

# Press Gaggle by Press Secretary Jay Carney en route New Orleans, LA

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July 25, 2012

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

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Aboard Air Force One

En Route New Orleans, Louisiana

MR. CARNEY: Thank you for joining us this morning as we make our way from Seattle, Washington to New Orleans. As we have been doing now for some time, Jen and I will brief together. I can take your questions on policy and the President's administration, and Jen can field your questions on the campaign.

I just wanted to note -- it happened yesterday, but it's worth noting again -- that the Congressional Budget Office confirmed once again that repealing the Affordable Care Act would increase the deficit, deny coverage to millions of Americans, and eliminate tax credits that will make health insurance more affordable for middle-class families. As the President has said, this law is here to stay and it's making a positive difference in the lives of millions of Americans.

Today, the Department of Health and Human Services announced that in the first six months of this year alone, the law has saved \$687 million in prescription drug costs for more than 1 million people with Medicare.

We will continue, therefore, our work to implement the Affordable Care Act and deliver the benefits of the law to the American people.

CBO also confirmed that repealing the Affordable Care Act would increase the deficit by \$100 billion over the first decade and a trillion -- more than a trillion over the second decade. That's why we're for implementing the law.

Q Jay, can you preview the speech a little bit for this evening?

MR. CARNEY: I think you saw in some places that it was written about that the President is going to announce an executive order aimed at helping African Americans get the best education possible. I think we can provide you a little more information about that, and certainly the Department of Education can.

He'll focus the speech primarily on the economy. And of course we believe, unlike, apparently, some in Congress, that education is an elemental aspect of the economy. But beyond that, I don't have a preview.

MS. PSAKI: One thing I just wanted to highlight before we continue. As we know, Mitt Romney has flatly denied his involvement with Bain during the time when he was at the Olympics for months, if not years now. There's a new AP story today I encourage everybody to read -- happy to send it to you -- that outlines the fact that he took trips back to meet with board members during this period of time. So that's a contradiction of what he said. And it shows, again, a continued pattern of secrecy around his involvement there and his time there.

I think the next question it raises that we still don't have an answer on is was that why he was paid \$100,000 a year? Was it something else? So, an interesting story I just wanted to highlight for everyone and encourage you to read.

Q Jay, on Syria, it seems like there are a couple of things happening that seem to show some signs of momentum -- rebels taking more territory, more defections, Turkey closing its border for trade. Is there anything that the U.S. and their allies are willing to do at this point to try to push things over the edge?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we and our partners have been and will continue to take steps to isolate the Assad regime, to starve it of financial resources through sanctions, which makes it increasingly difficult for Assad to finance his brutal crackdown on his own people.

We continue to support the opposition's efforts to consolidate itself and to take steps to implement their broad agreement in Cairo over what a political transition would look like. I would note that there is an ongoing assault in Aleppo --

Q What's that?

MR. CARNEY: -- an ongoing assault in Aleppo, in Syria, which is a civilian population. The Assad government is reportedly using not just helicopters, but fixed-wing aircraft as well as tanks to perpetrate heinous violence against the Syrian people and unarmed civilians. We condemn that. And it's just another indication of the depths of depravity that Assad has demonstrated himself capable of achieving.

Q Staying on Syria, Jay -- you said there were reports of using fixed-wing aircraft. Have you got your own verification of that, or is that just reports?

MR. CARNEY: We consider the reports credible, but I don't have an independent confirmation.

Q Okay. Staying on Syria, the Russian foreign minister earlier said earlier today that Russia regarded -- would regard the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government as unacceptable. How do you respond to that? And do you see any indication coming from Moscow that they might be softening their support for Assad?

MR. CARNEY: On the first point, we certainly agree that any use of chemical weapons is unacceptable and anyone responsible for the use of chemical weapons will be held accountable by the international community. That is certainly our view.

And we have -- as we've said in the past, we continue to be concerned about the disposition of the Assad regime's chemical weapons. We believe that they are still under the control of the government, and we use every opportunity to remind the Syrian government that it must maintain control of those weapons and, of course, never use them.

Q And the Russian support for Assad -- any indication they might be softening?

MR. CARNEY: We are in, as you know, regular consultations with the Russians as well as others about the need to form an international consensus around the simple notion that Assad must go in order for there to be a hope for a peaceful transition in Syria; that the longer Assad remains in power, the more deadly the situation becomes in Syria. As we've seen in Aleppo today, the longer we go, the more willing Assad is to take extreme measures to kill his own people.

And to I believe Julie's point about the defections -- maybe it was you, Roger, I can't remember -- we can confirm the defections of Syrian ambassadors to both the UAE and Cyprus. And this is another indication, we believe, that senior officials around the Assad inner circle are fleeing the government because of the heinous actions taken by Assad against his own people, and the recognition that Assad's days are numbered.

Q Can you say that again? That's defections from the UAE and Cyprus?

MR. CARNEY: Syrian ambassadors to the UAE and Cyprus.

Q Jen, do you have fundraising numbers for today?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. So before we go to the Urban League, the President has two fundraisers. The first is a roundtable, where we expect about 20 people, \$25K per person. The second is an event at the House of Blues, which is -- the tickets start at \$250. We expect a couple hundred people. I'll get the exact number once we get there.

Q What was the first one -- \$25,000 for 20 people at the roundtable?

