

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 12/9/2015

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MR. EARNEST: Good afternoon, everybody. Happy Hump Day.

Q What? (Laughter.)

MR. EARNEST: Before we get started, let me just do a little thing at the top. I think many of you may have had an opportunity to watch the testimony of Secretary Carter who was testifying before the Senate Arms Service Committee today. And he had an important message to deliver. He spent a significant period of time laying out the efforts that have been underway for more than a year to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL. He also had an opportunity to talk through the efforts that had been intensified in recent weeks to capitalize on progress that's already been made against ISIL and Iraq and Syria.

So he talked about a range of things. He talked about the recent and new commitment from our allies in Germany, France and the UK to our coalition military mission. He talked about the important progress that Iraqi security forces are making and how they benefitted from the backing of the United States and our coalition partners, particularly in the ongoing effort to retake Ramadi. He laid out the President's decision to create an expeditionary task force that would be based in Iraq but equipped to carry out missions that have previously killed -- equipped to carry out the kinds of missions that have previously killed ISIL leaders and uncovered treasure troves of intelligence.

The President also talked about -- I'm sorry, Secretary Carter also talked about the decision of the President to deploy U.S. special operators to Syria. These special operators can serve as force-multipliers to support the ongoing efforts of the Syrian-Arab coalition fighters on the ground that have already driven ISIL out of nearly 900 square-kilometers in northeastern Syria.

So I think all of that is a good reminder, and this is a good occasion for us to once again consider the commitment and heroism of our men and women in uniform. And here in this holiday season, it's an appropriate time for us to pause to consider the sacrifice that

they're making for our country and for our national security, and offer them our gratitude.

We'll say that stands in quite stark contrast to the conduct of Congress. Secretary Carter also noted in his testimony that Congress, despite repeated requests, is blocking more than \$116 million in funding for precisely the equipping operation that the Department of Defense is trying to carry out in northeastern Syria. This is equipment and materials that have previously been used by local opposition fighters inside of Syria, as I pointed out, to drive ISIL out of nearly 900 square-kilometers of space in northeastern Syria. And the Department of Defense has been asking for weeks now for additional funds to resupply that effort and try to continue the progress.

But Congress, inexplicably, has not acted. In fact, they have actually tried to block this funding from going through. And at a time when our men and women in uniform are bearing so much of a burden to protect this country, it's time for Congress to do something to actually help them. And hopefully they will do that before they leave for their own holiday break, a holiday break that our men and women in uniform -- at least those who are deployed to Iraq and in Syria -- will not have the opportunity to enjoy.

So with that sober reminder, Kathleen, you want to start us off with questions?

Q Sure. I wanted to start, actually, with other testimonies in the House this morning. Director Comey's testimony that the shooters in the San Bernardino massacre were radicalized for at least two years, and one of them likely before she arrived in the U.S. And I'm just wondering, now that we have those details, if you think this was an intelligence failure of some sort. And if you have any more specifics on what kind of changes to the K-1 visa program you're considering given that she appears to have slipped through on a visa, and whatever safeguards there didn't catch her political views.

MR. EARNEST: Well, I do think it's still too early to make any grand pronouncements about what could have been done differently to prevent this terrorist attack from occurring. But this investigation is ongoing, and there is more relevant information to be learned. There continues to be a significant effort underway to learn that information -- to learn about the backgrounds of these individuals; to learn about what their motivation may have been; to determine what links, if any, they may have had to extremists overseas.

There continues to be work to determine what were the circumstances of the individual who is not an American citizen entering the country. And the President has tasked both the Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security, two agencies that are involved in administering the K-1 visa program, to take a close look at the screening measures that are in place, and determine what sort of reforms need to be instituted to enhance our national security.

Q So are you saying it is still possible that there were direct links to networks overseas, that --

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, the FBI is leading the investigation, and I think what they have said thus far is that they have not determined that either of these individuals were part of a network or cell inside the United States, and were not part of a, at least thus far, were not determined to have been directed specifically by any sort of overseas extremist terrorist organization. But all that continues to be under investigation, and there obviously is a lot that's been learned just in the seven days since this terrorist attack took place. And they're continuing to learn everything that they possibly can to determine what led to this incident and what steps could have been imposed to try to prevent it.

Q Okay. And I wanted to ask you about the -- there's a draft of the climate change deal that (inaudible) Paris negotiations. They're still working and have two more days to the deadline, and there's still some very big issues not decided, particularly about how developing countries -- whether or not they're going to contribute to help (inaudible) to pay for some of these changes. Even some of the long-term goal is not quite fleshed out. And I'm just wondering what the White House's reaction to the draft is, and if you're at all worried that they're not going to be able to meet the deadline.

MR. EARNEST: Well, I haven't gotten a detailed briefing on the latest draft. The word that I have received back from Paris is that there is still a lot of work to be done. But the momentum is moving in the right direction. And you did see Secretary Kerry announce earlier today, Paris time, a significant increase in the commitment that the United States was prepared to make in investments that would assist communities that are struggling to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

There's no denying the leadership role that the United States continues to play in these negotiations, and those kinds of enhanced commitments will be instrumental in building momentum to a positive outcome. But there is still a lot of work that remains to be done. And I've said this before, and I think it's probably true -- there probably are at least a couple more sleepless nights facing our negotiators before there's any good news to report.

Q So do you think they're going to make the deadline?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I'm not going to make any predictions. But again, the last briefing that I got from my colleagues in Paris is that the momentum is moving in the right direction. But important and significant work remains done -- remains to be done.

Q Okay, and then just one last quick one. The President's remarks on the Hill, there were some comments that seemed you could interpret them as pointed at Donald Trump, in particular about respecting faiths of all backgrounds with different last names. I'm just wondering if the President's comments were particularly aimed at Donald Trump and, if so, why he didn't -- if he feels so strongly about it, why didn't he just name him?

MR. EARNEST: The President went and gave remarks to mark the 150th anniversary of the implementation of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution that outlaws slavery. And the remarks that the President delivered sounded quite familiar to those of you who have been covering the President for a number of years -- that this commitment that we have as

a nation to equal opportunity and refusing to discriminate against people just because of what their last name is, or what they look like, or who they love, or what religion they observe has been a consistent part of the President's message to the country. And that was true when he was a candidate for this office. It's been true while he's served in this office. It was true while he was a candidate for reelection. And I'm confident that this will be an important part of the message that he will continue to amplify over his remaining year in office.

