

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 7/26/12



obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/07/26/press-briefing-press-secretary-jay-carney-72612

July 26, 2012

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

July 26, 2012

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

See below for a follow up to a question (marked with an asterisk) posed in the briefing.

**The status of Jerusalem is an issue that should be resolved in final status negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. We continue to work with the parties to resolve this issue and others in a way that is just and fair, and respects the rights and aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians.*

12:49 P.M. EDT

MR. CARNEY: Thank you all for being here. It's wonderful to be back in the White House briefing room. I have a couple of brief announcements I wanted to make, if you will bear with me.

First, earlier this morning, John Brennan, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, hosted an Olympic security deputy's meeting with the full counterterrorism and law enforcement community to take stock of our efforts working with the United Kingdom to prepare for the London 2012 Olympic Games.

Following that meeting, Mr. Brennan provided the President with an update on the Olympics as well as the United States government's support to the United Kingdom prior to and during the games. The President directed that we continue to ensure that we are doing everything possible to keep the American people safe and to continue close cooperation with our British counterparts.

In keeping with our special relationship, the President also made it clear that he has the utmost confidence in our close friend and ally, the United Kingdom, as they finalize preparations to host the London Olympics.

Next, changing subjects, I just wanted to note that, as you saw last night, the Senate took action and passed a bill to extend the middle-class tax cuts for 114 million middle-class families. The House should follow suit and pass this bill right away. The House Republicans are now the only people left in Washington holding hostage the middle-class tax cuts for 98 percent of Americans and 97 percent of small businesses.

The fact is the typical middle-class family cannot afford a \$2,200 tax hike at the beginning of next year. It's time for House Republicans to drop their demand for another \$1 trillion giveaway to the wealthiest Americans and give our families and small businesses the financial security and certainty that they need.

As the President said last night, we need tax cuts for working Americans, not for folks who don't need them and weren't even asking for them.

And with that, I will take your questions. Mr. Feller -- oh, wait, before I do, I think congratulations are in order. I should have said that when I called on you, but I'll do it again.

Ben.

Q Thanks, Jay. I wanted to try to get some clarity about gun control and the President's positions. Since the Colorado tragedy, you've been telling us that the President wants to keep guns out of the hands of the wrong people under existing laws. And then, last night, to the Urban League, he said there have been actions taken, but they do not go far enough. He talked about AK-47s being kept off the city streets. And so I'm just trying to get clear -- does he or does he not think that any new gun legislation --

MR. CARNEY: Well, let me back up a little bit and say that President Obama has called for common-sense measures that protect the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding citizens and improve public safety by keeping guns out of the hands of those who should not have them under existing law.

And, as I think you know, thanks to the administration's efforts, background checks conducted on those looking to purchase firearms are now more thorough and more complete. The Department of Justice can provide more details on that.

I would also say that, or note, that the President made a broader point last night, which is that tackling the problem of violence is not just about gun laws. In communities across the country, the administration is partnering with local law enforcement and government officials to reduce crime, to connect young people with summer jobs, so they spend less time on the street, and to set up programs that steer children away from a life of gang violence and toward the safety and promise of a classroom.

We also must recognize that it is not enough to debate the role of government in reducing violence. It is up to parents, teachers, neighbors, and communities to make a difference in the lives of our young people as well.

I think that the point the President was making in the speech that he delivered last night was that we have to remember that in the wake of an awful event like the one in Aurora, Colorado, that violence is not an isolated incident in America, and that we need to take a broader look at it and try to tackle it from a number of different directions, which this President has been doing through his administration.

Q I get that broader point that he was speaking about more than the role of government and that was sort of part of the coverage. But I'm still not clear about the answer to my specific question. Does he think any new specific gun legislation is needed, or is existing -- enforce existing laws is needed?

MR. CARNEY: Well, he believes that we can enhance the enforcement of existing laws by making it more difficult for those who should not have weapons under existing laws, make it more difficult for them to obtain weapons. And that's what his Department of Justice have been working on.

I think you're aware of the fact that there is a stalemate in Congress on a broad range of issues, and this would include this one. The assault weapons ban is an issue that the President has supported the reinstatement of since its expiration in 2004.

But, given the stalemate in Congress, our focus is on the steps that we can take to make sure criminals and others who should not have those guns, make sure that they cannot obtain them.

Q So just two quick points. So does he plan to do anything, when he talked last night about working with Congress -- no stone unturned -- does he plan to do anything this year to make another case for that assault weapons ban?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I'm not going to make scheduling announcements in terms of what the President may or may not say in the future. What I can tell you is that the President's point last night was broader. I think there is an issue about the stalemate in Congress, and there are things that we can do short of legislation and short of gun laws, as the President said, that can reduce violence in our society and, as he mentioned last night, in our urban centers.

