

Gaggle en route Boston, MA

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The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

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Aboard Air Force One
En Route Boston, Massachusetts

11:08 A.M. EDT

MR. CARNEY: Welcome aboard Air Force One this morning as we make our way to the great state of Massachusetts. I think you have a readout of the President's events today, so I won't repeat them. I have no announcements to make, so I'm here to take your questions. Associated Press.

Q Thanks, Jay. Is the President participating today either remotely or in person in the principals meeting on Syria?

MR. CARNEY: The President is here on the plane. We tend not to send the plane with you guys in it unless the President is on board. You're making an assumption that I believe is false about a meeting that the President is chairing when in fact he's flying to Boston and then Miami.

Q I didn't say he was chairing it, but he could be participating ostensibly.

MR. CARNEY: We do regular meetings on Syria. I think I've mentioned that now for several days running. I have no specific meeting to read out. But the President is traveling today --

Q Do you have any reaction to the Senate vote yesterday on the early test of the immigration bill?

MR. CARNEY: We're very pleased by the significant bipartisan vote that we saw. And that reflects what the President said yesterday that the bill forged by the Gang of Eight, a bipartisan group of senators, represents a compromise -- represents a compromise that sticks to the principles that he's enunciated and that other supporters of comprehensive immigration reform have allied themselves with.

So that's an encouraging sign. But we are obviously still very much in the thick of the process in the Senate as debate gets underway and look forward to being engaged in that and in encouraging senators of both parties to keep focused on the goal here, which is

broad comprehensive immigration reform that strengthens our border, makes life better for our businesses and for the middle class, holds businesses accountable when it comes to ensuring that those they hire are working legally, and provides a pathway to citizenship -- a clear pathway to citizenship for the 11 million people living in this country illegally.

Those are the broad outlines of the kind of comprehensive immigration reform that the Senate bill represents and that the President supports. So we will be part of this effort every step of the way.

Q Jay, can I just go back to Syria for a second? Is this a critical week in the sense that there have been clear setbacks for the rebels combating Assad? Does the President have to make an important decision? There are all these reports about meetings that he's having. What does he have to do this week on the Syria situation?

MR. CARNEY: We are constantly evaluating the situation in Syria and the options available to the President when it comes to encouraging a transition there as well as supporting the opposition so that that transition can take place. I have no announcements to make, but this is something that is obviously a serious matter. It's something that we discuss regularly -- certainly not just this week but for two years now.

So the situation on the ground continues to worsen with elevated levels of violence with the participation of Hezbollah and Iran. And the President has made clear that he rules no option out, although he has also made clear that he does not envision a scenario that would lead to putting American boots on the ground in Syria. But setting aside that, he rules no option out and he's constantly evaluating his policy options.

And as he does so, he keeps the focus on which possible policy options would help lead to the ultimate goal here, and he wants a rigorous process that assesses whether -- assesses policy options based on whether they would lead to that goal or whether they would inadvertently set back progress on achieving that goal.

So that's where we are on Syria. When we have and if we have announcements to make, we'll make them.

Q Can you also just address does he have any concerns about what appears to be a broadening role of Iran in the conflict and the chance that Iran's influence in the region might benefit from its involvement in this?

MR. CARNEY: There's no question that Bashar al-Assad has two very clear friends in the region -- Hezbollah and Iran. And that ought to tell you everything you need to know about Bashar al-Assad and his tyrannical regime, and the fact that he is calling on outside assistance in the murderous campaign against his own people.

We have long been concerned about the instability caused by the conflict in Syria and its capacity to spread regionally, and certainly the participation of Hezbollah and Iran in the effort causes concern. And the President evaluates these developments as he's assessing policy options.

Q Staying with Syria, David Cameron said today that he's going to be discussing Syria with Vladimir Putin before the G8 starts next week. I was wondering is Syria going to be kind of the elephant in the room at G8, do you think?

MR. CARNEY: I think that the phrase usually suggests that it's a topic that will be unremarked upon but present nonetheless. I don't think that's the case. The leaders of these countries are I think always in a situation to discuss a broad array of subjects that are front and center globally.

So I don't have a specific agenda to lay out to you -- I think we might provide more of a preview tomorrow on the trip. But the fact of the matter is that Syria is an issue of great concern to many of the nations represented at the G8 -- all of them, in fact. And we have had regular conversations with Britain and France and others, the Russians, about what's happening in Syria and the need to take action to bring about a transition there.