I'm not going to wave you off consideration of the idea that that message stands in quite stark contrast to the rhetoric that we hear from a variety of Republican candidates for President. So I think it's appropriate for you to notice the difference in those messages, but I would contest the notion that this is something that the President newly inserted into his remarks to respond to one individual. This is something that the President has been advocating for quite some time.

Q So when he sort of emphasized birthright citizenship, that wasn't directly related to Donald Trump's proposal to cover the --

MR. EARNEST: Again, I think this is quite consistent with the message the President has been delivering for a number of years. It's a message that has resonated with a significant majority of the American population and, yes, it stands in quite stark contrast to the language, message, and values that's being promulgated not just by Mr. Trump, but by a variety of Republican candidates in the presidential field.

Roberta.

Q Does the White House think that online lenders should be subject to more regulation or scrutiny, given that the couple behind the California shooting took out a sizeable loan from an online lender just ahead of the attack?

MR. EARNEST: This is certainly some of the financial transactions -- the financial history of these two individuals is something that continues to be under investigation by the FBI. Again, they're considering every aspect of this terrible tragedy to learn as much as they can about the incident, about the individuals, about what may have motivated them, and certainly there may be financial transactions that are relevant to that ongoing investigation. I don't want to get ahead of what those investigators have learned, and I don't have any announcements about any financial policy or regulatory decisions that are made as a result of that investigation at this point.

Q So can you say whether this is an area, though, that the White House would consider looking at, separate from the investigation, as the White House looks at what could be done differently, what policies need to change to sort of prevent anything similar from happening in the future?

MR. EARNEST: Well, there's a significant wing of the Treasury Department right across the street that's dedicated to combatting illicit finance. And certainly these are kinds of questions that are considered every day by officials in the Treasury Department. This is a convenient way for me to remind you once again that the individual -- the financial expert

that the President has appointed to lead that division of the Treasury Department is somebody of impeccable credentials who has not -- credentials that have not been questioned by anybody in either party. He is somebody who has served Presidents of both parties, and yet, Republicans in Congress have been blocking his nomination for more than a year. And I've raised the concern about this Republican obstruction in the United States Senate for a while now in the context of the need for us to focus on shutting down ISIL's financing -- that certainly is one important part of the Illicit Finance Division at the Treasury Department's responsibilities.

But they also have a counterterrorism responsibility, and they are actively engaged in shutting down efforts to finance terrorism. Again, there's still a lot to be learned in the context of this investigation, so I'm not going to jump to any conclusions. But if there are Republicans in the United States Senate who are concerned about this, there's certainly one tangible thing they can do that certainly doesn't require anything extraordinary, it only requires them to do the job of confirming highly qualified nominees to important national security positions in the United States government.

Republicans in Congress have been delinquent about that. It's because of their, frankly, disconcerting willingness to put their own political and partisan priorities ahead of our national security, and it's got to stop.

Q Lastly, what's your sense today -- can you give us an update today of where things are at in terms of negotiations with the Hill on the CR omnibus? Are there any signs of optimism about --

MR. EARNEST: Well, these are negotiations that continue between Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill. The last I heard is there continues to be a willingness on the part of Republicans to try to use the budgetary process to advance their ideological agenda by putting ideological riders into the bill. These are essentially poison pills that Democrats find objectionable, and Republicans have shut down the government once before by inserting poison pills into the budget process. That was only two years ago. And they were counting on their ability to either pass a budget along strictly party lines or to get Democrats to go along with ideological poison pills even in the face of a government shutdown. And I think the American people were quite clear that that was something they didn't approve of, and it didn't prove to be a particularly effective strategy for Republicans in the past. And I'm hopeful, before we reach the deadline, that Republicans will abandon that strategy.

Let's move around.

April.

Q Josh, I want to go back to the 13th Amendment speech by the President. In his statement -- and you say it wasn't necessarily inserted for Donald Trump -- but you had some strong statements yesterday about Donald Trump; you called him by name. The President strategically did not call his name, he talked around Donald Trump. Why is he

not calling him out? I mean, you from that podium with the White House insignia behind you said it. You're the presidential spokesman -- why wouldn't the President say anything about Donald Trump, call his name?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think what the President spoke about today on Capitol Hill was a forceful and passionate defense of the kinds of values that our country has long defended. And while serving in this office and even before serving in this office, the President took up the mantle of defending for and advocating for those values. And at each turn over the course of our country's history, where we have perceived that our country has fallen short of our commitment to those values, we have, even in the face of significant obstacles, summoned the courage and the tenacity to overcome those obstacles and form a more perfect union. That's something that's worth celebrating, and that's what the President was talking about today.

Q In the last couple of months, I guess since Donald Trump has been here and even before then, there seems to be more of a visible uptick on issues of race. Is this White House willing to acknowledge that there is more on the table when it comes to issues of race now because of the rhetoric; that there is a tension, a racial tension that might be escalating in this country because of this rhetoric, be it black, white, be it Muslim or people from other countries versus white America? I mean, is there an acknowledgement that there is some kind of increase in a tension, racial tension in this country?

MR. EARNEST: I think the willingness of high-profile candidates for office in the Republican Party to use divisive, offensive rhetoric that appeals to people's fears and anxieties is counterproductive. It doesn't make the country stronger, and it certainly is a calculated political strategy to try to divide the country to advance their campaign. And it's cynical, it's repugnant, and it's something that the President and other people have spoken out against on a number of occasions. And I'm confident that the President will continue to do that.

Q So you are acknowledging that this White House is noticing an uptick in racial issues on the negative side?

MR. EARNEST: I'm acknowledging that there has been a calculated political strategy on the part of some high-profile Republican candidates for office to try to divide the country to advance their political ambition, and I'm saying that's a bad thing.

Mark.

Q Josh, back to the San Bernardino shootings and what Director Comey said. He said that they had been radicalized even before they were courting online, so very substantially in advance of the wife's admission over the K-1 visa program. I didn't hear you actually answer the first part of Kathleen's question. Is that not an intelligence failure that that wasn't caught?

MR. EARNEST: Well -- and what I said to Kathleen is that it's too early to determine, to make that determination.

Q Yes, but Director Comey didn't say it's too early to tell that. He said that that was the case.

MR. EARNEST: Then you can go ask him.