So I think he -- I know he will continue to press the Department of Justice to try to enhance the enforcement of existing laws, try to further develop our background check system so that it prevents criminals and those who should not have weapons from getting them under existing law. And he'll continue to make sure that his administration is partnering with local law enforcement officials and government officials to try to do the things that I talked about at the top that can help reduce violence.

Q Last one. You focus a lot on background checks. Our reporting shows that the suspect in Aurora passed all of his background checks. Can you explain how even an enhanced background check system would stop something like this?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I don't think the President ever suggested that the background check can stop every crime from occurring in America, even one as heinous as this. I'm not going to get into the specifics of what happened in Aurora because there's obviously an ongoing investigation.

But we do need to take a broader look at what we can do to reduce violence in America. And it requires a multi-faceted approach that looks at this problem from a variety of angles, and that's not just legislative and it's not just about gun laws.

Q Turning to a foreign subject -- is there any --

MR. CARNEY: Margaret, correct?

Q Margaret.

MR. CARNEY: Welcome.

Q Thank you. Is there any reaction from the White House on the indictment of Bo Xilai's wife at this time?

MR. CARNEY: I'll have to take that question. I was not aware of that. Maybe the State Department has a reaction.

Yes. Jake, then -- well, let's go to -- go ahead. Welcome.

Q Thank you. Just two topics. On Syria quickly -- you know that this crisis is deepening, is escalating, the ongoing assault in Aleppo. I just want to make sure I'm clear on what is it that the U.S. is doing right now. What can they do besides wait and see if there's some consensus reached in the U.N.? Is there --

MR. CARNEY: Well, we're continuing to work with other nations and the "Friends of Syria," as well as other international partners, to provide humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people, provide assistance to the opposition as it tries to form itself and unify -- nonlethal assistance to the opposition as well as administrative assistance, if you will, that the "Friends of Syria" is providing as the opposition comes together.

But it is a point that you made that is worth noting that there is an ongoing assault happening in Syria that demonstrates once again the depravity of President Assad and his regime. The fact is they're using artillery and fixed-wing aircraft -- there were reports of that -- as well as helicopters against a civilian population center.

And it once again points to the need for international consensus around the idea that Syria's future cannot include President Assad because of the actions that he's taken against his people. And we need to move quickly to look at what Syria can and should be in a post-Assad world, work with our partners, work with the opposition to help create that transition, because Assad's days are surely numbered.

As we've seen, it's clear that he's losing control of Syria. The momentum against the Assad regime continues with defections throughout the government. As we've seen in recent days, increasing numbers of formerly pro-regime Syrians, officials in the government, ambassadors to foreign countries, military personnel -- high-ranking military personnel -- are recognizing that to stand in solidarity with Assad is to stand against the Syrian people.

That's why it's time for the Syrian people and the international community to focus on what comes next, as I said.

Q And then one more on the guns issue. These are some of the President's strongest words yet on this issue. Does he feel like he has shown leadership publicly on the issues of guns during his term?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the President's feelings about this issue I think were reflected in what he said, and those comments and remarks echo what the President has said in the past. And I think he does take a broad view about the problem of violence and how we need to address it. He is very mindful of the need, when it comes to legislation, that we ensure that we protect the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding American citizens. That is very important to him. And he believes that we can take measures that improve public safety by preventing weapons from getting into the hands of those who should not have them, under existing law.

But there are broader aspects to this problem, as I talked about. And that's why we need to not look at it through one single prism, but to examine ways that we can help address the problem through assisting local law enforcement officials or through the education system, the school system, help keep kids off the street and out of gangs, for example.

And the President noted, and as I just did as well, that it's not just a governmental problem. It's something that teachers, parents, neighborhoods and communities need to talk about and take action on to make a difference in the lives of those who might otherwise fall into violence.

Jake.

Q You used the word "giveaway", and President Obama, in his statement yesterday, used the word "giveaway," referring to the extension of the lower Bush tax cut rates for I guess the top 1 or 2 percent of the country -- people making over \$200,000 a year, or couples making \$250,000. What do you say to a small business owner who says, that's not a giveaway, that's my money, and by the way, I'm going to need some of that money in order to help pay the health care of individuals that I'm now mandated to do? It's not giving anything away, it's allowing me to keep my money.

MR. CARNEY: Well, the phrasing of the question leaves out a few things, which is, one, this tax cut that the Senate passed and that the President supports would go to 97 percent of small businesses in America -- 97 percent. Further, this President has cut the taxes of small businesses in America 18 times, independent of this. So his focus on assisting small businesses, which he considers the engine of economic growth in this country, the engine of job creation in this country, has been intense and will continue to be.

