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The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

March 09, 2011

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 3/9/2011

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.

*The President stands firmly behind the nomination of Don Berwick because he's far and away the best person for the job, and he's already doing stellar work at CMS: saving taxpayer dollars by cracking down on fraud, and implementing delivery system reforms that will save billions in excess costs and save millions of lives.

12:48 P.M. EST

MR. CARNEY: Good afternoon, everyone. Before I get started two quick things. One, an acknowledgement, not an announcement -- today is my sister's birthday and I wish her a happy birthday. She is my dear --

Q What's her name?

MR. CARNEY: Elizabeth Carney.

Q Can we have a filing break? (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: I spoke with her this morning, and we are very close.

The second is that some of you have been asking and I can confirm that the

President is having a meeting early this afternoon with Senate Democratic leaders here at the White House to discuss obvious matters. I also can tell you that the Vice President, who is in Moscow, is making some calls -- leadership calls as well.

And that's all I have on the announcement front, so let's get started. Ben.

MR. CARNEY: Thanks, Jay. A couple questions on Libya, please. Can you set expectations for today's principals meeting? In particular, is this the day when the team is trying to settle on a recommendation for the best intervention strategy to present to the President?

MR. CARNEY: Ben, today is a principals committee meeting -- as you know, these happen with some regularity -- and they are discussing the events in Libya and in the region. I don't anticipate -- in fact, I know this is not a decision meeting. It's obviously one in which the events that are evolving in Libya will be reviewed and discussed and the variety of options that we have already taken and are implementing will be discussed, as well as the options that remain on the table. But I think I would not -- I don't want to raise expectations that this is a meeting that will lead to an imminent, concrete decision about some action.

Q A lot of the questions that we have go to a sense of urgency on behalf of the administration. And you talked to us about the perspective of how fast things are moving. But I'm curious, the story in Libya seems to be going the wrong way in terms of certainly the hopes of the White House. Qaddafi seems even more and more entrenched as the day goes, instead of less. I'm wondering if that pattern of events changes the timeline at all here, quickens the need for a decision about how to intervene.

MR. CARNEY: Ben, let me take you back a little bit, because I understand your question and I understand the sense of urgency that's created by what we've been witnessing occur in Libya. But let me remind you, first of all, what has been done in remarkable time. We have imposed very strong sanctions, including freezing over \$30 billion of the Qaddafi regime's assets. We have coordinated also with the United Nations for additional sanctions with our European partners and through the United Nations. We have led the way in initiating steps through the United Nations to make sure that those members of the Qaddafi regime who are responsible for gross violations of human rights and the use of violence against the Libyan people will be

held accountable. That includes a U.N. Security Council referral of the Qaddafi regime to the International Criminal Court.

We are engaged in a highly swift and coordinated effort to provide humanitarian assistance and we have also, through a variety of channels, reached out to the opposition to discuss what their goals are and what their situation is. We have also done military contingency planning. We have talked about positioning resources in the region for contingencies that might occur of all sorts. And let me remind you that the meetings in NATO this -- at NATO this week in Brussels were initiated by the United States of America, by this President. This has all happened in three weeks.

Let me take you back to April of 1992, which is when Yugoslav air force jets began to bomb civilians in -- essentially, when the violence began in Bosnia. It took -- for an arms embargo which has already been initiated by the U.N. against Libya -- three months from the declaration of Slovene and Croatian independence for the imposition of an arms embargo. It took nine days in this case.

When the ethnic cleansing began in April of '92 in Bosnia, it took a year, over a year, for an asset freeze; over two years for a travel ban. Again, our actions were in under two weeks in this case. There has never been a situation where the international community, with leadership by the United States, has acted as quickly as it has to respond to this kind of situation. And this is not the end of it. We are continuing to review options, and we are obviously aware of the suffering in Libya and the violence there. But I think it is very important for people to understand the kind of dramatic action that has been taken with the leadership of this President, and that will continue to be taken as we move forward.

Yes.

Q Jay, if you're saying that a decision is not necessarily going to come today, can you give us a sense of when something like that would come?

MR. CARNEY: As you know, Jeff, there have been meetings all week in Brussels, at NATO. They continue. We are in the process of reviewing a variety of options, which I've discussed from here, from Air Force One yesterday, and others obviously have discussed. I don't have a timetable for you for further decisions, or even, I don't want to put on the table here that some action will take place at some point in the future.

The actions we've taken have been dramatic, and we are implementing them in a way that we hope they will have an effect.

We are also, as you know, using the full spectrum of our intelligence resources to ensure that we are monitoring what's happening in Libya and in a way that will enable the international community to hold responsible those members of the regime who are perpetrating violations of human rights.

So this is an ongoing process. The review continues, the options are refined and reviewed and considered, and obviously, we want to work with our international partners. We feel it's very important to -- so that any action we take be done in a coordinated way with our international partners, because that is a powerful message to the people of Libya, to the Libyan regime, and to the people around the region: This is not about the United States; it is not about Western powers, European powers. It's about the people of the region, and in this case the people of Libya.

Q Let me switch topics really quickly. Regarding Secretary Locke, when do you expect to name a successor for him? And do you expect that his appointment to be ambassador to China will go relatively rapidly through the Senate?