Q Would it be fair to assume that the President will be talking with allies about Syria next week?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I don't have --

Q -- on the sidelines?

MR. CARNEY: I mean, I think, again, as I was saying, this is an issue of concern. I'm not saying it's on the formal agenda, but it's a topic that we are discussing with our allies regularly as it is, and I certainly wouldn't rule out that being a topic of discussion.

Q Jay, as part of the campaign swing today, the chairman of the RNC is quoted in an AP story today saying that early Democratic candidates are "running away fast from the President." Would you care to respond to that?

MR. CARNEY: No. Spin from a political committee is what it is.

Q Jay, on the IRS, does the White House think that Chairman Issa should reveal -- release the full transcripts of the interviews that he conducted with IRS employees?

MR. CARNEY: I think the Chairman promised he would. I think the Ranking Member has demonstrated that we have seen yet again some cherry-picking when it comes to the release of testimony, release of information. And I would just refer you to the comments of the Ranking Member on the committee.

Q Jay, any reaction to Google and other tech companies sending a letter to Holder and Mueller asking to release their national security requests? Is that something the White House would support?

MR. CARNEY: We have seen the letters from Google and other companies and understand that they have questions about how we can best talk about these programs moving forward. The Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation are reviewing Google's request, so I would refer you to them. But we're certainly aware of the letters.

Q Jay, what can you tell us about Biden's gun control event next week, and any efforts to kind of re-launch that effort to get legislation passed?

MR. CARNEY: I think it is important to understand that the commitment of this President and the Vice President to taking action to reduce gun violence is as strong today as it was at the beginning of the year and in the wake of Newtown. The President made clear his deep disappointment with the decision of the minority of senators to flout the will of the vast majority of the American people -- the majority of Republicans, Democrats and independents -- in states across the country.

We've also made clear, and it was laid out in the plan that the Vice President led a group in developing and that the President presented, that we would pursue legislative action and we would take executive action. And I think that this -- we're doing that. But I wouldn't -- I think that "restarting" or "relaunching" is a characterization made by a reporter, not by us.

Q Jay, back to the NSA for a minute and Mr. Snowden. You've said that it would be inappropriate for you to comment on something while it's being investigated, but prominent people from both parties now are commenting and are saying that based on what this gentleman has revealed or acknowledged himself that he is a traitor. So are people like Senator Feinstein and Speaker Boehner acting inappropriately by commenting on that?

MR. CARNEY: I've simply said what our disposition is on this, that we're not going to comment on the subject of a recently begun and ongoing investigation into the unauthorized disclosure of classified information. Others can speak for themselves.

Q And a number of lawmakers are appearing to be a little bit confused about it or said that they weren't fully aware of certain things. Is the reason that lawmakers are learning more now about this because they weren't given the information they needed, or because they didn't properly attend briefings or pay attention to information that was given to them?

MR. CARNEY: I think it's been amply demonstrated that with regards to both sections of the Patriot Act and the programs that exist under those authorities that members of Congress were briefed or had the opportunity to be briefed on them. And I would point you to statements by Senator Reid and to the simple facts. And it is certainly the case that some members of Congress did not avail themselves of the opportunity to be briefed, but that's certainly their prerogative.

Q On today's event, Jay, can you talk a little bit about what the President wants to accomplish by participating in a rally with Congressman Markey? Is the Martha Coakley-Scott Brown experience fresh in the minds of Democrats? And is the President concerned about effects that these controversies that we've been talking to you about over the weeks are going to have on Markey's candidacy?

MR. CARNEY: The answer to the second question is no. But the answer to the first question is the President supports Ed Markey's candidacy, as you would expect, and believes he'll make an excellent senator. And that's why he is traveling here to have a rally in support of Congressman Markey's campaign.

Q At an event benefiting that same candidate last night, the Vice President said that Republicans in the Senate are cowering to two of their freshmen senators -- Paul from Kentucky and Cruz from Texas. Is that a view that the President shares?

MR. CARNEY: I haven't talked to the President about that view. I would simply say that Vice President Biden is an expert on the Senate.

Q Thanks, Jay.

END

11:22 A.M. EDT