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**The White House**

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

August 11, 2010

**Press Briefing by Press Secretary Robert Gibbs, 8/11/2010**

**James S. Brady Press Briefing Room**

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

\* This meeting was focused on the drawdown and change of mission at the end of the month. Of course there is the context of our Security Agreement with the Iraqis, but this was not a focus of the meeting.

\*\* Since the beginning of this year, the U.S. and Iraqi military partnership has resulted in the death or arrest of more than 30 members of the top leadership of al-Qai'da in Iraq. That includes the killing of al-Qai'da's two top leaders this Spring.

\*\*\* No. The transition force will carry out focused missions of advise/assist; supporting CT operations; and force protection, and per our Security Agreement with the Iraqi government, all US troops are scheduled to be out of Iraq by the end of 2011.

1:40 P.M. EDT

MR. GIBBS: I am going to apologize in advance for my voice. It is not my Barry White imitation, but it is still a little on the scratchy side.

Let me give you a quick readout of the President's meeting this morning with his national security team. They met today, as you know, to discuss Iraq. The President heard directly from General Odierno who said that we're on target to complete our drawdown by the end of August. Already we've removed over 80,000 troops from Iraq since President Obama took office.

General Odierno also reported that the security situation has retained the significant improvements made over the last couple of years and that Iraqi security forces are fully prepared to be in the lead when we end our combat mission later this month.

The President also received an update from Vice President Biden and Ambassador Hill on our efforts to support Iraq's leaders as they form a new government and to transition to civilian lead within Iraq.

That meeting was this morning.

Ms. Loven.

Q On Iraq, is there anything that you all can envision, anything that came up in the meeting that could change that August 31st date for ending combat operations?

MR. GIBBS: No. And I would say that one of the things that General Odierno told the President and others in the meeting was that the level of violence observed over the past two weeks had been among the lowest in number of incidents that the coalition has seen since record-keeping on those incidences began. I'd say, obviously, that is a positive development. We continue to anticipate as we get closer to the 31st of August a traditional uptick of violence around Ramadan and as those that are left try to gain attention.

I would say the President also got, as I said, an update on government formation. I think you probably are aware of meetings that have happened over the past couple of days with Kurdish leader Barzani and Prime Minister Maliki. They had a press conference very recently to discuss efforts at making progress to form a government.

So the President was satisfied with the progress that we continue to see on the security side; got an update and continue to pursue progress on a formation of a government -- understanding the last one took six months, we understood this was not going to be a quick process. But we are on target by the end of the month to end our combat mission, turn over bases that Americans have been on to the Iraqis, and transition our role there.

Q So there's no turning back, no matter what?

MR. GIBBS: Nothing was brought up with the President that would necessitate us needing to turn back. And I

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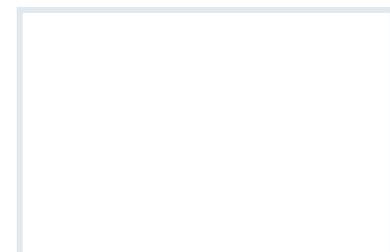
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would say this. The security situation -- security forces in Iraq were in the lead on Election Day. They provided that security. So we have seen tremendous progress. and obviously one of the things that we're trying to do in Afghanistan is to build a similar capacity with both police and a national army.

Q Just on another topic, what do you think the consequences should be of the comments that you made about this "professional left"?

MR. GIBBS: The consequences?

Q Yes.

MR. GIBBS: Do you have anything in mind? (Laughter.)

Q No supper.

Q One House member suggested resignation, so I'm asking what you think your view is.

MR. GIBBS: I don't plan on leaving, so -- and there's no truth to the rumor that I've added an inflatable exit to my office. (Laughter.)

Q Hard to transition from that -- (laughter) -- but a question on the economy. Is the White House concerned about signs from data today that the Chinese economy is slowing? Is that something that has the risk of affecting the U.S. in making the economic situation here even worse?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, Jeff, I think that -- and the President will talk later today in signing an important piece of legislation on manufacturing to help companies here at home. I think without a doubt we've all seen data, and the President continues to get letters from people all over the country that continue to feel the pain of the economic recession that we've been in for more than two years.

I think there's no doubt that in April, events that -- events in Europe began to play a role in where we are now. We have some things that clearly have to be done to continue to make progress on our economic front. There is no doubt that if you look back to where we were a year ago, we were discussing the depth of economic -- the depth of job loss. Now, we are seeing positive job gains -- not enough for the President, and I doubt enough for -- certainly not enough for those that continue to be out of work.

Yesterday, the House came back and passed a very important proposal, particularly to ensure that 160,000 plus teachers didn't get fired as a result of bad state budgets. And we hope that when the Senate comes back they'll quickly take up a small business bill that will increase the amount of credit that small businesses will have access to and cut taxes -- cut capital gains tax on small businesses.

So we're certainly monitoring what's going on throughout the world. We'll continue to do so and understanding that we've got some ways to go.

