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**The White House**

Office of the Press Secretary

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**Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 2/16/2011**

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

12:43 P.M. EST

MR. CARNEY: Good afternoon, everybody. How's everybody doing today?

Q Welcome.

MR. CARNEY: Excellent. Good. Well, thank you very much. I'm glad to be here. I really appreciate the turnout. I've never seen this room this crowded.

Before we get started today, I have a presidential scheduling update for you. This afternoon the President will tape television interviews with local television affiliates in Cincinnati -- that's WCPO; Richmond, WWBT; and Milwaukee, WTMG; and the Hearst TV conglomerate. It's part of his continued effort to talk to Americans across the country about his budget proposal and how it will prepare our country to win the future. These TV interviews are embargoed until 6:00 p.m. Eastern, so

you can begin refreshing those local TV websites now, which is where you'll be able to get information on what he said in those interviews.

And with that, I'd like to go to my briefing.

Q What time does he start doing them?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have a time for you -- it's just this afternoon.

Mr. Feller.

Q Thanks. Welcome, Jay.

MR. CARNEY: Thank you.

Q I had one question on the news of the day, but before that I wanted to ask you about -- as you see of the role of the press secretary, particularly as a former journalist. Do you think when you come out here that your primary job as you see it is to promote the interests of the President, or is it primarily to provide us with unvarnished information so we can inform the public?

MR. CARNEY: Well, Ben, let me tell you this. We obviously all here serve the President. I work for him. But the press secretary is a unique position within a White House. And not just because I'm a former journalist, because I think every press secretary understood this and understands it -- I work to promote the President and the message that he's trying -- the messages he's trying to convey to the American people.

But I also work with the press to try to help you do your jobs -- to help you cover the White House, cover the administration, and report on what we're doing here. So I think

it's been said before that the office that the press secretary has is somewhat symbolically located about halfway between the briefing room and the Oval Office, and I think that says something about what the nature of the job is.

I mean, I do work for the President, but I'm also here to help the press understand what we're doing, to give the best information I can give -- with the help of a great team -- and that's what I will try to do.

Q Fair enough. One question on the budget. The President said yesterday in his news conference that what's needed now is an adult conversation, and then later he added that what we need is a reasonable, responsible and initially probably somewhat quiet and toned-down conversation. And I'm wondering whether -- from the White House end, whether there's a pledge basically to honor that. Are you guys willing to say, we're not going to politicize this spending debate?

MR. CARNEY: Look, the President has made clear, I think as he did yesterday, that he takes very seriously the need to reduce spending in the near term. That's why his budget proposal does things like cut \$400 billion over 10 years to reduce spending to get -- not just spending, but the deficit, which is very important.

But he also understands that there needs to be a conversation about our long-term debt, and that needs to be, as he said, an adult conversation where reasonable people from both parties sit down and talk about this major challenge that we face and ways to deal with it. And I think that needs to be -- if we're going to succeed to get there, it needs to be civil and it needs to be reasonable. And I think, as he said, each side needs to be willing to give. That's what compromise is all about.

And remember, last December we saw -- we have a template for how this can work. Where people thought agreement couldn't be reached, both sides got together, each side gave a little bit, neither side got exactly what it wanted, but the President and the Congress were able to achieve something in the interests of the American people that will help grow the economy, create jobs, make us more competitive in this very competitive 21st century.

Q So we should expect an adult, civil tone coming from here?

MR. CARNEY: Yes, absolutely.

Let me go to Reuters. Yes, Jeff.

Q Thanks, Jay. Israel said today that Iranian warships plan to sail through the Suez Canal to Syria. Does the United States view that as a provocation, and how should Israel react?

MR. CARNEY: Look, I think our position on Iran in a variety of ways is well known. I would refer you on that specifically to the State Department. I don't have anything for you on the ship in the Suez.

Q Let me follow up with a Mideast question then. A lot of spread of the unrest in Egypt to other areas in the Mideast - the President referred to this issue yesterday and said that leaders of those countries need to get out ahead of the change. Does the White House think the leaders in countries like Libya or Bahrain are ahead of that change?

MR. CARNEY: Well, look, as he said, each country is different in how they respond to the expression of the legitimate aspirations of their people. It is very important and they need to do it in a way that reflects what we believe,

what the President has said, are these universal values that each government needs to respect. And those are freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of movement, freedom of assembly, freedom of access to information -- the Internet in particular -- and to respond to those demonstrations in a non-violent way.

We've called, as we did in -- as the President did in Egypt and as we are doing now, we call on both sides in countries where these demonstrations are taking place to be non-violent and for the governments to be responsive.

Jake.

Q Jay, welcome.

MR. CARNEY: Thank you.

Q If I borrow money from you -- (laughter) -- to pay off the interest of the debt I owe to Jeff --

Q How much do you owe me? (Laughter.)

Q Ten-year rule. If I borrow money from you to pay off the interest of the debt I owe to Jeff, am I not adding to my debt?

