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Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney 2/23/2011

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

12:50 P.M. EST

MR. CARNEY: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Before we get started with questions let me just make a couple of announcements.

Later this afternoon the President is scheduled to call Prime Minister Key of New Zealand and reiterate our nation's continued commitment to assist in the rescue and recovery efforts in the aftermath of the recent earthquake there.

I also just wanted to run through a few economic announcements. First, you should have all received a release listing the members of the President's Council on Jobs and Competitiveness. The first meeting of the new council will take place tomorrow at the White House at 1:45 p.m. There will be pool spray coverage of the President's remarks at the top of the meeting and the meeting will be live-streamed at www.whitehouse.gov.

Also today, Austan Goolsbee will hold a conference call at 3:00 p.m. to discuss the Economic Report of the President, which will be released later this afternoon. During that call, Austan will also announce the President's intent to nominate Carl Shapiro to be a new member at the Council of Economic Advisers.

With that, I will take your questions.

Q Thanks, Jay. Could you walk us through how the President's position on the Defense of Marriage Act has evolved and how he made his decision to order the Justice Department to no longer defend its constitutionality?

MR. CARNEY: Yes. The President's position on the Defense of Marriage Act has been consistent. He has long opposed it as unnecessary and unfair. Separate from that, or distinct from that is the decision that was announced today which was brought on by a court-imposed deadline, by the Second Circuit, that required a decision by the administration about whether or not this case should require heightened scrutiny, a heightened constitutional review -- because this -- unlike the other cases in other circuits, there was no precedent, no foundation upon which the administration could defend the Defense of Marriage Act, in this case. Therefore it had to basically make a positive assertion about its constitutionality.

The Attorney General recommended that the higher level of scrutiny be applied and under that higher level of scrutiny deemed or recommended that it be viewed as unconstitutional. The President reviewed that recommendation and concurred. Therefore, again, because of the court-imposed deadline and the necessity that this decision be made, our announcement was made.

Q But by making that decision is the President saying that he believes that marriage does not necessarily have to be between a man and a woman, that that cannot be constitutionally imposed?

MR. CARNEY: The President's personal view on same-sex marriage I think you all have heard him discuss as recently as a press conference at the end of last year. That is distinct from this legal decision. And he, again -- the Attorney General and the President were under a court-imposed deadline to make a decision in this case, and they did.

And the President -- let me make a couple of points about it. The decision is that we will -- the administration will not defend the Defense of Marriage Act in the Second Circuit. Furthermore, the President directed the Attorney General not to defend, because of the decision that it's not constitutional, defend the Defense of Marriage Act in any other circuit, in any other case.

Let me also make clear, however, that the United States government will still be a party to those cases in order to allow those cases to proceed so that the courts can make the final determination about its constitutionality, and also, so that other interested parties are able to take up the defense of the Defense of Marriage Act if they so wish -- and in particular, Congress or members of Congress who want to proceed and defend the law in these cases.

The administration will do everything it can to assist Congress if it so wishes to do that. We recognize and respect that there are other points of view and other opinions about this. It is also important to note that the enforcement of the Defense of Marriage Act continues -- the President is constitutionally bound to enforce the laws and enforcement of the DOMA will continue.

Q Well, I guess this raises questions, though, given that the President said his own personal position is evolving. Can you tell us where his position on gay marriage stands at this point?

MR. CARNEY: I would refer you just to his fairly recent statements on that. He's grappling with the issue, but he -- again, I want to make the distinction between his personal views, which he has discussed, and the legal issue, the legal decision that was made today.

Let me move on. Yes.

Q Jay, on Libya, the President's reaction has been fairly muted and low-key in terms of what he said publicly about it. And I was wondering if you could explain that. When the Egypt unrest was occurring he made several public statements. Does he plan to make any public statements on Libya? And what's going on, what's driving the decision to be more low-key on this?

MR. CARNEY: Well, let me just say that the President strongly condemns, and condemned in a statement on Friday, the violence, the bloodshed perpetuated by the Libyan government in Libya. The Secretary of State has strongly condemned what's happened in Libya.

