

Press Gaggle by Press Secretary Jay Carney en route California, 6/6/12

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The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

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Aboard Air Force One
En Route California

10:08 A.M. EDT

MR. CARNEY: Welcome aboard Air Force One on what appears to be Caren Bohan's final trip as a White House correspondent for Reuters. We will miss you. More to come on that.

The President, as you know, is heading to California, where he'll have several campaign events today and this evening, and tomorrow will go to Nevada, where he will have an official event to talk about the urgent need to take steps to improve college affordability because there is a direct link between economic growth and education. And that is the case he will make tomorrow.

With that, I will take your questions.

Q Jay, did the President have any reaction to the Wisconsin vote last night? And what does he think it says about the mindset of voters right now and his own prospects in Wisconsin in November?

MR. CARNEY: I didn't have much of a conversation with the President about Wisconsin. I think my observation is that what you had was an incumbent governor in a repeat election that he had won once, in which he outspent his challenger by a magnitude of 7 or 8 to 1, with an enormous amount of outside corporate money and huge donations, and you got essentially the same result.

The President supported and stood by Tom Barrett, but I certainly wouldn't read much into yesterday's result beyond its effect on who's occupying the governor's seat in Wisconsin. I certainly read in some of the analysis by you and your colleagues that even among the electorate that voted yesterday in Wisconsin, voters substantially approved of the President's positions when it comes to who they felt had the best vision for protecting

and securing the middle class, and we certainly think -- I certainly think that the President's message about the steps we need to take to grow the economy and create jobs will resonate in Wisconsin.

Q Can you comment on President Clinton's remarks on CNBC? And it seems the President's tour with him was book-ended by some comments in which he differed with President Obama. Is this indicative of some tension, or is he just incapable of staying on message?

MR. CARNEY: I think you saw, Caren, last night Mr. McKenna, the spokesman for President Clinton, put out a statement that clarified what President Clinton was saying and made abundantly clear that there's no daylight between President Clinton and President Obama when it comes to, A, the need to extend the tax cuts for middle-class Americans and to not extend tax cuts for those making over \$250,000. That's the President's position -- President Obama's position -- and that's the position that President Clinton has as well, which he made clear at the event that he -- in which he joined President Obama the other night.

Q They both agree that the tax cuts for the wealthiest shouldn't be extended permanently, but President Clinton and now Larry Summers has said that the tax cuts should be extended temporarily.

MR. CARNEY: First of all, I don't believe that's what Larry Summers said. But I think what, again, President Clinton's spokesman said last night is that President Clinton supported the extension of all the tax cuts in 2010 as part of the deal that President Obama reached with congressional leaders at the end of 2010. He does not support the extension of the upper-income tax cuts, but he does, as President Obama does, support the permanent extension of tax cuts for the middle class.

I mean, let's be clear about something here. President Clinton, in 1993 -- and I'm old enough to say this from experience because I covered him -- passed a budget plan that included raising rates on upper-income Americans. At the time, Republicans in the House and the Senate, including the very leaders that we have today, decried that budget plan as one that would cause a recession, economic decline, increase deficits, all the worst possible outcomes. What happened? The longest peacetime expansion in American history, 22 million jobs, and a situation where the middle class saw its incomes rise, not just for the wealthiest Americans.

Let's fast-forward to the eight years prior to President Obama taking office. Those same Republican leaders supported policies that led to a situation where the record surpluses that President Clinton bequeathed on his successor were transformed into record deficits when President Obama took office. The prescription that the Republicans put forward has been tried and it was a woeful failure. And people understand that.

Q Jay, is the President's vow not to ever extend the Bush-era tax cuts on the wealthy again extend to a temporary extension aimed at getting some comprehensive agreement?

MR. CARNEY: President Obama has been clear about his position and it has not changed: We should not extend and he will not extend the tax cuts -- the Bush-era tax cuts for the wealthiest 2 percent of the American people. It's bad policy. It's bad for the economy, bad for our --

Q Even temporary?

MR. CARNEY: I would just point you to what the President has said and his position has not changed.

Q It sounds like you're leaving room --

MR. CARNEY: No, I'm not. I'm citing the President of the United States.

Q I just want to be clear, though -- so even temporarily he would not extend the Bush tax cuts?

MR. CARNEY: The President's position is that we absolutely should extend the tax cuts for the middle class; we should not extend and he will not extend tax cuts for the highest-income Americans.

