

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 9/22/2014

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MR. EARNEST: Good afternoon, everybody. Happy Monday. I don't have any announcements at the top, Josh, so we'll go straight to questions. Would you like to get us started?

Q Thanks, Josh. How was an intruder able to make it all the way into the White House on Friday before the Secret Service was able to stop him?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Josh, I read some of your reporting on this topic over the weekend. (Laughter.)

Q Glad to hear it.

MR. EARNEST: Let me say a couple of things. The Secret Service has indicated that they are conducting a review of the incident that occurred on Friday night. That review will include a wide variety of things, and for a comprehensive list I'd refer you to the Secret Service. But it will include a variety of things, including the positioning of tactical and non-tactical assets inside and outside the fence line. It will include a review of technical or physical security enhancements that may be necessary to improve security at the White House. It will also include a question about ongoing staffing and an assessment about a -- whether or not addition staffing is needed. There also will be a review of policy and procedures related to the assessment of threats. And it also will include a review of previous interactions with the subject.

Let me also say that providing security at the White House is complicated business. The White House is, as many people know, one of the more popular tourist destinations in our nation's capital. Thousands of tourists on a typical day will tour the White House. That means that thousands of tourists, members of the public, will walk out that front door at the conclusion of their tour.

The White House is, of course, a place of business; it's essentially a large office building. It is where members of the White House staff and White House journalists show up every day to do their work. And facilitating your entry and exit to this complex with a minimum amount of inconvenience while also providing security is an important priority.

Right outside the front gate of the White House is Lafayette Park, which is among the more prominent First Amendment zones in the country -- that individuals will gather in that area to make their First Amendment views known. And this means that the Secret Service has the challenging task of balancing the need to ensure the safety and security of the First Family while also ensuring that the White House continues to be the People's House. And balancing those equities is challenging work, but it's clear that in this case a review of that work is warranted. And that review will be conducted.

Q What was the President's personal reaction to this? Did he express any concern about whether he and his family are truly safe here?

MR. EARNEST: Josh, I had the opportunity to speak briefly with the President about it earlier today. He did indicate, as you would expect, his family lives in the White House, and so he is obviously concerned by the incident that occurred on Friday evening.

At the same time, the President continues to have complete confidence in the professionals at the Secret Service to do the very challenging work that I described earlier. The President is also confident that this review that is underway is one that will be conducted with the highest amount of professionalism, and he's confident that the reforms that are determined to be necessary will be implemented in the proper way.

Q You talked about the need to strike the right balance between security and access to this institution. Does the President favor expanding the security perimeter around the White House grounds or further restricting the ability for tourists and other people to be in the immediate area?

MR. EARNEST: Fortunately, Josh, there are highly trained, highly experienced professionals at the United States Secret Service who will be conducting a broader review about security at the White House. And the kinds of questions that you're asking are the kinds of things that will be included in that review.

Q And turning to the United Nations activities this week, when the President laid out his strategy earlier this month to combat the Islamic State group, one of the things that Secretary Kerry and other folks here at the White House said was that they expected other nations to have their commitments to this coalition to basically be firmed up by the time we go to New York this week for the General Assembly. Is that still the case? Or is the President looking to use the next few days to continue to press countries to contribute to the effort and to broaden the coalition that he's building?

MR. EARNEST: Josh, the effort to build a coalition is something that will be ongoing. For weeks now, the President and members of the Cabinet, including the Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, the Secretary of State John Kerry, other senior members of the

national security team that work here at the White House, have been actively engaged with their counterparts in countries around the world related to contributions to this broader coalition to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.

This is a high priority. And we have seen important public commitments from individual countries around the globe indicating their support for the goals that the President has laid out for this broader coalition. And we will never reach the place -- or at least I don't anticipate reaching a place; maybe I'll be wrong -- but I don't anticipate that we will reach a place where we sort of stand up from the desk and say our efforts to build this coalition have been completed.

This will be ongoing work. And there is this important task that General Allen is principally focused on, which is assessing the needs of the coalition. And again, those needs will be -- will change over time. And he will also be assessing the capabilities of individual nations who are committed to being part of the broader coalition. And matching up those capabilities with the needs of the coalition will be work that's ongoing.

So I do anticipate that when the President is participating in activities associated with the United Nations General Assembly in New York this week that he will have the kinds of conversations with world leaders about how and -- how they can contribute to this broader international coalition. But that is work that has been going on for weeks in advance of the United Nations General Assembly. It's work that will occur during the United Nations General Assembly. And the efforts of the President and other members of his team to build this coalition will continue long after the United Nations General Assembly has gaveled to a close.

Roberta.

Q Hi. Iranian officials said yesterday that Iran is ready to work with the United States and its allies to stop Islamic State militants, but they want more flexibility on their nuclear program in exchange. And I'm wondering what would be the U.S. response to linking those two issues.

MR. EARNEST: The conversations related to the P5-plus-1 talks have to do with resolving the international community's concerns about the Iranian nuclear program. Those conversations to try to resolve those concerns are entirely separate from any of the overlapping interests that Iran may have with the broader international community as it relates to ISIL.

As you've heard me discuss on at least a couple of other occasions, it is not in the interest of the Iranian regime for this extremist organization to be wreaking havoc on its doorstep. So, like the international community, the Iranians are understandably concerned about the gains that ISIL has made in Iraq, and they have indicated that they are ready to fight ISIL.

But the United States will not coordinate any of our military activities with the Iranians. The United States will not be involved in sharing intelligence with the Iranians. And the United States will not be in a position of trading aspects of Iran's nuclear program to

secure commitments to take on ISIL. These two issues are entirely separate. And the focus of the P5-plus-1 talks will remain on resolving the international community's concerns about the Iranian nuclear program.

It is possible, as we've already indicated a couple of times, that conversations on the sidelines of those talks could occur about Iran's concerns -- or Iran's overlapping interest with the international community's as it relates to ISIL. As recently as this weekend, the Secretary of State John Kerry was in New York to engage in conversations in the context of the P5-plus-1 talks about resolving the international community's concerns about Iran's nuclear program. On the sidelines of those broader conversations, he did have a conversation with his Iranian counterpart to discuss ISIL.

I don't have any additional readout of that meeting, but that is an indication of the approach that we're taking here, which is that these are two separate matters that will be resolved separately.

Q So you've been clear that the idea of a tradeoff is a non-starter.