The President will be meeting with Secretary Clinton, his regular meeting with the Secretary of State, this afternoon. We will have some announcements out of that meeting. The President will address this issue either later this afternoon or tomorrow, so you will hear from the President relatively soon on Libya.

But let me step back and, again, make the point that this administration has very strongly condemned what's happened in Libya. The violence is abhorrent. It is completely unacceptable. And the bloodshed must stop.

This administration has made that clear. And we've made it clear both through the statements of the President and the Secretary of State; also through our work very closely with the United Nations Security Council, their very strong statement, which I'm sure you've all read, of which we are a party. And we continue to work with the U.N. in reviewing various options for actions that can be taken to compel Libya to stop, to end this terrible bloodshed.

Q Are steps like a no-fly zone under consideration?

MR. CARNEY: A lot of options are under review. Sanctions, other options. But I also want to make clear that we -- our thoughts and prayers are with the families of the victims in Libya. And we are also

focused, as I think many of you know, on the safety of American citizens who are in Libya. It's a very high priority for this administration, the safety of American citizens, and we're making sure that those Americans are able to be evacuated.

Jake.

Q Can you articulate a policy that the Obama administration has for the sweeping wave of protests that are breaking out in North African and Middle Eastern countries? Obviously, as has been said by your administration many times, nobody could have predicted that all this was going to happen. But certainly the President and administrations long before this President have been articulating the need for democracy and political reform. Is there a plan in place here?

MR. CARNEY: There is a policy, Jake, and we've been very clear about this. And what is important about this policy is that it does apply to every country in the region. First of all, violence against peaceful protesters is unacceptable. The rights, the universal rights of the citizens, the peoples of these countries, must be respected: the right to peaceful assembly, the right to free speech, the right to access to information. And the need for reform is paramount. These are principles that the President has enunciated when he's talked about every country in the region that's experienced unrest.

Q Those are certainly the principles that he has consistently articulated, but it's not really necessarily a policy for what to do in this country, what to do in that country, this country. Egypt has a functioning military; Libya has a complete vacuum, a lack of infrastructure. Is there a policy for not just beliefs that the President holds or America holds, but steps that the country will take, given unrest in various countries?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the principles guide the policy. And you are right to note that each country is different. The President has made that point. Every country is different; every country has a different tradition, different institutions and a different relationship, in some cases, with the United States. But it is important that those overall principles guide our actions.

And what I would say is that in each case, we are guided by the principles and also by the fact that the unrest, the demonstration by the peoples of these countries of their desire for greater political -- greater access to the political system, greater freedom, for rights -- we support. We support those aspirations of those peoples. And we are -- but we are not dictating outcomes and we are not telling the people of any country who their leaders should be or should not be. That is up to the people of Libya to decide, just as it is up to the people of Egypt to decide.

Q Is it fair to call this policy as it's formulated ad hoc or ad-libbed?

MR. CARNEY: No, I think quite the contrary. It's been -- there is a very clear set of principles that guide the policy. And I think that when you talk about broad policies in the foreign policy arena, the ones that are not ad hoc are the ones that are guided by a broad set of principles and not situation specific or country specific -- which is not to say, as I said, that how we handle or react or act proactively with regard to the situation in every country doesn't differ depending on the country, because we obviously want -- we're looking for positive outcomes.

Q Just one final question. I'm sorry, but just -- you guys are prepared, you have a policy for if this were to happen in Jordan, if this were to happen in Saudi Arabia, if there were to happen in Morocco? You have plans for all of these different countries?

MR. CARNEY: I'm not sure what you mean by plans, but we would be -- without speculating on what might happen, our policies -- our policy in the region and towards the unrest we've seen in these countries has been consistent and would apply going forward.

Q Jay, if there is a clear set of principles, why has the President chosen to not enunciate them for several days now? The last statement was from you on Friday not from -- it was the President's words, but delivered by you on Air Force One.

The President, when he comes out and makes a statement -- I know you're saying he might do it later today, maybe tomorrow -- in the meantime, hundreds of people have been killed in Libya, so why has he chosen to not enunciate those very principles you say are clear?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I was merely a vehicle for that statement. The President puts out statements on paper sometimes. I happened to be on Air Force One and read it aloud, but it was also put out and disseminated everywhere.

