

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest, Deputy NSA for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes, Senior Advisor Brian Deese and Deputy NSA for International Economics Wally Adeyemo, 8/29/2016

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****Please see below for corrections, marked with asterisks.**

1:40 P.M. EDT

MR. EARNEST: Good afternoon, everybody. It's nice to see you all. Happy Monday.

As advertised, I am joined by several members of the President's senior staff to discuss with you the President's travels over the next 10 days or so. To my immediate right is Ben Rhodes, the President's Deputy National Security Advisor. Ben will provide you an overview of the schedule and some of the topline priorities for the trip.

To his right, you guys know Brian Deese, the President's Senior Advisor, who has been leading many of our efforts on climate change, and there's been some important work that the President has been doing and will be focused on over the course of this trip, both here in the United States and overseas. Brian has been at the forefront of those efforts and can talk to you about that.

And then to his right is the President's Deputy National Security Advisor for International Economics, Wally Adeyemo. And Wally, before he came to the White House, did a significant stint at the Treasury Department. And Wally can give you a sense of some of the work that has gone into preparing for the G20 meeting in China and he'll provide some valuable historical context about the important work that has been done at the G20 over the last seven years, since President Obama has been in office, and discuss how the United States and the world have benefitted from those efforts.

So with that long windup, what we'll do is each of these gentlemen will deliver some opening remarks at the top and then they'll stick around for 15 minutes or so to take your questions on these topics.

So, Ben, with that, why don't I turn it over to you?

MR. RHODES: Great. Thanks, Josh. Let me just start by giving a bit of an overview of the trip and the current expected schedule. And let me just begin by saying also that we see this trip as really bringing together a number of the President's top priorities really for the last seven and a half years.

First of all, there will be a significant focus, particularly on the front end of the trip, on the efforts that we've been engaged in to confront climate change. There will also be a significant focus on the global economy through the G20. And then, of course, this is the President's 10th trip to the Asia Pacific region, and the rebalance of the Asia Pacific has been a centerpiece of our foreign policy. And the trip will give him an opportunity to once again make the case for America's focus on the Asia Pacific, to make the case for TPP as a centerpiece of our economic and strategic leadership in the region, and to address some of the very pressing issues that are going to be on the agenda. The summit is including maritime issues and the South China Sea.

So, again, I think three big pieces of the presidency are going to be front and center here through climate change, the global economy and the Asia Pacific region. And I think the schedule will illustrate that.

Brian will give you greater detail on the energy and climate events. As you know, we'll be departing on Wednesday morning and he'll have an initial stop in Nevada, where he will be speaking at the annual Lake Tahoe Summit with Senator Harry Reid there. And then that evening in Hawaii he will address leaders from the Pacific Island Conference of Leaders and the IUCN World Conservation Congress. And this is the first time that the United States has hosted the World Conservation Congress -- an important opportunity to bring together not just Pacific island leaders who have been a motivating factor around the urgency of action against climate change, but also conservation advocates from around the world. And Brian will speak in greater detail to his plans there.

Thursday, he will travel to Midway, where he will be able to speak to the latest marine national monument that I will leave it to Brian to pronounce and describe to you, but I think we will be bringing together through these three events both our domestic and international climate efforts and conservation efforts. The United States has been leading at home and we've been leading around the world in the pursuit of global action against climate change.

Following the trip to Midway, he will depart on the morning of September 2nd for China. And then that afternoon and evening in China, he will be engaged in the bilateral program with President Xi Jinping. And this will be on Saturday, September 3rd, China time, because we will skip forward by a day. And we expect that he'll have both an extensive bilateral meeting, and then be hosted for a small dinner by President Xi Jinping as has been practiced at their previous meetings. And this will build on the work that we've done in our previous travel to Beijing, which included the historic breakthrough announcement on cooperation on climate change and also the engagements we've had here in Washington and Sunnylands with President Xi Jinping.

I think we'll be reviewing all of the issues that have been front and center in the U.S.-China relationship for the last seven and a half years. On the positive side, we'll be able to review the progress we've made on the global economy, on climate change, our shared efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons through the Iran deal, our shared concern about the situation on the Korean Peninsula.

Of course, we'll also be addressing differences, as we always do with China, whether it relates to cyber issues, some of the economic practices that we have raised concerns about, some of the tensions around maritime issues in the South China Sea and, of course, our longstanding differences on human rights as well. But, again, I think this is going to be the last occasion of this sort for the President to spend several hours with his Chinese counterpart and to review the state of U.S.-China relations and to try to see where we can make progress, and working together on areas of common interest or bridging some of the differences that have been characteristic of the relationship. So that will be the program for Saturday, September 3rd.

Then, on the morning of Sunday, September 4th, in advance of the G20 Summit, we expect that the President will be able to have some bilateral meetings. We certainly anticipate that one of those will be with President Erdogan of Turkey. President Obama will want to discuss obviously the circumstances in Turkey since the attempted coup, as well as our counter-ISIL campaign and our efforts to promote greater stability in Syria and to respond to the refugee crisis. We anticipate there will be additional bilateral meetings and we'll keep you posted as they are scheduled.

Then the President will move into the G20 schedule, and I'll leave it to Wally to review the sessions and the agenda. That begins, again, on the afternoon of Sunday the 4th, and continues throughout the day on Monday the 5th. And it will conclude the President's time in China with his press conference at the end of the G20. And, again, we'll keep you updated on any additional bilateral meetings that are scheduled.

On the evening of Monday, September 5th, the President will fly to Laos. A few words about the program in Laos. First of all, this is the first-ever U.S. presidential visit to Laos. It's a truly historic event for U.S.-Lao relationships and for the people and country of Laos. We obviously have a very difficult history with Laos, but given our increased focus on the Asia Pacific, given our attendance at the ASEAN and East Asia Summit meetings and also given this President's commitment to reach out to countries with whom we've had complicated histories, we see this as a real opportunity to advance the U.S.-Laos relationship, to begin to build a real working partnership that can benefit both of our peoples. And, again, I think the President's program in Laos will demonstrate that.

We will begin on Tuesday, September 6th, with the bilateral program with the President of Laos. We also anticipate President Obama will have an opportunity to interact with the Prime Minister of Laos as well. Laos has recently gone through a leadership transition, but President Obama has been able to engage both of those leaders through his ASEAN meetings in the past.

Again, I think the agenda with Laos will seek to identify areas where we can cooperate and we have an increasing development relationship focused on education and health and human capital; an increasing trade and investment relationship. We also have the substantial effort that we are ramping up to address the legacy of war in Laos. For our part, we have been steadily increasing our commitment to clearing unexploded ordnance in Laos, which has caused significant human suffering and been an impediment to development since the conclusion of the Vietnam War. We've been spending additional resources each year as it relates to clearing unexploded ordnance, and we anticipate the President will make this a focus of his visit.

We also have a POW/MIA recovery effort in Laos that we're committed to continuing to pursue and, if necessary, take additional steps to ensure that we're doing everything we can to recover those who have been lost.

After his bilateral program, the President will give a speech that we anticipate to be an opportunity for him to step back and review his Asia policy over the course of the last seven years. I'll think he'll talk about how far we've come in shaping an architecture in the Asia Pacific for the United States to lead and to be at the table in forums like ASEAN and the East Asia Summit. I think he'll speak to the fact that we've significantly upgraded our commercial and economic diplomacy in the region, our security presence in the partnerships that we're building, both with allies but also with emerging partners on issues like maritime security and disaster response. I think you'll hear the President give a forceful case for TPP and why it is essential to American economic and security interests for Congress to move forward with approval of TPP.