Q It's true that I'm not bringing up people I was not asking about. That is true.

MR. CARNEY: Well, no -- but, I mean -- but your question framed it around the -- so you're talking about the 3 percent here. And as we've noted, under the definition of small businesses that Republicans trot out when they're insisting on these tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires, means that --

Q I wasn't talking about millionaires and billionaires. I was talking about somebody making over \$200,000 a year.

MR. CARNEY: Sure, but again, that's 97 percent of people who file -- small businesses that file taxes under the individual tax code will receive this tax cut. Many of the remaining self-described small businesses that we're talking about -- we're talking about hedge fund managers, often, and law firm partners -- and addressing those small businesses that fall in the remaining category, this tax cut goes to everybody.

This is an often misunderstood fact in reporting and I think just in general, that giving this tax cut -- extending this tax cut to 98 percent of Americans, those who make up to \$250,000, means that everyone gets it, even those who make millions and billions, up to the first \$250,000 of income. So that -- for a family, that includes everyone, okay? And including small businesses that file in this manner.

Secondly, the President believes that small businesses are so important that he has dedicated a lot of energy and focus on providing tax credits and tax incentives and tax cuts to small businesses throughout his three and a half years in office. Beyond that, he believes that extending the high-end Bush tax cuts again is something we simply cannot afford.

We're talking about a trillion dollars over a decade. We've seen what happened when these tax cuts, which you may recall, you and I were covering it, were sold initially as a pay-back from the budget surpluses that were achieved under the Clinton administration, and then when the economy ran into trouble and those surpluses were beginning to erode, it was sold as an economic stimulus measure. And what we got was middle-class incomes stagnating, the slowest expansion in 50 years, and an economic crisis the likes of which we haven't seen in more than 70 years.

Q The question is this -- why is it a giveaway? Why are you guys using -- you and President Obama -- using the term "giveaway" when even if you support the Senate Democrats' bill, it's not technically a giveaway, it is allowing people to keep the tax cut that they got in 2001 and 2002?

MR. CARNEY: Right. But these are tax cuts that we cannot afford, that do not -- by the estimates of credible, independent economists do not measurably help the economy and do not, in the way that tax cuts to working and middle-class Americans, help the economy, and we have to make choices. And it is a tax cut for the wealthiest Americans that we simply can't afford.

And those who say that, oh, it's terrible for the economy -- remember, again, you and I were there and covered it. There were proclamations of gloom and doom, of economic crisis, and stagnation and recession that were promised by Republicans when President Clinton instituted the tax rates that existed throughout the '90s. And instead of everything that Republicans predicted, we got the longest peacetime expansion -- economic expansion in our history. We got 24 million jobs created, and plenty -- as the President says, plenty of millionaires and billionaires created as well. So it's a matter of --

Q I appreciate you running on President Clinton's record, but that's --

MR. CARNEY: It's a matter of choices. I mean, that's what I think the President makes clear. We can't afford this tax cut for the wealthiest Americans. It is a giveaway that we cannot afford. Middle-class Americans need that tax cut. Our economy needs it for 98 percent of the country.

Q I'm told to change the subject. When Vice President Biden issued a rather strong statement yesterday about an unattributed quote or unattributed quotes from unnamed Romney advisors in a British newspaper, the Romney campaign's response was that unattributed quotes should not merit a response from the Vice President of the United States. And I wondered if you had any response to that.

MR. CARNEY: Well, I'll leave specific campaign questions for the campaign to answer. I find it a little ironic given some of the attention paid to quotes from unnamed -- alleged unnamed Obama campaign advisors that have been the focus of attention of the Romney campaign.

What I can say is that the record here is what matters. When this President came into office, our alliances were under strain and frayed. Our standing in the world had been diminished. In the three and a half years that President Obama has been in office, he has strengthened our alliances around the world, including and in particular with NATO countries, and including and in particular with the United Kingdom, with whom we have a remarkably strong bond, a special relationship that has never been stronger. And I'll leave the back-and-forth to the campaign, but let's talk about policy and fact here.

And I would note that in that article in question, again, as a matter of policy, the only difference that I could tell, aside from the quote that's gotten a lot of attention that was focused on, was the need to -- that the only difference in policy proposals that seemed apparent were that we should move a bust from one room to another in the White House. And that was a principal policy difference, which is pretty preposterous.

This President has strengthened our alliances. He has built up American credibility around the globe. He has kept his commitments to end the war in Iraq, to take the fight to al Qaeda, to wind down our war in Afghanistan, to rebalance our focus towards Asia, which was neglected in the eight years prior to President Obama coming into office. And he is meeting all those commitments.

