

Press Briefing by Deputy Press Secretary Eric Schultz

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MR. SCHULTZ: Good afternoon. I apologize for the tardiness. The last thing any of us would want to do is prolong this week. (Laughter.) So I'm going to withhold any announcements and I'm going to go right to your questions, Darlene.

Q Okay, thank you. Can you tell us what the White House is expecting out of the talks Secretary Kerry is having with his counterparts in Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Russia?

MR. SCHULTZ: Darlene, as you pointed out, I believe Secretary Kerry recently concluded his conversation with Foreign Minister Lavrov and several of their counterparts. I believe Secretary Kerry said it was a constructive conversation where productive ideas were put forward. I believe they've agreed to meet again next week. But I don't have any further details beyond that readout and beyond the fact that there's a commitment to reconvene next week.

Q Is this group the group that the White House would be looking to come up with a political transition in Syria that you all say is needed there?

MR. SCHULTZ: Well, if we take President Putin at his word, he is the one who said that a political transition is absolutely needed in Syria. So we believe that the recent red carpet that was rolled out for Mr. Assad in Moscow was counterproductive to that goal. This is someone who has used heinous chemical weapons against his own people. He's lost the legitimacy to lead. He's allowed his country to devolve into a sectarian civil war where extremists can flourish. And he's also caused the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II. So we do believe that Mr. Assad must go, and that is very high on Secretary Kerry's agenda.

Q Are there any concerns about Russian lawmakers being in Syria today to meet with Assad just days after he went to Moscow to meet with Putin?

MR. SCHULTZ: Darlene, I hadn't seen that report. But as we have said, efforts to prop up Assad are not only counterproductive, but they're probably on the wrong side of history.

Q Finally, can you preview a little bit the message the President is going to deliver this afternoon to the DNC Women's Forum?

MR. SCHULTZ: Sure. I don't have remarks to extensively preview for you at this time. But I can tell you that the President takes his role as head of the Democratic Party very seriously. He has worked, as you all have observed, and traveled a lot of miles to make sure that our Democrats, whose names are on the ballot, which does not include him in 2016, have the resources they need to succeed and wage effective campaigns.

I do think you can expect the President to make a pretty stark contrast between the economic vision that he's proffered for the past seven years, our record of accomplishment, and how Republicans want to roll a lot of that back. That includes taking away health care from 17 million Americans. That includes rolling back Wall Street reform. And that also includes taking away the bold action this President has led on climate change.

Roberta.

Q I want to ask about the power plant regulations. Twenty-four states today filed a petition to block the plan, as you no doubt know. I'm wondering how concerned is the White House that these challenges are going to delay or block implementation. And what impact could the challenges and sort of the uncertainty surrounding the challenges have on the Paris talks?

MR. SCHULTZ: Roberta, we are confident that this plan is on strong legal footing, and I'll explain why. The Clean Power Plan is consistent with the text history and structure of the Clean Air Act, and it also gives the states the flexibility they need to implement it, and reflects unprecedented public engagement, and finally, is responsive to all of the feedback we receive from stakeholders during this very long engagement process.

Overall, since you mentioned Paris, the President has made clear that we need to take bold action on climate change. Thanks to his leadership, more than 150 countries have stepped forward and committed to reduce global carbon pollution, and work to slow the impacts we are seeing in terms of more extreme weather, impacts to public health, and the economic and national security interests at stake.

Q But how concerned is the White House that those countries and others will look at what's happening here with the court challenge and also with the efforts by lawmakers on a CRA to block the rule? How concerned is the White House that other countries will look and that and go, well, if there's a lot of uncertainty in the United States, why should we do something?

MR. SCHULTZ: Well, I am not surprised that our Republican critics have rushed to the courts to try and prevent something they weren't able to do legislatively. That's something they've shown an inclination to do on other issue areas. But we believe that this approach has been shaped by data, shaped by science, and represents a balanced, pragmatic view of how to tackle this. Meanwhile, our critics show up on the floor of the United States Senate with snowballs.

It seems to me that this is a plan that doubles down on flexibility and choices for states and utilities by mirroring the way energy production is already changing around the country. This Clean Power Plan provides national consistency, accountability, and a level playing field, and again, really reflects our pragmatic and transparent approach to this.

Q Lastly, can you preview for us what the President hopes to accomplish during his visit on Monday with Indonesia's President? Particularly when it comes to climate, is he looking for something concrete or additional from Indonesia's President on that?

MR. SCHULTZ: Sure. On Monday, the President will welcome President Joko Widodo of Indonesia to the White House. The two leaders will hold bilateral meetings in the Oval Office. This will be the President's first visit to Washington since taking office. And I do expect them to discuss climate. We believe that this is, as two of the world's largest democracies, an area where the two countries can work together, as you point out, in advance of Paris. I also expect them to discuss areas where they can expand cooperation, such as trade, such as defense, and pursue new areas of growth, like maritime cooperation.

Jim.

Q Just wondering if -- because there are a lot of American retirees down in Mexico and that coast, and because of the storm that is approaching there, what is the United States doing to reach out to Mexico now in preparation? And what aid might it offer after the storm hits?

