs in the near term.

So the President, again, more than willing to work with lawmakers of both parties on measures that grow the economy and create jobs now -- because the American people are demanding that we take action now.

Q Did the President see the -- does he see the Speaker as being obstructionist still on the issue of infrastructure?

MR. CARNEY: You're talking about a specific issue, and I think the point that you're making is useful because it goes to what we've said all along about the elements of the jobs act, which is that they are all the kinds of proposals that Republicans and Democrats has supported in the past. And that would include rebuilding our crumbling infrastructure -- bridges, roads, schools, highways.

So we look forward to continued conversations about that. As you know, the Senate will take up the component parts, individually, of the jobs act in the coming weeks, and that would certainly include the infrastructure portion of it.

Q Does the President want to see votes next week on those parts, and if so, which parts first?

MR. CARNEY: As I think I've said before from the podium, the Senate Majority Leader will set the schedule, and we are obviously in conversation with him about this. I'll leave it to him to make any announcements about when votes might happen. But we are very confident that they will happen and that they'll happen in the near future.

Q Do you have opinions, desires, on the issue?

MR. CARNEY: Like I said, we consult with the Senate leadership and discuss these matters, but I don't have any opinions to express here except to say that we want votes on all the component parts, and that includes putting up to 280,000 laid-off teachers back to work. It includes putting idle construction workers to work rebuilding our bridges and highways and schools -- renovating our schools. It includes extending and expanding the payroll tax cut to everybody -- every American who gets a paycheck.

This is hugely important, and kind of shocking to hear I guess one leading Republican referred to that kind of measure as a "little Band-Aid." And I guess you have to be in a -- I would simply say that for most Americans,

\$1,500 is more than "a little Band-Aid."

Q -- the tone of the Speaker for these yesterday, or just the fact that he read that out -- in the tone that he did?

MR. CARNEY: We're fine with where we are on this discussion about the need to move the economy and create jobs now, and that's clearly a conversation the President has had and will continue to have with both the Speaker of the House, Leader Pelosi --

Q But the tone of --

MR. CARNEY: It's fine by us. What I think it points out is what I said before that Republicans are coming under pressure from their constituents to do something on jobs and the economy because, again -- and one of the reasons why they're coming under pressure is because we're not just saying that this is essential, their constituents are saying it, and independent economic analysts are saying what we're saying, which is that the President's plan is a plan to grow the economy and create jobs in the near term.

The Republican so-called plan for job creators, while it may have some good ideas in it, including passage of free trade agreements and passage of patent reform and some other issues, those same outside economic analysts are saying it will have no significant impact on the economy or jobs in the near term.

So you can have a plan -- and we all have policy proposals for different areas that will do different things that may be meritorious -- but what the Republicans lack at this point is a plan for jobs and the economy now.

Q Following up on that, just to look at the jobs bus tour that he's doing early next week, is the President going to have like a change to his message at all? I mean, the things you're saying are sort of the same things you've been saying before the Senate voted down --

MR. CARNEY: Let me make clear to you that this is not -- the Senate vote was the beginning of the fight, not the end. And we aren't going to stop talking about jobs and the economy until we have the kind of economic growth and job creation that this country needs and deserves and that the American people need and deserve.

And so you can expect to hear us -- hear the President making the case for the need to take action until Congress takes action on every item in the American Jobs Act, makes a decision about every item in it -- and then considers other proposals that may come from Congress, or further proposals we have for job creation and economic growth, that are paid for, that don't add a dime to the deficit.

I mean, there is no higher priority. So to suggest that, oh, we've talked about it for a few weeks and we should change topics -- not going to happen.

Q I didn't mean change topics. I mean, like, say something like -- "pass this jobs bill, pass this jobs bill," "tweet." They didn't pass the jobs bill.

MR. CARNEY: They are taking up the individual components of the jobs bill, and I think every senator and then hopefully every member of the House of Representatives will then have to explain if they vote no why they chose millionaires who have done extraordinarily well -- and that's a good thing -- but they've done extraordinarily well in the last 10 or 15 years, where the middle class has flat-lined or seen their incomes decline -- they're protecting millionaires rather than putting teachers back to work. Siding with millionaires rather than putting construction workers back to rebuilding our infrastructure. Protecting millionaires rather than giving every working American a tax cut, an expanded tax cut; small businesses a tax cut; small businesses incentives to hire veterans. I mean, there has to be an answer.

Q Can you explain why a bus tour this time? I mean, last time I think you guys said it was to reach places that were hard to get to by air. This the same thing?

MR. CARNEY: It's the same thing. It is a very positive thing for the President -- and I would argue any President -- to get out of Washington and to talk to Americans around the country. And he felt that was the case on his first bus trip, and he looks forward to the one we're taking next week.

Q Can I just ask you about this trip to Michigan. This is a region that did not fare so well under NAFTA -- there are folks who say that was a bad deal despite predictions that it would be good. What is the President's message as to why this trade deal is one that will help this region rather than hurt it.

MR. CARNEY: This President accomplished something that a lot of people -- a lot of observers, both journalists and others, thought would never come to pass. He was willing to walk away from the Korean Free Trade Agreement because he didn't think it was good enough, strong enough, or provided enough protections for American workers and American businesses. He took a lot of grief for that. He was able to achieve a better deal, a deal that's good for both countries, good for workers and businesses in both countries, that will, combined with the other free trade agreements and combined with TAA -- assistance to workers displaced by trade agreements -- be a boon for the economy, be a boon for employment in this country, supporting up to 70,000 jobs.