Norah. Congratulations.

Q Thank you very much. I'll miss all of you.

MR. CARNEY: Liar. (Laughter.)

Q I will. (Laughter.) On Syria, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton talked about the opposition taking more and more territory that will eventually result in a safe haven inside of Syria. What is the Obama administration weighing in terms of additional

support? Are there discussions ongoing about different -- providing different sort of support to the opposition?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we're in conversations and discussions all the time about Syria, both internally and with our partners and allies around the world -- at the United Nations, at the "Friends of Syria" and elsewhere. I don't have anything specific for you. Our overall policy approach is what it has been. Our focus is on continuing to pressure the Assad regime, continuing to draw attention to the need for a peaceful transition, the fact that the longer Assad is in power, even as his grip on power diminishes, the more violent and chaotic the situation in Syria becomes.

And we'll continue to work with our partners to provide the assistance that we have been providing -- humanitarian assistance, non-lethal assistance to the opposition, consultation with the opposition as it forms itself. And this is all towards the goal of a transition that guarantees fundamental rights in Syria, of all Syrians, including minorities. And that is a critical element of any transition in a situation like this, and it is a priority of the United States.

Q There are many differences between Libya and Syria, which we've talked about, but one of the things Libya had was safe havens for the opposition, and the opposition held control of areas of Libya. When that becomes more clear -- I mean, what the Secretary seemed to be hinting at is that the U.S. would then get further involved. Is that true?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I'm not sure what you mean by "further involved." We have not changed our position in terms of providing arms to or engaging militarily in Syria. We are pursuing the policy that we have been pursuing: to pressure and isolate the Assad regime; to work with our allies and partners and the "Friends of Syria;" to continue to try to build consensus internationally with the effort that we've undertaken at the United Nations; and continue to point out to the Russians and others about the need to accept that Assad cannot remain in power in Syria, and that it is a mistake to provide support to that regime because, in the end, the Syrian people will remember whose side each country was on in this brutal conflict. So these are the steps that we're taking.

So I would not read anything beyond that. I think she was noting the fact that the opposition has made gains and that Assad's grip on his country is diminishing.

Ed.

Q Hey, Jay. Two subjects -- one being the national security leaks. Can you say flatly that nobody inside the White House was involved in the national security leaks that are being investigated?

MR. CARNEY: Well, Ed, as you know, this is a matter under investigation by two experienced federal prosecutors, so I'm not going to speak specifically about it. I can point you to the statements of the President, statements I've made in the past about this, about the seriousness with which he takes this issue, and make the point that no one relies on the kind of information that is provided -- classified information that is provided to help

him make incredibly difficult decisions than the President of the United States. And so he has no tolerance for the leaks, and that's why he has spoken to this issue in the way that he has.

If you're asking me to make a comment on an ongoing investigation --

Q Right, but you referenced past statements. One of your past statements was June 11th, and you said it was absurd when Senator McCain suggested that people inside the White House had leaked this information for political gain. In June, David Axelrod flatly said on ABC that nobody inside the White House was involved. And yesterday, David Axelrod was -- hang on --

MR. CARNEY: Sure.

Q -- David Axelrod was on MSNBC yesterday and said the President did not leak anything, and then he followed up by saying the President did not authorize any leaks. That's different -- that leaves open the door that there were unauthorized leaks by White House people. So have you moved the goal post?

MR. CARNEY: No, Ed. I think you're conflating a lot of things. All those statements are completely true. I stand by what I've said and what Mr. Axelrod and the President said. What I can tell you is that there are investigations ongoing and I'm not going to comment on the specifics of the investigations. I can point you to what the President --

Q Right. But you flatly said nobody in the White House was involved. Can you today say nobody in the White House was involved?

MR. CARNEY: Involved in -- which particular case are you talking about?

Q The national security leaks.

MR. CARNEY: I can tell you that the President takes this very seriously. We all take this very seriously. It is, again, an insult and preposterous to suggest that this White House would leak information for political gain -- classified information for political gain. That did not happen and would not happen under this President.

And a lot of this began as a focus on the operation that successfully removed Osama bin Laden from the battlefield. And the fact of the matter is the President spoke to 100 million people about that operation. Its existence is well known.

And this President, as that operation demonstrates, finds the use of the kinds of information that is protected in our national security environment highly important. He has to make life-and-death decisions based on that information all the time, and he thinks it is extremely important that that information be safeguarded.

Q One of Governor Romney's advisors yesterday, Richard Williamson, flat out accused the National Security Advisor, Tom Donilon, of leaking information that David Sanger has written a book --

MR. CARNEY: Right. And he accused him -- he made that accusation based on rumors he said he'd heard in the journalistic community. That same person called Russia the Soviet Union on multiple occasions. He called Governor Romney, Governor Reagan, on several occasions, and could not, in my -- that I could tell, accurately or intelligently or coherently state a foreign policy difference between this President and the Governor. So I would let the investigations take place.

