



For Immediate Release

January 20, 2011

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Robert Gibbs, 1/20/2011

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

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

* The President raised Liu Xiaobo in Tuesday evening's small dinner and the expanded delegation meeting on Wednesday.

** While the President hasn't spoken with the family, White House staff is in regularly touch with Rep. Giffords' husband, Mark Kelly.

*** Food security is a critical part of our administration's international efforts and of the G20 agenda and as such is often a subject of discussion with the President.

1:45 P.M. EST

Q Are you over yesterday?

MR. GIBBS: What's that?

Q Over yesterday?

MR. GIBBS: Over yesterday how?

Q Translation errors. (Laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: I don't -- I don't think there were any translation errors. What do you mean? I mean, I think there were -- well, if you guys have questions I'm happy to answer them. (Laughter.) I'm sorry, I don't -- what are you -- I didn't -- I don't --

Q Was there a translation error?

Q Simultaneous --

MR. GIBBS: I don't -- no, no, we had always planned on doing, as we said yesterday, consecutive translation for the answers. It does slow things down; it makes it a little bit more cumbersome.

Q Nobody told the President.

Q Yes, they didn't know that.

Q Yes, he looked like he wasn't happy.

MR. GIBBS: Yes, he -- well, he did give a fairly long first answer to the consecutive translations.

Yes, Mr. Feller.

Q Was it a translation problem or he avoided the human rights question?

MR. GIBBS: A better question for the Chinese, Goyal. I would say this. I think the answer that he gave, be it to Ben's question or to Hans asking Ben's question -- (laughter) -- no, no, I mean, in all seriousness, I think you would all have to strain your recent memory to find a leader from China traveling outside of his country -- or in -- after meeting with the President on a number of occasions on this trip making such a frank admission of the improvement that needed to happen in the area of human rights in the country of China.

The process of translation was not the news yesterday. The news was just that, that President Hu realizes that -- and told the world -- that China has to do better.

We will certainly -- while we appreciate those words, the United States will watch the actions of --

Q But somehow --

MR. GIBBS: -- will watch the actions of the Chinese government to make sure that they meet the words that were spoken in the White House yesterday.

Ben.

Q Robert, I had a couple questions, and then maybe Hans can follow up. (Laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: You've been waiting to use that for a good part of the -- (laughter) -- that's the --

Q On the --

MR. GIBBS: If I ignore it, Hans will just come right in behind me.

Q On the staff changes related to the reelection campaign, a couple points on that. Can we say now or can you say from the podium that the President is officially running for reelection?

MR. GIBBS: I think that would -- I think it is likely that that's going to happen, obviously. I will say this. I think as the article says, the President is likely to file papers in the future that would officially make him a candidate. But I think it's safe to say, Ben, that the President -- we've started and we've made some progress on getting our economy back in order, and I think the President wants to continue to do that.

Q Will there be at the time of filing some sort of event, do you anticipate?

MR. GIBBS: I don't know that the campaign is that far down the road in the planning of that.

Q Patrick Gaspard going to the DNC -- so who will be the main political voice here?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I think as the article -- again, as the article says, the political office closes here. I think that's a matter of duplication and efficiency that makes a lot of sense, to house that operation over at the Democratic National Committee.

Q And I also wanted to ask, as the State of the Union comes up pretty quickly here, if you could give us some sense of where that speech is, but maybe more importantly, assuming you have some sense of the broad themes of where he's heading, can you tell us about that?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I think broadly what I would say about the State of the Union is obviously this is a speech that will center around and the great majority of the speech will be on the steps that the President believes our country has to take to continue that economic recovery; steps that we need to take in the short term that relate to jobs and steps that we need to take in the medium and the long term to put our fiscal house in order and to increase our competitiveness and our innovation that allows us to create the jobs of tomorrow.

I think you've heard the President talk about certainly the notions of competitiveness and innovation a lot. Recently he, on a number of occasions, has spoken about it in speeches. One that comes to mind is in December in North Carolina. I think many of those -- many of the themes that you heard in that and other speeches on the economy you'll hear again next Tuesday.

Yes, sir.

Q Robert, thanks. First off on foreign policy, any reaction to the news that South Korea had agreed to talk to the North Koreans on military matters?

MR. GIBBS: Look, obviously I think that is an important step forward. I think some of that comes as a result of yesterday's meeting here that for the first time there was an acknowledgment by the Chinese about the North Koreans' enrichment program. I think following that, the Republic of Korea agreeing to enter talks with the North Koreans -- clearly, conditions were created yesterday that showed the Republic of Korea that China and the United States were aligned in dealing with the aggressions of the North Koreans. So I think it is clearly a positive step.

Q And on the State of the Union, will the President raise the issue of the recommendations of his deficit commission?

MR. GIBBS: Without getting into a lot of detail, I think, again, spending and what we have to do to get our fiscal house in order is certainly going to be a topic that you'll hear the President discuss on Tuesday.

Q Will he embrace them?

MR. GIBBS: I -- Mark, I'm not want to get ahead of the President on his speech.

Jake.

