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The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

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Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 3/1/2011

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

See below for answers to questions (marked with an asterisk) posed in the briefing that required follow up.

*Governor Bush will travel locally in South Florida with President Obama but will not fly on Air Force One.

**The President last met with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid at a meeting at the White House on February 16, 2011. Senior White House staff typically speaks with Leader Reid on a daily basis.

1:00 P.M. EST

MR. CARNEY: I just have a couple of things I'd like to start with if I may. First, as you know, on Friday the President is traveling to Florida. He will visit Miami Central High School in Florida, with Education Secretary Arne Duncan and former Governor Jeb Bush. Governor Bush will be traveling with the President. Reforming our education system and preparing --

Q On Air Force One? He's coming -- when you say traveling --

MR. CARNEY: Yes.*

Reforming our education system and preparing the next generation of young people to compete globally is not a Democratic or a Republican issue. Miami Central High School was recommended by former Governor Bush because it tells an incredible story of the impact successful turnaround strategies and models can have on persistently low-performing schools. Governor Bush is obviously -- former Governor Bush, rather, was committed and remains committed to bipartisan education reform. The President is, as well. He's looking forward to that visit.

I'd also just like to tell you, inform you that the President, about 40 minutes ago, made a phone call to Speaker of the House John Boehner to discuss the progress being made on the negotiations for a continuing resolution. It was about a 10-12 minute phone call, a good phone call. And you will ask, but I will not divulge any more details about that phone call, but I just wanted you to know that that had taken place.

Let's start with questions. Ben.

Q Thanks, Jay. Two topics, quickly. On the spending standoff -- you just mentioned there, the House is moving ahead with its two-week stopgap bill. Is the White House engaged at all in trying to prevent this from becoming a two-week after two-week cycle where the government stays afloat but there's really no long-term continuity? What's the White House doing, if anything, about that?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the White House is obviously engaged at various levels, including at the presidential level, as I just noted. We believe some progress has been made. We believe that there is a focus in Congress now on cuts that we all can agree on. The President, as you know, is committed to reducing spending. As he made clear with his 2012 budget proposal and as he has made clear in these negotiations on the continuing resolution that he is committed to spending cuts. We can agree on those.

We also believe that this process should be one in which we are -- there is enough time allowed for all sides to come together to reach an agreement on a long-term continuing resolution, so that we can fund the government for the remainder of the year. That, in turn, will allow us to focus on the many other challenges that we face and that the American people want us to work on. So without getting into what is acceptable or unacceptable, our goal here is that we get a continuing resolution that is clean, that deals with the spending cuts we can agree on.

We do believe that if \$4 billion in cuts over two weeks is acceptable, that \$8 billion over four or five weeks is something that we could agree on. Again, if it was a clean continuing resolution, that would also allow the time. But our point here is not this amount of time versus that amount of time, but our focus is on moving beyond the short-term CR and focusing on negotiations for a longer-term CR that allows us to tighten our belts, live within our means, and continue to invest in the areas of the economy we think are essential to invest in, in order to keep growing and creating jobs.

Q Well, how does two weeks, though, give any of the parties the time needed to do exactly what you're talking about? Is the President wanting some other path forward?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think I just mentioned that another option would be a longer CR with substantially more spending cuts included, as essentially -- spending cuts that would go into an escrow against the long term -- the total number of cuts in a longer-term deal. Again -- but the point is, whether it's two weeks, two weeks and two days, three weeks, four weeks -- the point is that

what we do not believe would be helpful, in fact, we believe it would be harmful to the economy, and therefore, not something the American people would support, is that if we created a tollbooth where we are negotiating again and again on continuing resolutions to fund the government for two weeks or another short-term period.

There may be a process where we do that once or twice, but the focus needs to be on the longer-term deal so that we can come to an agreement, work -- find common ground, and then put that in place so that we can focus on the longer-term issues that we all realize the nation faces and that the American people want us to grapple with.

Q Are you saying you want to build on --

MR. CARNEY: Hold on. Let me -- let me just get --

Q It's a follow-up on that.

MR. CARNEY: Yes, okay.

Q When you want -- when you say you want the bill to be clean, what do you mean by that?