Again, in this part of the world, which is the largest emerging market in the world, TPP is seen as a litmus test for U.S. leadership. TPP allows us to establish the rules of the road for trade and commerce. It's also seen as a demonstration of America's commitment to be a Pacific power. And we would be stepping back from that leadership role. We would be ceding the region to countries like China, who do not set the same types of high standards for trade agreements, were we to not follow through with TPP. So at each of his stops, including in this speech, I think you'll see the President make the case for TPP.

He'll also have an opportunity to address both the enormous potential in the region for greater connectivity economically, for greater cooperation, and also some of the areas of recent difference, including the South China Sea and our approach to maritime issues.

So following the speech, we anticipate the President will have time for a bilateral meeting with President Duterte of the Philippines. The Philippines is obviously a treaty ally of the United States, a party to the recent arbitral ruling in the South China Sea. I think we'll want to review the state of play as it relates to our treaty lines and the situation in the South China Sea in that dialogue with the new President of the Philippines.

One Wednesday, September 7th, we anticipate the President will have an event devoted to unexploded ordnance, where he'll be able to discuss our efforts to support the people of Laos as they seek to clear unexploded ordnance, and have an opportunity to interact with some of the workers and survivors who have confronted this issue.

And then the President will travel to Luang Prabang, which is a cultural capital of Laos, an historical capital of Laos, where he'll have an opportunity to do a town hall meeting with some of our Southeast Asian Leaders. For those of you who have traveled with us, you know that the YSEALI Initiative, like our African Leaders Initiative, has generated enormous enthusiasm in Southeast Asia. It's something the President is committed to, and he'll have an opportunity for a town hall. And we anticipate he'll have some cultural stops in Luang Prabang, as well. Then, that night is the gala dinner kicking off the ASEAN and East Asia summits hosted back in Vientiane.

Then, on Thursday, September 8th, he will have the U.S.-ASEAN meeting and then the East Asia Summit. And again, we anticipate the potential for an additional bilateral meeting. And we'll keep you updated as we have any additions to the schedule.

So again, I will stop there, and we can deal with some of the specific issues at each of the stops in questions. But let me turn it over to Brian to give you an overview of the climate and energy event.

MR. DEESE: Thanks, Ben. And I will just touch on some of the climate-related issues, both domestically and internationally -- it's been a busy period over the last several days - - that provide context for this upcoming trip.

First, on the climate side, for those of you who are not breathlessly following the most recent data that has come out, I would note that just recent data that we've seen suggests that -- or finds that for the first half of 2016, energy sector emissions in the United States are actually down -- down 6 percent from last year, and 15 percent from 2005. And they're at their lowest level in nearly 20 years. So while there's been a lot of focus on the heat and the temperature increases in 2016, the President will enter this trip in a situation where we've seen emissions fall to their lowest level in 20 years while we've seen growth in the United States outpace most other advanced economies.

On the conservation side, as all of you probably saw, last week the President designated two national monuments -- the first in Maine and the second around the remote Pacific Hawaiian Islands -- both of which will be focuses as we go on to this trip.

So just to speak in a little bit more detail -- on the first stop of this trip, as Ben noted, the President will be delivering remarks at the 20th Annual Lake Tahoe Summit. He'll be joining Senator Reid there. This is a summit that for the past two decades has brought together federal, state and local leaders, all dedicated to restoring and sustaining Lake Tahoe, which is one of our most important environmental treasures, but also important economic driver for the region and the states in that part of the country.

The President's remarks will focus on the link between conservation and climate change, and trying to help explain and make the case why the types of actions that he's taken recently are part of his broader effort to combat climate change. And in that context, we'll also announce a series of steps that the administration is taking and will take to boost

clean energy in the region and the American West, and also to address some of the ongoing climate-related threats that the West is experiencing, including drought and wildfire.

The evening, as Ben noted, the President will travel to Honolulu. And there, he will have an opportunity to speak to a number of heads of states of Pacific islands. A number of these leaders are leaders that the President had an opportunity to meet with last year in Paris. One of the most significant meetings that the President took when he traveled to Paris on the front end of the COP was with a number of these Pacific island leaders to underscore the importance of their role in the global climate change effort, and to talk very pragmatically about how to address issues that they face more front and center than any other country. So the President is looking forward to having another opportunity to interact with and speak directly to those leaders.

It's also on the eve of the World Conservation Congress. And as Ben noted, this is the first time that the United States is hosting the WCC. And so, for those of you who don't know, the World Conservation Congress brings together approximately 8,000 delegates from 184 countries, and the delegates represent business, government, science, youth groups, indigenous peoples' organizations, NGOs, a whole range of actors who are committed to conservation. And again, in this context, the President will be discussing the role that remote islands play in the climate context, but also the importance of the intersection between conservation and climate change as we face an increasingly severe threat of climate change in these parts of the world.

The following day, the President will travel to Midway, as Ben noted. And Midway is within the Papahānaumokuākea National Monument. This is the monument that the President expanded last week. With the expansion, the total protected area is now 582,578 square miles. That makes it the largest marine protected area in the world, and the President is looking forward to having an opportunity to learn more directly about this marine area by traveling directly there. We anticipate that he will have an opportunity both to get a more detailed briefing from the experts there on Midway about the marine environment, and also be able to interact directly with the wildlife and the other attributes of the island.

The expansion of the Papahānaumokuākea monument is an incredibly significant action. It provides protections for more than 7,000 marine species, including whales and sea turtles that are currently listed under the Endangered Species Act, and also the longest-living marine species in the world, which is black coral, which have been found to live longer than 4,500 years. A lot of this area reflects marine environments that we are only beginning to fully learn about, and also learn about the impact of climate change and changing ocean patterns on this part of the world.

I would note that as part of the way in which the President approaches national monument designations under the Antiquities Act, we have prioritized community input and the importance of native management in the expansion of this monument. And so in

that context, Hawaii's Department of Natural Resources and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs will actually play a greater management role going forward as trustees in the national marine monument.

So then just to talk a little bit about the China portion of this trip as well, because in that context climate will be one of a number of significant issues that the leaders will discuss -- just for a little bit of context, the relationship between the United States and China on climate change has been one of the most significant drivers of global action over the last several years. As Ben alluded to, and as many of you know, that was most notably punctuated by the historic joint announcement in November of 2014, when President Obama and President Xi jointly set climate targets for their respective countries and demonstrated that after years and decades in which China and the United States appeared to be on opposing teams in a climate negotiation, that both the U.S. and China could demonstrate leadership. And that helped unlock an intense but deliberate diplomatic effort to try to encourage other countries around the world to do the same.

The U.S.-China climate interaction has built from there. Last September, the U.S. and China put out another joint climate statement which laid out a roadmap for the Paris climate agreement, as well as demonstrating additional domestic action that both our countries were taking. That roadmap, announced a couple of months in advance of the Paris agreement last year, was an integral component of laying the groundwork for how we ultimately got to a Paris agreement. And I remember -- I recall discussing with some of you at the time about how this roadmap would indeed be significant, because it wasn't clear what the Paris agreement would look like at that time. But if you go back now and you look at the shared vision that President Obama and President Xi put forward in September, you can see in that the seeds of how the Paris agreement itself actually came together.

And again, earlier this year in March, the presidents came together and marked important progress on climate once again, with both countries announcing that they would seek to formally join the Paris agreement in 2016. That announcement helped to encourage an effort that we have been working on since to try to get the Paris agreement to formally enter into force as early as possible and, hopefully, in 2016.

So we have now developed quite a significant record of working collaboratively with the Chinese on climate change. And I anticipate that we will be able to once again demonstrate our two countries working together on this issue when the Presidents meet in China. I had an opportunity to travel there last week to discuss these issues with my counterparts, and I anticipate that when the presidents meet, they will discuss topics that will include this issue of trying to get the Paris agreement to enter into force as quickly as possible. As many of you know that for the Paris agreement to formally enter into force, 55 countries representing 55 percent of global emissions must formally join. Together, the United States and China represent just under 40 percent of global emissions. So the act of our two countries joining, as and when that happens, will help move us closer to that goal.