MR. CARNEY: Well, without dealing with hypotheticals, why don't you -- (laughter.)

Q The President seems to think that borrowing money to pay the interest on the debt is not adding to the debt. I don't understand that math.

MR. CARNEY: What the President made clear is that we need to get to a place -- and his budget absolutely does this -- where we are no longer spending more than we're taking in. And what the reality is, is that we have, like some families might

have, debt on their credit card with interest rates that have to be contended with. But the first, important step to dealing with this issue is getting your regular spending and income in balance so that you are no longer adding to the problem.

The interest is something we have to deal with and interest payments are a major portion of our long-term debt problem that we need to address. But, look, it is not an inconsequential deal to propose a budget that cuts as substantially as it does in targeted areas so that the federal government lives within its means in order to be able to continue to invest in the future, because you have to have economic growth, you have to have job creation if we're going to address this overall long-term problem.

Q I assume when the President calls for an adult conversation he means that conversation should be forthright and politicians shouldn't be hiding behind cute language, such as we will not be adding more to the national debt, even if hundreds of billions of dollars are being added to the national debt in interest paid on debt that President Obama helped himself create.

MR. CARNEY: Well, the debt has been created over a number of years, as you know --

Q Not over the last two --

MR. CARNEY: -- and we came in here with an economic crisis the likes of which I daresay nobody in this room has ever seen and which threatened to head straight into a depression if we didn't act. But I also remind you that we inherited -- when this administration came into office, this President came into office -- an enormous debt that had been piled up in the previous eight years. And that is part of the problem, and the interest that you're talking about is on that debt as well.

But, look, I think it's important to step back. The President put forward a budget that seriously addresses the need to reduce spending, that also protects the key areas that he thinks need to be invested in so that we can remain competitive, grow the economy, create jobs. And he looks forward to working with Republican and Democrats in Congress to deal with both the budget proposals and the long-term debt. And he thinks that we can -- there is reason to believe that we can get this done.

Q So you -- just to button this, you think that we will not be adding more to the national debt is a statement that stands scrutiny?

MR. CARNEY: Absolutely, absolutely. And, Jake, we have explained precisely what that means in terms of new spending, getting our spending and income -- I mean our income and spending into balance. That is an important step towards dealing with our deficit and our debt.

Q Jay, in terms of that -- following on that, PolitiFact, which is nonpartisan -- both sides tend to agree with its nonpartisan analysis -- looked at the very issue of interest on the debt, and they said that if the President's budget passes, annual spending minus interest will equal annual revenue in 2017. So basically that's the point when the interest on the debt can be put aside -- that basically in the next six years, new spending is going to continue to add to the debt. So isn't that adding to the debt? I mean it's not just interest on the debt; it's new spending in the next six years.

MR. CARNEY: Well, we obviously have our budget proposal, and Jack Lew, the budget director, has been out answering in far greater detail than I can or do on what our budget proposal contains, and the assumptions it contains and the numbers it contains.

But the President has made very clear what his priorities are here, and what -- the reductions that we're looking to make and how that really is -- it's the only plan out there. Ed, I would remind you, it is the only budget proposal out there right now that reduces spending and brings down the deficit. Now, it is a very serious, reasonable proposal that demonstrates his seriousness about this debate.

Q Right, but when PolitiFact says it's false for the President to say that he's not adding to the debt, it doesn't matter? This White House is still going to continue to make the claim that you're not adding to the debt, even when nonpartisan people have looked at it and said you actually are?

MR. CARNEY: Well, look, I would just refer you to the statements of Jack Lew explaining this. I'm not an economist. I know you've heard phrases like that before. (Laughter.) But I'm not. And we absolutely stand by the budget.

Q Okay. On Egypt, yesterday the President said that he -- he said, obviously, there's a lot of work to be done, but what we've seen so far is positive, in terms of the Egyptian government enacting reforms, trying to move towards free and fair elections, et cetera. A couple hours later we had this terrible statement put out by CBS saying that one of their journalists was physically and sexually assaulted. What is this government doing to press the Egyptian government for answers about what happened and what they're going to do to bring people to justice?

MR. CARNEY: Well, Ed, as you know, during those events, the 18 days, the President made clear that our position was violence was unacceptable, and that -- specifically harassment, detention -- violence against journalists was unacceptable, and that the perpetrators of violence needed to be held accountable. And that remains our position.

Q Right, but we now know there is one case where it happened despite the White House saying don't do this, don't let this happen. So I'm unclear. What is the White House doing now to get answers from the Egyptian government about exactly what happened, since it doesn't appear that they followed up on your admonitions?

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, we have stated clearly what our position is. And we obviously have a lot of contacts with -- through our embassy and elsewhere with the current government. And we still believe that those responsible for these acts -- and there were other -- obviously, there was other violence -- need to be held accountable.

Chip.