Q You've often, just as you did now, been happy to highlight the fact that Europe is part of the problem that's affecting the United States right now. I'm just wondering if China is now getting closer to --

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, I think that -- I would say this. I think the events in -- I don't know if it's highlighting as much as understanding the effect that we -- in living in a vast global economy, that our economy or economies throughout the world are -- we're not immune to slowdowns that might start in other parts of the world. Again, I think the trajectory of where we were in April is different than where we are right now. And certainly Europe was one of the first signs of that.

Q One last follow-up to that -- do you have a time frame at all for a replacement for Christy Romer?

MR. GIBBS: No, Christy, obviously, will continue to serve, I believe through September 3rd. I do not have a timeline on a replacement for her.

Yes, ma'am.

Q Robert, following on Jennifer's question, I mean do you regret any of what you said to The Hill?

MR. GIBBS: I will say I think there are many times when I read the transcripts even of answers I give in here that I could have done -- could have said things slightly differently. I will say I watch a lot of cable TV, and you don't have to watch long to get frustrated by some of what is said, and I think that's what that answer has borne out.

Q But do you feel like there's still substance to what you said, not necessarily -- maybe not in the way you said it, but that there is too much of a demand or too much pressure perhaps from the left of the party and that --

MR. GIBBS: I didn't say there was too much of a demand. I think -- or too much pressure. I think that a lot of what -- a lot of the issues that Democrats throughout the party have worked to see happen have come to fruition as part of what this President has accomplished in the first 17 months.

Health care was an issue that was worked on for a hundred years. President after President after President



discussed the importance of passing something comprehensive and historic that cut how much we were paying for health care, that extended the life, as we saw last week, of the Medicare trust fund. I think those are accomplishments that we all should be proud of regardless of whether it encompasses a hundred percent of what we had wanted in the beginning.

Q And what about the rest that is outstanding -- gay rights, Guantanamo --

MR. GIBBS: I will say this -- all things that the President made commitments on and is focused on doing. We have a process underway with the Pentagon to make changes, as the President outlined in the campaign and, quite frankly, even before the campaign, in "don't ask, don't tell" as somebody running for the U.S. Senate in 2004. We have a process to make good on overturning "don't ask, don't tell."

Q What do you say to progressives who on reading your comments yesterday say, well, if that's their attitude, I'm staying home in November?

MR. GIBBS: I don't think they will, because I think what's at stake in November is too important to do that. I think what's at stake in November, as you've heard the President outline throughout trips -- on trips throughout this country, are exactly the choices that we face in November. Are we going to go back to the economic policies that got us into this mess, or are we going to go forward and see the type of progress that we've seen over the past 18 months.

I don't think it's any -- you look at the -- today the President had a meeting, probably, what, two, two and a half weeks before ending our combat mission in Iraq. That was a significant part of -- we don't talk about it as much, but I think we all remember we spent almost all of 2007 and a hefty part of 2008 debating our role in Iraq almost exclusively.

Dan.

Q Have you reached out to anyone in the Democratic Party to explain your comments?

MR. GIBBS: No.

Q On the government formation aspect of the briefing that the President got today, you talked about how everyone expected that it would take some time, but did the President express any frustration at the pace?

MR. GIBBS: Well, again, the last government took nearly six months to form. The President is encouraged that we see signs of progress. And I think as long as we're moving toward that eventual setup and making progress in doing that, we'll feel good about the direction we're heading. Obviously we want that to happen as soon as possible. As August 31st comes, there's a significant transition on our part that the Iraqis will now be more responsible.

Q The \$20 billion BP fund, I know that -- I believe \$3 billion has already been put into that. Is there a timeline or some sort of payment plan to fully fund that?

MR. GIBBS: Well, the escrow documents -- the escrow agreement calls for -- called for \$5 billion before the end of this year, \$5 billion in each year in 2011, 2012 and 2013, for a total of \$20 billion. So that's the timeline that was agreed to during the meetings in the Roosevelt Room.

I understand that Ken Feinberg has said that next week he will release documentation around the protocols for individual compensation claims to the trust fund. And I know there have been requests for, and we will make public the documentation -- the escrow trust documents. There was some question about that. We talked to counsel and DOJ today, and I anticipate putting that out in the next hour or so.

Yes, sir.

Q On Iraq, were there any doubts expressed today about the 2011 deadline? Was there a discussion about the do-ability of that?

MR. GIBBS: Not that I'm aware of. I was not in the whole meeting. I can check and see whether there was any discussion of the SOFA agreement or not.\*

Q There was a long piece in The New York Times today about how -- with some people expressing the opinion that it's just impossible. There are going to be troops on the ground after 2011 -- border security, weapons training, a lot of different missions that simply can't be done by then.

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, again, it would be premature to get into a discussion about -- obviously, as we speak, there is a SOFA agreement. I don't want to get ahead of anything and ahead of government formation. I think there is without a doubt a change in our mission in Iraq, who is in the lead in Iraq, the progress that has been made from a security aspect. And what we hope and what was always envisioned is that the security gains would lead to political gains, and that's what we're hoping to see in the formation of a new government.

