

Daily Briefing by the Press Secretary, 2/24/14

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February 24, 2014

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

February 24, 2014

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

1:31 P.M. EST

MR. CARNEY: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for being here on this bright and sunny Monday. I have no announcements to make so I'll go straight to your questions.

Julie.

Q Thanks, Jay. I have a couple questions on Ukraine. First, just as a practical matter, who does the U.S. consider to be the leader of Ukraine at this point?

MR. CARNEY: Well, as you know, Mr. Yanukovich has left Kyiv in an orderly fashion -- packed up his things and left, and his whereabouts are not known to us in a confirmable way. And certainly, while he was a democratically elected leader, his actions have undermined his legitimacy and he is not actively leading the country at present. We do believe that parliament has lawfully elected its new speaker and we support getting the situation under control in terms of law and order and in ensuring that the institutions of government are working. We note that recent parliamentary votes have been passed by overwhelming majorities that include members of Yanukovich's own party.

We believe that working pursuant to Ukraine's constitution and through its institutions of government is the most promising path toward the de-escalation of violence, a multiparty coalition government and early elections, all things that we have long supported. It will be critical, in our view, in the coming days for Ukraine's leadership to focus on its pressing financial challenges, and we stand ready to support them as they make needed reforms.

Q So just to be clear, the U.S. sees the speaker of the parliament as the current acting leader of Ukraine, not Yanukovich?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we believe he is the lawfully elected speaker of parliament. Mr. Yanukovich left Kyiv and packed up his belongings and left, and his whereabouts are not known, so he's certainly not actively leading the country at present. We encourage the

Ukrainian parliament and others to take actions that help continue a path toward de-escalation of violence, embrace constitutional change and move toward a coalition government -- a multiparty coalition government, as well as early elections.

The people of Ukraine are being heard -- their voices are being heard, and we have a real opportunity here -- or rather, they do -- to move beyond the current crisis in order to pursue the more democratic future the people of their country deserve.

Q Russian officials are questioning the legitimacy of the acting government in Ukraine. How concerned is the U.S. that Russia may try to wield some kind of influence or take steps to install a government in Ukraine that is perhaps more favorable to the Russians?

MR. CARNEY: Well, as I think you heard the President's National Security Advisor say yesterday, Russia and the United States have a shared interest in restoring Ukraine to stability, in de-escalating violence and supporting the formation of a technical government with broad-based support across Ukraine.

And it's certainly not in Russia's interest to have tens of thousands of people in the street, deeply discontent with a government that they were closely backing. And instability and violence in Ukraine is certainly not -- should not be seen as in Russia's interest.

So we are focused on working with Ukraine, and also our European partners as well as Russia, towards promoting a process that is nonviolent, that focuses on addressing the many challenges that Ukraine faces, including the need to set up a multiparty coalition government -- a technocratic government that can help Ukraine make some of the important decisions that need to be made, especially in the economic and financial sphere, while they move towards early elections.

Q But I guess how concerning is it to the U.S. that the Russians are not recognizing this acting government? Because it seems like you can't get to the scenario that you're talking about if you don't have that basic recognition.

MR. CARNEY: Well, the future of Ukraine should be and must be decided by the Ukrainian people, not by outside entities -- not the United States, not Europe, not Russia. So the issue here is for the people of Ukraine to move forward towards a process that leads to the creation of a coalition government, a government that has within it representatives of all sectors of Ukraine and Ukrainian society, that's focused on the technical work that needs to be done to stabilize the country as it moves towards free and fair democratic elections.

It's in nobody's interest to see further violence and instability in Ukraine -- certainly not in the interest of the Ukrainian people, not in the interest of Russia, Europe, or the United States. And our view -- and I think we've been stating this quite clearly -- that this is not a competition between East and West, this is not a restoration of the Cold War. This is about the Ukrainian people and their future. And there is no contradiction in Ukraine and Ukraine's people deciding to move forward with further integration with Europe while Ukraine and the Ukrainian people maintain their strong historic, cultural and economic ties to Russia. We believe that's entirely appropriate.

Q And just finally on this topic, some of the opposition leaders are calling for Yanukovich to go on trial. Does the U.S. have any view on that proposal?

MR. CARNEY: These are the kinds of decisions that would have to be up to the Ukrainian people. Our focus right now is on encouraging steps that lead to the formation, as I said, of a multiparty unity government that speaks for all the Ukrainian people.

And when we say multiparty, we obviously mean by that inclusion of Yanukovich's party. There needs to be a government that represents everyone. And, as I noted earlier, the measures that have been passed by the parliament in the past several days have included large majorities that include votes from members of Yanukovich's party, which is worth noting.

Steve.