Q Another question on Egypt. Obviously, there's an optimistic tone with elections looking like a real possibility at some point. But there are also a lot of critics who believe -- or a lot of analysts of Egypt and Middle East policy who believe that these generals are going to get very comfortable with power and that's going to create a real problem, and you're going to have maybe not Mubarak II, but you're going to have something not far from it. What is the White House doing to make sure that doesn't happen? And does the President believe -- how concerned is the President that these generals are going to get comfortable with power and keep it that way?

MR. CARNEY: Well, look, there have been -- Chip, there have been a number of positive signs in the very few days since this transition in terms of the top leadership took place. But our position in terms of what needs to happen, the constitutional reforms, the lifting of the emergency law, the release of political prisoners, those positions still pertain.

And obviously, we are watching closely and advising and assisting where we can. But also I would point to you that this is an Egyptian process. The amazing events that occurred over those 18 days were driven by the Egyptian people from all stripes -- from all corners of society who went out on the streets to air their grievances and make demands for more democratic representation and to be able to participate in the process and to create greater prosperity in Egypt.

And we support the Egyptian people now just as we did then because I think they have made clear that they want a democracy and they want free and fair elections. And we are obviously as on this today as we were in the last -- the previous three weeks.

Q Is there planning going on for the possibility that they start to settle in?

MR. CARNEY: Well, that's -- I'm not going to speculate about what may or may not happen. We have seen --

Q No, I'm asking is there planning going on, just in case.

MR. CARNEY: I don't have anything for you on that. I think the point is we have seen positive developments; our positions on what needs to happen remain; and we are obviously working with the Egyptians in terms of advising and assisting in ways that we can, but it is their process.

Q Is it the President's goal to get entitlement reform this year?

MR. CARNEY: Chip, I think this is a process -- this is the beginning of a process, but he has said that in the months ahead this is something that he will be engaged in. But I would never

put an endpoint on the process.

Q Last question. You say we're not adding to the credit card under this budget, but the fact is the total national debt increases. How do you explain to the average American that we're not adding to the credit card? Doesn't it sound like doubletalk to the average person out there?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think again, not being an economist, I will venture to explain the miracle and sometimes the horror of compound interest, and the reality is the interest on the debt is a major portion of the debt that we have to pay and the growth of the debt in future years. And I think Americans understand that.

Mike.

Q Jay, this afternoon, when the President sits down with the Senate Democratic leadership, is part of the discussion its time for this adult conversation on entitlements?

MR. CARNEY: Say that again?

Q Is part of the meeting this afternoon with the Senate Democratic leadership about entitlements, moving forward with entitlements?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the President is committed to meeting with leadership and members of both parties, both houses, and this is one of those meetings. The Senate Democratic leadership will be here. There will be staffers there who can discuss our budget proposal.

But I think -- the President just released his budget two days ago. I think that is a focus right now. But he -- as I said before, he wants to have the discussion about the long-term

debt. But it's important to understand the budget needs to move forward and that addresses the budget issues and his cuts address the 12 percent of our spending that's non-security discretionary spending. And in terms of the entitlement reform question, we look forward -- he looks forward to discussions with leaders of both parties and members of both parties on how to move forward.

Q The President reflected on history a bit yesterday, talking about Ronald Reagan with Tip O'Neill and then Bill Clinton with the Republican Congress. Does he believe there's time to get perhaps something done on entitlements before we get into 2012 campaign mode?

MR. CARNEY: The President is very confident that if we get together with both sides, members of Congress, the President, that something can be accomplished. And he has -- he believes that the approach he's taking by putting forward a budget that is serious about the need to reduce spending but is also serious about the need to continue to promote economic growth and innovation and infrastructure, building for the future and educating our children -- that he has created -- helped create an environment where we can have these conversations in a productive way.

So I think his seriousness about this issue is very clear and he wants to work together with members of both parties to get there.

Chuck.

Q Jay, first of all, the interviews with Cincinnati, Richmond, Milwaukee -- those are the three media markets of John Boehner, Eric Cantor, Paul Ryan. Coincidence?

MR. CARNEY: I think those are important states, important

parts of the country. And he's very eager to talk to and reach out to Americans in all parts of the country to explain what he's doing on the budget, explain his vision for the future, the need to reduce spending reasonably, promote economic growth and invest in the areas that will help us compete in a very competitive environment in the 21st century.

Q So the fact that -- it played no role or did play -- or an added benefit?

MR. CARNEY: He speaks to -- he travels around the country; he has meetings with Americans around the country; and this is just part of that process.

Q Oh, come on, Jay. (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: This is almost fun. (Laughter.)

Q Earlier today CIA Director Leon Panetta was asked if the U.S. government captured Osama bin Laden, what would happen to him. And he said, eventually he'd be moved to Guantanamo.

Believe it or not, the very first question Robert Gibbs received at his very first briefing was about the process of closing down Guantanamo. It's your very first briefing. Is it now no longer a main policy goal of this administration to get Guantanamo closed in the first term?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the President --

Q With the CIA Director saying he's assuming Guantanamo is going to be there to take high-level detainees.