I think going to Michigan this President has an enormously powerful message that will resonate with the citizens of

Michigan, not least because this President took action that was very unpopular -- even in Michigan at the time -- to save and oversee the restructuring of two American automobile -- two of the Big Three American automobile companies that resulted in the salvation of a million-plus jobs. Others thought that wasn't worth it. Others thought it was fine basically ending the American automobile industry and just accepting a fate that this President would not accept -- that we would no longer be competitive in that industry, in that field.

I think we saw some sales numbers this morning that reflect the wisdom of the President's decision. And he believes that folks in Michigan and around the region, around the country, understand why he did what he did.

Q If I could follow -- you talk about why the free trade deal is good for American workers and companies. Does he believe it's good for Michigan workers and companies? And if so, why do members of the Michigan congressional delegation disagree?

MR. CARNEY: Well, obviously there was strong bipartisan support for the free trade agreements. Not every Democrat voted for it; not every Republican voted for them. The fact is that, overall, yes, this President believes very strongly that these agreements are good for the country, good for the region, good for Michigan. I'm sure you'll hear from him today when he speaks on that matter. It is why he insisted on -- against a lot of resistance -- making sure that TAA was part of this deal, and why he fought so hard to make the Korean Free Trade Agreement the best possible agreement for Americans -- American workers and businesses. And again, I think the overall record here with regards to the automobile industry, with regards to Michigan and the region, is extremely positive.

Q Jay, about a year ago, Ford ran an ad pointing out that for every 52 cars that came from South Korea to the U.S., the U.S. was sending one back there. Can the President assure the auto industry that that's going to be balanced into an almost, like, equal -- to parity?

MR. CARNEY: I refer you to the experts on the numbers. But the whole point of this agreement is to open up that market to American automobile makers. You have heard the President say repeatedly, as recently as yesterday, that he wants Koreans to be able to buy as easily as -- buy American automobiles -- Chevys, Fords, Chryslers -- as easily as Americans are able to buy Korean automobiles, Kias and Hyundais.

Q Will it --

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, I don't have numbers for it, and we think this is an excellent agreement, a strong agreement that will allow -- that will result in increase in trade, increase in jobs here in America, and an increase in the number of American cars sold in Korea.

Q -- the unions that are opposed to this say that this politically suicidal for the President to have backed these trade agreements, given the track record of trade agreements over the last 15 years. So how would you respond to that?

MR. CARNEY: I would just say -- we've obviously talked a lot about this -- some significant union support did present itself for this, and that, on balance, this President believes that we have to expand our trade. He's committed to doubling our trade by 2015, as you know, and this will contribute to that, and that as long as we have free and fair trade agreements that will redound to the benefit of the American people, American workers and American businesses.

So we're very confident that because of the tough negotiating, because of the insistence with Congress that we pass TAA as well as these free trade agreements, that these deals will, in fact, prove to be beneficial to the American people and the American economy.

Q The trip out West next -- a week from Monday, is that campaign fundraising and jobs events or official events -- or what's the --

MR. CARNEY: I don't have any details on future travel beyond the bus trip next week.

Q Week ahead?

MR. CARNEY: I do have the week ahead, yes. One day I'm going to remember all by myself. (Laughter.)

Okay. Schedule for the week of October 17, 2011. On Monday, the President will travel to Asheville, North Carolina, to begin his three-day American Jobs Act bus tour, where he will discuss jobs and the economy. On the first day of the tour, the President will deliver remarks at the Asheville Regional Airport and at West Wilkes High School in Millers Creek, North Carolina. The President will overnight in the Greensboro area.

On Tuesday, the President will be in North Carolina and Virginia for the second day of his American Jobs Act bus tour. The President will make stops in Jamestown, North Carolina; Emporia, Virginia; and overnight in Hampton, Virginia.

On Wednesday, the President will be in Virginia for the third day of his American Jobs Act bus tour. On the third day of the tour, the President and the First Lady will hold an event at Langley Air Force Base in Hampton, Virginia, where they will discuss the importance of hiring American veterans. The President will visit other Virginia locations

before returning to Washington, D.C.

On Thursday, the President will welcome to the White House the 13 recipients of the 2011 Presidential Citizen's Medal, the nation's second-highest civilian honor. Later, the President will host Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg of Norway for a meeting in the Oval Office. The President met with the Prime Minister in December of 2009, and welcomes the opportunity to reciprocate the warm hospitality that both he and the First Lady received during that visit.

The United States and Norway are not only close NATO allies but also partners who cooperate in a wide variety of endeavors all around the world. The President looks forward to thanking the Prime Minister personally for Norway's important contributions to the NATO mission in Libya, and to consulting with him on issues of common interest, including Afghanistan, Middle East peace, the Arctic, global health, climate change, the famine in Somalia, and support for the new democracies in North Africa.

On Friday, the President will attend meetings in the White House.

Q What was your favorite part of the state dinner?

MR. CARNEY: Wow. It was pretty fun. Really the entertainment was pretty cool. Those three sisters were just unbelievable. And it's my understanding -- I don't know if we put out material on this, but they were raised by a single mom and just -- as somebody who's raising a couple of kids and can barely convince them to practice piano once a week, I just can't imagine -- (laughter) -- that accomplishment.

So it was really -- it was a special evening, and a great atmosphere. South Korea is such a close ally -- significant achievements yesterday not just in passage of the free trade agreements, but confirmation of our new ambassador to South Korea -- a very, very good day for both countries.

Thanks very much -- except for the rain.

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11:50 A.M. EDT