MS. PSAKI: Per person. It's a roundtable, kind of one of the smaller groups --

Q Do you know the name of the home that we're at, the people that are hosting?

MS. PSAKI: We'll give it to you when we're arriving.

Q On sort of a separate subject -- you guys have been talking a lot about the expiring Bush tax cuts. What about the expiring payroll tax cut -- do you want to see that renewed at the end of the year?

MR. CARNEY: Well, it's not the end of the year, and I will say as I've said in the past that that was a measure that was put in place as a temporary form of assistance to middle-class Americans. It was renewed for that reason. And we'll certainly evaluate the situation in the economy as we move closer to the end of the year.

The bill that we hope will be voted on today in the Senate, that Senator Reid put forward and the administration strongly supports, would extend not just the Bush tax cuts for 98 percent of Americans, those making under \$250,000 a year, but would also extend a series of other tax cuts put in place by this administration and passed by Congress that affect millions of middle-class families.

But on the payroll tax cut, we'll obviously evaluate that.

Q It sounds like you're much more comfortable allowing that to expire. What would you say to critics who say --

MR. CARNEY: You're putting words in my mouth. I'm simply saying that we'll -- that was extended for a year, and I think it was a memorable struggle with Congress and when the Republicans finally relented and allowed for the tax cuts for the middle class to go through, the President was able to sign them into law.

But what we're focused on right now is the vote in the Senate on the measure that Senator Reid put forward that very closely mirrors the President's proposals -- if we act on what we can all agree on, which is the need to extend tax cuts for the middle class, for 98 percent of the American people, and ensure that their taxes don't go up on January 1st.

Q Any concern that there might not be (inaudible) agreement by the President's supporters on Capitol Hill? Webb and I think Lieberman both said today that they wouldn't support Reid's measure.

MR. CARNEY: I'm very confident that the overwhelming majority of Democrats will vote for this measure. But I obviously don't want to -- I'm not whipping the vote. So we'll wait and see what happens. What I do know is that the wrong vote to take is one that would hold tax cuts for 98 percent of the American people hostage to an insistence that millionaires and billionaires get a tax cut.

Again, that is bad for the middle class and it's bad macroeconomic policy, because, as you know, independent economists are in broad agreement that tax cuts to working and middle-class Americans are very beneficial to economic growth because that money goes right back into the economy and spurs growth and job creation. Tax cuts to millionaires and billionaires tend to be far less efficient and generally are more expensive than they are effective in spurring economic growth.

Q Jay or Jen, can either of you say whether the President is aware of the report in the Telegraph about a Romney advisor saying that Obama doesn't appreciate the Anglo-Saxon nature of the British-American relationship? And can either of you talk about whether the President thinks the Romney campaign people are race-baiting? This is not the first instance where we've seen, for example, John Sununu talked about whether

Obama was "American enough" and Romney is quoted on the campaign stump talking about his foreign approach to national affairs, I believe. What is your view on this and what is the President's view on this?

MS. PSAKI: I have not spoken to the President specifically about this this morning, but you did see Vice President Biden did issue a statement on this. And just to reiterate that and add to it, this is a case where before Mitt Romney's plane even is wheels down -- they're still watching romantic comedies on the plane, they're peanuts they're eating -- one of his advisors violated exactly what they said they wouldn't do -- which is criticize the President beyond the borders of the U.S.

This is also -- it shouldn't be missed that this also comes on the heels of a speech at the VFW that was heavy on attacks, light on substance -- that's not just us saying that -- aside from endorsing the President's timetable in Afghanistan, which he vociferously attacked a couple of months ago, and earlier this week, misquoting the Australian Foreign Minister in public.

So this is a case where there's a continuous fumbling of the foreign policy football here. And it does raise the question as to whether Mitt Romney and his team are ready to have a serious conversation about foreign policy.

I don't want to characterize beyond that. I will say that there are countless examples, which I'm happy to provide, of occasions where Mitt Romney and his surrogates have questioned whether the President understood America or freedom, and that really goes over a line that we think they shouldn't.

Q That line, is it race-baiting?

MS. PSAKI: I don't want to characterize it in that way. I know that there will be a lot of people speaking to this today and asked about this. But there's no question that questioning whether the President of the United States understands America and understands freedom is taking the debate to a level that is not about what you support in terms of small business tax cuts and the extension of middle-class tax cuts, and whether we should have withdrawn from Iraq when we did. And in the spirit of trying to have a debate about what the American people care about, that's not what they care about. And I think that's not what people want to hear in this debate.

MR. CARNEY: Could I just add as a policy matter, referring to the comment by the advisor, is that what it is is gratuitously ignorant of the facts. As is widely recognized, this President, since he came into office, has strengthened our alliances across the board, including -- and importantly, including our NATO alliances, including the United Kingdom. As anyone who covered reciprocal state visits between the United Kingdom and the U.S.

-- most recently the visit by Prime Minister David Cameron -- can attest the relationship between the United States and United Kingdom has never been stronger than it is today under the leadership of President Obama.

Q Outlook for excerpts of the speech?

MR. CARNEY: I don't anticipate that. We're still checking on it, but I wouldn't anticipate excerpts.

Q I'm sorry -- do or don't?

MR. CARNEY: I would not, but I'll check.

Q Thanks.

MR. CARNEY: Thank you.

END

11:07 A.M. PDT