


# Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 9/27/16

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MR. EARNEST: Well, well, well. (Laughter.) Where to start?

Q Are you talking about last night maybe?

MR. EARNEST: Since I'm not sure where to start, Darlene, why don't you decide where we'll start?

Q Do you have any observations from the President about the debate last night? I mean, did he keep at least one ear on all or part of it?

MR. EARNEST: As predicted, the President did have the debate on television last night in the Indian Treaty Room of the residence while he was reviewing his nightly to-do list.

The President had an opportunity to talk about this with Ryan Seacrest just a little bit earlier this afternoon. But, look, his main takeaway is that the candidate that he strongly supports is the candidate that performed quite strongly in the debate last night. She made a very powerful case, particularly at the beginning, for building on the economic progress this country has made in digging out of the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. She laid out a strategy that's focused on cutting taxes for middle-class families, asking those at the top of the income scale to pay a little bit more, closing tax loopholes that only benefit the wealthy and the well-connected, focusing on investments in early childhood education and college education, growing our economy from the middle out.

That is precisely the economic strategy that President Obama has pursued, and that is the strategy that has yielded the longest streak of consecutive, monthly job growth numbers in our nation's history. And we saw in the Census data that was released just a couple of weeks ago that in 2015, the median income in this country rose higher than it ever has -- at least on record -- in one year, and that poverty declined as much in one year as it has in about 50 years.

So the President has pursued a strategy similar to the one that Secretary Clinton advocated, and our country has benefitted enormously from it. And he certainly was pleased to hear her deliver such a persuasive case about why that's a strategy that is worth building on.

Q What did he think when the subject turned to Donald Trump's taxes and his refusal to release them, and he bragged about how it made him smarter to not pay any federal income taxes? I mean, is there any reaction from the President to that? Or even from you? I know you said you don't want to stand up there every day and react to everything that Donald Trump says, but --

MR. EARNEST: Well, the President is also in a position where he has a little bit more latitude to respond to these kinds of declarations. So I think what I'll just leave it to is the President is somebody who, when he was running for President, made a conscious decision to abide by the standard that's been observed for more than a generation, which is he made a decision to release his tax returns. And even while serving in office as President, he continues to release his tax returns on an annual basis. And I'm not aware of any federal law requiring it, but if every presidential candidate in both parties dating back to the '70s has done it, then it certainly is something that voters can expect. And the President believes that that kind of transparency is good for the process and good for voters as they make a really important decision about the future of the country.

Q On one other topic, Senate Democrats are threatening to block the CR this afternoon because it doesn't include money for Flint, Michigan, which is an issue that you've said has concerned the President. Does the White House support Senate Democrats in their stated attempt to block this bill this afternoon?

MR. EARNEST: Well, the President has made clear for months that Congress needs to act to provide resources to this community of Flint. The President had an opportunity to visit that community back in the spring, and he met with the mayor, and he talked to some residents, he talked to federal officials who were responsible for coordinating the response. And what he saw was a community that had been let down by their government. And we've been advocating for months that Congress has a responsibility to step forward and provide resources to assist that community in their recovery.

Now, the executive branch, the administration has certainly fulfilled our responsibilities. The President mobilized FEMA; FEMA handed out hundreds of thousands of liters of water. We have seen ramped-up assistance to meet the basic health care needs of children that potentially were negatively affected by drinking the water. And there's been an effort to try to address some of these problems at the community level. But there is a significant investment in infrastructure in Flint that's required to address this problem, and Congress has a responsibility to step forward and provide those resources. The President has been calling on them to do that for months.

So included in the proposed text -- at least based on what I've been told -- are steps that Congress has taken to provide relief to families in Louisiana and Maryland and other places that have been hit by historic flooding. Those are communities that need to be

rebuilt as well, and the President was among the first to call on Congress to act to provide resources to Louisiana. And the President believes that Congress should do the same thing for Flint and other communities that are dealing with similar challenges.

Q Republicans say, though, that they will take care of Flint, Michigan, in separate legislation. So does the White House not believe Republicans when they say that that's how they'll take care of that?

MR. EARNEST: Well, based on -- as I have acknowledged on many occasions standing here, I am certainly no expert in the legislative procedure, but based on what I understand of the situation, there is some funding for Flint included in the Senate's version of the water resources bill. The House version does not include funding for -- the House version of the water resources bill does not include funding for Flint.

Now, this is a little ironic because the Speaker of the House says he opposes adding funding for Flint to the continuing resolution and believes that it should be handled in the Water Resources bill. But it's not included in the Water Resources bill that advancing through the House. And then he has the nerve to suggest that it's Democrats who are the ones causing problems. So I guess a little clarity about Republicans' commitment to addressing this issue is needed. And after waiting for six or seven months for this funding to come through, that clarification would be eagerly welcomed by the White House, but most importantly, by the people in Flint.

Roberta?

Q You talked about the economic case that Secretary Clinton laid out, but I'm wondering -- last night we saw her on the offensive on issues like race and the birther issue and temperament. And I'm wondering what the President said to you about what he thought about the tone of the debate, and some of the attacks that we saw.

MR. EARNEST: Well, listen, the President has made the observation on a number of occasions that there's a tradition in this country of a pretty confrontational brand of politics. And I think what the American people are looking for in their leaders are people who are tough enough to enter the arena and stand up for what they believe in, and to make a forceful case for what they believe in and to respond to even some tough criticism of the priorities and their agenda. And the President certainly engaged in that process over the last eight years or so, and he's got the scars to prove it.

So, look, I know that there was an expression from at least one candidate last night who was concerned that people weren't being nice to him. But, look, this is supposed to be a vigorous debate, and when you consider the stakes in this election, the President would anticipate and expect a tough debate on the issues. I think that's what we saw last night.

Q And out of curiosity, why did the White House -- or why did he choose to go on Ryan Seacrest to talk about the debate and give his response or reaction to it? What was sort of the decision behind that audience?

MR. EARNEST: Well, the reason that the President wanted to go on the Ryan Seacrest show today is that today is National Voter Registration Day, and the President devoted most of his appearance on that program to encouraging people to register to vote. The President also taped an interview with Steve Harvey that will air tomorrow where he made a similar case.

So that's why he did those radio shows. But it's not surprising -- or at least it wasn't a surprise to anybody at the White House -- that he was asked by both those hosts for a reaction to the debate last night.

Q And just quickly on the Yahoo hack. I'm wondering whether the White House has concerns or questions about whether the company waited too long to notify users about when it happened.

MR. EARNEST: Well, I will say that I cannot speak to the details in terms of what Yahoo has indicated occurred in the context of this hack. But I'd refer to my colleagues at the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security who have jurisdiction here and may be able to provide you with some greater clarity about what they've concluded.