MR. SCHULTZ: Thank you, Jim. While it doesn't appear that Hurricane Patricia will make landfall in the United States, we are indeed closely monitoring the storm and are in close communication with the government of Mexico. The State Department and USAID would be the lead agencies for any international request for assistance. So they'll be point if and when those requests come in. But I do know that the State Department has reached out to -- via our embassy in Mexico, reached out to any American citizens there with the appropriate warnings.

Q Is this something the two Presidents might talk about, as well? Do you expect any kind of phone calls between them?

MR. SCHULTZ: I don't have any phone calls to preview at this point, but I can tell you that United States government officials are absolutely in touch with our counterparts in Mexico.

Justin.

Q First I wanted to start with yesterday's testimony by Secretary Clinton in the Benghazi Committee. Some congressional Democrats are talking about disbanding the committee after the hearing. And I'm wondering both what your reaction to Secretary Clinton's testimony is, or if the President had a reaction? And secondly, if you're supportive of the effort by some House Democrats to disband the committee.

MR. SCHULTZ: My reaction to yesterday's testimony is that Leader McCarthy was proven right; that if you go back to when this committee was stood up by Republicans about two years ago, a lot of Democrats at the time charged that this was going to be a partisan exercise. It took a little while but eventually leaders of the Republican caucus acknowledged the same thing. And yesterday, if you review the videotape of 11 hours of testimony, you can be heartened by the fact that Leader McCarthy hit the nail on the head.

Q So you think Democrats should walk away from the committee?

MR. SCHULTZ: That's a good question. And you'll recall that that was a question that was in play when Republicans stood up this committee about 532 days ago. Democrats at the time were discussing whether their participation would lead credence to the committee or whether they should just not participate since it was going to be a partisan exercise. So at the time, we deferred to Leader Pelosi and the Democrats to make that decision, and we would keep that same posture today.

Q Some congressional Republicans are saying that they don't believe Treasury's November 3rd deadline for the debt ceiling, and independent projections saying that it could be as much as a week later. Orrin Hatch today in a letter asked the CBO for more guidance on this because Treasury is not giving them a day-to-day update on cash flows. So I'm wondering if you can say definitively whether the U.S. won't be able to meet all of its commitments on November 4th, and also if Treasury -- why Treasury isn't providing those day-to-day updates.

MR. SCHULTZ: Well, I can tell you that Secretary Lew has made clear that extraordinary measures will be exhausted on Tuesday, November 3rd. But I also want to be clear that given the volatility in this process and given the tens of millions of dollars the flow in and out of the government regularly, that if there is updates to those dates, Secretary Lew takes very seriously his responsibility to update Congress.

Q And then in his address earlier this week, Vice President Biden spoke about the moonshot to try to cure cancer. I'm wondering if you could put any meat on the bone. Are we going to see a concrete legislative proposal out of the White House on this? Is there a price tag involved? Is this just sort of something that the Vice President threw out aspirationally, or this something that we're actually going to see you guys put forward? And if so, what are the details on that?

MR. SCHULTZ: Justin, I don't have a new policy proposal to unveil to you right now. I would draw you to our Fiscal Year 2016 budget which does include significant investments in this area. A lot of research is done specifically at the National Institutes of

Health. So I know that this President under this administration has increased significant the amount of funding for this. I don't have anything new to announce in light of the Vice President's remarks in the Rose Garden yesterday [sic].

Q But a moonshot suggests kind of a new program of singular focus. Even if you don't have the details now, are we going to hear something beyond kind of the regular budgetary ask on this? Or was this not -- is this not actually something that's going to happen? Kind of a unique and singular focus.

MR. SCHULTZ: Again, I don't have any specific, new policies or white paper to read out to you right now. I would tell you that the President's commitment to curing cancer is matched in what he has asked Congress to fund. And we can get you -- the Office of Management and Budget can get you the specific breakdowns, but I did have a chance to take a look at this yesterday and there has been a significant increase under this administration.

Kevin.

Q Thanks, Eric. I want to ask you about Russia and its increasing role in the region, and in particular I want to ask you about what appears to be a new alliance with the Jordanians. And when you add it all up, Russia's supposed partnership with the Iraqis, perhaps, to help fight ISIS, their continued support for the Assad regime in Syria and now this latest alliance with Jordan -- how concerned is the White House about Moscow's increasing role, and in particular this new alliance with Jordan?

MR. SCHULTZ: Kevin, I saw news reports on that this morning. I would tell you that I think it's important to just back up and let's look at the overall context of where we were and where we are now. If you take a look at, like you said, the region, Russia is a country that used to have two very reliable client states -- the Ukraine, which recently has flexed its independent muscle, and Syria, which is falling apart.

So we don't look at this as a sign of strength by the Russians; we look at this as a sign of desperation -- that they've lost considerable influence in the region, and that puts aside the significant contracting their economy has done. I believe it's now smaller than the economy of Spain. And so we don't view this as any signs of strength by the Russians, but rather signs of weakness that they're losing influence in the region. So it would follow that Mr. Putin would want to help prop up Mr. Assad. We just think, as I said, that that's the wrong side of history.