Q Whether it's an intelligence failure? So you're not able to say that?

MR. EARNEST: I'm not able to say that from here I guess. What I'm trying to say is that we're seven days into the investigation and what that investigation is hoping to discern is exactly what transpired, what led to this action, and whether or not there's anything that could have been done in advance to stop it.

Q Do you not understand that -- the fact -- assuming what Director Comey said is fact, that the fact that it was not caught is terribly worrisome to people who see that we have this program that admits people from overseas and didn't catch it in that case, that that is worrisome?

MR. EARNEST: Well, and I think that's precisely why the President, even before these details of the investigation become public, that the President ordered a review of the program to determine if there are some changes to the program that could be implemented that would enhance our national security. So this is certainly something that the President is focused on.

Michelle.

Q On the same subject -- do you feel like knowing that -- I mean, whether we call it an intelligence failure or not, this is a program that some people are going to be able to slip through. We know that pretty much on its face. If somebody doesn't have a record or if they don't have any sign of being radicalized, even if they are radicalized, they might still get through. So do you have a concern that this is just going to add fuel to that fire, the rhetoric that's been out there against admitting people at all, against admitting refugees? It doesn't seem like there's a real line that anyone can designate of what's going to work and what's going to protect the country and what's not.

MR. EARNEST: Well, Michelle, I think one area of encouragement, one source of encouragement for the administration was the legislative action that was taken by the House of Representatives just yesterday to implement some reforms to the visa waiver program. These are reforms that the administration advocated. Some of them are reforms that were actually implemented to the program based on administrative changes using the administration's executive authority. And it's the view of the administration that that's the most effective way to protect the country and to correct some potential vulnerabilities in the system.

There was widespread bipartisan support for this legislation in the House. I think it got more than 400 votes. That certainly is, in my mind, is an encouraging sign that both Democrats and Republicans in Congress take quite seriously the responsibility that they have to confront this issue.

Q Yeah, I wanted to ask you about that, too. Because it's something -- it's a movement toward tighter security -- and, of course, that's always a good thing; that's why there's bipartisan support. I mean, few could argue with that. But I think everybody also looks at it and knows that people who are part of the visa waiver program for other countries -- travels they haven't been to -- they're able to come through without as much security.

And at the same time, we're hearing these reports about ISIS supporters who are now able to get into Europe -- I think "virtually unimpeded" was the word that one administration official used just in the last few days. So, I mean, do you worry that this is an action but it's not going to be enough? Or are you thinking wear do you draw the line?

Because you're looking at one specific part of a certain category of travelers' backgrounds, but there are other people that are part of the visa waiver program that are able to come through with far less scrutiny.

MR. EARNEST: Well, Michelle, what the reforms to the visa waiver program would do is they would impose more significant, more rigorous screening standards on a variety of travelers, including travelers who had recently traveled to a war zone.

Q Is that enough, though -- I guess is the simple way of asking this question.

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think there are other things that we would like to see as well. One of the other things that we have said -- and this is something that the President said in a news conference when he was sitting next to President Hollande three weeks ago -- is that there is more that we would like our European partners to do to share information and share intelligence with us. There's also more information -- or, frankly, more that our European partners need to do in terms of sharing information among themselves, but then also sharing that information with the United States so we can work even more effectively together to protect our borders and to protect our citizens. So there are some additional things that we'd like to see done here.

Q Okay. And is he hearing from Carter again today? And you mentioning sort of what's working and what's helping in the fight against ISIS, what you hear less of now than we did in the beginning was all the things that our Arab partners are doing -- so as they've been doing less. So what is the plan to get them to do more? And do you that's realistically going to happen?

MR. EARNEST: Well, this is something that Secretary Carter also mentioned in his opening testimony. He noted that there were additional commitments that we would like to see from some of our Arab partners, even in the context of our military campaign. And he did express some concern that some of those partners have been distracted by the ongoing conflict in Yemen. So there certainly is more that our partners in the region can do.

Some of them are already bearing a significant burden. Some of them are already housing a million or more refugees from Syria. We've been able to work effectively with our counterparts in the UAE to advance some of our online efforts to counter ISIL's messaging on social media. That is a valuable contribution from our Emirati partners. So there are some non-military steps that have been important.

We've also seen our partners in the region play an important role in trying to advance the diplomatic process. In fact, even as we speak, there is a meeting in Riyadh of a large variety of Syrian opposition groups that are trying to advance the process of unifying that opposition so that they can engage in a political transition process that's long overdue.

So there are a variety of ways that our Arab partners have contributed to this effort, and we certainly are appreciative of that. But you're right, there's more that they could do.

Christi.

Q Can I just follow on that? You said there's more that you'd like the European partners to do on intelligence-sharing. Can you cite what that is? And has the flow not improved since the Paris attacks, like you would like it to?

MR. EARNEST: I think there are a variety of things that we would like them to do. I think many of them are difficult to talk about because they have to do with intelligence information. But I can give you one example. There is something that's often referred to as PNR -- these are passenger name records -- and we believe that many of our European partners could do a better job of collecting that information in the first place, sharing that with other Europeans in the second place, and then in the third instance, do a more effective and efficient job of sharing that information with the United States.

So there is more that can be done, and it's sort of all -- it falls largely in that realm. But that's just sort of one example that we can talk about. And again, the President made a specific reference to this in his news conference with President Hollande.

Q What do you think is the holdup? What gets in the way of that?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think there are a couple of things that get in the way of that. I think one is sort of the complicated nature of the way that Europe is governed. These are different countries that have open borders, and so that poses some unique challenges in terms of securing their country and securing the continent. There obviously is a roiling debate in Europe about where to draw the line in terms of balancing national security and privacy. And those kinds of debates are not easily resolved. There have been some roiling debates here in this country about the best way to resolve that, so it's not surprising that that's happening in Europe as well.

But frankly, we believe that there is more that could be done on the national security side that would strengthen the national security not just of our European allies, but also of the United States that doesn't in and of itself significantly undermine the basic universal right to privacy that the United States and our allies share.

Cheryl.

Q Thanks, Josh. Back to the omnibus. If I could just dig in a little bit. Riders obviously appear to be the sticking point.

MR. EARNEST: They do.

Q If I could just ask about one in particular to see if it's ideological or not. We're hearing that a number of Democrats are joining Republicans in a rider that would block the NLRB, for example, from enforcing the Joint Employer Liability Rule. Do you consider that ideological?