Q Are we going to see something happen on August -- is there going to be something different on August -- on September 1st, compared to August 31st, or is this just kind of an arbitrary date as we move into --

MR. GIBBS: No, no, no, I think we should be clear, it's not an arbitrary date because there will be 80,000 fewer troops from when the President took office in that country, on that day. Obviously there will be a transition ceremony. There will be a new mission, we'll have a new commanding general, and the Iraqis will fully be in the lead.

We've transitioned -- we've moved out -- I forget the exact number -- on the order of 2 million of equipment have been moved out of Iraq; as I said, 80,000 troops; bases have been turned over, and there will be a new mission.

Q On the "professional left," there are some people out there who believe you're smarter than you're admitting, and that this actually was a calculated -- (laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: One of those is my mom. (Laughter.)

Q This actually was a calculated, premeditated effort to send a message to the so-called "professional left." Did you misstep? Did you put your foot in your mouth, or did you say something that you meant? (Laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: I think I have both my feet planted firmly on the floor, and nothing in my mouth to speak of.

Q Your esteemed substitute yesterday that you answered -- said that you answered honestly. Was this an honest, correct answer that you have to those questions when you --

MR. GIBBS: I would not contradict my able substitute.

Q So this was an honest answer? You're not backing away from it?

MR. GIBBS: I don't think that -- I think many of you all have heard frustration voiced in here and around, sure. I don't -- I doubt I said anything that you haven't already heard.

Q This wasn't a mistake? It was not something you said in error?

MR. GIBBS: It was borne out of frustration, but I don't think it was -- again, I think it was borne out of frustration.

Q But you stand by it? It's private frustration that you expressed publicly and accurately?

MR. GIBBS: Well, public frustration that was written down publicly.

Q Do you want to name any names?

MR. GIBBS: I left my membership list back in the office.

Q Of the professional left?

Q Well, who wants to eliminate the Pentagon?

MR. GIBBS: I think that was -- wasn't that a proposal during the presidential campaign? Didn't Dennis Kucinich -- or maybe it was adding the Department of Peace.

Q The Department of Peace --

Q There's a big difference between adding a Department of Peace and eliminating the Pentagon.

Some people today are trying to step back from this, some of the liberal bloggers and such, and say, okay, the White House does deserve some credit for things, but part of the problem is that when they don't go as far as we'd like them to go, they don't reach out to us; they don't pat us on the back and say, hey, we tried, there's no communication. Do you think there is a lack of communication with what you call the professional left's --

MR. GIBBS: I have not seen --

Q -- lack of outreach from this White House?

MR. GIBBS: I have not seen that criticism today. I think obviously there are a number of people in the White House in public engagement and political affairs and other places that spend a lot of time communicating. I don't doubt -- I doubt that there's a time in which everybody feels completely satisfied at the level of communication and we would always strive to do better.

I would say this. I think it's important -- let's put some of what the Democratic Party is doing into some real context. I think yesterday's vote in Colorado was a pretty good example of the type of coalition that the President put together in 2008 and that the President helped -- through his endorsements and appearances -- helped a candidate in Michael Bennet, that he believes is the best voice to represent Colorado in the Senate -- somebody with a long track record on education reform, a long track record -- or a track record in the Senate of pushing for needed congressional and ethics reforms.

And 60 percent of -- these are figures as of midday yesterday -- 60 percent of the electorate in the Democratic

primary had either not voted in or voted in only one past Democratic primary. That's an important obviously part of the coalition that the President put together in 2008 to get new voters that wanted to see change to the polls.

Q You told Dan that you haven't reached out to anybody on the -- in the so-called "professional left," so you don't believe you owe anybody an apology?

MR. GIBBS: I have not talked to anybody outside of the building other than normal friends that I talk to each and every day.

Q Have you talked to the President about it?

MR. GIBBS: We haven't talked about this, no.

Yes, sir.

Q Do you have any comments about Keith Olbermann's "special comment" last night?

MR. GIBBS: I got to tell you I was watching my BlackBerry for primary returns and watching the Braves game on the Internet.

Q Speaking of your '08 coalition, Dennis Kucinich says you've forgotten the role that progressives played in that and his own personal role, he says, in passing health care reform. Are you not giving liberals, the left side of the party, enough credit?

MR. GIBBS: How so?

Q For being a significant part of the coalition.

MR. GIBBS: I don't think I'm -- I don't remember having any comment on that at all.

Q The measure the House passed yesterday to help teachers retain their jobs calls for an eventual cut in food stamps. What's likely to be the impact of that? And that's brought on some criticism from progressives as well.

MR. GIBBS: I think it's important to understand that is not -- that is -- the Recovery Act changed food stamps through 2018. The redirection of that money only accounts for years 2014 through 2017. So the measures that were passed as a part of the Recovery Act for the foreseeable future are left intact for those that need help.