Q But do you believe he should be granted due process, or arrested, or -- do you have a position on that?

MR. CARNEY: Again, these aren't positions for us to take. We are for a de-escalation of violence, for the establishment of a coalition government that's representative of all sectors of Ukrainian society, and a focus on the steps that need to be taken to stabilize Ukraine and move towards early elections. We are for the territorial integrity and independence and unity of Ukraine. And we with other partners are standing ready to assist Ukraine moving forward as it deals with the challenges that the country faces.

Q Are you saying that you're confident that the Russians are going to stand aside and let events unfold in Ukraine?

MR. CARNEY: We have obviously been in regular contact with many nations who are concerned about and have an interest in the developments in Ukraine, and that includes with Russian government officials all the way up to President Putin. As you know, President Obama spoke at length with President Putin on Friday about Ukraine. And Secretary Kerry spoke with Foreign Minister Lavrov, I think yesterday, and Ambassador McFaul has also had conversations with government officials. And I think the conversations that we've been having reinforce what we're saying about views in terms of the need for the Ukrainian people to decide their future, the need for a de-escalation in violence and a return to stability as that process moves forward, and our view that it is certainly not in Russia's interest for there to be violence and instability in Ukraine and for what we saw in the past weeks and months with tens of thousands of people, of Ukrainians, or more, demonstrating, and then being engulfed in violence over their opposition to a government that was closely allied with Russia.

So we're having those conversations all the time. And again, we believe it's in everyone's interest -- most importantly, the Ukrainian people's interest -- that this process be allowed to move forward in a peaceful way so that they can get about the business of establishing a coalition government and addressing some of the many pressing issues that they face, and having early elections.

Q It's estimated that Ukraine needs \$35 billion in assistance by the end of 2015. Should that be done strictly through the IMF, or can the United States give some money on its own?

MR. CARNEY: The United States, working with partners around the world, stands ready to provide support for Ukraine as it takes the reforms it needs to get back to economic stability. This support can complement an IMF program by helping to make reforms easier and by putting Ukraine in a position to invest more in health and education, to help develop Ukraine's human capital and strengthen its social safety net. So we would be working with international partners to complement an IMF program going forward.

Let me start over here with Chuck. I'll go right to left.

Q Why, in all this talk about -- there was some talks about sanctions and certain things going a certain way with Ukraine. Why is there never talk of punishing Russia for all of the disputes? Has there ever been a discussion about this? Is this something -- between all of the problems we're dealing with the Russians and the United Nations, Ukraine, Syria -- that never comes up? I mean, is that just something that's off the table? Is there any way in dealing with the Russians?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I'm not sure what that means. We have a law on the book that deals with accountability in a particular case in Russia, so I don't think that's broadly the case.

I terms of Syria, we have made quite clear and quite public our disappointment in the past with Russia's blocking of United Nations Security Council resolutions. I would note that the U.N. Security Council passed unanimously, with full support among the permanent members, including Russia, a resolution with regards to Syria for the first time just the other day. And that is designed to force corridors to be open so that humanitarian aid can flow into Syria, and that's a significant step forward.

On the matter of Ukraine, we did take action in the realm of banning visas for specific individuals that --

Q Targeting Ukrainians and targeting Ukraine.

MR. CARNEY: -- who were, in our view, directly responsible for the violence that occurred and the death that occurred. And we remain prepared and have on the table additional sanctions should developments in Ukraine merit that.

Q But again, targeting Ukraine, not --

MR. CARNEY: I'm not sure targeting -- it depends on what -- targeting other countries for what action?

Q Well, if Russia is the one behind propping Yanukovich in this instance --

MR. CARNEY: But the sanctions were designed, or the contemplated sanctions were designed and the visa bans were specifically designed in response to acts of violence against innocent and peaceful civilians. The support for a government obviously is a

different proposition.

Q But I guess I go back to this criticism --

MR. CARNEY: And what I would say is that in the President's conversation with President Putin, as we read out, it was our view that President Putin, and Russia generally, agrees with the proposition that we need to see a Ukraine where there is not violence and where stability is returned. Because that's in Russia's interest, it's in Ukraine's interest, and it's in Europe and the United States' interest.

Q But the criticism you're getting mostly from John McCain but from some others on the tack that the administration is taking with Russia is that it is too passive, too agreeable with Russia, not taking a hard enough line. What do you say to that? How do you respond to Senator McCain?