MR. EARNEST: Well, let me say, Cheryl, that the concern that we have here is that there has been a tendency on the part of Republicans to try to advance their ideological agenda through the budgetary process because they haven't been able to otherwise advance some of the controversial policies that, for ideological reasons, they have prioritized.

This is a good example of one. For ideological reasons, we've seen Republicans essentially work aggressively to undermine the right of workers to form unions. And that's obviously something that the President disagrees with. And the notion that Republicans are prepared to shut down the government unless the President goes along and Democrats in Congress go along with their effort to make it harder for workers at a fast food company to organize collectively to advocate for higher wages I think is in some ways the best example of Republicans' misplaced priorities.

And again, I'm not going to get into the sort of -- walking through the list of things that we would find objectionable enough to veto in the budget bill. But we obviously would be opposed to any effort by Republicans in Congress to insert that measure into the budget bill.

Q Do you have a sense of how many riders are sort of still in play that are particularly objectionable?

MR. EARNEST: I don't have a good sense of the count. I know that as recently as a week or so ago, there were several dozen. I'm not sure what the latest tally is, or who's holding the piece of paper with the comprehensive list. That person is probably not getting a lot of sleep either. But there clearly has been, from the beginning, an effort on the part of Republicans to include a large number of ideological riders in the budget bill.

And again, as I mentioned -- as I've previously observed, I do think that is an indication that the Republican record in Congress is a pretty sorry state of affairs when it comes to what they've been able to achieve legislatively over the course of this year with a newfound, significant, widened Republican majority in the House, and a brand-new majority in the United States Senate. And I think this is animating a lot of the rhetoric that we even see in the Republican town hall meetings that candidates are convening in places like Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina. And I guess I'd make the same observation, but for slightly different reasons.

Q And finally, just because there's only three days left until the deadline -- I mean, do you have any -- well, first of all, I guess, is the President still determined to keep the December 11th deadline as --

MR. EARNEST: Absolutely. Republicans and Democrats in Congress have had ample time to negotiate this agreement. And the President is not going to sign a continuing resolution that gives them additional weeks or months to negotiate an agreement.

They've already had weeks and months to negotiate an agreement. And the only reason that we haven't come to an agreement is the continued insistence on the part of Republicans to insert ideological riders into the process. This could be solved in advance of the deadline if Republicans abandon that approach.

Mike.

Q Let me ask you about a budgetary matter that my colleagues on the Hill tell me is still actively being negotiated on that, but is of special importance to you all. Is the White House willing to accept any changes in the Affordable Care Act, including repeal of the Cadillac tax or the medical device tax as part of either the spending bill or a tax extenders bill? And likewise, also a budgetary matter -- would you all be willing to accept a provision that requires the risk corridors of the Affordable Care Act to be budget-neutral?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Mike, we have essentially made the case -- there's a lot there, that's why I'm trying to collect my thoughts here.

Q Tampering with the Affordable Care Act is the bottom line.

MR. EARNEST: Yeah. And I think the bottom line here is that we are interested in working with Congress to strengthen the Affordable Care Act. That has been our goal all along, and it's why we've been open to proposals from Democrats or Republicans that would serve that goal. For too long, we have actually seen Republicans repeatedly, dozens of times, put forward proposals that would undermine, eliminate, repeal, replace -- pick the verb --

Q (Inaudible) just Republican. The unions are for the Cadillac tax. Some Democrats want to get --

MR. EARNEST: Well, we certainly strongly oppose the notion of repealing the Cadillac tax. So look, I'm not going to be able to answer sort of all of the rumors on Capitol Hill about the status of budget negotiations.

Q Can you tell us if you're willing to accept any changes to the --

MR. EARNEST: I think we've been clear about our desire to strengthen the Affordable Care Act, not repeal it, replace it, or whatever other action verb some Republicans may choose.

Q One other question. In his call with Prime Minister Modi of India last night, did the President preview his proposal from Secretary Kerry today to expand the amount of money available to developing nations? And did Modi have any reaction to that? Did that narrow your differences over a climate agreement?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I don't have a more detailed readout of their call to share with you. I can tell you that, in general, that U.S. support both in the public sector and the private sector for efforts to assist countries as they adapt to the impacts of climate change is something that President Obama and Prime Minister Modi have discussed extensively

over the last several weeks and months. This was something that was discussed extensively when the President sat down face-to-face with Prime Minister Modi just last week when they were both in Paris. So I wouldn't be surprised if it came up in their conversation.

And what we are seeking is, given our commitment -- the commitment of the United States to those kinds of investments -- we want to make sure that there is also a commitment on the part of the Indians and the other 180 or so countries that have showed up to Paris to make serious down payments on cutting carbon pollution, and that a commitment to doing that is not automatically in direct conflict with the kind of economic priorities that many of those countries have identified for themselves.

Q Do you think you can tell us about the progress? Because clearly, Modi, in India, had the biggest people that Americans might consider the obstacle, but the biggest places we have with on the climate control agreement.

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, I don't think I would describe them as the biggest obstacle necessarily. Anytime you negotiate an agreement with more than 180 countries, there are going to be a lot of issues to work through. So I'm not sure that that statement is quite entirely fair to the Indians. But there's no denying that there has been a concerted effort on the part of the United States, starting at the level of the President, but also including the rest of our negotiating team to seek common ground with the Indians and to reassure them about our commitment to investments moving forward and helping countries adapt to the impacts of climate change, but also making sure that those countries are demonstrating a commitment of their own to reducing carbon polluting, and joining the rest of the world in the fight against climate change.

Jon.

Q Josh, a couple quick follow-ups. One, on Ash Carter's testimony, the other thing that came up -- he was asked directly if he thought ISIS has been contained, and his answer was no. Does the President disagree with his Defense Secretary? Because that directly contradicts, of course, what the President said a few weeks ago.

MR. EARNEST: It doesn't directly contradict what the President said several days ago.

Q Well, the President said ISIS had been contained, and his Defense Secretary said ISIS has not been contained. That sounds like a direct contradiction.

MR. EARNEST: Well, if you take a look at the transcript of the President's remarks, which I know that you've done, because he did the interview with ABC --

Q ABC News, yes.

