

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 5/31/12



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James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

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MR. CARNEY: Good afternoon -- or good morning. (Laughter.) Only just. Thank you for being here, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome, as ever, to the White House and the Brady Briefing Room. Before I take your questions I just wanted to note an article that caught my eye not that long ago.

First of all, I would say that it's based on anonymous sources, so I'm not sure that it's true, and hopefully it's not because it reports that Speaker of the House John Boehner, in a closed meeting with House Republicans, called the discussion over whether or not to allow student interest loan rates to double a phony debate. He said essentially that it's inconsequential, and he said that it's not going to pass in time to prevent those rates from doubling.

You know our position on this, the President's position, that, A, it is unconscionable to allow these rates to double for 7 million students around the country who depend on low interest rates to allow them to attend college. Support for taking action to prevent that from happening has generally been bipartisan, and we hope that this report -- again, based on reporting out of closed conference meeting -- turns out not to be true.

The other point it makes is it makes the suggestion that we've heard before from the Speaker's office that somehow education is not an economic issue. It says that they want to focus on jobs, and suggests that they believe education doesn't have anything to do with jobs. The American people don't believe that. The President doesn't believe that. Education has everything to do with employment, with economic growth, and with the

future of this country -- which is why the President has stressed education so much in his presidency and why he has made an issue out of the need to take action to prevent these loan rates from doubling.

And with that, I will take your questions.

Q The 1st Circuit ruled this morning on the Defense of Marriage Act. Can you comment on the ruling that DOMA is unconstitutional? Would you like to see the Supreme Court take this case? And if so, would this administration be actively arguing for the overturning of a law signed by a previous Democratic President?

MR. CARNEY: Well, Anne, as you know, the President has concluded that Section 3 of DOMA is unconstitutional. So has his Attorney General. And for that reason, the administration will no longer defend equal protection challenges against it in the courts. That's the position the President has held for some time now, and it has been enforced by the Department of Justice.

With regards to this ruling, which the DOJ was an active participant in, I would refer you to the Justice Department. But there's no question that this is in concert with the President's views.

Q But the question, though, is whether you would take your current somewhat passive position that you will not defend it and turn that around and actively argue for it -- to overturn the law.

MR. CARNEY: The Department of Justice participated in this very litigation in the 1st Circuit, consistent with the position that the President and the Attorney General have articulated, which is that they do not believe that Section 3 of DOMA is constitutional. I can't predict what the next steps will be in handling cases of this nature. I would refer you to the Department of Justice. But I wouldn't necessarily call that passive.

Yes.

Q Back on Syria. Ambassador Rice at the U.N. yesterday laid out what she said was a worst-case scenario, and said that in fact it was the most probable scenario in the Syria crisis in which it becomes a regional sectarian crisis -- conflict, arms flowing to both sides in a kind of proxy war, and then the international community basically -- world powers start taking action outside of the U.N. Security Council. She would seem to be suggesting that the hardening of the position the U.S. takes on where this -- has taken on where this is going, whether the Annan plan is going to completely collapse or not. Can you comment on that, whether it's what we're seeing?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would simply say that we have been focused on the need to bring about a political transition in Syria sooner rather than later, precisely because the longer this goes on, the longer that Assad and his thugs are allowed to brutally murder the Syrian people, the more likely it becomes a sectarian civil war; the more likely that it spills over Syrian borders; the more likely that it transforms into a proxy war with different players, including, of course, Iran, which is already engaging in malignant behavior with regards to the Syrian situation, stepping up that kind of activity and not being alone in doing that.

So what we're seeing happen in Syria only underscores the urgent need to take action to prevent further devolution of the situation there, take action to support the process of political transition, to isolate and pressure Assad into taking himself out of power so that that transition can proceed.

And that's why we have been working to overcome our differences with the Russians and others on this matter. It's why we need to have even greater unity in the international community at the United Nations Security Council, at the United Nations broadly because this situation is as Ambassador Rice described it.

Q She spoke of certain kinds of actions that would be taken beyond the scope of the Security Council, obviously signaling that the U.S. could take such action. Can you give anything specific on what might come next?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think that -- I'm not going to preview next steps, but we have been working consistently both within international organizations, within the context of the "Friends of Syria," collectively and independently, as have other nations, to impose further sanctions, to take other actions to isolate and pressure Assad, to support the opposition as it constitutes itself, to provide humanitarian relief to the Syrian people, to

provide nonlethal aid to the opposition. Those are the kinds of things that we've been doing through both collective action and individual action, and other nations have done the same.