MR. EARNEST: That's correct.

Q Has that idea of a tradeoff been overtly made to the United States by Iranian officials and overtly rejected?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I believe that there's a speech that was given by the Iranian leader over the weekend in which this was discussed -- I don't know if it was a speech or an interview. But I read news accounts of this proposal, and I'm confident that our views on this topic have been conveyed to the Iranians. What exactly that conversation was like or how it was brought up by the Iranians or by members of the P5-plus-1, I can't characterize those conversations other than to say we've made clear, both publicly and privately, that the conversations in the context of the P5-plus-1 talks are entirely separate from conversations that the international community, including the United States, may have with the Iranians about ISIL.

Q Just a quick one on the security incident. What's the timeline for the review that you discussed?

MR. EARNEST: I can tell you that senior Secret Service officials who are responsible for conducting this review are carrying it out with a sense of urgency. I don't have a specific timeline to share with you at this point; you might check with Secret Service to see if they have a timeline that they're putting on it. But I know that this is something that they are pursuing urgently, and I know that this is a review that began on Friday night.

Jim.

Q Because this incident on Friday evening occurred just a few minutes after the President and the First Family had left the White House, I would think that the President would be more than just concerned. Was he angry? Did he pick up the phone at some

point and call the head of the Secret Service? Can you give us a little bit more on his response?

MR. EARNEST: I can tell you that --

Q He just expressed concern?

MR. EARNEST: I can tell you that the President over the weekend was briefed; on Friday night he was briefed multiple times on the actual incident. And over the course of the weekend he was updated on the investigation.

I don't have any specific presidential conversations to read out to you other than the presidential conversation that I had with him earlier today. But there are senior members here at the White House, both the Chief of Staff, the Deputy Chief of Staff and others who have been in frequent touch with Secret Service personnel over the weekend, and even already today, to discuss the incident and to discuss the review that the Secret Service has already started.

Q And the Chief of Staff and other top officials here at the White House, I mean, were they scratching their heads over as to how these dogs weren't deployed; how the North Portico door was unlocked? Obviously, that gains access to an area that takes you very close to the residence of the White House. Any reaction to some of these lapses along the way that allowed this intruder to get so far?

MR. EARNEST: Well, many of the things that you're raising are topics that will be the subject of this review that the Secret Service is conducting. I can tell you that there are a number of changes to the security posture that the United States Secret Service has already implemented here at the White House, and these are changes that were implemented in the immediate aftermath of the incident on Friday.

The Secret Service has beefed up foot patrols along -- around the fence line of the White House complex. The Secret Service has deployed additional surveillance resources to beef up the surveillance around the White House. The Secret Service has changed the procedures for ensuring that the entrance to the White House is secure. And there is already some stepped-up training for officers who are essentially standing on the front lines of the White House to ensure that they're aware of the policies and procedures that are related to securing the White House and dealing with incidents like the one that we saw on Friday.

Q It seems pretty clear you have some antiquated procedures? Is that fair to say?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Jim, I wouldn't describe them that way. There's a review that will examine exactly what procedures are appropriate, and as soon as those procedures need to be changed I'm confident that Secret Service personnel will recommend that those changes take place. And the President is confident that those changes will be properly implemented.

Q And I'm sure you saw this -- that a spokesman for ISIS issued a call to foreign fighters around the world to carry out its acts on coalition countries. What is the administration's response to that?

MR. EARNEST: I don't have a response to that.

Q And just very quickly, though, during a background briefing this morning, a senior administration official did say that there's a concern that the international community is not prepared to deal with these kinds of calls, to deal with these kinds of foreign fighter calls that are issued by ISIS. Is that -- I mean, the President wants to accomplish that this week. That is one of the key deliverables this week, is that right?

MR. EARNEST: As you know, Jim, the President will be chairing a meeting of the United Nations Security Council. It's only the second time that a U.S. President has chaired a United Nations Security Council meeting. The topic of discussion will be what nations around the globe can do to mitigate the threat that's posed by foreign terrorist fighters.

We've seen that there are several dozen countries from around the globe -- not just the United States and not just in the West, but from around the globe -- where individuals have traveled to the region, taken up arms alongside ISIL fighters. These are individuals who have been trained. These are individuals who have access to military equipment. And these are individuals who have indicated a willingness to die for their cause.

The concern, again, that the U.S. has, that our allies in Western Europe have and that our partners around the globe have is that these individuals could decide to return to their home country and possibly carry out acts of violence. And what the President hopes to accomplish in the context of the U.N. Security Council meeting is to have a discussion about what kinds of global standards can be put in place to mitigate the threat from these individuals.

Viqueira.

Q Thank you. Just a quick follow-up on the fence-jumper. This being Washington, there are multiple jurisdictions just outside this fence.

MR. EARNEST: There are.

Q Whose call is it if you're going to expand the perimeter? You said that that was one of the things that are on the table. Does the Secret Service -- if they want to do it, it's done? Or does the Park Police, the Metro Police and everybody else have a say in this?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Mike, you did raise another complication, another challenge that Secret Service deals with in terms of providing security here at the White House -- that there are overlapping jurisdictions in place; that the Secret Service does have to work very closely with Park Police and with the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Police Department as they provide security here at the White House. So that is another layer of complexity that is added to this task.

As it relates to who might be involved in some of the proposed reforms, I'd refer you to the Secret Service and to some of these other law enforcement agencies about that. I am confident that the review that the Secret Service will conduct is one that will consider a wide range of factors.

And again, Secret Service is always updating and reviewing their security posture here at the White House. So there have been some reports about a possible change to the screening of tourists before they participate in a White House tour. Obviously, the individual in question on Friday night was not a prospective tourist.

So that is an indication of two things. One is that there is always a review of security protocols that the Secret Service is continually updating. But in the context of this specific incident, there will be a pretty broad look at a wide range of White House security procedures to ensure that the Secret Service is accomplishing their mission of protecting the President and the First Family, but also protecting the status of the White House as the People's House.

Q Two quick ones on ISIL. First of all, do you have a reaction to President Erdogan floating this idea of a buffer zone on the Turkish-Syrian border? Do you think that would be helpful?

MR. EARNEST: I haven't seen that specific proposal that's floated, Mike. We'll check with my National Security Council colleagues and see if there's a response that we have.