I also expect we will cover other topics and that the Presidents will have an opportunity to discuss important multilateral negotiations in the climate space that are going on outside of Paris. Notably, even before the historic November, 2014 joint statement, the Sunnylands interaction between President Obama and President Xi was the first time that they publically indicated their interest in working together on climate issues. And in that context, the issue was on hydrofluorocarbons -- HFCs -- in which in 2013, President Obama and President Xi committed to trying to work to find an international, multilateral mechanism to phase out the use of HFCs. Now, we are only about a month or six weeks away from a significant final negotiation -- international negotiation of HFCs, so I anticipate that that will be an important part of the interaction between the two leaders.

And likewise, there is an important multilateral negotiation in progress now on curbing emissions from the global airline industry. And aviation is an important sector with respect to carbon emissions, so I anticipate that likewise our countries will share views about how to find a solution to these issues as well. And as we have in other areas, our hope will be that we can demonstrate that by the United States and China moving together and jointly demonstrating our willingness to take on issues, we can help encourage greater ambition and greater action at the global level as well.

So with that, let me turn it over to Wally to talk about some of the national economic issues at play.

MR. ADEYEMO: Thanks, Brian. As you all know, this will be the President's 10th and final G20 meeting. And I think in order to understand what we're going to accomplish at this G20, it's important to go back to the President's first G20 meeting, which occurred in April of 2009.

At that point, the U.S. economy was shedding 800,000 jobs. The G20 responded to the global economic crisis by committing to provide trillions of dollars of stimulus and also by empowering the international financial institutions by providing them with a trillion dollars of additional revenue. This helped create the atmosphere for growth and now on the eve of the President's final G20 Summit, the U.S. economy has added nearly 15 million jobs, starting in early 2010. And despite the need for additional global demand, we've seen the global economy grow by over 25 percent since the depth of the global financial and economic crisis.

In addition to a debate over how to grow the economy coming out of the crisis -- which was resolved by additional stimulus by countries -- there's been an ongoing debate that you're all aware of, of what we do in terms of stimulus versus austerity that has been going on at the G20 for a long time. The debate was largely about whether you can cut to grow, which some advocated, and the President advocated an approach of investing to grow the economy by using additional fiscal resources to grow economies.

The data has proven that the President's approach actually worked. You look at job creation in the United States and you look at growth in the United States -- it far exceeds growth and job creation in a number of advanced economies due to the policies the President put in place. Imitation -- in looking at other economies, you look at places like

Canada, Japan and China, which only in 2015 have also taken steps to stimulate their economy using additional fiscal measures. And when you look around the table at the G20, a number of G20 countries have also used fiscal stimulus in the last few years.

Of course, we want them to do more because we think the global economy needs to grow more, but we think that the debate over austerity and stimulus has largely been settled in the favor of additional stimulus. And we think that countries should use all three tools -- fiscal policy, monetary policy, and structural reform to advance the global growth agenda that is critical to creating jobs and also to creating opportunities for American workers.

The President's final summit will provide an opportunity for leaders to continue addressing how to boost global growth while we also ensure that the benefits of globalization, digitization, integration are shared more broadly. On this year's agenda will be important issues such as reducing global excess capacity of steel, advancing the WTO Environmental Goods Agreement that eliminates trade barriers for a variety of green products, better preparing the international financial institutions to address the challenges associated with the global migration crisis, and advancing our shared climate and development agenda.

This year's G20 Leaders Summit will provide a chance to affirm the G20's commitments to upholding high standards, protecting workers, ensuring a level playing field, and expanding opportunity. In addition to the summit, top of mind for many of the countries sitting there will be TPP, which we see as essential to both our economic opportunity in our country but also to our national security priorities. A number of G20 countries are members of TPP and this will provide the President an opportunity to see them and to discuss how we advance that shared agenda of creating a rules-based order in the Asia Pacific that provides real opportunities to level the playing field for our workers and our firms. We look forward to a successful summit.

And I'll turn it over to Josh.

MR. EARNEST: Thank you, gentlemen. So with that, I think most of these guys can stick around for another 10 or 15 minutes at least and take a few questions.

So, Josh, do you want to get us started here?

Q Great. Thanks, Josh. Ben, I wanted to ask you about the bilateral with Erdogan that you mentioned. What will be the President's message to Erdogan about their incursion into Syria? And it seems like two of our partners now, Turkey and YPG, are basically in open combat with each other. So what are we doing about that? And given remarks recently from the Vice President, Kerry and others, is it fair to say we're kind of taking Turkey's side on that one? And then, Brian, if you could just confirm that the U.S. and China will join the Paris agreement during the President's trip to China.

MR. RHODES: Well, first of all, I think, Josh, broadly, they'll be discussing the counter-ISIL campaign and the fact that we need to stay united in our efforts to defeat ISIL. That is a shared priority of the U.S. and Turkey and our whole coalition. We're actively

working -- the specific question now related to Jarabulus. What I'd say is that the United States offered support and has supported the Turkish effort to clear Jarabulus of ISIL fighters and we also would support Turkey's efforts to secure its border.

We do not support and we would oppose efforts to move south and engage in activities against the Syrian Democratic Forces, the SDF opposition that we have supported. So I think our message to Turkey has been clear that we support the objectives laid out to clear Jarabulus of ISIL fighters -- that's something we've talked to Turkey about for some time - - and to provide space for them to secure their border.

Further action against the SDF would complicate efforts to have that united front against ISIL that we want. At the same time, we've communicated to the SDF that they should not be engaged in military activity against Turkish forces and, again, they have a commitment to retrograde east of the Euphrates River, as well. So what we will be actively working with our partners on in the coming days is, again, support for the objectives laid out by Turkey to secure and clear Jarabulus of ISIL fighters, provide that space and security on its border, but at the same time to not have members of our coalition engage with one another. We have enough work to do together to confront and combat ISIL.

In terms of the broader U.S.-Turkish relationship, we expressed our solidarity for Turkey in the face of an attempted coup and our condolences for the enormous loss of life in that attempted coup. They are a NATO ally, they have our strong support for their own security. And President Obama, like Vice President Biden, Secretary Kerry, has engaged President Erdogan regularly. He'll be able to carry forward those conversations, both about what's been happening in Turkey, also about what's been happening in the region. So we have a broad and active agenda.

MR. DEESE: And with respect to your question, I do anticipate that the issue of implementation of the Paris agreement will be a topic of discussion, but I don't have any announcements with respect to specific actions by either country.

Q I guess either for Wally or Ben -- you've both made the point that TPP is the centerpiece of the President's agenda in Asia, and he's going to make a big point of emphasizing that. But we've got two presidential candidates who are against it, you have congressional leaders saying it's not going to come up for a vote. How conceivably can he make a positive case for TPP in the current environment? That's the first question.

And then the second question is, the bilateral with the President of the Philippines, this is a gentleman who's made some fairly inflammatory remarks about treatment of women, journalists, others. Do you expect the President to raise concerns about those issues, given the long history of friendship between these two countries?

MR. RHODES: So on your second question, we absolutely expect that the President will raise concerns about some of the recent statements from the President of the Philippines. We regularly meet with the leaders of our treaty allies where we have differences, whether

it relates to human rights practices or derogatory comments. We take the opportunity of those meetings to raise those issues directly.

I think at the same time, of course, we have a very sensitive security environment in the region right now. And in the aftermath of the arbitration ruling, it's essential that, just as we will be talking to China about matters related to the South China Sea, that we're also talking to ASEAN countries and treaty allies like the Philippines, as well.

So I think that discussion will encompass both concerns about statements that have been made by the President of the Philippines and our commitment to supporting human rights and all efforts that are undertaken bilaterally, and also, again, discussing the regional picture, particularly I think with a focus on the maritime issues.