You see various iterations of how that has transpired just this week where a group of nations acted in concert to expel Syrian diplomats; where just the other day, in a joint U.S.-Qatar designation, sanctions were taken against the Syria International Islamic Bank. So these are the kinds of things that we can do with partners or independently.

Jake.

Q Has the administration given any thought to imposing an arms quarantine surrounding Syria to prevent them from getting arms from other countries?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have a preview for you of potential next steps. We are regularly consulting with our allies and partners around the world, with members of the Security Council and the broader "Friends of Syria" group, about potential next steps. But I don't have anything specific for you and nothing on that specific possibility.

Q When is the last time -- I know that there's a deputies meeting roughly every week or so on the subject of Syria. When is the last time there was one of these meetings?

MR. CARNEY: I'd have to check with you on that. There are regular meetings on Syria. This is obviously, on the international stage, a matter of great and intense focus right now because of the horrific brutalization of the Syrian people and the need for the international community to take actions.

Q And lastly, Jay, I understand the position of the administration and concern that military action would only cause more harm than good, at least at this stage. On a human level, what is it like for the President to see these reports, to hear about the brutalization of infants, of children in Syria? And how difficult is it for him to go through this, knowing that -- believing as he does -- that there's nothing he can do about it? And does it change his resolve at all? Does it change his desire to take action or find more or other ways to do something?

MR. CARNEY: Well, it bolsters his resolve when it comes to the need to do everything the United States can -- do everything the United States can both independently and in working with our partners, to try to bring about a change in that dynamic in Syria. It horrifies him, as it does anybody who witnesses or watches the reports on what's happening in Syria. The brutality exhibited by Assad is -- will surely doom him in history as a tyrant and a human rights violator and the worst kind of leader imaginable for any people.

The President is very aware of that. And when he makes judgments he obviously takes into account that kind of suffering. He has to make judgments with all considerations in mind, beginning with national security interests of the United States of America. And he has to make practical judgments about what steps we can take, both acting alone and in concert with partners, to bring about the result that we want and that is best for the United States, as well as for the Syrian people. And that's what he's doing.

There is no question that as mighty as the United States is, that we cannot end all atrocities around the globe. It is a fact that we need to work with our partners and allies to take the kinds of actions that can reduce that kind of appalling behavior in different parts of the globe. You have to be very focused on the decision-making process and what you are doing as the United States of America to bring about the desired result, and making sure you're not taking actions that create unintended consequences that are bad for the United States and bad, in some cases, for the very people you're trying to help.

That is the way that the President looks at all these sorts of problems. It's the way he looked at the situations in Egypt, in Yemen, in Libya, as well as the way he looks at it in Syria.

Dan and then Kristen.

Q Thank you. Anything more you can tell us about what was discussed yesterday in that videoconference with Merkel and Monti and Hollande? And also, what is the consensus among these leaders about managing the eurozone crisis?

MR. CARNEY: As I think we put out last night, the President did participate in a videoconference with the leaders of Germany, Italy and France. The discussions were a follow-up to the discussions around the eurozone crisis that were held at the G8 summit at Camp David. They also did discuss -- to go back to what we've been talking about thus

far in the briefing -- they also did discuss Syria. But the eurozone situation was the primary focus of those conversations and they were follow-up discussions on what was discussed at the G8, and they were also discussions held in anticipation of the G20 meeting later -- well, next month, in a few weeks, in Mexico.

I think one of the important things to remember about the outcome of the G8 is that all nations agreed that there needs to be a focus on growth and job creation, and that is certainly true today and is coming out of the videoconference. The President has made clear his views that we need to -- that Europe should take an approach that balances the near-term need to help the economy grow in Europe and help it create jobs with the medium- and longer-term need to implement reforms that help European nations get their fiscal houses in order. That's the kind of balanced approach that the President has pursued here in the United States. And I think that as was noted, there is agreement about the need to focus on jobs and economic growth in the near term.

Q New York -- on another issue, New York is banning -- set to ban these large sugary drinks. And given that the First Lady has been fighting childhood obesity, what's the White House reaction to something like that?

MR. CARNEY: I saw those reports. I don't have a specific reaction. Obviously, the issue of obesity is extremely important. The effect of obesity on the nation's health, on the health of our children and on the costs of health care are enormous. But I don't have a specific reaction to the announcement in New York City.