Q He's been in front of a microphone several times in the last few days --

MR. CARNEY: And he will be -- he will be, as I said, Ed, either this afternoon or tomorrow on this issue. I think that the Secretary of State has been quite forceful in her condemnation, as was the President on Friday, and Ambassador Rice in New York at the United Nations. I don't think there's any mystery about our position here, and our forceful condemnation of the violence that has been perpetrated by the Libyan government against its people.

Q Is he more cautious because of what you said about the Americans who are on the ground in Libya? Is that a key driving force here -- to make sure that they're safe? And if he went out there and spoke, it might backfire?

MR. CARNEY: The President is obviously concerned about the safety of American citizens, no question. And that is an important factor in any country. And the circumstances of American citizens are different in each country -- the protections they have, say, at the embassy might be different in one country than the protections they have in another. All of those factors are important in how we approach these situations and how the President looks at them.

He's also extremely concerned and alarmed by the horrific violence and bloodshed that's happened in Libya. And we have made that clear, and he will make that clear, as I said, this afternoon or tomorrow.

Q Last thing. There are now obviously various Libyan officials who are leaving the Qaddafi government, and one of them has come forward to say that he believes he has evidence that Qaddafi himself ordered the Pan Am bombing in 1988, which obviously is of great interest to the American people -- large loss of life, huge terror attack. What does the administration make of those reports? Are you doing anything to verify them?

MR. CARNEY: Ed, I don't have anything on that for you. Obviously we're focused right now on the events that are unfolding in Libya, how we can work together with our partners internationally to take the kind of steps that will bring about the end of the bloodshed, and the protection of the rights of the citizens, the people of Libya, and also the protection of American citizens still in Libya. So I don't have anything for you specifically on that.

Mark.

Q Jay, can you tell us what will be the determining factor on whether we hear from the President today or tomorrow?

MR. CARNEY: Just one second. This is just a scheduling issue. As I said, the President will meet with Secretary of State Clinton this afternoon, his regular meeting, and they will obviously discuss Libya. We will have something to say out of that meeting. And it's possible the President will speak this afternoon or tomorrow. But I assume we'll have information on when that will happen fairly soon for you.

Q Might it be about U.S. diplomatic relations with Libya?

MR. CARNEY: I'm not going to speculate on what goes into decisions about the President's schedule on when he will make a statement. But I just wanted you to know, because I anticipated questions about this, that the President will be addressing this issue in the near future.

Q All right. And on a government shutdown, is it the White House belief there won't be a shutdown starting March 5th?

MR. CARNEY: It is our belief, the President's belief, that the Congress, the congressional leaders, and certainly -- have said and we have said that we believe there is the strong potential there for us to reach an agreement to avoid what you call the government shutdown. And I think -- again, I would point you to comments made by the House and Senate leaders, including the Speaker of the House and the Senate Minority Leader, about their desire to avoid a shutdown.

And I think it's driven by the same reasoning that we adhere to, which is an outcome like a government shutdown would have harmful effects on our economy, would set back our economic recovery, would potentially reduce our job and reduce our job-creation efforts. And that is the focus that this President has every day. And I believe there was a study, a Goldman Sachs study, that pointed -- sort of spelled out and analyzed the potential impacts that a government shutdown might have on the economy. And we obviously, like the leaders of Congress, want to avoid that, and we believe we can.

Q Is the White House engaged in negotiations on a new CR, a short-term CR?

MR. CARNEY: Mark, what I can say is that, as the President has said and others, we are very interested in sitting down with -- talking with leaders of Congress of both parties, and we have been obviously in discussions with them. Some of those meetings here you're aware of. The process is a congressional process. And the House has acted; the Senate has to act. There are other steps that have to be decided between the House and the Senate, but we are certainly participating in a process and, again, are optimistic that decisions can be made to resolve this without harmful effects to our economy.

Q Has the ferry that was chartered to evacuate U.S. diplomats and other foreign nationals from Libya left yet?

MR. CARNEY: I would refer you to the State Department on that.

Q Is that what you're waiting for before the President comments on the situation?