On TPP, I'd just say a couple of things. First of all, we have been, in a very multifaceted way, expanding U.S. presence in the Asia Pacific because this is the largest emerging region in the world. It's essential to our economic growth, it's essential to our security interests, it's essential to our ability to stand up for our values in the world. And I think one of the points that we're going to make is this is not simply about TPP; obviously, we've done a lot to expand our security posture, to strengthen our Northeast Asian alliances, to build partnerships in the maritime and disaster-response space across Southeast Asia, to support a democratic transition in a country like Myanmar. There are many elements to our Asia Pacific strategy.

But TPP is, in many ways, seen as a litmus test for whether or not the U.S. has staying power in this region. We are a Pacific power, and we have been traditionally, but we're also on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. And what the countries of the Asia Pacific region want to know, particularly the Asian countries, is whether or not we can be counted on. And when they see an agreement like TPP that has enormous benefits for the United States; that, frankly, brings other countries up to standards set by the United States; that has a country like Vietnam endorsing, for the first time, through a legal process, the right of workers to organize; or has a country like Malaysia undertaking significant reforms to its economy and providing for greater protections against child labor and trafficking; or that has many different countries opening their markets to U.S. goods -- when they see such an evidently good deal for the United States, and then see the United States not following through on that, it will cause them to question our leadership in the Asia Pacific and our leadership in the world. And that is profoundly important economically to the United States because we need access to these markets, but it's also important to our national security, because it would be seen as a significant setback I think for American leadership if we don't move forward.

I won't speak to the domestic issues beyond saying that many of the questions that have been raised about trade agreements for many years are actually specifically addressed in TPP. So some of the things that we heard about the shortcomings of NAFTA that the President agrees with were actually addressed in the negotiation of TPP. That's why you have these unprecedented labor and environmental standards. That's why you have significant market access.

This is a trade agreement that is not simply about, again, undertaking steps to lower prices, it's about being able to create jobs here and export more goods to the largest emerging market in the world.

So I think he'll make the case that this is in the best interest of the United States. There's always difficult concerns raised around trade, but I think his point has consistently been that TPP actually addresses those issues and that it's a matter of both our economic security and well-being, and also a matter of our national security that we stick with the effort to approve TPP.

MR. EARNEST: I think the only thing I would add, just in terms of the politics, Mark -- and I'm sure this is, to the extent that the President's interlocutors at these meetings are sophisticated consumers of political information about the United States -- the President has a strong case to make about the strong bipartisan support for these trade agreements inside the United States. And there was a recent poll that was conducted by your colleagues at NBC that indicated there was majority support across the country both among Democrats and Republicans for the trade agreement that this administration has negotiated.

And I think there is a reservoir of support across the country that we can draw from, but there has long been historic opposition to these kind of trade agreements, certainly from the Democratic Party, but among some elements from the Republican Party, too. And so the President is going to make a strong case that we have made progress, and that there is a path for us to get this done before the President leaves office.

Michelle.

Q In these conversations with China, about how much of that discussion -- I know there's a lot on the table here -- but how much of that will be on the North Korea threat? How do you think China has been doing in pressuring North Korea? Where is that pressure visible? And how much do you think the THAAD system is an obstacle in how China is going to address this with the United States?

MR. RHODES: So we think that the Chinese have, over the course of the last several years, particularly since Kim Jong-un assumed power in North Korea, they have worked with us to apply additional political and economic pressure. The sanctions that were passed through the U.N. Security Council several months ago were the strongest sanctions that have ever been put in place. Chinese support for the implementation of those sanctions will be essential, and we continue to discuss that with them. The recent statement out of the U.N. Security Council on their missile launches was another indication of North Korea's isolation.

But at the same time, clearly there needs to be more pressure applied. I think our main principles are we are open to dialogue to resolve this issue, but only if North Korea demonstrates it's serious about denuclearization; if they continue on the current course of provocation that they're on, that we would want to see full implementation of those sanctions without fail; and that we would want to see a clear signal, each time there is one

of these provocations, of consequences from the international community -- whether that be through political and diplomatic pressure, or, when necessary, the application of economic pressure. I think China has raised these concerns about the THAAD system. Our point to China has been: This in no way is directed at China, it's directed at the threat from North Korea. And so long as North Korea is developing ballistic missile capabilities and moving forward with its nuclear program, we have an obligation, a responsibility for our own security and the security of our allies in Japan and the Republic of Korea to take steps to counter that threat.

And so China has expressed these concerns. But again, first of all, the most important thing that could be done is to continue to apply pressure on the North Koreans to change course. Absent that taking place, we are not going to skirt our responsibility to defend ourselves and our allies.

MR. EARNEST: Margaret.

Q Ben, do you expect President Obama to meet in any form -- bilat or otherwise -- with Vladimir Putin? And I think it's like a year now since the Russian incursion. Does the President view this as a sort of last chance to broker anything on Syria? Or how is he approaching that meeting? Is there anything you can tell us about Iran deploying these missiles around Fordow?

MR. RHODES: With respect to President Putin, we don't have a bilateral meeting scheduled. However, it has been the case that at each of these summits that they both attend, we usually try to find an opportunity for the two leaders to spend some time together, usually to focus on Syria and Ukraine. So I don't know that they'll have a full formal bilateral meeting, but I expect that they'll have an opportunity to speak on the margins of the G20.

With respect to Russia and Syria, Secretary Kerry recently, on Friday, had another round of discussions with Foreign Minister Lavrov. We did not reach an agreement, although progress was made. We are focused right now on getting Russian support and Russian action through its own military and through its influence on the Assad regime for there to be a true cessation of hostilities and a mechanism to get humanitarian assistance into affected areas, particularly in Aleppo. So we're going to continue discussions to see if we can accomplish that objective. As you know, we've always seen that to be an essential precursor to more effective political discussions.

I think the message to the Russians does have to be that there's a window closing here, and we need to see that they can reach a real agreement and that they can back it up. And so even if we are able to get an agreement, that's only going to happen if we are assured that it's going to provide the necessary humanitarian access into Aleppo. And then we're going to want to make sure that there's follow-through in terms of the pause that is necessary to allow that to go forward and in terms of our ability to assess whether or not we can move forward with additional cooperation with Russia to go after not just ISIL, but al Nusra Front.

So I think this is a critical time. In the coming days, we'll have an opportunity to see whether the Russians can get to the agreement that meets those requirements. And I think internationally, the enormous concern over the situation in Aleppo in particular I think makes it imperative that Russia take those steps. And it's not just us -- I think Russia will hear from other leaders at the G20, the U.N. General Assembly, that its intervention in Syria has in many ways exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in Aleppo and that we want to see, therefore, actions that can save lives and create some opening for a political resolution.

Your other question was Fordow? Look, the S-300 system, this is something that the Russians helpfully delayed transfer for many years as we were negotiating the nuclear deal. Our strong preference expressed to them continually is to not deliver this type of system to the Iranians. That's something Secretary Kerry has expressed. They did move forward with it. It's not prohibited under any U.N. Security Council resolution because it's a defensive system. So even, for instance, the arms embargo that had been in place under the previous regime would not have been applied to the S-300 system because it's a defensive system. That doesn't mean we don't have concerns with any increased Iranian military capability, and we've expressed those concerns.

With respect to Fordow, our main focus there is that the Iranians are keeping their commitments under the nuclear deal. They have ceased all enrichment at Fordow. Fordow is under very extensive IAEA monitoring. So we're principally focused on their fulfilling their JCPOA commitments there, which involves no enrichment; centrifuges that have been, in many cases, removed and put under monitoring and storage; and also the regular, ongoing access that IAEA inspectors have to the facility.

Q So are you concerned about the missiles being at Fordow? Or was the concern about the S-300 transfer?