Chris.

Q Josh, on the President's schedule today is a fundraiser in D.C. for the Hillary Victory Fund that's an LGBT and allies discussion. I'm sure the President has the goal of raising a lot of money at the event, but does he have any sort of achievement in mind in terms of the message he wants to convey to those in attendance.

MR. EARNEST: Well, Chris, this is a rather small event, so it's not open. The President will spend his time in discussion with those who are attending the event and talking about something you've heard the President talk about a lot before, which is, the stakes in this election; how important it is for Democrats to stand up for our values and fight in support of a candidate that's seeking to advance them. And the President's already spoken a lot publicly about his strong support for Secretary Clinton, and I would expect him to reiterate that pitch once again at the event this afternoon.

Q One of the things that we did not see during the Obama administration was the appointment of an openly-LGBT Cabinet member. If one of the attendance members brought that up or any other enhancement of LGBT rights that they wanted to have done, how do you imagine the President would respond?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Chris, I think the President's quite proud of his record of ensuring that there are senior officials in his administration -- let me say it this way. The President is quite proud of appointing senior officials in his administration that reflect the diversity of the country. And that's true when you consider the President's White House staff. It's true when you consider senior officials who serve at agencies across the government. It's also true when you consider the appointments that the President's made to the federal

bench. And whether you evaluate that diversity based on race, or religion, or sexual orientation, the President's record surpasses that of his predecessors. And he is quite proud of that legacy.

He also believes that's a legacy that can be built on. And I'll let Secretary Clinton speak to what her plans are for the kinds of appointments that she would choose to make if she were elected President.

April.

Q Josh, last night, many people are hands-down saying that Hillary Clinton was the victor, who include people from the Republican Party. But at the same time, with this victory, does the White House still believe that there is still an open window for Donald Trump to still possibly become number 45?

MR. EARNEST: The President believes it's important for people all across the country not to be complacent when the stakes are so high. And that's why the President was encouraging people to register to vote today on National Voter Registration Day. It's also why the President is going to spend a good portion of his October encouraging people all across the country to get out to the polls and make their voices heard on this Election Day. And the President believes that that's an important thing to do.

Q Vice President Biden used some very strong language today, talking about some of Donald Trump's comments from last night, particularly when it came to Donald Trump saying it was a good business deal when there was a housing crisis in America -- he was benefitting from people's problems. The Vice President used the word, h-e-double hockey sticks. So did the President feel -- well, I don't want to press it in the briefing room --

MR. EARNEST: I appreciate your restraint. (Laughter.)

Q Thank you. Did the President feel as upset about that someone who potentially could be in the Oval Office has profited off of people's pain -- the American public's pain?

MR. EARNEST: Well, listen, I think the President believes that that is a worthy question for voters to ask themselves. President Obama's career in public life is different than that. President Obama had spent the early stages of his career as a community organizer, helping people in communities that were facing significant economic headwinds protect their community. And whether or not that is -- so that's what made the President an advocate for expanded health care access and affordable housing programs and stronger education programs. And the President worked closely with faith-based organizations, helped citizens organize and petition their government.

So when faced with these kinds of challenges in the past, President Obama wasn't seeking a profit, he was trying to help people. And he's pursued that same kind of approach even as the leader of the free world. And many of the policies that he's been focused on as President of the United States, particularly early in his presidency, were about ensuring that middle-class families would get a fair shake and a fair shot. That's why he fought so hard to create the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau -- the only financial regulator in

Washington, D.C. that has a mission statement focused on consumers and middle-class families. That's why the President fought so hard to expand access to quality, affordable health insurance for every American. That's why the President's focus in improving the economy has been focused on growing the economy from the middle out. That's been his approach throughout his career, and he believes that's an approach worth building on.

Secretary Clinton has got a similar story to tell when you consider her professional career. I'll let her talk about that. But I think it is certainly appropriate -- and I think the President made this clear in the context of his presidential -- when he was a candidate on the ballot, he made clear that he intended to pursue a different approach or pursue an approach different than the one that was advocated last night by the Republican nominee, but an approach that's consistent with President Obama's focus on middle-class families and those families that are trying to get into the middle class that he's demonstrated throughout his career.

Q Lastly, when both candidates were asked about how to heal the racial divide that has been quite evident in this election cycle, Donald Trump said it was about law and order, and then he goes into talking about stop-and-frisk. What does this administration feel about that -- particularly when you started not long ago having conversations on race and he's talking racial profiling and law and order -- what's the thought about that?

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, as was noted during the debate, there are a lot of constitutional questions that are raised by that policy, and there's even a federal judge who weighed in and made clear that that stop-and-frisk policy that was used in New York is one that was inconsistent with the Constitution. As I've observed before -- it's a little strange to hear somebody who claims to feel so passionately about protecting the constitutional right to bear arms treat the constitutional right protecting against illegal search and seizure so cavalierly.

So President Obama believes that both of those constitutional rights are worth protecting, and that certainly is consistent with his approach to these kinds of issues. I think what's also true is -- and I'll leave it to officials in New York to speak to this -- but since that stop-and-frisk policy was ended, they've seen an improvement in their crime rates. So can you draw real, firm conclusions about the impact of that policy based on just a year or two of data? I'll leave that to the experts. But those are the facts and I think they're worth considering as you evaluate the approach that's being advocated by at least one candidate for President.

Olivier.

Q Thanks, Josh. Is the President preparing to send more American troops to Iraq or Syria?

MR. EARNEST: Olivier, I don't have any announcements at this point about additional commitment of resources to our efforts against ISIL in Iraq and in Syria, but you've heard the President speak many times about his approach to these issues, which is, every time the President gets his national security team together to discuss our ongoing strategy

against ISIL, they have a discussion about which aspects of that strategy are making the most progress. And we've enjoyed some important progress in recent weeks. There is additional progress that's been made on the ground against ISIL, both in Iraq and in Syria. The noose around the ISIL leadership in Mosul and in Raqqa continues to tighten. That's a testament to the efforts of the forces on the ground that are supported by the United States and our coalition partners.

We've also made progress in applying pressure to the ISIL leadership. And earlier this month -- or over the last month, there were a couple of strikes that were taken by the United States that took two senior ISIL officials off the battlefield. These are two individuals who had a central role in plotting ISIL's external operations. That doesn't just enhance the national security of the United States; that also makes it harder for ISIL to carry out attacks in Europe and other places where the United States is invested in our allies' national security.

But as the President has these conversations with his national security team, they aren't just looking to see which aspects of that strategy are showing progress. The President regularly asks, could we make more progress if we devote additional resources to that effort? And when the answer to that question is yes, the President has worked very closely with his team to find those resources and to devote them to that effort in a timely fashion.