MR. EARNEST: And the President was quite clear about how it is a fact -- one that Secretary Carter actually indicated that he did agree with -- that ISIS is no longer making significant advances across territory throughout Iraq and in Syria, and that those advances had been contained and, in fact, rolled back in some key areas. One area where

they've been rolled back is in northeastern Syria, where we've made progress in rolling them back from 900 square-kilometers of territory, but yet Congress won't fund the effort to keep up that momentum.

So the President also acknowledged in that interview and subsequently that there are significant challenges when it comes to controlling the spread of ISIL's radical ideology. And the United States is engaged in a coherent strategy to confront that. And one example of that is the recent Department of Defense strike that we know now succeeded in taking the ISIL leader in Libya off the battlefield.

Q Okay, so what's the distinction here? The President saying ISIS is contained in Iraq and in Syria, and his Defense Secretary is saying ISIS is not contained elsewhere in the world? Is that the distinction? I'm trying to -- because the President said his contained, his Defense Secretary said not contained. So, you're saying both are true?

MR. EARNEST: What I'm saying is I think that Secretary Carter indicated that he agreed with the viewpoint that was put forward by Secretary -- or by General Dunford who, again, also said the same thing that the President did in describing ISIL as contained tactically in areas that they have been in, in Iraq and in Syria, but strategically concerned about their capacity to spread. Again, that is why, for example, the Department of Defense has taken air strikes in Libya to take the ISIL leader off the battlefield in Libya.

Q Okay. And I'm really just trying to understand. So contained in Iraq and in Syria, but not contained elsewhere? Is that the position of the administration?

MR. EARNEST: Again, I'd encourage you to go back to exactly what the President said. We have had success, undeniably, in limiting the ability of ISIL to take over additional large patches of territory inside of Iraq. This military conflict has been characterized by some back and forth. But the statistic that our intelligence community and our military often cites is that ISIL is no longer in control of 25 percent of the populated area that they previously had taken over. That is evidence of ISIL being contained in Iraq and in Syria.

It is also why we are continuing to apply pressure to them. The whole reason that the President ordered military operations against ISIL in Iraq and in Syria was the concern that they could establish a safe haven there that they could then use to carry out attacks in other places. This is a concern that the President has had since day one, and it's why he's executed the military strategy that he has to combat them and ultimately destroy them.

Q Okay. And then I want to follow up on the President's comments today and Donald Trump. When the President said, "We betray the efforts of the past if we fail to push back against bigotry in all its forms," was he in any way referring to Donald Trump and the latest controversy?

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, I think what the President was giving voice to are the kinds of values that have animated his career in public service. This was true even before he ran for President.

And again, you'll have an opportunity to talk to him at some point about his remarks today. So you'd have to ask him about whether or not he specifically included those words for that reason. I just want to point out that those words are not new, and it's certainly not the first time that he has shared that view. In fact, this sentiment, these values have been part of his public remarks in a variety of circumstances.

Q And just one last thing. The Supreme Court today in the Fisher v. University of Texas case on affirmative action, Justice Scalia made some comments from the bench saying that affirmative action may not be in the interest of all African Americans. He said, "Most of the black scientists in this country do not come from the most advanced schools, and have benefitted from 'a slower track.'" And he went on to say they're being pushed into schools that are too advanced for them. I was wondering if you had any reaction to Justice Scalia's words on this.

MR. EARNEST: It doesn't sound like something that I would agree with, but I'm just hearing them for the first time, so why don't we take a look at those comments and maybe we'll get you a response.

Q Can you bring them back tomorrow? Can you bring some comments back on that tomorrow?

MR. EARNEST: I'll see what I can do. Mara.

Q I just want to try Mike's question again to make sure I understood. You said you strongly oppose the notion of repealing the Cadillac tax. Does that mean he would veto it if there was a repeal in there?

MR. EARNEST: As I mentioned to Cheryl earlier, I'm not going to go down the list of "this is what we'll veto and this is what we won't." I'm happy to do my best to try to describe to you the position that we have on these matters, but once we see a final bill then we can give you some guidance about whether or not the President is going to sign it.

Q So is it fair to say that although you're opposed to repealing it -- it's not clear whether you would veto things that chip away at it.

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, I think what we have -- I haven't said what we're going to veto or not veto about any of this -- any of the Affordable Care Act stuff or any of the efforts to chip away at the rights of working people.

So what I can do is I can try to describe to you as best I can our position on these issues. And our position is that we would welcome efforts from any Democratic or any Republican that has a desire to strengthen the Affordable Care Act. And repealing the Cadillac tax is not a way to strengthen the Affordable Care Act.

Q So you strongly oppose that. Do you strongly oppose repealing the medical device tax?

MR. EARNEST: Again, our view is that one of the benefits of the Affordable Care Act is that it contributes significantly to deficit reduction, and that imposing that tax is one way that we enjoy that benefit.

Q Okay. And speaking of deficit reduction, what about making risk corridors benefit -- budget-neutral? Because that's what opponents of that argue, that --

MR. EARNEST: It is. And this is -- the risk corridors policy is one that is rather complicated, so I'd refer you to HHS and CMS in terms of helping you understand exactly what we believe is the best way to strengthen that program in a way that's consistent with the interests of people who are benefitting from the Affordable Care Act.

Margaret.

Q Josh, should processing of K-1 visas be slowed or stopped until this White House-ordered review is completed?

MR. EARNEST: Right now, this is something for the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security to consider. I'm not even sure at what pace they're being issued right now. So for an update on that, I'd check with them.

Q So at this point -- I mean, you've said it's too early to say whether there's an intelligence failure related to San Bernardino, but is it still too early to say whether Tashfeen Malik should have been allowed into this country?

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, the circumstances that allowed this individual, who's not an American citizen, to enter the United States is something that is under careful review, not just by the FBI but also, as it relates to their involvement in this process, the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security. So I don't have any new conclusions to share with you about that investigation at this point.

Q Despite the fact that the FBI Director did say that this radicalization took part well in advance of the timeline for her having been vetted and interviewed and given a visa prior to entry into the U.S.? At this point you don't see anything that should have tripped a wire, raised a flag that should have prevented her from entering?

MR. EARNEST: I think, again, that's precisely what is under investigation right now.

Q But because it's an investigation, you can't say that?

MR. EARNEST: I don't want to get ahead of the ongoing investigation.

Q Can I ask you -- switching to Carter's testimony as well -- we've heard from the President, we've heard from you this call for a new AUMF and the need for it.