Q We're at the two-year mark for the presidency -- or the first term, depending on what happens in two years. Where does President Obama think the state of his presidency is? Obviously you're in flux. There have been changes. You have a new chief of staff. You're going to be leaving, Axelrod is leaving, Plouffe is in -- you have a Republican Congress. Tell us about his thinking about what he -- how he sees this -- not the state of the union, but the state of his leadership going forward.

MR. GIBBS: Well, Jake, I don't know that he spends a lot of time separating the state of the country and where he is in his presidency, because his task is -- the task that he has before him and the task that he'll bring to the next two years is helping our economy continue to recover after the massive job loss and downturn of what happened as a result of the financial calamities that peaked in September of 2008. I don't think the President -- obviously there are aides inside of here and outside of here that spend time worrying about the President's political standing. I don't think the President spends a whole lot of time thinking through and worrying about sort of where he is in his presidency. Obviously there's a lot on his plate and a lot that has to be done to continue that recovery, to put the pieces in place to see us be able to compete with the rest of the world, to attract the type of jobs that we know are necessary to continue our important economic growth. I think that's what the President is focused on each and every day.

Q The polling numbers have improved slightly, but the standing of the President among that key group of independent voters is still not where you want it to be. What is President Obama presumably -- I don't mean this to sound purely like a political question, but obviously for him to get support for his policies, for him to get reelected, to continue to pursue what he thinks is the best path for this country, he needs to get reelected and he needs to win those independents back. What is he going to do to win those independents back?

MR. GIBBS: Look, I will say this, Jake. I think if you look at any series of public polling that we've all churned through in the last week or so, I think it's -- I think the message that we saw come through and what you heard us say a lot during the lame duck I think is -- manifested itself in some of these recent numbers. And that is that the American people would like to see Democrats and Republicans sit down at a table, be it here, be it there, and work through important solutions to the problems that face the American people. That's -- I think that's what we did in large measure during the lame duck. I think with strong bipartisan votes we were able to see an agreement that didn't raise taxes on middle-class families, that protected our country from deployed nuclear weapons -- a whole host of things that were tremendously important, and I think that's what the President wants to continue to do.

Look, I think what -- it's that old adage that I think the President is not going to be worried about his political standing. That will certainly -- a lot of that stuff takes care of itself. You make good decisions on behalf of the American people, and I think that's what he's done for the last two years.

Q If I can just follow up on your comments about President Hu's remarks on human rights. Those are words, and while it's a shift, they're still just words. Is there any indication from President Hu that he will be taking any actions regarding the Falun Gong, regarding Tibet, regarding the jailed Nobel Peace Prize winner?

MR. GIBBS: Well, Jake, look, that's why you heard me say at the beginning of this that while that admission is an important one, the President will continue to, in meetings with President Hu and our administration, will continue, in meetings with Chinese officials, press the case for tangible action and result on human rights.

The President I think was pretty forward-leaning when it came to Liu Xiaobo and the awarding of the Nobel Prize and what happened when China would not release him in order to go get that Nobel Prize.

Q First time I've heard that name in three days.

MR. GIBBS: Well, the President talked directly to President Hu about that. So that's --

Q What did he say?

Q Can you tell us what he said to him exactly and what --

MR. GIBBS: I was not in the meeting. I can't quote anything. I know obviously that the topic was brought up.

Q Was that at the dinner, Robert?

MR. GIBBS: I believe that was -- I'll double-check. I believe it was in some of the private meetings yesterday.*

Q Would you say that those comments made by President Hu about human rights were the biggest breakthrough from the meetings?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, I think if you want to put -- I would put -- I think we had issues that we discussed in walking you guys through the important aspects of what we hope to get out of this visit -- security, economics and human rights -- I think we saw progress in each of those three areas, right?

So in the security realm, again, the Chinese acknowledgment in the statements that -- of the North Korean uranium enrichment program, setting forth a series of conditions that made the Republic of Korea confident enough to go into talks with the North Koreans -- is certain -- I would say one in the security basket.

In the economic basket, you had a series of important commercial agreements to the tune of about \$45 billion, which directly support several hundred thousand American jobs right here; progress on intellectual property rights. Obviously more has to be done on the economic basket, but, again, the progress on indigenous innovation and intellectual property rights I think were important steps to move us forward.

And lastly, the admission on human rights was obviously another set of issues that you heard the President discuss yesterday -- he had spent a lot of time with the Chinese President discussing over the course of the last couple days.

So I think we see some tangible progress on all three of those fronts that's important. There's clearly more work that has to be done. We've seen a currency because of some actions that the Chinese have taken, as well as inflation rise the -- increase the value of the RMB, but there's still progress that has to be made on that in order to, as you heard the President say yesterday, rebalance that currency.

Q And on those comments, was that a complete surprise to the administration, that he was that candid in public?

MR. GIBBS: I think that was -- as I said, I don't -- I'm not a Chinese historian, but I think if you go back in recent memory, it's hard to see where a leader of China has said that recently on a trip outside of his country.

Q And then on another issue, what kind of reaction has the President given to comments about him being a one-term President? We've heard that from Cheney and others. How does he react to those comments?

MR. GIBBS: I haven't talked to him about it. I don't think he spends a lot of time thinking about political prognostications.

Chip.

