

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest; Mayor Kasim Reed of Atlanta, GA; and Governor John Kasich of Ohio

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MR. EARNEST: Good morning, everybody. It's nice to see you all. As advertised, and as you can see, I'm joined at the podium today by Mayor Kasim Reed from the great city of Atlanta, Georgia, and by Governor John Kasich of Ohio. Both of them have indicated their strong support and their strong belief that Congress should approve the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and they had an opportunity to discuss that with the President in the Oval Office for about an hour or so this morning. And I invited them to discuss it here this morning with all of you, as well.

Each of them has prepared some brief opening remarks. We'll give them a chance to have their say briefly, and then we'll open it up to questions.

So, Mayor Reed, do you want to start, or Governor Kasich?

MAYOR REED: Good morning. I want to begin by thanking President Obama for giving us the opportunity to join us in expressing our enthusiastic support for the Trans-Pacific Partnership today. I'm honored to be among the bipartisan gathering of leaders that included governors, CEOs, financial individuals from the financial sector, former Treasury Secretary.

Last fall, I was honored that the city of Atlanta was selected to host the final round of negotiations for the Trans-Pacific Partnership. In our judgment, it's the most progressive trade agreement in U.S. history. I'm also proud that more than 100 mayors have stayed shoulder-to-shoulder with the President in the effort to pass TPP.

In Atlanta, small businesses are the backbone of our local economy and the primary drivers of growth and innovation. Nationally, we all know that they represent more than 98 percent of businesses in our country. But only about 1 percent of those businesses --

small businesses are engaged in international trade. When we pass TPP, I'm confident that that number will increase.

The TPP, which was finalized in February 2016, will reduce barriers and focus on small business exports by cutting tariffs and reducing non-tariff barriers, opening the fast-growing Pacific Rim region of the world. The 12 countries in the TPP represent about 40 percent of global GDP and account for about one-third of global trade.

Metro Atlanta right now is already the 13th largest exporter in the U.S. with more than 150,000 jobs in the metropolitan Atlanta region that is supported by the TPP. Georgia exported 37 percent of its goods, about \$14.4 billion to TPP countries in 2011, and we expect that number to continue to climb. Nationally, 11.7 million jobs are supported by countries that make up the TPP market.

And we came today because we intend to see that this bill is passed. And the President asked for our thinking on how it will get passed. One of the best quotes that I've heard around TPP came from a former U.S. ambassador, and he said something that I think resonates certainly with our group. What he said was, is that people who run for office often campaign against trade, but people who become President of the United States end up supporting trade.

There are a number of very important reasons for us not to let this matter fail, and the most important in my mind really is determining who's going to set the rules of the road. We have been working on this transaction for more than five years. The President and Ambassador Furman have done an exceptional job negotiating a very favorable agreement that is now becoming known to the world. If we want to make sure that the United States continues to lead and continues to set the rules of the road with 40 percent of the global GDP, we need to get this deal done.

One of the other factors that isn't mentioned enough is that the TPP group also forms the basis for more than 40 percent of future GDP growth. And so, once again, we think that it is in America's vital interest and in the interest of small towns across the United States of America to see that this bill is passed. Businesses that engage in international trade are more successful, pay higher wages to their workers. And so we have come together to make sure that in this season, with so much political noise and gamesmanship, that a bill that is vital to the United States long-term interest doesn't get left aside.

And with that, I would like to bring forward the Governor of Ohio, Governor Kasich. Thank you.

GOVERNOR KASICH: Thank you, Mayor.

I think the Mayor has done a great job of laying out the economics implications of this agreement. I think we now have a unique opportunity, again, to put country in front of politics.

I think many of the people that are in the Congress of the United States understand what this is all about. They understand the implications of trade. But there's one other thing that I think they all understand, and all of us in this room need to reflect on this. The two nations that most vociferously oppose this agreement are China -- you look at Xi. I'm astounded every day about another repressive technique that he uses to control his people, even going so far as to try to regulate or dismantle the youth involvement in politics in China.

Xi has been very repressive. And not only that. We're all clearly aware that it's been the reluctance of Xi and the Chinese to put the pressure that needs to be put on North Korea. They walked away from it, leaving the rest of the world wondering what to do, and bringing up issues about mutual security.

Vladimir Putin probably wakes up every day thinking about how he can complete the work he started in the Crimea, thinks about Ukraine and how much he'd like to gobble it up, or even the kind of actions he's now taking that threatens the Balkans -- I'm sorry -- the Baltics.

So, folks, it's really pretty simple. Economically, trade always makes sense. Are there losers in trade? Yes, there are. And that's why it's important that we have a system that can retrain people for the jobs of the future. Frankly, if you don't trade, you hurt consumers. If you don't trade, you hurt innovation. If you don't trade, you withdraw from the world. But from the geopolitical sense, it is absolutely critical that the United States stand with many of these nations that are, in some ways, economically weak -- including a nation like Vietnam, that is now asking us to work with them to develop a strong partnership that would have an economic underpinning. But that economic underpinning is absolutely going to lead to a strengthened sense of America's influence in Asia.

Could you imagine if the United States of America decided, as I told one congressman this morning, if we turned our back on those nations in Asia that are looking to us in a great sense of partnership to give them the courage and the strength to stand against a rising China? So both from an economic point of view and a geopolitical point of view, where would we be if we turned this down?

This is what gives us a unique opportunity again in this city -- that I've come to not quite understand -- that these kinds of issues is where politics goes out the window and where the good of America has to be represented and has to be respected.

I appreciate the President inviting the group that we had in there this morning. He's very passionate about the need to do this. He's willing to work with those who were both for and against, and he's willing to really put his shoulder to the wheel.

For me, I've got two 16-year-old daughters. I worry about the future of this country. America can't afford to lock the doors and lower the blinds and ignore the rest of the world. We're a force for good. And this TPP will help us not only on the economic side, but will also allow us to continue to be a strong world leader for good.

Repression, lack of human rights, lack of democracy that some of these opponents to this deal support is not something that the United States should take lightly. I would call on my former colleagues in the House and the Senate to think here over the next couple weeks about the implications of saying no, and what it will mean for our future, and the fact that they can cast a vote that can strengthen our country and our alliances around the world. To me, that's what's at stake. And, frankly, that's why I'm here today.

MR. EARNEST: Thank you, Governor.

Scott, do you want to start?

Q The President described it as a strategizing session. Can you guys talk a little bit about what strategy you've come up with, since I don't think politics is going to go out the window, how you're going to put political pressure on the House and Senate?

GOVERNOR KASICH: Well, I think part of it is the President of the United States, in a quiet way, without press conferences or blaring trumpets, needs to meet with a group of people who we know are not likely to support this but they don't want to see it die. I understand politics. Sometimes people can just sort of register their objection and kind of leave the floor or leave the meetings and let matters proceed. I think that's part of it.

I also think that the business community -- I was never a big fan of this Import-Export Bank, but the business community did a very effective job in talking about the fact that this is about jobs. We had a great, brilliant woman in there today, the head of IBM, and I think the suggestion to her is to make sure that the employees of IBM let members of Congress know that this is about my job, this is about my family, this is about my community.

