

Daily Briefing by the Press Secretary



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MR. EARNEST: Good afternoon, everybody. I apologize in the delay in starting today's briefing. We've got a few things cooking, as you may have seen. So, without further ado, Josh, why don't you get it started?

Q Thanks, Josh. What can you tell us about these passenger screenings, temperature screenings that will be conducted, starting at five airports in the U.S., for patients who may have been exposed to Ebola?

MR. EARNEST: Josh, let me start by saying that there will be an additional briefing later today over at DHS. They'll be able to get into some additional detail about this additional layer of screening that we're prepared to put in place at five different airports across the country. These five airports, as you may know, are the destination of 94 percent of individuals who travel to the United States from the three countries that are currently affected by Ebola right now. So the vast majority of passengers from those countries would be subject to this additional layer of screening.

Q Can you name them?

MR. EARNEST: I'm sorry?

Q The five airports. Do they have names?

MR. EARNEST: They do. They are JFK in New York, Newark Airport, Chicago O'Hare, Washington Dulles, and the airport in Atlanta.

Q Hartsfield?

MR. EARNEST: Yes, Hartsfield -- thank you.

The thing that's important for people to understand is we continue to have a lot of confidence in the screening measures that are already in place and have been in place for some time now. By far, the most effective screening measure that is in place is not any

screening that takes place here in the United States; it's the screening that takes place in these three countries in West Africa where they're experiencing this Ebola outbreak.

Preventing individuals who are already exhibiting symptoms of Ebola from boarding a plane in the first place is the most effective measure that will counter and has countered the spread of Ebola. As I pointed out before, there are -- as I have previously pointed out, there are dozens of people who have been denied boarding because they were exhibiting symptoms consistent with Ebola.

The CDC and other agencies in the United States have been heavily involved with advising those African countries in the protocols that they have put in place to screen passengers seeking to board planes. The CDC has been involved in providing supplies to the individuals who are responsible for performing those screening measures. The CDC and others have worked closely with those countries to develop systems and protocols for administering the screening. We've also been involved in helping them craft public messages in terms of educating people and educating the traveling public in those countries about the symptoms of Ebola and how to prevent its transmission. We've also been heavily involved in training staff there, too, so that we can have some confidence that the training measures are being properly implemented.

Q So you say that you're confident in the screening that's already taking place in these countries, but you're going to screen passengers again once they arrive in the U.S. Then how do you reconcile those two notions? Or is there a thought that the second layer of screening would help identify people who start showing symptoms while they're en route? Or really, what is the population that you're trying to get at?

MR. EARNEST: Let me clarify one other thing, which is that we have been, again, for a number of weeks, in addition to doing that screening in West Africa prior to departure, there were already screening measures in place here in the United States to evaluate the traffic of individuals who were entering the country.

What my colleagues who stood at this podium on Friday indicated to you is that while we have a high degree of confidence in the screening measures that were already in place, that our professionals were regularly evaluating that process for additional measures that could be put in place to further strengthen the system. What we have been focused on is not just enhancing safety, but also ensuring that we do so without placing a significant burden or causing a significant disruption to the rest of the traveling public.

And so the measures that, again, will be discussed in more detail later today fit that bill. We're able to target these measures specifically to individuals who are traveling from these three countries. This is a relatively small group -- well, not relatively -- this is almost by any measure a very small percentage of the broader traveling public who will be subject to these initial measures. We're talking about on average of about 150 people total at those five airports -- 150 people total at those airports every day.

Q What, passengers?

MR. EARNEST: We're talking about 150 passengers that originated or recently traveled to those three counties are entering the United States at those five airports every day. So this is a -- the point is that this is an additional layer of screening that can be targeted to that small population in a way that will enhance security, but also minimize disruption to the broader traveling public.

Q And turning to the President's meeting this afternoon with top military leaders and national security officials at the Pentagon. It's been two months now since the U.S. started airstrikes in Iraq that have since expanded to Syria. And yet we see that the Islamic State group remains essentially in control of most of the territory that it had seized and has even claimed some new territory and is threatening some really key, strategic towns. Is it fair to say that the President and his advisors will be rethinking their strategy or taking a look at whether what we're doing right now has the chance to be successful, considering the resilience that the Islamic State group has shown?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Josh, I think it is fair to say that the President and his team are continually evaluating the strategy we have in place to measure what impact that strategy is having so far.

Without a doubt we have made important progress because of the strategy that we have put in place. The President has built a significant coalition of partners all around the globe who are focused on this effort. More than 60 countries have made commitments to support this broader international coalition. Airstrikes that were conducted in Syria for the first time just a couple of weeks ago were conducted by U.S. military pilots flying side-by-side with military pilots from five other Arab countries. That reflects the depth and breadth of the international coalition that has been built.

Prior to these airstrikes being ordered in Iraq -- so again, early this summer -- we saw urgent humanitarian situations where there were a significant population of religious minorities who were being threatened with genocide by ISIL. We saw that ISIL was making substantial gains against critical pieces of infrastructure in Iraq. And because of the strategy that the President has laid out that includes launching military airstrikes in support of operations on the ground, the humanitarian disaster at Mount Sinjar was avoided. We ended the siege of Amerli in a different region of Iraq, where, again, religious and ethnic minorities were being threatened by ISIL fighters. Because of military airstrikes that were put in place in support of ground operations, Iraqi security forces were successful in retaking the Mosul Dam, and were successful in repelling an ISIL advance on Haditha Dam.

So there is plenty of progress to point to in terms of the impact of the strategy that the President has put in place, including airstrikes. At the very same time, the President has said from the beginning that strategy is not a short-term proposition; that this is going to require the sustained commitment of the United States and a broader international coalition to achieve our goal, which is ultimately degrading and destroying ISIL.

Q And any reaction from the White House to Justice Kennedy's move to temporarily block an appeals court ruling that allowed for gay marriage in Idaho and Nevada?

MR. EARNEST: I've seen those reports, Josh, but I don't have a reaction from here. We'll see if we can get one for you, though.

Q Anything more on the decision from earlier this week, the fact that many more states from the Supreme Court -- did you guys get to take a closer look at that?

MR. EARNEST: I have not had a chance to take a closer look at that. You did hear the President talk about that a little bit yesterday in the fundraisers that he did both in New York and Connecticut, and he talked about how he considered that to be a positive step in the right direction in terms of ensuring equality across the country. That is a basic American value, one that the President has long supported, and was one of the reasons that he spoke favorably of the announcement from the Supreme Court earlier this week.