Q And on the prospective travel ban, you had the FBI Director, the Counterterrorism Director Matt Olsen and other law enforcement officials testifying last week saying sometimes they want these individuals who are suspect to come into the country because then they can keep an eye on them, see who they're contacting, sort of develop an idea of what their network is. Is that being taken into consideration as the President puts forward his proposal?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Mike, I don't want to get into the procedures that are currently in place to try to mitigate the threat from foreign terrorist fighters. I will tell you that one of the concerns is that we want to ensure that countries around the globe are taking advantage of every opportunity that they have to monitor the individuals who have traveled to Syria and to mitigate the threat that they may pose either to their homeland or to other countries around the globe. And trying to raise those standards will be a topic of discussion at the Security Council meeting.

Nadia.

Q Over the weekend, 130,000 Syrian Kurds crossed to Turkey after ISIS attacked their villages. And the Generals -- I think General Dempsey said that it will take six months to one year to train the Syrian opposition. How do you explain this disparity between the speed in which ISIS are moving, especially in Syria, and kind of the tardiness of having the opposition in Syria ready? Is this kind of a weakness in the President's strategy?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Nadia, I'd say a couple of things about that. The first is, the humanitarian situation in Syria and the refugee situation in surrounding countries is one that we've been concerned about for quite some time. I'll remind you that the United States is the largest bilateral donor of humanitarian assistance to refugees from the Syrian conflict.

We have worked closely with our allies in Turkey and with our partners in the region to try to assist them as they meet the needs of these individuals who are fleeing violence. But what we have seen there is a terrible humanitarian tragedy, and we're very concerned about it. We're concerned about it both because of the concern that we have for our fellow human beings and for vulnerable populations that have been subjected to terrible violence -- or are fleeing terrible violence in pretty difficult conditions. We are also concerned about the destabilizing impact that significant flows of refugees could have on the politics of an already pretty volatile region. So that's one aspect of that that's important.

The second thing is, the United States has been providing both military and non-military assistance to the Syrian opposition. What the President has indicated is a couple of things. One is he believes that we should be ramping up the assistance, the training and equipping that is currently being provided to Syrian opposition fighters. We were gratified last week when Democrats and Republicans in the United States Congress came together to give the administration greater authority to ramp up our assistance to those Syrian opposition fighters. That should improve their ability to counter ISIL attacks on the battlefield.

The other thing that will assist these Syrian opposition fighters is a campaign of coalition airstrikes. And the President indicated in a speech to the nation about 10 days ago that he is ready to expand the air campaign in a broadened systematic way into Syria. And that will also have an impact on our ultimate goal, which is to degrade and destroy ISIL.

Sure, Jon. Oh, Nadia has one more, and I'll come right back to you, Jon.

Q Also, on Turkey -- you know that they released 49 hostages in the weekend. What's your understanding of that? Some deal has been -- took place? Especially that Secretary Kerry has been calling on the Turks to close that border and to stop the jihadists from crossing there. So what's the White House understanding of what happened there that all of a sudden ISIS decided to release 49 Syrian diplomats -- I mean, Turkish diplomats in Mosul?

MR. EARNEST: We here at the White House are obviously pleased that some diplomats, about 49 diplomats as you point out, who were being held hostage by ISIL are currently in the process of being reunited with their families. That is unquestionably good news, and we are relieved that that is occurring.

As it relates to the circumstances of their release, I don't have any information to share with you on that. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel was in Turkey I believe two weeks ago today to discuss with them their efforts -- or their willingness to participate in a

broader international coalition. Turkey has been robustly engaged in some of the other conversations that the United States and our partners and allies in the region have been having on this matter.

And as we've said for some time, nations like Turkey have their own clear vested personal interest in confronting the threat that's posed by ISIL. All of the mayhem and havoc that ISIL is wreaking in Iraq and in Syria is right on Turkey's doorstep. And it's certainly not in their interest for all that instability and violence to be occurring so close to their border.

And that is why the United States and the international community is confident that we will build a coalition that includes countries around the world, but also Muslim-led countries in the region who will join the effort to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.

Jon, we'll go to you now.

Q Josh, on this question of airstrikes in Syria, I'm just confused -- there have been really strikingly contradictory statements coming from senior officials in this administration about what exactly the President's intention is and what he has decided or not decided to do. You told us last week that the President had made a decision; your exact quote was, "The President made a decision more than a week ago." The night of his speech, September 10th, a primetime address, a senior administration official said, there is something -- "This is something the President has decided to do." And yet, just yesterday, Samantha Power, Ambassador to the U.N., said, "If the President decides to do the airstrikes," -- if -- saying he had not made the decision yet. And General Dempsey just said that he had presented a plan to the President but that the President had not OK'd it yet. So can you just clear this up? Is it "if" the President makes the decision, or the President "has" made a decision?

MR. EARNEST: Jon, the President has made a decision that he announced to the country about 10 days ago when he gave a primetime address indicating that he believed it was in the interest of the United States to broaden a systematic air campaign against ISIL targets to include targets in Syria.

You have heard in your conversations with military officials for a number of weeks now that degrading and ultimately destroying ISIL will require preventing ISIL from establishing a safe haven, or occupying a safe haven in Syria. So this broadened, systematic air campaign against ISIL targets in Syria is necessary to accomplishing this broader goal. And the President has decided, and he announced that decision to the country last Wednesday night, so 10 or 12 days ago.

Q Is it odd, though, that senior -- that his top person at the U.N. and his top military advisor both seem to be saying something else? I mean --

MR. EARNEST: Well, I can't account for their individual comments. I'm confident that both the Ambassador and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff are well aware of the President's decision and have been working closely with him to advance our strategy. I'll remind you that our strategy is not just focused on military strengths; that there are other

aspects of this strategy that are critically important, as well. But I'm confident that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Ambassador to the United Nations are firmly on the same page as the President.

Q Okay. And if I could ask you -- the President was sent a letter over the weekend -- 31 Republican senators saying that they are "gravely concerned" about the negotiations with Iran over the nuclear program, but the administration is -- the President will grant concessions to the Iranians while also allowing them to continue to produce nuclear explosive material, is the way they put it -- assuming they refer to enrichment. Has the President received the letter? Do you have any response to that?

MR. EARNEST: I haven't seen the letter, Jon, and I'm not aware of it, but we can get you a response. As a general matter, though, I will say that the United States continues to be actively engaged with our P5-plus-1 partners in conversations with Iran to address the broader international community's concerns about their nuclear program.