So I think there's multiple ways in which this message can get out, but I also happen to think the national security message is something that should resonate with every single member of Congress.

So I think there will be an aggressive move on this. I guess I'm an optimist -- I kind of think that at the end of the day, with the right appeals, people put their country ahead of political concerns. And I saw it the entire time I was here for 18 years, and I've seen it in the state of Ohio -- with the right group of people being involved, you can pull things out and have a good victory.

MR. EARNEST: Mayor Reed, do you want to add to that?

MAYOR REED: I do. We think a few things. One, we think that this is a country-first moment, and we believe that if you have a strong feeling and belief in American exceptionalism that you need to be a part of this effort. And we think that that is going to help us carry the day.

We also happen to believe that there are a number of folks who should demonstrate and have great affection for this President, certainly at this point in his tenure, and we intend to compete vigorously for their support. And so there will be the strategy of the

facts, which is that this is the right thing for America. We cannot leave 40 percent of future GDP growth to the whims and fortunes of the Chinese. We don't think that that's the smart approach. And we think that that will move us part of the way.

And then we think that another part of the way will be with those individuals who are loyal to the President and who want to help him get this bill across the line. And there is a very strong feeling that there will be a moment when that vote is appropriate.

What we can't do is be sitting on our hands and be on our heels. And so that's why we're here today, to start having a very detailed approach to how we're going to get this done at the right moment with a broad, bipartisan coalition.

MR. EARNEST: Josh.

Q Governor Kasich, we couldn't help but notice in the Oval Office earlier that you were shaking your head when the question came up about your party's presidential nominee reinjecting the birther-ism issue into the election. Could you take a little into what was going through your mind?

GOVERNOR KASICH: Well, what I was really thinking is that Bruce Springsteen has to be really happy, because "Born in the U.S.A." is probably going to sell a lot more albums. That's as far as I would go. I mean, what am I thinking about it? I'm here for TPP and what's happening in the world, not talking about where somebody was born.

MR. EARNEST: Ron.

Q Can I just ask -- when you were talking about how politicians run against trade but then change their position, essentially, are you saying that both of the leading candidates for President are now doing something disingenuous and that they are both wanting to flip their position at some point, regardless of the outcome of this election? What does it say about our politics and what does it say about --

MAYOR REED: Oh, no, I'm not casting aspersions on either of the candidates. What I'm saying is, if you just look at history, despite what has happened in the campaign process, when people actually occupy the office and look at the data and see what it does for the American people, the 11.7 million jobs that are being supported and the 11 partner countries here, that once people are in office and have the awesome responsibility of the presidency, they change.

That said, to get to your question, my sense isn't that either of these candidates would flip, which is why I think it's so important that we pass TPP right now. Because I actually don't believe that it will flip. But this needs to get done for the United States of America, and there will be a moment to get it done. And as you know from being in this town for a long time, you can't just jump up and try to engage in this process -- you've got to stay at it.

Q Right, if you don't think they'll flip -- this is a concern that a lot of leaders in Asia expressed, the President acknowledged that in his comments. They wonder what the future is, and America's credibility is on the line here. So what do you say to them when, admittedly, you think there's going to be a problem for this deal, even if it passes, come January?

MAYOR REED: Here's what I think will happen. I think if we pass this deal, it will be honored by the next President of the United States. And I think it's very important that we pass this deal, and it's a priority for the President. What the President made clear in no uncertain terms was that this was a priority and he was willing to work very hard on it.

GOVERNOR KASICH: I want to say something that concerns me. We had an article today in The Wall Street Journal. I get reactions like, well, you're a Republican, why are you supporting something that the President wants? We cannot get to the point in America that because a Democrat wants something that you happen to agree with, you can't agree with him. There's plenty of things that I disagree with President Obama on. But the idea that I'm a Republican and, therefore, I can't work with Democrats; or you're a Democrat, and you can't work with Republicans -- how does anybody think that the issues of debt, Social Security, Medicare, health care, any of these issues are going to be resolved when we spend all of our time fighting with one another?

You see, I don't recognize this town much anymore. Because now it's become so much about politics. And when politics is the order of the day, and partisanship trumps country, we drift. We drift as a nation. And I'm extremely concerned about what I see. This is a moment for people to begin to reverse that, to think deep inside of themselves about what matters when it comes to public service.

Q But, Governor Kasich --

MR. EARNEST: Hold on, hold on, hold on.

Margaret.

Q You're probably not going to want to hear this, but I'd like to take what you just said and segue back to the 2016 race then. I think the issue is not that everyone is trying to drag you away from TPP and into a different conversation. It's that the dominant conversation is the one about the election that's about to happen. You're now a month and a half, two months before the election. Donald Trump just came out and did like a "drop the mic" moment where he said that he's the one who resolved the birther controversy; it was Hillary Clinton's fault that there ever was one. Does this go to your point about partisanship trumping -- trumping? -- the good of the country. I think -- we're not trying to distract you from --

GOVERNOR KASICH: Look, in a presidential campaign -- we've seen a lot of them and every one, of course, is always defined as the most important one we've ever had in our history. But the fact of the matter is, is that that goes on. But this vote, ultimately, by the current Congress of the United States gets decided by the current makeup of the United States Senate and the United States House.

And I happen to believe -- well, I don't want to try to ever project how anybody else is thinking. But this is a serious matter. And when I see the presidential campaign going on -- it's almost a surreal 21st century presidential election, that if you and I had drafted a movie script about everything that was going to be happening on both sides with both candidates, or even the whole process, they would have thrown us out of their offices out in Hollywood because they would said, this is a fiction that goes well beyond any fiction that would be acceptable.

So I understand that. But we have to stay focused on the things that matter. And I'm focused very much on the things that matter in my state. And now with this, I'm focused not only on something that affects my state, but something that affects my country.

So I watch with some surprise. But I also have to tell you how amazed I am with the fascination of the media on really easy stories, things that get eyeballs and generates ratings, and therefore generates money. Look, I like the media. I was once in the media. I may be back in the media again. But there's a point at which I think that journalists need to -- you have to be responsible. You report whatever story you want, any story you feel strongly about. But if the issue is how many clicks can I get, and how much can I get paid, then that drifts into an area that I think we all have to think about, because I believe we all have to live a life a little bigger than ourselves. And so, food for thought.

Q But, Governor, I got to ask you. Respectfully, you ran for President on this issue -- other issues, as well. And you lost.

GOVERNOR KASICH: Yes.

Q Donald Trump ran opposing this, calling it the worst trade deal in the history of mankind or something. And he won. Hillary Clinton opposed it. Bernie Sanders opposed it. How is it right for Congress in a lame duck session to go against what was clearly the will of the voters through the elections process?

And I've got to just ask you one more thing on Donald Trump. Do you agree with Hillary Clinton that he owes the President an apology for five years denying that he was born in America, for denying the obvious?

GOVERNOR KASICH: I'm the person that's usually pretty direct, but I'm not stepping on my own message today by talking about that.

Now, number two.

Q It's got to bug you, right?