Jeff.

Q Josh, back to Ebola. Who will be taking these passengers' temperatures? And what will happen to them if they have elevated temperatures?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Jeff, you'll get an additional briefing from the Department of Homeland Security later today. I can tell you that these additional screening measures will involve personnel from CBP, from the Coast Guard, and CDC officials will also be on hand if a response is necessary. So this will be an interagency effort. But in terms of those kinds of detailed questions, we'll have some answers from the agencies that are responsible for implementing these measures later this afternoon.

Q And do you know whether, at these particular airports, whether quarantine areas are being set up in case it's required?

MR. EARNEST: Again, those kinds of operational details will be available later today.

Q All right. For a nonoperational question along the same -- on the same topic, what will this cost? And do you need to ask Congress for additional funds?

MR. EARNEST: I don't know right now that an additional resources request will be required. But if it is, we'll make it. This is obviously a priority.

Q And why were these measures not being done earlier if they've been determined to be necessary now?

MR. EARNEST: Well, as I mentioned to Josh, we continue to have a lot of confidence in the screening measures that have been in place for some time. And I think the performance of those screening measures is evident based on the success that we have had in preventing an outbreak here in the United States. Again, because of those screening measures, because of our medical infrastructure that we have in place, we think that the risk of an outbreak here in the United States is exceedingly low. And we do believe that the screening measures that we've put in place have been effective in protecting the American public.

In this case, after some thought and evaluation of systems that we do have in place, our security professionals determined that there were additional steps that we could take to further strengthen the safety of the American public, without causing a significant disruption to the broad traveling public.

Q And one question on another topic, following up from yesterday about Kobani. Is the United States satisfied with Turkey's efforts in that area, or is there a growing level of frustration about its dealings with the Islamic State?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Jeff, I think the way that I would answer is in a couple of ways. The first is that we continue to be deeply concerned about what's happening in Kobani right now. This is something that's being widely reported. I know that there are television cameras that are trained on that community right now.

The United States military over the last couple of days has conducted a number of military airstrikes against ISIL targets in the region. I noted yesterday that there were five airstrikes that had been conducted against ISIL targets around Kobani. Just last night, an additional six targets were hit that resulted in the destruction of -- I'm looking for it here -- that resulted in the destruction of an ISIL armored personnel carrier, three ISIL armored vehicles, and the destruction of an ISIL artillery piece. There were other elements that were damaged and degraded. This is an indication that the United States is taking airstrikes to limit the ability of ISIL to encroach on this community.

The fact remains, however, that the limitations that are in place -- meaning just airstrikes -- limits our capabilities in this region. The examples that I cited to Josh in response to his question about the success that we had had in Iraq in averting a humanitarian disaster at Mount Sinjar and ending the siege of Amerli is notable because those airstrikes were conducted in support of ongoing ground operations, that there were Iraqi and Kurdish security forces that were taking the fight to ISIL on the ground in those situations. And when backed by American military airpower, those operations were successful.

That sort of ground operation doesn't currently exist in Syria right now, and that will limit the effectiveness of the United States military to have the same kind of impact on the situation in Kobani.

Now, clearly, as evidenced by the fact that 11 military airstrikes have been conducted in the last 36 hours or so, that doesn't mean that we aren't going to use what military airpower we can to try to impact the situation. But we should just be forthright about the limitations in this particular situation.

Now, as it relates to Turkey, which you asked about, we certainly were gratified that the Turkish parliament in the last few days did vote to authorize the use of military force, and did recognize that ISIL is a significant national security threat to Turkey. That aligns Turkey with the broad international coalition that the United States has been leading against ISIL.

The question is how can Turkey's unique capabilities be integrated into this broader international effort. The point person here in the United States for coordinating this effort is retired General John Allen. He is headed to Ankara tomorrow to meet with Turkish leaders about how to integrate their unique capabilities into the broader international effort. And that will be an important part of what we're doing here.

This will not be the first conversation, however, between U.S. officials and Turkish officials about how they can be a part of this effort. The President himself spoke to President Erdogan a couple of times in the last month -- once in person in Wales, and then on the telephone just a couple of weeks ago. The Vice President did have the opportunity to meet with President Erdogan when President Erdogan was in the United States. There have also been a couple of phone calls between Secretary Kerry and his counterpart in Turkey just in the last 48 hours.

So there is significant and robust coordination between the United States and Turkey. But the question is how do you integrate their efforts into the broader international coalition. And that's something that we're working on.

Q Very specifically, then, Josh, would the White House, would the United States like to see Turkey send ground troops in? And is the United States frustrated that they're not doing more?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I'm confident that those sorts of logistical details will be part of the conversations that General Allen will have with Turkish officials. Again, it's General Allen's responsibility to coordinate the contributions of all 60 members of our broader international coalition.

And you're right that Turkey does have unique capabilities in this area. Some of that is derived from the fact that Turkey occupies -- that Turkey shares a long border with Syria. Turkey right now is dealing with more than a million refugees that have fled violence as a result of the Syrian conflict. So the stake that Turkey has in the outcome here is significant and very direct. It is not in the interest of that nation for this kind of violence and instability to be emerging literally on their doorstep.

Q It sounds like you're saying the U.S. would like Turkey to do more.

MR. EARNEST: The United States would certainly welcome Turkey's participation in this broader international coalition, and we're gratified that the Turkish parliament had indicated a willingness to do so.

Let's move around a little bit. Mara.

Q You said the screening at the airports are going to be for passengers from West Africa. Do you have specific countries?

MR. EARNEST: The three countries where --

Q Just the three?

MR. EARNEST: Yes, just the three countries where the Ebola outbreak is occurring right now.

Q Okay. And also, I know you've been very candid about the limitations of the airstrikes. What's going to fill the vacuum? I mean, if there are no ground troops, ours or anybody else's in Syria, why do the airstrikes at all? In other words, what happens in the meantime?

MR. EARNEST: Well, let me answer that question a couple of ways. First of all, I'd refer you back to sort of the way that we've talked about our strategy so far. And that broader strategy is significantly aided by airstrikes; that the airstrikes can have an effect of taking out certain command-and-control facilities that ISIL does operate in Syria. Military airstrikes can and have been effective in targeting the flow of oil that ISIL benefits from logistically and financially. And there are individual situations where specific pieces of either ISIL artillery or tanks or armored vehicles can also be taken out by military airstrikes.