MR. CARNEY: We want it to focus on the spending and spending cuts that we can all agree on, and not to include extraneous policy issues that are not priorities right now in terms of focusing on this -- on the continuing resolution and continuing to fund the government in the way that the American people want.

Q Jay, following up on this whole issue, if the House does pass this CR today, which they look likely to do, will the President support it?

MR. CARNEY: It is a process, as you know, where the House has already passed something that the President has made very clear he would not support, and that was a proposal that they put out on the table, and now they putting another on the table. The Senate has to agree to something, as well. And those negotiations are ongoing. So I'm not going to say yes or no from here to a proposal that may be voted today but may not represent what is ultimately agreed upon in Congress.

And the principles I just discussed about what our goals are we think are widely shared. What is very apparent in this process is that the President is committed to making tough choices on spending. He is equally committed to not going down a road in terms of spending cuts that does harm to the economy, potentially does harm to our national security and doesn't address the kind of investments that we need to make to keep our economy growing and innovating and educating so that we can win the future in the 21st century.

Those are his priorities, and he believes that there is plenty of common ground, that there are

reasonable proposals out there -- some of which I just discussed -- that Democrats and Republicans working together -- House members, Senate members -- can come together on and agree on, on behalf of the American people. And I think we all know that that's what they want. They don't want debate about extraneous issues. They want agreement on common ground, and I think we can get there.

Q Switching gears, just one follow-up question. What message is the U.S. trying to send to Qaddafi by moving warships closer to Libya?

MR. CARNEY: We are, the United States, preparing for contingencies by moving some assets into the region, primarily focused on the potential humanitarian contingencies that are out there. But as I have said and others have said, our U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations said yesterday, we obviously aren't taking any options off the table. But this is contingency planning, essentially.

Q Just following up on Libya, Qaddafi -- there's no indication that -- unlike the previous version of this film that we saw in Egypt, there's no indication that he's moving towards bowing out. If anything, he was walking around Tripoli. There are support -- he does have support in Tripoli. Moving warships to the Red Sea and the Mediterranean -- or humanitarian ships is not going to be enough. What else can the U.S. do? What else does the White House intend to do?

MR. CARNEY: Jake, I think we have done already quite a lot unilaterally and working with our international partners through the United Nations and the EU and other places. The unilateral sanctions that we imposed on Friday have already led the Treasury to block access to \$30 billion of assets held by the Libyan regime, by members of the regime. That's a pretty strong message about the consequences of this continued behavior.

The United Nations has, with incredible speed, made clear that it will refer to the International Criminal Court the abuses of human rights that are being proven to have happened in Libya and continue to happen, and that that will -- that demonstrates the international community's commitment to hold accountable those who would perpetrate the kind of violations that we've been seeing and hearing about. That produces, we believe, pressure on the regime. And as I said yesterday, those who are around Colonel Qaddafi who are wondering which way they should go and whether or not they should continue to support this leader who no longer has credibility at home or anywhere in the world, they ought to think twice about it, because the consequences of continuing to support Colonel Qaddafi are quite severe. They will be held accountable.

Q Last week we saw a rash of Libyan ambassadors and some ministers and others separating themselves, removing themselves from the Libyan regime. We have not seen that in recent days, even as the U.S. has upped the pressure. You're talking about those around Qaddafi needing to think about what side they want to be on. Right now, hypothetically, stepping into one of their shoes, I don't really know how it's going to go. It doesn't really seem like the momentum for him to actually have to be forced from office is there right now --

MR. CARNEY: Well, Jake, I would --

Q -- just based on activities last week compared to this week.

MR. CARNEY: I would say, first of all, I understand that -- and that's a fair question. I understand that as we all watch the events in the Middle East and Libya and other countries that the drama we are witnessing creates in us a sense of urgency. But when you say you don't see a sense of momentum, my goodness, would anyone have predicted two weeks ago or three weeks ago that Colonel Qaddafi would be in this position that he is in now where great swaths --

Q I just mean based on those around him.

MR. CARNEY: -- great swaths of the country are no longer in the control of his regime; where the entire international community, including Arab nations, have arrayed against him and called him illegitimate and not credible as a leader --

Q I only meant, in terms of momentum, I was just talking about those in the regime leaving the regime.