MR. CARNEY: Well, look, I think the DNI Director has also followed up on that. But I would just point out that the President remains committed to closing the prison at Guantanamo Bay, because, as our military commanders have made clear, it's a

national security priority to do so. I don't have anything beyond that on it for you.

Q But if the CIA Director is using -- I mean, does that mean there is no plan B?

Q Where is the process?

Q I guess, where is the process?

MR. CARNEY: I'm not going speculate about what would happen if we were to capture Osama bin Laden. I can tell you that this government is very focused on bringing to justice the perpetrator of the attacks on 9/11. But beyond that, I wouldn't speculate about what would happen.

Q Is there still a process of trying to close down Guantanamo?

MR. CARNEY: The President remains committed to closing Guantanamo.

Q Tomorrow the President is meeting in a private fundraiser, no public events in San Francisco, and overnighting there.

MR. CARNEY: It's not a fundraiser.

Q We've learned -- is there no politics at all?

MR. CARNEY: It's a dinner. I think the President wants to discuss --

Q I know it's with technology leaders. Is there any politics being discussed at all with these folks? Are they being asked to help --

MR. CARNEY: I think the focus of the discussion is innovation and job creation, and these are representatives of businesses who can -- who know a lot about private sector job growth.

Q Will the full list of attendees be released?

MR. CARNEY: Yes.

Q Okay, thank you. Welcome. And by the way, thanks for retiring the pastel ties. (Laughter.) No offense to Robert, but it's nice to see a dark tie.

MR. CARNEY: Let me go to the second row. Yes.

Q Welcome. On Social Security, the President repeated yesterday that he is opposed to slashing benefits. When he says slashing benefits, does that mean that he's against significant cuts in spending or is he -- I'm sorry, in benefits -- or that he's also ruling out any benefit cut whatsoever?

MR. CARNEY: I think the President was pretty clear in the State of the Union about his position on this, which is we need -- first of all, as all of you know -- some of you may even be economists -- the Social Security issue is not a deficit -- near-term deficit issue. It is a problem with the long-term debt. Secondly, we do not -- the President wants to protect current retirees. He does not want a solution that slashes benefits. And he wants to make it stronger and solvent for the future, because it is an important element of security for our seniors.

Now, on the specifics, I'm not going to get into negotiating a Social Security solution from this podium, precisely because, as the President said yesterday and has said

many times, we need to get together -- he needs to -- and will get together with leaders of both parties who want to address this issue seriously -- entitlement spending, in general -- and talk about the ways to do that.

Q I'm just asking what he means by the word "slash."  
It's his word --

MR. CARNEY: I think "slash" is a pretty vivid word. He does -- I'm not going to go beyond what the President said on what that means, but he would oppose any solution that slashes benefits.

Q And on the continuing resolution debate on Capitol Hill right now, is the White House position that we should just continue at a level of funding for the rest of this year and deal with spending cuts for next year? Or could the White House accept some, albeit not the kind of cuts being proposed by the House -- but would the White House be interested in some spending cuts this year?

MR. CARNEY: Similarly, I'm not going to negotiate the CR from here. But I would just like to say that this is the beginning of a process; the President believes we can work through it. And we haven't seen a formal proposal yet from Congress on the CR, and we will wait to see what it is. But he's enunciated his principles and we will let Congress come together and create a product.

Q So you don't have an opening position going into the conversations on the CR?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think the President has made clear what his broad positions are. But we're looking to see where Congress goes with this.

Mark.

Q Jay, welcome. On the CR, is there worry here about a government shutdown after March 4th?

MR. CARNEY: You know, Mark, I would say that it is our understanding that not only does the President not believe that a government shutdown is a good idea but the leaders of Congress in both parties obviously want to avoid that. And we believe that we can work together to prevent that from happening. So that's what we think -- that's an important position to take. We think that we can get there and avoid a problem like that.

Q And on the ambush of the ICE agents, what has President Obama been told about that, and what is the U.S. response?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the President has been fully informed on what happened in Mexico. And earlier this morning, the President called the parents of Special Agent Jaime Zapata to send his and Michelle's heartfelt condolences on the loss of their son yesterday. The President told them that no words could express the sadness of the loss of a loved one. Their son served our country admirably, the President said, and assured his parents that the entire country was grateful for his selfless service and contributions to our nation.

Now, you should know that the U.S. law enforcement agencies are working closely with Mexican authorities to investigate the shooting, and that the resources of the federal government are at the disposal of our Mexican partners in the investigation.

And today, Secretary Napolitano and the Attorney General Eric Holder are formalizing a joint task force between the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice that will leverage the investigative capabilities of both agencies to work with Mexico in tracking down the perpetrators.

Q Can I follow up on that, please?

MR. CARNEY: Let me work through here, but I promise I'll get back to you.

