

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 4/23/2013

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James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

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MR. CARNEY: Good afternoon. Thanks for being here. I have no announcements, so I will take your questions. Julie.

Q Thanks, Jay. I just want to say at the top that it appears as though AP's Twitter account has been hacked, so anything that was just sent out about any incident at the White House is absolutely false. And we'll be putting something out shortly to clarify that, if that hasn't happened already.

MR. CARNEY: Good, I thank you for that. I appreciate that, and I can say that the President is fine. I was just with him.

Q On another topic, Israel said today that they believe that Syria has used chemical weapons, joining Britain and France in making that assessment. I'm a little unclear on this about what the White House and the U.S. position on this is. Does the U.S. disagree with those assessments, or is the U.S. just not in a position or have enough information at this point to be able to make that similar assessment?

MR. CARNEY: I appreciate the question. We are, as you know, concerned about reports of potential chemical weapons use, which is precisely why we've called for a thorough investigation. As the President has stated, we know the Syrian government has the capacity to carry out chemical weapons attacks. We also know that there are those in the Syrian government who have expressed a willingness to use chemical weapons to protect their interests and prolong the rule of the Assad regime.

We remain skeptical of any claim that the opposition used chemical weapons.

It's important that we do whatever we can to monitor, investigate and verify any credible allegations, given the enormous consequences for the Syrian people and given the President's clear statement that chemical weapons use is unacceptable. We will also

continue to monitor closely Syria's chemical weapons in coordination with friends and allies who share our concerns. We believe that Syria's chemical weapons stockpile remains under Syrian government control.

I can't provide any additional details on those efforts because, of course, I won't speak to intelligence. But we are engaged with other countries to underscore the common concern about the security of these weapons and the Syrian government's obligation to secure them and not to use them or transfer them to others, including non-state actors. We coordinate closely with our partners, including the French, British, and the Israelis.

Q But in saying that you believe that the Syrian government still has control of the chemical weapons, that doesn't rule out the idea that they have used them, correct?

MR. CARNEY: We are in support of a United Nations unified investigation into the possible use of chemical weapons in Syria. The Assad regime has blocked that and I think that demonstrates the lack of good faith on the Assad regime's part. And the Assad regime could prove that its request for an investigation was not just a diversionary tactic by supporting that investigation.

Now, we have other means and we are engaging in other methods of monitoring the possible use or transmission of chemical weapons in Syria, but I can't get into great detail on those intelligence-related matters. But you can be sure we're monitoring this and that we are looking for conclusive evidence, if it exists, if there was use of chemical weapons.

Q Just to be clear, you don't disagree necessarily with what the Israelis, the Brits, and the French have said; you just haven't come to that conclusion yet on your own?

MR. CARNEY: I'm saying that we support an investigation. We are monitoring this, and we have not come to the conclusion that there has been that use. But it is something that is of great concern to us, to our partners, and obviously unacceptable, as the President made clear.

Q And then just quickly, is there anything you can tell us about U.S. involvement in the investigation that led to the arrests in Canada yesterday?

MR. CARNEY: I can talk to you about that. We, first of all, welcome yesterday's announcements by Canada that they have disrupted a terrorist plot working in coordination with U.S. law enforcement. The FBI worked with Canadian law enforcement, and I refer you to the FBI and Canadian government officials for more details on that.

But this successful cooperation illustrates the close relationship we have with Canada on so many important issues, including foreign affairs, trade, emergency preparedness, and security. So this was obviously a welcome announcement by the Canadian government.

Q The President -- going back to Syria and chemical weapons -- the President has said chemical weapons use is a red line that would trigger unspecified U.S. action if it was determined to have been used. Now, was the administration, first of all, made aware by

Israel in advance that they would be laying out these accusations today? And was it prudent for them to go public with them? And, again, if this actually turns out to be true, what would the consequences be? Could that include military action?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I'm not going to speculate about consequences. What I will say is that the President made clear that the use of or transmission of chemical weapons, including the transmission of chemical weapons to non-state actors, would be unacceptable in the President's view, unacceptable to the United States.