The question you should be asking is, will the Republicans force a tax hike on 98 percent of tax-paying Americans because they're holding them hostage to tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans. That's the question. Because if the Republican --

Q But --

MR. CARNEY: No, Julie, it's not on the level -- what I'm saying, he will not -- could I be more clear? He will not support an extension of the upper-income Bush tax cuts. He could not be more clear.

Q What about Larry Summers' comments, though? Does he --

MR. CARNEY: Yes, I just saw that briefly in my BlackBerry before we took off. I think there's -- I'll have to get back to you on that. I do not believe that is what he said. Larry Summers does not support an extension of high-end tax cuts.

Q Actually, what President Clinton said is that even though he doesn't want it, it's probably the best thing to do right now. And he also said there's a recession. I'm wondering whether President Obama agrees with that.

MR. CARNEY: Could you please look at what President Clinton's spokesman clarified? President Clinton -- you can cherry-pick the words that he said. He also referred --

Q I'm not cherry-picking.

MR. CARNEY: -- to the current expansion. We understand -- you know. You work for a news service that does a lot of economic analysis -- expansion means economic growth that is the opposite of recession -- as Matt McKenna clearly made abundantly clear to

those who read his statement. President Clinton referred to the expansion -- we're obviously not in a recession. He talked about coming out of the worst recession since the Great Depression. Expansion is the opposite of recession.

Q What they both said -- as I read both of their comments, President Clinton's actual comments and Larry Summers' comments, to say that although as a policy matter that wasn't their preference to extend it, that given the context of what's going on now, it's probably the best thing to do for the economy. And I'm wondering, does --

MR. CARNEY: Look at what President Clinton said. He said he is for extending the middle-class tax cuts; he is for not -- he is against extending the high-income tax cuts. He said that in the CNBC interview.

Q He said --

MR. CARNEY: Beyond that, Margaret, I'll --

Q -- probably the best thing to do right now.

MR. CARNEY: Again, do you even know what the pronoun he's referring to there, or the article is referring to there? He made clear specifically in that interview that he's for extending the middle-class tax cuts, he opposes extending the high-income tax cuts. Speculating about what position the Republicans might take is one thing. What he supports and what President Obama supports is another.

Q Do you happen to know if George W. Bush urged the President to extend those tax cuts while they were together? Did they discuss that?

MR. CARNEY: I do not think they had that conversation.

Q Can I ask you about the California fundraisers, in particular? The President is getting a lot of heat over cavorting with showbiz types. Rush Limbaugh is referring to him as Barack Kardashian, can you believe. What is your response to that? (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: Two words -- Donald Trump. Next question.

Q Jay, on Syria. Secretary Geithner is -- seemed to (inaudible) sanctions this morning in Washington. He said in his prepared remarks that if Syria doesn't take some action to back the Assad plan that the U.S. and other countries are going to have to probably take Chapter 7 action at the U.N. And he was very forward-looking at that, sort of leaning towards that option. Is that something that's become more likely, and is that something that's being discussed more urgently at the White House?

MR. CARNEY: All options with regards to Syria are being discussed and the need to take urgent action, as I talked about this week, is very much on the minds of policymakers in the administration and at the United Nations and elsewhere. I don't have any specific potential actions to preview for you, but I would certainly refer you to Secretary Geithner's statements.

And we are constantly looking for ways to work with our international partners to further isolate and pressure Assad, to get him to cease the brutal campaign against the Syrian people, and to allow for the political transition that's already underway to be completed.

Q Does the U.S. see Russia as moving more towards the U.S. in terms of being willing to take action on Syria? And can you tell us a little bit more about what Secretary Clinton is doing today in terms of reports we've seen about her meeting with Syrian rebel leaders?

MR. CARNEY: I would have to refer you to the State Department on that. In regards to Russia, we've been very clear about our view that Russia can and should play a constructive role on Syria in bringing about the political transition in Syria that is so necessary and that the Syrian people so deserve.

We are glad that Russia is seeking broad international engagement on Syria and we hope that it will lead to progress. And we're continuing our consultations with the Russians on Syria.

Q Can you give us any updates on what's going on with discussions with European leaders and deliberations over the crisis?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have any specific updates for you, except that we continue to have those consultations. The President is very engaged, continues to be updated and briefed on the situation. I think what I said yesterday remains true today, that our view is the Europeans have the capacity to act. They have taken some important steps, but more needs to be done.

There is a -- it seems to be the case the Europeans are acting with a sense of urgency, and we view that as a good thing. And we hope for expedited action in coming weeks, including in the lead-up to the important G20 meeting in Mexico. I don't have any more specifics for you on the process, which obviously is a European process that involves European decision-making.