Q If I can go back to the Suez real quick. Is the White House aware that Iranian gunships have plans to travel through the Suez?

MR. CARNEY: I'm going to refer you to the State Department on that. I don't have anything on that.

Q Even on whether or not this has risen to the level of the White House?

MR. CARNEY: No, we're aware of it, but I'd refer you to State on that.

Q So when you say "we're aware," is the President aware?

MR. CARNEY: Yes.

Q All right. And then in terms of the executives tomorrow, could we get -- are you going to give any other names out? We know Zuckerberg is going to be there.

MR. CARNEY: We'll release a list when we have it to give it to you. So I'm not going to name them from here.

Q Given that Zuckerberg is there and Facebook has and did play a role in the revolutions in North Africa, do you expect this to be a topic, or is it more focused on domestic innovation ideas?

MR. CARNEY: I think it's -- the purpose of the discussion is on innovation. Obviously other topics could come up.

Mara.

Q Welcome, Jay.

MR. CARNEY: Thank you.

Q A question about the tone that he wants to foster when and if you guys get to talking about entitlement reform. He said he doesn't -- he thinks both sides should be practical and not score political points. Now that all three House Republican leaders have said that they are going to offer some kind of entitlement reform or cuts in their 2012 budget, what is the message the President has to Democrats about how they should react when those cuts are released? In other words, does he want them to hold their fire in the interests of creating this atmosphere that he talked about yesterday? Or should they let loose?

MR. CARNEY: Well, Mara, let me say that the President, as he noted yesterday in the press conference, was glad to see Republican leaders acknowledge as he did in his State of the Union that our larger long-term spending issues -- deficit and debt issues -- cannot be resolved by cuts in 12 percent of the budget, which is our non-security discretionary spending. And then I would just go back to say that we welcome the conversation about how to address the entitlement issue.

And I would remind you that this President has demonstrated his seriousness about the need to reduce health care costs. As you know, health care costs are one of the big drivers in the deficit and debt. And he did that with the Affordability Care Act, which CBO has said will reduce spending by \$230 billion over the first 10 years and a trillion over 10 years after that. So -- and again, we have more cuts primarily in Medicare in this budget that he laid down.

So he has already demonstrated his seriousness about beginning to tackle these issues and he looks forward to working with members of both parties -- Democrats and Republicans -- in a calm, reasonable way to address this issue.

Q But the Democrats who are salivating and saying that the Republicans are walking into a trap on this? I mean, what does he think --

MR. CARNEY: I think the President -- his position has been made clear -- he said it yesterday again -- on how he approaches this issue. He thinks a solution comes when people are reasonable, willing to sit down, work together in a bipartisan way, give a little, compromise. And that's the only way we can address this issue.

Q And one more question on Social Security. The President used the word "slash," but David Plouffe in a conference call used the word "slash and reduce" benefits. But he also talked about current retirees. Just to make clear, when the President talks about slashing benefits, is he talking about benefits for current retirees, or is he talking about benefits in general?

MR. CARNEY: The President's position is clear, and I think David was articulating that yesterday, that we do not believe a solution can harm current retirees, and that's what he was talking about.

Perry.

Q Jay, during the 2008 campaign the President was so committed to transparency and openness in the process he said he'd have the health care negotiations on CSPAN. Can you explain -- yesterday he said the Social Security negotiations had to be in private; otherwise they couldn't be effective. Can you explain why the difference in transparency? Is health care

less -- and can you reconcile those visions, why one is in private, one should be on CSPAN, ever part of the process?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the administration is committed to openness and transparency. We are also committed to getting things done. And I don't think the President said that every discussion about entitlement reform would be held in private, but I think he made clear, as I think some other of the leaders on the Hill have made clear, that one of the lessons we've learned in history, in recent history anyway, about tackling these big, difficult issues is that it helps to have quieter conversations about some of the issues so that, as the President said, when an agreement is reached, first of all, we can get there, and then we all get into the boat at the same time so it doesn't tip over.

Q That's the opposite of what the President said about the health care negotiations on CSPAN. He said he regretted that he hadn't been more open about that after the shellacking.

MR. CARNEY: Well, but like I said, Jake, we're not saying that every discussion about the longer-term debt --

Q But he said he wished that they had been open.

MR. CARNEY: But we're talking now about the entitlement issue, and we're not saying that every discussion will be in public or private. We're just saying that the President is committing to getting something done. And I think that's what the American people expect and want him to do. And there are ways to do that when we're talking about these difficult issues. And obviously holding meetings and having conversations with members of Congress is one of those.

Let me move on here. Yes.

Q Jay, what's not clear to me is why these adult discussions can't start now. Why do you have to wait until -- I don't know, what exactly are you waiting for?

MR. CARNEY: The President made the point yesterday that there is -- we understand the urgency, we understand that people want a solution now. But this is a big issue. This is a hard nut to crack. And we're at the beginning of a process in terms of this stage of the process. But as he pointed out yesterday, the deficit commission, which he appointed, really helped change the conversation and created a framework for discussion going forward.