GOVERNOR KASICH: Oh, there's a lot of things that bug me. The chili dip shot on the 15th hole bugs me. (Laughter.) This is just life. This is politics. But, look, Jon, I don't happen to believe that with these specific issues -- whether it's the wall, or whether it's trade -- you give me \$2 billion worth of publicity, and I probably could even beat you, Jon.

But here's the thing that I want to suggest. I have never been an ideological supporter of free trade. The ideologues used to come to me and were frustrated with me. David Dreier is one of them -- from California. Well, what's wrong with you? Or Kemp, or any of these people. But when you look at these agreements in a real sense -- and this one, much different than even NAFTA. Because, Jon, this is China. This is Russia. These are fledgling countries in Asia, and we want to pivot to Asia, we're going to have to do this.

I think there's something that the Mayor said that's fairly accurate. You know, sometimes in campaigns people will say things only to find out later, oops. I used to say during the campaign, do you know how many promises people make when they run for President and they never carry them out? But, look, this is an opportunity for the Congress to carry out its responsibility.

And because somebody didn't support a trade agreement who's running for President - - so what? We disagree with Presidents. I disagree with this President on a lot of things, okay? But I happen to agree with him strongly on this thing. So I don't think because we have this presidential election that somehow the Congress that's sitting there shouldn't be able to move forward on this agreement, particularly when I think it's vital. And I don't think it's those issues that really are the ones that -- I think there are a lot of people in America who feel very frustrated, they feel very vulnerable.

You know how I understand it? Because I grew up in it. Where I grew up, in McKees Rocks, was a town if the wind blew the wrong way people found themselves out of work. And sometimes simple proposals to solve difficult problems sell, but they never work. Then never work. Blaming somebody's loss of a job on somebody from Mexico that came in and took your job -- that's a simple way to scapegoat. No matter who they are. Whether it's

-- or Bernie and his business of the only reason why you don't have something, because all the rich people in the world, they took what you had -- I just think that's just wrong. And I know it's boring to have complicated solutions to complicated problems, but we'll end up back there. We will end up back there, mark my words, or we will drift.

Q Who is --

MR. EARNEST: Hold on. Hold on. Are you on the ballot? (Laughter.)

Go ahead.

Q Governor Kasich, to follow up on what you were just laying out, are you saying, then, as the Mayor suggested, that this is just pure political expediency on the part of both the Democratic and the Republican presidential nominees to oppose this free trade deal? And what do you think that streak of protectionism in both parties is being fed off of?

GOVERNOR KASICH: Well, I think Hillary was once for it, until she was against it. I think that's a -- is that a quote from some other campaign? (Laughter.) So she moved there.

Q And you (inaudible.)

GOVERNOR KASICH: Oh, I have no idea. That's why I want to do this now, because you've got to get this done. I'd love to think it could happen next year. I'm not convinced it can happen after this year.

No, what I'm suggesting -- and I'm not questioning where either of the candidates' real heart is. I can't discern where their heart is. But what I can say is oftentimes when people run -- you know, when I ran for governor there were a lot of things that I thought I could do -- when I got in there, I said, oh, you know what, it's not that simple. I can actually tell you I remember saying I was going to abolish the Highway Patrol -- they're like armed revenue agents -- until I figured out what they did. So sometimes as you run, you don't have the sense of the heaviness, the gravity of decision-making.

As the Mayor will tell you, it's very hard to be the mayor of Atlanta. You know, when you run for mayor of Atlanta, I'll bet he said I'm going to do this and do that, and then you get in and you still stick to your principles, but with sophistication and understanding, leaders evolve. They don't change. I mean, this is not like you change colors or anything like that. But you learn more and you lead.

And so I don't know where these candidates will ultimately be, but what I know is there's a chance for the House and the Senate to actually do something. And here's what I do believe. I believe there are people both in the House and the Senate that will play pure politics with our future to take care of themselves. And let me also suggest to you, when that's what you do, when you leave Washington you didn't accomplish anything other than -- what? Obstruct?

Look, I've been involved in more fights on Capitol Hill than about anybody -- within my party and with the other party. But at the end, you have to accomplish something. And sometimes politics today in this town, it's overwhelming. As we all know. What, are we kidding ourselves? There's too much politics and not enough caring about being an American. Am I right?

Thank you.

Q If I could just follow, Governor. Whether you're in Parma or mayor in Dunwoody somewhere, I just want you to make it really simple for the guys driving the pickup truck who just wants to understand why this matters -- because I think when you're awash in it, it's easy, maybe, to make the compelling argument in a room like this. But for people who are not dealing with this day to day, they want to know how is this going to affect my life, this TPP.

MAYOR REED: Well, I'll tell you, there is a receptionist that I think we almost got disciplined because the Republican governor of the state of Georgia and I showed up to urge the President to support funding of the deepening of the Port of Savannah, which happens to be one of the fastest-growing ports in America. And ultimately, it was funded.

You go to the Port of Savannah, you see those jobs that everybody in America is talking about. You see a longshoreman that can put his kids through school and know that his children are going to go to college.

And so the kind and quality of jobs that everybody is talking about in America comes from investments in international trade.

The Port of Savannah supports 150,000 jobs in the metropolitan region. That's why I was sitting next to a Republican governor, asking that the Port of Savannah receive support -- not Atlanta. So I think what we have to do is to go back to jobs. All of this is a competition for talent. I happen to believe that technology is a far more destructive force in many areas than global trade.

Global trade is just more convenient to whack at because you don't want to beat up on your iPad or your computer, because we love them all so much. So it's easy to talk about global trade. I go back to jobs, jobs, jobs. Businesses that engage in international trade, we're only 1 percent of small businesses. Just imagine if we take our small businesses and move them from 1 to 4, to 5 percent -- the impact it has on our GDP.

And finally, I'll close with this. I love America. And right now, America makes up somewhere between 21 to 23 percent of global GDP. What are we going to do to make sure that that stays the case? To the extent that we maintain the influence and America's wealth, we ensure that our values can be shared across the country. So, one, I think a deep love of country, and where are we generating the highest quality of jobs that are exactly the kind that we've been talking about over the last 12 to 16 months.

GOVERNOR KASICH: Good job, Mayor. Look, I mean, first of all, for the consumer, you shut down trade, you will get products that cost more and don't have quality. So to the truck driver, I mean, you want to have textiles or cars or whatever it is that are not as good and cost you more, go ahead.

Secondly, I know those truck drivers. I grew up in a blue-collar town. They love our country. Our folks in the truck-driving, blue-collar world don't want to turn power over to the Chinese or the Russians. They love America. That's another given.

Let me tell you one other thing. We are a country -- we are now a knowledge nation. We supply the ideas, the brainpower to move things to bring about progress. Progress defined is improving our standard of living. That truck driver is worried about his or her kids. The biggest problem we have today is that our education system at all levels is not preparing our children for the jobs of today and the jobs of tomorrow. Furthermore, we also don't have the capability to retrain somebody. And we want to talk about somebody left behind? Yeah, a 53-year-old man or woman who one day heard they were out of work and now they don't know what to do.