MR. CARNEY: We certainly anticipate that Secretary Locke will be approved by the Senate. He has been approved obviously once before for his current post, and he is a, we feel, supremely qualified candidate for the ambassadorship.

The process that the President just went through was one to search for a replacement for the ambassador to China. It wasn't one -- that was the primary goal. It was not to search for a replacement for whoever filled that role. So I don't have a timetable for you on naming a nominee to succeed Secretary Locke.

Yes, Jake.

Q First of all, happy birthday to your sister.

MR. CARNEY: She thanks you. (Laughter.)

Q So Republicans on the Hill have seized upon NPR's latest woes to talk about

how it's time for the federal government to stop subsidizing the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The President's budget proposes more than \$400 million for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. I'm wondering if you have any response to the recent kerfuffle involving the resignations of both Schillers?

MR. CARNEY: Jake, everyone agrees that we need to cut spending. The President put forward a budget that does that in dramatic fashion. We also -- that budget also contains within it the President's priorities, and we're working with Congress to find common ground, as you know, on the broader budget issues. But we believe that -- or rather, we do not support calls to eliminate funding for National Public Radio and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, as is evidenced by our budget.

Q Why?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we think they are worthwhile and important priorities, as our budget makes clear.

Q Can you just elaborate a little bit? Why are they important priorities? What do they do that -- I mean, Republicans argue, okay, Republicans argue that the marketplace should support the programs of public radio and PBS. Why does the administration disagree? I'm sorry, Mara.

Q You're forgiven. (Laughter.)

Q I just feel for -- (laughter.) Why does the administration disagree? You're not exactly offering a full-throated defense of that. And I'm wondering, can you elaborate? Why is it --

MR. CARNEY: Well, I'm not -- wait, wait. I'm not -- I don't know what you mean by a full-throated defense.

Q I think it was pretty full-throated. (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: What I am saying is that our budget makes clear -- you guys could -- Mara, would you want to come up here? (Laughter.) But the budget makes clear the President's priorities, and among them are the funding at the level that we stipulate in

the budget for National Public Radio and for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

I don't think people here want to get into the history of public broadcasting and public radio and why successive administrations of both parties have felt that it's worthwhile. But suffice it to say that we do.

Q Quick question on the budget as well. You have the President meeting with Senate Democratic leaders, you said. Vice President Biden had been sort of deputized to lead these talks and you did note that he was still making phone calls from overseas. But is this a sign the President is going to get more actively involved in these budget talks now that you're moving closer to another potential government shutdown?

MR. CARNEY: Ed, the President has been involved. The White House has been involved. The Vice President, as you know, has been involved --

Q How has the President been involved? Was he making phone calls before?

MR. CARNEY: In this broader debate about budgets and spending, the President has been engaged since the State of the Union, in discussions with members -- leaders, rather, from both parties. You know he has had said members to the White House. He has had discussions, some of which I have mentioned from here and read out from here; and multiple, multiple interactions, conversations, meetings between senior White House officials and congressional officials.

So we are engaged. We don't read out every meeting and phone call. The meetings and phone calls -- or the meeting, rather, and the phone calls that I mentioned today are happening and it's all aimed at the purpose of finding the common ground that we need so that we can fund the government for the rest of the year, with substantial spending cuts.

As you know, an important part of this process is occurring today, I believe, on Capitol Hill when the Senate votes on two measures -- the House -- H.R.1, as it's known -- the House Republican proposal, which will be voted on by the Senate, and then the Senate Democratic proposal which will be vote on. And the outcome of those votes will, we think, help guide us forward in terms of the search for common ground.

And we look forward to that happening and we're working very hard to do what we

think is very important, which is reach an agreement that funds the government, substantially reduces spending, continues to pay for the very things -- the very priorities that are important to keep the economy growing, to ensure that the economy is continuing to create the kind of jobs that we saw last Friday with the most recent jobs announcement, and that takes us through the end of the fiscal year.

Because it is simply -- we are too great a country, with too large an economy, to be in a situation where we are negotiating whether or not the government will remain open every two or three weeks.

Q One quick follow on Libya and no-fly zone. Yesterday Secretary Clinton did an interview with Sky News, where she was stressing that this cannot be a U.S.-led situation, it has to be multilateral. And the reporter noted that other countries are involved -- the Arab League has gotten behind this, et cetera. So the reporter asked, "In theory, the U.S. would support a no-fly zone?" And the Secretary said, "Well, we are going to support the efforts that are being made." Is that a "yes," that the administration supports a no-fly zone? Not that you're going to implement it, but that you support it, but you're just trying to figure out how to make it work?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I don't want to refine the Secretary of State's words. What I have said from here and what others have said and I think she's made clear is that we're reviewing a variety of options; we're actively considering a no-fly zone --

Q She said, we are going to support the efforts that are being made -- the word "support" -- we're going to support the efforts.

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think we will support in a coordinated way the actions of our international partners, which we have leading up to this point and we will going forward, because we are an elemental part of that process.

Q But international partners like Britain and France are suggesting they support a no-fly zone. So if they're able to go on record and say they support it, why can't we?