So there are some specific situations where airstrikes can be and have been effective in advancing our broader strategy. Limitations, however, do exist when it comes to trying to deal with urgent humanitarian situations that are being threatened in a relatively urban environment here. When we are talking about close quarters, these kinds of airstrikes are less effective.

Q Just as a follow-up to that, I mean, you've been pretty clear about what you think about some of the criticism you've been getting from former administration officials, a question of when it is correct to write a book. Jimmy Carter has now joined the chorus of people saying if only we'd done something earlier, ISIS wouldn't have happened. How does the President react to that kind of criticism?

MR. EARNEST: Well, the President has responded to that criticism a number of times, and what he has said, and what I have said in answering questions along those lines, is that the President made a decision very early on that it would not be wise or effective to give weapons to a large number of individuals in Syria that we didn't know and hadn't had the opportunity to vet. The reason for that is it certainly would put the United States at risk because those weapons could pretty easily fall into the wrong hands if we didn't know who we were giving them to. That's the first thing.

The second thing is it is far-fetched to suggest that giving weapons to untrained, unvetted, unorganized groups of individuals in the hopes that they would succeed in overthrowing the Assad regime that was backed by a sophisticated, modern Russian military and was supported by Hezbollah fighters who are some of the more effective fighting forces intelligence world.

So the point is that there's a very straightforward calculation that you make in a situation like this: Is it worth the risk of putting in -- supplying weapons to large groups of individuals that you don't know in Syria -- that seems like a relatively high risk even to an uninformed, or at least inexperienced observer like me -- at the same time that the hopes

that that band of individuals who is not trained and not organized is going to succeed in overthrowing a regime that's backed by the Russian military and by Hezbollah fighters? The likelihood of that success seems awfully low. That's what ultimately made this a pretty easy calculation for the President to make.

Now, what's changed -- which I think is about what you're ready to ask me, and it's a fair question -- what's changed is two things. One is we have spent the last three years vetting these organizations, and that's why, over a year ago, the United States did indicate a willingness to start supplying assistance, both military and nonmilitary assistance, to Syrian opposition fighters because we had a greater sense of who we could count on to be fighting for the right reasons and fighting the right elements.

Secondly, we also are optimistic that -- well, I guess there are two more things I want to say. The next is we're going to ramp up that assistance, and that's why we were pleased that Congress voted to give the administration the authority to devote additional resources to training and equipping these Syrian fighters. We're working with our allies, including Saudi Arabia that's indicated a willingness to house these training operations. That will make them a more effective fighting force.

Secondly, we're also confident that this fighting force will be more effective when they're backed by airstrikes from the United States military and airstrikes from our coalition partners. That will have an impact on the battlefield, and that's certainly not something that was contemplated three years ago.

Jon.

Q Josh, on Syria, you're very candid in talking about the limitations of the current policy because there are no ground forces. Is it fair to say, to put a finer point on it, that what we are doing right now is failing to roll back ISIS?

MR. EARNEST: No, because for the reasons that I cited. We have had a number of examples where we have succeeded in rolling back ISIL advances in Iraq. The fact is --

Q But I asked you specifically about Syria, where we don't see them rolled back. We actually see them taking new territory, now taking over a town right on the border of Turkey.

MR. EARNEST: What we have succeeded in doing in Syria, which is consistent with our broader strategy, is that we have succeeded in taking out certain elements of their command-and-control structure. We have succeeded in destroying some elements of their logistical capacity, including some oil refineries. We have succeeded in shutting down some of the channels through which ISIL receives its financial support.

So we have made progress in degrading ISIL. That ultimately is the strategy that the President laid out. The President was also pretty clear that it's going to take some time for us to train and equip fighters that can be the boots on the ground that can take the fight to ISIL in their own country. And that will be necessary to succeed in our effort to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.

Q But if that's all true then why are they still able to take over additional territory? You've degraded them, you've done all the things you describe, and yet they're moving forward, not backwards.

MR. EARNEST: Because the President has been clear that this is a longer-term proposition and that we have succeeded in striking some of these targets and --

Q The targets you mentioned today was taking out basically four vehicles and an artillery --

MR. EARNEST: I'm glad you asked that because I want to clarify that. That is just around Kobani, right? So that's just in this one area of the country. There are other strikes that have been taken that have degraded their logistical ability, that have degraded their command-and-control structure, that have degraded their ability to supply their troops with money and other things.

So there has been a broader effort underway that is consistent with our strategy that has been successful so far. But there is still a lot of work to be done, and our strategy is reliant upon something that is not yet in place, and that is a Syrian opposition that can take the fight to ISIL on the ground in Syria.

Q And those that we're training, we're talking about initially a force of 5,000 Syrian opposition forces that won't be ready to go until the spring at the earliest, according to what we've been briefed on. I mean, how is that going to be enough to --

MR. EARNEST: Well, for those kinds of operational details I'd refer you to the Department of Defense. They have the lead on running this training and equipping operation.

Q Okay. And on Ebola, the temperature screenings, the individual who just died -- correct me if I'm wrong here -- wasn't showing any temperature or any symptoms when he came into the United States.

MR. EARNEST: That's correct. That's what we believe to be the case, yes.

Q So why do we think that temperature screening will be effective if in the one case that we've had so far it wouldn't have worked?

MR. EARNEST: Well, it's appropriate for you to mention that we've had one case so far. This Ebola outbreak began more than seven months ago, so I think that is an indication of the success that we have had in containing this outbreak here in this country. There obviously is a lot more work to be done at the source, and we will not have done everything we need to do to protect the American people until we have confronted this outbreak at its source.

What this goes back to, Jon, is the basic medicine surrounding how Ebola is transmitted. The only way an individual can catch Ebola is by coming into close contact with the bodily fluids of an individual who is displaying symptoms of Ebola. So you can't get it through

the air. It's not like the flu or catching a cold. You can't get it by drinking the water or eating the food here in this country.

So what we're trying to do is safeguard the transportation infrastructure of the global transportation system at the same time that we're protecting American travelers and the American public here in the United States. So what we are doing is we're screening for individuals who may be starting to show symptoms of Ebola to prevent that individual who would then be contagious from spreading the disease.

Q But we have nothing in place, no additional measures in place to screen those who aren't showing symptoms here?

MR. EARNEST: That's correct, and that's because those who are not showing symptoms are not contagious.

Q But, I mean, they could be within days of getting here and they'd be in the country.

MR. EARNEST: That's true, yes. And we've seen that that has happened once over the course of seven months. That's correct.