Q So it's thinking that the help won't be needed by --

MR. GIBBS: I think also that help -- rather than money programmed for 2017, given the fact that here we sit in early August with 160,000-plus teachers facing a layoff, that redirecting that money made more sense.

Q You just talked a minute ago about how the early part of the campaign was a lot about the war in Iraq, and the President was pretty critical of the surge. Does the President now think the surge worked and was a good idea?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I would give you the answer that I think the President gave standing both in and near Iraq in 2008, that the surge was intended to do two things -- it was intended to augment the security environment so that we could change the political environment. There's no doubt that the bravery and heroism of our troops and those additions added to impacting that security environment. What we wanted to see more of is a change in the political environment. And we are making progress toward establishing -- we've had another election -- establishing a new government and enabling us to change our mission in Iraq.

Q So was that improved security environment provided --

MR. GIBBS: As the President said it would when it happened, yes, the adding X number -- X thousand number of troops is likely to improve the security environment. But again, the security environment alone wasn't going to change our mission in Iraq. We can't -- we have a stability in a political system now and making progress toward a new government that does allow us to meet the President's commitment of transitioning our combat role. That was tremendously important.

Q So I guess just bottom line, do you think he does think it worked in the sense that perhaps under his own tenure, because the security environment was improved, he was able to bring about these changes?

MR. GIBBS: Again, the security improved as we all believed that it would. It has taken longer to see the correlating political gains, but we're far enough along now in some of those political gains that we can transition that role. I think the role that Vice President Biden and others have played in changing that political environment has been tremendously important to the overall cause.

And I will say this. Lest we not forget that it was Iraqi leaders in 2008 that said -- they also not just in the SOFA, but there was discussion obviously by Prime Minister Maliki about a timetable for transition that was enormously similar to that proposed by then-candidate Obama.

Q It just seems like you guys are pointing to Iraq and this drawdown and this date as a success, and I wondered if you give any credit to former President Bush and the surge as contributing to what you guys regard as a success.

MR. GIBBS: Again, I think that there's no doubt that, as Democrats and Republicans said, we would have security gains -- that as we talked about throughout the campaign and I think were criticized for, a military role alone was not going to change our mission in Iraq, because if you have security gains but not the responsibility of a functioning government to take the responsibility of both providing the security and executing its civilian duties, it would be hard to transition.

Laura.

Q Is the White House concerned at all that you will not get proper credit, if you will, for what's happening in Iraq, given the situation in Afghanistan?

MR. GIBBS: No, I think -- I will say -- look, we'll leave -- I'm sure many people will either decide to or decide not to give different entities credit. I think, again, I look back at a lot of time that I spent in 2007 and 2008 in a fairly vociferous debate about our role there. I think it is safe to say that even as the President pledged during that campaign, at the beginning of this administration, and even on the day that he traveled to North Carolina to give that speech, there were a lot of people that said it was not -- the date that we'd outlined, the end of August of 2010, was simply not doable. It not only is doable, we're on track to do it. In 20 or so days, that mission transitions.

I think if you look at the sheer number of troops that are deployed between right now and when the President took office, even with the additional troops in Afghanistan, I think by a little more than 30,000 -- by a number of a little more than 30,000, there are fewer troops deployed overseas.

Q Do you think the American people understand and appreciate that accomplishment, what you just described?

MR. GIBBS: I do think that, because we do know so many years later the amount of sacrifice that was made on behalf of our men and women in the military, some paying the ultimate price. I harken back to -- remember when I forget who the advisor was who said it might cost \$150 billion in Iraq. I'm pretty sure we're multitudes beyond \$150 billion. We have a -- we're ending a commitment that -- we're ending a combat commitment there and transitioning our role in a way that will help our military and will help our treasure.

Mark.

Q Robert, is there a contingency that if conditions in Iraq turn sour that the U.S. role, military role, could resume a combat role there after August 31st?

MR. GIBBS: I will say, Mark, that I think it is always safe to say that the military has plans drawn up for a 1,001 different scenarios. Again, the report that the President got, though, was clear in the progress that was being made. The level of violence at a rate over the course of the past two weeks, as General Odierno said, which was among the lowest that had been recorded since they had kept records on this may all of -- has made the transition possible.

Q On August 31st, do we end up with 50,000 U.S. troops? Is that what the number is?

MR. GIBBS: I think that's the approximate number, yes. I think that's the approximate number.

Q On another issue, have you heard the President offer a view on the exceedingly bad press the First Lady got about her trip to Spain?

MR. GIBBS: I have not.

Roger.

Q Robert, I'd like to go back to the economy again. The markets are down between 2 and 3 percent worldwide today -- I'm sure you know that -- largely brought on by the Fed's action yesterday. We're out with a survey of 67 economists saying the GDP for the U.S. for the last -- for the six months of this year, the last half of this year, it's going to be only 2.55 percent, which is really an economy sort of treading water. Is there any -- number one, do you have any comment on that? And second, has the President asked Mr. Summers or Ms. Romer to take a look at is there anything else we can do?