Q You read out a call with Prime Minister Cameron yesterday. Have there been any other calls? Has he spoken recently to Chancellor Merkel?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have any other foreign leader calls to read out to you. I think as I mentioned yesterday, it certainly is the case that he has conversations both with leaders -- foreign leaders and congressional leaders and others that we don't always read out. But I don't have any to read out to you beyond the Cameron call.

Q Can you tell us a little bit more about tomorrow, what he'll talk about in Las Vegas? And also, will he personally address these Republican proposals? They say that they have ways that he can pay for the student loans. Is he going to address that personally?

MR. CARNEY: I don't want to get into too much detail about the President's remarks. I think we'll probably have more on that for you later. Broadly, the President wants to talk about college affordability. We had discussions about that yesterday in the sessions the Vice President led with Secretary Duncan and Director Cordray.

The President views education as very much an integral part of our economic growth and building the foundation we need for competing in the 21st century. And I think that he'll address the overall need for Congress to act, both on specific measures related to making education in college more affordable, but also more broadly, on a host of initiatives that the President has put forward that would directly and quickly have a positive impact on economic growth and job creation.

As I said yesterday, the initiatives the President put forward in the American Jobs Act that Congress refused to pass not coincidentally addressed some of the very weaknesses, or weak sectors, that we see in our economy as it has recovered -- construction, layoffs among teachers and first responders. Had Republicans in Congress not refused to pass those measures, outside independent economists say we would have added an additional 1 million jobs since the fall. Obviously, that would have had a very positive impact on the jobs picture today.

That's why -- we know what we need to do. We know what measures have positive impact on economic growth and job creation. Republicans talk about the measures they passed through the House that addressed our economic challenges, but outside economists say that's not right. Giving substantial tax cuts to hedge fund managers and partners in law firms might be good for those individuals, but nobody estimates -- nobody credible in the economics field estimates that that would have an immediate impact on growth and job creation. We need to act now to help our economy now.

Q Do you have any reaction to McCain's comments this morning about the -- this morning when he said that there were leaks from the highest levels in the White House and that was unacceptable? Do you have any reaction to his comments?

MR. CARNEY: We are not going to comment on any of the specific information contained in the articles referenced by Senator McCain. This administration takes all appropriate and necessary steps to prevent leaks of classified information or sensitive information that could risk ongoing counterterrorism or intelligence operations. Any suggestion that this administration has authorized intentional leaks of classified information for political gain is grossly irresponsible.

Q On Wisconsin, I know we sort of touched on this, but does President Obama plan, either for policy or campaign purposes, to spend any more time in Wisconsin now in the coming days or weeks?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have any travel to preview for you here. For questions about campaign travel, you might check with the campaign.

Q -- Wisconsin?

MR. CARNEY: I have none to announce for you. The President, I'm sure as part of his campaign, will travel around the country to many, many places -- many states.

Q But there's not a concern that he has been personally substantially weakened in Wisconsin as a result of last night?

MR. CARNEY: I would just refer you to the articles I read that said even in the electorate that voted yesterday, which will be -- which is substantially different from the electorate in Wisconsin that will vote in November, those voters yesterday said they believed that the President's policies are the right policies to protect the middle class. And I would refer you to the campaign for more details.

Q Do you think that the outcome in Wisconsin shows that the labor union movement has been weakened substantially?

MR. CARNEY: I would leave it to others to make -- to analyze that. Again, I would point to the factors that I read about in the press, which include the enormous spending differential. It's pretty hard to overcome when you're outspent 7 or 8 to 1.

Q Jay, Jon Bon Jovi was on that New York flight. Can you give us a sense of anyone interesting who's on this flight, be they celebs or maybe members of Congress? Who else is on the plane?

MR. CARNEY: Marvin Nicholson is here.

Q Awesome. (Laughter.)

MR. CARNEY: I don't know that we have any guests. I don't believe we have any guests on this flight.

Q And quickly, there's been a lot of talk in California about the potential for -- theoretical potential for Democrats to gain House representation in California. Is that going to be any kind of a focus of the President's visit in term of who he meets with, who he talks to at these events, and does he think that there's any prospect for that?

MR. CARNEY: Any prospect for what?

Q For Democratic gains in November in California.

MR. CARNEY: I haven't talked to him about that. I don't believe that's the focus of his campaign travel to California today. I can't preclude that he won't be asked about that, but I don't know.