Q Thanks, Robert. Following up on April's question -- I think it was a serious question -- that you had the President standing there looking embarrassed and awkward for a moment because nobody had told him that the translation was not going to be simultaneous. Now, something as important as a press conference with the Chinese and American leaders, to have the President standing there looking like a deer in the headlights for a moment there, isn't that a pretty big faux pas by staff to leave the President hanging out there like that?

Q He looked angry, too. He looked angry.

Q He looked angry.

MR. GIBBS: No. I don't -- I could -- I don't necessarily agree with many of the phrases that you used in your question. Again, we can get lost in the -- we can get lost at picking out a series of trees. I think, again, the forest that I would -- I think most people around the world had focused on was the answer. That's kind of why I thought you guys would ask those questions of the leaders.

Q So you don't think it's important for the President not to be caught flat-footed out there like that by staff?

MR. GIBBS: I don't -- I think the President --

Q He wasn't upset?

MR. GIBBS: He wasn't upset. Again, I think the points that he made and I think the progress that we made -- look, we can spend time worrying about process or we can spend time worrying about results. I think the President spends most of his time worried about results.

Q It was last week you were -- I just want to see if you still feel the same way -- that you were a bit noncommittal on the question of whether the President would deliver a big speech on health care reform at some point to explain that. There's a new CBS News or New York Times poll showing that only 10 percent of people believe the bill has been explained very well to them; 56 percent believe it's not been explained well to them.

Do you think he has -- there's a need for him to get out there and explain this thing again if people are that confused?

MR. GIBBS: No, I don't think the President has any plans to give a big speech on health care.

Q No plans to do that?

MR. GIBBS: No.

Q Okay. And on the --

MR. GIBBS: I mean, look, Chip, I think -- do I think that a lot of the coverage last year was on process and politics? Yes. I don't -- do I think, at the same time, 3.3 million seniors have gotten checks to cover the doughnut hole expenses in their prescription drugs? I do. I think that's why, in a series of the public polling that you've seen, people don't support repeal, because they understand -- they do understand that they're seeing, whether it's their children -- children that might have preexisting conditions not have to fight with insurance companies to ensure that they can get proper coverage. I think they understand that insurance companies are not in charge of making all the decisions anymore, and I think that's a good thing for our medical system.

Q Will he defend it in the State of the Union address?

MR. GIBBS: I think that -- I don't know what degree that that is in the State of the Union.

Q And in the State of the Union -- was it Peter's piece, that he wants ideas that get him excited? Has the President -- Peter Baker's piece said --

MR. GIBBS: I have not fully read --

Q The President was quoted as having said that he wants ideas that get him excited, ideas for creating jobs that get him excited. Do you know if he's found any?

MR. GIBBS: Tune in around nine-ish on Tuesday. (Laughter.)

Q Come on, we like a little preview. You don't have to give us details. Do you know if he's found any new ideas --

MR. GIBBS: Can't do the translation -- (laughter) -- I'm looking, I'm -- I can't believe -- Bill, I can't understand that -- (laughter) --

Wendell, do you have a question?

Q What is the reaction to the House vote on health care repeal?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I mean, I think I've gotten this question several times before. I mean, I think it's --

Q Not since the House actually voted, however.

MR. GIBBS: No, I don't think my -- I don't think my answer changes. I mean, it was -- I don't think it was a serious legislative effort and I don't think anybody -- I don't think people in the House thought it was a serious legislative effort. I think the message, though, that those people that voted for repeal were sending were to put health insurance companies back in charge of medical decisions that have the ability to drop, deny, limit or cap health

insurance coverage.

I think it -- I think you got a pretty good example of who you think should be in charge of health care. Should it be patients and doctors or should it be insurance companies? I think that was -- I think that's what we've seen. I think -- again, we -- I mentioned 3.3 million seniors that have gotten help with their prescription drug costs as a result of this; out-of-pocket costs that are going to go up if something like this were to become law. But I don't -- I think, thankfully, it's not going to.

Q Does the President share most Democrats' concerns that the debate over spending cuts in the Congress now among Republicans goes too far, especially in the House?

MR. GIBBS: Well, again, I think, Wendell, that we're going to have a lot of time to work through how we get our fiscal house back in order and the steps that we take to do so. And we've got to make sure that we don't find ourselves crippling our ability to innovate and provide the types of incentives that we need to create the jobs of tomorrow.

Q Is that a yes?

MR. GIBBS: I don't -- it was whatever answer I just gave.

Q Finally --

MR. GIBBS: I didn't know we were playing multiple choice today.

Q Just true/false. (Laughter.)

Q The Attorney General has announced the military commissions board of the Cole bombing suspects will go forward. It was 14 months ago that he said that they would go to military commission. Why so long in setting a trial?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, I read the story in the paper today. I don't -- I think the individuals that are mentioned in the story were talked about in terms of going through military commissions, as you said, quite some time ago. I don't have any sense of timing or any sense of when final decisions on that type of thing will be made.

You heard the President outline --

Q No final decision has been made?

MR. GIBBS: No, the -- I think if you look at -- in terms of timing, I don't -- you've heard the President back at the Archives speech talk about the fact that we were going to -- we had different groups of those at Guantanamo that -- they were going to have to be dealt with in different ways, which is why we sought and the President and the administration worked through a restructuring of the military commissions law.