As a result of the interim agreement that's been put in place so far, Iran has rolled back key aspects of their nuclear program to allow for these conversations to continue. So we are pleased that the administration has been able to work closely with our partners in Congress to put in place the kind of sanctions regime that has taken a significant toll on the Iranian economy, has brought them to the negotiating table. And in the context of those negotiations, Iran has agreed in verifiable steps to roll back key aspects of their nuclear program.

However, that is different than ultimately resolving the broader international community's concerns about Iran's nuclear program. That's very difficult work, but that is work that continues to be underway. And the Secretary of State was engaged in that work over the weekend.

J.C.

Q As you may know, Josh, there are now private groups forming, like the Counter Extremism Project, who are trying to expose the secret funding sources for ISIL. What is the administration's position on private efforts of this nature?

MR. EARNEST: J.C., we welcome the efforts of non-governmental organizations and other outside observers. I know that the group that was announced over the weekend, or maybe this morning, is a group that has some bipartisan membership. And we're certainly gratified that here in the U.S., that we can work across party lines to try to confront that threat that's posed to counter violent extremism.

Q You don't see that might be a conflict with what the Department of Treasury is doing, or whatever?

MR. EARNEST: No, we don't see any reason that there wouldn't be an important role for non-governmental organizations to play to try to counter violent extremism. And there certainly is an opportunity for the administration and other law enforcement agencies to work with agencies in communities across the country to try to counter this threat.

Major.

Q Just to -- be sure what you just said -- the entrance to the White House is secure. Does that mean the door is locked now? (Laughter.)

MR. EARNEST: Major, what I'll tell you is that the door that you're referencing is a door that is used by tourists -- the thousands of tourists every day who tour the White House. I don't believe there are tours on Monday, so I don't know if that's true today. But on a regular basis, there are thousands of people that go in and out of that door. There are staffers here at the White House who are responsible for doing work, either in the East Wing or in the residence. They will occasionally use that door as well.

But I can tell you that after Friday night's incident, that when the door is not in use, that it will be secure.

Q Be locked?

MR. EARNEST: Yes.

Q Okay. Jeh Johnson just put out a statement urging the public not to jump to conclusions. This has obviously been an episode -- we have jumpers here all the time. You know that, I know that, anyone who's here. This one has sort of captured the public's imagination. Do you think there is something that the public should be calmer than it is about this, that it's maybe an anomaly? Maybe there are things that are just particularly unusual about this? Or do you think it actually does represent something that's bigger and broader and requires a much more sweeping assessment of what goes on here on a day-to-day basis?

MR. EARNEST: Well, more important than my opinion is the opinion of the Secret Service. And they have, as a result of the incident on Friday night, launched this broader review into the security posture here at the White House. And I'm confident that they will consider all of the factors that may have contributed to the situation, and ensure that our future ability to deal with these situations and to respond to them promptly will be strengthened as a result of the review.

Q Does the President have an opinion on whether there should be a second fence?

MR. EARNEST: The President is going to leave it up to the professionals at the United States Secret Service to determine the security posture that is necessary to both protect the First Family that lives here, but also to ensure that the White House remains the People's House.

Q The suspect's family said he did three tours of duty in Iraq, and there is some sense that he might have fallen through the cracks in the VA system and not had the kind of care that he either was obtaining or needs to have now and needed to have up until this episode. Has there been any request from the White House to the VA to sort of run down

his situation, find out where he was in the system, and perhaps if he had been either a victim of waiting list or any of the other problems, that clearly the White House was concerned about it and took several measures to address?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Major, let me say a couple of things. The first is, I'm hesitant to talk about the case of one individual, because the subject that we're discussing is currently in the midst of a criminal prosecution. So I wouldn't want to get ahead of that.

Let me just say, as a general matter, that the President has spoken on a number of occasions about the important commitment that the nation has and that he has as the Commander-in-Chief to ensuring that all of our veterans, particularly those who have served on numerous deployments to Iraq or Afghanistan, have access to the physical health and mental health benefits to which they're entitled. And there have, as you pointed out, a number of reforms that have already put in place at the VA to try to improve the ability of those individuals to have ready access to the benefits to which they're entitled. And I know that this is a top priority of the newly confirmed VA Secretary as he continues to determine -- continues the work necessary to determine what reforms are necessary. That continues to be a high priority, and it would be a high priority regardless of whether this incident on Friday night or not.

Q On "60 Minutes" last night, former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said it would have helped to have armed Syrian rebels two years ago, which was a recommendation made to the President by a good number of his national security advisors. Do you agree with that? And does the President have any regrets not doing that two years ago?

MR. EARNEST: We've been really clear, Major, about the challenge here, that the challenge of vetting elements of the Syrian opposition is difficult work. And the concern that the President had -- particularly early on, before these individuals could be vetted by national security professionals and some of our partners that have relationships in this part of the world -- is that our weapons and training could fall into the hands of individuals who don't share our goals and who don't share our interests and don't share the values of the United States of America.

What we have been engaged in is a longer-term effort to determine who are the Syrian opposition fighters that are fighting in Syria for their country and that are fighting for the right reasons, for the reasons that would promote the kind of inclusive government that the people of Syria would like to have.

Over the course of the last three years, we've made tremendous progress in learning about these individuals. This is not full-proof work here, but we've made progress, we've made strides in partnering with individuals and with elements of the Syrian opposition. And those are the elements that after three years of work in vetting and building relationships with them, that we feel like we can ramp up our training and assistance to them in a way that will counter the advance of ISIL in Syria.

Q But looking back on it -- I understand that; we've discussed this before. What would have been worse -- ISIL -- which we have now, which requires an enormous amount of work militarily and diplomatically to assemble this coalition -- self-financing, beheading of two Americans? What would have been worse? That, which we have now? Or a few weapons given two years ago leaking into different hands? I mean, I know it's hard to imagine that given all of its complexity, but you have something that is a legitimate threat to the region, possibly the United States, that's here now, that might have been stopped or slowed -- not according to me, but according to a former Defense Secretary that worked for this President, and many who advised him at the time. What would have been worse?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Major, I think the one element of your question that I want to raise is that I don't think that even Secretary Panetta would suggest that a few weapons would have dramatically altered the outcome here. I think what would have been required --

Q No, I mean, those would have leaked out because they would have been given to someone who would have been thoroughly vetted, is all I'm saying.