Q So you disagree with him. (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: I do.

Q Last topic -- veterans affairs. The President, to the VFW on Monday, flatly said, your veterans' benefits will not be affected by the sequester. General Shinseki, who is meeting with the President today, testified on Capitol Hill yesterday, I believe, and said that administrative costs would be affected by the sequester, not veterans' benefits. The question is, if -- when you have the Veterans Secretary saying that there will be some cuts to the Veterans Affairs Department because of the sequester, the President flatly saying your veterans' benefits won't be affected, how do you know that for sure when their budget is going to take a hit?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would refer you to the Secretary's comments that, if the sequester were to come about and take effect, that it would -- again, I'm just citing what Secretary Shinseki said -- that the impact would be on administrative costs in his agency.

But let's just back up and be clear. The whole point of the sequester was to create a forcing mechanism to get Congress to act. And the sequester itself was filled with cuts to both defense and non-defense spending that were so onerous that nobody would support them. The President doesn't support them. Republicans and Democrats in Congress don't support them. And bipartisan majorities of both Republicans and Democrats voted for this measure because they thought it was necessary to hold themselves accountable to do the right thing, which is to pass a balanced deficit reduction plan.

And as you know, Ed, that the only opposition to a balanced deficit reduction plan has come from Republicans who refuse to accept the very mainstream principle that we should not ask only the middle class and seniors to bear the burden of getting our fiscal house in order.

We have a situation where defense cuts that the President believes are much too deep, that Republicans and Democrats believe are much too deep, as well as non-defense cuts -- Republicans would allow those to go into place, rather than ask millionaires and billionaires to pay a little bit more. That's unacceptable as far as this President is concerned.

And every bipartisan commission that's looked at this issue has said that we need to take a balanced approach that includes spending cuts, entitlement reforms, and revenues. Some gatherings of senators, the Gang of Six, and others have also adopted that principle. That's

the principle that underlies the President's budget proposals. It's the principle behind what the President submitted to the super committee last fall. That's the approach we have to take -- it's a principle supported by a majority of the American people.

Unfortunately, there is this obstacle in Congress that has prevented us from moving thus far. Hopefully, that will not be the case as the year moves on.

Q You were talking about the security briefing the President got today about the Olympics. Does he often get security briefings about -- I mean, does the United States have a role in the Olympic security?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we are --

Q What is our role?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we have a very close relationship with the British, obviously, on security issues.

Q Are there assets that we're loaning?

MR. CARNEY: This is a major international event where many, many Americans will be present, as well as people from around the world, and we assist our allies with security operations all the time. So, in that sense, obviously, this is a British -- an event hosted in London, and the British are running this security operation, but we are absolutely providing assistance.

Q When you say we're providing assistance, what does that mean?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I mean, beyond --

Q Is it physical? Is it intelligence? Is it actual boots on the ground? What is it?

MR. CARNEY: We're providing advice, consultation, cooperation. I don't have specifics for you beyond that.

Q Did the readout on this have anything to do today with what Mitt Romney told Brian Williams last night about security?

MR. CARNEY: The President had this briefing today, so, no. The answer is no. He did -- it did not.

Q But the decision to read it out to us publicly?

MR. CARNEY: I'm just trying to fill you in on the President's day. (Laughter.)

Q On guns. I'm just asking. No one answered. You made a claim that he said that he has had a record on gun control. What is that? You were saying in the answer to Ben's question, about the things he has done during this administration on the issue of guns. What has he done? I know he signed a law expanding gun rights in national parks and stuff, so that people can carry concealed guns in the national park. What else has he done?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I pointed to the measures that have been taken at his direction by the Department of Justice to enhance the quality of our background checks system that reduces the likelihood that weapons fall into the hands of criminals and others who should not have them under existing law. And those are actions that DOJ has --

Q -- can you explain it a little bit?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I don't have the paper on them, but we -- when this came up earlier in the week, or rather late last week, I think we had something that we passed out to you, and the Department of Justice has it. But they've taken a number of measures to increase the sort of quality -- both the quantity of information and the depth of information that goes into the background check system. And that has a -- that's progress. That's positive -- it has a positive impact on the goal of preventing weapons that should not get into the hands of criminals under existing law from getting to those criminals.

Q Does he want Congress to vote on an assault weapons ban?

MR. CARNEY: He supports -- and has from the beginning -- the reinstatement of the assault weapons bans. I think you know very well that there's a stalemate in Congress on that issue, as there is on so many issues.

