

# Press Gaggle by Deputy Press Secretary Jennifer Friedman en route New Mexico

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The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

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Aboard Air Force One  
En Route New Mexico

\*\*Please see below for corrections, marked with an asterisk.

1:07 P.M. EDT

MS. FRIEDMAN: Hey, everyone, and welcome on board en route to New Mexico. As you know -- we'll do a little topper here on what you guys can expect for this weekend and then happy to take your questions.

So, as you know, the President and First Family are headed to Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico, and Yosemite National Park, where they'll be visiting two of the many national parks across our country that add great value for families and communities both recreationally and, of course, as critical economic drivers. And they're making this trip as part of our national celebration of the 100th anniversary of our National Park System.

So the President understands that no challenge poses a greater threat to future generations than climate change, and our conservation efforts need to meet this challenge. And that's why, since taking office, the President has protected more than 265 million acres of public lands and waters across the country

-- which is more than any other President in history -- and he's taken unprecedented steps to protect our planet for future generations.

In addition, the President has helped ensure that all Americans have greater opportunities to experience our nation's unparalleled national parks and monuments, including by launching the Every Kid in a Park initiative, which gives every fourth-grader and their families across the U.S. free access to visit the country's public lands and waters. And according to a report that was recently released by the National Park Service, more than 305 million people have visited America's national parks in 2015, which is an all-time record, with visitors spending \$16.9 billion in nearby local communities. So, obviously, this is an economic driver as well.

Specifically, in New Mexico, where we're headed now, where we have 15 national parks, 1.7 million visitors spent \$97 million in local economies, and that's supported over 1,500 jobs. And in California, where we have 27 national parks, 38.4 million visitors spent \$1.8 billion in local economies, and that supported 25,000 jobs.

So, obviously, in addition to the steps the President has taken to make it easier for Americans to get outside and enjoy the public lands, there's some economic value to the communities that these national parks serve as well. And so the President and First Family are looking forward to spending some time in the beautiful parks this weekend.

So with that, happy to take your questions.

Q Is there any reaction from the White House to the internal State Department memo that's very critical of the President's Syria policy?

MS. FRIEDMAN: Thanks, Darlene. So I haven't read the memo, so without getting into any specifics of it, I'll say sort of generally that the administration obviously welcomes a strong deliberation on foreign policy challenges that face our nation. And Secretary Kerry noted today that he looks forward to reading this memo. And, as the President has said and others have said, we're always open to new or different ideas when it comes to the challenges in Syria. And the President certainly expects a robust discussion to be brought forward.

And so, without getting into details of any national security meetings or discussions, I think it's fair to say we've taken a very close look at this over the course of the last few years and are certainly receptive to ways to facilitate our objectives.

But let me just be clear about what the President's approach has been. First, the President has always been clear that he doesn't see a military solution to the crisis in Syria. And that remains the case. And so we're focused on the threat posed by ISIL and terrorist groups in Syria. We've been relentless in pursuing ISIL and the external operations of leaders of al Qaeda in Syria, and working with a variety of local partners on the ground.

As you heard Brett McGurk say in briefing you all exactly a week ago, ISIL has lost 20 percent of their footprint in Syria. And, as we all know, Assad has brutalized his own people, and even his allies in Russia and Iran have acknowledged the imperative of a political transition. And so we're working with the international community on a Syrian-led transition process facilitated by the U.N. And, as you also know, Secretary Kerry has been working intensively to reduce the violence in Syria through a Cessation of Hostilities, both to ensure regular and routine humanitarian access, and then to set the conditions for a political transition. And since the cessation of hostilities went into effect, 820,000 Syrians have received aid.

So, needless to say, this is obviously tough work that our diplomats are pursuing every day. And I think it's not surprising that there would be a diversity of opinion on how best to achieve these goals in Syria.

Q Jen, has the President seen the memo or read it? Or will he have a chance to read it, or any interest in reading it?

MS. FRIEDMAN: I don't know that the President has seen the memo. I am not aware that he's read it. As you know, this is an internal memo to the State Department. Secretary Kerry noted he was looking forward to reading the memo.

Q Jen, you said that the White House has been open to all ideas on this, but you've also said that the White House -- the President believes there's no military solution. So I'm wondering if you can say whether or not the President is open to this idea of targeted strikes -- and if not, why not -- against the Syrian government.

MS. FRIEDMAN: I'll just reiterate that the President has been clear and continues to be clear that he doesn't see a military solution to the crisis in Syria. And so that doesn't mean that there shouldn't be discussions or a variety of conversations and a variety of opinions, but that fundamental principle still remains.

Q There are reports that the U.S. is putting a hold on the transfer of cluster bombs to Saudi Arabia because of civilian death over there. Can you confirm that is the case?

MS. FRIEDMAN: I don't have anything to confirm at this point, so I'll take that and let you know if we have anything on that for you.