MR. EARNEST: I think the concern is that a significant investment of time and hardware would have been required with the hope -- again, not the conclusion, but with the hope that it could alter the outcome.

So we're not in a situation where we know for sure that providing additional weapons would have solved the problem. In fact, there is the significant concern that many people hold that providing a large chunk of weapons early on to a group of Syrians that were not thoroughly vetted would actually have done more harm than good.

So the President and his national security team are confident that in the midst of dealing with these very complicated set of variables, that at each turn a decision was made that recognized the centrality of American security as they were implemented.

Q Last question. We talked about this a little bit last week. How optimistic, or how much effort will the administration put in in New York this week to talking to the Russians about ISIL and trying to enlist their cooperation?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I've seen -- or at least I've read the reports of President Putin's comments.

Q -- some conversations yesterday that were of significant note with some heavyweight players in this administration.

MR. EARNEST: Well, I know that President Putin has been outspoken on this in expressing his concerns about the threat that's posed by ISIL to countries around the globe, including his.

So what we have demonstrated over the course of our relationship with Russia is that it's possible for us to have strenuous disagreements related to their behavior in certain parts of the world while being able to maintain some ongoing cooperation and collaboration

with them in other parts of the world. And our counterterrorism relationship with Russia, despite our very strong and vigorous difference as it relates to Ukraine, is ongoing.

Q Come on in, the water is warm.

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think that there is an opportunity for us to demonstrate some cooperation and coordination between the United States and Russia despite our differences on Ukraine. President Putin has made clear that he's concerned about the threat that's emanating from ISIL and the rest of the international community is, too.

Leslie.

Q Thanks, Josh. I was sort of taken aback -- in an earlier question, you were asked about the Islamic State --

MR. EARNEST: Oh, did I say something wrong, if you were taken aback?

Q You said you didn't have any response to the Islamic State recruitment video. I was just wondering if you had no response because you didn't want to engage. Could you elaborate a little bit on the official no response?

MR. EARNEST: I appreciate the opportunity to elaborate a little bit more, but I'm not going to. (Laughter.)

Christi.

Q Josh, could you draw the contrast as you see it between the President's contemplated course of action in Syria and the run-up to the Iraq war? I ask because some critics have drawn comparisons between the two. There's no imminent threat. There's no invitation from the sovereign nation. How do you see the President's approach as different from the one pursued by President Bush?

MR. EARNEST: Well, as it relates to the two examples that you cited, there was an invitation from the Iraqi government for American military participation and efforts to counter ISIL. So that has been part and parcel of the strategy. You will recall that the formation of an inclusive central government in Iraq was the linchpin of this broader strategy. And the decision that the President announced in the national address about a week and a half ago was predicated on the formation of a central government in Iraq.

So the involvement of the Iraqi government is important because the President doesn't want to fall into a pattern of making a mistake that was made in the previous conflict, which is that the United States was put in the position of essentially trying to deploy significant resources and significant personnel to try to address the security situation across the nation of Iraq. Thanks to the bravery and courage and service of our men and women in uniform, as well as some of our diplomats and intelligence professionals, significant gains were made in terms of trying to strengthen the security situation in Iraq, but what we saw was that those changes and those improvements did not endure because the Iraqi central government was not invested in them. Rather we saw the Iraqi central

government sort of lapse back into governing in the sectarian way that quickly exposed the divisions in that country that allowed ISIL to make dramatic gains across the countryside.

So that is one way in which the approach that the President has taken is different than the approach that was taken in the previous decade.

The other thing that I think is important for people to understand -- and this is not an unrelated point, but I will make it anyway because it's important -- the President is not contemplating committing 140,000 U.S. military personnel to go on the ground in Iraq. He does not contemplate columns of American tanks rolling across the desert seeking to occupy large swaths of territory inside of Iraq. The President believes it is the responsibility of the Iraqi people, the Iraqi government and the Iraqi security forces to provide for the security of their own country.

The Iraqi people can count on the U.S. military and a broader international coalition coming in behind them to support them as they take the fight to ISIL on the ground; that they can count on getting the kind of equipment and training that they need, even some tactical advice that they may need to wage this campaign against ISIL. They will do that with the full support of the American people, the American military, and the broader international community. But there should be no doubt about the fact that the President has determined that sending a large contingent of American ground troops in a combat role there is not in the best interest of the United States of America and it is not the way to get the desired outcome here.

Q That's helpful. Thank you. But the parallel that I would point out is that the President is talking about going forward with airstrikes in Syria, a sovereign nation, and like President Bush before him, is going to the U.N. and essentially asking world leaders to at least tacitly support that.

MR. EARNEST: Well, the principle as it relates to Syria is one that is central to this presidency. The President has made clear that he will actively deny a safe haven to those individuals and organizations that are seeking to do harm to the United States and our homeland. That is consistent with the approach that this administration has used as a counterterrorism strategy that we have used to deny a safe haven to extremist organizations in other parts of the world.

This is a strategy that involves building up the capacity of local forces. This is a strategy that involves supporting local governance structures. It is a strategy that involves building a broader international coalition. And it's a strategy that involves using the military might of the U.S. military to back up those local forces as they take the fight to extremist organizations that may have designs on attacking the United States or the U.S. homeland.

The examples that we've publicly discussed here are Yemen and Somalia. Each situation is very different, of course, but the strategy that the President is hoping to deploy has been successful in those two other places in mitigating the threat that is posed to the U.S. or

our interests around the globe, and we do expect that that strategy will be successful in Syria as well.

Angela.

Q On inversions, the President has made it clear that inversions are his top tax reform priority, and Secretary Lew has said that “regulation will be coming very, very soon.” Over the weekend he said that they’re putting the finishing touches on the regulation. Can you update us on the timing of that and what’s been holding it up, given how close it’s been for so long?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Angela, I will tell you that the top priority really is getting Congress to pass legislation that would close this loophole. There is precedent for Congress acting even shortly before an election to close a loophole related to inversions.

You will recall that the last time the United States Congress passed legislation addressing a loophole like this was actually in 2004. That was a law that passed with bipartisan support from the House of Representatives. It passed with bipartisan support in the United States Senate, and it was signed into law by a Republican President just a month or six weeks before Election Day. So there’s no reason that Congress shouldn’t be able to act to address this loophole in that timeframe.