MR. CARNEY: It's a scheduling issue, Wendell. The President will speak on the issue, as I said in answer to other questions. The safety of American citizens is obviously of concern to the President, as it should be.

Q Is it our feeling that the Libyans have been cooperative about that ferry, or have actually not been so?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I can just simply say that, as you know and as has been discussed, we have been arranging the evacuation of American citizens, but beyond that, I'm not going to comment on levels of cooperation.

Q How much influence does the U.S. have with Libya's opposition, do you think?

MR. CARNEY: With -- sorry?

Q Libyan opposition, the opponents of Qaddafi?

MR. CARNEY: The issue for us, for the United States, again, is to enunciate our clear principles and to make also -- make it clear as we did in Egypt and elsewhere that the drivers of change in these countries -- and this applies to Libya -- are the people -- in this case, the people of Libya. Our principles are very clear about what we -- what our position is: that governments should never use -- that there should not be any kind of use of violence against peaceful protesters; that the aspirations -- legitimate aspirations of the people of Libya should be recognized and responded to; and that the universal freedom -- sorry, the universal rights of the Libyan people need to be recognized and upheld. So that's how I would answer that question.

Q A couple more questions. Does the President support Senator Kerry's call for reimposition of sanctions?

MR. CARNEY: Wendell, we are looking at a variety of proposals, including Senator Kerry's. And again, we are eager to work with our international partners to take the kind of actions that will be effective in bringing the Libyan government to the point where it will cease the violence and end the bloodshed and stop the incredibly abhorrent actions it's taken against its own people.

Q And separately --

MR. CARNEY: Let me add -- go ahead, but I do want to move on.

Q There's an Al-Quds report that says that Hosni Mubarak refused to take a phone call from President Obama. Can you respond to that?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have anything on that, no.

Chuck.

Q This issue of policy versus principles in the Middle East -- so American foreign policy has not changed, the President's foreign policy in the Middle East has not changed at all, or it's not changing, it's not --

MR. CARNEY: Well, Chuck, circumstances in the Middle East have changed dramatically -- in many ways, more dramatically in the last four to five weeks than they have in our adult lives. But the principles the President enunciated as far back and prior to -- but as far back most clearly in his speech in Cairo are the same principles that are guiding his --

Q So it's fair to say we are in the midst of sort of changing, reworking our Middle East policy? It's not fair to say that?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would say that the policy, that the principles that guide the policy -- the principles that guide our day-to-day decisions about how we handle these circumstances have not changed. And in fact, the speech -- if you look at the speech and the text of the speech that the President delivered in Cairo, you can find the clear lines that you're hearing today from this podium and from the President.

Q Sure. But the emphasis -- there's clear principles and there's how much you let those principles influence your policy on Egypt at the time in your dealings with Mubarak and things like that.

MR. CARNEY: I think the principles very strongly influence.

Q And is it now influencing in a stronger way now than it did six months ago?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the circumstances have changed, so -- but what I would say about the principles enunciated in Cairo are that they recognized the circumstance in the region whereby there were a lot of people whose universal rights weren't respected, and that that, as we've said in other ways, could lead to unrest; and that stability in the region will come with reforms that recognize the universal rights of the people and respond to the aspirations --

Q So would it be fair to say our policies may change, for instance, in Saudi Arabia because we're going to be emphasizing these principles a little bit more? Or are you saying --

MR. CARNEY: Again, I don't accept the premise. I think the principles have been consistent, and the decisions that policymakers have made have been guided by those principles throughout this process.

Q Budget shutdown. Can you tell us the interaction the White House is having right now? Who at the White House is having interaction with leaders on Capitol Hill? Can you give us a little bit of background?

MR. CARNEY: I don't want to give you a play-by-play on our meetings. I would direct you to the answer I think I gave to Mark, which is that we are interested in engaging and we have --

Q Are you active in negotiations?

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, I don't want to characterize the kind of conversations, and I would point you to the fact that this is a process, obviously, that needs to take place on Capitol Hill that --

Q Can you at least describe the level of involvement that the White House is in? I mean, you're not simply an observer, right?

MR. CARNEY: Well, Chuck, I would point you to the public -- well, I mean, I observe these meetings. But the --

Q Meaning the White House.