Kristen.

Q Jay, I'm going to try again on Syria. You have expressed deep skepticism that the Annan plan can work. Given everything that we've seen in recent days, why not just declare the Annan plan dead and try to come up with another solution at this point? Why do you --

MR. CARNEY: Well, we are continuing to come up with and work with our partners on additional steps. The reason why we are both skeptical about Assad's willingness to comply with his commitments under the Annan plan is because he has failed to comply with any of the six points contained within it, and he has continued to brutally attack his own people -- most recently with the -- well, not most recently, unfortunately, but very recently with the horrific massacre in Houla.

However, there are some positives out of the Annan plan in spite of the failure of Assad to abide by it, and that is where there are United Nations observers in place there has been a reduction in violence. That is a good thing. Where there are United Nations observers in place it allows for more information about what's happening in Syria to get out of that country and become more broadly known. It allows for the international community to counter attempts at propaganda and lies put forward by the Assad regime.

I think Secretary Clinton has made this point, as well as others. So we support the Annan plan because if it were adhered to by Assad it would be very much in the interests of the Syrian people, and it would bring about a reduction -- a cease-fire and a withdrawal of forces. We are skeptical that it will be complied with in the end, and that is why we are talking with our partners about other options and other steps.

Q I think most people, most outside observers would conclude that things seem to be getting worse, though, not better. Given that, does the President have a deadline, a breaking point in his own mind at this point?

MR. CARNEY: We have made clear -- the President and others have made clear that the window of opportunity here to allow for a peaceful political transition in Syria is -- will not remain open for long. There is an urgent need for the international community to come together and further unify against the Assad regime, in an effort to persuade the Assad regime and pressure and isolate the Assad regime to the point where that transition is allowed to fully take place.

If that does not happen, the consequences are very serious. And that's what Ambassador Rice was talking about, and Secretary Clinton and I, because the consequences of not taking that firm action are more violence -- violence that spills over Syria's borders, violence that results in even greater participation in this by Iran, for example, and others, to the point where it becomes a proxy war of sorts. And this is bad for the region and bad for the Syrian people and bad for the world.

So that's why we're working with the Russians and others to try to explain to them our views on this, persuade them why allowing this to continue will have such horrific consequences.

Q But I guess what I'm asking, at what point --

MR. CARNEY: I don't have a date for you, Kristen. I think that the President --

Q Not a date, but is there something that is a red line for the President --

MR. CARNEY: I'm not going to preview next steps or options. I can tell you that there is very much an urgent need for action to be taken here, for the international community to further unify and make it clear that a transition has to take place in Syria.

Q Can I follow up on the question about Russia? I mean, you -- when Secretary Clinton proposed a U.N. Security Council arms embargo last month, it was quickly shot down, including by Russia. Could a -- is there any way to impose -- as Jake referred to earlier -- some kind of a unilateral or separate arms embargo apart from the Security Council? Would that have any -- are you getting any sense from the Russians that they would be willing to even entertain that thought, especially considering that they currently supply the Assad regime with weapons?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have any detailed readout to give to you of our discussions with the Russians or with others on this issue and on possible next steps. I can tell you that we are working to overcome our differences with the Russians on Syria. Our points are very clear and we've made them transparently both in public and in our conversations with them. We simply do not believe it is in Russia's interest, let alone in Syria's interest, for the Assad regime to continue to be propped up, and therefore to allow it to continue to brutalize its own people. Beyond that, I don't have anything I can divulge to you today.

Yes.

Q Jay, you took a question yesterday on gender-based abortion. The House is voting on this ban. I understand the administration opposes the ban. My question is, since the President has been outspoken about being against gender-based discrimination, how can you allow gender-based abortion?

MR. CARNEY: Well, Ed, the administration opposed gender discrimination in all forms. But the end result of this legislation would be to subject doctors to criminal prosecution if they fail to determine the motivations behind a very personal and private decision.

I think we, again, oppose gender discrimination in all cases. I think our record on that is very clear. The President's record on that is very clear. But the purpose of this legislation - - or the result of this legislation would be to subject doctors to criminal prosecution for failing to divine the motivations of their patients when it comes to a very personal and medical decision.

Q -- a law then to deal with that issue? Because the real central issue with the one child --

MR. CARNEY: To allow doctors to read their patient's minds?

Q To figure out a way -- to figure out how to get to the bottom of this -- because when the one-child policy in communist China comes up people of all political stripes in this country are outraged that girls are killed, essentially. How can that happen in this country?