Operationally, what do you need from a new AUMF that you don't already have since legally you believe that the fight is justified under the existing authorities? Operationally, what becomes different if you get what you're asking for?

MR. EARNEST: The Department of Defense I think has spoken to this already. And I think that what they have articulated is that there is -- that they are able to do everything that the President has ordered them to do based on the authority that the President has been given by Congress under the 2001 AUMF.

The reason that the President has been advocating for more than a year now that Congress pass an authorization to use military force is it would send a very forceful signal to our citizens, to our men and women in uniform, to our allies, and, yes, our adversaries that the United States is united behind the priority of degrading and ultimately destroying ISIL.

This is a congressional responsibility. We're not asking them to do something that they're not supposed to do. We're not asking them to do something that isn't directly part of their job description. And the fact that they haven't done it is a source of significant disappointment here.

Q But what you're describing is symbolic importance. It's not anything operationally different. It wouldn't change what U.S. forces are doing, is what you're saying.

MR. EARNEST: You should check with the Department of Defense to confirm this; it's an operational question. But my understanding about what they've said is that they are able to carry out all the orders that the President has given them based on the authorization to use military force that Congress gave the executive branch back in 2001.

What the executive branch is seeking -- and I think the Department of Defense would say they would welcome the show of support from Congress -- is the Congress acting to demonstrate the unanimity of opinion inside the United States about the priority of degrading and ultimately destroying ISIL.

Q So it is correct to say "symbolically important"?

MR. EARNEST: It surely is symbolically important. It's also a basic congressional responsibility that they have put off for more than a year despite the fact they, on a daily basis, criticize others -- including the Secretary of Defense -- for the way he has handled his business when it comes to countering ISIL.

Q Does the White House have plans to hold further consultations or new drafts on what they'd like to see in the new AUMF? Because previous attempts haven't gone anywhere.

MR. EARNEST: Well, I'm glad you cited previous attempts. The administration back in February put forward our own legislative language when it came to -- for an authorization to use military force.

Q And a lot of Democrats --

MR. EARNEST: I'm not saying it's partisan. I'm saying this is a congressional responsibility. And it isn't just that we put forward legislative language. It isn't just that the President has been consistently publicly advocating for congressional action in this

regard. It's that the President also sent senior members of his national security team, including the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense, to go to Congress and talk to them on the record, under oath, in public about why this legislation is important.

And in the face of all of that, Congress has done absolutely nothing other than criticize, I suppose.

Q So you don't think the arguments have been effective? Or you're putting the fault back with them on --

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, considering this is a specific responsibility of the United States Congress, I recognize that they may want to point fingers to avoid some blame. But when we're talking about Congress not doing their job, it's hard to determine who else might be at fault.

Q Can you quickly just say whether the White House is prepared to confirm that Iran tested a ballistic missile last month?

MR. EARNEST: Margaret, I can tell you that these are reports that we have seen, and I've seen these reports, as well. And the United States government is looking into them.

Q Our intelligence community, as you've said, is one of the best. So one would think that it's more than reports --

MR. EARNEST: Indeed they are. I think the best, even.

Q But when the intelligence community recognized that Iran tested a missile in -- a month prior to that, and Iran also acknowledged that it tested a ballistic missile back in October, there wasn't any consequence for Iran, other than a complaint at the U.N. Is there any follow up on that? I mean, should we have a follow-up on the October test if we're not acknowledging the November one?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think there has -- I would disagree with the notion that there hasn't been any consequences. On October 21st, the United States condemned the violation and submitted a joint report with France, Germany and the U.K. to the U.N. Security Council's Iran Sanctions Committee. We called for the committee to review the matter and take appropriate action.

Just last month, together with the British and the French, we also proposed that the committee push Iran for a formal explanation. Many of the entities that were involved in that prior missile launch are already subject to sanctions by the United States. And the President has been talking for at least since this summer about steps the United States can do to deepen our security cooperation with our partners in the region, to better counter Iran's ballistic missile program. And that's the nature of the ongoing security consultations that are taking place between, for example, the United States and the GCC countries. They obviously have a vested interest in countering this illicit missile program.

And there's more that can be done and more that we're actively doing and have been doing, frankly, since before this latest confirmed test back in October.

Q When I said no consequence I meant no sanctions, other than complaint.

MR. EARNEST: And some of it is that they're already sanctioned. And we're already seeking to work -- and we're already seeking to deepen our cooperation with our partners to counter this program.

So, look, this is a -- the Iran ballistic missile program is something that's been a source of concern for years now, and it continues to be. It's something that we closely monitor, as you suggested, and it's something that we talk about on a regular basis with our partners and allies in the region.

Julie.

Q Just to follow up on the AUMF for a moment. A lot has changed since the President submitted the language to Congress that he thought should be in the AUMF. Is what he was talking about on Sunday basically the same thing? In other words, does the White House think that that is still the proposal that Congress should take when it comes to authorizing force if they were to do something on this now?

MR. EARNEST: We continue to support the legislative language that we put forward back in February. The steps that the President has ordered are entirely consistent with that language that we put forward.

We've also indicated a willingness to negotiate that language; that if there are Democrats and Republicans that want to get together and have some conversations about how to more effectively, in their view, word an authorization to use military force, we'd welcome those kinds of conversations.

But I guess -- this is what I keep going back to -- is that ultimately it's Congress's responsibility to write this bill and to build support for it, vote on it and pass it. And Congress has done very little, if anything, in pursuit of those goals. And again, for members of Congress who have spent a lot of time talking to all of you, appearing on cable television, criticizing the administration for our response to the counter-ISIL campaign, it's still hard for them to point to anything tangibly that they've done to help this effort.

Right now, we know they're blocking funding for an equipping program that would benefit forces that are actually working effectively with the United States to push back on ISIL. They're unwilling to take what even is a symbolic step, as Margaret described it, to demonstrate their support for our ongoing efforts. They're unwilling to confirm the highly qualified individual that has served President in both parties that would lead the effort to shut down ISIL's financing.

So we've got a pretty broad list of concerns. And it's unclear to me exactly what members of Congress would say that they've done. That's not -- I'm not even sure. And right now, I guess to make matters worse, they're also on the verge of shutting down the government,

which would also risk funding for national security and homeland security.

So it's time for Congress to get to work.