MR. GIBBS: Well, Roger, I want to not get into commenting on Fed actions, obviously. The President met with and talked through some scenarios today with Dr. Summers on what we were seeing worldwide -- in the Oval Office. And I think he will continue to talk to the team about any efforts that they think are necessary to ensure that we continue positive job growth, that we see positive economic growth.

Again, it wasn't long ago where the debate was the depth of that job loss, the depth of that economic retraction. I know that a great number of meetings and discussions were held on the legislation that the House passed and the President signed late yesterday. If you think about both the short-term economic impacts of 160,000 teachers losing their job, the long-term impacts of 160,000 classrooms without a teacher, the impact that that has on educating a workforce that we need for the jobs of tomorrow, it's why the President wanted and why he appreciates the actions of the House and the Senate so much in making it happen.

Obviously, I mentioned earlier, the President wants to see progress on a small business bill, on cutting taxes and on increasing credit. And certainly they'll continue to talk about whatever steps those in the White House or others deem might be necessary.

Q But if these economists are right and the economy only grows 2.6 percent in the last half of this year, that's not good as it compares with the 3.1 percent in the Mid-Session Review that was just out last month.

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, as I said earlier, I don't think there's any doubt that the trajectory of where we were in April is somewhat different than we are today. Our goal is to continue that positive action.

I will say this -- I've said this a bunch -- I don't have my favorite graph, but nobody here believed that the depths of what we were entering into was going to be easy to get out of, because you didn't have just one problem, you didn't just have a collapse in the financial industry, you didn't just have -- which led to tightening of credit. You didn't just have a huge housing crisis. You didn't just have 8 million jobs lost. You had all that at one time. It's going to take quite a bit of time to move out of that.

Again, we are at a point where instead of discussing where we are on the downward trend of that hole, where we are on an upswing -- not satisfied, the President and the team not satisfied with all of what they see. Obviously different sectors are going to do better than others and we have to keep working at whatever is necessary to continue to get the economy growing again.

Q Just a quick follow -- who did he meet with this morning? And can you give us a sense of what they --

MR. GIBBS: I don't -- we were going into a meeting, Dr. Summers was coming out of the Oval. But best I can tell -- I don't know who else was in that meeting with the President and Dr. Summers.

Q What's going on with the President's export initiatives that exports actually fell in June?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I will say obviously there are monthly numbers that will bounce around -- increases in imports, decreases in exports. We still have the same goals. I think today's event on manufacturing furthers those goals. And I do point out that the year-to-year change in exports is up 18 percent. So while there will be some monthly bouncing around, our commitment and our goal of doubling exports remains a huge priority, because, as you've heard the President say, world economic growth can't hinge entirely on United States demand.

We have good products that we want to sell overseas. The President -- just last week at an auto plant outside of Chicago that makes the Explorer that will be exported to 90 countries. Those are -- that's tremendously important.

Scott.

Q In setting these deadlines, there was some concern that al Qaeda in Iraq or other insurgent groups would just wait out. I know SOFA sets out deadlines, but this August 31, 2010, deadline was the President's. Was there any conversation this morning about whether or not that's taking place? Any sense of that's the reason why this is --

MR. GIBBS: Let me get somebody to get a longer answer on that. There was some discussion and has been over the past few days of just the, quite honestly, the severe degradation of al Qaeda in Iraq. I've been in meetings where that's been discussed in terms of General Odierno's viewpoint. And obviously we are -- we see a different security environment on the ground than we saw just a few years ago, particularly as it relates to al Qaeda insurgents there.\*\*

Q One other. That roughly 50,000 there will be there at the end of this month -- is there a drawdown schedule, or is there conversations around one for the next --

MR. GIBBS: Let me check. I don't know the answer to that but I can check on the phasing of that.\*\*\*

Sheryl.

Q Robert, a couple things. On the Panama City trip coming up, can you talk to us about what the President and his family plan to do over the weekend? And why only one night? Some questions came up yesterday about the short duration of their stay.

MR. GIBBS: Well, Sheryl, let me -- we'll have more information on their schedule. Some of it will be -- some of the events that he will do will be treated as OTRs. Secretary Mabus will be going to the region with the President, and I think when they arrive the President will meet with business and tourism leaders to discuss the impacts that they've seen on their business because of the oil spill.

The President will meet with those folks and have a chance to update, I think, the region on where we are both from a relief well standpoint -- obviously the weather has -- the weather will likely delay the relief well completion by two to three days, but we anticipate that the work will continue again over the weekend. And I think it will be important for the President to talk about what are the next steps in bringing the region back.

The primary point of the President's trip is to highlight that -- obviously many of you know this because you traveled there during the summer, I grew up not too far from there -- tourism is the economic issue -- those hotels along the beaches, the businesses that they support. And because of the spill -- even in places where oil didn't necessarily wash ashore have, because of the environment around the spill, seen a huge contraction in their own business.