MR. CARNEY: Our approach to our relations with Russia has been extremely clear-eyed. It has not been driven by hope or romanticism about what Russia might do, but very specifically driven by what we can get done cooperatively with Russia in some areas, even as make abundantly clear both in public and in private, where we profoundly disagree with Russia. And that approach, as I know the President and Ambassador Rice and Secretary Kerry and others have said, has resulted in tangible benefits for the United States and our national security when it comes to the cooperation we've gotten from Russia in resupplying our troops in Afghanistan; when it comes to the joint efforts and cooperation we've had with Russia on the Security Council; when it comes to Iran. And it's also been clear in the very clear approach we've taken when we've disagreed -- whether it's on missile defense or, profoundly, on Syria, or on other matters.

So I think instead of --

Q There is no carrot-and-stick approach here. It's almost all carrots with Russia. What's been the stick? The President cancelling his --

MR. CARNEY: I think that that whole argument is premised on the idea that somehow the fact that Russia's client state in Syria engulfed in a civil war is good for Russia; or that the government in Ukraine, a large nation on Russia's border, has been under constant protest by the people of Ukraine and that government obviously was allied with Moscow -- I don't see how that can possibly be viewed as good for Russia, or demonstrative of Russia somehow getting the better of the West.

I think that, again, is an antiquated view of a dynamic that doesn't exist anymore and that doesn't reflect what's actually happening, which is, on the ground in Syria, as horrific as the events there have been, we have seen the Syrian people come out and demonstrate that they want a better future for themselves that does not include a dictator who has been propped up by Moscow, in part, and in the people of Ukraine feeling similarly when it comes to wanting a government that reflects their aspirations and their demands and their hopes for the future, which they were not feeling they were getting from a government that was supported by Moscow.

Q I understand that. But yesterday Susan Rice and the President himself last week consistently have said this is not a Cold War, this is not a Cold War chessboard, we're not going back to the Cold War.

MR. CARNEY: Right.

Q But Putin seems to think we're back in the Cold War. Is he not dealing with this in Cold War mentality?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I think that he --

Q So what do you do? I understand what you want to do. What do you do when the other side doesn't want to have that conversation?

MR. CARNEY: But it doesn't -- whatever others believe -- and I'm not sure that we, you or I, can speak for President Putin's approach and what it's motivated by. The fact is we called for and the West called for, and most importantly, the Ukrainian people called for a change in Ukraine that included early elections and a constitutional change, and a coalition government, and a government that's responsive to the wishes of the majority of the Ukrainian people. And obviously it's a very fluid situation there, but we have -- they have, rather -- taken steps to move in that direction.

And, again, when it comes to Syria, we make our profound differences with Russia very clear when it comes to Syria, as have our international partners. And where we can cooperate -- when it comes to Russia's role in getting the Assad regime to admit that it held one of the largest stockpiles of chemical weapons, for example, and committing itself to ridding itself of those weapons, or when it comes to passing the resolution just on Saturday to allow for humanitarian relief to flow to the Syrian people -- again, something that has been blocked by the Assad regime but has now been voted for by all the members of the United Nations Security Council, including Russia.

Let me -- Chuck, I feel like I've got to move around here.

Margaret.

Q Thank you. Could you bring us up to the state of play on the El Chapo situation? Has the U.S. made a formal request for extradition? And I know there's ongoing discussions with the Mexican government, but how important is this to you to be able to do what we need to do through this partner?

MR. CARNEY: Well, you've answered part of your question when it comes to the issues of extradition. As the Department of Justice has said, the decision whether to pursue extradition will be the subject of further discussion between the United States and Mexico, so those conversations are ongoing.

Q Does that mean that you're not going to formally ask unless they're going to say yes? I mean, I read a report either yesterday or this morning from a U.S. attorney somewhere saying that the U.S. did want to extradite him. So I know what you're saying, that this still

has to be worked out, but what's the U.S.'s starting position? Do you want to go through the whole process of a trial in the U.S.?

MR. CARNEY: The answers to all of those questions would have to come from the Department of Justice, which handles issues of extradition.

Q Does the President have a preference?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have a presidential view to read out on this. We're obviously appreciative of the fact that Joaquin Guzmán Loera, known as "El Chapo," the alleged leader of the Sinaloa cartel, was captured, and we congratulate the Mexico government on that fact. And this is a significant achievement in our shared fight against transnational organized crime, violence and drug trafficking. The U.S. and Mexico have a strong security partnership, and we will continue to support Mexico in its efforts to ensure that cartel leaders are put out of business.

On matters of -- judicial matters and legal matters like extradition, I would just have to refer you to the Department of Justice, except to say that that matter will be the subject of discussions between the U.S. and Mexico.

Q Is it all right to say that the U.S. hasn't yet decided, or --

MR. CARNEY: I just wouldn't have more of a characterization of our approach, except to tell you that Justice is handling it.

Q Can I ask you another Eric Holder question then? (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: Sure.