Yes.

Q You have lauded President Hu's admission that there's work to be done on Chinese human rights. Where's your reaction to the fact that 1.3 billion Chinese did not hear those comments -- they were blacked out -- nor did they hear anything about Liu Xiaobo?

MR. GIBBS: Look, again, I -- which is why one of the conditions to coming here was an opportunity to take questions from you guys.

Look, we can't -- obviously there's very little that we can structurally do to deal with that, in terms of how they cover this visit. Obviously they've got a very different governmental system than we do, and a very different system on how leaders in their country are covered.

But when the President was in Shanghai more than a year ago, he talked about needing an open society, having an open Internet so that people in China can read about the news all over the world.

The world heard the leader of China make that important admission, and the world will watch to see the steps that they take over the course of the next many months to fulfill -- or I should say to make the improvements that he says need to be made.

Q And on the political changes and the rearranging and the establishment of the Chicago headquarters, is this

not early? I mean, you speak of the fact that the economy is getting back on its feet, there are so many things in flux, both politically and economically in this country -- is it a little early to get started on 2012?

MR. GIBBS: No, look, I think this is very much in line with the calendar that you've seen align with similar efforts that were made in -- ahead of the 2004 election and ahead of the 1996 election by Presidents Bush and Clinton. I think that's just the way it works.

Q Is this a function of the need to begin fundraising for a formal declaration?

MR. GIBBS: Well, again, there's a -- there are a whole series of things that have to happen in a campaign. And, again, I think they're happening very much in accordance with the type of timelines you've seen in the past.

Q Robert, can I follow on this?

MR. GIBBS: I'll come around.

Q Did you say that he is likely or definitely running?

MR. GIBBS: I think obviously the setting up of a campaign makes it far likely. But, again, I think the official rendering of that decision would come, as the story notes, in the filing of that paperwork with the FEC.

Q Can I just follow up -- because I know Obama is going -- the President, excuse me, is going to Schenectady tomorrow. What do you hope to get or what does he hope to get --

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, tomorrow as you mentioned, the President will go and visit the birthplace of General Electric, talk about the economy. It's the -- it's home to GE's largest energy division. It will be the future home of their advanced battery manufacturing. This is a company that has brought jobs from overseas back into the United States -- obviously that's important -- and a company that as a result of some of the work that the President did on commercial diplomacy before and, while in India, saw an expansion of the business that they do all over the world that supports jobs here in America. So I think that's a bit of the backdrop of the events tomorrow in Schenectady.

Q Any major announcements --

MR. GIBBS: There are likely to be some. But we'll talk about those tomorrow.

Q How do you all feel about this term "Obamacare"?

MR. GIBBS: I don't know that I've spent a ton of time, Peter, thinking about it.

Q Do you find it pejorative?

MR. GIBBS: Again, I don't know that I've spent a lot of time thinking about what somebody may or may not call it. Again, I don't know what a senior who is getting help from prescription drugs calls it. I don't know a senior that gets a free preventative visit calls it. I don't know what a child that no longer has to fight with an insurance company to get coverage because their preexisting condition calls it. My sense is that all those people call it a number of different things, but in their mind it means that they're finally getting a little bit of help with the problems that they have. And we live in a country where if you go sick, you ought not go bankrupt trying to get the type of care and help that you need. And that's what animated the President's decision to pass the bill.

Q Totally unrelated, Robert -- I'm wondering if the President has had any contact with Congresswoman Giffords' family or any of the other victims since he was in Tucson, any other communication with --

MR. GIBBS: Not that I'm aware of. I'll double-check and see if there have been -- I've not seen any calls that I know of since Tucson. Obviously I think we're all heartened by the almost daily progress reports that we hear from Congresswoman Giffords' family. I think it's nothing short of extraordinary the amount of progress that has been made in such a very short period of time.**

And Peter, having been backstage before that and talking to some of those who were there that day who had come from the hospital who still had wounds, bullet wounds, from that horrific day, their stories continue to give us strength and encourage us and inspire us each day. I told that to several of them that day and I think it's -- I think it will be true for a really long time.

Q What's his message to the mayor -- the mayors this afternoon?

MR. GIBBS: Obviously the mayors are in town. I think they'll talk about a whole host of things that mayors generally talk to the federal government and the President about.

Q In the past when mayors were here, they talked a lot about the importance of the stimulus, what it did to plug gaps in their budgets. Is there going to be any warning that they need to do fiscal consolidation just like the federal government might need to do fiscal consolidation?

MR. GIBBS: Well, Hans, I doubt that anybody here needs to warn them of "fiscal consolidation." Many of them are dealing with and have dealt with for quite some time the impact on their budget of a dramatic downturn in our economy. Many of them are dealing with them -- dealing with those problems far before coming here.

Yes, sir.

Q Robert, you mentioned on Tuesday that the President is going to go over some of the material he talked about in North Carolina in December. But will there be big new proposals on Tuesday as well?

MR. GIBBS: I can't imagine if we went all through this today what we could possibly talk about on Wednesday or Thursday, so I'm not going to dip my toe deeply into the State of the Union preview pool.

Q Okay. And you made a distinction between the short-term focus on jobs and then the medium-term focus on getting the fiscal house in order.