MR. CARNEY: Well, first of all, I think there's -- you're getting a little ahead of yourself in terms of the process of preparing for potential contingencies, evaluating options, even preparing language -- which I think you're referring to -- and a decision by the international community -- by NATO, by the U.N., by the United States, by its international partners -- to endorse and pursue a specific course of action. I think

there's a difference. And we are working very closely with the British and the French and many, many other countries on this effort.

Q Jay, let me follow up on Ed's question because this morning she went a bit further on The Early Show. She said --when asked about all the different options that are on the table, she said, "We think it's very" -- yeah, I'm one-upping with everybody -- "We think it's very important that there be a U.N. decision on whatever might be done." So she is basically saying that nothing is going to happen without U.N. approval, which means Security Council approval, and we already know that China and Russia are likely to veto anything. Isn't that a way of saying that we're satisfied with the status quo right now? And is that administration position, that it has to come from the U.N., as she said?

MR. CARNEY: It is our strong preference that actions we take are done in concert with our international partners.

Q But she said U.N., not just international partners. And that means Security Council, and that means Russia and China.

MR. CARNEY: Let me just go back to the point. It is our strong preference, in this situation and many others, that we act together with our international partners, because, collectively, we are stronger than we are individually in cases like this. It is also obviously the case -- again, not referring to the specific action -- but it is obviously the case that we always reserve the right to act -- NATO does, rather, as the United States does, to act on its own.

But let me just be careful and say that our strong preference and what we are working for right now is to work with the United Nations and other -- and NATO and all our international partners on the variety of considerations that are there, the variety of options that we're reviewing.

Q Could you just answer though -- does the President agree that "it's very important that there be a U.N. decision on whatever might be done"?

MR. CARNEY: It is very important that we work together with the United Nations and other international organizations and our --

Q She said that there be a U.N. decision.

MR. CARNEY: It's very important -- I'm not going to --

Q Are you walking back what she said?

MR. CARNEY: I am not walking back what she said at all. I mean, I think I just would refer you to the State Department. But it is very important that we work with the United Nations.

Q Okay, but that's not what she said. Again, she said there be a U.N. decision on whatever must be done.

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, we are working with the United Nations. We're working with the British and French. We are working -- we are pursuing that course as we decide, collectively, what options we make take.

Q Okay. On another topic, as you know, in the past, the President has talked about situations in which the U.S. has a moral obligation to intervene, not just intervention on behalf on U.S. national interests. Is he looking through that lens at this situation in Libya? Does he consider this a situation that could get to the point where the United States has a moral obligation to intervene? Is that one of the ways he's looking at this?

MR. CARNEY: Chip, I would say that the statements and the actions that have been taken by this President in the three weeks since this circumstance began in Libya demonstrate the moral outrage that we feel at the actions taken by the Libyan regime against its people. So, clearly there is a moral component to not just the actions of the United States and the President of the United States but the actions of the entire international community, and its swift and coordinated reaction to and response to the despicable behavior of the Libyan regime.

Q Last question. Is there any chance he would stop by the principals meeting today? And I'm just trying to get a sense -- is there a vigorous debate going on back there over what to do or is it more waiting to see --

MR. CARNEY: You want me to break it down for you who's on what side and everything? Would that be okay from here? (Laughter.)

Q That would be great. That would be really great. So you're conceding that there are two sides --

MR. CARNEY: I am not. I am not. (Laughter.)

Q At least two.

Q More than two sides?

Q That was really nice of you to offer that. (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: These meetings -- again, let me go back to my original answer to the original question. These meetings are held frequently in the Situation Room here at the White House, principals committee meetings -- I believe there was one just a couple of weeks ago -- and they are evaluating the various options in the situation in Libya and the broader region, and the various options that we have taken and are implementing, and others that remain on the table.

I don't have any information on the possibility the President will stop by. It's not anticipated.

Wendell.

Q Ambassador Rice told "Good Morning America" today that U.S. would keep the pressure on Qaddafi until he falls. Is this the regime change the President is so often skeptical of?

MR. CARNEY: We've made clear, Wendell, that we believe -- the President has said very forcefully that Muammar Qaddafi needs to leave, needs to step down. He has lost the legitimacy to rule in the eyes of his people and in the eyes of the world. I don't think you can be any clearer than that.

Q Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison and Mary Landrieu want the President to extend

the leases that were basically frozen after the Deepwater Horizon spill in the Gulf of Mexico instead of reviewing them. As I understand, all of the leases are being reviewed now individually. Given the increases recently in the price of oil, is this something the President could support?

MR. CARNEY: Since the oil spill in the Gulf -- a terrible, terrible oil spill in the Gulf, the worst in history -- we have ensured that future permits will be granted when there is a containment -- when there is -- the applicant shows an ability to handle through a containment procedure a spill. We have, as you know, last month -- late last month, last week -- granted our first permit for deepwater drilling.

Since the oil spill we have granted 37 permits, shallow water permits. Moreover, it's important to note -- and I don't think many people realize this -- that domestic oil production last year rose to its highest level since 2003. This administration has actively pursued all forms of energy production, precisely because we think it's so important to reduce our dependency on foreign oil, and to create the clean energy industries that will drive economic growth and job creation, and our national security through a reduction in foreign oil dependence in the future. So I think that's my answer.