Q He's been urging Congress to require companies to alert consumers on data breaches, but I haven't heard any more specifics on that. Is the White House or the Justice Department -- or, in concert, the White House and the Justice Department -- are you giving Democrats any guidance on specifics for data breach legislation that you want Congress to pursue?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have an answer to that. I'll have to take the question.

Jon.

Q The Defense Secretary is talking today about reducing the size of the army to its lowest level since before World War II. And what I'm wondering is, from the President's point of view, is this decision to reduce the army fairly dramatically a reflection of budgetary realities, or a belief that the threat environment around the world is at its lowest point since before World War II?

MR. CARNEY: Well, Jon, I know as a student of history you understand that there's a lot more complexity to that. Obviously, the run-up in World War II was quite substantial because we were fighting a two-pronged world war, and then obviously there was a huge increase in forces during Vietnam.

The fact, as you said, is that Secretary Hagel and Chairman Dempsey are speaking to the press right now to preview the key decisions they have recommended to the President for the Defense Department's fiscal year 2015 budget and beyond. Since they are delivering this information, I'm not going to be in a position to discuss details at this stage. But I would just make clear that we appreciate the thoughtful approach they've taken that will reposition the military after the longest conflict in our nation's history, focusing on the strategic challenges and opportunities ahead.

For the first time, the Defense Department's submission will now specifically show what DOD must do if Congress cannot reach additional compromise on deficit spending and sequestration-level cuts return in fiscal year 2016 and beyond. The Pentagon also worked with the White House on a five-year plan that comes in above sequestration but below the President's submission last year. This plan is responsible, it's realistic, and it supports the President's defense strategy.

So, again, I urge you to look at what Secretary Hagel and Chairman Dempsey provide today and they'll have more detail for you after that.

Q So the President, obviously he has to make a decision, you're saying, on whether or not to accept the recommendations?

MR. CARNEY: Well, these are the decisions that they're recommending to the President as part of his fiscal year 2015 budget and beyond. It is our view that the recommendations fit and represent a responsible, realistic approach to supporting the President's defense strategy. But for more detail, I would encourage you to wait for the presentation from Secretary Hagel.

Q And if I can just get I guess to the general principle of a smaller standing army. In the President's view, is that, again, driven largely for budget reasons, or is it because the nature of the threat has changed?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I think for defense strategy, I would refer you to the Defense Department. What I can tell you, obviously, is that the President, when he took office, became Commander-In-Chief at a time when we were still fighting two wars -- one in Iraq and one in Afghanistan. And he pledged during his campaign that he would end both, and he has done that in Iraq and he is doing that in Afghanistan.

So obviously, we are in, as the President spoke at length about at National Defense University, in a different footing -- on a different footing, and we were transitioning away from the permanent war footing that we experienced in the wake of the September 11th attacks. Obviously, that doesn't lessen the fact that we have to maintain extreme vigilance -- and we do -- when it comes to the threats against our nation. And we have to deploy a strategy that is responsive to those threats and anticipates the kinds of conflicts that we are most likely to see in the future.

Major, then Chris.

Q Beneath Yanukovich, does the United States government feel it has a functional relationship at the ministerial level with key aspects of what remains of Ukraine's government, specifically the military and otherwise? It was made clear to us on Friday that Defense Secretary Hagel finally got through to his defense counterpart. I'm just curious -- over the weekend and in intervening days ahead, is there a concern that absent Yanukovich the entire government itself could fall apart and that could create a power vacuum that any party could exploit or create more turbulence?

MR. CARNEY: I think your question reflects the fluidity of the situation. It's also worth noting that President Yanukovich was not the only senior member of his government to pack up and leave Kyiv not long after he had signed an agreement with the opposition that would have created the coalition government that we and many view as still the right approach moving forward.

So in terms of our interactions with ministries at a lower level, I can't really speak to that. Our embassy and the State Department I'm sure could. We would note some of the statements that have come out from the defense ministry there, and others, about the approach that they're taking and the nonviolence that we would like to see there, and the de-escalation that we've seen and hope continues.

But I think your question goes to our insistence or urging that steps be taken very quickly to establish a technocratic unity government that is multiparty in nature so it is reflective of all sectors of Ukraine, and it is focused primarily on stabilizing the country and stabilizing the economic situation in an atmosphere of peace and nonviolence so that that stability can then help the country move forward towards early elections, free and democratic elections, that would result in a government that reflects the will of the majority of the Ukrainian people.

Q Is one of the fears the administration has that this talk of partition could take on greater significance if, in fact, that technocratic government doesn't take place and a sense of order isn't established?

MR. CARNEY: Well, when it comes to that question, I would note that we have been very clear that we support an independent and unified Ukraine, and that the idea of separation or partition or division is not in the interest of the Ukrainian people, of the Ukrainian nation, of Europe, or Russia, or the United States.