The other thing I’ll point out is that the piece of legislation that was passed and signed into law in 2004 shortly before Election Day was also retroactive and it prevented companies from trying to take advantage of this loophole shortly before legislation was enacted. And we would like to see Congress pass a measure that would be retroactive to ensure that companies who are trying to game the system and beat Congress to the punchline here are not able to do so -- or at least they’re not able to benefit from it.

Now, separately, because Congress has so far not taken the kinds of concrete steps that we would like them to take, the United States Treasury, at the direction of the President, has been conducting a review of their own to determine if there’s anything within currently existing law that would allow them to reduce the financial incentive that currently exists for companies to exploit these loopholes. And again, the loopholes we’re talking about here are essentially allowing companies to renounce their American citizenship so they can avoid paying their fair share of taxes.

So this is work that’s been underway at the Treasury Department for a number of weeks now. This is something that’s being worked on by the experts over there. And my colleagues at the Treasury Department or the Secretary of the Treasury can give you the best assessment about the status of that work, and they can give you the best assessment about what kind of options they’re considering. But I saw the same report that you did that Treasury is expecting an announcement on this soon.

Q Do you expect it to be discussed this afternoon when the President meets with Secretary Lew?

MR. EARNEST: I'm not in a position to preview the meeting between the President and his Treasury Secretary. Obviously this is a very high priority. It's something they certainly have discussed previously in the context of these meetings. So I'm not in a position to preview the meeting, but I wouldn't be surprised if it came up.

Justin.

Q To follow up on that a little bit -- the President, when he was asked about it, said he wanted those recommendations as quickly as possible, which is very reminiscent of maybe immigration reform language, and so my question would be the same as on that. Do you guys expect that announcement before the midterm election?

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, this is a ruling that would be determined by the Treasury Department, so I'd refer you to them for timing. But I would be mindful of the guidance that the Treasury Secretary has already offered here, which is I think he anticipated that they would go very soon.

Q More generally, can you maybe just talk about how you guys, with a lot going on on foreign policy fronts, obviously the push on the ISIS legislation last week and the U.N. this week -- there's maybe a month and a week until Election Day. Are we going to start hearing more from you guys about just straight-up midterm elections? And separately, I think a return to the economy -- have you guys talked about how that is a big part of your midterm effort?

MR. EARNEST: While I don't have any scheduling announcements to make from this podium today, I can tell you that the President has talked about why he believes it's so important for Americans to participate in the electoral process, particularly in the midterm elections that are upcoming. The President has talked wistfully about the fact that this is essentially the last election, which he has such a clear, direct stake in the outcome as an elected official. So the President has placed a priority on supporting Democratic candidates who are on the ballot.

The President for months now has been traveling across the country to raise money in support of those candidates and in support of political committees that will benefit those candidates.

In the context of those events, principally, the President has made what I think is a pretty persuasive case about the determination of this administration and Democrats in Congress to advance the kinds of policies that will benefit middle-class families. That is the President's priority when it comes to his domestic policymaking agenda. And the President does believe there is a clear choice in this election between Democratic candidates who are supportive of those priorities that benefit the middle class and those policies that are advanced principally by Republicans that benefit the wealthy with the hope that those benefits will then trickle down to benefit middle-class families. The President doesn't believe that that approach has worked in the past. He doesn't believe that that approach will be successful this time.

So he is hopeful that the American public will engage in this debate, will participate in the elections, and will be supportive of Democratic candidates who are supportive of the middle-class agenda that the President himself has put forward.

Q Putting aside that obviously the President has to balance all sorts of things on his agenda and the pressing foreign policy threats are a part of that, is there concern among you guys, since you haven't seen poll numbers rebound on the economy even as sort of the underlying trend numbers look better, that foreign policy has drowned out some of that economic messaging or some of the President's midterm push? Because his overall numbers are also still struggling.

MR. EARNEST: Well, Justin, I'll tell you that the President believes that his top priority as the Commander-in-Chief is the safety and security of the American public. And the President is confident that as he makes decisions to secure the homeland and to protect American interests at home and around the world that that is the most important part of his job. And we'll leave it to you guys to analyze the polls. But the President is confident that he, over the course of the next two years that he remains in office, that regardless of what the polls say, his top priority is going to be the safety and security of the American public.

Steven.

Q Yes, Josh, does the White House have a ballpark estimate at this point for how much the war is going to cost, the war against ISIL?

MR. EARNEST: Steven, I don't have an estimate on that. I know that we're interested in having an open dialogue with Congress to ensure that our military has the resources necessary to carry out the mission that the President has laid out. We are also actively engaged with our partners around the globe for ways that they can participate in this broader effort. And as we discussed at the briefing last Friday, one way that countries can participate in this coalition and contribute to this broader effort is financially, to support the broader global community's -- or the international community's efforts to take the fight to ISIL.

So in terms of a specific number, I don't have one in front of me now. You can try and check with OMB to see if they have a ballpark figure they can give you.

Q There have been outside experts who've said it might be \$1 or \$2 billion a month. I don't know if you want to comment on that number. Also, is the President, when he goes to the U.N., is he specifically going to be making these asks of these other countries and saying, if you can't send planes, send a check?

MR. EARNEST: I'm not sure if he'll put it exactly that way. I do think that the President will be engaged with world leaders about how they can contribute to this broader international coalition.

I would remind you the President has got a pretty aggressive agenda when he's at the United Nations General Assembly. He's giving a speech focused on climate change, and he'll discuss the leadership role the United States has played in reducing the causes of climate change. He's going to lead this meeting of the National [United Nations] Security Council to talk about foreign fighters. There are also some events that are dedicated to building up civil society in countries around the globe as institutions that can support effective government that actually reflects the will of the people.

So the President has got a pretty wide-ranging agenda when he's at the U.N. But I do anticipate that he'll have a number of conversations with world leaders that will include this topic.

Alexis.

Q Josh, two questions. You were just talking about the midterms and you were saying that the President is trying to articulate that there is a clear difference between the parties on policies related to the middle class. Does he believe that there's a clear difference between the two parties, as voters go to the polls, on the issues of foreign policy? And if he does see a distinction, how would he describe that distinction?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think that's a difficult thing to assess, Alexis, from here because there are -- we've heard a variety of opinions that have been expressed by Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill. I can tell you -- I'll just repeat that we are gratified that Democrats and Republicans put aside their partisan differences last week. And we saw a majority of Democrats in the House, a majority of Republicans in the House, a majority of Republicans in the Senate and a majority of Democrats in the Senate all vote together to approve giving the administration the needed authority to ramp up our assistance to the Syrian opposition. That was a welcome development and I think a welcome indication that members of the Senate, at least in that one instance, were willing to put aside their partisan interests and focus on the interests of the country. And I think that is a credit to the men and women in the United States Congress in this instance that they were able to do that.