Q Is tapping the SPR still being considered?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have anything new on that. We are monitoring the situation with oil prices. We are confident that the global system has the capacity to deal with a major disruption. We understand the impact that higher gasoline prices have on family budgets. But I have nothing specifically to add except that that option is one we're considering, which we said before.

Q If I could ask one more question.

MR. CARNEY: Let me just -- ok, let's -- I want to get everybody involved.

Q The Wisconsin state Senate majority leader says the President's political team in Chicago is working to recall Wisconsin state Republican legislatures. Any truth to that?

MR. CARNEY: I have no idea what you're talking about, Wendell, honestly.

Yes.

Q I want to try one more time Jake's line of questioning on NPR. With the proliferation of media from all points of the political spectrum and all points of opinion, why is it important for the taxpayers to still continue to fund public broadcasting?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I'm not going to -- I've made clear what our position is on this. I don't want to get into a debate about the merits of public broadcasting --

Q I'm not trying to engage in a debate, I'm asking --

MR. CARNEY: But, Mike, the reality is that the administrations, both Republican and Democratic, have supported public broadcasting in the past, and we think in an era where tough choices have to be made, including the ones that this President laid out in his proposed 2012 budget, that there remains a need to support public broadcasting and NPR. I don't have anything more on it.

Q Okay. Tomorrow, Representative Peter King will have a hearing, obviously very controversial. And obviously the Deputy National Security Advisor spoke on this over the weekend -- Sunday. Does the White House object to the tone and the comments coming from Congressman King, or do you object to the fact that this hearing is being held at all? Or what do you object to about this hearing, specifically?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think I have to take issue with your premise. We have said that we welcome congressional involvement in this issue. We think it's an important issue. The Deputy National Security Advisor Denis McDonough spoke about our position on this issue and the violent extremism here in the United States, and made points that we think are very important, which is in the United States we do not practice guilt by association, A; B, we believe that Muslim Americans are part of the solution, they are not the problem. It is through the helpful cooperation of Muslim Americans that we are able to effectively address this issue.

Q And finally, the meeting with Democratic leaders today -- Joe Manchin, Diane Feinstein have been critical of what they describe as a lack of presidential

involvement. Is this meeting called in response to their criticism?

MR. CARNEY: No.

Q When was it scheduled?

MR. CARNEY: It's been scheduled for days. And as you know, the President meets fairly regularly with leaders of Congress. We don't throw in meetings based on comments from individual senators in 24 hours. And I would just say that the debate that's happening in the Senate and the votes that will come out today in the Senate will give us an indication of where we need to go -- Congress and the White House -- to find the common ground that the American people want us to find so that we can reduce spending, tighten our belts, live within our means, and still fund the essential services of government, our national security, and make the investments that we need to make to continue growing; to make sure that the kind of growth we've seen in the last year plus and the kind of job creation we've seen in the last year continues -- because there is no plan, no proposal that will be effective in reducing the deficit or addressing our long-term fiscal issues if we don't grow and create jobs.

Yes.

Q Thank you. Two questions -- one on foreign policy. Does the U.N. arms embargo restrict the United States from sending arms to the Libyan rebels in the east? Senator McCain has said that it should be interpreted narrowly to apply only to the government, but what is the administration's interpretation of that?

MR. CARNEY: We believe that the arms embargo contains within it the flexibility to allow for a decision to arm the opposition, if that decision were made.

Q And the second question, on the budget talks, what is the President hoping to come out of this meeting today with Democrats?

MR. CARNEY: He hopes to continue the process of finding the common ground that I've made reference to from here, which is the kind of budget cuts that we can all agree on, that the American people expect us to make, in a continuing resolution that funds the government through the end of the year, maintains the investments in

education and innovation and infrastructure that are essential to economic growth, and that does not include extraneous political or social issues that are not the focus of -- a proper focus of a budget deal.

Q And is Biden -- are Biden's calls specifically about the CR?

MR. CARNEY: I think it's safe to assume, yes.

Q Jay, what time is the budget meeting?

MR. CARNEY: It's early this afternoon. It may be within the hour.

Q A minute ago, you used the statement "live within our means." And that's a statement President Obama used yesterday in Boston and has used often.

MR. CARNEY: That is a coincidence. (Laughter.)

Q Well, what I'm asking is, what does he mean by that? Does that mean a balanced budget when he says we need a government and a budget that helps us live within our means?

MR. CARNEY: Well, as a technical matter, beyond the broadly understood sense of the term, which is that you don't spend more -- that you spend -- that you manage your budget responsibly, your inflow and your outflow, and I think as a specific matter, as we talked about in the early days after our budget release, our budget is designed to get to a point where we are taking in what we are spending.

Now, I understand that we have this huge overhang of a national debt that requires substantial interest payments. But you cannot -- one step in dealing with our fiscal situation, with our deficits and our long-term debt, is to get to a point where we are living within our means, spending only what we're taking in. That's what his budget proposal does, and he thinks it's a very important goal.

Q So it means it's a budget in balance except for interest on the debt?