So, I don't have any announcements at this point, but we'll keep you posted if that changes.

Q One more. There's a Daily Beast report that the senior -- Special Envoy to Syria Michael Ratney was told two days before the latest airstrikes against the so-called White Helmets in Aleppo that an attack was coming. Can you confirm that the U.S. government at that level had advance warning?

MR. EARNEST: Olivier, I have not seen that report, but why don't I check on it and we will follow up with you directly.

Cheryl.

Q Thanks, Josh. Two quick topics. On the CR, if Congress can't get an agreement by the end of the week, will the President sign a two- or three-day extension if needed?

MR. EARNEST: I haven't heard that option be floated at this point. The President certainly is not interested in seeing the government funding lapse, but this is not an executive branch responsibility. This is a legislative branch responsibility. And Republicans have a substantial majority in both the House and the Senate. It is the responsibility of House and Senate Republican leaders to pass a bipartisan budget bill that arrives on the President's desk in time for him to sign it before funding runs out on September 30th.

So I recognize that right now Republicans in the Congress are scrambling to try to figure out how to get this done. Some of that may be attributable to the fact they took seven weeks off earlier this year. Maybe that's time that would have been better spent actually

focusing on putting together a responsible bipartisan budget proposal.

Q And one other thing. Today, the D.C. Circuit is hearing oral arguments in the Clean Power Plan. Can you outline any of the administration's arguments?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I'll leave it to my colleagues at the Department of Justice to make the legal case to the D.C. Circuit. Obviously, we've got a lot of confidence in the case that they will make. The administration was acting on a strong legal and technical foundation in issuing -- or putting forward the policy that the administration announced last year. And the President is convinced that this is a policy that is important to living up to the commitments that we've made in the context of cutting carbon pollution in a way that will be good for the long-term health of the planet.

The President is also convinced that this policy is actually going to end up being good for the U.S. economy. We know that investments in clean energy have created tens -- or supported tens of thousands of jobs all across the country, and we've had success in significantly expanding the amount of energy that is produced through wind and solar and other renewable forms.

I'll also point out that there are significant public health consequences for this policy. And our scientists estimate that implementing this policy to reduce carbon pollution by 32 percent by 2030 would avoid 3,000 premature deaths, 90,000 childhood asthma attacks, and eliminate 300,000 missed work- and schooldays each year by 2030. So there are a lot of important reasons why the President has prioritized this approach to cutting carbon pollution, and the administration is quite confident in the legal power of the arguments that we'll make before the D.C. Circuit about why it's within the scope of the President's authority to make that kind of policy decision.

Margaret.

Q Josh, the Senate does appear poised to override that presidential veto of the 9/11 bill that would allow the families to sue Saudi Arabia. Why do you think that it's this particular issue that has allowed the first presidential veto override?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think there are a couple reasons for that. The first is, we have not seen the United States Congress be particularly effective at passing legislation. The President hasn't issued that many vetoes, period. And I made this observation on a number of occasions. Over the last couple of years, we haven't seen Speaker Boehner or Speaker Ryan work effectively with Leader McConnell to pass legislation that advances the conservative agenda.

It's not as if in the last year and a half you've seen Congress pass bills that would cut taxes for American businesses or cut spending -- cut government spending -- or increase funding for the military, or any of the other conservative priorities that they spend a lot of time talking about but not actually legislating. So the fact that the President hasn't vetoed that many bills I think is a pretty damning indictment of the effectiveness of Republicans in Congress. That's just a fact.



I think that is why it's not just Democrats who are dissatisfied with the performance of the United States Congress. There are plenty of Republicans who are pretty unhappy. They cast votes. They elected a Republican majority to the United States Congress and what do they have to show for it? Not very much.

So that's part of it. I think the other part of it is that you have seen Democrats on Capitol Hill who work very effectively to try to champion ideas that the President supports as well, and having a lot of Democratic unity in fighting for some of the priorities that the President cares about has allowed us to make some progress in areas that are Democratic priorities. So one example of that would be the budget agreement that they reached last year, essentially a two-year budget agreement that, the hope had been that that would prevent any budget drama this year. We'll see if that remains to be true.

But the President has strong views about this legislations and the impact that it would have not just on the U.S. relationship with Saudi Arabia, but with countries around the world. It would increase the risk that is facing our servicemembers and our diplomats and our intelligence professionals. And that is a view that President has stated on a number of occasions.

It is a view that has been -- it's an argument that was also made by -- in a letter -- by President George W. Bush's attorney general and his national security advisor. They also have significant concerns about impact that this bill would have on our servicemembers and our diplomats. And some of America's closest allies, including in Europe, have raised concerns about this bill entering into law.

So the President feels strongly about this. He's also aware of how challenging the politics are, and --

Q How challenging the politics are because some Democrats are helping to make this happen, and balking at what the White House is asking them to do. Don't you think there's something very emotional on this particular issue that is getting Democratic support to reject what the White House is asking them to do?

MR. EARNEST: Oh, listen, I don't deny the political and emotional power of these arguments. But, look, the President has spoken powerfully on a number of occasions about the sacrifice that's been made by the families of those in the United States who lost loved ones on 9/11. And the resilience that they have shown has served as a continuing inspiration to the President personally.

So I think what's also true is the politics of this are tough, but, look, nobody questions the President's commitment to protecting the country and protecting the interest of America's 9/11 families, primarily because he's the President that ordered the mission against Osama Bin Laden. He's the President who fought hard to ensure that 9/11 first responders and the rescue workers at Ground Zero got the access to health care that they need when they risked their lives to try to save their fellow Americans but also to rebuild that site.

So, look, the President is able to take the political heat because he's got the strong track record on this issue. But again, I'll let individual members of Congress speak for themselves. We have heard from Democrats and Republicans who have indicated some openness to the position that we've articulated. They've expressed some concerns about the potential impact of this bill. We'll just have to see if those private concerns end up in the public votes that they cast.

Q Do you think that you might have enough votes to block this from happening?

MR. EARNEST: I'm not going to make any predictions about a congressional outcome here. I'm just giving you a sense of the kind of argument that the Obama administration is making to members of Congress. This is the same argument that was included in the letter from a bipartisan group of national security experts, including President George W. Bush's attorney general and his national security advisor. This is the argument that we heard from some of our closest allies. This is also, by the way, consistent with the argument that we saw in a letter today from Jeffrey Immelt, the chief executive at GE, who raised significant concerns about the further erosion of this concept of sovereign immunity and the impact it could have on American businesses.

So there are widespread, longstanding concerns that have been articulated, and the question remains whether or not members of Congress will demonstrate the courage of their convictions and vote their conscience.

Q Two administrations have now said that there is no link between senior Saudi officials and the terrorists who carried out these attacks. So given that, and you standing by those findings, why do you think it is such a risk that if these cases make it to court that they could find otherwise?

