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## Briefing Room

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### The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

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# Briefing by White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs, 11/6/09

12:15 P.M. EST MR. GIBBS: Good afternoon. Let me -- I'm going to start with a couple of things. I was going to do a week ahead but, as you might imagine, the week ahead prior to leaving for Asia is a bit in flux. As that gets filled in throughout the rest of today, we will endeavor to provide better guidance to the exact events that will happen over the course of those several days prior to us leaving for Asia. Secondly, I'm just going to say that I'm happy -- I know there will be many questions and I'm happy to try to the best of my ability and the knowledge that we have right now to answer those questions, understanding that this is an investigation right now being conducted by the Department of

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Defense and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. So there -- I'm going to push you on some of these questions to speak directly to them about details and facts as we learn more. So, Mr. Feller.

Q Okay. I'm going to try. A few questions on Fort Hood, Robert. We just heard the President's words of caution about jumping to conclusions, so let me ask you this. What can you tell us about what you learned about the shooter's motivation?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I think we don't yet know that answer and I think the best update on that will likely come from the FBI.

Q So it's a matter at this point of it's not known as opposed to it's known but it would be imprudent to share?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I would point you to the FBI for the latest information.

Q From the White House perspective, from what you've learned so far is it clear whether anybody missed any signs that could have prevented this?

MR. GIBBS: We are right now focused on -- with the Department of Defense and the FBI -- on what happened and this will be thoroughly reviewed.

Q What about the possibility, or is it under consideration the President will go to either Texas or to Dover?

MR. GIBBS: I think it is -- one of the things, obviously, that's most in flux about the week ahead is -- would be a visit to Texas. When a service is scheduled, the President will attend. Fort Hood is, as you all know, the largest military institution in this country. We will -- the

memorial service would be scheduled for the convenience of the families that suffered the tragic losses yesterday. Just to give you some background, in the facility where the incident happened were troops representing more than a dozen different units throughout the country. So because of the dispersed nature of where individuals were, I'm told that not all of the notifications have yet been completed. When that is done, and there's -- we have an understanding of when it is best for the families, the President will work his schedule around what's best for those families. Yes, sir.

Q The President in the Rose Garden said that the unexpectedly big jump in unemployment past the 10 percent mark was sobering, and he also listed some ideas that he said his economic team was considering for further job creation. The question that some economists are asking is, is this really enough? And some say it's not, but there needs to be a second stimulus program of some sort. Is there any consideration going to be given to a second stimulus package, or is the President ruling that out?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I don't think today's news changes what we have said for quite some time on this, Matt, and that is, we know, first of all, that the recovery plan, as signed into law in February, continues to make investments and create and save jobs here in this country. We saw that we've had positive economic growth for the first quarter in more than a year, and that before we can have job growth we're going to have to have economic growth. So our focus obviously continues to be on ensuring that that money gets out as quickly as it is prescribed. The President

and his team for some time have been evaluating other ideas. Advisors were here earlier in the week to go through some of their ideas that the President and the team will look at and decide if they make the most sense.

Q The Democrats lost two state houses earlier this week, and polls showed that voters were particularly unhappy about the economic situation. Is there any concern that -- in terms of 2010 coming up, that the -- these concerns might -- joblessness in particular might have impact?

MR. GIBBS: I'm just going to put a little of the exit polling on this, and I was reminded of this because I saw it up on the television screen before I came out here. The exit polling question was, "Are you worried about the economy?" Okay? Had the President been a voter in Virginia or New Jersey and been asked by an exit poller if he was worried about the economy, the answer would have been yes. I think the numbers in Virginia were 90 -- one of the states was 90 [percent] and one was 84 [percent]. We'd all be anxious to meet that 10-16 percent that don't seem to be worried about the economy. I'm not entirely sure who those people are. So, look, the President is focused on getting our economy back, understanding, Matt, where we started from, right. In January we had a loss of 741,000 -- 741,000 jobs. As the President mentioned, we are seeing those numbers slowly decrease, and that is part of the good news. We saw unemployment claims drop slightly into their lowest level in several months yesterday, but the President won't be satisfied until those that are out of work and want to work can find a job. Yes, sir.

Q It's kind of a theoretical question, but what --

at what point does an attack become considered a terrorist attack, even if it's a domestic terrorist attack?

MR. GIBBS: I don't know that I would have the theoretical background to answer that. I would pose that to somebody at the FBI. But again, Jake, I don't know that we're at a point yet where we fully understand the motive.

Q Okay. In terms of the House health care reform bills, right now one of the big logjams, as you know, has to do with abortion language and also has to do with whether or not illegal immigrants, undocumented workers, can have access to the health insurance exchanges. Those are both issues that you have said from this podium, I think, that should have been settled theoretically, because you said that the bill the President signs will not fund abortions, I believe.

MR. GIBBS: The President said that.

Q The President said that. And you said that the bill the President signs will not -- illegal immigrants will not have access to health care -- to health insurance exchanges. So why are they still debating this on Capitol Hill if the President has made his position as to what he's going to sign clear?