MR. CARNEY: Mark, if you -- and I assume this isn't true, but let's say your credit

card bill arrived yesterday, and you have a substantial balance and an interest payment that you have to deal with. You're never going to get that under control if you go out tomorrow and drop another thousand dollars that you haven't earned -- despite being worth more than that in the work that you do from here. (Laughter.) So the point is that it is part of being responsible -- financially responsible, fiscally responsible -- to get to the point where we haven't been for a while, I remind you, in the years prior to getting here.

There was a golden era in an administration long, long ago when balanced budgets were created, where surpluses were created, where surpluses were envisioned as far as the eye could see -- 1999, 2000. That's not the circumstance that we inherited when we got here. It is a circumstance we hope to get to at least in terms of the balance between inflow and outflow. And we think it's an important milestone.

Q I'm still not clear on what it means.

MR. CARNEY: I'd hate to see your checkbook.

Q Thank you, Jay. On the budget talks, Kevin McCarthy yesterday --

Q No gift for your sister. (Laughter.)

Q Oooh --

Q Kevin McCarthy suggested yesterday that there are talks among House and Senate leaders to extend the deadline from March 18th for another two, three, or even four weeks. Is that being circulated here at the White House? What does the President think of that?

MR. CARNEY: What I'll tell you is that we think it's important -- I think you remember me saying and probably others prior to the recent CR that was signed that our desire was to have more time to allow for the negotiations that are necessary to reach the common ground that needs to be reached so we can get a deal through the end of the year. That is still our goal. How we get there -- I'm not going to get into -- draw lines in the sand about what specifically we would support or not support. But the overall point is important, which is the American people don't want us to get into a situation where

we are going through these cycles of negotiations on how to make sure the government's bills are being paid every second Monday, or every third Monday.

So we need to get very soon to the hard work, the important work, but the achievable work of negotiating a budget deal that funds the government through the end of the year, cuts spending substantially, in a way that all sides can agree on, and that maintains the important investments to keep our economy growing.

Q So you're keeping that door open for that, then?

Q Jay, does the President feel that it's premature to broaden the budget talks, as some Senate Democrats have suggested, to include more than just this tiny slice of the budget that you're focusing on now? He's often said --

MR. CARNEY: Mara, that's an excellent question. In the State of the Union he talked about even as he was proposing a budget -- or was going to propose a budget which would have substantial cuts in non-defense discretionary spending, he came out in front of a large audience to make the point that the non-defense discretionary budget is 12 percent of our overall budget, and there is no way to get from here to there responsibly in terms of restoring our fiscal sanity, you might say, if you don't address the bigger issues. He is committed to doing that. And he welcomes the input that other leaders in Washington are providing in that process.

And he, as I think I said from here on Monday, welcomes the statement by the Speaker of the House in the Wall Street Journal on Friday that dealing with those bigger issues that affect our long-term debt -- entitlement spending, interest, defense -- as well as tax expenditures, that we all need to link arms and do it together.

Q Right, at some point. But yesterday several leading Senate Democrats said that these negotiations that we're talking about now for the CR need to be broadened to talk about things that are mandatory and not just domestic non-discretionary. So does he think that is premature?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would just say that we welcome the input from members and look forward to getting to the point where we are talking about reaching a deal on a continuing resolution that funds the government through the fiscal year, so that we can move on to --

Q So that has to come first?

MR. CARNEY: I'm not making a dividing line. But I don't think that anyone thinks between now and March 18th we will resolve entitlement reform, tax expenditures, and all the other issues that go into a much bigger deal. But the elements that would go into a fiscal year 2011 agreement I don't want to negotiate from here.

Q Jay, is the President then -- to follow up on Mara -- is it waiting for the House Republicans to put forward their broad budget before it would be prepared to enter into broader negotiations?

MR. CARNEY: Jackie, we are in a situation, as we were last week, where the government shuts down on March 18th -- I mean, we're not -- we need to resolve the issue on the table, which is funding for fiscal year 2011. So we're not waiting for anything to get to those talks. So we're eager to --

Q But the broader negotiations -- he's put out his budget, so now --

MR. CARNEY: I think you're asking me a version of what Mara said, which is -- and I'm not, from here, separating the near term from the short term, except that we don't have a choice but to deal with the near term funding posed by the short-term extension.

Go ahead.

Q Before you get to that near point, how worried are you that you'll be up against the President's departure to South America?

MR. CARNEY: We believe -- and that's also the beginning of a congressional recess, I think. So we believe that -- we have made clear, the President has made clear, that it is an economic -- would be incredibly harmful to the economy if we were to have a shutdown of the government. He doesn't want one. Congressional leaders don't want one. They have said so, both parties. We believe that we can work out a deal that avoids one, as we did last week. But obviously we think, as I said and I'll say one more time, it would not be good for the economy. It would create a great deal of uncertainty if we were to continue this exercise, repeat this exercise every two weeks.

Q The Congressional Budget Office scoring of your proposal from last week, they

don't see \$2 billion worth of savings that you said were in there.