MR. CARNEY: No, we participate. I mean, look, you know about some of the meetings that have happened. But I am not going to come up here every day with a list of meetings that happened yesterday or are going to happen tomorrow, because the focus here is on results. The focus is on coming to an agreement. And we do not believe that reading out every meeting or --

Q Not asking for every meeting, but just characterize the level of --

MR. CARNEY: The House Republican leadership has been here. Senator McConnell has been here. The House Democratic leadership has been here. There have been meetings with Senate Democratic leaders. I mean, these -- we have been engaged in this process.

Q Jay, thank you. First of all, congratulations from here to there.

MR. CARNEY: Thank you.

Q Two questions -- one on the Middle East and one on India. As far as Middle East is concerned, how much President is worried about the flow of oil -- because the global community and the Americans are worried about it -- and also the security of Israel?

MR. CARNEY: What was the last one? I'm sorry.

Q Security of Israel. If Iran doesn't -- Middle East doesn't become another Iran for the Middle East -- for Israel.

MR. CARNEY: Well, our commitment to Israel's security is unshakeable, as you know. And that is always a concern for us. On the issue of oil, obviously, we are monitoring oil prices very carefully, but I wouldn't speculate about where those prices may go in the future.

Q And second, as far as India, when President was in India in November and he announced by addressing the U.S.-India Business Council in Mumbai that thousands of jobs will be created here in the U.S. and India-U.S. relations, and Secretary of Commerce was recently in India. So what's happening now as far as India-U.S. relations are concerned? Especially, trade, commerce, and creating good jobs, and --

MR. CARNEY: Well, we're obviously very committed to the commitments that were made and to the importance of job creation here that is helped by increased trade with India. But I don't have any specifically on that for you.

Q Jay.

MR. CARNEY: Let me go here.

Q Jay, let me follow up on oil prices if I can. Since your briefing began, West Texas crude topped \$100 a barrel. Is this just a matter of watching, or is there anything the U.S. government can do to ensure continued oil flow from -- well, from Africa's biggest oil supplier -- North's Africa's biggest oil supplier?

MR. CARNEY: Well, whenever there's unrest in this part of the world, there are going to be reactions in the markets. Beyond that, the situation is fluid, and I don't want to speculate about where prices will go or any other potential things in the future. But we are obviously monitoring this carefully and we're concerned about it. But we're just monitoring it.

Yes.

Q Jay, I've got questions for you on the DOMA decision. What kind of reaction are you expecting from Congress as a result of this decision? And what is the administration doing to prepare for that?

MR. CARNEY: Tell me again? Sorry, what kind of reaction?

Q Are you expecting from Congress as a result of this decision? Any sort of backlash from Congress, and were you prepared for that?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I don't want to speculate about how members of Congress might react. We have, I believe -- and if you haven't seen these, you should -- the Attorney General has put out a statement and there's a notification or a letter to Congress that explains the course of action that's being taken. But beyond that, I don't -- I wouldn't want to speculate.

Q I got a statement from Speaker Boehner's office on this issue. This is from their press office: While Americans want Washington to focus on creating jobs and cutting spending, the President will have to explain why he thinks now is the appropriate time to stir up a controversial issue that sharply divides the nation. What's your response to that?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would say simply, as I said in the beginning, that the administration had no choice. It was under a court-imposed deadline to make this decision. This case in the Second Circuit was unique in that it lacked the precedent upon which to defend the Defense of Marriage Act in the way that this administration had defended it in previous cases. It, therefore, required this decision on its constitutionality, and we had to act because of the deadline.

We are also absolutely focused and committed on these key issues of economic growth and job creation. And we are now anticipating that this will move to the courts, and the courts will decide. And meanwhile, we will continue to focus on job creation and economic growth and winning the future.

Q Just to be clear, just to be clear, will this decision -- does it just apply to the four pending lawsuits on DOMA? Or does it apply to any -- another lawsuit for DOMA in the future?