MR. GIBBS: But I said both the medium and long term, dealing with our fiscal budget situation, but also let's understand the steps that we have to continue to take in the medium and the long term to prepare our children for competing in an economy against the Chinese and the Indians and a whole host of different countries.

Q Does the President still see something of a tension between that short-term focus on jobs and a need to keep government spending --

MR. GIBBS: Well, I would say we took some -- we obviously had to take, in the course of two years, some extraordinary steps to ensure that an economic downturn did not become the next Great Depression. And we did that, and some of that stuff obviously -- Hans just mentioned -- is -- a lot of that stuff has run its course through the Recovery Act.

So, look, I think that the President wants to and will outline what he thinks is the best course forward to ensuring that we're dealing with a whole host of problems, including how do we grow our economy, how do we help and work with the private sector to create jobs, and how we get our fiscal house in order all at the same time.

Q The same time -- it's not a question of sort of one thing now, and then down the road --

MR. GIBBS: Well, again, I think even in a -- even -- if you look at last year's budget, even at a time where the second half of the Recovery Act is still doing what it needed to do, the President presented a budget that froze non-security discretionary spending because we had to begin to take steps even then.

Q In 2007, at a labor union forum, the President raised concerns about -- or the candidate at the time raised concerns about Walmart and he said I would not shop at those -- he would not shop there back there. I wondered in light of today's announcement from the First Lady if that is still true, if he would -- I know he spends a lot of time shopping, but if he were to --

MR. GIBBS: Yes, I was going to say --

Q -- if he were to buy goods, would he feel comfortable buying goods at Walmart? And more broadly, his views about Walmart have changed in terms of how it treats its workers and unionization --

MR. GIBBS: I mean, obviously I think we're in a -- I think we're all in a different time with clearly steps that have been taken. I think the First Lady was proud to stand with the country's largest retailer. They've taken some dramatic steps in how they're dealing with food and how they're marketing food and packaging and things like that that will make a genuine and big difference for people that shop there. And the First Lady is proud to and happy to stand with any company that will make similar pledges to make a difference on behalf of the American people.

Q In terms of their practices, does he condemn them still in terms of how they treat workers, how they pay workers? He was very explicit about this --

MR. GIBBS: Again, I --

Q -- so has that changed at all -- I mean --

MR. GIBBS: I guess the short answer is it's just -- lots has happened since 2007.

Q Robert, you said earlier that -- with respect to President Hu -- one of the conditions for coming here was an opportunity to take questions from you guys. Are you saying that the White House set a condition for President Hu's visit that he would have to take questions from American reporters?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I was very clear in the planning of this that we would have a press conference and the press conference would include questions from you guys. We were clear to make sure that that's what they understood was going to take place if they came.

Q And was there any resistance to that?

MR. GIBBS: Not that I know of. I mean, I obviously did not -- I did not deal directly with them on that, but in the pre-planning for this, this was something that we talked about, and not doing it wasn't an option.

Q If you can remind me since I wasn't on the President's trip to China, was there a press conference on that?

MR. GIBBS: There was.

Q On that trip? Okay -- a joint press conference with President Hu?

Q It was statements.

MR. GIBBS: Right, they did not take questions, right.

Q And so was this in some way a reaction to that or saying you're on our turf now?

MR. GIBBS: No, we weren't in China.

Q But they didn't take questions in China. I guess what I'm saying is, were you saying, okay, now you're on our turf, you need to --

MR. GIBBS: Yes, we were -- this is the United States of America.

Q Robert, global warming -- any reaction to the fact that the U.N. weather -- meteorological agency has determined that last year was tied for the warmest year on record and -- talking about the State of the Union again -- will the fact -- will the President's suggestion that he's got other ways to skin the cat other than cap and trade feature in that?

MR. GIBBS: I honestly don't know the answer to the second one. Obviously I think there are continual reminders that we have to transition to a clean energy economy. Without getting into whether or not that's in the speech, obviously there are a number of different policy ways to do such a thing -- whether it is setting renewable energy standards that create the type of market conditions where you see that transition -- again, there are obviously a number of different ways to do that.

Q Does the President consider it a big issue still?

MR. GIBBS: Look, I think energy independence and the security of our planet are and will continue to be issues that we're going to have to deal with. And, again, more and more and more of our oil comes from -- or our energy comes from places that are not here. That puts us at a disadvantage. We've clearly taken some steps to change corporate average fuel economy, fuel economy standards, that lessen some of that usage of foreign oil, but I think there's no doubt that we have a lot more to do.

The Recovery Act invested in wind and solar. The plant that we'll visit tomorrow will soon be home to GE's advanced battery manufacturing as you see car companies, both foreign and domestic, having success marketing cars that don't run on gas but run on electricity. And we're going to have to meet many of those challenges.

Yes, sir.

Q Thank you, Robert. Two questions. First is, both President Obama and President Hu mentioned about the historic meeting 30 years ago by Deng Xiaoping and how the White House evaluate this state visit?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look I think -- as I said earlier, I think we saw some progress on a host of important fronts that we wanted to see progress on -- security, the economy and human rights. But at the same time, again, I think that whether it's our trip to India and South Korea, Japan, our trip to China last year, China's trip here -- I think they're better evaluated over the course of the long term to see have we set ourselves on the path to making real and substantial progress.