MR. CARNEY: We supported the Democratic proposal that was put forward -- it wasn't our proposal but it was the Senate Democratic proposal. We have come halfway, the White House and the Democrats, with slightly separate proposals. They don't match up dollar for dollar in the cuts. The point is the Senate proposal will be voted on today -- the Senate Democratic proposal will be voted on today. After the outcome of that vote, we will then receive I think a clear indication of the kind of -- where we need to go. The President has made clear he is willing to do more. It is I think essential and incumbent upon the Republicans to show that they're willing to move, as we have, as the Democrats have.

Because that's what the American people expect. They don't expect in a negotiation or a compromise or the finding of common ground that -- they expect both sides to give, both sides to make tough choices, to come together, to do the business the people sent us here to do.

Q You said that's the difference between the Senate proposal and your proposal. That's what explains the CBO --

MR. CARNEY: I'm just saying that -- because you described it as "our" proposal, and I just wanted to make clear that, first of all, we have never formally laid out -- we made clear that we -- had indicated additional cuts that we supported or could live with, another \$6.5 billion in cuts. The Senate -- the Senate is a sovereign organization. The Senate Democrats produced their own budget that didn't -- I'm just saying, line for line it didn't mirror necessarily the same cuts.

We support it. We want the Senate to vote on it. And then we'll proceed from there.

Q Can we just follow over here --

MR. CARNEY: Let me just move around here. I haven't been -- yes.

Q Third row.

MR. CARNEY: Third row.

Q Jay, two questions, please. First of all, the fact that Gary Locke is Chinese-

American, does the President believe this will make him more effective as an ambassador to China?

MR. CARNEY: Well, look, the President had an announcement today where he spoke. His words are far more important than mine on this issue. He obviously thinks Secretary Locke will be an excellent ambassador. There are a lot of very important ambassadorial posts around the globe, and this is top shelf, as you might say. So his background, his range of experiences, his -- what he brings to this job make him ideally suited to fill it.

Q So that matters more than the fact that he's Chinese-American, or that doesn't matter at all?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I wouldn't rank it. Obviously the fact that he's Chinese-American --

Q I mean, I'm just asking, does it matter?

MR. CARNEY: Secretary Locke spoke about how it matters to him and it obviously matters to us that he brings that as part of who he is to the job.

Q Okay. And if I could just ask you, on Guantanamo, does the President believe that Americans want that detention center closed? And does he have any hope for the possibility that it can still happen during his term?

MR. CARNEY: The President didn't make his position based on polling, if that's what you're asking. What he firmly believes is that it is in America's interest, in our national security interest, as many military leaders have said and, as I would remind you, the previous administration said towards its end, that we should close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, and that remains his position.

Q And based on the logic that he explained at the time, I wonder if you think or he thinks that simply declaring that he wanted it closed and that he still wants it closed achieves part of the goal?

MR. CARNEY: Our position is well known in the United States and around the

globe. And again, it is a position that's not ours alone or his alone. It's shared by military leaders and was expressed by the previous administration.

There are obviously obstacles to that. We understand the reality that we're living in and that this is a difficult issue. But it remains his goal. He remains committed to seeing that facility closed, in the interest of America's national security.

Glenn.

Q Jay, one of the members of that sovereign organization, the Senate, Chuck Schumer, who the President will presumably see today, has proposed putting entitlements on the table as well as certain tax hikes. How does the President feel about that? And a second question from another sovereign, Dick Lugar yesterday said that he felt the United States could not afford, in a fiscal sense, any intervention in Libya.

MR. CARNEY: Let me go to your question about Senator Schumer. I would just say what I said to Mara, which is we welcome the thoughtful input of lawmakers on this issue. It is vitally important that we all recognize what the President made clear in his State of the Union, which -- you cannot get your fiscal house in order if you only go after 12 percent of the budget, and that's what non-defense discretionary spending amounts to.

So the more people who recognize the seriousness of this and the kind of steps that have to be taken the better, because, as he's made clear, we have to do this together. We have to get in the boat together and row in the same direction, with everyone sitting down and not standing up so the boat doesn't tip over. And he remains committed to that goal.

Sorry, what was your second question, Glenn?

Q Yes, Senator Lugar said that one of the factors we should consider in Libya is the cost. He said we can't afford it.

MR. CARNEY: I think that we consider all the factors, all the elements. And one of things I got at I think yesterday on the plane and the day before from here, and others

have, is that -- Secretary Gates -- is that what's important when we consider these options that have memorable phrases attached to them like no-fly zone is that these are substantial undertakings that require assets and potentially put Americans and the forces of our international partners in harm's way. And obviously they also cost money. So all these factors are things that we consider as we develop a set of options and potentially pursue one or the other.

April.

Q Jay, I want to go back to AFRICOM. How often does the President talk to the commanders of AFRICOM? How often does he talk to Kip Ward, who is now commander there, and you have Carter Ham now commanding that.

MR. CARNEY: April, I have to take that. Defense might know. Obviously there's a chain of command. He doesn't, as far as I know, have regular scheduled contacts with different regional commanders. But beyond that, I'm not sure. I'd have to -- I could find out for you, but I'm not sure what the --

Q Well, especially right now, AFRICOM is very important because administration sources are saying that this, if indeed there were to be some way to enforce a no-fly zone and to deal with military options, the U.S.-Africa command center would be the lead. So with that, do you know anything of how the President is communicating, how is he getting information from AFRICOM? And also, not only just with Libya, there are other issues with Cote d'Ivoire. There are other issues within Africa. Is the President being apprised of what's happening?