We have made clear that we're concerned about reports of potential chemical weapons used by -- in Syria. It's also important to note that the use of chemical weapons is difficult to confirm, especially in a circumstance and environment like you find in Syria at this point. But we are utilizing a variety of methods to assess those reports and claims of use. And we are, of course, in support of a unified United Nations investigation into this matter -- an investigation that the Assad regime called for but is now blocking.

Q Would the red line be on any use whatsoever of chemical weapons, including nerve gas, an isolated incident, or are we talking about something more widespread, a more widespread use or deployment of nuclear -- of chemical weapons?

MR. CARNEY: The President spoke very clearly about this from this podium and his views on the unacceptability of the use of chemical weapons. I'm not going to speculate about how they would be used. The use of chemical weapons would be unacceptable, as would the transmission or transference of chemical weapons to others outside of Syria or non-state actors.

Q On the Boston bombing, more questions are being raised about whether the FBI acted thoroughly enough after Russia raised concerns about the older brother's -- in 2011, and then why there was no follow-up after he visited Russia in 2012. So what, if anything, is the White House itself doing to get to the bottom of this?

MR. CARNEY: There is an active and complete and full investigation underway into what happened in Boston, the bombings at the Marathon. We have obviously apprehended and have in custody and have now charged a suspect -- Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. Another suspect, his brother, died on Friday night. But this process is just beginning.

What is clear is what the FBI has said about the actions it took in response to information received from Russia -- actions that included interviewing Tamerlan Tsarnaev and family members, and the conclusions that they reached at that time regarding the fact that there was no evidence of terrorist activity domestic or foreign. I would refer you to the FBI for more details about their actions and response to the information they received from the Russians.

We have an active and cooperative relationship with the Russians on security matters, counterterrorism matters. That is true broadly, and it is true specifically in this case.

Jessica.

Q This morning, Secretary Napolitano said in a hearing on Capitol Hill that the system pinged when Tamerlan Tsarnaev went overseas to Russia but not when he came back. Is the President concerned that there's a flaw in the system? And if so, is he looking to have a review of that and have it possibly changed?

MR. CARNEY: What the President said when he stood here before you late Friday evening -- or night -- was that there are many questions that need to be answered, and that's what a thorough investigation will produce, is answers to all the questions we have about these two individuals, their activities, their travel, their associations, what motivated them, everything that went into the decision that they took to engage in a terrorist act against people of the United States and Boston.

And that will -- all of these questions would be part of this investigation. It is part of the case that will be built against the suspect who is in custody, and part of the overall investigation into what happened.

Q Shouldn't he have been on a no-fly list? Should people who are spending that much time overseas in Russia be on no-fly lists? Should we be concerned about people who have been interviewed by the FBI and are just simply spending time overseas?

MR. CARNEY: Well, specifics of this investigation should be reviewed by investigators, and as they develop more information and it's appropriate to make it public, that will happen.

In general, as I said earlier when the FBI put out information with regards to the actions it took after being informed or warned about Tamerlan Tsarnaev by the Russians, they found no derogatory information, no terrorist activity -- domestic or foreign. And having said that, this investigation will continue. And there is active cooperation with the Russians with regards to the trip that the elder Tsarnaev made to Russia. There is a thorough investigation underway into all of the actions and sources of motivation and inspiration that were involved here that led to these actions, as it should be. And this is in an early stage right now. The arrest was made only on Friday night.

Q Is this the President's new nightmare scenario, where a homegrown terror cell -- if you call two guys together a terror cell, if that's all it turns out to be -- who knows at this point -- operates on their own without any forewarnings and there's really no advance notice where the President or law enforcement can track it down in advance?

MR. CARNEY: Well, it's a great question. And let's set aside this specific case, because we don't have all the answers yet. But you have heard the President discuss, and John Brennan, as his Counterterrorism Advisor -- he is now obviously the Director of the CIA -- discuss, the Attorney General discuss, and others, the evolving threat posed by terrorists. The fact that we have made progress in decimating al Qaeda Central, including obviously the elimination of Osama bin Laden, has not meant that the threat itself has gone away. And we've been very clear about that. There are threats from a variety of al Qaeda offshoots around the world.