Q You put -- on the stalemate on taxes, you guys put your shoulder in on that, though, and you said, no, we want a vote. We insist on a vote. We demand a vote. You brought leaders down. Fair to say not the same level of concern on this issue?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would say that the President supports it. He recognizes there is a stalemate in Congress. He believes that anything Congress were to do must cross the threshold of protecting the Second Amendment rights of Americans citizens, law-abiding American citizens. And that while there is that stalemate in Congress, there are other things that we can do and we should do.

An action that he's taken and an action that we don't often talk about here, but those who cover federal law enforcement as well as education know about the programs that are in place to help local officials deal with violence in their communities, to help connect teenagers with summer jobs, to help keep teenagers off the streets and out of gangs -- that's all part of a broader effort to reduce violence.

Yes, Jared. Then I'll move it around.

Q Thank you. Just one on taxes. You have said and the President --

MR. CARNEY: Summer cut there, didn't you?

Q Yes, thank you very much. (Laughter.) Glad you noticed. The President has said and you have said the wealthy don't need a tax cut right now, but then why still allow them to have a tax cut on the first \$200,000-\$250,000 of their income?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the principle is that everyone -- that we should reduce taxes -- or extend the tax cuts for everyone earning -- every family earning \$250,000 or less. I mean, you know how our tax code is written. That means that everybody making up to that point enjoys that tax cut. What the President does not believe is that we can afford extending the Bush high-income tax cuts. They're too expensive. They're not helpful to the economy.

And what we know from past experience is that the upper marginal rate that was in place under the Clinton administration, did not in any way impede economic growth. In fact, the tax rates that existed in the 1990s weren't -- that were decried by Republicans at the time, were in place and were law when we had the longest peacetime economic expansion in our history and when the economy created 24 million jobs. So that's why.

Q And then I guess just to back up, also you've said many times how ruinous the Bush tax cuts were. Then why still extend 98 percent --

MR. CARNEY: Well, the President believes that the middle class needs and deserves the assistance that this tax cut would provide, that we cannot raise taxes on the middle class by an average of \$2,200 next year. That is good for individual families and it's going for the economy.

As economists, you know well -- because of the nature of your coverage -- that independent economists broadly agree that the economic benefit of tax cuts is disproportionately felt when those tax cuts are given to lower and middle-income Americans; that higher income Americans and millionaires and billionaires are much less likely to inject that money directly back into the economy. And, therefore, even its economic benefit -- setting aside the fairness argument, even the economic benefit is minimal and outweighed by the cost.

Again, we're talking about a trillion dollars over 10 years. And when you talk about -- you mentioned the ruinous effects of the Bush tax cuts -- those high-end tax cuts contributed mightily to the record trillion-dollar-plus deficit that President Obama inherited when he came into office.

Mark, yes. Then I'll move to the back.

Q Jay, on Olympic security, was there some new or recent request from the British government for assistance?

MR. CARNEY: Not that I'm aware of. This is the kind of partnership that we have as a matter of course. We have a longstanding, close cooperation -- cooperation relationship with the UK officials on security and intelligence matters. U.S. personnel in London for the games are building on the well-established law enforcement intelligence-sharing relationships that already exist between our two countries.

The State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security has the U.S. security lead for Olympic Games in foreign countries, and for more specifics, I could refer you to them.

Q And one more. On the tax cut, doesn't it take two to have a stalemate? Isn't President Obama as dug in on his position as Republicans are on theirs?

MR. CARNEY: No, but that's where -- I'm so glad you asked that question because no. (Laughter.) No. Everyone -- and this is the miracle of miracles -- everyone in Washington, Republican and Democrat alike, on Capitol Hill, in Congress, supports extension of the middle-class tax cuts. So let's do it. Let's pass that and sign it into law and give that security to 98 percent of taxpaying Americans, give that help to the economy that that certainty will create, and then we can debate the merits of tax cuts for the top 2 percent, because that's where the disagreement is.

Everyone agrees on tax cuts for 98 percent -- why don't we get that done? Tax cuts for the 2 percent -- we can debate and have a healthy debate about it. And obviously, there are strong feelings on both sides of the issue.

But we all agree that Americans earning up to \$250,000 -- that's 98 percent of us -- should get that tax cut extended. So let's do that. God, they could do a voice vote. They could pass it unanimously and send it down here, and the President would sign it into a law.

Q So it's a one-sided stalemate?

MR. CARNEY: In this case, yes. I mean, look, there are real differences between the parties. There are real differences obviously between the two contenders for the presidency. And, as the President has made clear, here is an area where there is broad agreement, so let's act on it.