So, I mean, this process has already begun. The process began, as I said, when the President addressed soaring health care costs in the Affordable Care Act. It's present again in the way he addresses additional health care costs in his budget. It's present in the deficit commission that he created. And he's -- the conversations -- there's not a start date or an end date that I'm going to announce from here. The conversations are happening and they will continue to happen.

Q But by not convening a meeting, let's say, on it in the very, very near future, he does leave the impression that he is waiting for the other side to, for example, come across with their budget plan and their proposals on -- and they get in the boat first.

MR. CARNEY: I think everyone needs to move forward and the President I think has discussed this -- I know he has -- very clearly about what his position is. And he will be having discussions and meetings and conversations on this issue in the weeks and months ahead. I think to announce a big meeting is not necessarily conducive to getting it done, and the President is very serious about getting it done.

Ann -- oh, I'm sorry, Jackie. Let me do the second row here.

Q I know, I was going to welcome you -- (laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: I was looking at you before. You didn't look at me. (Laughter.)

Q The President said yesterday that there were months of discussions ahead. Could you say exactly what he means? Was it sort of the informal, a lunch here and a phone call there -- or does he foresee something more structured? And in terms of talking about months -- this sort of follows up on the last question -- but is that going to come at the end of the congressional budget process, which could be as late as post-October?

MR. CARNEY: I don't think, again, with the goal of addressing this in a serious way, that there's a timetable that he or I or anyone else here wants to announce. I think that the conversation -- he looks forward to having these conversations and the overall process, as I just pointed out, has begun and it will continue in the weeks and months ahead.

Q Jay, welcome. A couple of short questions. How often should a President have a news conference? (Laughter.)  
Seriously.

MR. CARNEY: I don't think there's a hard and fast rule. I think the President gave a press conference yesterday; he's given press conferences over the course of his time in office and will continue to do so.

Q How about events like Cabinet meetings, which used to traditionally be open to some kind of media coverage -- will those be open in the future?

MR. CARNEY: There are no hard and fast rules, Ann. I think that we're committed to providing access and we're also committed to getting the work done here that the American people expect us to get done.

But let me just say, I mean, I understand where you come from -- literally. And I want to work with you, and all of you, to get the access that we can give and that you need.

Q And how often do you think you'll brief -- five days a week? (Laughter.)

Q Saturday? Sunday? (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: You guys will get so sick of it if I do it that frequently. But I'm committed to briefing frequently. I don't want to say every day or five days a week, or four, or six.

But I've had some discussions with the Correspondents Association about my plans going forward and I just want it to be -- to evolve. I don't have a new plan to lay on the table about how we're going to do this. I want to see how it works.

But I'm eager to work with all of you to make it as productive for us and for you as possible.

Q Last question -- do you have a preference on which member of the cast of Saturday Night Live plays you this weekend. (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: God forbid that anyone does. (Laughter.)

Q You answered a hypothetical. (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: Got me.

Q Jay, does the President want to see the provisions of the Patriot Act extended?

MR. CARNEY: Well, as you know, it's our position that it

would be helpful to extend that for two years. We're working with Congress to see what we can get done, but the answer is yes.

Q Does it need to be dialed back in any way, any provision?

MR. CARNEY: The act -- I think what we've said is with the necessary provisions in there and precautions that -- the safeguards, but we believe it should be extended.

Q So the President believes that civil liberties are adequately safeguarded just as currently written?

MR. CARNEY: I think his position on this has been pretty clear. It hasn't changed. We do want it extended, and two years would be useful, we think, so that there's certainty in the community going forward.

Q Welcome. I'd like to bludgeon you with another comment that the President has repeatedly made, which is that he's the adult, that he doesn't want to kick these cans down the road in terms of entitlement reform, this is the big enchilada -- I don't think he said "big enchilada." (Laughter.) How can you sort of -- how can you justify that the President hasn't articulated any specific position or even sort of a general position on any of these entitlement reforms?

For instance, he mentioned yesterday that he favored some things in the deficit commission report and didn't favor others. Can you maybe articulate for me what some -- what his starting position might be based on what he liked in the deficit commission?

MR. CARNEY: Well, he has articulated a general position, and he's articulated a specific position in terms of the ways in

which he has already tackled some of these entitlement issues in the health care spending, in particular. You cannot forget that one major element of the Affordable Care Act was to get control of soaring health care costs. And I refer you again to the CBO, and their projections on those savings over the first 10 and next 10 years.

I want to remind you that he said that he believes we need to have an adult conversation, and that means with many adults and not that -- what he's looking for and what he believes the American people expect is a cooperative, focused, sincere effort towards tackling these difficult issues.

Q Well, what do you say to people who say that it's the President's responsibility to lead on this?