And so I think we will -- while we're pleased with the outcome of the visit from yesterday, obviously on each of those baskets that I discussed -- security, the economy and human rights -- there are still -- the two leaders talked about progress that certainly we acknowledge needs to be made and hasn't been, and we'll continue to try to be a leader in seeing that happen.

Q And also, on the currency issue -- you mentioned still a lot of work to be done. What's the next step?

MR. GIBBS: Well, the next step is with the Chinese in taking -- continuing to take actions at a faster pace to deal with the valuation of their currency. Again, obviously -- and there's been a decent amount of coverage on this -- there's actions that you take to change the valuation, and certainly inflation gives you some real impacts too, that that indicate there's been some changes, but, again, as the President said I think on a couple of occasions yesterday, not quickly enough.

Yes, sir.

Q Robert, one of President Obama's campaign promises back in 2008 was passage of the employment nondiscrimination act, which would provide workplace protections to gay and transgender Americans. Is this something that the President expects to see passed over the course of the 112th Congress, at least in the Senate where Democrats still have control?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, I think there's a whole host of things that the President has made part of his campaign. We talked about DOMA a few days ago and other things that are important to build off the progress of repealing "don't ask, don't tell." I think those continue to be priorities of the President's and we will certainly work to make progress on those fronts in obviously a much more challenging Congress over the course of the next two years.

Q But in the Senate where Democrats still have control, is he expecting passage of the employment nondiscrimination act?

MR. GIBBS: Again, I think you'll see the President continue to push on a whole host of those issues.

Q Just two more questions. Does the administration see value in passing ENDA in one chamber of Congress to build momentum for complete passage at a later time?

MR. GIBBS: Well, yes, I mean, look, I think there's no doubt that -- look, whenever you get something done in one, you're closer to certainly seeing it come to fruition. So, yes, obviously.

Q And will the President address ENDA in any context during the State of the Union address, perhaps as a jobs bill?

MR. GIBBS: I'm not going to get into previewing State of the Union today.

Yes, ma'am.

Q I just have a quick question about -- the President is going to be talking with congressional Democrats this weekend at their convention. Does he have a message for them? Is he going to be sort of talking a little bit about what his State of the Union might talk about --

MR. GIBBS: Well, I think they'll -- he travels up there tomorrow after our return from Schenectady. I think he'll have an opportunity to talk about -- talk to them about the challenges that lay ahead and what we have to do -- many of the themes that he'll outline in the State of the Union.

Q I imagine that Democrats are going to have to respond to Republicans who are not only trying to repeal the law but also they're making -- taking steps today to replace the health care law. Is he going to --

MR. GIBBS: I was going to say, I did notice they passed an almost one-and-a-half-page bill --

Q Something like that.

MR. GIBBS: Yes, many of which I find -- it's interesting -- many of the goals that they espouse in that bill are the current law of the land, like ensuring that people aren't discriminated because of preexisting conditions. That actually exists -- it's called the Affordable Care Act.

Q So you're not at all concerned about this effort to actually propose an alternative and the consequence for the -

MR. GIBBS: I am happy that several years later they've gotten around to what they might do. I think all of you must be anxious to know what they're going to do. I think they have set forth some exceedingly lofty goals, again, some of which -- most of which are currently embodied in the law of the land.

But, yes, I'm happy for them to take a spin and tell us how they'll do what they passed today. I would suggest, too, that as they talk about making some progress in the deficit, they deal with the Congressional Budget Office's indication that the action that they took just yesterday adds a couple of hundred billion dollars to the deficit.

Now, keep in mind this was a CBO that, while we were going through the process of health care reform, was the be all and end all of the scorekeeper. Then when that same CBO, headed by the very same person, discussed the very same topic of the impact of the deficit on health care reform, all of a sudden, "Well, that can't possibly be right, that's not true."

So I do think it is important to underscore that the first legislative action that that Congress took was to repeal a law that helps seniors and helps families, and added a couple hundred billion dollars to the deficit. Not entirely sure that in the run-up to the 2010 campaign, they spent a lot of time talking to seniors about raising their out-of-pocket costs on medical care and prescription drugs or talking about adding a couple of hundred billion dollars to the deficit.

April.

Q Robert, on issues of gun control, former Vice President Dick Cheney said that he could see some sort of more restrictions on semi-automatic weapons, semi-automatic handguns. Is this administration going to navigate through the steely, tough waters of gun control in the wake of what happened in Arizona?

MR. GIBBS: April, I don't have a lot to add to what I've said I think on a couple of occasions in here on that, and that is I have no doubt that there will be proposals offered as a result of different circumstances that would have happened in Tucson. And the administration will evaluate those proposals.

Q Do you agree with what the former Vice President had to say on semi-automatic --

MR. GIBBS: Again, I think we're looking through some of those proposals.

Q And also, back on China, but on a whole other issue, on issues of unions, did --

MR. GIBBS: The issue of what? I'm sorry.

Q Unions, unions -- they have unions in China.

MR. GIBBS: Yes. No, no, I just -- sometimes I can't --

Q Lost in translation. (Laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: -- believe it or not, sometimes I can't hear.