We will continue to debate whether or not we should take a balanced approach to our fiscal challenges. We can continue to debate whether we need to give tax cuts to the top 2 percent of income earners in America. And we will debate a number of other issues, the merits of extending -- of health care reform and Wall Street reform, for example.

But here is something that we all agree on, and if we all agree on it, let's pass it. The President will sign it, and then we can debate the issues that continue to divide us.

You had a follow-up, Jon-Christopher?

Q We now know that -- it's pretty obvious that the Governor and Mrs. Romney are attending the Olympics. They are there in London today. The question is -- we also know that First Lady Michelle Obama is leading the presidential delegation at the opening ceremonies. Does this mean there is a temporary bipartisan truce when it comes to supporting the USA teams?

MR. CARNEY: I think every American supports our athletes, whether they're Republican, Democrat, independent or otherwise.

Q A follow-up? Has the President sent a special message along with the First Lady to the U.S. athletes?

MR. CARNEY: I believe there is a message that the President and the First Lady deliver to -- the First Lady will deliver, but a message from both the President and the First Lady. I don't have details on that for you now, but there --we'll all be watching. Very exciting.

Cheryl and then April.

Q Speaking of overwhelming, the House and Senate overwhelmingly passed a bill to require the White House to reveal the details of the sequester cuts. Will the President sign that bill? And do you have that information all ready -- the Sequester Transparency Act?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the President will sign the bill. Up to this point, OMB staff has been conducting the analysis needed to move. And should it get to the point where it appears that Congress will not do its job and the sequester may take effect, OMB, DOD, and the entire administration will be prepared.

But let me be clear. There is no amount of planning or reporting that will turn the sequester into anything other than the devastating cut in defense and domestic investments that it was meant to be. The sequester was passed by both Republicans and Democrats not as a policy we want to see enacted, but as a forcing mechanism to get Congress to act in a serious, balanced way on deficit reduction.

As the President himself has said, there's no reason why these cuts should happen, and Congress ought to be able to come together and agree on a balanced approach that reduces the deficit and keeps our military strong.

Right now, as I noted earlier in answer to Ed, congressional Republicans are trying to get out of what they agreed to because they'd rather protect tax cuts for some of the wealthiest Americans than make tough choices needed to reduce the deficit, even if it risks big cuts in our military. The President disagrees and will continue to urge Congress to act to avoid these devastating cuts.

I think the answer is he will sign the bill.

April.

Q Jay, two questions. On the President's White House Initiative for Educational Excellence for African Americans, what is the budget for that? I understand that Arne Duncan is holding the purse strings. And I ask that because there's such inequity in educational excellence or scoring between blacks and mainstream students, and to bridge that gap, it's going to take a lot of money from what many in the education fields have said. So how much money is this White House putting out for that?

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, I think you'd noted at the top that this is something that will be overseen by the Department of Education, so in terms of how it is funded, I would refer you to them.

The executive order reflects the fact that the President has made providing a complete and a competitive education for all Americans from cradle to career a top priority. And the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans will work across federal agencies and with partners and communities nationwide to produce a more effective continuum of education programs for African American students.

The initiative aims to ensure that all African American students receive an education that fully prepares them for high school graduation, college completion and productive careers.

I would note, when you talk about funding, that this is obviously not -- this is a part of a broader effort that this President and his administration have embarked on to improve education in America. And when it comes to teachers in the classroom, this is an issue that the President cares very deeply about. And that is why, in the American Jobs Act, he called on Congress to provide funding to put teachers back in the classroom, to prevent their layoffs around the country that have occurred at state and local governmental levels, that have affected teachers and policemen and firefighters disproportionately -- and especially in the education field.

Congress has -- Republicans in Congress have refused to pass that. But if Congress would act on that, on those elements of the American Jobs Act that they have yet to pass, not only would we benefit from what economists say would be another million jobs for our economy, but every child in America who is in a public school could potentially benefit from having those teachers go back to work. And we call on Congress to act on that immediately.

Q And my last question, please. On gun control, what does this administration and you particularly say to Democrats, like Congressman Ed Towns of New York, who say there needs to be a serious discussion with both sides across the aisle on the issue of gun control? He says that, historically, we've seen Presidents killed by guns. We've seen urban areas, people killed by guns. We've seen civil rights leaders killed by guns. We saw Gabrielle Giffords shot. We've seen Columbine. We've seen Virginia Tech, and we just saw what happened at the midnight massacre. What say you when Democrats are calling for this, and they're even -- Congressman John Lewis, right after Aurora, even invoked Robert Kennedy, talking about are we tolerating violence and letting common humanity go. So what say you about that?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would say what I have been saying earlier in this briefing, which is that the President is focused on steps that we can take to keep guns out of the hands of people who shouldn't have them under existing law. And because of those efforts, background checks are now more thorough and complete.