MR. CARNEY: Again, you're talking about a matter of days since -- or if that -- hours maybe since high-level officials around him have separated themselves from him, so I don't -- I'm not sure I can accept the premise that there is a lack of momentum.

Q When is the last one who left the regime -- who is the last one to do it?

MR. CARNEY: Jake, what I'm saying is that the rapidity of events in the last 10 days is rather remarkable, so the idea that things are moving slowly I just don't think is credible.

Yes, Dan.

Q Is the administration surprised at all that Qaddafi doesn't appear to be getting the message? I mean despite the sanctions -- and I know it's only been last Friday, but still, as Jake was pointing out, no sign that he's backing down. So is there surprise that these sanctions or whatever -- these other options they have on the table so far are not making him budge?

MR. CARNEY: I would -- I won't bore you by repeating exactly what I said to Jake.

Q -- change a bit. (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: But the point -- I could mix it up, use some new verbs. But the point is the same, that events have moved with remarkable speed and we have reacted -- both the United States, President Obama, the international community -- with remarkable speed.

And not everything we do comes in the form of a speech or an announcement. One of the reasons why we had so much success -- we and our partners -- in moving the international process forward so quickly is because of the intense diplomacy, the quiet diplomacy that that entailed. And you can be sure, as I said yesterday, that the President and all senior members of the national security team are focused on this intensely and continue to be.

So I just think you cannot reasonably measure momentum in this situation and in terms of hours and days when the speed -- the momentum has been almost blinding in terms of what we've seen in the region and in Libya specifically.

Q On the phone conversation with Mr. Boehner, did the President -- I know you don't want to talk about specifics, but was there a commitment at all from Mr. Boehner about a long-term solution, making sure that there is a long-term solution quickly so that you're not going two weeks by two weeks?

MR. CARNEY: Without addressing the specifics or the content of that conversation, I will go back to what I said before, which is our general concern -- without going to whether two weeks was acceptable or 16 days or 21 days -- is that there is a focus by all parties on the need to resolve this in a way that -- where we get the spending cuts that we call can agree on, that funds the government with those spending cuts for the end of the year, fiscal year, and then allows us to move on and address the other important issues facing us.

Q So there was no commitment? You won't say if there was a commitment?

MR. CARNEY: I'm not going to go into the content of the conversation beyond what I've already said.

Yes.

Q Did you say who called whom?

MR. CARNEY: The President called Speaker Boehner.

Q Okay, he got directly to him? This wasn't one of those -- (laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: It was quite quick, yes.

Q Okay, glad to hear it. Question: Boehner himself said today in a little press -- not a press conference, but a Q&A a little while ago when he was asked did the President come late to the game on this one-month extension, and Boehner said if there had been a conversation about this 10 days or two days ago, you know we might have had something to talk about. But the fact is that we were forced to move on our own. He's suggesting that if the President hadn't been slow to the

game on this, that maybe they would have been able to do a one-month extension. Comment?

MR. CARNEY: I would simply say that, again, the President and the Speaker had a productive and useful conversation today --

Q He said if they had had it two days ago things might be different.

MR. CARNEY: I see no reason, and I don't believe we see any reason why we cannot engage -- as we have been, by the way, at the staff level prior to this -- but as have Democrats on the Hill, Democrats and Republicans together in this process going forward. We -- the American people expect us to come together.

The President has made very clear in his -- that he is also committed to cutting spending. There's no longer -- there's no debate here about the need to cut spending. The question is where do you cut in a way that doesn't harm the economy, doesn't throw it in reverse, doesn't reduce job growth, job creation, and it protects the investments that are so key to longer-term economic growth in this country. And the President thinks there's common ground there.

We have made clear that we could accept, even over a relatively short period of time, \$8 billion in cuts that we can agree on. I think that's a substantial number and demonstrates our -- his commitment to the need to tighten our belts, as long as we protect essential functions of government, national security, and don't do anything that would hurt our ability to grow and create jobs.

Q Was this a pleasant call or was it as they say, "frank and direct"?

MR. CARNEY: It was a good call. I'm not going to use the diplomatic-ese. It was a good call and, from what I understand, very productive.