It was something that the governor of Florida specifically talked to the President, and to the First Lady about when she was down. And they both believed that it was important to highlight that, indeed, the Gulf Coast is, during a busy summer, open for business and the families that are there are enjoying their time there. Even as the President

talks about what our next steps are in our response, obviously part of this will be highlighting the tremendous economic toll that has taken place -- as I said, even on places that didn't necessarily see a large amount of oil wash up, are still very much open for business.

Q It doesn't sound like much of a vacation for him if he's going to be meeting with business leaders and --

MR. GIBBS: Sheryl, I think --

Q Is he going to be -- is his family going to be doing social --

MR. GIBBS: I think if you've been in the pool in either Martha's Vineyard or Hawaii, I think you could attest to the fact that the notion of a presidential vacation is one Sit Room call away from becoming a -- I just heard a lot of groans -- they watched their Hawaii trips disappear.

Q Will we see his family doing sort of more recreational activities --

MR. GIBBS: You'll see he and the family out there. You'll see all of them out there.

Q And can we also talk a little bit about Colorado? Can you tell us, did the President watch the returns last night? Does he draw any broader message from Michael Bennet's victory and his own involvement --

MR. GIBBS: Well, I would say this. The President called Senator Bennet not long after the race was called. The President obviously had traveled out there to help Senator Bennet gain support, raise money. The President was proud to lend his name -- I think appeared over the course of the last week, in "Get Out The Vote" mailings, television ads. The President participated in Senator Bennet's tele-town hall. I gave you those figures earlier about what comprised voter turnout in the Democratic primary, in seeing first-time and nearly first-time voters come back out again to participate in an important primary.

Look, I think it's hard to take away from the results of last night -- whether it's in Colorado, in Connecticut, or in Georgia, in some cases gubernatorial races, in some cases gubernatorial and Senate races -- to think that the Democratic Party as a whole didn't have a very good night. I think if you look at -- Senator Bennet will now go up against somebody who believes that Social Security is bad policy and that we should do away with our involvement in a student loan program that allows thousands to send their kids to college without having to pay exorbitant interest rates. I think that is a debate that will turn out quite well for us in November.

Q He also was non-committal about -- when asked if he would want the President to campaign for him through the general election. He was non-committal about that. Any reaction to that?

MR. GIBBS: Look, I think our involvement in that race, whether on the television out there, or in the mailboxes out there, or in the news out there, is fairly well documented. We were -- again, I think Senator Bennet has -- he's a first-time political candidate. His substantive professional experience was superintendent of a Denver school system that saw an enormous amount of reforms that he can be proud of. And I think he'll be an enormously strong candidate in the fall.

Q Are you saying that Democrats should feel better about the prospects in 2010 and what the impact of the economy will be two, three months from now?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, obviously our hope is to try to get the economy turned around not just in two or three months, but tomorrow. I think the outcome of last night's elections in the states that those primaries were had, were nothing but good news for the Democratic Party. I'm hard pressed to think of a race where -- last night -- where we didn't end up in good position either with who won or in good position with who the eventual Democratic nominee will face in a general election.

Q And could I ask you real quickly, if tomorrow the Senate does come back and pass that immigration -- the \$600 million for the border security, is that it for the year for immigration? Is there anything else President Obama thinks can be done?

MR. GIBBS: Look, I think you've heard the President on any number of occasions discuss the importance of dealing comprehensively with immigration reform. That was the bedrock of the suit that the Justice Department filed in Arizona. It's going to take 60 votes to get something through the Senate. It takes 60 votes to get the nominee at an agency you've previously never heard of through the Senate.

Q So it's a yes, nothing else this year?

MR. GIBBS: No, I think that's up to -- that is up to Republicans about whether -- Republicans are going to have to ask themselves do they want to roll up their sleeves and be leaders on a very tough issue, or do they want to play politics?

It is fascinating to watch the strict constructionists and those that have great fidelity to our Constitution want to tamper with the very amendment that provides -- that has provided for 150 years equal protection under the law and a due process. That's not how we're going to solve the very hard issue of immigration reform. That's not how we should solve immigration reform. Only by comprehensively addressing border security, the workplace, those that are here -- only by doing that comprehensively are we going to make progress.

Q Some of the people on the Gulf are asking will the President go in the water. (Laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: I will let that dangle until sometime over the weekend. We all know that it's hot enough that the one place you want to be most quickly is -- having spent some time in Panama City -- is in the water.

Q I have a question on Iran. The seven Baha'i leaders who have been imprisoned for the last two years have just been sentenced to 20 years imprisonment. What is the President's reaction to this?

MR. GIBBS: I don't have anything on that, but let me get something from NSC on that.

Q Thank you.

MR. GIBBS: Yes, sir.