You see, the whole system has broken down. We have an education system that reflects the way we lived a hundred years ago. We've got a higher education system that costs too much and doesn't appropriately provide kids with the skills that they need. And we do

not have a job-retraining system in this country. That should come with any trade deal because there will be some people who will be displaced.

But, you know, where I grew up in Pittsburgh, we had steel mills. For anybody that reads The New York Times, on Sunday, there was an incredible article about 500 people in Pittsburgh growing to a thousand who are involved with Uber in autonomous vehicles. We may no longer make the iPhone -- we don't manufacture the iPhone, but we created the iPhone, and these knowledge jobs pay a lot more.

So to that truck driver, you're going to get your children a good education. We're going to train them for an entire lifetime, and they're going to be living in an exciting world of drones and autonomous vehicles and iPhones and Skype and all this incredible stuff that we see every single day. We can't go backwards to buggy whips. We have to go forward to these exciting, new innovations that will mean more wages, better jobs, more consistent work, but we need to change everything.

I mentioned to the President before I -- he and I had a little bit of time together. The whole education system -- it all needs to be changed. I want to ask you -- you all have children -- I think Josh is going to wrap this up -- do you think we're training your children for the jobs of today, the jobs of tomorrow? Most young people will have between five and 10 jobs in a lifetime. Are we giving them the resilience, the knowledge, and the capability to be flexible and to have a great life? We need to do that for our kids. We need to forget about politics and everything else, and start to do it.

Josh, thank you.

Q If you were the nominee, would you be endorsing TPP, sir?

GOVERNOR KASICH: I was for it when I was running.

Q Will you endorse Donald Trump?

Q But at the White House?

GOVERNOR KASICH: Of course. (Laughter.)

MR. EARNEST: I'm happy to talk about TPP at additional length -- (laughter) -- I've got some of my own thoughts to get off my chest -- or anything else that may be on your mind today.

Josh, do you want to get us started?

Q Sure. Let's go to the Syria deal, actually, since we're getting closer to the end of this test period for the ceasefire. And I'm wondering if you can comment on the perception that's out there now that the State Department and the Pentagon are basically taking public their strong disagreement about whether this deal with Russia is a good idea, whether we can cooperate with Russia, the Pentagon publically threatening not to even

implement it, the State Department essentially saying, well, look, Obama agrees with Kerry. Is part of the President's goal today to try and say to the heads of those two agencies, like, look, you need to kind of get along on this?

MR. EARNEST: Well, there's a lot there. Let's start with the President's meeting later today. As all of you know, the President every couple of weeks gathers his national security team together to discuss the effectiveness and progress of our strategy to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL. The next installment of those meetings will take place later today at the White House. And this is consistent with the kinds of meetings that you've covered before. This is one that had long been planned, and it's been on the books, in fact, before the agreement that Secretary Kerry reached with his Russian counterpart at the end of last week.

As it relates to the President's national security team, as I mentioned earlier this week, the President didn't staff up his national security team with yes men and yes women. The President staffed his national security team with experts who are determined to offer the President their best judgement about the best way to protect the American people and to protect our national security.

The President expects to receive advice based on their differing perspectives, their different experiences, and their different expertise. What the President also expects is that once he has made a decision that his team -- all components of the team -- move out to execute that strategy with excellence. And the President has no doubt that that's exactly what will happen as it relates to our latest effort to reduce the violence in Syria, address the terrible humanitarian situation, continue to pressure ISIL, and facilitate the kind of political transition inside of Syria that is long overdue.

In terms of those goals that I just articulated, those are widely shared across the administration, including at the Department of Defense and at the State Department. And both sides -- I would say everybody who is sitting around that table in the Situation Room today understands the situation inside of Syria is extraordinarily complicated. And there aren't a lot of good options available to the United States. But the option that has been made available at the President's direction, thanks largely to the tenacity of Secretary Kerry, is this effort to apply pressure to the Russians to see if they will use the influence that they have with the Assad regime to reduce the violence, allow for the free flow of humanitarian assistance, and facilitate negotiations around a political transition.

There are no other legitimate options that have been presented. And it's not as if there is an alternative that's been presented by somebody inside the administration or outside, for that matter, that anybody thinks is actually an alternative, long-term solution to this problem. So what the President is pursuing, with the support of this national security team, is the best option that is available to advance the interests of the United States, to reduce violence in Syria, to address the humanitarian situation inside of Syria, and bring about the kind of political transition that would address the root causes of the chaos and violence inside of Syria.

Q And the Associated Press, along with our colleagues at Gannett and Vice, sued the FBI today over our request for contracts related to the FBI getting into that iPhone that was used in the San Bernardino case. You've spoken quite a bit about the administration's pride in its record with compliance with Freedom of Information Act requests. Would the White House like to see the FBI comply with the FOIA request related to this case?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Josh, I'm just not going to be able to comment on what you acknowledge is the subject of litigation as of today. The FBI and the administration have tried to be as transparent as possible about this situation. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, we've been quite limited in what we've been able to discuss publicly. But at this point, there is a process that has been initiated by your news organization and others, and I'm confident that the Obama administration will comply with the law.

Roberta.

Q Josh, Vietnam had been expected to quickly ratify the TPP. But earlier today, Vietnam indicated that it would not be -- it would hold off on that ratification. And we saw during the Asia trip President Obama spent a lot of time talking with the leader of Vietnam at the dinner and other meetings. I'm wondering if he had a head's up that this wouldn't be happening, and what your assessment is of the implications for where -- TPP on a broader scale.

MR. EARNEST: Well, Roberta, I can't speak to any of the private conversations that the President had with his Vietnamese counterpart. I know that he did not have an opportunity to have a detailed discussion with his Vietnamese counterpart at the ASEAN meetings. I think what I can say in general is, in the context of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Vietnam, as a country, has made some rather substantial commitments that are consistent with American values and with America's economic interests in Southeast Asia. These reforms include significant human rights and labor reforms that would lead to a more level playing field for U.S. businesses that are interested in selling goods in Vietnam.

Critics of the Trans-Pacific Partnership and trade agreements like this often cite Vietnam as exactly the kind of country that engages in unfair trading practices that disadvantages American workers and has a negative impact on our economy. They have not -- those critics have not presented an effective strategy for countering Vietnam's unfair trading practices. President Obama has. That's exactly what the Trans-Pacific Partnership is about.

Vietnam, in the context of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, has agreed to raise their labor standards and to better protect human rights. That's exactly the outcome that we're looking for. That's why the President is such an ardent advocate of this. And you had an opportunity to hear from Governor Kasich and Mayor Reed to talk about how do you make the case to the American public about why this is important.

My version of that argument is I think it's pretty simple. There's widespread acknowledgement that the U.S. economy and U.S. businesses and U.S. workers are under increasing pressure and increasing competition from overseas. And the question really for policymakers in the United States is what are we going to do about it. And critics of the Trans-Pacific Partnership have not put forward any solutions. They don't have a strategy, aside from complaining, bemoaning the situation.

The President has put forward a very specific strategy that has the potential to show very tangible benefits about the very concerns identified by the self-proclaimed champions of America's workers. So the President has a solution that will work, but it's going to require Congress's agreement to implement the deal because -- news flash -- people around the world expect the United States to lead the way.