Q Could you update us on what the President's latest thinking is on whether he's going to give a speech on the Middle East overall? And secondly, have you heard him talk recently about what he believes is the common element in all of these different uprisings all through Northern Africa and the Middle East? What makes them all similar? What do they all have in common?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I don't even -- I have heard him discuss this recently, and I would simply say that -- I've spoken to this quite a bit from this podium, because the elements of his perspective on this are contained within the speech he gave in Cairo early in his presidency that talked about the need for the countries in the region to be -- to hear the voices of their peoples, to be responsive to their aspirations, and to reform their political systems in a way that meets those aspirations -- and precisely for the reason that more democracy, more pluralism, more participation by the peoples in these countries, in that region, is a way to prevent the kind of instability and unrest that inevitably comes when entire populations feel that they're not being heard or respected and that their

aspirations aren't being met and their grievances not being legitimately considered.

So his principles in dealing with all of these situations in these countries again go back to non-violent response to peaceful demonstrations; to respect for the universal rights of the peoples in the region who -- the right to free speech, the right to free assembly, the right to access to information; and then the need to engage in a political process, a reform process, that brings in the people of the region in these countries to participate in their government and in a way that gives them a greater voice.

Q A speech on that is --

MR. CARNEY: There are many ways that the President can, has and will address what's been happening in the Middle East. He has spoken now, I believe, four times on this issue, and will speak again on this issue. In fact, I expect he'll speak on it -- is it Thursday that the President of Mexico will be here? You may hear from him on that day about this. As for other plans, we're always looking at different options.

Q A Hill report from the Republicans says the expansion of Medicaid will cost the states \$115 billion through 2023. Do you have any reaction to that?

MR. CARNEY: Well, first, Mike, we are committed to working with governors to help them manage their Medicaid costs, their Medicaid programs, and the Department of Health and Human Services has been an active and constructive partner with the states, with the governors, to answer their questions and ensure they are aware of the substantial flexibility that exists in the Affordable Care Act.

It's important to remember that the Affordable Care Act will cover the overwhelming majority of the costs associated with the Medicaid expansion and will, in fact, reduce the amounts they spend to care for the uninsured. A lot of independent experts have actually estimated that the states will have a net savings in their Medicare program because of the Affordable Care Act.

But again, we are working with the states. Secretary Sebelius is committed to working with the states to help them explore the flexibility they have to reduce costs. And we'll continue to do that. The President, actually just this week in his meeting with the governors, asked them to name a bipartisan group of governors to work with Secretary Sebelius on ways to lower costs and improve the quality of care for these Americans.

So we're on it. And again, I would just say we want to be a partner of the states in dealing with this issue.

Q Does the White House believe Guantanamo Bay will still be open next year, Jay?

MR. CARNEY: As you know, Mike, the President is committed to closing Guantanamo Bay. I don't have a timetable for you on that process.

Q Jay, let me read this directly. President Saleh in Yemen --

MR. CARNEY: Breaking news?

Q No, I just want to get the quote right. He had this to say about the uprisings, about the protests that are taking place in Yemen. This is the President of Yemen, somebody that John Brennan in the handful times he's come in here talks about an important American ally -- he said this: "I am going to reveal a secret. There is an operations room in Tel Aviv with the aim of destabilizing the Arab world. And that operations room is in Tel Aviv and run by the White House." Is that how an ally -- is this how our ally should speak about the United States?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we've made clear to the leadership in Yemen, as we have with the leadership in other countries, that they need to focus on the political reforms that they need to implement to respond to the legitimate aspirations of their people. And we don't think scapegoating will be the kind of response that the people of Yemen or the people in other countries will find adequate.

So, again, I think the focus needs to be, in Yemen as it needs to be in other countries, on opening their society, working with countries -- I mean, working with the peoples in their country to bring them in to a political process that's democratic and inclusive.

Q Given that al Qaeda AP is such a threat to the United States, comments like this -- is this becoming -- does this bring to the forefront a possible national security problem -- if this is what he believes about the American government?