MR. RHODES: I think the concern is about the -- that we've expressed for years was about the upgrade in Iranian capability in this space. So that's a concern that we had already expressed. And again, it's a defensive system. But its sophistication raised those concerns for us, and I know for some of our allies and partners in the region.

Again, with respect to Fordow, if they're not enriching there, that addresses that immediate concern that it not be used as a facility where they can advance their nuclear capability.

MR. EARNEST: Ron.

Q Just on climate and the environment, I'm trying to understand exactly how the United States intends to ratify the Paris agreement. Because I believe it's your position that it's not a treaty, it's an agreement, so this can be done through executive action of some sort. And more broadly, with the stops in Midway and Tahoe next week, can you more broadly explain what you think the President's legacy should be, how we should think of it in this area of climate and environment, and what he has done?

MR. DEESE: Sure. Well, on the first issue, the Paris agreement is an executive agreement. And so the President will use his authority that has been used in dozens of executive agreements in the past to join and formally deposit our instrument of acceptance and therefore put our country as a party to the Paris agreement. That's a process that is quite well-established in our existing legal system. In the context of international agreements and international arrangements, there is a category of them that are treaties that require advice and consent from the Senate. But there's a broad category of executive agreements where the executive can enter into those agreements without that advice and consent.

Q And when is that going to happen?

MR. DEESE: Well, we have made the commitment that we will join in 2016, and we have made the commitment to do that as soon as possible this year. So with respect to exactly when, I don't have any announcements on that front, but we have committed and we have been working on that issue.

Q Is there some legal process? I don't understand why it hasn't been done and what's delaying it.

MR. DEESE: Well, there's a whole process of how the U.S. enters into executive agreements, which involves a legal component, a legal analysis of the agreement, as well as a review by executive branch agencies and otherwise. That's a process that has been underway since the Paris agreement. And again, we've made a commitment that we will get that done this year and that we're working to get it done as soon as possible.

With respect to your broader question and climate more broadly, I guess I would say two things. The first, the question of legacy I'll leave aside and leave to other people. But I think there's two things about this trip in particular that I think are notable. The first is that this President views conservation activities as an important component to an overall approach to climate change, and that particularly when you look at what's happening in our country right now -- whether it's floods in the Southeast or fires in the American West, droughts and water issues increasingly emerging in various parts of our country -- it's impossible to escape the fact that in the 21st century the questions about conservation, conserving land and water resources, will need to be done with a view toward both addressing climate change, but also with a view toward adapting to the impacts of climate change that are already being felt by communities across the country.

And so that has affected the way that the President has gone about conservation. It's affected the priority that he's put on conservation. And so these last two monument designations that he took this past week are significant, but he's not coming new to this issue. And, in fact, the President has been implementing a comprehensive conservation agenda for the last several years. And that has included the use of the Antiquities Act and monument designation, but it's included doing so in a way that increasingly links this issue with climate change.

I think that the President's stop in Tahoe, as well as his stop in Hawaii, will both accentuate that in pretty stark terms because of the challenges that the Tahoe region and the West more generally are facing associated with climate impacts, and also because of both the astounding natural wonder of Papahānaumokuākea, but also the incredible threats that our ocean faces as a result of climate change.

I think the second significant thing about the President's approach to climate change is seen in his engagement with China. And the President recognized early on in the administration that if we were going to have an effective global response to climate change, we were going to have to write a new playbook; that the old approaches had not succeeded and, in fact, the Copenhagen conference in 2009 was a poignant moment where it was clear that the world was not going to come together under an old framework where developed countries were put on one side of the field and developing countries were put on the other side, and developed countries alone were asked to take action.

If we fast-forward now to the fact that we have a Paris agreement and that the global community's approach to climate change has fundamentally changed, that process didn't happen by accident and it didn't happen overnight. It was the result of a very consistent and steady diplomatic effort that the President prioritized year after year, working to restore U.S. credibility on climate issues through our Climate Action Plan, demonstrating to the world that we actually could make progress in reducing emissions.

And as I mentioned at the top, CO₂ emissions in the United States are falling, and falling increasingly rapidly, which is something that analysts even only a couple of years ago wouldn't have projected. But then taking that credibility and applying it internationally to try to forge new coalitions, the partnership with China was significant but it's only one of the places where the President has prioritized that. You saw him over the course of the last several years use diplomatic engagements with countries like India and Brazil in the North American continent just recently announcing a North American-wide goal of using 50 percent clean energy and building a North American strategy toward this issue.

The President understood that in each of his engagements, he was going to need to personally and directly prioritize this issue in building this new consensus. So I think one of the -- this I think is an example of the way that the President approaches diplomacy in international challenges where you need to identify a strategy that will work, but also be steady and persistent and patient in trying to get to those ultimate objectives.

We have a lot of ways to go -- more to do, including these multilateral negotiations on HFCs and aircraft emissions that are alive right now and that we'll resolve later this fall. So the President is also going to look forward and try to figure out how he can build on the progress we've made to get successful resolution over the course of the fall as well.

MR. EARNEST: Roberta.

Q Thanks. About a year ago I think President Obama and President Xi agreed to step up work on the Bilateral Investment Treaty, and I'm wondering how much progress has been made on that point. And are you looking for a breakthrough, or, conversely, can you

describe some of the real sticking points that remain?

MR. ADEYEMO: So we continue to work with China on the Bilateral Investment Treaty and on our trade and investment relationship at large. That work has led to making progress in meaningful ways. I think that when you look at the overarching relationship between the U.S. and China, you need to look back to the beginning of the President's term. And we've made a great deal of progress on issues including the exchange rate, on trade and investment issues, and also on issues, as Brian said, related to climate agreements and development. That has been possible through the President's engagement with President Xi, and also the engagement of various Cabinet Secretaries with their counterparts in China. Ambassador Froman and Secretary Kerry continue to negotiate the Bilateral Investment Treaty -- we're hoping to continue to make progress with the Chinese on this issue. It's an issue that the President has discussed with President Xi during their last meeting in March, and they'll also discuss during the meeting that they will have before the G20.

Our goal, of course, in the Bilateral Investment Treaty, is to open up markets for American firms and workers in China but to also encourage China to push forward with the reforms that President Xi has announced. And in doing that, it will create a market-determined -- it will help us with our push to have them have a more market-determined exchange rate and open markets to U.S. firms, but also will create opportunities for Chinese firms as well. So our hope is that by the time we have the meeting with President Xi, President Obama and he will be able to talk about our next steps in moving towards the completion of the Bilateral Investment Treaty.

MR. EARNEST: George, I'm going to give you the last one for these guys and then we'll have them go.

Q Ben, you mentioned the importance of the pivot to Asia. This trip and the APEC Summit are the last chances to lock that in. Do you have any confidence that the pivot will endure past January 20th? And if so, why?

MR. RHODES: We do, principally because I think anybody who is looking objectively at the world and prioritizing where we're going to spend our diplomatic resources, our military resources would determine that the largest emerging region in the world merits our attention. I think we've tried to make progress in a number of areas -- one is just simply on shaping the architecture for how the region operates.

So when we came into office, the United States was not really at the table on a lot of the discussions about how countries were going to engage multilaterally. To use an analogy, the Atlantic community has NATO, it has the U.S.-EU relationship, it has a whole host of multilateral organizations. There were not similar structures for dialogue in the Asia Pacific.

One of the things that we've done is attend every year at the head-of-state level the U.S.-ASEAN Summits, and then also help to shape the East Asia Summit process, which brings the ASEAN countries together with the other big players in the region like the United

States, China, India, Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand and Russia. Now, we think that we've established the predicate that the U.S. is going to be at the table on those discussions and that we're going to work through ASEAN and the East Asia Summit to address the full range of political and economic questions in the region. And our expectation is that the next President would carry forward that head-of-state engagement. So structurally, that's one big difference.