MR. CARNEY: Well, absolutely he's being apprised of what's happening multiple times a day in terms of Libya and the whole region, as well at Cote d'Ivoire. The AFRICOM is not an independent entity. It's part of the military command structure. And he speaks with his defense secretary and his commanders regularly. But I don't have any information for you in terms of his specific communications with one command.

Q And there's a follow-up. Is there somewhat of a study or some type of assessment on the psychological costs on the soldiers to go into combat again and the possibility to do more combat?

MR. CARNEY: I'd have to refer you to the Defense Department. I don't know.

Margaret.

Q Thanks. Forgive me if this came up Monday. I might just be spacing on it. When Denis McDonough spoke on Sunday, he made a reference to the fact that the administration's approach to domestic radicalization would be forthcoming within the coming weeks. And I'm just wondering if you know what he was talking about. Are you guys getting ready to unveil something new? Or what -- I just didn't know what -- do you know anything more about that? Should we expect --

MR. CARNEY: Well, I don't want to get ahead of what Mr. McDonough said, so -- I think that we have made clear that we take this issue very seriously. We think it's an important issue. We have been engaging in it or evaluating it for some time. And one of the reasons I think that -- because people had talked about the timing of Mr. McDonough's speech. The timing was associated with where we are in the process of that review of the situation, which we think is very -- is an important one. And that's why he spoke. So I don't have anything more for you on what specifically he was referring to that I can announce from here.

Q But is there something -- even regarding policy --

MR. CARNEY: Nothing that I can announce.

Q Okay. Thanks.

MR. CARNEY: Yes.

Q Since you spoke to us on Monday, has the U.S. government been able to reach any clarity about the makeup from the aspirations of the various Libyan opposition factions?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I can't say more than I said, which is that we are in contact with opposition groups, individuals and groups, through various channels. And that's ongoing.

Yes, ma'am.

Q On the King hearings, I guess I -- I know we heard from McDonough and I know that the feeling is that there is no -- there is still outreach to the Muslim community. But they are, for whatever reason, they're feeling demonized, that there is this guilt by association whether the administration is vouching for it or not. Are we going to hear from the President on this? Obviously Muslim engagement is something that the President has been working on throughout this administration.

MR. CARNEY: Well, he has. And I would say that the fact that Mr. McDonough went out and gave the speech when he did, where he did, reinforces the message that he carried, which is that it is our belief, this administration's belief, that, A, as I said, in the United States of America, we do not practice guilt by association; and B, that, in fact, in dealing with this issue, Muslim Americans are very much a part of the solution and not the problem. And that is our position. And obviously Congressman King should answer for himself.

Yes, David.

Q I'm sorry, can we -- but will we hear from the President?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have an announcement on when he might speak next.

Yes, David.

Q Thanks, Jay. A few minutes ago, Speaker Boehner put out a tweet saying -- this is it in its entirety -- "Americans have one message for their elected leaders: Cut spending now." What's the White House response to that? Do you think that's where the political debate now is? One message about --

MR. CARNEY: I think in the 140 characters allowed in a tweet there is room to add -- and I would say that Americans want spending cut and they want responsible government and they do not want actions taken in Washington that would undermine the recovery that we have fought so hard to achieve and that we are in the process of seeing, including the substantial private sector job growth that we saw last Friday.

That's more than 140 characters. But if you put it into one of those condensers -- (laughter) --

Q That's cheating, but nevertheless --

MR. CARNEY: Okay. Americans want us to responsibly cut spending and not --

Q I'm not going to hold you to 140 characters.

MR. CARNEY: -- and not tank the economy.

Q Okay. But do you think the debate is such that the emphasis has become unduly put on the cutting part of that equation?

MR. CARNEY: I think that -- more importantly, the President thinks that cutting spending is important, and he made that clear. There is no disagreement here in Washington or around the country that we need to reduce our spending to deal with our deficits. And I would remind you, again, that the President's budget that he put forward does two things: It cuts spending and it reduces the deficit, which is a challenge that not every plan that we have heard, specific or otherwise, can meet. So his commitment is clear. His commitment to work with Republicans and Democrats to find common ground is clear. And we are engaged in that process now. He is optimistic that we can find that common ground.

Q Can I follow on the budget --

MR. CARNEY: Let me move around to some folks that I haven't -- yes.

Q Jay, two questions. On the meeting with the Democratic leaders, you said they're trying to reach common ground. Are they trying to reach common ground among Democrats or common ground with something that's palatable to the Republicans in the House and Senate?

MR. CARNEY: My reference to common ground was everybody -- Republicans, Democrats -- coming together for a final resolution of this issue of funding the

government through the end of the fiscal year. This meeting is part of that process.

Q And then on Libya, Jay, with Guantanamo Bay, the executive order earlier in the week, and with Congressman King's hearings, is there any -- is this making the delicate line the White House is trying to make in Libya more difficult? Are these two domestic decisions making the President's work more difficult internationally?

MR. CARNEY: No.

Yes.