MR. CARNEY: Again, we think that he needs to focus on what he needs to do in terms of political reform in his country. And in terms of al Qaeda, I think one thing that has been abundantly clear in these last several weeks and months is that the unrest we've seen in the region is not inspired by al Qaeda, but is in fact demonstrative of a movement within this region of the world that is wholly counter to everything that al Qaeda believes in and to the methods that they believe change -- the methods by which they believe change should come about: peaceful, non-violent, pluralistic, non-sectarian demonstrations in -- that's not in the al Qaeda manual. And it is a powerful response, we believe -- or a powerful message, we believe, to those who think that change needs to come about through horrific violence and attacks on innocent people.

Q Quick follow-up on the Boehner phone call. When was the last time the President spoke to Senator Reid?

MR. CARNEY: I'll have to get that for you. I know he was here not that long ago when he visited with the President, but I can find out.**

Q Jay, a question about international cooperation and coordination. European Union leaders are holding a special summit on Libya and North Africa in Brussels on March 11th. Will the President be sending a delegation to that?

MR. CARNEY: I'll have to get an answer to you on that. We are working very closely, as you know, at every level with our international partners. We believe very strongly that the response has been effective in Libya precisely because it has been so united and that we're speaking with one voice.

Q Is that something the President might consider?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I'll have to take that question.

Q I understand that during the phone call with the Prime Minister of Canada, the President and the Prime Minister, they agreed on the need to deter additional acts of violence by the Qaddafi regime. Do we have to understand that the military is authorized to interfere just in case?

MR. CARNEY: Again, we have said very clearly that we are pursuing the options that we've already taken -- the actions that we've taken on sanctions, and other areas -- other options remain on the table. And that's all I'll say about that.

Q One thing, Jay. The President is pushing ahead with his plan to travel on Friday. Does that mean that he is confident the fix is in and this is going to be settled? There's not going to be a government shutdown?

MR. CARNEY: I'm not sure I'd describe it "the fix is in." (Laughter.) I think that the President remains confident that we can find common ground to avoid a shutdown that nobody wants, that the leaders of both parties in Congress have said they do not want, that the President does not want, because the American people don't want it and because of the impact on the economy that it would have, the negative impact. So we are still in discussions. The Senate and the House are in discussions on how we reach an agreement on the continuing resolution, but we remain confident that we can get there.

Q So would it be one -- a two-week this week, and then the President and the Congress are both leaving town on the 18th -- when are you going to get around to the longer-term CR?

MR. CARNEY: Well, Ann, again, I don't want to say that we're doing this for however many weeks and then another thing for another number of weeks. We -- but you make a good point about the fact that Congress will be leaving town for a week in this period and -- which is why we believe that whatever agreement we come to for the short term, we need to be mindful of the fact that the next stage really does have to be -- or does soon have to be a focus and a commitment to deal with the longer-term continuing resolution so we can fund the government through the end of the year and focus on the other issues.

Q So it's going to take one short CR --

MR. CARNEY: Again, I'm not going to say precisely what we will accept or what we won't accept, except to note that the President has been very clear about what he will not accept, and I've been very clear about where we believe there is a great deal of room for common ground -- on the spending cuts that we all agree on, on the need to demonstrate spending restraint as we continue to fund the important areas that will allow us to out-educate, out-build and out-innovate the competition in the 21st century.

Yes.

Q Thanks, Jake. You've said several times that the President is very engaged on Libya. Could you give us a more specific sense of how and where this falls in the President's day? Is there a regular meeting at the same time with the same people? How is this being incorporated into his schedule?

MR. CARNEY: Well, as you know, get a morning brief, the presidential daily brief, that has in recent days focused in some and often large part on the events in Libya. He is also getting additional updates. I think I mentioned from this podium a while ago, last week, perhaps even the week before, that as this unrest in the region began the President asked for more regular updates, approximately the morning update, midday, and end of the day updates. So he is fully informed of what's happening. And if there are significant occurrences, events, things that happened that he needs to know about in between those times, he finds out about them. He's very much on top of his.

Q In terms of him being fully aware, yesterday you guys announced the \$30 billion in assets, the freezing of the assets. Are you guys -- does the President know which entities, which U.S. financial institutions have those assets?

MR. CARNEY: I would refer you to the Department of Treasury which is overseeing that.