Q Can you give us a preview of what he's going to talk about at the gala -- the LGTB gala?

MR. CARNEY: I think he'll talk about the same things he talks about when he addresses supporters and, in general, the American people, about his vision for moving this country forward, the steps that we've taken to pull us out of the worst recession since the Great Depression, and the steps we need to take to continue the road -- to continue down the road to recovery. I don't think you'll -- you won't hear much variance from those fundamental themes, but I don't have any more specific comments to make to preview his remarks.

Q -- are there steps that he'll take to see gay marriage legalized nationwide?

MR. CARNEY: I think the President made clear in his interview with Robin Roberts from ABC that what his personal views are. He also made clear that he believes it's a state issue, and that hasn't changed.

Q Jay, could I just go back to Todd's question? Setting aside the Kardashians and Rush Limbaugh, does the President worry at all that by spending a lot of time with celebrities and at these glitzy fundraisers that it sends the wrong message at a time of economic distress?

MR. CARNEY: Caren, you should know -- and I know you do -- better than anyone -- and I am making this observation as someone who just consumes the news -- that the difference between President Obama's support, financial support and his opponent's is stark, but not in the way that you describe. The fundamental difference is President Obama has vast numbers of small donors who support his campaign. Again, this is something for the campaign to address. I'm just making this observation because I've read it in the newspapers and in the wires.

That is not the case for the Republican nominee. And I think that the fact that the President enjoys that kind of support speaks to what his policy priorities are. He's out there fighting for the middle class. He's out there fighting to protect the middle class and help it expand, to create an economic foundation that will allow the middle class to thrive, as opposed to the situation the middle class experienced in the first decade of this century under the previous President where average incomes for the middle class stagnated or declined while average incomes for the wealthiest Americans increased dramatically.

The President is happy to have the support that he has, but the bedrock foundation of his support are the millions and millions of Americans who believe in his vision for this country's future and believe that he has their backs.

Q The President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta said today that some of the ongoing economic developments like the weak jobs report could actually help make a case for more stimulus. And I'm wondering whether President Obama also thinks that that's true, and whether he's hoping that the Federal Open Market Committee does recommend more stimulus.

MR. CARNEY: You know I don't discuss matters involving the Fed. I'm not aware of the report that you mentioned. The President believes that Congress should pass measures that would have a direct, positive impact on our economy and on jobs right away. He has proposed a number of such initiatives and Republicans have opposed them, largely because they refuse to ask oil and gas companies to give up their subsidies or hedge fund managers to give up a tax loophole that allows them to pay income at a rate far lower -- income tax at a rate far lower than you and I and everybody else standing here pays.

That's a choice. It's the wrong choice. And it's the wrong choice for the American people. So however you would describe the President's initiatives -- which were paid for in the American Jobs Act -- those initiatives to put teachers back to work, construction workers

on the job would have a positive effect on economic growth and job creation right away. Congress should act. They should not sit on their hands. They were sent here -- sent there to Washington to get things done for the American people.

So the President is going to continue to make that case in the days and weeks ahead.

Q Can I ask you one fundraiser question about tonight? The President is going to be serenaded by Darren Criss. He's going to be in Ryan Murphy's house. When was the last time he watched "Glee"? How often does he watch it? Does he have a favorite character?

MR. CARNEY: I haven't heard the President talk about that. I think he has referenced some of the shows he does watch, so I don't know -- I don't know the answer to your question.

Q Is he a fan?

MR. CARNEY: I don't know the answer to your question.

You know, I have to note, going back to this issue that we were talking about before, that you have to admire the sheer gall it takes to argue, as some have, I've noticed, when it comes to responsible fiscal stewardship that the very "architect" -- and I put that in quotes -- who served a President who inherited budget surpluses projected to last into the future, and then eight years later delivered the largest deficits in history, is now arguing that those ideas, the policies that created that situation are superior than the President's policies. And I know you guys see that for what it is, but it is remarkable.

As you've heard me talk about before, in the previous administration we had two unpaid-for tax cuts, two unpaid-for wars -- those tax cuts overwhelmingly benefited the wealthiest Americans while the middle class got stiffed -- the Medicare prescription drug benefit that was unpaid for, and those policy choices resulted in the very structural deficit that we deal with today -- take that as a gift, then along with that gift give cascading financial crisis and the worst recession since the Great Depression. And that's what this President had to deal with. It's a funny day.

Q Thank you.

MR. CARNEY: Thank you.

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10:36 A.M. EDT