And President Obama has lead the way by negotiating a trade agreement that is in the economic and strategic interests of the United States. And now it's time for Congress to show some leadership -- both when it comes to looking out for our interests overseas, but also when it comes to looking out for the interests of America's workers.

Q The decision by Vietnam then, how big a setback is it?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I don't think it's a setback yet. I think the real stumbling block, the real impediment, the obstacle here is Congress. And I don't think there's any indication that -- well, let me say it in the affirmative. There's every indication that Vietnam will move forward with these critically important reforms once Congress has approved the deal.

Q Do you have any other -- do you have any insight on when the President is going to veto the JASTA legislation? And can you talk at all about what kind of work is underway to maybe kind of adjust the bill or tweak the bill, tweak the legislation to make it -- to address some of the concerns that the White House has expressed?

MR. EARNEST: I don't have an update for you on timing. Once the President has vetoed the bill, we'll be sure to let all of you know. We continue to make our forceful, principled argument to members of Congress. There's openness to our argument; there's even sympathy for our argument. We just need to turn that into votes, and we'll continue to make the case.

Joe.

Q Josh, now that Donald Trump has said President Obama was born in the United States, do you see that as a disavowal of the birther movement? And do you think, as Hillary Clinton has said, the President is owed an apology, or the voters are owed an apology?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think I'll leave it to other people to analyze and evaluate the comments of the Republican nominee. There are plenty of people who are eager to do that -- I'm not one of them. With regard to an apology, I don't think the President much cares.

Q Hillary Clinton has called this whole business bigoted. Are you willing to go that far? Are you willing to call it racist?

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, Secretary Clinton is somebody who, I think for understandable reasons, is commenting on and giving voice to her own conclusions about the comments of her opponent. There are plenty of other people who also are interested in doing that, but I'm not one of them.

Q Should the country move on from this issue, or do you think it's appropriate for it to remain a political matter up to the election?

MR. EARNEST: I think when the President released the long-form version of his birth certificate in this room five years ago, he was hoping that people would move on.

Q But should Donald Trump's positions on this through the years remain an issue through the election?

MR. EARNEST: Well, when it comes to their support for -- when it comes to voters making a decision about who they're going to support in the presidential campaign, they'll use their own criteria, including the comments and positions of the individual candidates, in determining who they're going to support in the election.

Q Is the issue settled? And what was the effect? (Laughter.)

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, when the President released the long-form version of his birth certificate five years ago, he expected that the issue was settled.

Jon.

Q But I have a question on this. So the President may not care what Donald Trump did, and I can tell he doesn't care at all, but there are a lot of people in this country that are deeply offended that for five years, Donald Trump questioned whether or not the President of the United States was actually an American citizen, that he was actually born in this country. They were offended by that behavior. They felt it was driven by either racism or bigotry or whatever else. Shouldn't Donald Trump be held to account for that? Is that -- I think that's what Joe is asking. Is that an issue that should be over, that people should move on? Or should Donald Trump be called to account for what he has said for the past five years?

MR. EARNEST: I think in a variety of contexts I have readily acknowledged that elections are about accountability. And so if there are people who have the views that you've described --

Q Do you not acknowledge that? I mean, do you think people have those views?

MR. EARNEST: I'm confident there are plenty of people with a variety of views out there. So I guess --

Q (Inaudible.)

MR. EARNEST: It is, isn't it? My point is, if there are people that do have strong feelings about this, they have a unique opportunity to make those feelings known at the ballot box if they choose to do so. But, ultimately, people are going to have to make up their own minds about this.

Q Now, Trump said two other things. He first acknowledged the President was born in the United States, but he also said that it was the Hillary Clinton campaign in 2008 that started this whole thing.

MR. EARNEST: There's no evidence to support that.

Q And he said that he is the one that ended it all. Is Donald Trump the one that finally ended all this? Is Donald Trump the reason why the world now knows the President was born in the United States?

MR. EARNEST: No, I don't think that's the case, either. (Laughter.)

Q So one for three? (Laughter.)

MR. EARNEST: Ron.

Q Just to follow up, if I can, can you take a step back and why do you think that this issue resonated? And will you accept that there are a significant number of people in this country who agreed with Donald Trump and who still may question the President's -- you've seen these polls that suggested there are people who still think the President is Muslim, so on and so forth. What accounts for that in this country?

MR. EARNEST: Look, there have been people who have been speculating and even writing books on this question for years. So, again, people are welcome to formulate their own analysis. But the President, as he said in the Oval Office, he's hopeful that people are going to be focused on the most important issues facing the country. And this isn't one of them.

Q Well, I guess some people would argue that it is one of the most important political issues facing the country -- not the question of where the President was born or not, but the fact that there are a significant number of people in the country who this whole argument resonates with, and that these are, in large part, the people who have made Donald Trump the nominee of the party, to some extent. That's the issue. And does the President or you -- does the President not think that this is a significant issue that needs to be addressed in this country? And why does this still exist?

MR. EARNEST: Well, look, the beauty of our democracy is there is ample opportunity for there to be a vigorous debate. And there is an opportunity for people to debate those issues, the issues that you've just raised, if they so choose.

The President is going to be making a forceful case for Secretary Clinton on the campaign trail because of his belief that she is going to fight for middle-class workers in this country; that she has the temperament and judgement and experience to lead the country

and ensure that our national security interests are represented and advanced and protected around the world. And the President is able to speak to those qualities based on his personal relationship with Secretary Clinton, and based on the fact that he's the one that's been responsible for doing the job over the last eight years.

So he's got a cogent, forceful case that he'll make based on the issues that he believes are most important in the election. And he certainly is hopeful that people across the country will be persuaded by that case. But, look, people will have an opportunity to draw their own conclusions and cast a vote based on whatever criteria they determine is most important.

Q And you said there's a National Security Council meeting this afternoon -- is that -- it's not on the schedule, is it?

MR. EARNEST: Yes, it is on the schedule. The President will be --

Q Not on the public guidance.

MR. EARNEST: It was not on the guidance last night, but there won't be public access to the meeting. They'll just be meeting in the Situation Room. But this is part of the regular series of meetings that the President has done.

Q So is the President going to make remarks, as he has after the meeting at the Pentagon and Treasury?

MR. EARNEST: No, he will not today.

Q And just lastly, the question I asked you yesterday about Syria -- obviously that will come up in this meeting I would think, to some extent.

MR. EARNEST: It certainly will.

Q Beyond this meeting, is there anything else that the President is doing that -- where he is personally engaged in trying to break this impasse that still has humanitarian aid that is not getting through? I think we're at four or five days now into this seven-day window.

MR. EARNEST: Listen, the situation on the ground in Syria is deeply concerning. There continue to be populations of innocent Syrians who are not receiving the humanitarian assistance that they badly need. The United States has fulfilled our responsibility to ensure that those opposition forces have complied with the request to ensure that that humanitarian assistance can flow to the areas where it's needed most. The Assad regime, however, has not. They have not complied with the requests to do what's necessary to allow that aid to move.