Q Has this come up at all in any conversation about which ones they are?

MR. CARNEY: It may have, but I think Treasury is the place to go for that.

Q In the morning show interviews this morning, in one of them, Ambassador Rice mentioned contacts with countries that have -- I'm trying to think of the exact -- oil capacity, excess oil capacity. What can you tell us about that in terms of trying to relieve the price pressure, assure the supply and so forth?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I'll just say, first of all, that we are very conscious of the fact that a rise in gas prices has a direct effect on American and their wallets. And we're very conscious of that and we're monitoring that very closely. We also believe that the international -- the global system has the

capacity to deal with a major disruption. And we have, I think I said in a previous briefing, been in discussions with the IEA and others about how you deal with disruptions. We do believe that we can -- we're just monitoring this situation very carefully.

Q Beyond the umbrella talks with an umbrella organization like the IEA, are there specific contacts with Saudi Arabia, with some of the other big oil suppliers on the region?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have anything for you on that, I'm afraid.

Let's see. Yes.

Q David Cameron said today that it would be a good idea to find out a little more about the Libyan opposition before going any further with talk of any kind of military intervention. Does the President have any concrete sense of who's in charge in eastern Libya, or at least who you should be talking to?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the United States is using many channels -- diplomatic, businesses, NGOs -- to reach out to those in Libya who are in the opposition who are interested in creating a government that respects the rights of the people and meets the aspirations of the people. It is -- and I think this must be -- I believe this is probably what the Prime Minister was getting at -- it's a very fluid situation, but we are reaching out through these different channels to a variety of people who are in the position I just described and broadly describe as the opposition.

Q I understand that most of the significant NGOs bear the name Qaddafi. Is that a problem?

MR. CARNEY: I don't -- I think the issue is we want to hear from and learn from and talk to those who have a desire to move towards a representative government that is responsive to the aspirations of the people and protects the rights of people. So what it's called matters far less than what it supports and what it does.

Let me get you in the back. Yes, sir.

Q Thank you, Jay. Two questions on Libya. First is, during this morning's hearing, Secretary Clinton said Libya could descend into civil war. What's your viewpoint on that? And also China evacuated 30,000 citizens within just a few days with air force and navy. How you see that?

MR. CARNEY: I will just say on Secretary Clinton's comments, I'll just refer you to her comments. She's the Secretary of State. And I missed the other part of the question.

Q China evacuated its citizens from Libya, almost all citizens there, took we think just a few days with navy and air force. How you see that?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think China, like a lot of other countries, has moved to evacuate its citizens. The United States did, as you know, evacuate those citizens who wished to leave as well as its embassy personnel.

Yes, all the way in the back. Yes.

Q Thank you, Jay. In the last several days in China there's been some violence against journalists and also detention of them. So the response from the administration doesn't seem to be to the same magnitude as it is of the same treatment in North Africa and the Middle East. Why is that? Is it because it's off the radar? Is there another reason?

MR. CARNEY: Well, what I'll do in giving you a response now is use the same language we've used in response to violence against journalists in those parts of the world that you mentioned. We are aware of reports of foreign journalists being detained or physically harassed in Beijing and we find these reports disturbing. We call on the Chinese government to respect the rights of foreign journalists to report in China, and urge public security authorities to protect the safety and well-being of anyone who is subject to illegal harassment or intimidation.

I believe Ambassador Huntsman at our embassy in Beijing put out a statement, and I refer you to that for more information. But we obviously do not think this is acceptable for journalists not to be able to do their work and to be harassed or detained.

Sorry. Yes.

Q Jake, I've heard you mention representative government and also moving towards democracy. Is it your position that the people in all these countries in the region deserve the right to elect their leaders through elections?

MR. CARNEY: We support democracy. We believe that the peoples of these countries should be able to decide the kind of government they want and pick the leaders -- and elect the leaders that they choose.

Every country is different, and the process for getting there is different. We are not here to dictate outcomes. It is very important we believe that it be recognized that the movements we've seen in the Middle East have not been driven by the United States or outside governments or forces; they've been internal. And the credibility they have has come because of that -- the organic nature of the unrest and the uprising.