And as the President has said -- and others have said -- there is always the potential threat from lone actors, those who are self-radicalized and who are not associated with outside groups or terrorist organizations, but take action on their own. And this is something that Mr. Brennan has discussed and others have discussed. And it's part of the threat that is assessed every day by the professionals who work every day to protect our country.

Jon.

Q Jay, back to Syria. You now have three separate American allies who say that they have evidence that Syria used chemical weapons in multiple incidences going back to December and as recently as March. When the President talked about this, he didn't just say it was unacceptable; he said it was a game changer. So my question to you is what does that mean? What does it mean?

MR. CARNEY: It means that we are assessing the reports of chemical weapons used. And it is very important to do whatever we can to monitor, investigate and verify any credible allegations, given the enormous consequences for the Syrian people and given, as you said, the President's clear statement about the fact that chemical weapons use is unacceptable. It is precisely because of the seriousness of the use of chemical weapons and the seriousness with which the President made clear that that use would be unacceptable, that it is incumbent upon us and our partners to investigate thoroughly and validate or verify allegations of chemical weapons use. And we are obviously doing that.

Q But the President didn't just say unacceptable; he said chemical weapons use would be game changer. So my question is what does that mean?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I'm not going to speculate about actions that may or may not --

Q This isn't speculation.

MR. CARNEY: Sure it is.

Q The President said it would be a game changer.

MR. CARNEY: He means that it's a red line and the use of chemical weapons is unacceptable, and it would not be acceptable to the President, to the United States -- all the more reason why we have to monitor very closely and take action to verify and validate credible claims of chemical weapons use.

What I won't do is jump to the next step and say, if claims are verified, what action will we take? That's speculating and I won't do that. But you can be sure, based on what the President told you from this podium, that this is a very serious matter, which is why we are investigating it the way that we are.

Q Can we be sure he's going to take action? If you won't tell me what the action is, is he going to do something about this?

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, you're saying "do something about this." We have to make sure that we monitor --

Q This isn't crazy speculation.

MR. CARNEY: I'm not saying it is.

Q You have two allies who say they have physical evidence. You have the Israelis who have made a strong case about what happened --

MR. CARNEY: And we are, as we absolutely must, working with our partners to investigate these allegations. It is absolutely the case in an environment like the one you have in Syria that proving chemical weapons use can be difficult. But we are engaged in a process of trying to investigate and verify these allegations.

Q What are we doing in that area? We know that the Brits actually went and took soil samples. What are we doing to --

MR. CARNEY: Well, I'm not going to get into the methods that we use to gather information or intelligence. But you can be sure that we are utilizing the tools that we have available to us to investigate these very serious allegations.

Q Are these three countries jumping the gun reaching this determination?

MR. CARNEY: This is a very serious issue. The fact that there were allegations about chemical weapons use led to the calls for an investigation by the United Nations. We support that effort and believe that the Assad regime's blocking of that effort demonstrates -- or seems to demonstrate a lack of seriousness about their intent when it comes to their original calls for an investigation.

It is why we are working with our allies and partners, as well as using the tools that we have available to us, to further investigate these allegations. But it is the seriousness of this --

Q Did they reach a conclusion --

MR. CARNEY: Here's what I'll tell you, Major. I speak for the President; he views these issues as very serious, as he made clear to you, and he is ensuring that we carefully investigate allegations like these and attempt to verify them because of the fact that they, if it were to be the case that chemical weapons had been used in Syria, that would be unacceptable, as the President made clear.

Q Implicit in your answer that it's difficult to verify these things because of the facts on the ground and that we have yet to reach this conclusion -- implicit in that is that these other three countries have reached a conclusion prematurely.

MR. CARNEY: Well, no. We're working with our allies. We consult with these countries and others and share information all the time on these matters. And I would simply say that we are working to investigate and verify these allegations. It is precisely because the use of chemical weapons is such a serious issue and the seriousness that the use of weapons would -- those weapons would be viewed by this government that we need to be extremely deliberate in the process of evaluating and attempting to verify these reports.