And that is squarely the responsibility of President Putin and the Russians. The Russians are the ones that are party to this agreement. They are the ones that have made a commitment to use their influence with the Assad regime to reduce the violence and allow humanitarian access. And either the Russians are unable to live up to the agreement --

maybe they don't have the juice and influence that they claim to have and that we all thought they had, or maybe they're just unwilling. But in either case, it means that they're not living up to the terms of the arrangement.

Q Is this arrangement just crumbling before our eyes?

MR. EARNEST: No, I don't think that's the case because part of the arrangement has -

Q Is there anything that you've seen over the past couple of days that gives you hope that something positive is going to happen here -- the trucks can start rolling?

MR. EARNEST: Well, first of all, I think the immediate impact has been that there has been a significant reduction in violence across Syria. That's a positive development. But we have not seen the corresponding freedom of movement for trucks delivering humanitarian assistance. And that is also a high priority. That's something that we also need to see happen. And we haven't because it's been blocked by the Assad regime. And that is something that is the direct responsibility of the Russian government.

Margaret Brennan.

Q Josh, did the President make a decision earlier this week to allow U.S. forces to work alongside the Turks in northern Syria, as is being reported?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Margaret, what the United States has committed to do is to support efforts of the Turkish government to clear ISIL from what had recently been a previously contested area along their border. And a month or so ago, the Turks took action, with the support of the United States and our coalition partners, to launch an offensive against ISIL forces along the border. And they're continuing -- those efforts along the border are continuing, and those efforts continue with the support of the United States.

Q But that's not just from the air anymore. That is on the ground, U.S. forces on the ground, alongside the Turks. That is what you're addressing?

MR. EARNEST: That's correct. I'm not going to be able to provide a detailed, operational status update in terms of exactly where they are and what they're doing, but there are a variety of ways that the United States can provide support to Turkish forces that are doing this work, and that includes U.S. forces on the ground.

I'll just point out that the actions that the Turks are taking are consistent with the request that we have been making to the Turks for more than a year. And we have been pleased to see the Turks pursue this kind of decisive, strategically significant action that will aid our efforts to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL. It also will enhance security along the Turkish-Syria border and hopefully put an end to the kind of violence that has spilled over into Turkey.

I know the Turkish government and the Turkish people have been deeply concerned about some of the terrorist attacks that they had seen, and the United States has been deeply concerned about that violence as well. And that's yet another reason why we are supporting their efforts to eradicate ISIL from this border region, to secure that border, and better protect the Turkish people.

Q You acknowledged Syria is going to be part of the conversation during the NSC meeting today. The State Department said earlier that John Kerry told his Russian counterpart that the idea of the U.S. and Russian military working together would not happen until aid flows through. Are you revisiting -- is the administration revisiting that decision to establish the joint operations center?

MR. EARNEST: No, there's no revisiting of the arrangement that was reached and announced last week. The arrangement is quite clear that the kind of military cooperation that the Russians have been desperately seeking for quite some time will not occur until they follow through on their commitment to persuade the Assad regime to reduce violence and allow humanitarian assistance to reach populations in need.

Q So President Obama still is willing to partner with Vladimir Putin on this?

MR. EARNEST: Only in the context of the agreement, though. So, as we've been saying since last week, the Russians need to deliver on their commitments. The Russians are the ones who are most interested in enhanced military cooperation. That's the Russian ask. But that Russian request will not be granted until they fulfill the commitments that they have made in the context of getting the Assad regime to reduce violence and allow for humanitarian assistance to reach the populations that need it the most.

Q John Kerry said earlier this week that this was the last shot, diplomatically, for the White House to try to persuade Assad to do all these things. Do you see us at that point, that at this meeting today, President Obama would look at whether his premise of finding a way to talk him into doing the right thing is just not worth it? I mean, is it truly the last shot at a diplomatic deal under this administration?

MR. EARNEST: Well, listen, Secretary Kerry -- I referred earlier to his tenacious efforts to broker this agreement. And in the months that he's been trying to do that, he and I and others have been asked about a Plan B. And I haven't seen anybody articulate what a Plan B would look like.

Q And he said there was none.

MR. EARNEST: Right. So I guess the point is that this is why you've heard me say many times that Russia's credibility is on the line here. The world is watching, and we're going to find out if Russia has the kind of influence with the Assad regime that they claim to have. And we'll find out if they are willing to use that influence to protect their integrity and to live up to the terms of the arrangement. And if not, if they are unwilling to do so, it's unclear what the alternatives are.

Q But, arguably, American credibility is also at risk here if you continue to provide diplomatic cover when it appears that Assad has no intention to follow through this deal, nor does Russia have the ability, as you've suggested, to follow through to this deal. So do you see American credibility now at risk? Is there reason for this to be the last shot?

MR. EARNEST: No, I don't see American credibility on the line, because the United States of America has lived up to our commitments, and our commitment has been to look for a way to reduce the violence in Syria, to enhance the provision of humanitarian assistance to those who need it the most, and to expedite a political transition inside of Syria that everybody acknowledges is necessary -- with the possible exception of Bashar al-Assad himself.

At the same time, we have also been making important progress against ISIL -- both in Iraq and in Syria. And that includes continuing to take back territory from ISIL, continuing to support Iraqi forces as they do so, continuing to support opposition forces in Syria who take back territory from ISIL. We continue to enjoy success in taking senior ISIL figures off the battlefield. Earlier this week, the Department of Defense confirmed that they had succeeded in carrying out a strike against a senior ISIL plotter, Adnani, who was a senior figure in that terrorist organization. As we continue to apply pressure to their leadership, and continue to make progress on the ground against ISIL, we are making important progress even as we try to deal with the terribly thorny situation inside of Syria.

Q So you're not at the point of calling off this deal? You're not at the point -- even though the U.N. has said that they're not getting any compliance from the Assad regime in letting in aid trucks? You are willing to just let the clock keep ticking on this, the only leverage being the possibility of future military operations with the Russians?

MR. EARNEST: Well, we know that that's significant leverage because we know that the Russians have been publicly asking for that for more than a year.

The second thing is that leverage has succeeded in reducing violence inside of Syria since this arrangement was announced and went into effect. But we haven't gotten everything that Russia committed to provide, which is sufficient leverage on the Assad regime to allow for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. And that is a critical part of this arrangement. And military cooperation will not go forward until that element of the arrangement has been completed.

Q Will President Obama speak to President Putin at any point about this? Or is this left to their chief diplomats?

MR. EARNEST: I'm not aware of any conversations that are planned at this point. If there is a conversation like that, we typically let you know about it. But right now, there is nothing to be negotiated. It's clear what everybody has agreed to. It's also clear who hasn't lived up to their end of the bargain, and that's the Russians.

Q It's not that clear what everyone has agreed to because there's actually no text that's been released. But that's another matter. When do you think you could do that?