MR. CARNEY: Again, Ed, we oppose gender discrimination in all its forms -- in all its forms. And we don't selectively pursue legislation in order to achieve other ideological goals. We oppose it in all its forms.

This piece of legislation would have the hopefully unintended consequence of criminalizing a failure by a doctor and prosecuting a doctor for criminal behavior if he or she were somehow to fail to intuit the motivations of a patient in making a very private medical decision.

Q The President today is obviously unveiling a portrait of former President Bush. I wonder, when they have this private lunch, do you think the President is trying to soak in a little insight about how to take on somehow from Massachusetts? (Laughter.) Because I noticed David Axelrod is in that state today.

MR. CARNEY: I think, as I said yesterday, that the discussion that will take place -- or is almost taking place at this moment -- between President Obama and both former Presidents Bush, as well as other members of their families, will be about what it is like to live -- to have the privilege, the rare privilege to live in the White House for not just Presidents but their families, to serve their country by living here.

I think that, as I said yesterday -- and you'll have three Presidents in this lunch -- there is a commonality of experience that transcends political differences. And my guess is that that is what the Presidents will discuss.

There is also a commonality of experiences I think for First Ladies that -- and for families. In the case of President George W. Bush, he also raised two relatively young daughters here in the White House. And I know that President Obama and the First Lady greatly appreciate the counsel and advice that the President and Mrs. Bush provided to them during the transition, not just about the official aspects of their duties but the very personal ones and the family ones. And I know that President Obama and the First Lady have been looking forward to and are enjoying this encounter.

Q Last thing on that. The European debt crisis -- I think Dan asked you about -- how worried is this White House that -- former President George H. W. Bush here as well -- that a sour economy may wind up with this President having one term as well? The same thing happened to him.

MR. CARNEY: You want to turn this lunch into a political prism. I think the --

Q Well, there is a pretty similar situation where you have a President who has had some successes on the national security front but is facing a very difficult economy here at home, and George H. W. Bush faced that as well.

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would simply say that President Obama will probably not spend a lot of time talking about election year politics with either President Bush. And as I think you know, he's met with former President George H. W. Bush on several occasions. He has very high regard for that President Bush's foreign policy record in particular, and, in general, appreciates the service provided by all members of the Bush family. And again, that transcends political differences, and of course there are political differences.

As for the race, I think every race is different. What the President says repeatedly and I try to echo is that it is precisely because there are headwinds like the crisis in the eurozone that can affect the global economy and therefore the American economy, that we in Washington need to buckle down and do the things that we can control to insulate the American economy from those headwinds; to help the economy grow, to help it create jobs.

You'll hear the President again tomorrow talk about the need for Congress to take action on those items that are before it that have in the past and should in the future enjoy bipartisan support -- very specific items -- a "To-Do" list that can, if fulfilled, contribute to economic growth and contribute to job creation. These are things that Americans support, whether they're Democrats or Republicans. And they're things that Congress should act on.

Norah.

Q On Syria, how critical is Russia's support in getting rid of Assad?

MR. CARNEY: I think I've made clear here that we are working to consult with and try to overcome our differences with Russia on Syria. And I think that reflects what was clear at the United Nations Security Council when resolutions were vetoed by Russia on this matter. So we have, in spite of those obstacles, worked broadly with a number of international partners to isolate and pressure Assad, to support the opposition, help it constitute itself, to provide humanitarian relief to the Syrian people. We have, working with Russia and other nations, supported the Kofi Annan plan.

So there have been things that we can and have done -- can do and have done to bring about the political transition that the Syrian people so dearly deserve and desire. But there is no question that greater international unity would assist the effort here to bring about that transition sooner rather than later.

Q How are you working to overcome those differences? And what gives you hope that Russia is going to budge at all?

MR. CARNEY: Well, as I've said now several times, we're in consultations with a number of international partners, with the Russians as well as others on this very issue. It's an issue that for obvious reasons gets a lot of attention here, at the State Department, and elsewhere. And we'll continue to have those discussions.

And we believe that the Assad regime is making the case for us by its brutal behavior. This is unfortunate, but it is apparent. It is -- no one in the world needs the United States to point out Assad's behavior because it's apparent to the entire world.

We are working with our allies, working with our partners, working with members of the Security Council and others, in light of the obvious responsibility that Assad bears for the thousands of deaths of his own people, to take further action.