MR. GIBBS: Congress obviously is working through a process that will ultimately, we believe, before the end of the year get a bill to the President's desk. I think there are still discussions going on, on both of these two issues up on Capitol Hill. While the President would like it, tomorrow will not be the final vote on a bill coming to his desk. But he sees tomorrow as an

important step forward. He'll go to Capitol Hill tomorrow to advocate for continuing that progress and passing in the House of Representatives a bill.

Q Well, I guess the question is the people who are -- have the Democrats who are urging a different position from the one that you and the President have stated about what the President will sign, have they not gotten the message? Has the President not conveyed to them what he wants in the bill sufficiently?

MR. GIBBS: Look, as you mentioned, the President has been clear about what he said and I think those that have a different viewpoint than what the President might have on either side of the aisle are best to speak to their motives.

Q Robert, could you clarify something? The President was supposed to go to the Hill today. Now you're saying he's going to go tomorrow. Hoyer is saying that the vote might not happen until Sunday or even next week. Is it -- is he going tomorrow or is he going --

MR. GIBBS: The schedule as of now has him going tomorrow. Obviously the events of the past few hours have changed schedules, and the President preferred to go slightly closer to the vote, which put it at tomorrow.

Q So he's going tomorrow either way?

MR. GIBBS: That's -- as of right now, that's what's on the schedule.

Q Why was he waved off today?

MR. GIBBS: Again, just what I said -- schedules

have changed a bit based on the events that have happened over the past -- regrettably over the past 24 hours, and the President wanted to go a little closer to the vote. Yes, sir.

Q It's been reported that the alleged shooter did not want to go -- be deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, and I'm wondering if the President has commented about this at all?

MR. GIBBS: I have not heard him say anything on that, and I think the best place to get information about where a soldier might or might not have been headed is over at the Department of Defense.

Q Are there any additional war council meetings planned?

MR. GIBBS: Again, the schedule is a bit in flux. There will be one next week before the President departs for Asia.

Q On Afghanistan?

MR. GIBBS: Afghanistan and Pakistan, yes.

Q And does the President -- where is the President in terms of his thinking -- all the information that he's been trying to gather? Has he given any indication at all that "I'm almost there, I'm 90 percent there" in terms of making that troop decision?

MR. GIBBS: I've described the process as coming to a conclusion.

Q Anything more specific than that?

MR. GIBBS: Not that I'm aware of, no.

Q One other question on the Asia trip. He's making several stops. But when the President comes back, is there anything at all that he wants to come back with? Is there an issue --

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, I think that the President is going to have an opportunity over the course of this trip to meet with important -- important leaders. Obviously, we start in Japan. We will go to APEC. We will visit China before going to South Korea and home. You can understand what I think the President will be discussing -- I should mention, at APEC, there will likely be some important bilateral meetings. I think what will be on the docket will obviously be the health of the world economy. We will discuss, obviously, North Korea. I anticipate Iran will come up in meetings. Nonproliferation obviously will be something that is discussed, certainly as it relates to those two previous countries that I mentioned. And, finally, energy and climate change will also be part of what's discussed. I know we delayed a briefing call on this. It was originally supposed to be today. We'll probably do that likely some time early on Monday.

Q But are you looking to get anything at all, reassurance from one of these leaders about any one of these issues? Anything in particular that you're looking --

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, I'll wait for the call to go through exactly what we see as part of each day on this. Again, I think you've got a very important part of the world to our economy and to the economies that we're going to see. I think obviously economic health and well-being and jobs will be a significant part of this. Yes, sir.



Q On Fort Hood, you said that when a service is scheduled, he will attend?

MR. GIBBS: Yes.

Q Did I understand that -- you mean, before or after the Asia trip?

MR. GIBBS: I anticipate -- we will attend a memorial service at Fort Hood when it is scheduled. I anticipate that that will likely happen prior to Asia. But again, this is, again, somewhat in flux based on the scheduling of this -- there are families that would have to come in from all over the United States, and our schedule is -- will be formed around that.

Q And they're not building the schedule around his schedule, I take it, for memorial services, as far as you know.

MR. GIBBS: We have communicated with the Department of Defense that our schedule is built around the families that suffered tragic losses yesterday.

Q Well, if they were to delay it until Tuesday or Wednesday or something like that, he could end up changing his schedule on the Asia trip.

MR. GIBBS: We anticipate going to Asia, and we anticipate -- we will get to a memorial service. I hate to get into hypotheticals --

Q Right, but you're not ruling out the possibility of changing the departure.

MR. GIBBS: I'm not ruling -- I'd prefer to talk about the schedule when we have a better sense of its formation.

Q Okay. What is -- could you give us an idea of what the President is doing and can do from here, with regard to Fort Hood? How much of his time is he spending on it? What can a President do in this situation?