MR. EARNEST: I think there's been a rather clear description of exactly what the stages are in this arrangement. And it's not as if -- I guess to that point, Margaret, it's not as if the Russians are claiming somehow that they've done everything that they agreed to do. In the readout of his telephone call with Secretary Kerry, Foreign Minister Lavrov acknowledged that they had not yet fulfilled their responsibilities to get the Assad regime to provide that humanitarian assistance. So it's not as if the Russians are claiming that they lived up to their end of the deal.

So, again, I think there is a lot of clarity around what the arrangement looks like even though the paperwork has not been released.

Margaret Talev.

Q Thank you. Josh, President Obama, of course, is going up to New York for the UNGA next week and will have leaders -- meetings with leaders. Hillary Clinton also has I think what her campaign called bilats. I don't know if it's a bilat if they're not -- anyway, with at least the Egyptian leader, and the Ukrainian, probably some others to be announced. Is it appropriate for a presidential nominee to have meetings on the sidelines at the U.N. with world leaders? Would it be appropriate also if Donald Trump did it? And can you talk about to what extent the President maybe is coordinating with the administration on some of these meetings and what gets discussed?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Margaret, it certainly is not uncommon for presidential candidates to travel overseas. President Obama did that when he was running for this office in 2008, and while he was traveling overseas he had the opportunity to have meetings with the elected leaders of other countries. So I don't think that there's anything significantly different about doing that when those foreign leaders travel to the United States.

I can't speak to the degree of coordination between the administration and the Clinton campaign with regard to setting up those meetings. But there's nothing about the occurrence of those meetings that we find objectionable. After all, Mr. Trump flew to Mexico a few weeks ago to meet with the Mexican President. And again, as I noted at the time, it was consistent with what other candidates for President have done in the past.

Q I wanted to ask you also a follow-up question about earlier today. If we could get like the Colin Powell email version of what President Obama was actually thinking -- (laughter) -- when he saw Donald Trump's statement today -- which we're obviously not going to. It might be different than what he wanted to disclose publicly. What I'm wondering is are you kind of holding back kind of an emotional response to this because the President has specifically said that he doesn't want that to be the White House's posture? Or is it a strategic issue that President Obama actually thinks it's not good for Hillary Clinton's prospects to focus on the birther issue? Is it more like a personal request like this just needs to stop, or is it more of a strategic statement that --

MR. EARNEST: Well, I did have an opportunity to talk to the President about this issue earlier today. It was not -- it was prior to Mr. Trump's brief statement earlier today. And, look, I think the President -- what the President told all of you in the Oval Office is consistent with what he told me in the Oval Office a few minutes before, which is that this is serious business that we're engaged in here today at the White House. The President believes that it's important for us -- for the Congress to follow through and approve the Trans-Pacific Partnership. And there are strong bipartisan agreement about that.

We have leading figures in the Republican Party, including Governor Kasich, who stood here with leading figures in the Democratic Party to advocate for the completion of this agreement -- not just for economic reasons, but also for strategic ones as well. That's where the President believes the attention of the country should be because of the significant consequences for our country's future.

Q Are you saying that your reluctance is more about keeping the message on TPP today, and you may well in the days to come hear much more about precisely what he thinks about this?

MR. EARNEST: No, I would not expect -- I would not clear your calendar in anticipation of a lengthy presidential discourse on this topic.

Francesca.

Q Speaking of meeting, President Obama met with Secretary Clinton last night, the White House has confirmed --

MR. EARNEST: That's correct.

Q Did he have an opportunity to talk her about the situation in Syria last night, or perhaps the trade deal, which she says she disagrees with him on? Maybe gave her a get-well card?

MR. EARNEST: In the conversation I had with him this morning, I asked him about his conversation with Secretary Clinton. They did have an opportunity to visit for about 15 minutes or so. The President -- it was a casual conversation so there was not a detailed policy discussion on Syria or anything else, frankly. But, look, they do what old friends do when they run into each other after not having seen each other in a while, which is that President Obama asked Secretary Clinton about her grandkids. She gave him an update and showed him some pictures. And I think it's an indication of exactly what their relationship is like.

The President also told her about how much fun he had on the campaign trail earlier this week and that he's really looking forward to spending more time over the course of the fall campaigning in support of her effort to take the presidency. And he's excited about that prospect because he's enthusiastic about her candidacy. And he told her that, and presumably she was glad to hear that. And then she went to deliver her remarks.

Q How many more times can we expect him to be so enthusiastic for her on the trail?

MR. EARNEST: We'll give you an update about the President's planned travels over the course of the fall. The President certainly has some significant responsibilities here at the White House. So, for example, next week he's going to be devoting most of his time in New York to meeting with world leaders and participating in the activities that are part of the U.N. General Assembly. But the President will leave Washington on late Sunday afternoon because he's going to spend some time Sunday evening in New York helping to raise money for the Democratic Party in pursuit of -- in support of Secretary Clinton's presidential campaign.

Q Just to follow up on that. Would you say maybe one more time, two more times? Could you give us a range of how many more times?

MR. EARNEST: How many more times that he'll be --

Q That the President will campaign for her, not necessarily fundraising, but doing the sort of events that we saw him do this week.

MR. EARNEST: Well, certainly more than one or two. We've got about seven or eight weeks to go here. Next week, again, will be consumed primarily with the President's official responsibilities as President of the United States. But after that, the President will be able to devote more time to another priority of his, which is advocating for Secretary Clinton's election.

Chris.

Q Josh, I asked you a lot of questions a while back about the administration guidance regarding discrimination against transgender students in schools and litigation against that guidance by the Attorney General. That issue has now reached the Supreme Court in the form -- as a result of a separate but related lawsuit (inaudible.) The ACLU has called on the Court to not take up that case. But where does the administration stand? Would the White House welcome the Supreme Court taking up this issue?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Chris, I have to admit, I'm not aware of the latest step in the process that you're referring to here. Given the fact that this is an issue that's being litigated in the courts, there's not much that I can say beyond what we've already said, which is that in offering the guidance that was provided by the United States Department of Education, they were being responsive to requests that they had received from school administrators, teachers and parents from all across the country. And in an effort to provide professional, expert advice, based on the best practices of other education professionals, they offered some advice and they issued some guidance.

But this is something that's being discussed in the courts. The administration's top priority is the safety, security and dignity of every single kid in American schools, and that's going to continue to be our priority.

Q But the President, when that guidance came out, predicted that the courts would resolve the issue. Wouldn't a decision from the Supreme Court indicate that that guidance enhanced the safety and security --

MR. EARNEST: When it comes to our legal strategy, I'd refer you to the Department of Justice.

Cheryl.

MR. EARNEST: Thanks, Josh. On TPP, when the President goes to New York next week for the U.N., will he be meeting with leaders or holding any sort of meetings specifically to discuss TPP?

MR. EARNEST: We'll have some additional details about the President's schedule in New York later this afternoon -- a couple of my colleagues will be convening a conference call to discuss the President's schedule in New York.

Q And then, real quick, does the White House have any date in mind that it would like to submit the actual TPP for ratification to Congress?

MR. EARNEST: Listen, as we've said in the past, we're going to continue to coordinate with Speaker Ryan's office and Leader McConnell's office to design the best path forward here when it comes to securing legislative approval of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. So I don't have any updates in terms of timing, but once a decision like that is made, it will be made in coordination with Leader McConnell's office and Speaker Ryan's office.