Second, on a military and security side, in our defense budget review during this administration, we prioritized the Asia rebalance. So it is an area where we protected investments in our defense budget, and we've dedicated those to strengthening our alliances. And we've taken steps to modernize those alliances, whether we're talking about some of the shared capabilities we've developed with Japan and the Republic of Korea, the rotational Marine deployment through Australia, the access agreement we have with the Philippines as it relates to their base, but also we've developed increasing partnerships with Southeast Asian militaries, and we have a maritime security initiative to strengthen capacity on maritime security. And we've been the largest supporter of disaster response. So I think the U.S. military is postured in a way in which we're going to be able to be present and to meet the challenges of the 20th century in this part of the world.

Now, one of the tensions, of course, has been on the South China Sea, on maritime security. In addition to the maritime security initiative that I mentioned, the President has worked with his team to ensure that we have a game plan that includes commitment to principles of freedom of navigation. And the type of freedom of navigation operations that we see, we think it's the type of thing that will carry forward, given that the South China Sea is an area that has a trillion dollars of commerce flowing through it.

At the same time, some of the diplomatic efforts that we've had to support international law, to support steps like the arbitral ruling that's taken place, and the support and the negotiation of a code of conduct between ASEAN and China -- we'd like to see those carried forward, because the world has an enormous interest in there not being a conflict in the South China Sea and there being peaceful resolution of disputes under international law. So we think that that will carry forward.

I've talked about TPP -- that really is the connective tissue and the glue to economic and commercial leadership. And it's something, as I said, that the region connects to other elements of U.S. leadership. At the same time, a lot of our export growth in the world has come from this region. And we've dedicated enormous resources from the Commerce Department, the State Department and others to advocate for U.S. businesses. And I think you're going to see that continue as well, because our business community tells us that this is an area of principal focus.

And then lastly, we remain very committed to democracy and human rights. And shortly after the President's visit, for instance, he'll be hosting State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi here at the White House. The democratic transition in Myanmar has been another centerpiece of our engagement with Asia, supporting that process. And we've gone from a

situation where Aung San Suu Kyi was in prison to a situation where she's going to be welcomed by the President of the United States as the leader of the government there as State Counselor. And so that's I think a nascent relationship we'd like to see develop.

The very last thing I'd just say is if you look at some of the President's travel this year, Vietnam has become one of our critical partners in that part of the world, across a host of fronts. And there are enormous strategic and economic reasons that that relationship will continue to grow. Laos is an emerging partner for the United States.

So again, in addition to our core alliances, I think people will look back and see this as a time, when you talk about a Vietnam or a Laos or a Myanmar, the United States was developing closer relations with countries that had traditionally been adversaries. I think there will be enormous incentives for the next administration to carry that forward.

So TPP remains the major question mark. I think the logic of it is overwhelming, that we'd be cutting against our interest to walk away from TPP. The next President will benefit enormously from having TPP. If you were taking office, you would be in a much stronger position if you had the United States having established that it will be setting the rules of the road through this multilateral trade agreement and will have sent a signal that we're present in the Asia-Pacific. That will be of enormous benefit, we believe, to the next administration.

MR. EARNEST: Thank you, gentlemen. So I think you can tell that the President expects to cover a lot of ground on this trip, both based on the wide-ranging discussion that we've had and based on the fact that we anticipate two refueling stops on the flight back. So it should be a good one.

Q Is he giving a news conference at the Southeast Asia --

MR. EARNEST: I do anticipate that the President will have an opportunity to take questions from all of you after the ASEAN Summit in Laos.

We'll just bounce around if that's all right. Olivier.

Q Thanks, Josh. Ben mentioned that the S-300 deployment doesn't violate U.N. Security Council resolutions, but what about U.S. law? My understanding is that there are several U.S. laws that at least strongly suggest that that deployment is not legal. What is the administration's position on that?

MR. EARNEST: Why don't I go and confirm this, but my understanding is that it does -- it's not -- it obviously is something that we are deeply concerned about. But much of the legal architecture that's in place is directly -- both at the U.N. and in the United States, frankly -- related to Iran's offensive military capabilities. And the system that they have purchased from the Russians, while we find it objectionable, is defensive in nature.

Q And on a much, much more lighthearted note -- you can't just dangle out there that the President is going to interact directly with wildlife and not expect a follow-up question. (Laughter.) So any details you could offer up on that particular exchange?

MR. EARNEST: It will be a formal bilateral meeting. (Laughter.)

Q Well, it could be a pull-aside, I guess. But any additional details you could provide on that score would be --

MR. EARNEST: We'll do our best to do that as the trip gets closer. So hopefully it will go swimmingly, though. (Laughter.)

Kevin.

Q Thanks, Josh. On climate change, can you describe the level of concern that the administration might have that whatever is accomplished at the G20 vis-à-vis the Paris accord will be diminished, if not disbanded, at some point in the future by a future presidency? The possibility of that?

MR. EARNEST: I think Brian alluded to this a little bit earlier. But I think what is clear, Kevin, is that we have been able to work effectively with the Chinese to advance U.S. interests in a way that's consistent with the Chinese interests based on their own assessment, but also in a way that has really catalyzed action around the world. That's a good thing.

And you'll recall, Kevin, that so much of the skepticism that was in place about U.S. efforts to take action on climate change was driven by our critics who said that China would never go along with it, and that for all the steps that we were taking to address climate change, that was being undermined by China's continued investment in fossil fuels.

That's no longer the case. The dynamic we have now is much different, where the United States and China are working together in, again, a way that advances our mutual interests to confront this problem. And that has prompted more people around the world to get engaged with this effort.

So what that means is that any effort to roll this back is going to isolate the United States of America on an issue that we have been leading on for decades. So I think what is emerging as a consensus is that because of the President's leadership, and because of this diplomatic strategy that we have implemented successfully, we've been able to advance our interests. And even a President in a different party would be reluctant to unravel that progress.

Q But critics said that this was sort of an "end round" Congress in sort of getting this done. A proponent, meanwhile, told me this morning, hey, that's just sour grapes. How do you see that?

MR. EARNEST: Well, the way that the agreement is structured, the way that the agreement that was brokered in Paris is structured, essentially allows the President to use existing authority that Congress has already given the President to implement this agreement. So essentially, we are pursuing this agreement consistent with the way that Congress intended.

Q Last one. I want to ask you about -- something about hacking. We've been reporting today that there were two state election databases that had fallen, at least possibly, to theft of voter registration information. The FBI, you may recall, has actually warned that foreign hackers may have penetrated a couple of state election databases. I'm curious if you're aware of that, and if so, how serious are the breaches that have been reported. And does the White House have any evidence that the hackers that may have been involved in these breaches were the same hackers that were involved in the previous release of DNC and DCCC information?

MR. EARNEST: Kevin, I think much of this reporting has been based on the FBI's communications with the administrators of computer networks and other cybersecurity experts around the country.

So I'll leave it to the FBI to describe the nature of their conversations. What I can say more broadly for the administration is that there has been a discussion about whether or not to designate certain voting systems that are, of course, maintained at the state and local level as piece of critical infrastructure. And that would give the federal government and experts at the federal government more of a role in assisting the administrators of those networks as they deter intrusions.

That's something that's being discussed by senior members of the President's national security team. We certainly will continue to work in coordination with state and local officials, even short of that designation, to offer them advice and assistance at their request to ensure that they are protecting their systems. And I know that this is something that the Department of Homeland Security is taking the lead on. Secretary Johnson convened a conference call a couple of weeks ago with election officials across the country to discuss this issue. That wasn't the last conversation in this dialogue, but this is a conversation that will continue.

Q I also follow up because, again, he did mention that, and we're down to 70 days. And given the stakes, I would imagine that some sort of a designation either is or should be forthcoming. And I also would like to follow by asking, will that be part of the discussion -- hacking, if you will, cybersecurity -- when the President makes his way to China? Because I didn't get a chance to ask Ben about that.