Q In other words, we find nothing objectionable about the evidence they've cited or the methods to try to verify it on their own?

MR. CARNEY: Again, we work with our partners. We share a great deal of information. We have means and methods that we employ to monitor chemical weapons in Syria. We support an investigation led by the United Nations into the allegations of chemical weapons use. And through all of these methods, we are attempting to get to the bottom of these allegations to find out whether or not they're accurate.

Q Based on what the President knows about the 2011 questioning of Tamerlan Tsarnaev, does he believe proper procedures were followed?

MR. CARNEY: All of these matters are under investigation. It is clear from what the FBI has said that when they received information from a foreign government about this particular individual, they investigated appropriately. And they detailed the actions they took, so I would refer you to their statements about those details. Their conclusion was that they did not have any derogatory information or information that showed terrorist activity, foreign or domestic.

Beyond that, we are in the process of investigating a terrorist attack on the United States.

Q As the President no doubt knows, these procedures went through substantial review in the latter part of the Bush administration, were re-reviewed in the Obama administration and the Justice Department, and then propounded right around 2010 in their most recent form, and have been sort of tweaked a little bit since then. This has not been an issue which has not received a tremendous amount of attention I'm sure at this White House and at the Justice Department. And there were civil libertarian concerns raised about this entire process. Based on what the President knows and what he has received so far, does he believe that this was done according to the procedures and no ball was dropped and nothing was done in an inaccurate or non-procedural way? Can you make that determination?

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, you're asking for a judgment on a matter that is under investigation. What I can point you to --

Q Well, what's under investigation is what happened since that original --

MR. CARNEY: Look, everything that involved these two individuals you can be sure is under investigation right now, as is appropriate. Actions taken in response to information that we received, everything that went into the lives of these two individuals that led to their decision to take the action that they're alleged to have taken last Monday, a week ago Monday -- all of that is under investigation. So it is obviously premature for me or anyone else here to make judgments on these matters that are under investigation.

What I can point you to is the fairly detailed information that the FBI has released about the actions they took. I can point you to the fact that the FBI last week oversaw from the federal level an extraordinary effort to, in response to the Boston Marathon bombings,

track down who was responsible and by Friday had done that in I think enormously successful coordination and cooperation with state and local officials.

But this is the beginning of a process that involves further investigation, as well as moving forward on this prosecution of a case for which initial charges were just brought yesterday.

Q One last question: The ball might have been dropped, is that what you're saying? You don't know?

MR. CARNEY: No, no, you're -- I appreciate the opportunity to have answers to questions that are under investigation. I just -- I don't have judgments to make about matters --

Q I mean, the file was open, there was no derogatory information, and the file was closed. According to the procedures I've read, that's exactly what's supposed to happen.

MR. CARNEY: Well, that's your judgment, and I would point you to the --

Q I'm just asking if the President believes what he's been briefed about this was -- were the procedures followed?

MR. CARNEY: The President has been thoroughly briefed on all the matters related to this investigation and will continue to be briefed.

The FBI is both the lead investigative authority in this at the federal level, as well as the agency involved in the past activity that you talk about with regards to suspect number one or Tamerlan Tsarnaev. So I would simply note that this investigation is still in its early stages, and we are looking at everything in the past regarding these two individuals because we want to find out, as the President said, how this happened, why this happened, what the motivations were, what, if any, associations they had. And once that investigation is complete, we'll have many more answers both for the court of law where Dzhokhar Tsarnaev is going to be prosecuted and for the American people.

Yes, Wendell.

Q Yesterday's FAA furloughs produced the predicted flight delays. Senator McConnell said today, "As a result of the administration's poor planning and political motives people were stuck on tarmacs." What's your response to that?

MR. CARNEY: I find it fascinating that Mitch McConnell, the leader of the Republican Party in the Senate, is decrying the sequester that he decried in the past and then supported. This is a result of the sequester being implemented. We made it clear that there would be these kinds of negative effects if Congress failed to take reasonable action to avert the sequester -- policy that everyone who was involved in writing it knew at the time and has made clear ever since was never designed to be implemented. It was designed to be bad policy and, therefore, to be avoided.