Q But a lot has changed in terms of what's going on in Iraq and Syria since you guys sent that language up to the Hill. You've presumably learned a lot about what ISIL is doing and how our efforts are succeeding and falling short. So you would think that maybe there would have been some modifications that he might want to make to get the most effective AUMF he can get? Unless it really is just symbolic -- show of support for the fight.

MR. EARNEST: Well, I guess -- in some ways, it might show the wisdom of what we put forward back in February, the fact that it continues to be relevant and consistent with the actions that the President has taken thus far. But even when we put forward that proposal back in February, and even when senior members of the President's team were testifying before Congress, there was a willingness to negotiate around it, but we haven't even gotten much of a serious effort in that regard, either.

So Congress has fallen quite short in terms of fulfilling their responsibilities to demonstrate their support for the priority that the President has identified -- to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.

Q And on Secretary Carter's testimony today, is the President concerned that this is really going to deepen American involvement in Iraq beyond what he's been willing to consider in the past? I mean, it's not ground forces, but --

MR. EARNEST: When you say "this," what do you mean?

Q The potential to send attack helicopters to support the fight in Ramadi. I mean, these pilots could be fighting ground fire. I mean, this is close-in operations we're talking about, and I wonder whether there's any concern on the part of the President that this is really going to draw our military involvement in beyond what he's been willing to consider in the past. And if that's the case, then why now? What's changed on the ground to warrant that at this point?

MR. EARNEST: Well, let me say -- I've got a couple of thoughts here. The first is that there are already American servicemen and women in Iraq, and in some situations, in Syria, doing very dangerous things to advance our national security. And the President, as the Commander-in-Chief, feels responsible for their safety, and certainly feels responsible for any orders that he gives them that puts them in harm's way.

So the President is mindful of this whenever he considers these kinds of military options. I will say that the President has not decided to approve the use of U.S. attack helicopters in an operation like this. So that -- the President has not signed off on that. I also think it's important to note what Secretary Carter said, which is that any sort of decision like this would only come at the request that is made by Prime Minister Abadi.

So I think all three of those things bear keeping in mind. The other thing that bears keeping in mind is that we are seeing Iraqi security forces make some modest progress in retaking Ramadi. I don't think it's imminent, and it's certainly not even a foregone conclusion. But there's no denying that there's important progress that has been made there. And given our commitment to supporting Iraqi security forces as they make progress, I suppose this is the reason that this issue came up for discussion. But I'd just reiterate that any decision like this would only come at the request of Prime Minister Abadi and after explicit signoff from the President of the United States. And that's signoff that has not been given at this point.

Q The Pentagon has made -- I mean, Secretary Carter has made clear he thinks this might well be necessary and the right thing to do. Does the President hold a different view?

MR. EARNEST: I think Secretary Carter made clear that it was an option, but he also made clear that it was an option that would, again, only make sense in the context of a specific request from Prime Minister Abadi, and certainly is only going to be something that moves forward once the President has signed off on it.

Kevin.

Q Thanks. Can I just follow up on that?

MR. EARNEST: Sure.

Q If the Prime Minister were to say -- and this sounds like this would be useful -- is there any indication that you would have that the President would say no?

MR. EARNEST: I think it depends on the circumstances. It's difficult to entertain that specific hypothetical. But I think Secretary Carter was making clear that this is an available option. But again, there are still some decisions that would have to be made before that option is one that is taken.

Q Staying with Secretary Carter's testimony today, he made mention of the fact that he would like coalition partners to step up, offer more in the way of munitions, weapons, et cetera. Is it fair to say that our Gulf partners are not doing their fair share?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think it's fair to say that we believe that there is more that they could do. And we have welcomed additional contributions in just the last few weeks from the Germans and from the French and from the British. And as I mentioned in response to an earlier question, there are a number of things that our Arab partners have done previously over the course of this campaign and are still doing today that are advancing our effort to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL. But we believe that there is room for improvement and there is room for additional contributions that they could make. And this is the subject of ongoing conversations with them.

Q Couple more. I want to ask you about the funding. You mentioned that Congress is simply not doing their bidding and making that money available. Can the White House guarantee a full accounting of those dollars if they were provided to make sure, obviously,

that if there were materials that were purchased, that it wouldn't end up in the hands of the enemy, quite frankly, on the ground?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Kevin, there is a mechanism for providing feedback to Congress. Congress obviously has oversight over these programs, and so there is an established channel for doing precisely that.

Q Lastly, just quickly, I want to ask you about -- there was a report that actually came out of an IG report from DHS that there were more than 70 employees for the Department of Homeland Security that had been on a terror watchlist. Are you aware of this report? Congressman Stephen Lynch mentioned it. And if that were the case, how much would that surprise the President, that people who may be on that watchlist may actually be working in that capacity?

MR. EARNEST: Kevin, I haven't actually seen that report, but let us take a look and we'll follow up with you.

Ron.

Q Just one quick one on Chicago. I'm not sure when you last commented on this, perhaps -- the mayor there said today that it's a "defining moment on these issues of crime and policing, and the even larger issues of truth, justice and race." And I know there's a DOJ investigation and that's going to take a long time, but can you give us some sense of the President's level of concern and engagement on that particular situation? Because obviously this is something he cares deeply about. It's the last year of his presidency soon. Does it take violence -- or what would it take for the President to be more demonstrative, more outspoken about what's happening there and in other departments around the country?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Ron, as we've discussed previously, the President does have some limitations on what he can say on this matter, given that he is the President of the United States and the Attorney General that he appointed is leading an agency that's conducting an independent investigation.

That said, I'd point you to what the President said just a couple of weeks ago, shortly after this video was released, where he noted that he was deeply disturbed by the footage of the fatal shooting of 17-year-old Laquan McDonald. And he noted both that it's worth keeping in mind the significant loss that's been suffered by a lot of families across the country -- at the same time, keeping in mind our enduring gratitude to the overwhelming majority of men and women in uniform who protect our communities with honor and respect, and they do so with professionalism and they do it for the right reasons.

But, ultimately, this is a significant issue that -- even sort of stepping outside of the specific case in Chicago -- that I do think you're going to hear the President talk about some more over the course of the next year.