Q What about this partnership -- or budding partnership with the Jordanians? Any concerns about that?

MR. SCHULTZ: I would refer you to my friends at the State Department. I do know that the Jordanians are part of our anti-ISIL coalition. They've contributed significantly to that. One of the touchstones for the President on building that coalition was to make sure we had a number of Arab states involved, so we appreciate the Jordanians' efforts on this. But I'd refer you to the State Department in terms of any specific communications we've had with them.

Q Okay. And last, I want to just take you back to the hearing yesterday. And I know there's a great sense among many that it was political, but there's also the obvious -- people died. There seems to be a number of people who are still concerned about the narrative that was coming from the administration in the hours thereafter. New records show that Mrs. Clinton wrote within 24 hours of the attack that it was, in fact, al Qaeda. She told the Egyptian Prime Minister there was no connection to the film that we heard talked about a great deal yesterday and at that time. So I'm just wondering, how do you square that with the administration's statements that we heard from the podium and other places?

MR. SCHULTZ: Kevin, we had 11 hours of questions and answers along these very lines, so I'm going to mostly refer you to Secretary Clinton's responses on that. I would tell you that you are right that this was a tragedy. Four Americans put their lives on the line to keep us safe and to advance the nation's interest in a very dangerous place. They were killed on the line of duty on September 11th, 2012.

Unfortunately, there wasn't a lot of discussion about that yesterday. And I didn't get a chance to watch the whole thing, but the parts I saw there was very limited conversation about that. I would tell you in terms of the charge that you are mentioning -- that somehow talking points were politicized -- has been debunked time and time again. And I would refer you to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence November 2014 report, which was signed by Mike Rogers, a well-respected member of Congress, a well-respected Republican, who wrote that the process used to develop the talking points was flawed -- a conclusion that we would absolutely agree to -- but that the talking points reflected the conflicting intelligence assessments in the days immediately following the crisis. This was a fluid time. This was a difficult time where intelligence that we were receiving was conflicting and evolving, some of which turned out to be true, some of which, unfortunately, turned out to not be true.

But there is still no evidence to suggest that anything the administration did in talking about the attack was anything but based on the talking points and the guidance we received from the intelligence community. But you don't have to take my word for it. The CIA has said just that.

Q Okay, so to button it up -- and this is the last one I have. Then is it your suggestion that her opinion in her conversations with others, that it was, in fact, al Qaeda -- even though that was not what was being said by the administration -- it was just her opinion? Did she not get the same guidance? Or did that guidance come out after or separately from what she was telling other people? I'm just trying to figure out why they seem so divergent.

MR. SCHULTZ: Well, Kevin, I think in your question, I think you got to it, which is the sequencing of this is difficult and it's complicated. And at the time, it's a very fluid, difficult situation. And our intelligence community is receiving intelligence in real time, and that is being vetted and looked at. And then the administration in real time must answer questions from you and your colleagues. So we were doing the best we could based on the intelligence that was coming in.

And as my counterparts in the intelligence community will tell you, they were doing the best job they could.

Pam.

Q Eric, on the debt ceiling again, Kevin McCarthy said today that Republicans will demand spending cuts in any bill that avoids default. Does that set up a situation where the government will wind up defaulting on the 4th?

MR. SCHULTZ: I certainly hope not. The President has been clear and this White House has been clear that we're not going to negotiate over the debt limit, that this isn't asking Congress to do anything extraordinary or special. This is asking the Congress to pay bills that it's already incurred. And so this is something that we don't negotiate. We urge them to do this immediately and without any drama or delay.

Q So would the President veto a bill that comes with these cuts on it?

MR. SCHULTZ: Yes.

Q And the House also, for the 50-somethingth time, passed a bill that would repeal a lot of the Affordable Care Act.

MR. SCHULTZ: If the day ends in Y.

Q How concerned are you that if a Republican President takes over in 2017, that it actually will be repealed or changed dramatically?

MR. SCHULTZ: Well, we are confident that a Democrat, we think, will take over the White House in 2017. And if Republicans do win and choose to repeal the Affordable Care Act, they're not going to have to answer to us; they're going to have to answer the 17 million people they want to take health care away from.

As of June 30th, 9.9 million people were enrolled in the insurance marketplace for 2015 coverage. The rate of health care increases is the lowest it's been in decades. Over 13 million additional Americans were covered under Medicaid expansion and Children's Health Insurance Program. Young adults are getting covered. Hospitals are saving billions of dollars. So we feel very good about our record on the Affordable Care Act, and it's going to be Republicans who have to answer why they want to take all that way.

Q Is there any update on states that may expand Medicaid now -- that there were some that looking at it? Do you have any news on that?

MR. SCHULTZ: So I don't have the latest state-by-state breakdown. As I think you've mentioned, we've been heartened by the fact that a number of both Democratic and Republican-led state governments have decided that this is the right course of action. That's obviously something we believe. Our door is always open for anyone else who wants to do this. But I don't have any updates on the state-by-state breakdown.

Cheryl.