Q Just one more on Syria. You said there's no military solution, but it seems that this memo is saying that -- not trying to provide a military solution, but using the military to strengthen the diplomatic process, sort of forcing Assad's hand

-- forcing him to be more honest in the diplomatic process. Is that something that the White House agrees with?

MS. FRIEDMAN: As I mentioned, I haven't read the memo so I'm not in a position to get into any of the specifics. We certainly welcome strong deliberation on these challenges generally, but the sort of principles that I outlined still remain the same.

Q Fifty-one people signed the memo. Does the White House find that embarrassing?

MS. FRIEDMAN: Look, I think, as Secretary Kerry said this morning, he looks forward to receiving and reviewing the memo. And I'd sort of refer you to the State Department to give some more details about the process of these dissent memos.

But as I understand it, this is an existing official vehicle that's in place to allow State Department employees to convey alternative views and perspectives on policy issues. And so they might have more to say on that.

Q And is Secretary Kerry -- you said he's open to meeting with these people. Would it be something that the President would be open to as well, to meeting with this group of State Department people?

MS. FRIEDMAN: I don't have any sort of meetings or possible meetings to outline at this point. But for now, again, I'd refer you to what Secretary Kerry said on this this morning.

Q I'm wondering if the White House or the President has been made aware of the killing of the Parliament member in Britain, which earlier reports suggest could be a -- may have been carried out by someone who was sort of -- had anti-Muslim sentiments in Britain. And I'm wondering if the White House had a reaction at all to that, what was happening there.

MS. FRIEDMAN: Thanks, David. So we offer our most sincere and heartfelt condolences to the family and loved ones of UK member of Parliament Jo Cox, who was brutally murdered yesterday in the course of doing her public duty. And obviously, this is a tragedy and our hearts go out to the family. And in terms of the investigation or any of the specifics you're asking about regarding this terrible crime, we'd refer you to the UK authorities who we understand are already investigating this heartbreaking incident.

Q And as for the Deputy Crown Prince meeting, do you have a readout of that meeting with the President?

MS. FRIEDMAN: In fact, I do, which -- as you know, this meeting wrapped up a little bit before we took off today.

So President Obama met this morning in the Oval Office with His Royal Highness Mohammad Bin Salman of Saudi Arabia to continue discussions that they'd begun in April at the U.S. Gulf Cooperation Council Summit in Riyadh. The President expressed appreciation for Saudi Arabia's contributions to the campaign against ISIL. Reviewing recent Iraqi gains against ISIL, the President and Deputy Crown Prince discussed steps to support the Iraqi people, including increased Gulf support to fund urgent humanitarian and stabilization needs.

On Syria, they reaffirmed the importance of supporting the cessation of hostilities and a political transition away from Assad. The President and Deputy Crown Prince also agreed to build support for Libya's Government of National Accord. And with regard to Yemen, the President welcomed Saudi Arabia's commitment to concluding a political settlement of the conflict and of GCC support to address urgent humanitarian needs and rebuild the country. And, more broadly, the President and Deputy Crown Prince discussed Iran's destabilizing activities and agreed to explore avenues that could lead to de-escalation of tensions. They also discussed the important role Saudi Arabia can play in addressing extremist ideology.

Finally, the President commended the Deputy Crown Prince's commitment to reform of the Kingdom's economy, and underscored strong U.S. support for achieving the recently announced Vision 2030 goals. The Deputy Crown Prince underscored Saudi Arabia's strong support for the Paris agreement and welcomed cooperation with the United States on clean energy issues. And the President and Deputy Crown Prince reaffirmed the strategic partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia.

Q Does the President think that the Deputy Crown Prince's economic plan to wean the Kingdom off oil is feasible?

MS. FRIEDMAN: So, Roberta, as you know, the President's economic team, the National Economic Council, along with a number of Secretaries -- Treasury Secretary Lew, Commerce Secretary Pritzker, Energy Secretary Moniz -- also met with the Deputy Crown Prince yesterday, and both sides agreed on the importance of both economic diversification, expanding private sector employment opportunities and renewable and natural gas development, and sort of the beneficial role that U.S. companies could play in implementing Saudi reform objectives. And so all those things were discussed yesterday.

Q Yesterday, the President was talking about sort of national solidarity in a time of crisis. He had a Republican senator on board Air Force One. But back in Washington, his opponent in the 2008 election essentially, initially seemed to blame the President personally for what happened in Orlando. And I wondered if the President was aware of what Senator McCain said, if he understood his sort of longer explanation afterward or whether he believes that that kind of rhetoric is out of bounds in any way.

MS. FRIEDMAN: So, David, last week, you'll recall a certain Republican presidential candidate made a similar comment, and at that time, when you all asked Josh for his reaction, he said we're not going to be distracted by small things. And so that applies to this situation as well.