Q Thank you. Did the President encourage the First Lady to go out on the campaign trail during this midterm season? And what message might the First Lady offer in her travels?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, I don't want to get ahead of announcements on that. I think that -- I think you've heard others and I know David Axelrod said it, and I anticipate that at some point she will likely make some appearances. She is -- she's a mom and has to focus on the importance of raising two children, and we'll get into that closer to the political season.

Yes, ma'am.

Q The President has launched a pretty good push on education, talking up his education reforms. I'm wondering why now and if this has anything to do with the midterms?

MR. GIBBS: Look, I think the President has spent a lot of time talking about education. It has not -- sometimes when there's not a lot of back-and-forth, sometimes when there's not a lot of resistance and debate, an issue like that doesn't get as much attention.

I think the investments that the Recovery Act made in things like Race to the Top, I think reforms that have been instituted to take banks out of the role that they traditionally had played in student loans, are all extremely important achievements for this administration. I think the President will likely continue to talk about them, particularly as families get closer to sending their children back to school for the year.

April.

Q Robert, on the economy and something else. The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities says 44 states are addressing 2011 budget shortfalls. What's next after this jobs bill?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I think, again, the next thing that we'd like to see the Senate complete -- the House has voted on this and the bill lies with the Senate, and that is a small business bill, a bill that, as I've said, cuts capital gains taxes for small businesses, allows them to deduct a greater amount of their investments, and opens up the lines of credit through community banks that they need to expand. I think that is -- I think you've heard the President talk about that, and that's the thing that the President will talk about as the Senate comes back.

Q Included in the Recovery Act was an increase in funding for food stamps, for the food stamp recipients. And food stamps were pretty much cut to fund the teacher jobs and --

MR. GIBBS: Well, I will say this again. I don't -- I forget who exactly asked the question -- the Recovery Act extended that through 2018. The reprogramming took place for the latter four years because the belief was that instead of programming money for 2017 when you have 160,000 teachers that are about to be given pink slips, that at the time-being, that was the more urgent need.

Q So is there going to be any kind of recalibration? Is the administration going to go back -- because there are advocacy groups for many of those who are on food stamps saying this is just not fair, there is a need, and it was put in place originally because there was a need.

MR. GIBBS: But, again, I think -- we understand that. That's why it was in the original bill. I think redirecting money from 2017 to 2010 we believe addressed the most urgent need that states and localities faced at that time.

Q And what did you say to the President about your faux pas or your misspeak --

MR. GIBBS: As I said, I haven't talked to the President about it.

Q Has he made note to you by email that he knows about it or anything?

MR. GIBBS: We haven't emailed about it either.

Q On another economic issue, the tax cut extensions for the top 2 percent, the Democrats' desire not to extend those. It's been the White House's position that you'd like to see Congress -- I guess both chambers do these votes before the November election. And I just wanted to get an update on that. Do you still feel that that's the right way

to go? Do you have any concern that it could backfire either if the Democrats lose the votes within their own caucus to split the difference that way or --

MR. GIBBS: Let me say, I don't -- go ahead, finish your question. I don't think -- I have to say, I don't think the President's position on allowing the tax cuts for those that make more than \$250,000 is splitting the difference. The President has supported middle-class tax cuts. The bedrock of the Recovery Act was a tax cut for 95 percent of working Americans. What the President has not and never supported is tax cuts for wealthy, upper-end income earners.

Q I don't mean split the difference on what you want. That's not what I'm trying to get at. I mean, I'm asking you a tactical question. Do you still think that pushing this before November is the right way for Democrats to go? Do you have any concern it will backfire? And do you have any update on the timing of how --

MR. GIBBS: I don't have any update on the timing. I think that's probably a question better directed to the Hill. I will say, Margaret, that this is obviously going to be a part of the debate over the course of the next 80 days. So I don't -- whether there's a vote or not, this is going to be hotly debated. I don't -- you had a series of tax cuts that were designed to take on varying levels, depending on what taxes were cut, and then December 31, 2010, they drop off a cliff. I think it's safe to say that's not how the President would have designed the tax cut. And there will be a debate that I think will be a big part of the 2010 election, particularly as it relates to -- I mean, look, that was the centerpiece of the economic policies of the previous eight years.

Q But the White House wants not just a debate but a vote before the election?

MR. GIBBS: I can double-check particularly with Legislative Affairs and see if there's -- I don't know of any clarity on that. Again, I think I would point you to the House and the Senate in terms of the scheduling.

Q -- question about Chip's earlier question, not on the "professional left" but on Iraq. Did I understand you to say that with regard to pulling out the remaining 50,000 troops that will be there under a sort of different purpose after August 31st, that that is an issue that exists as long as the SOFA says so, but it's theoretically possible that that could change?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I just didn't want to get into the hypothetical of what's next. Obviously the agreement that has been signed by the two governments is a status of forces agreement that ends all American personnel by the end of 2011.

Q Was this discussed today during today's meeting with the President -- you know, if things take a really bad turn after August 31st, what the mechanism is for sort of a U.N.-turn or a slowdown or anything like that?