What I think is in everyone's interest is a unified Ukraine and a stable Ukraine, and a Ukrainian government that reflects the will of the Ukrainian people and that allows for steps to be taken if the Ukrainian people so desire towards greater integration with Europe, but that, of course, allows also for the historic, cultural, and economic ties that have long been in existence between Ukraine and Russia to continue. And I think that the two should not be seen as contradictory.

Q Caracas has seen a lot of violence. Twelve people have died. There are protestors in the street. There is no sense that the government is going to fall, but there are issues related to the release of the Leopoldo Lopez and other issues. What is the

administration's position on what's happening in Venezuela? And how concerned is it about what it's seeing playing out in Caracas?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we are concerned, and we made clear, that with our OAS and regional partners -- the Organization of American States and our regional partners -- we are working to urge calm and encourage a genuine dialogue among all Venezuelans. As President Obama said in Mexico last week, rather than trying to distract from its own failings by making up false accusations against the United States, which the government there has, the Venezuelan government ought to focus on addressing the legitimate grievances of the Venezuelan people.

Another way of putting this is that when President Maduro calls for a dialogue with the U.S. President and an exchange of ambassadors, he should focus instead on the dialogue with the Venezuelan people because that is what is at issue here. This is not about the United States. The government of Venezuela needs to release detained protesters immediately. It also needs to stop impeding the work of independent journalists and restricting information-sharing via television, radio and the Internet.

Freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are universal human rights. They are essential to a functioning democracy. And the Venezuelan government has an obligation to protect these fundamental freedoms.

Q Lastly, on Syria, did the U.N. resolution this weekend pave the way for deeper consideration of military action if those corridors are not opened? Ambassador Power said this is not going to happen just by magic; there needs to be compliance. And this is a specific expression of the U.N.'s will and desire for absolute things to happen -- open up those corridors for the humanitarian relief to get in, and there's a clock ticking on this. Does this pave the way for military action if Syria's not compliant?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the resolution contains within it not just a commitment by -- not just a requirement that Syria open up access to humanitarian provisions, but a commitment by the Security Council to take action in the event of noncompliance with its demands.

Q Unspecified action, right?

MR. CARNEY: Well, because this resolution is specific about that, and because the Security Council for the first time committed to take action if there is noncompliance, this resolution is a significant tool. So there are steps along the way, but it is notable that the resulting resolution included within it that commitment, made by all the members who voted for it, which was all the members. So that's a significant step.

Now, we obviously hope that the result of the resolution will be Syria's decision to allow for the provision of and free flow of humanitarian assistance to take place because that is our primary interest here.

Q But if it doesn't, the reading of that resolution is, if there isn't compliance, the military option now comes more directly into this equation.

MR. CARNEY: Well, the resolution itself contains a commitment by the Security Council to take further action in the event of noncompliance.

Q It doesn't say what kind of action. It says nothing about what kind of action.

MR. CARNEY: That's correct, but it does commit the Security Council to take that action.

Q Does this administration interpret that as military?

MR. CARNEY: I would simply that say we interpret it as a commitment by all members of the Security Council -- all of them, including the Permanent Five -- to take action if there is noncompliance. Our focus at the moment is on compliance because we hope very much that the resolution and the fact that it passed with unanimous support should --

Q Shouldn't Assad fear something if he doesn't comply?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would just point you to the resolution. I mean it's -- that's a significant tool, and it's important.

Jim.

Q After the meeting with the governors, Governor Fallin came out to the mics out there at the stakeout and said that the President was within a couple of months of making a decision on the Keystone pipeline. Is that accurate?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I don't have a conversation of the President's to read out to you. What I can tell you is that this process is with the State Department. There are steps in that process that have taken place. There are more steps that need to take place in keeping with the kind of timetable that's been existent in reviews like these for many administrations of both parties.

So you know that after the release of -- or the publishing of the environmental impact statement, there's a period that allows for input from other agencies, input from the public, and that's the process we're in now. So I don't have anything else to add to that, and I don't have a conversation to read out.

Q So by the middle of the year you'll think we'll have a decision?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have a timetable to give to you. I would refer you to the State Department.

Q And I'm just curious, does the President have a take on this legislation that apparently had been passed but not signed in Arizona that would allow businesses to deny service to gays based on the religious beliefs of the business owners?

MR. CARNEY: I haven't spoken with the President about that. I don't have an official position. It certainly doesn't sound particularly tolerant, but I don't have a position at this time on it.

Q And getting back to the governors -- I should have done the second -- but Governor Jindal, when he came out, there was a bit of a back-and-forth between him and Governor Malloy over the President's push for a minimum wage increase. And Governor Jindal said that this was basically the President waving the white flag of surrender and trying to create a minimum wage economy. Your response?