MR. CARNEY: I would refer you -- I'm not a lawyer -- but I would refer you to the Justice Department. My understanding is that because of the decision about the constitutionality of DOMA and the position that the administration is taking, that we will no longer defend DOMA going forward. We will, however, continue to enforce it. And we will continue to be participants in the cases to allow those cases to continue and be resolved, and also so that Congress or members of Congress can pursue the defense if they so desire.

Q I just have one last question, one last question. Is there any outcome at the district or appellate level that would persuade the Obama administration to volunteer discontinuing enforcement of DOMA throughout the nation?

MR. CARNEY: You're asking me to speculate. I would also note that the President is obligated to enforce the law.

Q Jay?

MR. CARNEY: Yes, Peter.

Q Thank you. Just to clarify, so imposing a no-fly zone in Libya, that's under active consideration right now?

MR. CARNEY: I'm not going to get into specifics, but I will say that we are reviewing a variety of options with our international partners to compel or to persuade the government of Libya to cease this terrible violence.

Q And could you also maybe give us any insight into why that might be the right course of action at this point, or whether it is --

MR. CARNEY: Again, I'm not going -- you mean a specific course of action? I'm not going to. What we are looking for are courses of action that have produced the desired results, which is an end to the bloodshed.

Q Jay, when you look at state capitals in Wisconsin, Ohio and Indiana, what's wrong with a governor trying to address basically state entitlements, something the President says the federal government has to do as well? And are the Democratic members of those legislatures correct to simply leave the state and not deal with the legislation on the floor?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I will -- on the specific actions that members of different legislatures have taken, I'm not going to judge that, but I will -- from here. But I will say that there is nothing wrong with -- as the President made clear in his interview with a Wisconsin television station, he firmly believes that state legislatures and governors need to address their fiscal issues, just as he is working with Congress to address fiscal problems at the federal level.

His view is that it is important that everyone work together towards that goal; that public sector employees obviously have to tighten their belts, others have to tighten their belts, but that this should not be an effort that goes after some of the fundamental rights of collective bargaining in the name of reducing the deficit. Because that -- I think it's fair to say that the best outcomes will be when everyone sits at the table -- executive branch, legislatures, union members -- and deals with these issues in a productive way so that they can be resolved, precisely so that these states can get control of their budgets, as we are very aggressively trying to get control of ours.

Q Since it is happening in a number of states, does he see this debate now becoming more national?

MR. CARNEY: I'm not going to speculate on his behalf or mine about where this debate is going.

Let me pick on some folks that I haven't. Yes, sir.

Q Thank you, Jay. Following up on Wendell's question earlier about the Libyan opposition, does the administration have a dialogue, either through a back channel or more public, with any of the international opposition or expatriate groups who have been speaking out against Colonel Qaddafi for years?

MR. CARNEY: I actually will direct you to the State Department on that. I don't have anything about our engagement at that level, but perhaps the State Department does.

Q A follow-up?

MR. CARNEY: Hold on a second. Yes, sir.

Q On Pakistan, how concerned -- if you can give us some idea separate of State Department output -- how concerned is the President with this diplomatic situation? And has the presidential visit to Pakistan -- is it now in jeopardy? Was it ever placed in question by the whole situation?

MR. CARNEY: I will simply say that our position is the same as it was, which we believe that the principle that every country in the world that participates in the Vienna Convention on diplomatic relations has a responsibility to honor the provisions of that treaty. And that's our starting point in dealing with this issue. And we continue to be focused on a resolution that results in Pakistan honoring the diplomatic immunity status of the individual and his return home.

Savannah.

Q Two things. Does the U.S. believe it has any leverage over Qaddafi?

MR. CARNEY: The United States believes that, as I think I said the other day, that the most effective action here is -- will be taken in a united way by our -- the United States with its international partners; that that will have hopefully the most significant impact on the behavior of the Libyan government. And we are working very closely with our allies and our partners in the international community and examining multilateral actions as well as bilateral actions that will bring about the kind of result that we think is absolutely necessary.

Q And why has the President not spoken out on Libya until now

MR. CARNEY: Well, Savannah, I would just direct you to what I said before, which is the President has issued a statement in his words. The Secretary of State --

Q You consider a paper statement equal in force, magnitude, impact to an on-camera statement?

MR. CARNEY: I will say that the President is going to speak directly about this either later today or tomorrow.