Q President Obama frequently blames President George W. Bush for the current state of the economy, two wars in Iraq, the debt. Is it an awkward event today for the two of them?

MR. CARNEY: Norah, I'll say what I said yesterday and just earlier, which is that there are certainly political differences, as there were between President George W. Bush and former President Clinton, when President Clinton and his family came for the unveiling of his -- and First Lady Clinton's, Hillary Clinton's portraits. There were differences, I'm sure, in the past when incumbent Presidents have presided over these ceremonies. But there is so much in common for the men thus far who have occupied this office and for the families who have lived in the White House, that there I think is a great deal of respect and appreciation held by everyone who is participating in that lunch for one another.

There's much to discuss. As I noted yesterday, it's a small collection of people who know what it's like to sit at the desk in the Oval Office and have to make the kinds of decisions that a President makes. And again, the commonality there transcends politics.

Mr. DeFrank.

Q Thank you, Jay. Just following up on Ed's question, in addition to the two events that are on the President's public schedule with the Presidents Bush, are there any other things -- specifically, is President Obama going to have a little private time with either of the Bushes, or any other sorts of events beyond the two we know about?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have any more details on the President's schedule to give to you beyond what's been made public.

Olivier.

Q Jay, you've talked in the past about the United States' role in uniting and vetting the Syrian opposition. And I'm wondering what the purpose of that effort -- is it to give Syrians someone or a group of someones to rally behind for the post-Assad? Is it to make sure that aid gets into the right hands, whether it's humanitarian or military? I know the United States is not providing those -- what's the purpose of this?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think you've described two of the purposes behind it. In order to bring about an effective political transition in Syria that serves the interest of the Syrian people, it makes eminent sense to help the opposition constitute itself and to identify the various components of the opposition.

On the question of whether or not one of the reasons is to prevent humanitarian and non-lethal aid that the United States is providing from falling into the wrong hands, I think that's certainly the case, too. We recognize and have said that there are elements to the Syrian opposition that do not share the democratic ideals of the broad Syrian people, who are not necessarily friends of the United States. Those elements appear to us to be fringe elements. They do not represent the opposition as a whole. But we need to be mindful of that. And that is why we make these evaluations and assessments.

Q Are you looking to stand up some kind of official opposition in the --

MR. CARNEY: We don't -- it's up to the Syrian people and the representatives of the opposition to organize themselves. We can assist and offer advice. And I say "we" in the sense of speaking more broadly about the "Friends of Syria" who have participated in this effort. So it's not for us to create or stand up an opposition. It's for us to help assist it as it stands itself up.

Q But if you're vetting them, there's at least an implicit approval from the United States, right?

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, I think you went to the point about assistance that might be provided by the United States and the importance of ensuring as best we can that that assistance reaches its intended recipients. When it comes to humanitarian assistance, obviously that means the Syrian people who are suffering greatly because of their -- because of the Assad regime's brutality.

Alexis.

Q Jay, you've talked today about Assad in the sense of brutality, human rights violations, potential war crimes. When Prime Minister Cameron was here at the White House, he talked about trying to build a record of that for perhaps future international prosecution, whatever. And you also talked about the President's interest in seeing Assad participate in a peaceful transition. I'm just trying to clarify, what does the President envision would be the future for Assad if he were to participate in some sort of peaceful transition? Is it inevitable that he would be held accountable for the crimes you've described? Or is it possible, and would the President assent to his going to some safe haven to escape that?

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, I think we're focused on bringing about that transition. We're not focused on decisions that the Syrian people would have to make and decisions that the international community would have to make. It is another benefit of the Annan plan, despite the failure of Assad to abide by it, that we have United Nations observers who can account for -- objectively account for the actions of the Assad regime and the thug forces that support it.

But I am not going to prejudge now where that leads in terms of his future. The point about a peaceful transition is it's made in contrast to a full-out sectarian civil war. That is not obviously a desirable outcome. And that is what could be the outcome here if there is not further unification in the international community and further efforts taken to pressure and isolate the Assad regime.

Q But in terms of the timing that Kristen was asking about, is there an incentive -- is the world community offering an incentive that would allow Assad in some way to slip that noose?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I don't have any insight to provide to you about the discussions that are underway on next steps. What needs to happen is a political transition that serves the interest of the Syrian people. How that comes about is obviously not entirely up to the United States. We are working with our partners to do everything we can to help make it happen.