That certainly will be the approach that the President will take even in the run-up to some hotly contested midterm elections.

Q The other question I have is about the training that you've been talking about. Because the rebel training school, or whatever it's going to be called, in Saudi Arabia is going to get up and running -- training rebel university -- whatever -- (laughter.)

MR. EARNEST: It sounds like you've got some ideas. I'd encourage you to contact the Department of Defense with them.

Q An acronym, I'm sure. Can you explain how soon that will get up and running, whether the individuals who are vetted and brought there, maybe some 5,000 to be trained, will be wearing uniforms of some particular country? Will they be wearing Syrian uniforms?

And also, will U.S. taxpayers, through the efforts that Congress just approved, be offering them a subsistence to live? Because, as we know, one of the arguments about why ISIL is doing well in recruitment is that they offer a subsistence, they pay their recruits a lot more than the Syrian army -- Free Syrian Army is able to pay. So can you explain how soon -- how it will get up and running? Will they be wearing uniforms? And are they going to be paid to live?

MR. EARNEST: It sounds like you're asking me for the dress code at rebel university.

You're asking a lot of legitimate questions, but they're along the lines of the kinds of operational details that the Department of Defense will have. So I'd encourage you to check with the Department of Defense. There are a couple of things I can tell you, though.

I can tell you that this a priority of the administration; that the President made clear when he was talking to Congress that it was urgent for Congress to grant the administration this authority because we had already seen the kind of commitment from regional partners to -- participating in this broader training effort. And the President wanted to strike while the iron is hot -- essentially take these regional governments up on their commitments to be actively involved in these training programs.

So for example, we saw the government of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia announced a willingness to host a training site. And so we obviously want to work closely with the Saudis to advance our goals along those lines. So rest assured the Department of Defense and the staff who is responsible for ramping up our training and assistance to the Syrian opposition is already hard at work on doing that.

In terms of the specific timetable, I'd urge you to contact the Department of Defense about that. As it relates to specific recruits -- as I mentioned to Major's question -- over the course of the last three years, the United States and our partners in the region have been vetting the individuals and elements of the Syrian opposition. So we do have established relationships with some of these groups that could be useful in terms of this broader training effort.

But again, in terms of the timing for when those individual would start, which uniforms they would be wearing and what sort of compensation they'll receive, I'd refer you to the Department of Defense who is responsible for making those operational decisions.

Connie.

Q Couple of questions. Do you have any update on the Afghans who have disappeared up in Martha's Vineyard?

MR. EARNEST: I don't have an update on that. I'd refer you to the Department of Defense on that.

Q And there was a story a few weeks ago about some planes that were hijacked or disappeared -- some passenger planes. Do you have anything on that?

MR. EARNEST: I didn't see that story. Sorry.

Q And one last thing. The Congress has passed some resolutions about anti-Semitism; you've got the Jewish High Holy Days coming up this week. Is the White House concerned about added terrorism in this country? Are you taking the actions to protect not just the Jewish community but the Christian community also?

MR. EARNEST: Connie, I can tell you that the United States and our law enforcement professionals here in the United States are constantly vigilant about threats that may be related to American citizens and to the American homeland. And our national security professionals are constantly reviewing our security posture to make sure that we're taking all the steps necessary to keep the American people safe.

Zeke.

Q Josh, the President is obviously a sports fan and his administration has called for this -- been a lot about sort of tax reform over the past couple of years. Does the President believe that the National Football League should be a nonprofit and should not pay taxes?

MR. EARNEST: I've heard the President express a lot of views as it relates to professional football. (Laughter.) Most of them relate to the coaching decision made by the coaching staff of the Chicago Bears. But I have not heard him weigh in on the tax policies as it relates to the National Football League.

Q -- estimate the President would want to see, as part of a broader -- as part of the conversation around some broader tax reform that may or may not or may never happen on Capitol Hill.

MR. EARNEST: I'll have to be honest with you, I'm not sure what impact this particular tax benefit would have on the broader national revenue stream. I know that the tax impact of the inversions issue that we've been talking about is on the order of several billion dollars a year. So this is -- that's why this particular issue has emerged as a rather high priority of this administration.

I don't believe that the price tag for the NFL tax benefits is quite that large. If it is, then maybe we should have a conversation about it, but I don't think it is.

Q Okay. And on a different subject -- earlier today, administration officials said that at least some of the foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq have come back to the United States. I was wondering how many of those is the administration tracking? And that also they were under active surveillance by the FBI -- I was wondering if you could comment on that.

MR. EARNEST: As it relates to the number, I'm not in a position to confirm numbers like that from here. You're obviously asking about some relatively sensitive intelligence information that I couldn't discuss from the podium.

Just as a general matter, let me say that the United States and our law enforcement officials here, as well as our national security officials, are very focused on the threat that is posed by foreign fighters. Again, these are individuals from the U.S. or the West that have traveled to Syria or the region and taken up arms alongside ISIL. And the concern is that they could return to the U.S. and carry out acts of violence here.

We are working very closely with our international partners to try to mitigate this threat, to keep eyes on these individuals and to monitor their movements. We've also been working closely with Interpol, the law enforcement organization, to track the movements of these individuals. So this is an interagency response to a significant threat that we're watching closely.

Bob.

Q Josh, you alluded to it a short time ago, but arm-twisting is a term of art that's used on Capitol Hill. But when it comes to this ISIL coalition, would you admit there are some nations that still need to be cajoled, pushed along, encouraged to join this coalition, to do more, to do their part, to do something at all?

MR. EARNEST: Bob, we're very pleased with the response that we've gotten based on the individual conversations that the President and other senior members of the administration have had with their counterparts around the world.

The broader international community recognizes the threat that is posed by ISIL, and they recognize the danger that could ensue if ISIL is able to establish a safe haven in Syria. The threat that they pose is not just to Iraq -- although the Iraqi political leadership has indicated that they're very concerned about ISIL using Syria as a base of operation to launch attacks and violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of their country.