Q You think it's small? You think it's small what one of the leading Republicans in saying in terms of what the -- about the President's policies?

MS. FRIEDMAN: I'm saying what the President is focused on is exactly what he was talking about yesterday when he was in Orlando visiting with the victims and -- the families of victims and some of the survivors of the horrible attack last weekend. And at that moment, he was explaining to everyone that we're going to have to all work together at all levels of government, across political lines, and do more to stop these killers who want to terrorize us. And he was sending a powerful message.

Q Let me ask about another Republican -- the Governor of Maryland, Larry Hogan, has now said publicly he will not support Donald Trump and not vote for Donald Trump. I'm wondering if the President, who has spoken out very forcefully about how he sees Donald Trump and the dangers associated with electing someone like that to the highest office in the land, would the President in any way try to reach out to governors like Larry Hogan or others, Republicans who are willing to speak out against their standard bearer in any way, sort of offer his support to them or sort of in any way show a partnership with those kind of governors, or even other Republicans.

MS. FRIEDMAN: As you know, the President obviously has had a number of things to say on this topic generally, and I think you can expect that he will continue to make the case for the policies that Democrats are putting forward and their vision for the country, and

the importance of what's at stake in this election. And I think you can expect to see that in the weeks and months ahead. I don't have any specific previews of potential support of candidates that he'll be supporting.

Q In the readout you mentioned the President talking about combating extremist ideology within Saudi Arabia. That's something that Secretary Clinton said in a recent speech, that the Saudis need to do more to combat terrorist ideology and financing. Is that something the President brought up explicitly during this meeting?

MS. FRIEDMAN: I don't have any more details beyond these topics that they discussed that I referenced here in this readout. So I'll let you know if we have any additional details.

Q Yesterday the President made a powerful statement in his remarks in Orlando about combating discrimination against women and discrimination against the LGBT community even when it occurs overseas. And I'm wondering if he brought up those issues with the Deputy Crown Prince today.

MS. FRIEDMAN: I don't know if that came up in his conversation today, specifically. Obviously you heard the President reference this just yesterday and a number of other times, and that's something that is a priority for him in general. But I don't know if that came up in this specific conversation.

Q It's been a year since churchgoers were killed in Emanuel Church in South Carolina. And we all remember the President when he went there and delivered the eulogy and saying -- are there any plans for the President to acknowledge that anniversary in any way today?

MS. FRIEDMAN: So, Darlene, I don't have any schedule updates or anything like that for you on this today. Obviously the President spoke at great length yesterday and then earlier in the week as well -- yesterday, in particular, to the families of many of the victims of Orlando and to a number of the survivors, and had spent what was I think a very emotional and moving couple of hours just talking with them and expressing his support and condolences. And so I think that certainly applies to many of the families of the victims and other survivors from a number of these tragedies.

There's obviously, quite sadly, and the President noted, more than just the tragedy in Orlando. This is just the latest example. And so I think his words yesterday would be applicable to a broad range of these tragedies.

Q The BREXIT vote is about a week away. There are several polls showing that Britons are sort of leaning towards voting to leave the EU. Is the President worried about that, and can we expect him to do anything more in the next week to express his opinion?

MR. FRIEDMAN: I know you've heard the President talk about this generally when he was visiting the UK in April, where he expressed his views pretty clearly. I would note that in light of the tragedy in the UK \*today [yesterday] with a member of Parliament who was brutally murdered, the campaign there has been suspended -- the BREXIT campaign

there has been suspended for the day. So I wouldn't expect we would have anything in particular to say today, and certainly nothing beyond what the President expressed pretty clearly in April when he was there.

Q The AP is out with new numbers that 234 women, pregnant women in the U.S. have reported cases of Zika, and a number of incidents of microcephaly have been reported as a result of that. Understanding that legislation is still held up in Congress, with the summer months approaching and these mosquitoes with the Zika virus coming to the U.S. and landing here, affecting U.S. citizens, is there anything more that the President can do to speed up this funding, or anything he can do aside from what's being held up in Congress?

MS. FRIEDMAN: Well, that's a really good question and it's a really important question for Congress to answer -- which is, why it's taken more than four months to approve the request that we submitted for \$1.9 billion in funding to make sure that we have what we need to combat the Zika virus. And as you note, as mosquito season is upon us and certainly in certain regions of the country more so than others, it's becomes absolutely all that more critical that Congress act quickly to give states and local communities the funding they need to address this significant public health issue.

And so I think you've heard the President make this case and lay out why that's necessary. But it's not just the President. You've heard his public health experts outline in great detail what it is they need the money for, again, particularly in many of our local states and -- our local communities and states across the country.

And so it's absolutely time for Congress to act. And I think the question should be, why haven't they done so yet.