MR. CARNEY: I saw that. The President is trying to create a national economy where the minimum wage is \$10.10 an hour. Perhaps Governor Jindal prefers a Governor Jindal economy at \$7.25 an hour, but the President certainly doesn't; the American people certainly don't. Because that wage, a minimum wage that is far behind the times, both economically and otherwise, leaves hardworking Americans who work full-time in poverty. And it is a fundamental principle that this President embraces that if you work full-time, if you work hard, if you are responsible for yourself, if you're responsible for your family, your reward should not be poverty. It should be a living wage.

So that's the approach the President is taking. And that's the approach that governors across the country have been taking. It's the approach that millions of Americans, a majority of Americans, by far, support. And it's an approach that would be good for our middle class and good for our economy.

Q And just very quickly, on the President's phone call with President Putin -- did they have any common ground that they found during that phone call when it came to Ukraine?

MR. CARNEY: I think what we said, and what I repeated today, is that President Obama and President Putin both agreed that it was in everyone's interest to see the violence deescalate and for stability to be restored in Ukraine. I think it's pretty clear, as I was saying earlier, that it is not -- in our view -- in anyone's interest or any country's interest to see continued violence and bloodshed in Ukraine, to see instability in Ukraine. It is not in the West's interest, it's not in Russia's interest, it's certainly not in the interest of the people of Ukraine.

And so we note that there has been a de-escalation in violence, and we note that there has been movement towards a coalition government. There has been constitutional change, there has been movement towards early elections, and those are all positive developments. Now they need to continue on that path and make sure that a transitional government, a unity government that is multi-party and reflects input from all sectors of Ukraine is established so that Ukraine can begin to deal with some of the many challenges it faces.

Chris.

Q Thanks, Jay. As you know, Ugandan President, Yoweri Museveni, signed today an anti-gay bill that in some cases would penalize homosexual acts with life imprisonment. I saw your statement, but my question is, what details do you have about the impact of

signing that bill on U.S.-Uganda relations? The President earlier said signing that bill would complicate the relationship. Will that affect the \$400 million a year the United States gives to Uganda in foreign aid?

MR. CARNEY: I think I would point you to our statement, which I believe reflects our strong disagreement with the decision to sign that legislation. It's a sad day for Uganda. Instead of standing on the side of freedom, justice, and equal rights for its people, today, regrettably, Ugandan President took Uganda a step backward by signing into law legislation criminalizing homosexuality.

As President Obama has said, this law is more than an affront and a danger to the gay community in Uganda; it reflects poorly on the country's commitment to protecting the human rights of its people and will undermine public health, including efforts to fight HIV/AIDS. We will continue to urge the government of Uganda to repeal this abhorrent law and to advocate for the protection of the universal human rights of LGBT persons in Uganda and around the world. What I can tell you about steps the United States might take in response is that we are undertaking a review of our relationship with Uganda in light of this decision.

Q When will that review come to an end?

MR. CARNEY: I'm sorry?

Q When will that review be complete?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have a timetable for you, but we are undertaking a review.

Q And National Security Advisor Susan Rice -- you tweeted out last week I think that she had a conversation with President Museveni about the bill. I was wondering, were there any conversations with her and President Museveni? Or between President Obama and President Museveni, either immediately prior to or after the signing of that bill?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think that in that conversation, Ambassador Rice made clear our very strong view on this matter, and unfortunately and regrettably the President signed into law this legislation, which has caused the reaction that we gave today.

Yes, Wendell.

Q A couple of different issues, and one on Ukraine. A couple of Republicans in the House are calling for hearings or an investigation of problems Maryland and Oregon have had in their implementation of state exchanges for the Affordable Care Act, which they say indicates that federal money was wasted or worse. Do you have any reaction to this?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have a reaction to that specific report, Wendell. I'd simply say that the administration, HHS and CMS are focused on implementation of the Affordable Care Act, focused on making sure that the exchanges run at the federal level and those run at

the state level are functioning effectively on behalf of the millions and millions of Americans who have or want to avail themselves of the opportunity to acquire affordable, quality health insurance.

And we have seen, in the wake of the very problematic rollout of healthcare.gov and the fixes made to that website, sustained, substantial interest in making that acquisition -- getting the affordable, quality health insurance that is available now to millions of Americans, many of whom have never had that availability before or haven't had it for a long time.

So that's our focus. Obviously, the states that have run exchanges have had different experiences, many of them very positive. I would note that California I think last week said very, very early in the open enrollment period that they had surpassed their goal in terms of signups. And obviously, there are many other states where implementation has been very effective and robust.