The key then is to make sure -- and this is another part of the screening regimen that's in place -- is making sure that individuals who are traveling from this part of the world are being educated about Ebola, that they understand what symptoms they should be looking for, that they understand how this disease is transmitted, and that they know if they do get sick to go to a doctor immediately and inform that medical professional of their travel history, because what we're trying to do here is we're trying to quickly isolate cases of individuals who are showing symptoms. And that's the key. Because it's only when they're showing symptoms that you're contagious.

Q And just one last one, on the fundraiser in Connecticut. So if you'd just remind me or give me the latest estimate on costs and cost-sharing. So Marine One lands on a polo field at Rich Richman's place or whatever. I mean, this is an expensive operation. So do you have an estimate for how much it cost taxpayers for the President to take this fundraising trip and how much of those costs were reimbursed?

MR. EARNEST: I don't have those numbers in front of me, Jon, but we can look into it. What we can do is we can at least try to explain to you what the policy is so that we can give you some greater insight into how that's handled.

Q Okay.

MR. EARNEST: Michelle.

Q In the last few weeks we've heard from the administration that ISIS had advanced more quickly than expected over the last six months or so. Is it fair to say now, even with weeks of airstrikes, that ISIS continues to advance more quickly than expected?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Michelle, what I think I said in response to Josh's question that over the last several weeks we have had success in repelling ISIL advances. They were advancing on the Haditha Dam. That advance was repelled. They had advanced on the dam in Mosul, in fact even taking over that dam for a brief period of time, but because of the efforts of Iraqi security forces that were backed by American military airpower, ISIL had to relinquish the dam once again.

There was a siege at Mount Sinjar where ISIL forces were promising to carry out a genocide against religious minorities there. Because of the success of Iraqi security forces backed up by American airstrikes, ISIL forces had to give up their positions around the mountain and they weren't able to victimize these minorities. A similar situation occurred in Amerli.

So there have been a number of things that we can point to that indicate the effectiveness of these operations. But this is not a -- this is a long-term proposition that we're embarking on here, and the President believes it is in our core national security interest to do so. But it's going to take some time.

Q Did you expect them to continue to advance in Syria in the way that they are?

MR. EARNEST: Well, we have been clear about what is going to be required for success in Syria. We have succeeded in degrading their command and control structures. We have succeeded in degrading their ability to get oil to the front lines, which is important for their logistical capabilities. We have succeeded in shutting down some avenues for obtaining financing for their operations. Some of that is due to the efforts of my colleagues over at the Treasury Department. Some of that is due to the success of our military airstrikes against their oil refining capacity.

For some time now, ISIL has sold -- essentially sold oil for money that's then used to finance their campaign of terror. That capacity has been degraded because of the success of American military airstrikes.

But ultimately, as I mentioned earlier, the success of our broader strategy is contingent upon an element that is not yet in place, and that is a Syrian fighting force that can operate on the ground in Syria and can take the fight to ISIL in their own country.

Q Does the administration expect there to be some ground forces from Turkey or otherwise before those Syrian opposition forces can be trained?

MR. EARNEST: Well, this is a number of -- this is one of the many things that General Allen will be discussing with members of our broader international coalition here. We have 60 countries that are on board as part of this broader international coalition. And what he is currently engaged in doing is evaluating what kinds of contributions can be offered up by these member countries and integrating them into the needs of the broader military operation that is being led by General Austin, who is the commander of Central Command.

Q But do you expect it to happen before Syrian opposition troops can be trained?

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, this is -- I don't want to get ahead of any conversations that General Allen may be having with members of our broader coalition.

Q And last question, on Ebola. I'm a little bit confused because I know that we've been hearing that you're confident in the measures that are in place and have been in place screening-wise in West Africa. So what then is the point then of doing the exact same screening on the other end of a flight? We're talking half a day's time. Wouldn't it be more practical to screen them several days after they arrive in America -- if they're staying that long? What's the practical point of screening them at the beginning of the flight, and then exactly the same at the end of the flight?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Michelle, we have confidence in the screening measures that are currently in place in West Africa. Dozens of individuals have been denied boarding because they are exhibiting symptoms that are consistent with Ebola. So those measures are effective and, frankly, are the most important part of this multilayered screening approach that we have implemented.

When it comes to the screening measures that are in place here in the United States, what we're essentially doing is adding another layer of security and this is another layer of screening that individuals who are coming from those three countries will have to go through. And what that will do is it will add some confidence in our ability to continue to protect the American people from an Ebola outbreak.

Q So you're completely confident in the measures there, but you're adding more confidence here?

MR. EARNEST: That's right. This is a multilayered screening approach, and what it demonstrated is our commitment to ensuring the safety of the traveling public and the safety of the American people right here at home.

Q Thanks.

MR. EARNEST: Alexis.

Q Josh, can I follow up on what Michelle was just asking you? Dr. Fauci and other medical specialists, understanding that this was under discussion since at least Monday when the President was talking to officials about this, have said that there will be a lot of false positives and that was one of the downsides of adding something like this, this screening. Because the President did discuss this with officials on Monday, can you describe how the government has wrestled with this idea that many international travelers coming from those countries will perhaps have a temperature that is totally unrelated to Ebola, but the first reaction will be to assume that they are infectious or can transmit the disease, and what the downside of that is and how they will be handled?

MR. EARNEST: Alexis, my colleagues in the Department of Homeland Security and the CDC are going to be doing a briefing later today where these kinds of detailed questions can be asked and then answered by the professionals who are responsible for implementing this policy.

Let me just say as a general matter -- let me restate something as a general matter that I mentioned earlier, which is the reason that we have some confidence -- the reason that this approach makes sense is it is a way for us to target this additional screening at a small population of the traveling public. We can do this in a way that doesn't cause a greater disruption to people who are coming in and out of these major American airports. But what they can do is we can target these measures in a way that a very small number of people are inconvenienced.

But in terms of this question about false positives, I'd refer you to the professionals who are responsible for carrying out this policy and what they will do to mitigate any risk that's associated with false positives.

Q Let me ask you a related question. Lots of people who may be watching this now or waiting and miss the briefing later, travelers, are going to be worried that they will have been on these planes --

MR. EARNEST: They should not be worried.

Q -- and that someone who is pulled aside for a fever could have been sitting next to them or whatever. So let me ask you a question related to this. The President this afternoon is going to be talking to state and local officials in a phone call from the Oval Office.