Q Can I follow up on that?

Q Does the nature of the Qaddafi regime and the unpredictability of his behavior limit what the United States could do to stop this bloodshed, barring except articulating U.S. principles?

MR. CARNEY: Again, to us it's not about individual leaders, it's about the principles that guide our positions. And we insist that the bloodshed end -- together with many other countries. We insist that the universal rights of the Libyan people be recognized and respected. And we believe that for Libya, as well as other countries, that reforms need to be taken to respond to the aspirations that have been voiced so profoundly by Libyans and other peoples in the region.

And again, it's not about personalities, it's about the people of these individual countries.

Q You mentioned the safety of U.S. citizens as a factor. Are oil prices a factor as well in formulating U.S. position?

MR. CARNEY: I would say simply that our position has to do with the absolute necessity to end the bloodshed, with the need to recognize the universal rights of the citizens of Libya and the need to protect American citizens.

Q Just two questions.

MR. CARNEY: I'm going to go all the way back, which I don't think I've hit that road. Yes, sir.

Q I understand that President Obama is going to meet President Calderón next week here at the White House. Can you tell us what is the reason of the meeting?

MR. CARNEY: I'm sorry, I didn't hear the full question. Say that again?

Q We understand that next week President Obama will receive here at the White House the President of Mexico, Felipe Calderón. Can you tell us what is the reason of the meeting?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the President is deeply committed to the strong partnership the United States has with Mexico. I think that is the reason for the meeting. We admire the commitment and sacrifices of the Mexican people as they confront the criminal organizations that have brought so much violence to Mexico, specifically on those issues which I know have been in the news. But this is a vital and important relationship with an important ally.

Q When is going to take place the meeting? The third?

MR. CARNEY: I'm sorry?

Q When? The day of the meeting?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have that. I don't have that for you. But maybe I can get a specific for you.

Hold on. I haven't done anybody standing. Yes, sir.

Q Thank you very much, Jay. When you say reviewing options with international partners, are we talking about NATO as an entity and NATO members in particular?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I was -- I think I was referring to the United Nations Security Council, but we're consulting with our international partners about different things we can do to effect the change that we think is necessary.

Q When we discuss, for instance, no-fly zone, would NATO as an organization, which has been used in the past, could be --

MR. CARNEY: I don't have anything on you -- on specific options.

Q Somali pirates?

Q Just two?

MR. CARNEY: Hold on. Andre -- yes, right up front. Yes, sir.

Q How would the White House read the performance of the Gulf Coast Claims Facility and Ken Feinberg in handling oil spill claims?

MR. CARNEY: As you know, in the wake of the unprecedented oil spill, the President worked to secure a \$20 billion fund that would be used to pay claims and would be administered by a third party. Ken Feinberg, whom you mentioned, was appointed by BP to manage that process. This administration, through the Department of Justice, has made clear -- has clearly communicated its concerns -- some of the concerns that we have had and has publicly urged the Gulf Coast Claims Facility to take a number of steps to improve the process. I would point you to -- for more on that, there's a filing that the Justice Department made I think in the last day or two.

Q In that filing, though, they said, "The United States is not in a position to comment on any specific claims or their treatment by the GCCF." Why won't the Justice Department or the Obama administration say if Feinberg is doing a good job, a bad job, somewhere in the middle?

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, I would point you to the Department of Justice, which is administering that -- or at least overseeing that -- and to the document that they file.

Q Somali pirates?

Q Two questions?

MR. CARNEY: Hold on.

Q Thank you, thank you very much.

MR. CARNEY: Yes. Margaret.

Q Thank you. I know you said that it's not about the person when we were talking about Libya, but does the President believe, given what's happened in the last few days, that Qaddafi can continue to lead Libya? And what message do you believe it would send to other countries where there is now civil unrest but nobody has been toppled yet if he were able to remain in power?

MR. CARNEY: Margaret, again, I would point you to the fact that this is not about individual leaders, it's not about personalities. And our position has never been -- with regards to Libya or any of the other countries that have been affected by unrest and by demonstrations, peaceful demonstrations by the peoples of those countries -- that we should be selecting the leaders or deciding who can or cannot lead a country. The process is what's important: the respect for universal rights, the ability of the people in these countries to participate in the political process in a democratic way and to have their voices heard and, through that process, to enhance the possibilities for prosperity and economic growth in their country.