Q And did they give you any guidance yet that you can discuss?

MR. EARNEST: We've had some conversations about it, but I don't have any details to announce at this point.

Kevin.

Q Thanks, Josh. I want to circle back on TPP for just a second and some of the comparisons to NAFTA. Previously, you have suggested that some of the provisions in TPP would sort of eradicate some of the problems that were borne out of NAFTA, but I distinctly remember the sale of NAFTA was it will be great for you, trust us, Americans. The American people remember that. How is this not different?

MR. EARNEST: Well, it is different, and the reason it's different is that the improved labor and environmental standards that were side agreements to NAFTA are enforceable in the context of TPP. So these core components that level the playing field for American businesses and American workers are fully enforceable, which means --

Q -- skepticism, though, because people are like, look, they promised us a bunch of stuff with NAFTA, and it didn't pan out.

MR. EARNEST: Well, I guess the President has raised his own concerns about NAFTA, and it included the fact that some of those key provisions that are important to protecting U.S. businesses and U.S. workers were not enforceable. In this agreement, in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, they are enforceable, which means that if other countries aren't living up to their terms of the agreement when it comes to leveling the playing field, then they're in violation of the agreement and can be kicked out.

Q Are you familiar with TISA?

MR. EARNEST: I am not.

Q It's part of the services agreement that's being negotiated right now between the United States, the EU, and 22 other nations. It's sort of an Uber TPP if you will. Can you give me sort of an administration update on how those negotiations are going?

MR. EARNEST: I'd refer you to my colleagues at USTR. We'll see if we can get you some additional information about it, but I'm not aware of the status of the ongoing negotiations.

Q Okay. Last one. We've talked previously about Syria being effectively this mash-up. We've talked about de-confliction, because there's so many different interests that are there -- more than 60 countries apparently working with the U.S., you have the U.S., you have the Russians, you have the Syrians. As we continue to work now with the Turks and others in this environment, what's the President's level of concern that American lives are increasingly at risk without an agreement forged with the Russians?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Kevin, what we have been able to work with the Russians is to effectively de-conflict their military activities with ours. So that's different than coordination and cooperation, because we're not sharing intelligence information in a way that allows us to coordinate our activities. But what we are is sharing enough information to make sure that the Russian military, when they're operating either in the skies or on the ground in Syria, are steering clear of the United States and our coalition partners.

With regard to coordinating our activities with Turkey and others, Turkey is part of our 65-member coalition that is effectively coordinating all of our efforts. So Turkey and the United States, for example, are working together and that only enhances the security of U.S. forces that are operating there.

But I've not heard anyone downplay the risk that our men and women in uniform are assuming in carrying out counter-ISIL operations against targets in Iraq, or in Syria, for that matter. Our men and women in uniform are bearing a significant burden. They are putting their lives on the line for our national security. We owe them a deep debt of gratitude.

The Commander-in-Chief is keenly aware of that. He talked about it at the news conference in Laos at the end of his trip a little over a week ago, and he talked about his deep admiration for the sacrifice that our men and women in uniform make. And one of those sacrifices that thousands of Americans are making right now is to serve our country in Iraq and in Syria in support of our counter-ISIL campaign and in support of the strategy that the President has laid out to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.

It's dangerous work. They're putting themselves at risk. And we are deeply grateful for the responsibility that they've assumed that makes our country safer.

Okay? Thanks.

J.C., I'll give you the last one.

Q For some obvious reasons, my students from Catholic University are here today joining this briefing. The question is, do millennials really hold the key to this election and will they get out and vote? The youth, the young voters, the first-time voters.

MR. EARNEST: Well, listen, when President Obama ran for this job in 2008, his candidacy and his message inspired millions of young people all across the country to get engaged in our political process for the first time. One of the real legacies of President Obama's campaign and tenure here in the White House is the degree to which he succeeded in engaging the youngest generation of Americans in questions of politics and in the broader public debate.

So there's no denying how important a role young people play in American politics. And that certainly is -- they'll continue to play that role in this presidential election. And I know that there is a lot of thought and effort and energy that's going into persuading them to support Secretary Clinton's campaign.

Q President Obama was a unique individual with a certain energy that really inspired young people. Do you believe that either candidate can have the same kind of influence on the youth vote?

MR. EARNEST: Well, look, I think what President Obama often -- the case that President Obama repeatedly made in the context of the election was that he was eager to give voice to a new generation of Americans and fight for the kinds of priorities that they've identified in their own lives -- reducing the cost of a college education, making sure that people in the United States of America aren't discriminated against just because of who they love, making sure that the United States continues to play a leading role in fight climate change and fighting carbon pollution.

The President also made commitment to go in and enhance the national security of the United States, and reduce the number of young people from the United States that were serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. And more than 90 percent of the troops that were serving our country overseas in Iraq and Afghanistan when he took office have come home.

So the President has made good on a lot of promises, and I think he made good on the promises that he made to America's young people. Hopefully both candidates will be making a forceful case to pursuing the kinds of priorities that young people are still concerned about, and, like I said, I'm confident that Secretary Clinton's team is very focused on making that precise case.

Okay? So I don't have a written week ahead in front of me but -- (Eric Schultz places a piece of paper on the podium.)

Q You do now. (Laughter.)

MR. EARNEST: Well if I can read Eric Schultz's handwriting then I will try to do it.

As I mentioned earlier, the President will depart the White House late Sunday afternoon, headed for New York, and he will participate in a fundraiser in New York in support of the Democratic Party and Secretary Clinton's presidential campaign.

On Monday, the President -- this is late morning -- the President will participate in a roundtable fundraising event to benefit the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee.

On Tuesday, the President will deliver remarks at the opening session of the United Nations General Assembly. After his remarks, he'll attend a luncheon that's hosted by U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. That afternoon, he'll attend a CEO roundtable and participate in a refugee summit. This, of course, are a set of activities that the United States has organized to focus international attention on the plight of refugees and to get other countries around the world focused on what kind of commitments they can make to supporting the needs of people who have had to flee violence.

Late Tuesday afternoon, the President will participate in a family photo with other world leaders who are attending the U.N. General Assembly. And then that evening, he will deliver remarks at a reception for the heads of delegations who are attending the United Nations General Assembly.

On Wednesday, in New York, the President will participate in the U.S.-Africa Forum, and then return to D.C. late Wednesday afternoon. I should point out that, over the course of his three days in New York -- Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday -- the President will have a couple of bilateral meetings, and we'll have more information on those meetings later today.

On Thursday, the President will award the 2015 National Medal of Arts and National Humanities Medal here in the East Room of the White House. And then on Friday, he'll host a reception for the opening of the African American Museum in the East Room of the White House.

And then next Saturday, a week from tomorrow, the President and First Lady will attend the opening ceremony of the African American History on the National Mall. The President will deliver remarks at that ceremony.

So, with that, I hope you all have great weekend, and I look forward to seeing many of you in New York.

Q Thanks, Josh.

MR. EARNEST: Thanks.

END 1:15 P.M. EDT