MR. CARNEY: I think he is -- look, he is leading. He led for two years. This is a President who has done big things. He has tackled hard issues. And again I would point you to, on the issue of reducing health care costs, what he did with the Affordable Care Act. I would point you to the budget proposal he just put on the table, which is the -- only in Washington would \$400 billion be viewed as not a lot of money. I think in the places that the President travels around the country, they understand, Americans do understand that that's significant money.

And they understand this, that this budget proposal will reduce non-security discretionary spending to its lowest level since Dwight Eisenhower was President. I don't want to embarrass people and ask who was alive when Dwight Eisenhower was President, but that was a long time ago, and that is a period that includes Presidents Reagan, Clinton, Bush -- this is a long time.

So this is a substantial step forward that takes very

seriously the need to reduce spending and also to invest so that we can grow, because Americans want this country to grow economically and to be the economic powerhouse in the 21st century that we were in the 20th -- I mean in the 21st that we were in the 20th.

And the only way to do that is to make the key investments in our infrastructure, in innovation, in the industries and the technologies that will drive job creation in the future in America, and in education so that we have the kind of educated workforce in science and technology and engineering and other areas that we need in order to win the future.

Yes, ma'am.

Q -- was alive when Eisenhower was President. But besides that, two comments really from Republicans lately -- and one was Speaker Boehner saying, so be it, about federal jobs being lost; and also the governor of Florida saying he's not going to take federal money now for high-speed rail.

MR. CARNEY: Look, we think that's an unfortunate decision, but I think I would refer you to the Department of Transportation. Secretary LaHood has put out a statement about that. Look, this goes right to the essence of what we're talking about here. There's been a lot of bipartisan support for the need to create the kind of modern infrastructure in this country that will enable us to compete. High-speed rail is very much a part of that. And we will make sure that that money is used elsewhere to advance the infrastructure and innovation agenda that is essential for economic growth.

Q And Speaker Boehner's comment?

MR. CARNEY: I'm sorry, say --

Q Speaker Boehner's comment about, so be it, in terms of federal job joss?

MR. CARNEY: Look, we -- first of all, his figures were off. But the broader issue is, we are committed -- the President is committed to making hard choices, tough choices in terms of spending cuts. He's demonstrated that in his budget and he's demonstrated it by putting forward cuts in programs that he believes in deeply. But he understands that tough choices need to be made.

Q Thanks, Jay. Why does the President support continued public funding of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in the midst of the calls for belt-tightening? What does he think about the Republican efforts to cut CPB funding? And do you think that their interest is primarily fiscal or ideological?

MR. CARNEY: Look, I would refer you -- again, I'm not going to speculate about motivations on any part. But I think we all take seriously -- Republicans and Democrats -- the need to tighten our belts and live within our means. And the President has put forward a budget that is a road map to his priorities, that reduces spending where we can, where its wasteful or where it's not absolutely necessary, but maintains spending in areas that we think are important.

Q But could you --

MR. CARNEY: Let me move --

Q I just want --

MR. CARNEY: Sure.

Q Just to clarify, does he think that there is a universal American value in public broadcasting? I mean he

hasn't slashed that project, so he presumably --

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think again, the budget represents his priorities, and I think you can read into that.

Q Thanks, Jay. Ohio, Wisconsin and Virginia are also pretty important states in '012. Will we be seeing a string of local interviews in similar close states like Pennsylvania and Florida?

MR. CARNEY: The President and other officials here do interviews, regional interviews all the time all over the country.

Let me -- I want to get you and then experiment a little bit here. But, yes.

Q Is the White House concerned that the political unrest in Bahrain could make it more difficult for the U.S.-allied government to support the Fifth Fleet's base there?

MR. CARNEY: Look, what the President believes and the administration believes is that Bahrain, like all the countries in the region, needs to respect the universal rights of its citizens, their right to protest, the right to have their grievances heard, and that they should refrain from violence on both sides. And we are obviously watching events in Bahrain and around the region very closely, but our position on all the countries is the same at the universal-rights level.

Yes, Savannah.

Q Okay. If the President is committed to making big budget choices, this is a tough budget and so on, why have all of his public events since the State of the Union been not about budget cutting but spending? Does it exacerbate this perception

that he's more enamored with spending than he is with cutting?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I would point you to the budget, Savannah. It's very clear, and he's talked very clearly about it in the State of the Union, in his press conference, other venues, in his weekly radio address. And we're talking about priorities that have to coexist, exist together. You have to cut spending where we can to live within our means, but invest where it's absolutely necessary so the economy grows and that we're competitive in the future.

I think you could maybe count the words that he's addressed -- that he's dedicated to each issue. I think it would be very much in balance because both are essential priorities.

Q Does the President have concerns about his relationship with the press?

MR. CARNEY: No. I think he feels that he has a very good relationship with the press and that you guys do important work. And -- no, not at all.

Q Can I follow up on that?

MR. CARNEY: Sam.