MR. EARNEST: Our concern is not rooted in a prediction about the outcome of these individual court cases. I have no idea what judges will ultimately conclude, I haven't reviewed the evidence that the families or others may present. Our concern is rooted in the erosion of this foundational principle of international law.

And the concern is rooted in the idea that the United States of America is more deeply engaged in more countries around the world than any other country in the world. So carving out additional exceptions to sovereign immunity puts the United States at greater risk than any other country in the world. By virtue of the fact that we are more engaged around the globe than any other country in the world. That's the concern that the President has. And, again, it's not just the President who's making this argument. It is national security experts in both parties, leaders in the private sector, and the leaders of some of our closest allies are expressing the same concerns.

Q What do you say to the families who, in their view, believe the White House is standing in the way of justice?

MR. EARNEST: Listen, the President is very sympathetic to the argument that the 9/11 families make. And the President is very interested in making sure that those families understand that this administration stands with them. This is an administration that

sought justice for their loved ones. This is the administration that fought to ensure that our rescue workers got the health care that they deserve. And this is the President who, every year, has paid tribute to those who were lost on 9/11.

So the President understands the passion that's on both sides of this issue. It's the President's responsibility to consider the broader impact that this bill, as it's currently written, would have on our national security, and our standing around the world, and on our diplomats and our servicemembers who represent the United States around the world.

Q One final question, different topic -- Syria. Any update on any National Security Council meetings, White House meetings about the siege underway in Aleppo and whether there's going to be any intervention?

MR. EARNEST: I don't have any update on any discussions. But, obviously, this is a situation that continues to be of deep concern by the President and his national security team and it's something that we're going to continue to closely monitor.

James.

Q Josh, thank you. I have three issues I think we can knock out fairly quickly before we return to a fourth that may take a bit longer, being the debate. First, just on JASTA, my understanding is that the Senate Republican leadership has indicated that action in that chamber on this measure will begin tomorrow or thereabouts.

MR. EARNEST: Yes.

Q If that is your understanding as well, is that occasioning any intensification of the lobbying effort by the White House and/or by the President?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I don't have any specific presidential conversations to talk about at this point, but the administration and the White House remain engaged in making our case to members of Congress and will continue to do that as long as we have the option to do so.

Q On the event today, concerning outreach to millennials, if one studied the attendee list, one saw that among those in attendance is an executive associated with the program Funny or Die. And I just wonder if you could provide for us a bit of the strategic communications thinking that goes into the invitation to a White House summit of somebody associated with a program whose name is Funny or Die?

MR. EARNEST: This is an outlet that has had a lot of success in building a large audience among young people. And the President has gone to places like Buzzfeed and even Between Two Ferns to make a persuasive case the young people should consider signing up for health care through the marketplaces, so it makes sense to engage as many organizations as we can who have that kind of audience. And we certainly welcomed the constructive engagement that we got from Funny or Die.

Q Besides the simple practicality of seeking out such individuals and venues for outreach to millennials, does it say anything about the state of this younger generation that they may be getting their news through a place like Funny or Die or Between Two Ferns and so forth, and that an institution like the White House has to seek out the help of -- if you've been around a long time or if you have any sense of history, you would see the sort of -- it would jump out at you that somebody associated with a program like Funny Or Die as White House summit attendee, and what does it say about --

MR. EARNEST: Listen, I think it's a commentary on the increasingly fragmented nature of our media environment, that people have an opportunity to get their news and to be informed based on the way they consume information from a wide variety of sources. And, look, the President is still interested in engaging with outlets like all of you to talk about the Affordable Care Act, and I'm confident that he'll do that in the four months that are remaining here while he's in office. But we would be remiss -- I guess to use another legal term, it would be malpractice to fail to engage those kinds of outlets that we also know have a substantial audience that we're trying to reach. So that's part of what we're doing today.

Q "Malpractice" is also a medical term, so it's very --

MR. EARNEST: Well, that's what I was referring to there, rather clumsily.

Q Finally, before we tackle the debate again, DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson spoke today about the many resources that his agency is making available to state election officials and offices to protect the integrity of the elections at the state level in terms of cybersecurity and so forth. How confident is the administration about the integrity of the electoral process in this season of cyberattacks and so on?

MR. EARNEST: James, we continue to be very confident for a variety of reasons. I think one of the most important reasons is that many of -- because state elections -- because elections are controlled at the state and local level, and they're administered by state and local officials, there's not one central repository that lends itself to easily corrupting or influencing a national election. So the fact that you essentially have administrators using a variety of systems in 50 different states and thousands of localities means that that poses a pretty unique challenge to hackers.

Now, it also poses a pretty unique challenge to individuals who are interested in reforming and making the system more efficient, but it does come in handy when you consider potential vulnerabilities in cyberspace.

The second thing that I would note is that the Department of Homeland Security however does maintain significant resources and expertise that can be made available to state and local elections administrators who want to do everything they can to protect their systems. And we certainly would encourage them to consider availing themselves of those resources. And I know that Secretary Johnson has put together essentially a working

group that includes people from all across the country that do have an expertise in this that can be helpful in trying to facilitate that delivery of that expertise and of those resources to administrators across the country.

But overall, the administration continues to have a high degree of confidence in the ability of election administrators all across the country to conduct a free and fair election consistent with the expectations of the American people. And I think the American people share that confidence.

Q All right. So the debate -- again, two separate topics here. At the beginning of the briefing, you commended Secretary Clinton for the case she made on behalf of the President's economic stewardship and how she would bring that forward in various respects. In explaining why she would seek to raise taxes on the wealthy, Mrs. Clinton said that the wealthy "have made all the gains in the economy." Was that an accurate depiction of the economy that the President has stewarded in this recovery, where the wealthy have made all the gains?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think the latest Census report indicates that we have actually seen income growth all across the income scale, but there's actually been more income growth among lower and middle-income families than there has been among families at the top of the income scale, at least in the year 2015. That is a reflection of the priority that the President has placed on focusing our strategy to support middle-class families and those families that are working hard to get into the middle class.

Q So her description was inaccurate; it's not the wealthy that made all the gains in the economy, correct?

MR. EARNEST: Well, listen, I think the latest Census data indicates that there has been important gains enjoyed by families at the low and middle-income level in 2015, and that's a --

Q That's not an accurate statement, correct?

MR. EARNEST: Listen, I didn't see the direct quote, so we'll take a look at it. But what I can tell you is that the numbers indicate that we've made important progress in helping families in the middle grow their incomes in a way that is consistent with a smart approach to growing our overall economy. And I know that's an approach that Secretary Clinton shares and is promising to build on.