MR. EARNEST: That's correct.

Q Is he going to discuss this layer of procedure with them? And can we learn what it is that he's going to be explaining to them? And can it be opened in some form or fashion?

MR. EARNEST: What the President will do is he will essentially be speaking at the beginning of a telephone briefing for state and local officials that's very similar to the briefing that all of you received about four or five days ago when those officials gathered as this podium.

So the message that they have to convey is very similar to the message that they conveyed to all of you on Friday. I would anticipate that they will discuss some of these additional screening measures. And we'll have a briefing specifically for journalists like yourself who are very interested in this issue, and we'll make professionals available to answer your detailed questions about those screening procedures.

Q But the President's conversation will not be in any way available to journalists here?

MR. EARNEST: That's correct.

Richard.

Q When is the briefing? When is this briefing?

MR. EARNEST: The President is doing a phone call in an hour or so.

Q No, no, no, you said there will be an additional briefing for us.

MR. EARNEST: Yes, this is something that will be organized by my colleagues at the Department of Homeland Security and the CDC.

Richard.

Q Thank you, Josh. The Canadian parliament has authorized military force against the Islamic State, but for just -- like for several other members of the coalition, it's only for a six-month period. Where does the President see the fight against ISIL in six months from now?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I'm always reluctant to predict the future, particularly when I'm standing here. What I can tell you is that the success that we'll have in implementing this strategy over the next six months will benefit significantly from the contributions of nations like Canada that have a sophisticated military capability that they can add to this fight. So we certainly were pleased from the vote in Canada, and I'm confident that if American officials haven't, that they will soon be in very close touch with our partners in Canada about what sort of contribution the Canadians are prepared to make to this broader international coalition.

Q But the President must have an idea of where things should be. We understand, because we have been told, that this is going to last years. But in six months, he must have a certain idea of where this will be. Or he has no clue?

MR. EARNEST: Well, this is something -- the President is certainly evaluating what sort of plans are in place from the military as it relates to military operations against ISIL in Iraq and in Syria. I'm not in a position to discuss those plans either in the short term, in a short-range planning or a long-range planning.

But the President has indicated exactly what our strategy is, which is that we're going to use the air power of this broader international coalition in support of troops on the ground. They will not be American troops, but rather they will be troops in Iraq or in Syria who can take the fight to ISIL in their own country. And we certainly would welcome the contribution of other countries to this broader international coalition and this broader international effort to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.

Mark.

Q Josh, thanks. The President has been very clear since he began this military campaign what he viewed as strategically critical things to defend -- whether it was the Mosul Dam or Erbil or Mount Sinjar, whether on strategic grounds or humanitarian grounds. I haven't heard an administration official describe Kobani as a strategic objective for the United States. Is it fair to assume that the U.S. doesn't view preventing the capture of Kobani by ISIL to be a strategic goal in this conflict?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Mark, for questions about our basic military strategy I'd refer you to the Department of Defense. I will say a couple of things, though. The first is, we remain deeply concerned about what's happening in Kobani. And it is a place where we are seeing, where some journalists, Western journalists are seeing firsthand the brutality of this terrorist organization. It's on display for the world to see. It's appalling. And it's something that we continue to be concerned about. That is in part why you have seen the United States and our coalition partners take almost a dozen airstrikes just in that region of Syria in the last 36 hours or so.

At the same time, the broader strategy that the President has laid out for combatting ISIL is focused on degrading the command-and-control ability of ISIL. There are a number of command-and-control targets that have been destroyed by the U.S.-led coalition bombing campaign. There are other targets related to ISIL's ability to fund their operations and to supply logistically their operations that have been destroyed or significantly degraded because of military operations that were ordered by the President of the United States.

So we have implemented this specific strategy. We continue to be concerned about what's happening in Kobani. But ultimately, our broader strategy when it comes to Syria is contingent upon a ground force that can take the fight to ISIL in that country. Our overall goal here -- it's important to remember, because this is where the intersection with American national security priorities is most significant. Our overall goal is related to ensuring that ISIL and other extremist groups cannot use the power vacuum that exists in Syria right now as a safe haven from which to plot attacks against the United States. That is our central goal, and that is what our strategy is arrayed around.

Q Would you liken the potential humanitarian crisis or catastrophe in Kobani to that of Amerli or Mount Sinjar?

MR. EARNEST: It's hard for me to make that assessment. I actually don't have a good sense of the number of individuals that we're talking about here. But as I mentioned, Kobani is a place where the brutality of ISIL is on full display. It is something that we're concerned about. It's something that we're acting against. And it certainly bolsters the moral case that this President and other world leaders have made about the necessity of the international community to act in the face of this extremist organization.

Q And then, last question. The French have come out in support of a buffer zone, which is a Turkish idea, obviously, for protecting displaced people in that region. What's the U.S. position on a buffer zone?

MR. EARNEST: This is something that the Turks themselves have raised on a number of occasions, and we've obviously talked to them about that. It's not something that's under consideration right now, though.

Justin.

Q I wanted to ask about an essay that was in Vox today that's been getting a lot of play on immigration --

MR. EARNEST: I'm sorry, a what that was in FOX?

Q An essay. Just a story, I guess. An explainer, maybe.

Q Vox.

MR. EARNEST: Oh, on Vox?

Q Yeah.

MR. EARNEST: Oh, I'm sorry, I though you said FOX, and so I just didn't -- (laughter) -- not that that would make it illegitimate. I'd be happy to answer questions about essays on FOX. I just wasn't aware that any essays had been posted to FOX recently. But if there are, I'd be happy to read them. (Laughter.)

As it relates to your question on Vox, please continue.

Q I apologize for mumbling. But it's titled: "He doesn't know it yet, but Obama's likely to break another promise on immigration." And it raises kind of two points.

MR. EARNEST: Sounds provocative, doesn't it?

Q Yeah -- two points that I wanted to get your reaction to. The first was chasing down the idea that you and the President have said that any executive orders he's going to take on immigration will be more politically stable after the midterms. And the point that the essay raises is that by pretty much all accounts Democrats will lose seats to Republican candidates who are running against immigration reform in this election. So why does the White House believe that these immigration reforms after November are going to be more sustainable than they are now while Democrats who are representing the American people and have voted for immigration reform are in office?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I'm not ready to concede any Democratic losses in the midterm elections. The American people will have their vote. And the President and I both believe very powerfully in the message that's being delivered by Democratic candidates in these races all across the country, that the values of the vast majority of Democratic candidates who are on the ballot are consistent with the values of middle-class families across the country. And I do think that that will -- the consistency of those values and of those priorities will have an impact on the electoral outcome.