Q Yes, thanks. To follow up a little bit on yesterday. Yesterday, the House Transportation Committee reported out a six-year transportation bill. But the package isn't final and ready, and it's not going to be by next week. Will the White House veto a short-term funding patch for the highway bill?

MR. SCHULTZ: Cheryl, as you just alluded to, the Surface Transportation Authorization expires next week. And I think the unfortunate reality is that due to congressional inaction, will need to pass another short-term extension of these authorities to keep federal funding for America's transportation systems.

As the President has said many times, that this country cannot continue to rely on short-term patches as an approach to funding our infrastructure. So the House and Senate should use this time to finally complete its work on a long-term bill like the one you mentioned.

Q But he will support that then, just in order -- if they --

MR. SCHULTZ: Again, I think the unfortunate reality is that that's the only option at this time. Republicans in Congress have chosen to use their time looking at other things.

Anita.

Q Just to follow up on the Benghazi hearing yesterday, I know that you were asked yesterday when I was not here, when I was over there --

MR. SCHULTZ: We missed you.

Q I was there for 11 hours. Somebody had asked you if the President watched, and at that point you had said you didn't know, or he hadn't yet, or it wasn't on his plan. Since it was 11 hours, and there was many hours of opportunity, I wonder if he did tune in, or if he saw anything later in the news reports, and also if he had a chance to call Secretary Clinton at all.

MR. SCHULTZ: Anita, I know that this was a seminal television moment for a lot of people in this room, and a lot of people elsewhere. But we had a lot of business to do yesterday, so we were busy hard at work advancing the President's agenda. I have not in truth spoken to the President about the hearing on Benghazi yesterday. I am sure, given the ubiquitous coverage, he's seen a little bit of that, but I don't have any personal reaction or any communications -- or any conversations with Secretary Clinton.

Q You don't know either way if he called her?

MR. SCHULTZ: Correct.

Q Okay, thank you.

MR. SCHULTZ: Ron.

Q Another Benghazi question. Given 532 days of it --

MR. SCHULTZ: Yes.

Q There's now the formation of a select committee to look at Planned Parenthood, and I'm wondering what the President's reaction is to that. And following up the previous question about the Democratic role in this, would you advise -- or would the White House suggest that Democrats not participate in this? Or what posture do you think they should take towards this?

MR. SCHULTZ: In the Planned Parenthood?

Q Yes.

MR. SCHULTZ: I think of all days for Republicans to stand up another select committee, they've picked a very special one. Again, we're going to leave it to Democrats in the House of Representatives to decide if they want to participate. That was our approach in May of 2014 when Speaker Boehner decided to stand up the Select Committee on Benghazi.

Q You're saying that because this is the day after Benghazi or because of something else then?

MR. SCHULTZ: I'm going to say because I'm not sure that yesterday you really gleaned a serious sense of purpose from Republicans who conducted that hearing.

Q So then you would suggest that this is the same thing?

MR. SCHULTZ: I think it remains to be seen. But in terms of participation, we're going to defer to the House Democratic leadership.

Q On Benghazi, as well, there were a number of recommendations that were made about embassy and consulate and other security at various outposts. Are there specific things that you can tell the American public that have been done since that incident? And is the White House now confident that -- I know you can't say that nothing like that will ever happen again -- but are you reasonably -- how confident are you that changes have been made that will prevent something like that from ever happening again?

MR. SCHULTZ: I appreciate the question, because in the wake of this tragedy the State Department did stand up an Accountability Review Board led by two of the most respected names and individuals in national security affairs. And they developed -- they took a hard-nosed look at this. I think anyone who has read the report will characterize it as unsparing. And they came up with 29 recommendations. The State Department committed to adopting all of them. I believe they've closed out on 26 of them, and there's three that are in process or near completion. You should check in with the State Department for details on that.

But a few examples of, like the ones you're asking about, they've hired more security personnel and enhanced their training. With congressional support, the department created or funded 151 new diplomatic security positions. The department has procured

new personal protective and breathing equipment for fire safety for high-threat and high-risk posts. They've implemented the Vital Presence Validation Process, which articulates a very clear mission based on U.S. interests, and weighs the needs of U.S. foreign policies against the risks facing U.S. personnel. And they've also expanded the Marine security guard program.

In 2012, Ron, Marines were at about 150 posts. We have signed assigned detachments to 21 more posts, with 14 more scheduled in the coming months.

Q And despite all that's been said about this issue, is the administration much more -- or how would you describe the administration's view about embassy, consulate security now around the world, especially in hostile areas? Is the administration more confident? Are there still things that you want that you're not getting? Where are we?

MR. SCHULTZ: I would describe our concern for the safety of those serving in diplomatic posts as paramount. These are men and women who oftentimes out of the limelight put their lives on risk. They serve in places that are sometimes tranquil and sometimes very dangerous. So that is something we are constantly looking at, and we are constantly evaluating security situations regionally and very locally.

You all have reported sometimes when the State Department issues an advisory or a security change -- level of change for an embassy or a post. So I think that should be evidence to you that this is something we take seriously. And it's something we try and be very vigilant about.

Q Just one last quick one. Has the President reached out to the family of Master Sergeant Wheeler?