Q Before we proceed to the final subject of the debate I want to pursue with you, again, one is compelled to ask you if the recovery has been so successful and if the stewardship of the economy has benefited so many different sectors of the economy and so many different classes in the economy, and all the various points you made, why is it that public opinion surveys -- not just one snapshot, but over time and repeatedly, and no matter who is doing the polling -- show that large majorities of the electorate regard the country as being on the wrong track? There's only two possibilities, Josh. Either they have it right --

the country is headed down the wrong track. Or they don't, and they're just misinformed or laboring under some misapprehension about the economy that's so wonderful. Why does three-quarters of the electorate regard the country as being on the wrong track?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think people are quite dissatisfied with the dysfunction they see in Congress and the fact that we are once again, three or four days before a deadline, and Congress has not acted to keep the government open and fulfill their basic functions might leave people more than a little dissatisfied with their representation in Washington, D.C. right now.

I think the second thing is there has been a concerted effort on the part of Republicans -- not just one presidential candidate, but several of them -- to spend a lot of money and a lot of time on the stump tearing down the economy and tearing down the country and being sharply critical of the country. And that's unfortunate, but that's going to have impact and that's going to take a toll.

I think the third thing is, what we did see is that the memory of the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression is still very present in the minds of many people across the country, and while they have certainly benefited from the kinds of gains that I've described, I think people understand that those gains are fragile. And they're right. There is the prospect that our economy would be significantly weakened and undermined if we were to revert back to the kinds of policies that got us into this mess in the first place. And that's why the President has regularly made the case that the stakes in this election are rather high, the gains are fragile. And that's why he's so forcefully supporting a candidate who is vowing to build on the progress we've made as opposed to tearing it down.

Q Lastly, you said earlier in the briefing -- you described earlier in the briefing President Obama's reaction to watching the debate and I think provided some of your own sentiments about the debate as well. Your comments were focused on the two participants in the debate, but I wonder if either you or the President have any view of Lester Holt as the moderator and his performance.

MR. EARNEST: Well, look, I think -- I've heard the analogy to the moderators to either umpires in a baseball game or referees in a basketball game. And if you're in a situation where in the immediate aftermath of a contest you're talking about the officiating, that usually means one of two things -- that the officials did a bad job or that you're on the losing end of the contest. So the fact that we've gone through a good 40 minutes or so of the briefing without mentioning Mr. Holt's name I think is a pretty good endorsement of his performance.

Q So it eluded the President's attention that Mr. Holt, who enjoys the respect of everyone in this room, this questioner included, nonetheless, last night, pressed Mr. Trump pointedly on just about every perceived area of vulnerability for him, including his early statements about the Iraq war, his refusal to release his tax returns, his role in the birther issue, his endorsement of stop-and-frisk, and his comments about whether or not Mrs. Clinton has a presidential look, but somehow failed to press Mrs. Clinton even a

single time on any of her perceived points of vulnerability such as her conduct with her emails, the role of the Clinton Foundation in the Clinton State Department, her refusal to release her Goldman Sachs speeches, her deep trustworthiness deficit with the American electorate, her role in the destruction of Libya or the Benghazi attacks. None of those things were pressed by Mr. Holt. Did that elude the President's attention, that sort of seeming imbalance in the questioning?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I don't think it's accurate to say that all of Mr. Trump's vulnerabilities were covered. I'll let other people be the judge of that. But I think what is true is that the debate lasted 90 minutes, and there's a reason that the Commission on Presidential Debate doesn't just schedule one -- they schedule three. And certainly in the two subsequent debates I would anticipate that there will be additional topics covered.

Ron.

Q Just one more thing about the debate and this trade -- the Trans-Pacific Partnership. How did the President feel about watching his former Secretary of State essentially trash this deal that is so important to his legacy while literally tens of millions of Americans are watching?

MR. EARNEST: Well, listen, the view that was expressed by both presidential candidates with regard to the Trans-Pacific Partnership is different than the view that's been advocated by the President. And that's why -- I mean, look, Ron, if anything, it strengthens the case that we make to Congress that this is something they need to act on before the end of the year, because either way, it is now crystal-clear that whoever is elected President is not going to be somebody who is enthusiastic about the kind of approach that President Obama has pursued.

And look, when it comes to the Trans-Pacific Partnership, President Obama negotiated a good deal. This is a deal that will level the playing field for American workers. It will cut 18,000 taxes that other countries impose on American goods. And this is a deal that's been endorsed by the Chamber of Commerce, the American Farm Bureau, the Business Roundtable and the National Association of Manufacturers. Those are four organizations that are not typically strong advocates of policies put forward by the Obama administration, but in this case, they have strongly endorsed the Trans-Pacific Partnership and are encouraging Republicans in the United States Congress to support it.

So I think that it speaks well of the President's approach to this issue, but I also think it speaks to the urgency that members of Congress are going to need to feel if this kind of approach to protecting America's interest around the world is one they share.

Q Has the President ever spoken -- recently spoken to the Secretary about this particular thing?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I'm not going to read out all the details of their conversations. They had an opportunity to see each other a couple of times when she was in D.C. a week and a half ago.

Q And how is he going to campaign on this issue out there in the world in the coming weeks -- not months, but weeks -- when he clearly feels so strongly about this and she clearly feels so negatively about it?

MR. EARNEST: Well, listen, the President has not hesitated to put forward a persuasive case about why he believes the Trans-Pacific Partnership is something that Congress needs to ratify before the end of the year. And he's going to continue to make that forceful case. He believes it's in the clear national interest of the country when it comes to considering the strategic situation in Asia. He also believes it's important when you consider the impact that this policy would have on working people all across the country - - that there are communities across the country that are facing a challenge from globalization, and the question really is, what are we going to do about it?

And President Obama has implemented a strategy that will confront those forces of globalization, level the playing field in some of those economies that have some of the fastest-growing economies in the world, and that ultimately is going to be good for our economy, good for America's businesses, and good for America's workers.

The President is not going to hesitate to make that argument. But when he's on the campaign trail encouraging people to support Secretary Clinton, he, I think understandably, is going to be quite focused on the --

Q Something else.

MR. EARNEST: Well, I guess I would say on the many, many things that they have in common. On the many, many priorities that they share.

Q It just seems like such a contradiction on such a huge issue that he feels so strongly about. And let's assume for a moment that somehow this does get passed. Then clearly the next President is opposed to this. What does that say to our allies? What does it say to -- I mean, how is this thing ever going to become -- take root and actually become a significant part of our country's policy if both future Presidents are against it?

MR. EARNEST: Well, first of all, I don't think it's a contradiction, I think it's just a difference of opinion.

Q So at some point does he expect Secretary Clinton to just flip on this?