So setting that aside, the question I think really is around what sort of political dynamics are in place in advance of the midterms around the issue of immigration. The fact, or I guess the concern is that had the President moved forward with his announcement prior to Election Day, you would have seen Republican candidates do more to make the immigration issue central to their campaign. And in the event that they were successful in their campaign, the concern would be that they would cite their opposition to immigration reform as a reason for their success. That is not a storyline that the President wanted, or that anybody here wanted to contribute to.

Now, I will just say that I do not think that there are -- let me say it this way -- I don't think in the vast majority of congressional races that it is a particularly wise or popular decision to say that you're against common-sense, bipartisan immigration reform.

So the reason I say that is that this is less an issue about trying to dictate or influence the outcome of the elections, and more about making sure that the immigration issue is not a casualty of the post-election political analysis. And that is a complicated case to make, but it is important to protecting the political viability of an issue that the President thinks is a top domestic priority, and that's immigration reform.

Q Just to follow on that a little bit, I guess the other argument that's made is although the President has repeatedly said that he will act between November and the end of December, coming up right after that are going to be budget battles and battles over the debt ceiling. And Republicans have already indicated that they're likely to try to put as a condition of any raising of the debt ceiling or passing a new budget, that the President not act on immigration reform, or that they'll -- that he repeals whatever executive action he takes. And so what I'm wondering is, can you guys say now that the President would flat out veto in a way that you have in previous battles over Obamacare any attempt by Republicans to condition whatever legislation comes through Congress on revoking the immigration reform?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Justin, I don't think that there are many analysts that believe that the political standing of the Republican Party was enhanced by shutting down the government, so I would be surprised if Republican leaders chose to pursue that path again.

At the same time, I also heard Republican leaders in the aftermath of the last budget showdown indicate that they would never again hold hostage the full faith and credit of the United States of America. And I take those leaders at their word when they say that no one should do that.

Q Well, that didn't really answer my question, though. If they do do it --

MR. EARNEST: Well, but I guess the point is -- the point I'm making is I think most people, even in the Republican Party -- and I hesitate to speak for them; I don't think they want me to, but let me just do it based on my own observations here -- that I don't think that many Republican political professionals believe that the standing of their party was enhanced politically by shutting down the government. And I take the leaders at their word when they say that vowing to hold hostage the full faith and credit of the United States is an unwise strategy, both politically but also substantively for the United States. I take them at their word on that.

Obviously, these Republican leaders are going to have some influence -- significant influence even -- over the strategy that Republicans pursue at the end of this year.

Q Well, the only reason it was a hostage situation was you guys flatly said that you would not sign any bill that overrode Obamacare, right?

MR. EARNEST: No, I think the reason it was appropriately described as a hostage situation is because Republicans took hostage the full faith and credit of the United States. The fact that we received a ransom note doesn't mean that we're responsible for the hostage-taking does it?

Q Well, let's say that you receive a hostage note again. (Laughter.) I mean, it's happened.

MR. EARNEST: Again, I think my point is, I don't think and I certainly hope it's not going to happen again, both because the vast majority of Republicans don't think it's in their interest to do so and important members of the Republican leadership have ruled out doing it.

Q So if I'm an immigration activist here right now, and you won't say that even though it's -- you believe that it's unlikely that the President would veto legislation that rolled back this executive order, why would I not -- why would I feel confident that the President is actually committed to immigration reform, since he's already delayed this measure past the deadline that he set for himself?

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, I think the President's performance and record on immigration reform should properly be evaluated in the context of executive actions that he will announce before the end of the year.

Major.

Q Josh, on behalf of the Correspondents Association, I'd like to engage you in a dialogue about this conference call this afternoon. You from the podium have said several things that are relatively important in this context. One, this is a hugely important job for the President, he's engaged all members of his administration in trying to do it. Communication with the public at the state and local level about the public health, public transportation and coordination of a response is vital -- not only as a matter of practice, but as a matter of communication. All of those things will be present on this conference call.

During the entire crisis, so-called, about how many people were signing up or not signing up for Obamacare, we were typically allowed to call in to a conference call in which the Health and Human Services Secretary would talk to state and local officials about implementation of Obamacare. This strikes me as something far more important and a far greater public visibility and interest than that, and I would urge you to give us an opportunity to hear the President dialogue with these state and local officials not on our behalf, but on behalf of the country and on behalf of an agenda you said is important for public knowledge and comfort about this issue.

MR. EARNEST: Major, what we will do is we're going to convene a briefing later today with --

Q Right, and that briefing is your obligation. You're obliged to provide that briefing to all of us because this is a public policy issue. That's not a gift, that's not a favor to us.

MR. EARNEST: I'm not suggesting that it is.

Q Okay.

MR. EARNEST: I would like to take advantage of the opportunity to answer your question. What we will do is we will convene a briefing later today with the experts who are responsible for implementing this policy. We do believe it is in the public interest for them to have all the details about this policy, and to have a very clear assessment of what risk is facing the American public. It's important for them to understand that because it's our belief, based on the protocols that we have in place, that that risk is exceedingly low, and people should understand why that's the case.

Each of you will have, through the pool, have the opportunity to hear from the President later this afternoon when he travels to the Pentagon, where he will be meeting with his combatant commanders from across the globe who are responding to a wide range of challenges and key national security priorities. One of them is the AFRICOM Commander who is responsible for the military response that the President ordered to the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa. And you will have the President -- have the opportunity to hear from the President in the context of those conversations.

Q I understand that. I am just saying, what is the downside of this unique opportunity for the public to be able to hear a recorded conversation of their President talking to state and local officials about how they can best deal with localized public concerns and this entire threat, writ large? What is the downside of that? What could possibly inhibit you from denying the American public hearing that information?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I'll tell you what, I'll on the spot we'll make a little executive decision. What I think that we can do -- and I will check with our -- make sure that we have the capability to do this -- is that we will release a transcript of the President's remarks that he delivers to these state and local officials. That's not everything that you want, but that will give you and the American public insight into the message that the President delivered to these local elected officials.

But what you will also have the opportunity to do is to hear directly from the President on camera as he speaks with his combatant commanders about dealing with this and other issues that are facing the country.

Q I encourage all executive decisions from the podium. (Laughter.)

MR. EARNEST: Going out on a limb.