Q Thank you. There's a high school student from Indiana named Elizabeth Olivas at this hour sitting in the consulate in Juárez, I believe. She missed the deadline for going back to get the legal paperwork done by one day, and she is in danger of missing her high school graduation on Saturday. Has there been any -- is the President aware of this story? And was there any discussion here at the White House whether it would be appropriate for the President to ask immigration to give her case special --

MR. CARNEY: Ann, I'm learning of this story from you, so I'll have to take the question. I have not heard it discussed. But questions of that nature I think are best directed towards DHS and ICE, Immigration and Customs.

Roger.

Q The President for a long time has advocated ending the tax breaks for those making \$250,000 or more. Nancy Pelosi has come by with another suggestion, setting that number at \$1 million. Her office says it's a way to move the process along. I was wondering what the White House thinks of her proposal.

MR. CARNEY: Well, the President's position has been clear for years. As you rightly state, we need to end the tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans and make them permanent for every family bringing in less than \$250,000 a year. We know that Democratic leaders in Congress are committed to making sure that taxes do not go up on millions of families at the end of the year, as is the President. And the question now is whether Republicans will vote to raise taxes on the middle class and hold the middle class hostage on the insistence that the wealthiest Americans continue to get tax breaks that contributed mightily already to our deficits, which in this economic environment they do not need.

Q So he doesn't -- he's not keen on the \$1 million -- raising it to \$1 million.

MR. CARNEY: Look, we're continuing to work with leaders in Congress on how best to move forward to ensure that we not only protect middle-class families from a tax hike, but also how we achieve a balanced plan to reduce the deficit and avoid the sequester -- to use Washington lingo. I apologize to anyone out there watching, but you know what I'm talking about. And these are -- these obviously are ongoing discussions.

Our position is clear, and it has been clear for a very long time.

Q So he's not rejecting it out of hand?

MR. CARNEY: Again, we're working with leaders in Congress. We're continuing to have discussions on that. I think the question that needs to be asked is of Republicans, who at every turn have refused to take sensible action to protect the middle class, to ensure that they receive further tax relief unless the wealthiest Americans who have enjoyed substantial benefits over the last decade get additional tax cuts or have those tax cuts extended. That's simply unaffordable and does not represent the kind of balanced approach that we need to take to deal with our fiscal challenges.

Q On the call last night, did the leaders discuss a bailout for Spain?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have any specifics for the conversation beyond what I've said and what the paper readout we gave last night said.

Q And can you tell us when the call was scheduled?

MR. CARNEY: It was a follow-up on discussions that were held obviously at the G8. I don't have a specific date for when it was penciled into people's calendars.

Q And on Syria, you said earlier in the briefing that Iran has been playing I guess a malignant role in Syria. Can you elaborate more on what role the U.S. sees Iran has been playing?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think Iran has been transparent. They've admitted involvement in the Syrian crisis by sending troops to Syria. That fact further highlights Iran's continued effort to expand its nefarious influence in the region and underscores Iran's fear of a Syria without the Assad regime. Assad's partnership with Iran is a direct offense to the Syrian people, their revolution, and to Arabs across the Middle East and North Africa.

We are also focused on preventing Iran from continuing to financially, materially and logistically support the Syrian regime. Again, they have not pretended otherwise. And I think the fact that it is Iran that is coming to Assad's aid here is only further evidence of how isolated and beyond the pale Assad and his behavior have become.

Q Tomorrow night the President will be in Chicago. A couple of questions about that. Usually, when the President has finished his final event on the road he'll fly back, even if it's late at night. He's staying overnight I think. Can you confirm whether he's going to stay at his own house, and also characterize if he needs to be there this Saturday morning for some reason, or whether he also has a feeling that being at home gives him a little bit a break from Washington and can refresh him?

MR. CARNEY: I can tell you that the President always enjoys returning to Chicago, returning to Illinois. I can't give you details about where he's staying, but I can assure you that he will enjoy being in Chicago.

Q Do you know if he plans to visit the campaign headquarters or anything like that this time?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have any scheduling updates for you on that.

Chris.

Q Jay, I want to ask you about two topics. First of all, I want to follow up on the DOMA ruling from today. The President campaigned on the repeal of DOMA. He has endorsed legislation to meet that goal. He has stop defending the law in court. He has sent Justice Department attorneys to litigate against that law in court. But does the administration --

MR. CARNEY: Well said. (Laughter.) Yes?