Q I ask again because there's yet another videotape, yet another case in Chicago, and I think you'd agree that we could probably find similar evidence or problems around the country. So is -- again, and given the limitations of what he can say, what is his -- isn't there more that he could do? Isn't there more that he could -- before another American city explodes in some level of violence? Not predicting that, but obviously that's the concern. Why not be more proactive as opposed to reactive, which has, to some extent, been an enduring criticism of the President?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Ron, I'd remind you that earlier this year, the President convened a taskforce on 21st-century policing that brought together law enforcement experts, prosecutors, chiefs of police, but also community advocates and civil rights advocates to sit together at the table and put together essentially a list of ideas and policies and best practices that law enforcement agencies across the country could implement to improve and build trust between their officers and members of the community.

We've heard a good response from communities across the country who have taken a look at those recommendations and, in some cases, implemented them. And in some cases, it had a tangible impact on improving relations between local law enforcement and the communities they're sworn to serve and protect.

Q How engaged is that group in Chicago? I think Chief McCarthy was a member of that group and now he's out. Am I correct?

MR. EARNEST: I don't, frankly, recall. We can take a look in that for you.

Q Chief Ramsey was --

MR. EARNEST: Chief Ramsey was in charge of it. I don't recall whether or not Chief McCarthy was a member of that taskforce.

Q So, again, do you know if that task force or some other aspect of the government, of the administration is actively involved in Chicago now?

MR. EARNEST: I know the Department of Justice has community liaisons that -- beyond just the ongoing investigation, there are also community liaisons that do important work in the community with both law enforcement and community leaders to try to bridge some differences and to try to build some trust.

I think the other thing, Ron, that experts would tell you about this is that inspiring and building confidence in trust in the relationship between community leaders and citizens and local law enforcement is not something that takes place overnight. It's going to require sustained engagement on the part of both parties to building that kind of trust.

Ultimately, it's in the interest of both sides to do that. Having trustworthy police officers walking the beat is going to make our community safer and having members of the community who trust those officers and have an effective, functioning relationship with them means that the officers are going to be safer as they do that important work.

So this is why I think there has been so much robust engagement by leaders on both sides of this issue to try to help everyone recognize that there's a lot of common ground to be found here.

Q Just one other thing. I don't think there's any evidence yet that there is a direct connect between Raqqa and San Bernardino in terms of directing, coordinating that effort.

MR. EARNEST: That's correct. There's no evidence at this point. It's the subject of the ongoing investigation, but thus far, there has not been.

Q One of the loudest criticisms or concerns by the committee when Secretary Carter was testifying was what was perceived as a lack of a plan, timetable to take that capital out, for lack of a better word. If there is a connection found, as the French apparently have found, would you think that the President would more precisely come up with a plan or a timetable -- I know there's a general plan of Sinjar -- would that be a trigger that would cause the President to initiate a sharper plan directed at the so-called capital of the caliphate? It's a hypothetical but I think it's something that a lot of people would just like to --

MR. EARNEST: Well, I guess I would start by observing that if there were a timetable for a military operation against Raqqa, it's unlikely that we would announce it in advance. I think Secretary Kerry -- or Secretary Kerry did discuss how continuing to apply pressure on Raqqa has been a prominent military objective of our coalition for quite some time.

Our coalition has been taking strikes at ISIL targets in Raqqa for more than a year now. There are ISIL leaders that have been taken off the battlefield there. There is significant infrastructure in and around Raqqa that has been destroyed by military airstrikes. So certainly continuing to apply pressure on ISIL leaders in Raqqa is a core component of our strategy. But in terms of a timetable for any kind of ground operation that would, of course, be led by local opposition forces, that's just not something that we would discuss publicly in advance.

Q Right -- on a timetable. And arguably, one of the things that he admitted or said that's lacking is the ground component to take care of a place like that, to hold territory. My colleagues have asked again, is the President -- the Secretary I believe said -- had been on the phone and he talked about -- how engaged is the President in that specific issue of trying to talk to our Sunni Arab partners about getting troops, fighters on the ground in places like that?

MR. EARNEST: The President has had those conversations. Those conversations are principally led by Brett McGurk, who is an envoy at the State Department who is principally responsible for discussing with our coalition partners the kind of commitments they're prepared to make to our coalition activities. But I can tell you that the President has had those kinds of conversations with a variety of world leaders who are leading countries that are part of our coalition.

Q But at this point, clearly he has not had much success.

MR. EARNEST: Well, at this point, I don't have anything to announce. And I think Secretary Carter was pretty blunt that we are concerned about the way that some of our partners in the coalition have been distracted by the ongoing conflict in Yemen, and that continues to be a source of some concern.

JC, I'll give you the last one.

Q Thank you very much, Josh. To follow up on both April and Jon's query, and to put it a little bit into global perspective -- as I'm sure you know, there's a petition in the U.K., which is now reaching 300,000 signers, which will go to Parliament, to the House of Commons, and bring up a debate as to whether or not Donald Trump can be permitted into the United Kingdom. This, among other areas of anxiety now reaching fear, have made some of the leaders in Europe actually pretty vocal, and in the Middle East and throughout the global community, as well. What would this President say to the global leaders, to the citizenry of the world, to assuage them to belay fears that a Donald Trump presidency, if or not, would not leave America unrecognizable to his allies and to his leaders throughout the world?

MR. EARNEST: Well, the thing, JC -- to most directly answer your question, I think I'd refer you to the President's previous comments that he continues to be confident that he will be succeeded by a Democrat. More generally, I think the President has confidence that, regardless of who serves in the Oval Office, that the kinds of values that the President was discussing at the United States Capitol earlier today are enduring. And they're enduring because they're central to the founding of our country but they're also enduring because they have the broad support of the vast majority of the American people. And the President's ability to lift up these values and to animate them, to make clear that they are a priority in the policymaking process is, frankly, the reason the President was elected President in the first place. And these are values that the President has been fighting for since before he ran for President, and I'm confident that these are the kinds of values that he's going to continue to lift up even in the glorious days of his post-presidency.

Q But I'm sure -- I know you and the President and this administration must know that there is real growing concern that this individual who was at this -- to a certain point not so long ago was basically considered a vaudevillian who had great stage presence has now become an entity that may, in fact, influence the future of this country.

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, the President continues to be confident that he'll be succeeded by a Democrat, and the President continues to be quite outspoken in his view that the offensive, divisive rhetoric of Donald Trump does not at all reflect the values, the heart, the principals and priorities of the American people.

Thanks, everybody. We'll see you tomorrow.

END

2:17 P.M. EST