Q Some people have called Kobani, at least for the moment, an acid test of this strategy. Would you agree?

MR. EARNEST: I would not agree with that assessment. I think what is the test of the strategy in Syria is to look at what the strategy -- what the strategic objectives were, and then to evaluate them accordingly.

One of our objectives in Syria was striking the command-and-control structures. We have made some progress on that; the job is not done. The same is true when it comes to the sources of ISIL funding, the sources of ISIL oil revenue, and other logistical capabilities that ISIL has demonstrated. We have made progress against those, and that is how the broader strategy should be evaluated.

I guess the other thing that you should do is evaluate the progress that we're making to ramp up our training and assistance to Syrian opposition fighters. This is a core element of our strategy. We're still in the very early stages of that. So that is -- I think you can say that would be an in-progress assessment of that status. But that is another thing that should be assessed as we move forward.

Q I'm just wondering, and I know you can't do this, but from the point of view of someone living in Kobani, all those other things are not only secondary, they're completely irrelevant to their immediate needs, their immediate concerns, and possibly their own immediate jeopardy. And I'm just wondering if those who observe this say this is a proof positive why air power alone can't solve this problem, and you have what is suggested to be a potential -- I'm not suggesting it will happen -- but a potential massacre. And we're not going to do a humanitarian relief mission. The Pentagon says, well, there's lots of terrible things going on in Syria -- this is just another one of them. It does seem like a moment in which to evaluate the visible limitations of this strategy.

MR. EARNEST: And I think I've acknowledged that from pretty close to the very first question that was asked in the briefing, that there are limitations associated with the exclusive use of air power. That is the situation that we're operating in Syria right now. The President is not willing at this point --

Q So the residents of Kobani and any other city in the next six months just have to wait?

MR. EARNEST: Well, for the residents of Kobani, they should understand that the United States and the international community is deeply concerned about what's transpiring there. It has put on full display the brutality of ISIL. And you have seen the U.S. military carry out airstrikes in this region that have degraded the ability of ISIL to carry out this function.

Now, is this going to stop ISIL from overrunning Kobani? I don't think anybody knows. That's why we're concerned about this situation. It's why that another core component of our strategy is training and equipping Syrian opposition fighters so that they can take the fight to ISIL on the ground in their own country. That will be a key component -- that is a key component of our strategy, and it will be critical to our broader success; that when we have an arrangement where U.S. and coalition fighter pilots are carrying out airstrikes in support of ongoing ground operations, that will have a pretty dramatic impact on the conditions on the battlefield.

But right now, because those Syrian opposition fighters aren't in place, our capabilities are still powerful but they're limited.

Ed.

Q Josh, since FOX was mentioned, I wanted to ask about that. (Laughter.) Essayist and author Bill O'Reilly, who had Leon Panetta on last night --

MR. EARNEST: Best-selling author.

Q Best-selling.

MR. EARNEST: A number of best-selling books that he's written.

Q I appreciate you mentioning that.

Q I'm sure he appreciates it more. (Laughter.)

Q He appreciates it even more. Leon Panetta --

MR. EARNEST: Did we just guarantee a wider share tonight? (Laughter.)

Q Hopefully he'll share. (Laughter.) Leon Panetta -- I know you were asked about this Monday at the last briefing, and in the gaggle yesterday, but beyond the policy differences, beyond the headlines of the book, specifically he told Bill O'Reilly last night he has questions about the President's leadership style and was saying specifically on ISIS that the President needs to "develop the will to fight and get into the ring and make it happen." And went on to say that he thinks too often the President approaches these kinds of things like a law professor. So beyond the headlines, how do you respond to those kinds of criticisms from a former insider about the President's leadership?

MR. EARNEST: Ed, I think the success that we have had in about a month or so in building a coalition of 60 countries from around the world who have joined the United States under the leadership of the President of the United States to take the fight to ISIL is an indication of the kind of leadership and influence that the President continues to have around the globe.

This is influence that the President wields to benefit the global community. Most importantly, this is influence that the President wields to benefit American national security. That's what the President is focused on when it comes to demonstrating his leadership around the globe, and that is leadership that has made the United States of America safer.

Q Another thing Panetta said was, "We could govern either by leadership or by crisis, and today we are largely governing by crisis." And when you see Dan Balz do a news story, a news analysis today in The Washington Post suggesting that this should not be seen as disloyalty, but he said that this should be seen as an attempt -- for the President to reflect on his leadership style -- will there be any reflection here at the White House beyond the headlines of the book? Will there be reflection about what's been done and not done in terms of his leadership style?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think in answering a lot of your questions on a range of topics today I talk about how frequently the strategy that this administration puts in place is evaluated and constantly revisited for effectiveness and for success, and that where

changes are necessary, the President and his team have not hesitated to do them. Where we can make additions, such as when it comes to screening travelers to the United States, we're willing to make additions.

At the same time, the President is also dedicated to the strategy that he has put forward, and it's because of his dedication and commitment to that strategy we've had success in building a broad international coalition to take the fight to ISIL. So I think what you see is a President that has a leadership style that is candid and direct and committed to protecting the core national security interests of the United States of America.

Q And last one. When you talk about changes -- after the 2012 election the White House was upfront about saying we're going to get some fresh legs, bring in some new people. David Ignatius today suggests that he's been talking to people around here who think that maybe after the midterms there's going to be some pretty broad changes, as well. What do you say to that?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I personally don't know of anybody who is planning to leave at the end of the year. It is, as you point out, customary and has probably been true since George Washington's second midterm election that some members of his staff left. So I would --

Q Is that true?

MR. EARNEST: I don't know. I'm sure somebody will fact-check me. (Laughter.) I would assume that it is, but who knows. The point is, is that it is customary after midterm elections for members of an administration to pursue other opportunities.

Q But beyond the customary, is -- again, getting to the reflection question, is there a sense here in the White House that some changes, some rejiggering needs to be done given all these crises?

MR. EARNEST: No, I don't think so. I think the President is deeply appreciative of the dedication and professionalism of the men and women who show up to work here every day focused on fighting for the American people, for middle-class families, and fighting to ensure the safety and security of the American public at home and around the world.

Chris.

Q Let me ask you about the phone call a little bit more today, Josh, because you said it's going to be similar to what was said from that podium on Friday. So is it an acknowledgement that the message is not getting out to state and local officials? What's the purpose of the call if that information has been out there for days?

MR. EARNEST: It reflects a commitment on the part of this administration to have an open line of communication with state and local officials all across the country. We want to --

Q But what are you hoping to accomplish?