We've also seen governments in the region -- understandably, these are even Muslim-led -- Sunni Muslim-led governments -- indicate that they are concerned about the instability and violence that ISIL is wreaking in that region of the world, and they're justifiably concerned this is on the doorstep of these countries, terrible acts of violence, and individuals who are being recruited and radicalized in a way that is not in the best interest of these countries.

So it shouldn't be a surprise to you that we have seen the willingness from countries in the region to actively engage in this. And because of the threat that's posed by foreign fighters -- that Zeke raised -- we're seeing countries around the world approach conversations with the United States and the broader international community wanting to know what they can do to assist as we degrade and work to ultimately destroy ISIL.

Q I guess I'm trying to get a better verb, if you will, about what the President is going to be doing in New York.

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think the President will be having a number of conversations with world leaders at the U.N. and he'll be discussing a wide range of issues while he is there, from everything from climate change to some good governance issues. But certainly when

the President talks about issues related to foreign terrorist fighters and other efforts to build a broader international coalition, we are optimistic that he'll continue to get the kind of feedback that we've gotten already, as it relates to individuals' willingness to participate in this international coalition to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.

Richard.

Q Thank you, Josh. You're talking about the leading role the U.S. played in climate change. And so there were hundreds of thousands of demonstrators in New York City, all over the U.S., all over the world. How does the White House judge and see those demonstrations this weekend? And some signs in New York City were very critical of the administration, saying not much in the end was done during the last six years, even if you say the U.S. has played a leading role. People don't seem to view this, or people don't seem to be conscious of this.

MR. EARNEST: Well, Richard, let me say a couple of things. The first is, as you know, the President will be addressing the climate summit tomorrow, where he'll speak to the tremendous progress the U.S. has made under his Climate Action Plan to cut carbon pollution, partner with the private sector to advance clean energy solutions and promote energy efficiency, deploy more renewable energy and build resilience to climate impacts in American communities.

He'll also discuss the role of the United States in leading on the international stage, and will call on other leaders to work toward a strong global framework to cut emissions.

In addition, the President will commit to redoubling our efforts to help vulnerable populations around the world prepare for the kinds of climate impacts that we can't avoid. To that end, the President will announce a suite of planned tools that will harness the unique scientific and technological capabilities of the United States to help vulnerable populations around the world strengthen their climate resilience. So we'll have some more details on that tomorrow.

The President in the context of his Climate Action Plan has laid out a pretty aggressive agenda to take the kinds of steps that are so critical to protecting the public health and public safety of the American people, to reduce the causes of climate change, and to try to mitigate the impacts of climate change on our population and particularly in some populations that are in cities that are more vulnerable to some of the more common impacts of climate change.

So the President has played a leading role in this, and the President does hope that the kinds of steps that he has already taken here in the U.S. will serve as a model for significant commitments from leaders of other countries to take similarly important steps to confront the challenge of climate change.

Q -- demonstrators are a sign for the White House that the people are getting involved, are conscious that something has to be done, something has been done, something more has to be done?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I do think that the demonstrations in New York over the weekend were an indication that there was a lot of support at the grassroots level all across this country for important steps that can reduce the causes of global climate change. And the President is pleased to see that there are citizens in this country who are willing to give voice to the concerns that they have about the causes of climate change and is pleased to have their support for some of the steps that he has already announced for reducing some of the impacts of climate change.

Bill Press, I'll give you the last one.

Q Wow.

MR. EARNEST: A lot of pressure. Let's make it a good one here.

Q I want to follow through on something that Steven asked. He asked you, what was the cost of the war, and you didn't challenge the word "war." So do you accept that what we're talking about is a new war in the Middle East, in Syria and Iraq?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Bill, we talked about this a little bit over the course of the last 10 days or so.

Q But I haven't heard you yet use the word "war."

MR. EARNEST: I have. I have a couple of times, because we did have a little bit of back-and-forth on this. But you're raising an important issue and so I will restate it for you. It is the view of this administration and of the United States that ISIL has declared war on the broader international community. And what the President is doing, as he is doing what is expected of the American President, is that he is building and leading in an international coalition to take the fight to ISIL. And that means that the international community is at war with ISIL and the United States is at war with ISIL in the same way that we're at war with al Qaeda and its affiliates around the globe.

Q It's not just a counterterrorism operation, not just a police operation or police action - it's a war.

MR. EARNEST: Well, what we're talking about Bill is we're talking about a counterterrorism strategy that will apply to this situation that we've successfully applied in other places. And what's important for everybody to understand, particularly your listeners, is that the conflict that the President is talking about and the strategy that the President is talking about is very different than the strategy that was pursued in the previous conflict in Iraq. That we're not talking about the deployment of hundreds -- of 140,000 American troops to roll tanks across the desert and secure and occupy large swaths of desert land in Iraq. That's not what we're contemplating here.

What we're contemplating is a counterterrorism strategy that's predicated on strengthening the capacity of local forces to take the fight to ISIL, backing them up with a broader international coalition, and where necessary, backing them up with American airpower to take the fight to ISIL to ultimately root them out of Iraq in a way that will

allow the Iraqi people to stabilize the security situation in their country, but will also have the effect of denying ISIL a safe haven in Syria. And the President is concerned that if ISIL were to gain a safe haven in Syria that that could be very dangerous for the international community and could potentially even be dangerous for the U.S. homeland.

Q And in the interest of collegiality, I'm going to cede my second follow-up to Jen Bendery from Huffington Post.

MR. EARNEST: All right, that is very collegial of you, Bill.

Q Thanks, Bill Press. Senator Leahy told The New York Times recently that Obama's judicial nominee, Michael Boggs, doesn't have the votes in the committee and that he should withdraw. Does the White House plan to support -- does the White House plan to urge Michael Boggs to withdraw his nomination?

MR. EARNEST: No, as we've discussed a couple of times, the President believes that Mr. Boggs has the -- that Judge Boggs has the necessary qualifications to serve in this role. That's why the President nominated him. And in terms of Senator Leahy's comments to The New York Times, I hadn't seen them, I've heard about them, but ultimately the President believes that Judge Boggs has the qualifications necessary to serve in that very important role.

Q So the White House won't encourage him to withdraw now that the Chairman of the Judiciary Committee has said he doesn't have the votes?

MR. EARNEST: That's correct. We will not.

Thanks, guys.

END

1:36 P.M. EDT