So, again, it's not about individual leaders.

Q If your position shifts at some point, do you believe that would be in a unified sense with other countries? Should we not expect the United States to take a different position unless other people --

MR. CARNEY: I'm not going to speculate, but our position on this has been very uniform and clear with regards to all these countries.

Let me -- sir, yes, next to Sam, on the right of Sam. I don't know your name, sorry.

Q Jared.

MR. CARNEY: Oh, Jared, okay, nice to see you.

Q Jay, does the President -- you've outlined kind of the principles and what the President expects moving forward when it comes to the North African and Middle East unrest. Does the President see this as

kind of an arc, due to any overarching factors like decreased power of OPEC or dispersion of al Qaeda -- is there any -- are there any starting factors that the President sees crediting for this unrest?

MR. CARNEY: Jared, I would -- a starting point would be the speech in Cairo, which clearly recognized the need and called on the countries in the region to respond to, with reforms, the democratic aspirations of the people in the region. On al Qaeda I would note that the change that has come about in this region has in many ways been a direct repudiation of the kind of change that violent terrorists want to bring about and the means by which they believe change should come about, which is death and destruction. This has been peaceful change. It has been pluralistic. It has been -- really has unfolded in stark contrast to the methods of terrorist organizations.

Q And one more, Jay. The President is going to the United Kingdom May 24 to 26. Will he be in Chicago on the 16th? Any plans to be there?

MR. CARNEY: Is that a trick question? (Laughter.)

Q Is the President planning to be in Chicago for Mayor --

MR. CARNEY: I don't have anything on his schedule.

Q Did he call Rahm?

MR. CARNEY: He did call and congratulate Rahm.

Q What did he say?

MR. CARNEY: He congratulated him on his victory. And I believe we put out a statement -- the President put out a statement.

Q How long was the conversation?

Q Did he phone him?

MR. CARNEY: Yes. I don't have -- I actually don't know how long.

Q Just two questions.

Q Somali pirates?

MR. CARNEY: Hold on one second.

Q One second? All right.

Q Hey, Jay, can you clarify something you said to Jared?

MR. CARNEY: Yes.

Q You said -- he asked for a starting point of all the unrest and you said -- I just want to give you the chance to clarify this. You said the President's speech in Cairo was the starting point?

MR. CARNEY: No, no, no, no. Thank you, Sam, for offering me the opportunity to clarify that. I was simply saying as a starting point to understand our perspective and policy towards the region and the unrest that we've seen in these last several weeks.

Q And then, just to -- quickly on Wisconsin and Indiana. How closely is the President following the situations there? And has he been in contact with national labor leaders since the episode began?

MR. CARNEY: I'm not aware that he's been in contact with national labor leaders. He's aware of reports about what's happening in these areas, but I don't have anything more for you on that.

Q Just two questions.

Q Thanks, Jay.

MR. CARNEY: One more all the way in the back. My commitment to get to the back.

Yes, ma'am.

Q In the Small Business Forum that the President attended yesterday he expressed an interest in something called a tax credit for angel investors. Those would be those with financial means to invest early on. Is the President considering new initiatives in this area or part of a small business -- a broader small business package?

MR. CARNEY: I think what the President was reflecting was this interest -- and Startup America is a good indication of his interest in just this, which is vehicles by which the government can assist the efforts by larger companies or investors to invest in smaller companies to speed up the process of growth and job creation and innovation. So I think Startup America is a good indication of how important he views the role that small business and innovative businesses have in growing the economy and creating the industries that we need to compete in the 21st century.

And he was very -- the forum yesterday was excellent in that regard because there were so many -- it was clear that the kind of small businesses that were represented there in Cleveland were exactly the kinds of businesses that will drive not just job creation -- because we all know that small businesses are the engine of economic growth -- but innovation, creativity, which is exactly what we need in this coming century.

Thank you all very much. Appreciate it.

END

1:36 P.M. EST