MR. EARNEST: Well, we want to make sure that all these state and local officials have answers to questions that they may have either about the broader federal response to this issue, or what role they have to play in keeping their community safe.

We want to make sure they have all of the necessary information to reassure members of their public that the -- members of their community that the risk of an outbreak of Ebola in the United States is exceedingly low; that we continue to have screening measures in place both in Africa, in transit, and here in the United States; that we have a medical infrastructure that can quickly isolate and treat those who contract Ebola and prevent its spread, most importantly. These are all reasons that the American people should have some confidence -- strong confidence -- in the ability of this government to prevent an Ebola outbreak in the United States.

But this is a threat about which we are very vigilant. And what's most important is that we confront this outbreak at the source, and that our efforts to try to stop Ebola -- the spread of Ebola in its tracks in West Africa has a direct relationship to our commitment to protecting the American people here at home.

Q Thanks, Josh.

MR. EARNEST: Go ahead, Chris.

Q I just wanted to ask you about the death of Thomas Eric Duncan. When he was first diagnosed, it did raise some questions about the preparedness to detect -- to treat the virus, and I wonder if any of those questions have really been answered in the interim. And we keep hearing assurances, the very same assurances that we have been hearing over the course of weeks since this diagnosis happened -- over the last week since this diagnosis happened. But has anything substantially changed that would send a message that this is less likely to happen here?

MR. EARNEST: Well, let me start by saying that we here at the White House offer our condolences to the loved ones of Mr. Duncan. We also want to share our gratitude to the doctors and nurses who worked around the clock literally to try to care for him and help him recover.

This is an indication of the fact that this is a deadly disease, and it underscores why the President has made it a priority to stop the spread of this disease at the source. And the involvement of the United States military has galvanized the international community. We are seeing significant contributions of international aid and assistance; more, however, is needed. And we are committed to putting in place the medical protocols that are required to stop this outbreak in its tracks.

As it relates to what's changed, I think one important thing that's changed -- and I alluded to this I think in the briefing on Monday -- that there's no doubt that medical professionals all across the country are more vigilant about this now. Now that there has been one case here in the United States, I do think that all of the public attention on this that has been merited has also ensured that this is an issue that is on the radar screen of every medical professional all across the country.

Roger.

Q Thank you. The President has spent his entire presidency reviving the U.S. economy, which, of course, is dependent on the global economy. Russia's economy right now is almost zero, much of it due to the sanctions. Europe is in trouble. Angela Merkel is looking at stimulus measures to head off a recession. Is there any concern at the White House here that the global economic recovery is at risk?

MR. EARNEST: I think my first observation, Roger, is that the conditions that you're citing make the President's policies look pretty good. They certainly make the performance of the American economy look pretty good. I saw that there was a recent report from the IMF that downgraded economic forecasting of the global economy at the same time they were revising upward the forecast of the U.S. economy. That's an indication that this economy continues to be extraordinarily resilient. A large part of that --

Q You're not suggesting the U.S. economy is isolated, are you?

MR. EARNEST: I'm suggesting that the United States is showing the kind of resilience that other countries are desperate for. And a lot of that is due in no small part to the policies that this administration put in place in the early days of the Obama administration.

Now, the bulk of the credit goes to the American workers who through their grit and determination have helped us recover. A bunch of that credit goes to entrepreneurs and innovators that are the strength of the American economy. But there is no doubt that the economic policies that this President put in place are the envy of the world and have --

Q Granted, the U.S. economy is stronger. Europe needs to be strong, too, to buy our products. Is there no concern?

MR. EARNEST: Well, we certainly are hoping that the economy of our allies and partners around the globe strengthens. We certainly would like to see that happen. But the fact is that here in the United States we've had 55 consecutive months of private sector job growth. That's the longest streak of private sector job growth in American history. We have seen over that course of time 10.3 million private sector jobs created. There is a tremendous record of progress that we have made here in the United States, and the fact that all of that is occurring against the backdrop of a global economy that continues to struggle is an indication of how strong the America economy is. It's a strong validation of this President's policies, and most importantly, it's a testament to the hard work and determination of the American worker.

Fred, I'll give you the last one.

Q Thanks, Josh. At least five states have minimum wage on the ballot this year, in November, but each of those is less than \$10.10. Even the President's home state of Illinois is \$10, just a tiny bit under; most are \$8 or \$9. Is that a disappointment to the White House, or do you see this as a good first step?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Fred, what we have seen since the President first issued his call for a higher minimum wage is a number of states take action to raise the minimum wage in their states. I think there are 13 different states and the District of Columbia that have taken specific steps to raise the minimum wage in their states. We've also seen announcements from companies large and small all across the country indicating their commitment to paying their workers more.

What's important here are two things. The first is the consequences that has for middle-class families and those families that are trying to get into the middle class. According to, I guess it was a CBO study, there are millions of Americans that would be pulled out of poverty if we raised the minimum wage to \$10.10. That is a benefit that is being experienced by working families in those 13 states and the District of Columbia. The second thing that's important to note about this is, in those 13 states where the minimum wage has been increased, we've seen greater economic growth in those states in comparison to -- in contrast to states that have refused to raise the minimum wage.

So this is an indication that there are significant and beneficial economic trends for raising the minimum wage. That's why the President is urging Congress to take a step and give American workers all across the country a raise in the minimum wage.

Q But on the question that most of the states are looking at less than \$10.10, is that a disappointment at all?

MR. EARNEST: Well, \$10.10 is certainly the level that the President believes is optimal, but the fact is we are pleased to see an increase in the minimum wage. We believe that has important benefits for the broader economy, but also for working families across the country. We would urge Congress to take the steps that are necessary to give workers all across the country a wage increase in the minimum wage.

Q And a final one on that. Having this on the ballot in states like Alaska and Arkansas, where there's really tight Senate races, do you think that could help draw the Democratic base out?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think the thing that it has done is it has helped to win the support of some Republican candidates running for office. So the more that we can build support among Republicans across the country for raising the minimum wage, we see that as a good sign.

The fact is, this did used to be a bipartisan issue. The last time that the minimum wage was signed into law, it was signed into law by President George W. Bush. So there's no reason this has to be a partisan issue, and the President certainly would enjoy the opportunity to work in bipartisan fashion with Congress to give all of America's minimum-wage workers a raise.

Thanks, everybody. Have a good day.

END

1:09 P.M. EDT