Again, how you get there is different probably in many countries, but the overarching belief that we have is that pluralistic democratic societies that have inclusive governments that respect the rights of their people, that respond to the legitimate grievances of their people, have the potential to be both more prosperous and more stable, and that that in both cases would be a welcome

development.

Sam.

Q Jay, was the President aware of Speaker Boehner's criticisms this morning before he placed the phone call to the Speaker?

MR. CARNEY: The President is paying very close attention to the debate and he is -- without going into what specific comments he might have been aware of, he's very well briefed and read into what's happening regarding the budget debates and the negotiations toward a resolution.

Q Let me put it this way. Did the President call Speaker Boehner in response to the Speaker saying that the President wasn't engaged?

MR. CARNEY: No. I was in the Oval Office and I can tell you that he called Speaker Boehner because he felt it was a good time to call him to discuss progress on discussions around a continuing resolution.

Q Did he mention the comments?

MR. CARNEY: He did not.

Yes, David.

Q Thanks, Jay. In talking about who the administration is talking to, to find people to deal with Libya, does that include any U.S. oil companies or transnational oil companies? Are you reaching out to them?

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, David, I would just point you to the fact that there are different channels through which we can reach people in the opposition, people who represent groups or who support the idea of a more democratic government, a government that would be responsive to the rights -- respect the rights of the Libyan people and be responsive to their aspirations.

Those channels include diplomatic, businesses, NGOs. So I'm not going to enumerate specifically the channels and who we're going through or which potential businesses are included in that group, but they do include businesses.

Q Let me follow up. Is the President satisfied -- has he been satisfied with the state of knowledge that the U.S. government had about internal circumstances within Libya in terms of who to try to talk to?

MR. CARNEY: I'll just speak broadly that the President feels that his diplomatic corps as well as his

intelligence community does an excellent job in informing him on the situations in these countries in the region that have experienced unrest.

Q You recalled the U.S. ambassador to Libya.

MR. CARNEY: Yes, we did.

Yes, Sheryl.

Q I have a follow-up, but first, Senator Lugar is cautioning that the State Department needs to be mindful of its funding request. The President has asked for an increase for the State Department of 8.4 percent. Senator Lugar says that given the economic situation we face, all foreign aid is going to have to meet a really tough test. Does the President think that in light of events in the Middle East and North Africa that we need to increase our foreign aid budget? And how does he reconcile that with the spending cut mood on Capitol Hill?

And then just separately, if you could just shed a little more light on how it came to be that Jeb Bush is riding on Air Force One on Friday. Appreciate that, too. (Laughter.)

Q Well, on the Governor Bush portion of your question, I'll just -- I'll say that he recommended this school. He has a record of being engaged in and committed to education reform. Obviously, this is a high priority for the President and he believes very strongly that education reform is neither a Democratic, nor a Republican issue. And I think his pursuit of reform has demonstrated that.

His reforms already have generated a great deal of bipartisan support, and I think that's reflective of the fact that Americans believe it ought to be a priority.

Q Did he reach out to Governor Bush, or the other way around?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have a sequence of events. I do know that the Governor specifically recommended this school as a good one to showcase in terms of its turnaround efforts. But in terms of who called whom, I don't know.

Q Is he meeting him at Andrews or --

MR. CARNEY: Let me -- I don't have any more details on that. Maybe if you check back with me later.

But, Sheryl, what was your first question?

Q So on foreign aid, the administration is asking for an increase in the State Department budget. Senator Lugar is saying, hey, we've got to cut spending. How important is that increase to the

President? What does he think in light of events?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think the budget the President proposed for 2012 reflects his priorities. It also reflects the fact that he was willing to make very tough choices because he realizes that we all have to live within our means and the federal government needs to live within its means. It includes, as you know, a \$400 billion cut over 10 years that's the result of a five-year freeze in non-defense discretionary spending that will bring that portion of our budget to its lowest level of spending as a portion of the overall GDP of any President since Dwight Eisenhower was in office.

And again I would say it reflects his priorities. I'm not going to negotiate line items in the budget, but I will say that it reflects his priorities, and I'll leave it at that.

All right. That's it. Thanks, guys.

END

1:45 P.M. EST

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