The fact is Congress had an opportunity, but Republicans made a choice. And this is a result of a choice they made to embrace the sequester as -- and I'm quoting Republicans -- "a victory for the tea party" and "a homerun." I'm not sure if leaders in the Republican Party and that Congress agree with those assessments now, because they've obviously changed their position on the sequester a variety of times over the last several months.

The sequester never should have become policy. The President has put forward a comprehensive, balanced approach to deficit reduction that would eliminate the sequester. But this is Congress's responsibility. It needs to take action.

Q There are a couple of groups, bipartisan groups of senators making proposals. Senators Moran and Blumenthal saying the administration has the opportunity to prioritize spending. Senator Blumenthal is suggesting that furloughs ought to be postponed to give Congress another chance to revisit sequestration. A couple of other senators -- a Republican and a Democrat -- asking the Transportation Secretary, the head of the FAA, if they might be able to move money around. What's your response to that?
MR. CARNEY: Well, let me say a couple of things. One, I think the fact that various lawmakers are suggesting remedies confirms what I've said, which is only Congress can take action to stop these delays. These delays are a result of the sequester that Republicans insisted take place.

But let's be clear about the actions the FAA has taken and the actions that it cannot take. Because of the way the budgets are structured and the way that the law imposing a sequester is written, the Department of Transportation is required by the law to cut about \$1 billion between now and the end of the September. That's \$637 million from the FAA.

The FAA has initiated a series of cost-saving measures, both personnel and non-personnel related, including a hiring freeze, restrictions on travel, termination of certain temporary employees, and reductions to contracts, among other savings. But the fact is 70 percent of the FAA's operations budget is personnel. So there is simply no way to avoid furloughs.

And remember, Secretary LaHood came to this briefing room and laid this out as what would be an inevitable consequence if sequester were to become law, were to be implemented, and over time all of these other measures were implemented and the final action had to be furloughs. That's just a fact.

Now, the President has put forward a balanced plan that would replace sequester and reduce our deficit while making the investments that are necessary to have our economy grow and create jobs, protect the middle class and protect seniors. And the President is engaged in a process with lawmakers where he is trying to find common ground -- to see if common ground exists with Republicans around the basic principle that we need to reduce our deficit in a balanced way. And he has put forward a plan that would do that and would eliminate the sequester in the process.

When it comes to these delays, though, Congress has to act in order to avert these delays.

Q Senator Moran says the fact that you're not asking for the ability to prioritize spending under the FAA suggests that you want the sequester to inflict maximum pain.

MR. CARNEY: Since we did everything we could to avert the sequester and, unfortunately, Republicans decided as a political matter that it was a home run for them to inflict this upon the American people, I think that suggestion just doesn't hold water. Secondly, the FAA did take action -- all the action that it could under the law -- to produce savings and avoid furloughs up until this point, where because of the nature of their budget and the personnel-heavy nature of their operations, furloughs are the only option available to the FAA at this time. Now, if Congress wants to address this matter, then they should act. But this is something that only by law Congress can do.

Q Can you give us an answer for us then on what the administration is doing right now in terms of dealing with the significant delays -- several hundred yesterday and many others being reported again today? Aside from the pressure put on Congress, what can you do at this point to try to reconcile the situation in some form for travelers?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think you're asking separate questions. As a matter of how we resolve our budget disagreements that have led to the imposition of the sequester, the decision by Republicans to embrace the sequester --

Q I understand that part.

MR. CARNEY: -- and to spend a lot of time insisting that there were no consequences to the sequester, and then, suddenly, when there are consequences that they don't like, to start pointing fingers when, in fact, they had the opportunity to avert this and avoid it. Our interest is in eliminating the sequester entirely. It never should have become law. The President has put forward a proposal that would eliminate the sequester.

When it comes to specific actions that the FAA has undertaken to deal with the delays caused by this, I would refer you to the FAA. Those are matters of traffic control and safety -- and to the Department of Transportation in general.