Q Can I ask a couple more about this trip that we're on right now? I'm just trying to understand -- I understand the tie-in to the national parks' 100th anniversary. But is this trip also something like that the First Family wanted to do and the First Lady or the daughters expressed an interest in, and the timing is such that it coincides with the 100th anniversary? Or is this a trip because it's the 100th anniversary, the First Family is making this trip to make a point specifically?

MS. FRIEDMAN: So I think both things can be true, that they wanted to visit our nation's national parks, which, as you know, the First Family has done in the past. And this is, again, something that is critically important during the national celebration of the 100th anniversary of the National Parks System.

Q But is this a trip based on Malia's graduation, or summer break -- you know, it's summer break time, we're going on a family trip, and that's what sort of the genesis of it is? I mean, how long ago was this being talked about as something that the Obamas wanted to do and being looked into, I guess?

MS. FRIEDMAN: I don't think it should be any surprise that this is the kind of trip and activity that the President and First Family would be interested in doing, as they have done so before. I think what is important is the President's record when it comes to

conservation and the importance of climate change. These are issues that I think you'll hear the President talk about a little bit --

Q I guess a better way to ask it, is this trip -- if I'm not mistaken, when they go to Hawaii or things like that, or maybe Martha's Vineyard, the rental compound where the First Family stays is paid for I think by the family to some degree. And I just wonder, is this a personal trip, or is this a policy trip? And how is it being funded. For example, there are accommodations in parks, for example, overnight. Is that more of a family thing and are they paying for it? Or is this more of a policy-oriented trip?

MS. FRIEDMAN: I don't have those details in terms of who's paying. I can see if there is anything additional we can get you on that. But I can tell you that the President, as he has done many times in the past, is going to be highlighting not just the record of progress we've seen in terms of conservation efforts and climate change, but what more we need to do. And I think particularly for the Every Kid in a Park initiative, which I something you've heard him talk about before, which is an initiative that he's been working on for many years, is all the more important this year -- recognizing the 100th anniversary of our national parks.

Q The last one on that is, I know this trip has been planned well before the past week or so. In light of the tragedy, I'm wondering if the White House thought or considered in any way postponing or cancelling the trip. Was that discussed? If yes, what was the conclusion on that? If no, is there any particular reason why not?

MS. FRIEDMAN: So, look, David, I think the President's response and the entire administration's response to the tragedy of last weekend has been pretty evident throughout the week. If you recall, last Sunday, as soon as we heard about the \*remarks [attack], the President went out and talked about exactly what he knew, updated the American people on the tragic events. On Monday, as you recall, he was briefed by his FBI Director and a number of national security officials, and made sure to give the American people an update about we're doing regarding this tragedy. On Tuesday, he met with his broader national security team at the Treasury Department, talked about our ongoing efforts to counter ISIL around the world. And then on Thursday, the President went to Orlando, and as we just discussed, spent a good deal of time with the families and survivors there.

So I think the President's reaction to the tragedy last week is pretty clear.

Q Is he going to be doing any interviews while he's visiting any of these national parks?

MS. FRIEDMAN: We'll let you know if we have anything like that planned for the weekend.

Q -- on how the President will spend his time in the park, at Yosemite, in particular, after tomorrow? I mean, there's a lot to do and see there.

MS. FRIEDMAN: As I think I mentioned, and you all know, you should expect you'll hear from the President at some point tomorrow in Yosemite, and you'll have a chance for him to talk a little bit about his efforts in this area and what he's doing. And then I think you can expect there will be a little bit of private family time to experience all the park has to offer themselves.

All right, week ahead. So on Monday, the President will deliver remarks at the SelectUSA Investment Summit at the Washington Hilton in Washington, D.C.

On Tuesday, the President will travel to the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, where he'll visit with wounded servicemembers.

On Wednesday, the President will attend meetings at the White House.

On Thursday, the President will travel to San Jose, California, to participate in the Global Entrepreneurship Summit, which is the seventh installment of the summit and final of his presidency. And this will showcase America's diverse entrepreneurial spirit and feature entrepreneurs from across the globe. The President will remain overnight in San Jose.

And then on Friday, the President will participate in the Global Entrepreneurship Summit before traveling to Seattle, Washington, where he'll attend an event for Governor Jay Inslee in a DCCC event. And then the President will remain overnight in Seattle. And then on Saturday, he'll return to Washington.

Q A White House-organized summit?

MS. FRIEDMAN: It is the White House in conjunction with partners. We can get you some additional information about who is actually organizing that.

Q Do you know, is he leaving on Saturday morning then to Washington? I'm sorry, Jen - - do you know the timing when he comes back?

MS. FRIEDMAN: Next week?

Q Next week, yes.

MS. FRIEDMAN: I don't have the exact timing, so we'll make sure to get you more details as soon as that's nailed down.

Okay. Thank you, everyone.

END

1:30 P.M. EDT