MR. SCHULTZ: I can tell you that, as I mentioned yesterday, our thoughts and prayers are with Master Sergeant Wheeler's family and friends and colleagues. Our sincerest condolences go out to his family. I don't have any specific calls to read out to you, but I know, broadly speaking, the administration has been in touch.

Q Is that something that the President would do or routinely does? Routinely is a bad word, but does on these occasions?

MR. SCHULTZ: Again, I don't have any specific conversations to preview for you, but I do know that we have been in touch. And, again, the President extends his thoughts and prayers to his family.

Major.

Q Related to that, Eric, the Pentagon described this as an enabling mission that went out to rescue these prisoners. It happened, as you told us yesterday, without the President's direct sign-off. The Defense Secretary was authorized to do that. Isn't it time to recast the rhetoric about boots on the ground an actual threat or jeopardy that American military personnel are exposed to in Iraq? Because an enabling mission carries with it a sort of sense, well, it's maybe not dangerous. In fact, it was. It was fatal for this

Master Sergeant. There could be more enabling missions in the future. There are boots on the ground, there are active military operations, and the United States is participating. Doesn't the American public deserve a clearer assessment of what the actual risks are and the fact that there could be more casualties of this kind in the future?

MR. SCHULTZ: Major, when the President laid out the rationale and the plan for Operation Inherent Resolve, he absolutely made clear that these men and women were going to be serving in a dangerous place; that they do, as you point out, put their lives on the line. That this is not a safe place to be. That when they assume these roles, there is inherent danger. And like the operation that you're talking about, the loss of any American servicemember is tragic. And that's why we offer our condolences to Master Sergeant Wheeler's family.

The operation that the President has authorized, known as Operation Inherent Resolve, is consistent with our goals to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL. The actual mission and operation that you're referencing that was authorized by the Secretary of Defense; that is consistent with our mission to train, advise and assist Iraqi forces under this very operation. That mission is limited in scope, but does include supporting our partners on the ground. This was a Peshmerga-led operation, which falls under the authorities of Operation Inherent Resolve.

Q So you don't think that this needs to be explained in any more clarity or precision about what actually U.S. military personnel might face on the ground in this operation or any other future operation?

MR. SCHULTZ: Well, I do think --

Q You think the American get that it's dangerous and somebody could die on an enabling mission when that sort of phraseology hadn't cropped up before?

MR. SCHULTZ: I do think the President has made clear, and all of us who speak for the administration will continue to make clear that he does have no intention to authorize long-term, large-scale ground combat operation like our nation has conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This is a specific, narrow operation that the President has laid out for our engagement in Iraq and Syria. And the specific operation that you're talking about was authorized under Operation Inherent Resolve's mission to train, advise and assist Iraqi forces.

Q Samantha Power said yesterday, "Since Russia began its airstrikes, the Syrian map has shifted in ISIS's favor." Does the President agree with that? And how strategically important is that reality for the U.S.?

MR. SCHULTZ: So I don't have an updated map or assessment on that.

Q But your U.N. Ambassador said that.

MR. SCHULTZ: I'm going to defer to my counterpart at the United Nations, but I just don't have an assessment to offer you from here at this time.

I would tell you that there is no doubt that Russia's actions in Syria are counterproductive to its stated goal of wanting both a political transition and to attack ISIL.

Q But they're productive, she says, for ISIS.

MR. SCHULTZ: My point is that there's no question that the strikes we've seen in total are not pursuing the goal that they stated.

Q We asked you this yesterday and you were reluctant to even weigh in on it. Is the administration involved in any conversations about a one-year debt ceiling increase?

MR. SCHULTZ: Our position on this --

Q I know what your position is.

MR. SCHULTZ: -- hasn't changed. It's one day more dire, but our position is that the debt limit should be raised.

Q Is that something you're open to? And has that been in any way, shape, or form conveyed or proffered as a possible way out? Can you give us any guidance on that? And if not, why not?

MR. SCHULTZ: Well, our position is the debt limit should be raised. And the reason we're not going to attach specifics and caveats and negotiate this is because it's a very simple proposition. It's been done under Presidents of the Republican Party and Democrat Party.

Q All I'm asking you is if Republicans suggested that to you, and are you open to it.

MR. SCHULTZ: What we're open to is the debt ceiling being raised, because that's their responsibility.

Q But that leaves open a week, six months, a year? I'm just trying to figure if there's anything specific about this that you're willing to if not embrace, at least acknowledge -- considering the gravity of the situation, which you apparently think is large.

MR. SCHULTZ: I agree with that myself. I would tell you that the debt limit should be raised. We're not even negotiating with our partners on the Hill, so it's going to be hard for me to negotiate with you because we believe that this should be done without negotiation, without drama, without delay. Major, Speaker Boehner did this a couple times in past years without negotiating, and that's the same position we're going to have on this instance.

Q Last thing, on Benghazi. It was suggested by some Democrats that a wider lens might have been more appropriate for the committee itself and for yesterday. Is the administration supportive of a lens that is so wide that it brings in the former CIA director, David Petraeus, and ask questions about CIA operations in Benghazi and/or just the number of personnel there, what was their relationship to the State Department outpost in Benghazi, things of that nature?