MR. GIBBS: Well, as I said to Mark, look, there are -- suffice to say the Pentagon has plans for a lot. That's their job. They're military planners. Again, the President did not hear from those on the ground -- both on the diplomatic side and on the security and military side -- did not hear anything that would lead him to believe that any of those plans would ultimately be necessary.

Q But there are contingency plans that always get discussed that you can't talk about?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I don't know the degree to which those were talked about today. My guess is not a lot, simply because the update on the situation doesn't necessarily -- again, the situation is such that we see no impediment to what's happening on the 31st and going forward, starting September the 1st. Like I said, there are on any number of occasions in any number of places in the world very, very detailed contingency plans for a lot of different things.

Yes, ma'am.

Q Thank you, Robert. Going forward, what is the U.S. involvement politically in Iraq? Because I think a lot of people, especially in the Middle East, were kind of holding on a lot of hope for the President's announcement last week as far as what the U.S. will do for the political situation, which has reached a pretty significant stalemate now between Allawi and Maliki. So how much of that was discussed in the meeting today?

MR. GIBBS: The Vice President remains actively involved in the continuing talks about forming a new government. We had staff in the region not too long ago that -- meeting directly with the parties to try to continue to get progress along the road to setting up a new government. We will remain active in them. The military role transitions to one led by civilians, and the formation of a new government in Iraq remains a significant priority for our government.

Q And this was discussed in the meeting today?

MR. GIBBS: Yes, Vice President Biden specifically provided the President with an update. And as I said earlier, I think you can see developments in the region that are positive, meetings that are happening between the parties that are ultimately necessary for what's going to need to happen to form a government.

Q But there are no deadlines or anything set up?

MR. GIBBS: No deadline timelines.

Q And no discussion of such?

MR. GIBBS: No.

Michael.

Q The President in the past has been a very vocal supporter of net neutrality. There's a proposal by Google and Verizon that would allow for prioritization of Internet content over wireless networks and also for building sort of premium Internet services on top of the public Internet. Does the President and the White House have a view on that?

MR. GIBBS: Let me get some information on that for you.

Sam.

Q Back on Iraq, I wonder if you can -- throughout the debates on the Iraq war, Republicans, with some notable exceptions, have asked for -- have called for victory in Iraq. Is that we'll have after August 31st? Will it be -- did we win?

MR. GIBBS: We are transitioning from -- to a new mission. I think that by any account there is still progress to be made in Iraq. I think that the President will celebrate the role and, as I talked about earlier, the effort and the heroism that our men and women in uniform -- the role that they played and the role that they contributed in bringing about stability to that country.

But I will say this, Sam. I don't think -- again, there's a formation of government that has to take place. The next government will have challenges as it relates to services that any government of a country provides. And there's still progress that has to be made. I think we can -- we, though, can celebrate the transitioning of responsibility to the Iraqis.

Q Going back -- sorry -- going back to your comments on Ken Buck's win, I want to expand it out a little bit. In the Georgia Republican gubernatorial primary, the winner in that race, Representative Deal, has actually dabbled in birther conspiracies. I don't know if he is an avowed birther, but he certainly has pushed the notion that the President wasn't born in this country. And I'm wondering if you -- upon reflection, what do you think of the fact that the Republican Party has put forth someone to run a state who doesn't believe in the President's birthplace?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I think if you look at what Nathan Deal is probably going to have to explain over the course of this primary, that might be some of the least of his concerns -- in terms of some ethics investigations that are currently ongoing.

I think having -- the last I checked, the results in that race were within a few thousand votes, which means even as you're hoping to find a nominee, you have a very divided party, with somebody in Roy Barnes who has a track record that Georgians can be proud of.

Q Handel conceded.

MR. GIBBS: But you still have a very splintered party. Again, I think you are hard-pressed to see, whether it is gubernatorial races in Georgia, Connecticut, Denver -- I'm sorry, Colorado -- and Senate races in Connecticut and Colorado, where Democrats didn't have an extraordinarily good night and are faced with I think, quite frankly, candidates that are largely out of step with the states and areas that they wish to ultimately represent.

Q Thanks, Robert. Following up on Sam's question, in your view and the President's view, is Iraq a success story? Can you view what the U.S. has done in Iraq -- now having a reliable ally in the region -- as being a success in terms of U.S. foreign policy?

MR. GIBBS: I would say this. I think there are -- as I enumerated in Sam's question, I think there's progress that the Iraqis leading and being responsible for their own country now are going to have to make. Again, I think that what has never been in doubt is -- and the President said this in announcing his opposition to the war in 2002 -- we all support our troops. We all recognize the tremendous sacrifice that they and their families and all of their loved ones make when a Commander-in-Chief, regardless of who that is, makes the decision to deploy them. That's a role that the President toward the end of the month will celebrate -- again, even as Iraqis turn to governing their country, providing exclusively for its security, warding off potential insurgents, and ultimately making progress in their own quality of life.

Thank you.

END

2:41 P.M. EDT

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