Q Does the administration see value in holding a vote in the Democratically controlled Senate on repealing the law as a symbolic stand against that statute?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I haven't heard that discussed. The President's position is clear. The actions taken as a result of that position are clear. Participation of the Department of Justice in the specific litigation is clear. But I don't have anything for you on that proposal, which I have not heard.

Q The other thing I want to ask you about is, there was a vote yesterday among Exxon Mobil shareholders to include LGBT non-discrimination protections for its more than 80,000 workers that work at the corporation. The shareholders voted down that proposal but it's still possible for the board to accept it without the shareholders taking action. Back in April, when you talked about the executive order not happening at this time, you said that the administration was committed to directly engaging with and educating all sectors of the business community from major corporations to contractors to small businesses, and raising public awareness about the human and financial cost of discrimination in the workforce. Following up with these words, will the administration call on Exxon Mobil to adopt that non-discrimination policy?

MR. CARNEY: Well, that is certainly our position, and what I said in April holds true today. And those kinds of conversations, broadly speaking, continue to take place -- have taken place and will continue to take place. I don't have anything specifically for you on this case and this vote, which just took place. But broadly, yes, that's our position.

Q Has the administration communicated -- any communications at all with Exxon Mobil?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I can tell you broadly that those kinds of conversations have [been] had. Our position and views on this are well known. That's why the President supports ENDA, a legislative solution to this discrimination. And those conversations will continue. I just don't have anything to report to you on specific conversations with specific companies or business leaders.

Q In the past year -- the past decade, Exxon Mobil has taken more than \$1 billion in federal contracts. In the wake of this vote, will the administration revisit the idea of issuing that executive order, barring federal contractors from taking money if they don't have non-discrimination policies based on sexual orientation and gender identity?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we don't expect that an EO of that nature will be issued at this time. We are working, as I've said in the past, with Congress. We support legislation that has been introduced, and we will continue to work to build support for it. We believe that the legislative avenue here is the right avenue to pursue at this time.

Q How can the legislative avenue be right at this time when Republicans control Congress? How will that legislation get through the Republican-controlled Congress?

MR. CARNEY: Well, because it's the right thing to do.

Yes, Stephen.

Q Just following up on your comments on Iran. Is one of the reasons why the administration is worried of arming factions in Syria that it is concerned about the possibility of starting a direct proxy war with Iran, given the fact that you're saying it's helping to arm the Syrian government?

MR. CARNEY: I think -- I wouldn't tease it out that far. I think that we don't believe that further militarization of situation in Syria is the right course to take. That's our position. We believe we need to act while the window is still open to bring about a political transition before we have a situation in Syria that dissolves into a sectarian civil war or a proxy war.

As I think I mentioned earlier, there is obviously an issue with the need to evaluate and assess and learn more about all the elements of the opposition. We believe that those who support al Qaeda or al Qaeda in Iraq and other elements are fringe elements of the opposition; that the broad opposition aspires to meet the democratic desires of the Syrian people. But all of these things are considerations that we evaluate all the time as we review our position on Syria.

Q Given that the U.S. and Iran are clearly on the opposite side of this dispute, is there any concern that what happens in Syria could prejudice the chances of agreement on the other big issue, the nuclear question?

MR. CARNEY: Well, they're both very big issues, and in each case -- specifically with regards to the nuclear ambitions of the Iranian regime, they are specifically the problem. Their need to comply with their international obligations is the demand of the international community and specifically of the P5-plus-1. Their behavior and involvement in the Syria crisis is another example of the kind of -- it's another indication of why the international community does not trust the Iranian regime to keep its word. It's why we insist in our negotiations with them over their nuclear program that we will judge them by their actions, not by their promises.

Yes.

Q Jay, where in the White House is the portrait going to hang? And does the President -- has he seen it? And does he think it reveals any particular quality about President Bush? (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: I'll let the President discuss this. I think there will be an event, an open-press event for the unveiling. And you'll see I believe where it's going to hang. We're providing some background documentation on the history of these portraits and the tradition of hanging them and where they hang and how they move around the house.

I don't know the answer to the question of whether or not he's seen the portraits. I suspect by now he has, and my guess is he saw them before the rest of us. But I can't guarantee it because I haven't asked him about it.

Q Who are you taking down? (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: Again, there's a process that -- we'll follow tradition, I think, is how -- is the answer to that.

Q Thank you, Jay.

MR. CARNEY: Thanks, you all.

END

12:45 P.M. EDT