MR. EARNEST: Well, every time that President Obama has sat down with his counterpart -- whether it was President Hu or President Xi -- there has been a discussion about cybersecurity. And you'll recall that about a year ago, when President Xi was here at the White House, there was an important commitment that was made by the Chinese President to abide by some important norms in cyberspace. And we certainly welcomed that announcement. And I would anticipate that this issue more generally will be on the agenda when President Obama has an opportunity to meet with President Xi later this week.

Q And last one from me. Did you read -- maybe you've had a chance to see -- the Washington Post did a pretty interesting bit on the Obamacare exchanges. Again, the continued sort of slide -- the numbers continue to trend downward. What is the level of

concern here at the White House right now about that? In particular, I ask because as Aetna and others, UnitedHealthcare, continue to sort of shed participation, there is a criticism, at least among some of the folks who have to rely on Obamacare -- their premiums keep going higher, the choices keep shrinking. Tell me what the President has to say about that.

MR. EARNEST: Well, Kevin, I appreciate the opportunity to talk about this, because I do think there is one important fact -- that to the credit of Juliet's colleagues at the Washington Post, it was included in the story. And it's simply this: It's important to understand the context in which the CBO was putting forward these estimates about the number of people that would sign up on the marketplaces.

CBO was based on an assumption that across the country you would see employers essentially kick their employees off of their health insurance and tell them to go sign up in the marketplace. The truth is, that has not happened nearly as often as our critics predicted. In fact, what we have found is that the vast majority of employers have continued to offer health insurance to their employees; that their employees continue to see that as an important benefit. And this actually is an example of yet another of the worst predictions about Obamacare not coming true.

So it's important for people to understand exactly the context of these numbers and what they show. That said, the administration is focused on making sure that we realize the potential around the marketplace to expand choice and opportunity for people all across the country. And what is clear is that the vast majority of people all across the country will have access to a plan that costs \$75 a month or less. And these are plans that are quality plans, that meet a set of benchmarks that weren't previously available in an affordable way in the private insurance market.

So we have made important progress in terms of expanding choice, certainly from before Obamacare went into effect, and we have made important progress in keeping those choices affordable for the vast majority of individuals who go to shop in the marketplace.

What we have also succeeded in doing is putting in place important consumer protections that people who don't shop on the marketplace but still get health insurance from their employer benefit from. And that's things like free birth control and being able to keep your kid on your health insurance program if you're a parent until they turn 26.

So these are important benefits that apply to everybody, not just people in the marketplace.

Q But if you're Aetna and you're shedding millions, tens of millions of dollars, this hasn't worked out so well at all.

MR. EARNEST: Well, if you're Aetna, you've actually seen your stock price more than double since the Affordable Care Act went into effect. And the fact is, there are plenty of other insurance companies who are competing for this business who are doing it right.

So look, I'll let executives at Aetna explain their business decisions and to explain their struggles to make this process work for their bottom line. Plenty of other insurance companies have figured it out and are putting forward offerings that give the American people a choice when it comes to providing health insurance for their families.

Q So to put a cap on it, even though there are fewer choices for some consumers -- I'm not saying you're painting a perfectly rosy picture here -- you're saying there are some things that still have to be worked on because, clearly, it's not working out perfect, I imagine, based on how the President first pitched the idea.

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think what is clear is there are far more choices that people have now than before the Affordable Care Act went into effect. And I think that is the important comparison for people to recognize.

The President has indicated a willingness to work with Democrats and Republicans on ideas to further strengthen the program. Let me give you two examples of that. The first is, there are still a lot of Republican governors across the country who have refused to expand Medicaid in their state. They do so solely for political reasons, not because of any substantive objection. And that's unfortunate, because you essentially have the federal government indicating that they'll pay for the vast majority of the expense of providing health insurance to those individuals at the bottom of the income scale in their state, but yet Republican governors in many states have opposed this.

That's had a bad impact on the health care situation for a lot of people across the country, and I think the human impact is the most important one. But what's also true, Kevin, is that there is a recent study that was completed over at HHS that indicated that states that haven't expanded Medicaid have actually seen health care costs grow by 7 percent more than states that did expand Medicaid. So the choices that some Republican governors are making to prevent access to health care for some are actually raising costs for other people in their state who are able to purchase health insurance. Again, this is the classic situation where people that don't have health insurance and don't have access to it because of a decision made by Republican governors, that ultimately other people who do have insurance have to pay the tab. So that's a bad policy decision by Republican governors, and that certainly is one thing that we'd like to see changed about Obamacare.

You've also heard the President talk about some of the potential benefits of Congress once again considering the idea of a public option. And I would expect that that's something that a future Congress and a future President will discuss.

Ron.

Q On Syria -- the 10,000th refugee hit the United States today. Is the President satisfied with this number? And I know the argument about the levels of humanitarian aid that the United States contributes to this crisis. But given the millions and millions of people who have fled that country, is the President satisfied that this goal -- that anyone would say is

modest -- has been reached yet? And I gather he's going to set a goal for 2017, perhaps at the U.N. gathering in the coming weeks. Is that going to be much higher, or where is that going to be?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Ron, I appreciate you asking about this because it's not often I get asked about good news up here. And certainly over the last --

Q It isn't good news --

MR. EARNEST: I think it is good news, particularly in light of the kinds of questions that I received over the summer about whether or not this goal would be met. And the truth is, this administration did succeed in meeting this goal -- a significant ramping-up of the number of Syrian refugees to the United States. And we were able to do all of that without cutting any corners when it comes to security. And significant screening was put in place to ensure that these individuals don't pose an undue threat to our national security. That's the kind of screening that every refugee applicant is subjected to. And we were able to meet this goal without cutting any of those corners. So the President is gratified that we have succeeded in meeting this goal.

I think the President would like to see the United States continue to expand our ambition when it comes to responding to this global calamity. The United States has already stepped up to the plate and played an important leading role in the response, both in terms of providing more humanitarian assistance than any other country in the world, and we certainly are playing an important role here in accepting refugees from that conflict. The United States is obviously in a different place, literally, than countries in Europe. The United States is separated by a large ocean when it comes to these refugees.

So the situation that we face is different when it comes to this set of refugees. And the President does believe it's important for the United States to do our part. That's why we increased our ambition and admitted 10,000 Syrian refugees this fiscal year. But I think the President certainly would like to see the United States continue to ramp up our commitment.

Q For all the success, wasn't this goal a response to political pressure from critics of the administration who did not want to see even 10,000 people admitted from Syria, admitted to this country? And again, the bottom line: For the biggest, most powerful country on Earth to admit 10,000 people from one of the most devastated places in the world just doesn't sound like a lot.

MR. EARNEST: Well, Ron, I think you're illustrating the dynamic here, which is that there are a lot of people out there who are saying that the United States has not done enough, and there are a lot of people out there who are saying that the United States has done too much and taken too many. And I think many of the people on both sides are playing politics. And President Obama is focused on doing the right thing and continuing to uphold the tradition of strong leadership in the United States when it comes to responding to a global calamity like we've see in Syria. And that response isn't just

admitting 10,000 Syrian refugees, but it's also providing billions in humanitarian assistance, and also -- not insignificantly -- building a large international coalition to address the terror threat and the extremist threat that emanates from that situation.

Q Let me ask you one other question from a colleague of mine with CNBC who knows a lot more about this stuff than I do. There's a ruling by the European Union Commission that's expected tomorrow in Brussels that has to do with tax policy, tax laws, Ireland, U.S. companies, and how these companies are taxed and where the proceeds go. And apparently, the ruling is something that Treasury had tried to intervene in and tried to stop this ruling because it feels like it unfairly -- it does not fairly tax American companies, and that the Europeans are the beneficiaries of this and not the Americans. Again, you probably understand this better than I do, perhaps, but are you familiar with this ruling that's expected on Treasury's objections and concerns about this?