MR. EARNEST: No, I take her at her word, so I'll let her describe her opinion and her position on this issue. With regard to the policy, the other 11 countries that are party to this agreement are counting on the United States to be true to our word. Some of them have already started implementing the kinds of reforms that benefit the United States, but those reforms are contingent on the completion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership -- that our ability to raise labor standards, to raise human rights standards, to improve intellectual property protections, to raise environmental standards in these countries in the Asia Pacific -- those are all policies that benefit the United States, both in terms of being consistent with our values, but also in terms of leveling the playing field so that American workers and American businesses will have an opportunity to fairly compete.



And other countries are interested in the United States following through on our commitment and implementing the agreement. And the President heard a whole lot about this when he was traveling in Asia earlier this month. And so this is something that the President sees as a priority. And we know that the U.S. business community that, as I mentioned, is typically aligned with the Republican Party, is typically not so supportive of an Obama administration policy, but in this instance, they are advocating to Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill that this is something that we need to get done.

Q Question on Syria. When you were talking about the national security meetings that the President has, you were very specific in saying that there's a lot of discussion about ISIS -- the counter-ISIS campaign, and so on and so forth. Is there discussion specifically about the Syrian regime and the civil war as well by that group? And have they gotten to the point where they have -- I think Mark kind of asked you this earlier -- where they have ruled out everything essentially?

MR. EARNEST: No, they have not ruled out everything. What they have -- what's important for you to understand about these conversations is that there is broad recognition that the failed leadership of Bashar al-Assad has created the conditions on the ground inside of Syria that have allowed extremism to take root. His failure to lead that country, in fact his willingness to divide that country, by waging war against his own citizens have fueled extremism, and it's created enough chaos that organizations like ISIL and even al Qaeda have sought to establish a safe haven or a toe hold inside of Syria and use that as a base of operations to threaten the United States and our allies around the world.

So, yes, the administration and the President has implemented a policy to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL. But we also have been very focused on trying to address the root causes of this conflict that have allowed ISIL to flourish. And that is the failed leadership of Bashar al-Assad. That's why Secretary Kerry has devoted so many sleepless days and nights to trying to negotiate with the Russians and to try to advance political talks so that we can bring about the kind of political transition inside Syria that even the Russians acknowledge is necessary.

Q Is there any -- given what's happening in Aleppo in the last days since the ceasefires fell apart, is there any rethinking of what America perceives as its only -- as its national security interest in that theater, in that context, given what seems to be an impending humanitarian disaster there -- worse than what we've seen during the past -- or I mean, it's a very common-sense -- is the situation there so terrible that the President is rethinking what he might want to do there? Is he even considering it?

MR. EARNEST: What I'd say about this, Ron, is a couple things. The situation in Syria has been terrible for years now, unfortunately, and there are too many countless innocent lives that have been lost, and millions of other lives that have been changed for the worse as a result of the chaos and violence that we've seen in that country. But, look, I would also acknowledge the situation there has gotten worse in recent days, that the bombing has been more intense, that the pace of the military attacks against innocent civilians has

only increased, that the willingness on the part of the Assad regime, oftentimes with the support of the Russians, has been more egregious in terms of targeting civilians and civilian facilities.

We've seen that the Syrian regime has been willing to target first responders -- so-called White Helmets. We know that there was a military strike that was focused on the supply of drinking water that was available to the citizens of -- or the civilians in eastern Aleppo. So I would acknowledge that the situation in Aleppo has gotten worse.

But what's also true is that the President and his team are always looking carefully at the situation to determine if there's something different that we can do, if there's more that the United States should do to protect our interests in that region of the world.

Q And the disappointing answer to that question is no.

MR. EARNEST: No, at this point, the approach is we're going to be squarely focused on ISIL and other extremists in Syria and Iraq that could pose a threat to the United States, and we're making important progress in backing opposition forces on the ground, carrying out airstrikes, and working closely with the Iraqi government to apply pressure both to ISIL leadership but also to retake territory that ISIL had previously held. We continue to be focused on trying to work closely with the U.N. to facilitate some kind of transition inside of Syria that would address the root causes of all of this chaos. That work continues.

There continues to be important work that's being done on the homeland security front to try to prevent ISIL from radicalizing or inspiring others to carry out acts of violence in their name. We're working all across the international community to try to shut down the flow of foreign fighters. I know that Director Comey had some comments earlier today that indicated that the flow of foreign fighters from the United States to Iraq and Syria has slowed significantly. That obviously is a welcome development and is an indication both that our efforts are bearing fruit, but also that ISIL is having a tougher time recruiting people to their cause.

So all of this is progress. All of this enhances the safety and security of the American people. But there is no downplaying the awfulness of the situation in Syria right now.

Michelle.

Q Earlier in the briefing you talked about the powerful case that you thought Secretary Clinton made last night. You also called it a persuasive case. That's a case that we've also heard the President and others in the administration make over the last couple of months. A lot of strong words used to describe what is believed to be the reason why Donald Trump is not qualified to be President. We've heard the President say that a lot of times. But the fact is the poll numbers between these two candidates have only gotten closer and have not moved in the other direction. So is that an indication to you that the case that is being made is either not working, or needs to be made in some different way?

Because when you say -- you use words like "powerful" and "persuasive." I mean, maybe that's in the words chosen, but that's not clearly in the effect that it's having on the electorate.

MR. EARNEST: Well, listen, the case that the President is making is one that is focused on turning people out on Election Day. And this is a case that we'll build through the month of October in support of the candidate that he believes so strongly in. So I think we'll all evaluate the effectiveness of the President's case on Election Day.

Q What do you think it says that there's arguments that are made, arguments that you feel are powerful are not changing people's minds, at least not as reflected in the polls?

MR. EARNEST: Look, there are plenty of people out there who can comment on the polls and offer up their own analysis, so I'll let them do that. But the President is going to be focused on an argument that he believes is most important, and hopefully people will hear it and be convinced by it.

Q So when are we going to see him out on the trail much more?

MR. EARNEST: Well, listen, I think through October the President will be increasing his involvement in this race. And that doesn't just mean through travel. That also means that the President will be more engaged in -- or I guess I would say feature more prominently in some of the advertising efforts of Secretary Clinton and other Democrats across the country.

But the President has made clear that he wants to do as much as he can to support Secretary Clinton and her campaign, and that's what we'll do. But largely, our cues for how to do that will be taken from the campaign and Secretary Clinton's advisors who are formulating a strategy.

Q Yeah, he's used the phrase, you have to be running scared when you're looking at this election in particular and those numbers. So when he sees those numbers only getting closer -- and it remains to be seen, of course, what happens after this debate in the next couple of days -- but when he sees those numbers, does he feel like the message needs to change or that he needs to do something that, I don't know, gets people's attention more or makes his case better?