MR. SCHULTZ: So in terms of the scope of this committee's investigation --

Q There were some members who suggested that would be a productive line of questioning. And I wonder if you agree.

MR. SCHULTZ: Right. I don't have a position on where this committee should go from here. Clearly, they've lived up to Leader McCarthy's view that this was a political instrument to take down the Secretary of State's poll numbers. But in terms of who they should interview from here and what other hearings they should have, it seems like they've had a pretty exhaustive try of it.

Q Would you deem that irrelevant, or something that would be counterproductive to an inquiry about Benghazi itself -- the tragedy and the things that can be learned from it?

MR. SCHULTZ: I see. I'm going to just largely defer to members on this. It's their inquiry, it's their investigation. Clearly, we've seen this particular one be politicized. But if they have other people they want to interview, that's going to be up to them.

Michelle.

Q So in the more than 500 days and \$4 million and 11 hours of Clinton testimony, do you feel that there was anything good or positive or productive that came out of this?

MR. SCHULTZ: That's a good question. I think we saw a former Obama administration official take seriously her responsibility to lead the Department of State. I think we saw Democrats on this panel come to that hearing with a serious sense of purpose. And I think we saw unfortunately a conversation that got politicized.

Q Well, what about the -- I'm not so much talking about the kind of effect while Clinton's testimony was going on, I'm talking about the investigation itself. Do you think that there was anything productive or that we've learned from this particular investigation?

MR. SCHULTZ: Not really. I think that, as Ron mentioned, in the wake of this tragedy, under Secretary Clinton's leadership, an Accountability Review Board was stood up, led by Ambassador Pickering and Admiral Mike Mullen, two public servants of renowned reputation. They did a very deep dive on this. They spent months and months interviewing State Department officials, leaving no stone unturned in their investigation. They actually came up with 29 concrete recommendations to make sure our posts abroad were more secure, and to prevent a tragedy like this from ever happening again.

I haven't seen such concrete or constructive recommendations from House Republicans.

Q So you think that this particular investigation that we're still seeing, it's a complete waste of time and money?

MR. SCHULTZ: I think it's a political exercise, as the Majority Leader said.

Q And the latest poll that we had showed that 59 percent of Americans are dissatisfied with the way Secretary Clinton handled Benghazi. So what do you think of what we saw yesterday -- what effect do you think that that could have on those numbers?

MR. SCHULTZ: It's hard to say. I'm going to leave the political tea reading to all of you.

Q I mean, the fact that that many Americans feel like there was something missing. So I'm just trying to square how you see it as -- there were deep dives before; this one went deeper. Americans still feel dissatisfied over the subject in general. Do you find any sense of maybe those two extremes meeting after this?

MR. SCHULTZ: After the 11 hours of testimony? Hopefully. I will tell you my observation from yesterday, which I think anyone objectively looking at yesterday's hearing will see a former Secretary of State who exhibited a deep sense of responsibility for what happened, a deep sense of responsibility for making sure our diplomats who serve abroad in dangerous places are protected, and someone who likes to hold herself accountable when things go wrong. So those are some of the attributes of why the President selected Hillary Clinton in the first place, and that's why he's proud of her record as Secretary of State.

Q Would you say that a lesson has been learned here about talking points in general, though, on the part of the administration? This in particular really publicly highlighted that. I mean, almost every other question. So the American public, if there was confusion over that before, over what was said when, now they get it. So what would you say from the perspective of the administration on any lesson to be learned there on that?

MR. SCHULTZ: I'm struck by the premise of your question, which is half of an 11-hour hearing was dedicated to talking points. That should tell you all you need to know about the value of the hearing. But this has been something that's been -- I understand we're talking about this eighth investigation, but the preceding seven looked at this too and they found no evidence of the Republican conspiracy theory that these talking points were politicized.

Mike.

Q Thanks, Eric. In July 2011, the President said he would not negotiate the debt ceiling -- raising the debt ceiling limit. He said he wouldn't negotiate with a gun to his head. And we ended up with quite an extensive negotiation, resulting in the sequester. Republicans are going to look at that and they're going to listen to what you have said and what the President has said about absolutely no negotiation, and they're going to say, well, they said that before. So do you really mean it this time?

MR. SCHULTZ: Mike, I would tell you that the President absolutely believes that raising the debt limit is the bare minimum that Congress can do. We're not asking them to do anything extraordinary or anything special. They just need to pay the bills for a tab they've already incurred.

When we all go out to dinner at restaurants, we pay the bill -- that's all we're asking Congress to do. It's fairly simple. As you all -- and let me just be extra specific that raising the debt limit does not increase spending or authorize new spending. All it does is pay bills that Congress themselves have already incurred. So we do absolutely encourage Republicans to get their act together and figure out a way to do this.

Q So there will be no negotiation this time, despite the fact that that pledge has been broken in the past?

MR. SCHULTZ: No negotiations, period.

Jared.

Q Actually, I'll split the difference between a question that Cheryl asked earlier and Mike just asked now. Because when she was asking about --

MR. SCHULTZ: Well, you're sitting in the right spot for that.