Q Yes, two questions. One is there are reasonable, well-respected people, not just economists, who say that now is not the time to tighten your belt, that while you're at the end of a recession you shouldn't be making these cuts even if you are investing elsewhere. Is that -- what is wrong with that logic? And then I will ask the follow-up --

MR. CARNEY: Well, Sam, I would point you to our logic, to the President's logic, which is that we need to live within our means. We need to reduce spending. We need to demonstrate our

seriousness about that, but we also need to invest where it's essential. And we feel that we need to be careful about cuts so that we don't threaten the recovery, that we don't threaten growth, that we don't threaten our national security. But we obviously agree with others that spending cuts are necessary.

Q The follow-up question had to do with the high-speed rail. You hinted that you'll make sure that money is used elsewhere. Are you talking about the federal money that has been allocated for Florida, sending it to another state? Or are we -- is that --

MR. CARNEY: Well, I will refer you the Department of Transportation. But, look, we believe that the money that was allocated for high-speed rail as part of the Recovery Act is essential to the infrastructure agenda that this President has.

Q So that's going to be spent, regardless?

MR. CARNEY: I think that, again, as part of the President's priorities, and he believes it is essential both to creating infrastructure that allows us to compete in the 10th century -- I've heard some other countries are very advanced in high-speed rail. We need to be. He believes that. And it's also an important job creator.

Yes, I said I would take yours.

Q Do you think this incident of the attack on the federal agents will have any negative effect in the bilateral relationship, as it happened in '95 with the killing of the DEA agent Enrique Camarena?

MR. CARNEY: Look, we are very supportive of the Mexican government, and my answer to that is no.

Q Jay --

MR. CARNEY: I don't recognize all of you so I can't call all of you -- all of you by name. (Laughter.)

Q Jay, can I just ask real quick --

MR. CARNEY: Yes.

Q Did the President have any words of wisdom or did he wish you luck before you came out here today?

MR. CARNEY: I spoke with him a couple of times this morning, and, yes, he wished me luck.

Q Can I follow up on that, Jay?

Q Not a follow-up on that.

MR. CARNEY: You don't want to talk about me, but -- yes.

Q Jay, the President said yesterday that Washington is impatient. Congressional Democrats and Congress, generally, failed to pass a budget last year, and now we're just a couple of days before the CR. So is the President patient, or does the President need to lean harder on Congress, and will he do that in the leaders meeting?

MR. CARNEY: Look, he will have these discussions in his meetings today about the need to move forward on all these issues. But -- and I think that the impatience is not just the press. It's every -- he understands that when there is a big problem out there that needs to -- that everyone agrees needs to be solved, that there's an eagerness to solve it yesterday.

But there is a process here. He mentioned Egypt. Big things

can happen in three weeks. I'm not saying that this will happen in three weeks, but I think that you need to let those discussions happen. He has clearly articulated his positions on -- both in his budget and on how he wants -- he believes the discussions about the long-term debt issue need to proceed, and he'll follow those.

David.

Q Thank you, Jay. Welcome. The President's response to the Republican spending cuts seems to be a little muted. I mean, these cuts would be in the SEC, the FBI, climate change, global health. And he hasn't really seemed to go after it as a package and to have sort of a political and philosophical discussion with Republicans about their view of government versus his, focusing more on entitlement reform than these spending cuts. Why is that?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I disagree with that. I mean, I think that, first of all, this is the beginning of a process. He's committed to cutting spending and reducing the deficit, and that's why he put forward a tough budget. But he has already made clear that, like families around the country who are making tough decisions about their family budget, that we need to tighten our belts where we can, but we have to do that in order to preserve the ability to invest in the future. And he's made very clear that those investments are important and protecting those investments are important because we do not want to create a situation where we stymie economic growth or limit our ability to create jobs.

Q But does he think that the Republican cuts are dangerous? Not the ones going after your investments, but going after things like the SEC and the climate change programs?

MR. CARNEY: Without getting into specifics, I think that the

President has made clear that he doesn't -- we cannot support arbitrary or irresponsible or deep cuts that undermine our ability to grow the economy or create jobs, win the future, or harm our national security or other essential functions of government.

So I would leave it at that. I'm going to take one more here, and I will see you tomorrow.

Q Thank you. On corporate tax reform, Secretary Giethner this morning said he was looking for consensus on that. Is there any timetable on when that needs to get done, and will that be part of the conversation with entitlement reforms, or will that be separate?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I don't have a timetable for you. The President laid out in the State of the Union, addressed it; he believes it's important to simplify and lower the tax rate in a revenue-neutral way for corporations to make America -- again, all part of this goal of making America competitive, growing the economy in the 21st century.

But I don't have a timetable and I think these -- I mean, these are separate issues but the conversations will occur in the same general time frame.

That's it. Thank you, guys.

Q Thank you, Jay.

Q Was it as bad as you feared?

MR. CARNEY: It was better than I ever could have imagined.  
(Laughter.)

Q Which side do you prefer being on?

MR. CARNEY: I like it up here. (Laughter.)

END

1:36 P.M. EST

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