Q They have unions in China. Did they discuss that issue there? And particularly, the first union in China was Walmart.

MR. GIBBS: Let me ask some of our guys whether that's a topic that came up. I honestly don't know the answer to that.

Q On a completely different subject, what are the President's viewing plans for the NFC championship game? (Laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: I think he's going to do like he did last week. Well, last week, obviously, he went to play basketball with the girls and came back a little after kickoff. They had some staff, and the President watched most of the game over in the theater. I think the President plans to do that again. And I think we've given this to a few papers

in Chicago and Wisconsin, the President's prediction that the Bears will win the game 20-17.

Q Has he made any bets?

MR. GIBBS: Not that I know of, no.

Q And will he still go to Wisconsin, should the unthinkable happen? (Laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: Yes, we're still planning a trip to Wisconsin. I might have already -- I might have just complicated the -- complicated the questions you asked sort of with Ben on the political effort by predicting the team in Wisconsin not doing as well against the team in Illinois. So, I don't -- not a hypothetical.

Go ahead.

Q If they lose, he won't go?

MR. GIBBS: No, no, no, no, no. Of course he is going to Wisconsin. Of course he is going to Wisconsin.

Q What about February 5th in Dallas?

MR. GIBBS: I think our President hopes to have his team playing there.

Q If they win he plans to go?

MR. GIBBS: I will say this, I'm a very --

Q It's a hypothetical --

MR. GIBBS: No, no, this is superstition. I will answer this question on behalf of him based on superstition. I think all of that is way, way, way getting ahead of yourself.

Q Is he superstitious that way?

MR. GIBBS: Not nearly as much as I am.

Yes, sir.

Q Robert, I'll take a stab at this. In the State of the Union address, the President no doubt will remind Americans that we have troops on the ground in two war zones. Will he, though, at the same time, try to get the American people and the Republicans behind the idea of maybe pulling back on defense spending, considering everything else he may mention in terms of reducing spending yet?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, I think it is safe to say that we are going to see or going to have to see a tightening of the belt around everything that government is doing in order to make progress on getting our fiscal house in order. The Secretary of Defense, Secretary Gates, has made some -- has taken some steps on procurement reform and taken some steps to cancel weapon systems and programs that for quite some time the military itself hasn't wanted despite the fact that Congress might continue to fund it. I think those type of efforts have to happen because we can't see taxpayer dollars wasted on anything.

Q But the American people may not know about like a strike joint fighter or debate over an engine kind of thing.

MR. GIBBS: Right.

Q Should the President maybe point that out in the State of the Union address?

MR. GIBBS: Well, without getting into what may or may not be in there, again, I think whether it's in the speech or not, it's something that the President and the Secretary will continue to work on.

Stephen.

Q Do you think it's possible that President Hu's remarks on human rights are being over-read at all, given the fact that several occasions yesterday he stated that China didn't share Western definitions of human rights?

MR. GIBBS: Look, I guess I don't want to translate the translation. But I will say this, as I started out by saying, I

think that regardless of what he said yesterday, the true test is not in the words that someone speaks but in the actions that a country takes. And that's what animated the President to bring up the issue of human rights again and I think that's -- the actions that that country takes is how we will evaluate the progress that they may or may not make over the course of coming months and weeks.

Q So you don't think there's any sense in which you could see this as -- this scripted answer, it was obviously a scripted answer -- that he had as a way to alleviate pressure while stating that China would continue on its current --

MR. GIBBS: No, because -- well, because, again -- look, I think you could read it -- maybe you can read it several different ways. I think it was an admission that we haven't heard before. And, again, I think -- I know the way we read it and that is acknowledging that is -- acknowledging that you have improvements to make is part of it, but it's a very small part compared to what has to be done to make progress, and that's what we'll watch.

Q Was something like that said privately though?

MR. GIBBS: Again, I was not in some of the private meetings.

Go ahead, yes, ma'am.

Q Thank you. On Guantanamo, Robert, with the reports that the administration is likely to start military trials in Guantanamo, what does this mean for the administration's efforts of moving some detainees back to either their home countries or host countries? And does that have any effect on the administration's talks with these other countries?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, I think that look, there are -- let me at the beginning of my answer acknowledge obviously there are some prohibitions, legal prohibitions now, on some transfers that I think you've seen our commenting on in the past.

We will continue the process of going through who is there. Clearly the courts continue that process of going through who is there and deciding whether or not their continued -- whether them being continually held there is in accordance with the laws, as you've seen courts do in the past.

But none of these decisions change our fundamental desire and goal to see, because of our security, the prison at Guantanamo Bay closed once and for all.

Q Does it cause of delay in any of these? I mean, are there any deadlines that have been --

MR. GIBBS: Again, I'd point you to the fact that the individuals that were named in today's story were the same three individuals that were talked about to be tried in military commissions quite some time ago.

David.

Q Let me follow up on April's question for a second. Representative McCarthy and Senator Lautenberg have posed bills that would ban high-magazine -- high ammo in guns. Have there been any discussions between those offices and the White House whether that it is a proposal worth pursuing in this Congress?

MR. GIBBS: I don't know the answer to that. I don't know what specific conversations have been had.