Q Out at stakeout, there was a fairly sharp exchange between a couple of the governors over the Keystone XL pipeline. I wonder if that's reflected in the President's talks with the governors -- because we don't see much of opposition on environmental grounds to the Keystone XL Pipeline, but it was very obvious outside. Is that the case in the President's talks with governors?

MR. CARNEY: I think the President had conversations with governors around a whole host of issues, including the goal of raising the minimum wage nationally, but also the efforts undertaken by states to raise the minimum wage in those states and a whole host of other economic issues.

I think that -- I mean, I don't have a specific conversation related to the pipeline to read out to you except to say what I said in answer to Jim, that that process continues as it is supposed to over at the --

Q Why are you so reluctant to deal with specifics on that when Governor Fallin said very clearly the President promised a decision in a couple of months?

MR. CARNEY: Because this process -- first of all, I don't have a private conversation to read out to you. I don't know if --

Q Were you involved in the talks with the governors?

MR. CARNEY: Was I talking with Governor Fallin and --

Q Were you listening when the President -- were you in the room when the President was talking?

MR. CARNEY: -- I wasn't in the room for that, and I'm --

Q You were not?

MR. CARNEY: -- so I'm not going to -- well, for that conversation I didn't hear it, so I can't -- and even if I did I don't read out private conversations that the President has. What I can tell you is what he would tell you if he was standing --

Q A private conversation with all the nation's governors?

MR. CARNEY: You're telling me Governor Fallin said that he told her -- I don't know --

Q This happened at the Q&A. She said it happened at the Q&A.

MR. CARNEY: What I'm saying is I don't have a readout of that conversation. What I can tell you is that the --

Q Can you get back to us?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have a readout and won't have a readout of that conversation. What I can tell you is that there is a process being run by the State Department -- I know this is very upsetting to Republicans, but it was done this way under Republican administrations, more than one, and it's being run that way under this administration, which has run --

Q Jay, I'm not asking about the process and I'm not asking about what's upsetting to Republicans. I specifically asked you whether or not Democrats have deep environmental concerns about Keystone that they express in talks with the President.

MR. CARNEY: Again, I don't have readouts of those conversations. I'm sure anybody, Democrat or Republican or independent, who has concerns about Keystone on either issue can and has expressed them publicly to the press. And obviously this is an issue where there are strongly felt opinions on all sides.

But what I can tell you is that there's a process in place that has associated with it some timelines that include a period of 90 days -- up to 90 days where agencies have input and the public has input, and that's the process we're in now. You guys can figure it out from there, and you can figure it out by talking to the State Department.

Q Jay, just one other Keystone question in regards to the process. What's interesting about the two-month timeline that, again, the Governor mentioned in the context of this large discussion is that obviously a Nebraska court has thrown out the route through Nebraska, and clearly it's going to take some time for it to be resolved what route at all would happen in that case. Can you say just broadly speaking how that would affect the review process?

MR. CARNEY: I can't, because that again would be something that the State Department would have to assess. And obviously a local court decision in a state would be something that -- and its impact on the decision-making process and the review here would have to be assessed by the State Department, which is overseeing the review. So I think -- I don't have any insight into the decision or its effect.

Jared.

Q Thanks. Several of the Republican governors not here at the stakeout, but at their own press conference said they complained to the President about how some of the defense cuts were affecting the National Guard. And they said the President was dismissive in some ways of their complaints; said something to the effect -- I think Governor Haley said the President said something to the effect of, well, you've asked for spending cuts, now you've got them.

MR. CARNEY: Again, I don't have a -- I'm not going to read out pieces of the conversation the President had with governors, because as these questions themselves demonstrate, there were a lot of issues covered. And there are, when it comes to the defense budget, that's being addressed right now by the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. And they will have a great deal of detail about the recommendations they're making as part of the budgetary process, and I'm sure we'll have more to say about that after the budget comes out.

Dan and then April.

Q Thanks. Just a follow-up on the Uganda question. I've been checking through my email trying to find what the reaction was. I know Kerry last year reacted to the Nigeria gay law ban. Was there ever to your memory a review of aid issues for Nigeria after that was --

MR. CARNEY: I'll have to refer you to the State Department or USAID.

Q And in President Museveni's statement, quoted by AP, saying he wishes they would just just leave us alone where the gay law is a concern.

MR. CARNEY: Again, we're -- in light of this decision, the United States will undertake a review of its relationship with Uganda. But I don't have any outcomes to predict to you because we're undertaking the review now.

April.

Q I want to follow up on -- I have two topics on Jon and Jared's question. What assurances to the American public and to the military that with this latest round of cuts, this recommendation of cuts, that there will not be vulnerabilities for the American public as well as for the military?