There is a broader issue that your question raises about violence in the country and in different areas of the country that needs to be addressed not just through legislation, and certainly not narrowly just through laws affecting guns, but that has to do with education

and economic opportunity. It has to do with assistance to local law enforcement and government officials and their efforts in their communities. It has to do with teachers and parents and neighborhoods coming together to address this problem.

It's not -- as the President said last night, you have shocking events like the one that occurred in Aurora or at Virginia Tech, but the fact is there are far too high levels of violence occurring every day in the United States, and we need to take a comprehensive approach to that. And that's what the President is trying to do -- recognizing that, in terms of legislation, there are obstacles in Congress, and the President believes that we need to take measures that protect Americans' Second Amendment rights while ensuring that those who should not have weapons do not get them.

Q So understanding this broad base about violence, but still with the incorporation of guns within this broad violent scope, if reelected, will this President push -- actively push for the reinstatement of the assault weapons ban?

MR. CARNEY: I've stated the President's position on that; it has not changed. What I can tell you is the President will continue to push for common-sense measures that make it harder for those who should not have guns under existing law from getting them while protecting the Second Amendment rights of American citizens.

Q Do you think it's appropriate for Governor Romney to attend this fundraiser in London tonight being co-hosted by a lobbyist from Barclays, seeing as Barclays is at the center of this Libor scandal? The Barclay CEO pulled out of this fundraiser, but still there is going to be a presence there from Barclays at this fundraiser tonight.

MR. CARNEY: I think that is definitely a question that I would refer to the campaign.

Q Well, what about the amount of money that's being spent abroad and raised abroad? I mean, the President has raised over \$600,000 at fundraisers in other countries. I mean, to most Americans, many would be surprised to hear that.

MR. CARNEY: But this is money raised from Americans.

Q From Americans in Shanghai and London and Europe --

MR. CARNEY: I would refer you to probably both campaigns. But in terms of that, I know that we follow the rules in terms of fundraising. And on the other issue that you began with, I would refer you to the reelection campaign.

Q Jay, may I?

MR. CARNEY: Yes, Connie.

Q What city does this administration consider to be the capital of Israel -- Jerusalem or Tel Aviv?*

MR. CARNEY: I haven't had that question in a while. Our position has not changed, Connie.

Q What is the position? What's the capital?

MR. CARNEY: You know our position.

Q I don't.

Q No, no, she doesn't know. She doesn't know. That's why she asked.

MR. CARNEY: She does know --

Q I don't.

Q She does not know. She just said she doesn't know. I don't know.

MR. CARNEY: We have long -- Les, I call on Christi. Go ahead.

Q Back on the question of gun violence. Why did the President wait? What's the reason for the venue and the timing of those remarks?

MR. CARNEY: The remarks last night? Well, it was a very appropriate venue -- it was the Urban League Conference. He talked about a number of issues, especially the economy, as well as the problem of violence in urban communities.

Q But those were his most extensive and impassioned remarks, and I just wondered if he's planning to do that in a more noticeable venue at a more noticeable time.

MR. CARNEY: You mean a speech in front of a vast audience with television cameras is not more noticeable?

Q Late at night, it was five days later --

MR. CARNEY: Well, we didn't schedule -- we didn't organize the conference. It was a very appropriate place to have that conversation.

Q Tel Aviv or Jerusalem?

MR. CARNEY: You know the answer.

Yes.

Q No, I don't know the answer. We don't know the answer. Could you just give us an answer? What do you recognize -- what does --

MR. CARNEY: Our position hasn't changed, Lester.

Goyal.

Q Thank you. Two questions, Jay. One, India has now a new President -- if President has spoken to him? And second --

MR. CARNEY: I don't have any readouts of foreign leader calls.

Q And recently Time Magazine has come up -- the Prime Minister of India, that he is an underachiever and also shadow prime minister. What President think of India's Prime Minister and his relationship with him?

MR. CARNEY: I'll have to -- I haven't had that conversation with him. We have a very important relationship with India, Goyal, as you know, but I haven't had that conversation with him.

Q And finally, as far as the AIDS -- International AIDS conference going on in Washington and thousands of people around the globe are here. And what message you think the President has as far as spreading AIDS around the globe, but AIDS has gone down here in this country but spreading in other countries?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the President's commitment to fighting AIDS both globally and domestically I think has been demonstrated. We gave out a lot of information in advance of this conference, had some senior officials speaking at the conference, so the commitment is broad-based.

Q Thank you, Jay.

MR. CARNEY: Thanks, Ben. Thanks, everybody.

END

1:40 P.M. EDT