Q It works out perfectly, and so I wonder what your answer will be. (Laughter.) You gave Cheryl an inch on transportation funding, and you wouldn't give Mike a mile on debt ceiling. So in the other one on --

MR. SCHULTZ: It's like those SAT questions -- if the train is leaving -- (laughter) --

Q Let's see how you do.

MR. SCHULTZ: Not well. (Laughter.)

Q December 11th, we've got CR. You described to Cheryl that it was the Republicans' inaction and their inability to get more done that gives the President a loophole on transportation. So will you give them the same pass -- so when it comes to a CR, could we see a short-term CR sign, despite the President's promise earlier that he wouldn't do that?

MR. SCHULTZ: The President was clear, when he unfortunately had to sign the last CR, that Republicans and Democrats in Congress should take this time that was afforded to them to come up with a long-term spending bill.

Q He was also clear about other spending as well. And Cheryl talked about transportation. So why is that special and this isn't?

MR. SCHULTZ: Well, as he said at the time, that this was the last CR short-term extension he was going to sign. And he said that for a good reason, which is this country is experiencing tremendous, significant economic growth that includes the longest stretch of private sector job creation in our nation's history. And there is no reason why our

friends at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue can't roll up their sleeves and figure out a way to fund the government. We're not asking them to do something that's particularly extraordinary or special or requires a whole lot of extra analysis. We're asking them to keep the government open. It should be fairly simple. Republicans ran very hard in the last several midterm elections in order to have the responsibility to lead those chambers of Congress. And we believe it's part and parcel of that responsibility to keep the government funded.

Q Right, but it was your characterization that because of choices that they've made, the President has to countenance signing a short-term or at least won't veto a short-term transportation. And so I'm wondering if that could possibly extend. If Republicans continue to run out clocks on things like maybe a speaker election or a few other things that's going to eat up some time, is that going to apply to the CR negotiation that's going to take place or has to take place in the next few weeks because that runs out on December 11th?

MR. SCHULTZ: Jared, the President was absolutely clear he is not going to sign another short-term CR.

Andrew.

Q The President this morning named Brett McGurk as his new envoy for countering the Islamic State. Is his brief to continue the work of General Allen, or should we expect some kind of change in tack?

MR. SCHULTZ: Change in?

Q Change in tack?

MR. SCHULTZ: Well, I think you all received the written statement from the President earlier today, noting that General Allen has done an outstanding job with an enormously complex assignment. He himself has built from scratch a robust international coalition that is undertaking a wide range of political, diplomatic, military, economy and other efforts to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.

Anyone who has been fortunate enough to work with General Allen knows he is a true American patriot and one of our greatest leaders. The President is very grateful that General Allen once again postponed his well-deserved retirement to build and lead our counter-ISIL coalition. As you know, this was initially supposed to be a six-month term. He, due to a lot of arm-twisting, agreed to stay on for an extra six months.

And by the same token, the President is very pleased to welcome Brett McGurk as the new Special Presidential Envoy. Brett, as you point out, has served as General Allen's deputy since the beginning of this campaign and has long been one of the President's most trusted advisors on Iraq.

The President has also asked Brett to work closely with our national security team to strengthen our partnership with Iraq and work extensively with regional partners to bring an end to the civil war in Syria, which continues to fuel ISIL and other extremist groups.

Q And given what you say about Brett McGurk -- I mean, his experience is in Iraq. He knows the tribes in Anbar. He knows the country extremely well. Should we take his appointment as a sign that the ISIL campaign will now be more focused on the Iraqi theater than it has been in the past year or so?

MR. SCHULTZ: No, I wouldn't see that as a sign. In fact, if you take a look at Brett McGurk's record, he has got a proven track record and is held in high esteem within our government, and with coalition partners across the world. Over the last year, he's worked shoulder to shoulder with General Allen providing firm advice and a steady voice in the most senior meetings.

As you point out, his precise specialty is Iraq, but he's spent a lot of time both in the region and studying it. And that's why the President is gratified he's going to accept this post.

Q And just a final question. Does the administration have a position yet on whether Iran should face additional sanctions as a result of the ballistic missile test?

MR. SCHULTZ: Andrew, I believe that this was brought up at the United Nations earlier this week from our ambassador, Samantha Powers. I believe she submitted this resolution as a violation. We firmly believe it is a violation. But that process needs to work its way through the United Nations.

Q A violation would mean more sanctions?

MR. SCHULTZ: Well, again, I'm not going to prejudge the result of that process.

Goyal.

Q Thank you. Two questions. One, as far as Prime Minister Sharif Nawaz of Pakistan visit was concerned, he was met with many demonstrators outside the White House, and also this morning at the USIP, from Balochistan. They're talking about human rights and also that Nawaz Sharif was friend of Osama bin Laden and so forth in supporting terrorism in Pakistan against other countries, among others.

And the question is about the terrorism, human rights in Pakistan, and second, what he was saying, that -- almost every week there is a statement from Pakistan against India that their nuclear program is not as wedding gift, but it will be used against India someday or one day. My question is here, human rights in Pakistan, and if and how much safe is their nuclear program from the terrorists?