MR. EARNEST: Yeah, I'm familiar with the ruling. My colleagues at the Treasury Department are the experts here. I think what I can just say in general is that the United States is committed to tax fairness. And we want to make sure that the kinds of agreements that we reach with other countries are not manipulated to allow certain companies to shirk their responsibilities. And that's true both when we're talking about United States companies who have obligations to the United States in terms of bearing their tax burden, but that's also true of companies that are based in other countries and do business here in the United States.

The truth is, the complexity when it comes to these kinds of international tax agreements in some situations only makes it easier for countries in the -- or for companies in the United States to ship their profits overseas. And we certainly do not want to continue to perpetuate a system in which companies hide behind the complexity of this system in a way that disadvantages the United States and our economy.

So when it comes to the particulars of the ruling, I'll refer you to my colleagues at Treasury who can give you a more specific answer when it comes to the ruling. The principles that we take the closest look at is fairness, and we want to make sure that when we reach agreements with other countries, that those agreements are implemented fairly and in a way that they cannot be manipulated to allow companies to shirk their responsibilities.

Q Just one last thing, on the Paris agreement. Brian said that this could still be done through executive authority, that it falls in the category, and it is not a treaty that requires Senate approval.

MR. EARNEST: That's correct.

Q What is the -- why? Other than you saying it so, what makes it not be a treaty that requires ratification? Or what would require -- how do you do -- what's the distinction?

MR. EARNEST: Well, maybe we'll have Brian give you a call on this. But my understanding is essentially this -- that the kind of authority that needs to be exercised to allow the U.S. to make these commitments that we committed to making in Paris is

consistent with authority that Congress has already given to the President of the United States.

Q Right. That's a judgment against -- the question is -- I mean, is there -- is it because there's 155 countries, or because it was done in -- there's usually some clear distinction as to why something is a treaty or not. Or maybe it's not clear, obviously.

MR. EARNEST: Well, what it is, is it's related directly to the kinds of commitments that the United States agreed to in the context of the Paris agreement -- what are the steps that the United States is now required to take to live up to the terms of the agreement. And those steps that we have to take are steps that don't involve an act of Congress. So to put -

Q -- requires the passage of additional laws by states. But they do, don't they?

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, I think this is where we can have Brian talk to you. But the bottom line is that there is no specific congressional action that's required to allow the United States to fulfill the commitments that we made in the context of the Paris agreement.

Pam.

Q Thanks, Josh. Just to follow up on Ron's question about the refugees, it was a six-fold increase in the number of refugees in less than a year, at least. How would you reassure people who are concerned about maybe some radicalized person getting through that you were able to do this safely, given the process that's generally considered to be a two-year vetting process? Did you have the extreme vetting that we heard something about?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think that's a term that might have been used by somebody who doesn't currently work in the U.S. government. I'll stop there. (Laughter.)

But let me answer your question a couple of ways. The first is, this is a process that typically does take quite a bit of time. And I think what that would tell you, Pam, is that there are a number of people who are already in the pipeline when the President made this commitment. And essentially what the Obama administration was able to do was to mobilize resources, both within the intelligence community, within the Department of Homeland Security, to do things like deploy more officers to conduct interviews. You'll recall that this vetting of refugee applicants involves collecting biometric information, doing in-person interviews, doing background checks, running their information through a variety of national security and international databases. And a lot of that just requires personnel and expertise. And President Obama made this a priority.

You'll recall when the President made this commitment, he made clear that we weren't going to cut corners when it comes to security. And in order to meet this higher threshold, it was going to require not shortchanging the security steps, but actually increasing the resources that are being deployed to our security. And that's exactly what we've done. And the President is gratified that even in the face of a lot of doubt, this is a goal that was met a month ahead of schedule.

John.

Q Thank you. In previewing the President's trip to Laos, Ben acknowledged the legacy of war that the United States has with Laos. I'm wondering how the President intends to communicate that legacy with the people of Laos, and whether he'll apologize.

MR. EARNEST: Well, obviously this is going to be an historic trip on the part of the President. As I recall, it's the first time that a U.S. President has traveled to Laos. And obviously there is an interesting history, and certainly one that the President will confront quite directly when he goes to -- when he visits Laos next week.

Part of what he'll do when he's in Laos is talk about the ongoing effort to recover unexploded ordnance. This is an unfortunate and violent legacy of war that ended I guess four decades ago now. And the President is aware of the impact that that legacy has on our ability to build a strong relationship with Laos. And this trip will give the President the opportunity to not just meet with his counterparts, but also to spend time with the people of Laos and to visit some of the cultural institutions there, but also to talk about this one element of painful legacy of the relationship between our two countries.

Q And then separately, the President is well known as a big sports fan. On Friday night, before the '49ers lost to the Green Bay Packers -- Go, Pack -- Colin Kaepernick decided that he would not stand for the National Anthem. He cited oppression to people of color and minorities. I'm just wondering if the President saw that, if he noticed that, watching SportsCenter over the weekend. Does he have any sort of reaction? Was that the wrong forum for Colin Kaepernick to take that action, coming from a (inaudible) Commander-in-Chief --

MR. EARNEST: Given the President's interest in the sports world, I'm confident that he's aware of this issue. I have not spoken to him about it today. I think in general, what I can say is that I certainly don't share the views that Mr. Kaepernick expressed after the game in explaining his reasoning for his actions. But we surely all acknowledge and even defend his right to express those views in the settings that he chooses. That's what he's done. And even as objectionable as we find his perspective, he certainly is entitled to express them.

Michelle, I'll give you the last one.

Q Okay, thanks. Over the weekend, we heard the German economic minister say that, in his view, the T-TIP has failed. What is your view of that?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I understand that at least one of my counterparts at the EU has indicated that the work to try to complete a trade agreement between the United States and the EU is ongoing. Those negotiations have been underway for a couple of years now, and they continue.

The President has set a rather ambitious goal of trying to complete those negotiations by the end of the year. And that certainly is what his team is working to do. It's going to require the resolution of some pretty thorny negotiations, but the President and his team

are committed to doing that. His team has certainly been empowered by the President to try to bring those remaining issues to a close, and hopefully we'll be able to get that done before the end of the year. But the work to do that continues.

Q It hasn't effectively failed at this point?

MR. EARNEST: No. That's not the ongoing assessment. The ongoing assessment is that they're continuing to work to try to complete this agreement before the end of the year.

Q And quickly on the Syrian refugees numbers. Since that was a sort of lower goal with more to come, this year can you see sort of a projected number that we can say will come in?

MR. EARNEST: In terms of the overall refugee count?

Q No, Syrian refugees in particular.

MR. EARNEST: Okay. The expectation I think is that we'll be right around 10,000 for fiscal year *2017 [2016]. The President, I think, put forward a slightly higher number for fiscal year *2018 [2017], and that's something that we'll consider. My understanding is that Secretary of State John Kerry actually has some conversations with Congress that will occur before we set the final figure for the number of Syrian refugees that would enter the United States during the next fiscal year.

So I would anticipate in the next few weeks we'll have some additional news on this. I think the President would like to see a ramping-up of those efforts, but I think the President is also realistic about how quickly that can happen.

Q Can you give us a -- I mean, in what range would the President like to see?

MR. EARNEST: I think the estimate that we put forward last year, as I recall -- it was last year about this time when we were discussing this issue -- the President made a commitment to increase the number a few thousand over 10,000. But again, that's something that Secretary of State John Kerry will discuss with Congress. And hopefully we'll have more detailed information to provide on this before the end of next month.

Q And just one more thing -- just kidding. (Laughter.)

MR. EARNEST: Thanks, everybody. We'll see you tomorrow.

END

3:11 P.M. EDT