Q Let me ask you a couple of other questions. Today it was announced by Senator Max Baucus of Montana that he is going to retire or is not going to seek reelection a year from now. I'm just curious for the White House's impression on that, especially given the fact that this -- what should have been an ally of yours voted against the background check bill just a matter of days ago.

MR. CARNEY: Well, the President will have a statement, as we tend to do on a retirement like this or a decision not to seek reelection. So I would look for that this afternoon.

Q But just on that issue in particular, there were a variety of Democrats, including Max Baucus, who voted against this. And now, one of them doesn't even have to seek reelection. So the argument that the White House has made that they're making political calculations at home -- for him, this wasn't even a political calculation. What does that say?

MR. CARNEY: Well, obviously any senator who voted no would have to explain for himself or herself what motivated that vote. We firmly believe that the proper vote was to agree with the 90 percent of the American

people who made clear in poll after poll after poll that they supported expansion of the background check system, a very common-sense measure to reduce gun violence in America. And those numbers are true not just in New York and California or Massachusetts; they're true across the country. The support for expanding background checks was overwhelmingly in every state where this question was raised.

So every no vote was disappointing. Every no vote reflected a decision that was at odds with the views of a majority of the constituents of the senator's state -- whichever senator you wanted to put forward when it comes to voting no on this matter.

But the President is committed, as he said, to moving forward on this. And he believes that when you have a situation where the American people so strongly support moving forward in one direction and there is resistance because the Senate, in this case, is behind the curve here catching up to the American people, eventually they'll get it right and what is a common-sense measure to reduce gun violence while protecting Second Amendment rights will become law.

Q Can you give us a better sense of what to expect during the President's visit to the Bush Library? And we, you said yesterday, would learn from you more about what his role will be at the ceremony to take place and memorial service in Waco, Texas on Thursday.

MR. CARNEY: Well, I don't have any more details for you at this time. The President looks forward to the event with former President George W. Bush and the other Presidents who will be in attendance.

Q Does he make remarks?

MR. CARNEY: I'm not sure what we put out. I think it's -- you might expect that the President will say a few words. But we'll give you details when we're ready to announce them.

When it comes to the memorial service, as the President noted I think appropriately on Friday night as we were discussing the dramatic events outside of Boston, the people of West, Texas suffered enormously last week and continue to suffer from this tragic explosion that has taken lives and property and caused enormous harm. The President wants to make clear, as does the First Lady, that our thoughts and prayers are with them. And we will be with them moving forward as they rebuild their town and recover from this tragic event.

Q Will he be speaking?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I'll provide you details as we formulate them.

Yes, Margaret.

Q I had a couple. There's a report out of Oxford, Mississippi that Paul Kevin Curtis has been released from jail. And I'm just wondering, has the White House, has the President been briefed? Do you know why, what the conditions are? And what are your reactions to

it?

MR. CARNEY: I would refer you to the FBI. I don't have a great deal of information on that, so they're the lead investigating authority in that matter, so they might have more details on that. I saw the news reports, but I don't know whether the President has been briefed on it.

Q Okay. If I can go back to the sequester briefly. So the furloughs that are set to kick in May the 1st, do you have any hard numbers now at this point on how many White House staff would be affected and how you would handle in particular pay cuts for officers?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have specific numbers. The sequester affects everyone in the White House office. There will be furloughs effective with the first pay period in May, as I understand it. And I think we've provided that information. I don't have the specific numbers, but you can deduce from the numbers that are here the impact.

Others who are, I guess, commissioned officers or that don't have leave -- I forget the way that it's described -- will have a pay reduction. And I believe that takes effect also with the first pay period in May -- the point being only that everyone is affected by this, as a result of a decision to embrace policy that was designed never to become law.

Q You've said that the President is confident that at some point the background checks will become law. When does he want it brought up again?

MR. CARNEY: We are going to work with the Senate. We are going to work with outside stakeholders. You will hear the President speak about this issue, just as he has in the past. I think Senator Manchin has said that he is looking for ways to increase the bipartisan support that his amendment had, and we will obviously be supportive of those efforts.