MR. SCHULTZ: Thank you, Goyal. Yesterday, as you point out, President Obama did have the opportunity to meet with Prime Minister Sharif. They met for about an hour and a half in the Oval Office. President Obama underscored that the United States is

committed to a broad, sustainable, and enduring partnership with Pakistan that delivers progress for the Pakistani people and reinforces Pakistan's democracy and civil society.

Specifically on terrorism, as you brought up, President Obama and Prime Minister Sharif both noted that our two countries are threatened by terrorist groups, and that the Pakistani people have suffered greatly.

These leaders committed to continue bilateral counterterrorism cooperation. And President Obama highlighted the importance of Pakistan undertaking effective action against terrorism -- against terrorists that seek to undermine peaceful dialogue and destabilize the region.

One piece that was important to the President is that Pakistan not discriminate against terrorist groups. That's something that we've made clear in the past and was reiterated yesterday in the bilateral meeting.

Q And second, as far as Prime Minister Modi's visit was last month here at the White House and the United Nations, two senior senators from the Capitol Hill wrote a letter to the President for -- a resolution about 12 points they made -- Senator John Cornyn and also Senator Mark Warner. One, if the President received this letter because they are seeking this resolution on U.S.-India Investment Treaty and also defense treaty among others. And where do we stand now, as far as U.S.-India relations are concerned after the visit?

MR. SCHULTZ: Goyal, I haven't seen that letter, so I don't know --

Q (Inaudible.)

MR. SCHULTZ: Okay. I haven't seen that letter so I'm sure that if it was addressed to the President we'll make sure that it's processed in turn.

I can tell you that the President deeply values his relationship with Prime Minister Modi; that the United States and India have worked together very closely. They have a strong partnership specifically on expanding economic opportunities. That's something the President has worked hard on. He's directed his team here at the White House and throughout the administration to focus on our relationship there and seek opportunities to expand cooperation.

John Decker, we'll give you the last one, and then we'll do the week ahead.

Q Thanks a lot. I appreciate that, Eric. Interesting news this week on the Democratic front in terms of the race for the Democratic nomination, Lincoln Chafee dropped out of the race today. Jim Webb dropped out earlier this week. And we saw the announcement by Vice President Biden in the Rose Garden earlier this week. Does it make it easier for the President to endorse Hillary Clinton much earlier in the process now that Vice President Biden has decided that he's not going to run for President?

MR. SCHULTZ: John, I don't think there's been a discussion of that here. I will tell you the President actually addressed this question, I believe last week in the Rose Garden, when he said he's going to cast a ballot in the Illinois primary on the Democratic side for President. And it's going to be up to him whether he wants to make that public or not in advance of casting that ballot.

Q Is he pleased that a former member of his administration is the clear frontrunner for the Democratic nomination?

MR. SCHULTZ: I think he's pleased that Democrats running to work here in the White House in 2016 are largely recognizing the record of this administration over the past seven years. This is an administration that took the country from economic crisis to resurgence. As I mentioned earlier, we're proud of that record on the economy. We're proud of our record strengthening relations around the world. We're proud to extend health care to 16 million Americans and make sure those costs rise at the slowest rate in decades. We're proud to institute new reforms governing banks on Wall Street to make sure that the financial crisis that this country had to endure in 2007 and 2008 never happens again.

Q And here's one final question for you. It's a Friday afternoon question for you. I, obviously, like others, had some time to kill while waiting for you to come out -- (laughter) -- and I was listening to the President's Spotify list. I found an opportunity to listen to that. And I'm curious, with so much on his plate, both on the domestic front and the foreign policy front, how did he have the time to come up with that list? Did he have some help in putting together that Spotify list?

MR. SCHULTZ: I can tell you that that was a project the President took very warmly to, and with great enthusiasm was excited to share his musical preferences with all of you.

We'll do the week ahead. On Monday, the President will attend Senator Daschle and Senator Mitchell's lunch at the Metropolitan Club here in Washington.

On Monday afternoon, the President, as we talked about, will welcome President Joko Widodo of Indonesia to the White House. President Widodo will make his first visit to the United States since becoming President. President Obama looks forward to charting with President Widodo a new phase of the U.S.-Indonesian partnership.

On Tuesday, the President will welcome the United States Women's National Soccer Team to the White House to honor the team in their victory in the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup. The visit will continue the tradition begun by President Obama of honoring sports teams for their efforts to give back to their communities.

In the afternoon, the President will travel to Chicago to address the International Association of Chiefs of Police at the 122nd Annual IACP Conference. The event is the largest gathering of law enforcement leaders in the world, with more than 14,000 public safety professionals attending.

Later in the day, the President will attend a Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee event and a Democratic National Committee event. The President will remain in Chicago overnight and return to Washington on Wednesday, October 28th.

On Thursday, the President will be here in Washington, will participate in a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee roundtable event.

And on Friday, the President and First Lady will welcome local children and children of military families for one of our favorite events here at the White House, the annual Trick-or-Treat at the South Portico.

Thank you, guys. Have a good weekend.

END 2:17 P.M. EDT