MR. EARNEST: I think you're going to hear the President continue to warn against complacency. And the President's remarks to the Congressional Black Caucus 10 days or so ago I think is a good example of that kind of message. I also think you're going to hear the President deliver a message similar to the one that he delivered on Ryan Seacrest's radio program earlier today in which he made a case to the American people that it's important to get involved in our democracy and that our democracy benefits from that regardless of who you choose to support.

Now, the President has obviously got his own very strong view about who he believes people should support, and he'll make his case accordingly. But he believes that our democracy is improved when more people are engaged. And he'll continue to make that

case as well. The President will have ample opportunity to make that case, and I think the President feels good about the current trajectory of the race.

JC.

Q Putting your political hat back on, Josh, reflecting a couple of years ago when you were very much involved in the Obama campaign in the early stages, and addressing those people who are not quite committed, including the millennials, do you think after last night's debate -- and if you watched it -- do you think the folks are more interested or less interested in watching the second debate?

MR. EARNEST: I think it's hard to generalize. I think there are probably some people who had the opportunity to watch the debate, and as James alluded, that there are some other issues that they'd like to see be discussed. So maybe that means some more people will tune in. I think there are some other people who watched the first debate and learned everything they need to know about the two candidates and what they stand for. And hopefully they'll turn out to vote and choose to be engaged in our democratic process.

Kenneth.

Q Thank you, Josh. Back to last night. Did President Obama call Hillary Clinton before to give her a pep talk, or did he speak with her afterwards to say what he thought of her performance?

MR. EARNEST: I'm not aware that the President has spoken to Secretary Clinton in the last 24 hours or so. But they have the opportunity to speak frequently, and sometimes we tell you about it and sometimes we don't.

Q You mentioned the President is going to be, in October, he's really going to ratchet up being on the campaign trail or helping Hillary Clinton. So the question is, how aggressive will it be? One a week, two a week? I know there will be some behind-the-scenes things. But as far as jumping on Air Force One and going to the battleground states, will we see an aggressive approach from the President on that?

MR. EARNEST: I think the President will be making a very forceful case. I think that he'll be looking to maximize the time that he is able to make available to support Secretary Clinton, and looking to make the most of those opportunities that he has.

Look, I think in early October the President will be spending one or two days per week on the road in support of her campaign. And as the election gets closer, he may look for more opportunities. But I would caution against you evaluating the President's engagement solely based on how often the President travels outside of Washington, D.C. to make a case for her. There are a variety of other ways for the President to get engaged. And certainly we would expect that the case that the President had the opportunity to make in the context of radio interviews would be something that would benefit her campaign. I would anticipate that the President will appear in television and online ads in support of her campaign. So I think the President will be visible, but that doesn't always include headlining a rally.

Q And finally, after watching last night's debate, is there one top rebuttal from the Obama administration around the White House that you want to get out there that Donald Trump put out? For instance, on the DNC hack, he says, "We don't know who did it. We have no clue who was behind it." So does the White House have any clue who's behind it, even if you don't want to say? Is there an actor you believe is behind the DNC hack?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Kenneth, of all the rebuttals that's probably not the one I would choose. But since you raise it, you deserve an answer. What we have said about this particularly situation is that the FBI and other experts within the national security apparatus of the United States are investigating that particular situation.

I know that there are some private sector experts who have released reports based on their examination of the evidence that implicates the Russians in that hack. Government experts are still looking at it. And a decision has not been made to go public at this point with saying who may be responsible for this particular incident. But because of the focus that the President has had on this issue, there are a number of tools available to respond to it. And those responses may not necessarily be something that we announce in advance. Those responses may not be something that we ever announce or acknowledge. But the United States maintains significant capabilities and is prepared to use them to ensure the safety and security of the American people in cyberspace.

Q So if that one is not at the top of your list, which one is?

MR. EARNEST: I guess I walked right into that one, huh?

Q Yeah. Which one is at the top?

MR. EARNEST: Listen, I think what I would do is I would say it this way, which is that there was a rather stark difference in the approach that's being advocated by the two candidates, and I think it's hard to minimize the significance of those differences. The stakes in this election are really high. So it's not just that the differences are stark; the consequences for the different approaches that are being advocated by the two candidates are also stark. There are long-term consequences for this decision that the American people have to make.

And I think that's why, just to go back to your first question, I think that's why the President will be so engaged in this election, because he understands that the stakes are rather high.

And, look, if the polls indicate that the race may be close maybe that has the effect of getting more people engaged and more prompting more people to pay attention in the race and the potential outcome. And if there are more people that are open to the case that President Obama has to make about who they should choose in the presidential election, then we would certainly welcome that opportunity.

Toluse.

Q Thanks, Josh. Continuing on the theme of rebuttals from the debate. Donald Trump talked about Janet Yellen for a bit during the debate yesterday. He basically implicated -- or indicated that she was involved in sort of I guess rigging the Fed on behalf of the President, being very political, and sort of managing the Fed in a political way. What's your response to that charge?

MR. EARNEST: I will acknowledge I chuckled when he said that she was more political than Hillary Clinton. I'm not really even sure what that means. But I thought it was funny.

The charge, of course, is preposterous. It is baseless, and there's been no evidence to marshal to support it. The President I think time and time again, in words and in deeds, has demonstrated his commitment to protecting the independence of the Fed. That's a principle that benefits our economy. It's a principle that is the bedrock of our financial relationship with countries all around the world. So I guess that's the reason that I would wade in and respond to a situation that I guess I might otherwise not choose to engage.

Q In another moment in the debate, Donald Trump referred to the President as "your President," when he was speaking to Hillary Clinton. Did the President or the White House notice that? Is there any response to that labeling?

MR. EARNEST: I don't know if there was any offense intended in that remark or not. But I'll leave it to the candidate to explain what he might have meant.

Q And just one more, on the Department of Justice announcing some sanctions on some Chinese individuals and companies for more or less not abiding by the North Korean sanctions. I'm wondering sort of what the White House statement is on that, and whether or not that should portend future actions, stepping up of regulating these sanctions and making sure that the Chinese abide by them.

MR. EARNEST: Look, there are a couple of things at play here. The first is, with regard to any sort of criminal investigation that is being conducted by the Department of Justice, I'll defer to my colleagues there for discussion about why those charges were brought.

They can describe what evidence they have access to and the prosecutorial decisions that they've made in the context of this case.

With regard to sanctions, I think this is an indication of the President's commitment to further isolate the North Korean regime and to apply pressure to those entities and individuals and organizations that try to support them. This is something that the President takes quite seriously. And we certainly value the kind of cooperative working relationship that we've enjoyed not just with our allies in the region, but with our partners in the region that don't work with us on every issue. But I think that is an indication of how unified the international community is about confronting North Korea and their repeated violations of U.N. Security Council resolutions.