Q Given the President's previous positions on banning assault weapons in favor of some gun control measures, is this something that you think he'd likely support?

MR. GIBBS: Again, I think we're looking through different proposals -- the proposals that you mentioned and others -- and we'll evaluate them based on those events.

Q And is there any possibility you're going to be proactive and propose something of your own?

MR. GIBBS: I have not heard anything particular in here.

Q Robert, the President's poll numbers have been moving up fairly steadily. I think he's at 50 percent in the average for the first time in a year. To what does the White House attribute that?

MR. GIBBS: Well, again, I think that -- I think I said earlier that I think you -- I think what the American people said in the election was they wanted two political parties to be able to work together and make progress on issues that

were important to them, particularly economic issues. I think that's what they saw during the lame duck session. I think that's -- I think that was a productive time. People saw Republicans and Democrats working together to make sure their tax rates didn't go up. So I think there's some obvious benefit to doing that.

Q Thanks, Robert.

MR. GIBBS: Sam.

Q Robert, thanks. Just back on the reelection real quick. I'm curious, the President said right after midterms there would be plenty of time for the next election in 2012. I'm guessing -- I'd bet my paycheck he is going to, in the State of the Union, call for rising above politics and doing the work of the country. Why announce the reelection --

MR. GIBBS: How much is your paycheck? Because I may try to go get him to change a few lines just to -- (laughter) -- sorry.

Q You did better off the - but, I mean, I'm curious, why announce this now? Doesn't it complicate the State of the Union?

MR. GIBBS: No, no, because, Sam, I think it's important to understand just because the President sets up the machinery of ultimately running for reelection does not mean that you're going to see the President doing a ton of political reelection events. That's just -- the nature of the way these things work is you've got to have -- you've got to set up a legal mechanism by which to begin to fund something like this. You have to get people in place. You saw the quotes in the story that this will be located in Chicago and focus on the type of grassroots effort that we saw in 2008. That doesn't mean that the President is going to spend a whole lot of time worrying about that. The campaign is going to be run by a group of people in Chicago whose jobs will be to worry about that, not the President's.

Q I also wanted to ask, the Vice President sent out an email to supporters today in which he says that this White House has accomplished more in the first two years than any President since Roosevelt -- FDR. Is that the administration belief?

MR. GIBBS: I'm not going to contradict the Vice President, that's for sure. (Laughter.) I would say it's a big deal.

Q What type of --

MR. GIBBS: Kind of a slow group today, come on, guys. I know we got the -- I know we've got the post-China blues, but come on, a little help here. (Laughter.) I was going to say -- well, that would certainly liven things up.

Q We'll insert the adjective. Robert, I don't have to remind you that Senator Lieberman endorsed John McCain, campaign for him, and said that Barack Obama wasn't prepared to be President. Is the President relieved to see Joe Lieberman out of the Senate?

MR. GIBBS: No, look, obviously we had a little disagreement on the 2008 presidential campaign, but I think Senator Lieberman is -- look, take the most recent -- the progress that we were taking about that was made in the lame duck. I think obviously Senator Lieberman is somebody who, while having disagreements with this White House and with Senator Obama when he was in the United States Senate, clearly played an important and instrumental role in rolling back something that he and the President shared a belief in the injustice of "don't ask, don't tell."

So I think that obviously Senator Lieberman made a decision, as he said, to go on and do something different in his life, and while we haven't agreed with him on every issue, I think clearly there are a whole host of issues -- energy independence, "don't ask, don't tell," -- a whole lot of issues that the President was happy to see Senator Lieberman's leadership and support on.

Q Did they ever have a get-together where they just said, okay, let's let bygones by bygones and move forward together, after the election?

MR. GIBBS: I don't -- look, I think there are obviously opportunities -- look, I don't think the President needed to have some air-clearing moment. People are free to make decisions -- Senator Lieberman was -- about who to support for -- to run for President. But I don't think that -- I don't think anybody here spent a lot of time thinking about that. In fact, there were some who thought, maybe because of that, Senator Lieberman wouldn't be the chairman of the committee and that was not a view that we held.

Yes, sir.

Q I was wondering if the President has been briefed on what appear to be impending global food shortages as a result of aberrant weather in Asia or South America and South Africa.

MR. GIBBS: I'm not aware of whether he has been or not, but let me see if that has either come up in an NSC meeting or in any of his economic daily briefings.***

Let me go to two back here -- yes, ma'am.

Q There was an arrest in Canada last night of a guy apparently plotting to kill U.S. soldiers in Iraq, and this is the latest of several terror-related arrests with a Canadian connection. I just wondered is the White House growing concerned about Canada as a possible terrorist haven? Are there any --

MR. GIBBS: Let me ask NSC. I don't have any guidance on that. But let me -- I'll get something from NSC on that.

Yes, ma'am.

Q With the emphasis on regulation this week, there was a bill reintroduced today that -- backed by Speaker Boehner -- that would require a vote on regulations, executive regulations, before they could go through. Do you have any comment on that or views on that?

MR. GIBBS: Let me get some guidance on that bill. I'm not familiar with it, but let me see if there's some guidance from Legislative Affairs.

Thank you, guys.

END

2:45 P.M. EST