It is also the case -- and this is broadly true of the way the President believes change happens in general in this country -- and that is that change happens on difficult and important issues like this when the American people insist that their voices are heard. And the American people made clear where they stand on this issue. And now that a vote has been taken, and the will of the American people has been thwarted by a minority in the Senate, those who are disappointed in that, those who are angry about it need to raise their voices.

And that's how change happens -- when the public is engaged, and when the public that sent elected officials to Washington makes clear to those elected officials what their evaluations are of how they're doing their jobs. And in this case, whatever the state is, there is a majority in that state that is disappointed in the vote taken if the vote was no by a United States senator.

So we, as the President did, call on frustrated constituents to make their frustration known.

Q Well, generally the way they do that is in an election. So are you waiting until after the next election?

MR. CARNEY: No, I don't think that it requires an election necessarily to bring about that change. I think that there is an opportunity for Americans who are frustrated by the failure of the Senate to act in a common-sense way, in a way that is supported by the vast majority of the American people, to make their unhappiness and their frustration known sooner than the next election. And there is a variety of means available to the citizens of this country to communicate with their lawmakers and make their views known.

Q So is the focus now on Manchin-Toomey, on background checks alone?

MR. CARNEY: I think it's -- no. The President is committed to all of the elements of the package that he put forward. He is disappointed by the failure of the Senate to take action on things that had broad bipartisan support across the country, majority support across the country. And he will continue to push the entire package.

He is also continuing to ensure that we implement all of the 23 executive actions that were part of this package. There was action taken on a mental health executive action on Friday to ensure that records are more available to those conducting background checks. There is action today at the CDC looking at matters of gun violence that is part of the package of executive actions that the President put forward. And he is going to insist that all of these actions be implemented, even as he pushes for and works with Congress to take up legislation.

Alexis.

Q Jay, back on the FAA and sequester. You've said two things today -- that the President thinks it's dumb policy; he has great sympathy for the people at DOT and FAA, for the travelers who have been inconvenienced, and it's up to Congress to act. So my question is, if Congress decides to act immediately by enacting some sort of change that addresses just FAA and that \$637 million, separate and apart from whatever they might want to do with the President on the budget, would the President sign such legislation?

MR. CARNEY: Well, let me say, first of all, that the best way for Congress to fix this problem is to replace sequestration with a smarter approach to deficit reduction. That's how it was designed. It was this onerous law that was put before Congress to run away from and force them to take responsible action to reduce the deficit.

Unfortunately, a decision was made -- and I'm quoting Republicans here -- "to embrace sequester as a home run and a political victory," a victory for the tea party. But Congress can still act.

Now, if Congress has another idea about how to alleviate the challenges that sequester has caused for the FAA and for American travelers, we are open to looking at that and we're happy to look at it. But let's be clear: If they were to take that action -- and we would be

open to looking at it -- any short-term or targeted fix to this problem is just a Band-Aid, because the fact is, there are a variety of -- a broad variety of negative effects of sequester and this is one of them.

It's the families whose kids aren't in Head Start or won't be in Head Start. It's the seniors who won't get Meals on Wheels. It's the furloughed Defense employees or those in defense industries, private sector, who are suffering and will suffer because of it.

The fact is, there are a number of negative consequences and a Band-Aid fix to this problem, while we will certainly be open to looking at it, does not solve the overall problem. The overall problem can and should be solved by embracing the basic principle supported by the American people that we should reduce our deficit in a balanced way.

Q And one quick follow-up on the FBI. Do you happen to know how often in this administration another government has asked the United States through the FBI to pursue intelligence on someone living here?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have a number to attach to it. We have cooperative relationships when it comes to counterterrorism with a number of governments across the country -- allies and partners and other governments. So that cooperation is broad and deep, and extends to this kind of information.

Q Would you say it's common?

MR. CARNEY: I wouldn't hazard to characterize it in any way because a lot of these matters are matters of intelligence. But we do have broad and deep cooperation with a number of countries and their intelligence agencies in our efforts to combat terrorism around the world.

Q Congressman Duncan of Tennessee has introduced a bill that says those organizations that collect money for presidential libraries should disclose the donors, those over \$200. And I'm wondering what the President's thoughts are on that.