Andrew.

Q Thanks, Josh. I wanted to go back to Syria. A number of times from the podium you've remarked on the kind of (inaudible ) good options with regard to the Syria civil war. I don't think anybody would disagree with that. But I wanted to go through a couple of suggestions and to get an idea of why the White House thinks they wouldn't work.

MR. EARNEST: I should take out my pen.

Q Do we need clearance for --

Q Not from me. (Laughter.) Airdropping aid to the residents of Aleppo.

MR. EARNEST: Well, there has been a -- you'll recall that our discussions with the Russians have been predicated on two things recently. The first is a reduction in violence. And while that is a worthy goal in and of itself, it is also a means to an end. Currently, the violence and the fighting is so intense that it's not possible for humanitarian aid workers to safely access those communities and provide humanitarian relief that's badly needed. So the United States has been strongly supportive of a variety of ideas for expediting the flow of humanitarian assistance to these communities that are plagued by violence and where there are so many innocent people that are caught in the crossfire.

Unfortunately, just last week we got a vivid illustration of how dangerous it can be to try to provide humanitarian assistance to the people in need in Syria, and there were humanitarian aid workers that were victims of a military strike inside of Syria. That's a strike for which we hold Russia responsible, because it was either a strike that was carried out by Russian military forces or by Syrian military forces that Russia has agreed to use their influence to limit.

So the United States is very interested in looking for creative ways that we can expedite the delivery of humanitarian assistance to communities in Syria that need it the most. And, in fact, that is the prominent goal of so many of our diplomatic efforts there right now.

Q The second suggestion is supplying the people of Aleppo with a means to defend themselves.

MR. EARNEST: Well, with regard to this situation, there are obviously forces on the ground, inside of Syria, that benefit from the support of the United States and our coalition partners because they are focused on going after ISIL. And there are a variety of ways in which we've offered assistance to those opposition groups. And they have proved, in many cases, to be a pretty effective fighting force against ISIL forces on the ground. And there's more than 20 percent of the territory that ISIL previously controlled in Syria that's been taken back because of the efforts of these forces.

These forces have also succeeded in reducing, if not outright eliminating, access that ISIL has to the Turkey-Syria border. That's significant because we know that ISIL was using their access to that border to get access to cash and other supplies, and even foreign fighters. That's much more difficult for them now than it was before, in part because of

the effectiveness of the fighting force on the ground. But what we have indicated is that our counter-ISIL strategy depends on our ability to support those forces on the ground that have proven a willingness and a capability to go after ISIL.

With regard to the challenge that's facing the civilians in Aleppo, it's significant. And when you consider the military might of the Syrian regime and their Russian backers, and their willingness to target civilians and civilian facilities like hospitals and the water supply, it's clear that the best outcome is for the violence to come to an end. And the concern that we have expressed about providing that kind of armed assistance that you're referring to is that that only further militarizes the situation that doesn't have a military solution.

Q And sanctioning Russians involved in supporting the regime, and prosecution of the siege of Aleppo and mid-level Syrian military officers who have been involved in the same.

MR. EARNEST: Andrew, we have not taken the prospect of additional financial sanctions off the table. Financial sanctions have proven to be a useful tool in advancing our interests around the globe. So we certainly haven't taken those sanctions off the table. What we have taken a dim view of, however, are unilateral sanctions. We have found the strategy of implementing sanctions in close coordination with our partners to be a much more effective way for us to maximize the impact of financial sanctions. And that's an option I would not take off the table in this instance.

Q I'll leave it there.

MR. EARNEST: Jane.

Q Thank you very much, Josh. At last night's debate, Donald Trump said that we cannot protect the country (inaudible) alliance of Donald Trump. This is so confused because there's tensions in the Korean Peninsula with the North Korean threat. Do you think the U.S. and South Korea has an alliance?

MR. EARNEST: President Obama has stated many times how important the U.S.-South Korea alliance is. And President Obama had an opportunity to meet with President Park earlier this month in Laos to discuss the ongoing U.S. commitment to the safety and security of our allies in South Korea. The President's commitment to that alliance has not diminished in any way. And that's why the United States has discussed the deployment of a THAAD battery to South Korea to protect the South Korean people from the ballistic missile threat emanating from North Korea. And the United States continues to work closely with South Korea, our allies in Japan, and other countries around the region to counter the rhetoric and threats of the North Korean regime.

Q So will the United States continue to protect South Korea from North Korean threat?

MR. EARNEST: The United States is as committed as we've ever been to the health and strength of the U.S.-South Korea alliance.

Lalit, I'll give you the last one.



Q Thank you, Josh. Over the weekend, Indian Prime Minister Modi said that India is going to ratify the climate change agreement on October 2, with 60 countries and 48 percent of emissions countries would be ratifying it. Do you think this will be coming to force in the Morocco conference on November 7th? And will the President think this is mission accomplished on the climate change part?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Lalit, we have not put a firm deadline for ratification of the climate agreement, other than to say we expect the agreement to enter into force by the end of this calendar year. I don't know if it will be done by the first week in November. We, of course, welcome the actions from the Indian government. It is just another example of the courageous leadership that Prime Minister Modi has shown on this issue. And that's to his credit. He recognizes how important it is for India to be a leader in the international community on this issue. And he's making good on that priority, and he deserves a lot of credit for that. And I know that the President, when he met with Prime Minister Modi earlier this month in Laos, had an opportunity to thank him for his leadership on this issue.

However, as important as the Paris climate agreement is, and how significant it is that this agreement is going into effect within a year's time, it's only a starting point. And the President is hopeful that the significance of this agreement is not that it solves the problem of carbon pollution once and for all, but rather it serves as a template to mobilize the international community to take coordinated, substantial steps to addressing this problem.

And it sets up a mechanism whereby every five years countries consider the commitments that they can make to further fight carbon pollution. And the impact of this agreement is one that is likely to be seen only after it's been in place for a substantial period of time. And we've been able to see the progress the country, that the world, that the planet makes in confronting this challenge, and as the world continues to more effectively cooperate to confront this shared threat.

Q I have one more question. After the Uri terrorist attack, India has said -- Prime Minister Modi has said talks -- they cannot work together, and as such, he's taking several steps -- like one, India has pulled out from SAARC Summit in Islamabad next month. How do you see the situation there?

MR. EARNEST: Well, the United States has continued to encourage India and Pakistan to find a way to resolve their differences peacefully and through diplomacy. And we have condemned violence, particularly terrorist attacks. And we continue to be hopeful and encouraging of both sides to try to find a way to resolve their differences and to reduce their tensions through diplomacy and without resorting to more violence.

Thanks, everybody.

END

2:10 P.M. EDT