Q Two questions. On Libya, the U.S. has been communicating with European allies. Do you have any plans to communicate with your Asian allies such as Japan in light of the -- in light of G8 foreign ministers meeting in Paris? And second, in Okinawa, Japan, where U.S. based is located, there was a comment by senior U.S. State Department official on Okinawa made to U.S. students saying that the people in Okinawa are lazy, et cetera. What --

MR. CARNEY: I'm not aware of that comment, so I'd have to refer you to the State Department. And in terms of the spectrum of communications we're having on Libya, I might also ask you to either check back with us, the national security staff, or with the State Department.

Let me go all the way back. Yes, in the back. Final row, striped shirt.

Q Thank you, Jay. On the no-fly zone, the big push seems to be coming from Britain and France. And the situation is that you've sort of articulated that you're willing to wait to get this right. Is the administration -- is it fair to characterize that you're trying to be the cooler head, or is there a concern that other nations are too quick to over-commit NATO resources, which are mostly U.S. resources?

MR. CARNEY: No. We are working with our international partners, the British and the French, and we are moving together, together. And the leadership the United States has shown has been quite clear, as I think I pointed out and I think I reminded you at the beginning, or relatively close to the beginning, that it was the United States that initiated the meetings at the NAC, at NATO in Brussels, where a lot of these

military options have been under consideration. So we are coordinating with our international partners, and that includes, obviously, the British and the French.

Q One question -- I have two questions. One real quick one on public broadcasting.

MR. CARNEY: On?

Q -- on public broadcasting. From an alternative perspective, I mean, could the case be made that since only 2 percent of the funding comes from the federal government that could be a long-term benefit for public broadcasting to cut the purse strings from political pressure?

MR. CARNEY: I would just refer you to my statement before.

Q Okay. Second question: There's been some conflicting reports on where the White House stands with regards to Dr. Berwick at CMS. Is the White House still committed to seeing that through to confirmation?

MR. CARNEY: I confess that I'll have to take that question. I don't have anything, which is not meant to connote anything except that I don't know. So let me take that question. We'll get back to you.*

Yes.

Q Why is tax cuts so much of a mantra when it didn't create jobs over the last decade and 40 percent of the stimulus was tax cuts? And do you agree with Senator Reid's news conference yesterday that oil subsidies and foreign subsidies could be alternative ways to cut the budget? And thirdly, is Social Security off the table now that people are starting to realize that not a dime of the deficit comes from Social Security and it's fully paid for 30 years?

MR. CARNEY: That's a lot of questions. We believe that the tax cuts that this President has proposed and supported and signed into law have had a very positive impact on the economy. The ones that were included in the Recovery Act helped us get out of a situation where this economy was experiencing dramatic negative growth -

- it was shrinking; where job loss was as high as 740,000 or 750,000 a month -- to a situation now where we have real economic growth and real job growth, and have had for a sustained period of time. And we think that the payroll tax holiday, the payroll tax cut that every American received as a result of the tax cut deal, the bipartisan tax cut deal that was reached in December, which the President signed, has had a salutary effect on growth in this quarter.

So we think they are part of the package. And I would remind you that this President has passed something on the order of 14 or 17 small business tax cuts. So they are part of the puzzle.

When you talk about the broader -- it is true that, as I think our budget director has said, that Social Security is not the problem when it comes to our near-term deficits, our annual deficits. It is, however, an issue in terms of its long-term solvency and health. And this is a vital program that we intend to make stronger as we address the overall issue of entitlement reform.

Q Jay, back on Libya for a second. You keep mentioning NATO. Is intervention in Libya something that can be sold as the purview of NATO, and is that a strong line of possible action you're pursuing?

MR. CARNEY: Let me just back up here and make clear that we -- first of all, we are not at a decision point. We are considering these options. We are actively considering a no-fly zone. We are very committed to pursuing a process by which the options that we do decide on are -- that we work with our international partners to take them and implement them.

Beyond that, distinctions between -- NATO is obviously a military alliance and that is a fit place for discussing the military options that we have. It is also vital, we believe, very important to the whole way that we deal with the unrest in the region that the international community broadly is part of this; that it is not just the West, it is not just the United States. And it has not been and that has been a great virtue. And that's a virtue that we hope to continue.

Okay, last one. Yes, sir.

Q With the upcoming anniversary of the oil spill last summer, I wonder is the President satisfied with the current level of new regulation over the oil industry and the level of preparedness for another potential incident like we saw last year?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would just refer you to the -- I forget who asked the question about drilling -- that we take very seriously the need to have the regulations in place that will help prevent the kind of environmental disaster that we had because of the Deepwater spill; that the containment facilities are adequate. And that is why those companies that have sought leases for deepwater drilling have had to prove that they have that capacity.

And we, as I mentioned, approved the first lease since that process -- those regulations were implemented last week. We are very much interested in responsible but effective oil exploration and recovery, and that is why we have approved 37 shallow-water permits and why overall, as I noted, domestic oil production is at its -- last year was at its highest level since 2003.

That's it for me, folks. Thanks very much.

Q Anything on the bullying conference tomorrow?

MR. CARNEY: No.

END

1:49 P.M. EST

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