MR. CARNEY: Again, April, this is being addressed I think in great detail by the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman. And upon release of the full budget, there will be a lot of charts and tables and numbers for people to review. But the overall approach taken fits into and reflects the President's defense strategy. For more details, I'd refer you to the Department of Defense, and understanding that when the full budget is released there will be more again at that time.

Q Okay. But since it fits into a strategy, does that mean, do I look into that as saying that there will not be vulnerabilities or there could be some? I mean, the definitive -- will there be vulnerabilities --

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think the Secretary of Defense is giving a definitive speech about it today.

Q And then on the other topic, on Uganda, you said that this administration is reassessing its relationship with Uganda. Well, is it reassessing its relationship with the other African nations, many that have bans on homosexuality? There are 31 Sub-Saharan African nations that have -- it's against the law for same-sex acts in those countries. And you have Senegal and Tanzania, where the President visited, that have bans on homosexuality. And you have Nigeria and Uganda at the topping of that list. So are you guys reassessing your relationships with all of these countries as well?

MR. CARNEY: I would have to refer you to the State Department on how those laws have affected our policy approaches and either led to reviews either underway or completed. What I can tell you is that the law in Uganda was signed, and our reaction I think is reflected in the statement we put out and in the fact that we're reviewing our relationship with Uganda in light of that decision.

Alexis.

Q Jay, this is a wonky budgety question that you probably don't have the answer to but -
- (laughter) --

MR. CARNEY: I can try.

Q The President is doing an event tomorrow --

MR. CARNEY: I usually go to Cheryl for that stuff.

Q I've got another one. (Laughter.)

Q So the President is doing an event tomorrow to focus on the hubs, and he would like to expand the number of hubs, and will in his budget propose that they include 45 of those he wants to include in the \$56 billion of additional spending -- so the rationale for expanding those hubs. Can we find out how much of that \$56 billion he's thinking that is needed -- he would ask Congress for to expand those hubs, so we can build that into our stories?

MR. CARNEY: I'll have to take the question. I don't know the answer to it. I think that I appreciate the question about tomorrow's event, because President Obama will announce new steps in partnership with the private sector to boost advanced manufacturing, strengthen our capabilities for defense, and attract the types of high-quality jobs that a growing middle class requires.

As you know, the President will announce two new manufacturing innovation institutes led by the Department of Defense, supported by a \$140-million federal commitment, combined with more than \$140 million in non-federal resources. Number one, a Detroit-area headquarter consortium of businesses and universities, with a focus on light-weight

and modern metals manufacturing. And two, a Chicago headquarter consortium of businesses and universities that will concentrate on digital manufacturing and design technologies.

Tomorrow's announcement is another step forward towards fulfilling the President's vision for a full national network, which you mention, of up to 45 manufacturing innovation institutes, which will also require legislation from Congress. The President will continue to work with Congress to get legislation passed while also continuing to make progress where he can to put boost these partnerships that are important to revitalizing our manufacturing sector.

Q Can you maybe by tomorrow --

MR. CARNEY: I think we have given some preview, but on the specifics of the budget -- the budget is coming out in just a couple of weeks -- I'm sure you'll be able to pore over that in a race with Cheryl to get all the details into print.

Cheryl, what do you have?

Q Well, I'll try another little one, which you may or may not know. But the President today -- been talking about his budget to the Governor, said that he was going to be proposing a new way to pay for -- I'm not sure exactly how this works -- wildfire suppression. Do you have any more details on that?

MR. CARNEY: I think there's been some reporting on it, but I can tell you this: Population growth near forest and rangelands, past management practices and a change in climate have dramatically increased wildfire risk and the resulting cost. Unfortunately, the current way that the government pays for fire suppression and preparedness costs is ill-suited to the increasing severity and cost of fires.

In recent years, including both of the last two years, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior have been forced to rely on short-sighted transfers from non-suppression programs in order to fund excess fire suppression activities. What that means is this undermines other important functions, including critical forest management and fire risk reduction activities. In other words, you're taking from funding that would help manage forests and reduce fires in the future in order to suppress existing fires.

So the President is calling for a fundamental change in how wildfire suppression is funded. The President's budget will support bipartisan congressional proposals to treat suppression of the most severe fire activity, including large fires that require emergency response, are near urban areas, or for abnormally active fire seasons as extraordinary costs that would be funded outside the discretionary budget caps much like we fund response to other natural disasters. So the answer is, yes, he is looking at a whole new way of making sure that we have the funding necessary to deal with these major fires.

Thanks very much, everybody.

Q Hey, Jay, is that what they're going to talk about with the western governors today?

MR. CARNEY: I think there's a discussion about drought in general. I don't think it's specific to that.

END

2:24 P.M. EST