MR. CARNEY: I'm not aware of the legislation.

Chris.

Q Would he -- would he support this proposal?

MR. CARNEY: I would have to just say that I'm not even aware of the legislation.

Peter. I did say Chris -- then Peter.

Q On that point, where is he at in thinking about his own library? Has he begun thinking about a site? There's talk about Chicago or Hawaii.

MR. CARNEY: I haven't had a discussion with the President about that, and I talk to him almost every day. He's focused on the work that he's doing now in office to try to advance the priorities that he laid out in the campaign last year and laid out in the State of the

Union address and in his inaugural address.

He wants action taken to grow the economy and create jobs. He wants action taken to pass a comprehensive immigration reform bill that he can sign into law. He wants action to reduce gun violence -- common-sense action to reduce gun violence. He wants more action taken to enhance our energy security and our environment. He has a broad agenda that he's working on. He's not focused on his life after the presidency.

Q Does anybody focus on it, though, on his behalf?

MR. CARNEY: Not that I'm aware of.

Q Jay?

MR. CARNEY: Chris, sorry. Yes.

Q A question on the employment nondiscrimination act, which is going to be introduced in both the House and the Senate on Thursday. It's been more than a year since you announced that in lieu of the LGBT nondiscrimination executive order, you would work to build support to pass legislation. In fact, it was on April 12th of last year that you said, "We plan to pursue a number of strategies to obtain that goal." Can you name one thing the President has done over the course of the past year to build support for LGBT nondiscrimination in the workplace protections?

MR. CARNEY: I think the President's record on LGBT issues and his commitment to rights for LGBT Americans is I think clear and demonstrated by his views and the actions that he has taken and the actions that his administration has taken at his direction.

The fact is, as you noted, we have long supported -- the President has long supported an inclusive employment nondiscrimination act, and now it's being introduced, and that is a good thing. The administration will continue to work to build support for this important legislation because we believe that this is the right way, the right approach to take because it is inclusive. And that's why we supported it then; that's why we're glad to see it being introduced.

Q Well, you keep saying you're going to work to build support. Can you give me one thing, any initiative, any action the President has undertaken to build support for this legislation?

MR. CARNEY: Again, Chris, I think the President's record on these issues has been pretty well documented. And it's clear his commitment to the rights of LGBT Americans is very clear. His support for this specific legislation I think is reflected in the fact that it's being introduced, as you said, in the House and the Senate.

And he will work with like-minded lawmakers who support movement on this legislation to see it passed and hopefully signed into law. That's how this process works. This is the approach the President thought was the right one to take and he is encouraged by the progress being made.

Q Can you name any initiative the President has undertaken?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I think I've answered the question.

George.

Q Yes, how much does the President view the four former Presidents as a resource for advice? We know he relies on President Clinton at times, but does he talk to the other former Presidents ever?

MR. CARNEY: What I will say and I've said this before that I'm not going to divulge conversations that the President has had, private conversations with his living predecessors. I will simply say that he believes that they share a very unique experience -- that's a redundancy -- it's just unique -- not just very unique -- a unique experience of holding this office, and that, regardless of the times when they served and their political and policy differences, there is a commonality of experience that the President believes binds them together. The responsibilities of the office are the same. The weight of the decisions that a President has to make is always enormous and substantial. And he believes that every person who has held this office has approached it with a commitment to doing the things that he believes -- he, in the case of the past -- he and/or she in the future -- are the right things to do to make the country better and to help the American people, and to make it safer.

And that commonality regardless of the differences that may exist between them is I think a very powerful thing. And the President looks -- and for that reason, the President looks forward to seeing all of his predecessors in Dallas next week -- or this week.

Q Tomorrow.

MR. CARNEY: Tomorrow.

Q Without getting into any specific conversations, does he stay in touch, though, with the others?

MR. CARNEY: Again, he is -- broadly speaking, he has had conversations with his predecessors, but I don't want to get into specifics about those conversations.

Thanks, you all.

END

2:03 P.M. EDT