MR. GIBBS: Well, obviously the President is receiving regular briefings from John Brennan. The President's daily briefing was expanded this morning in both scope and time to include a fairly lengthy briefing from Secretary Gates, Admiral Mullen, Director Mueller from the FBI. There was a meeting last evening in the Oval Office, about 6:20 p.m., with the same -- that same group of people. Again, the President gets regular updates as to the incident and to the investigation.

Q And is he only receiving information, or is he also in a position to direct resources, to give orders in some sort --

MR. GIBBS: Well, obviously he talked with -- he talked yesterday afternoon with -- obviously by phone with Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen to get an update as to what has happened. He talked with Lieutenant -- I'm having a hard time today -- Lieutenant General Cone, the base commander at Fort Hood, and obviously has offered whatever resources any of those -- any of those individuals might need. I think the FBI was on the location fairly quickly and is working on this investigation jointly with the Department of Defense.

Q But are you aware of any action that he's actually taken, any affirmative action he's taken to order resources --

MR. GIBBS: I'm not aware of any requests --

Q -- or to tell somebody to go?

MR. GIBBS: I'm not aware of any requests that have been made for the movement of resources.

Q One question on health care. How do you respond to the piece from some conservative economist, Feldstein -- Feldstein -- I forget -- Martin Feldstein -- in the Washington Post today that the preexisting condition language in the Democrats' bills would basically encourage people to drop their health insurance. They would escape -- especially people who buy it directly themselves. If you're facing \$10,000 in premiums for your family of four, that's a lot more than the penalty you would pay for not having insurance. And if somebody does get sick, because there is no ban on preexisting conditions, you can then just go in and get the insurance. So why drop it?

MR. GIBBS: Understand in that scenario, if there is a scenario which you described, my sense is that would exceed the income threshold and there wouldn't be a penalty.

Q No, he -- they said it worked quite well. Maybe there wouldn't be --

MR. GIBBS: I'm sure we estimated a series of events that could happen in the --

Q But, I mean, it just makes sense, though. Why would people not drop their health insurance if they can get it at any time as soon as they get sick because of the preexisting condition?

MR. GIBBS: There's a setup where, based on certain income levels, you'd be required to have insurance, not unlike --

Q Or pay a penalty, which is much less than the premium.

MR. GIBBS: Well, the President doesn't believe that people don't want insurance. We're seeking to make that insurance more affordable. Nobody here seems to subscribe to what several of those economists have come up with for the latest road bump on passing health care reform. What we see more likely are people that are dropping their coverage because they can't afford skyrocketing premiums. We see small businesses that are dropping their coverage because it's become -- despite the fact that they want to provide coverage -- it's become far too expensive for them to do that for their employees. And we've seen insurance companies abuse the system by taking somebody that gets sick and dropping their coverage. People losing their coverage is happening right now. Insurance companies dropping their coverage is happening right now. Somebody gets sick, they call their insurance for their coverage, they find out it's gone. That's going to be illegal when the President signs health care reform by the end of this year.

Q A couple questions. First, the President said it's important we don't jump to conclusions. Is that a way of the President expressing some concern that people are reading too much into the shooter's religious beliefs, profile? I mean, is there --

MR. GIBBS: All that is simply to say, Chuck, that I think we've all seen that the situation is moving quickly, that what facts have been presented have changed, and it's early in this investigation to know all that we need to know.

Q How much concern does the President have and does the White House have that because of some of the pieces of information that are out there about the shooter, that there is --

MR. GIBBS: Well, again, I think --

Q -- an uneasy reaction that some people are having?

MR. GIBBS: Well, again, I think that's why --

Q And maybe the potential mistreatment of Muslim American soldiers.

MR. GIBBS: I think that's why the President said what he said, in terms of let's figure out what we need to know and go from there.

Q And is it -- do you guys believe it will -- it may end up being the role of the President to try to -- to deal with this issue if there is something that the Army -- this issue --

MR. GIBBS: I can tell you that the President and Secretary Gates talked about -- talked yesterday during their early evening meeting about morale in the military. Obviously that's something that's on their minds and on Admiral Mullen's mind, as well.

Q Going to health care, what is the message -- Vice President Biden is making calls, we know some Cabinet secretaries are making calls to these -- to undecided Democrats. Can you summarize the message that they're --

MR. GIBBS: Pass health care. (Laughter.)

Q Or else. (Laughter.)

Q Or else. No, but what is the sales pitch? I mean, what is the sales pitch to these wavering Democrats, saying, you know what, maybe they're concerned about the political environment, maybe they're concerned about -- what is the sales pitch?

MR. GIBBS: The sales pitch is simply that we're on the cusp of the type of health care reform that this country has been talking about for decades. We're on the cusp of making it -- health insurance more affordable for those that don't have it. We're on the cusp of making it more affordable for those that do have it.

Q So don't stand in the way, do you want to be -- is it one of the these things, do you want to be on the side of not passing this or --

MR. GIBBS: No, I -- don't go with your answer to your question, go with my answer to your question.

Q Fair enough. There isn't -- there isn't a sense of, you know, you got to do this for the party, you got to do this for the President?

MR. GIBBS: -- you ask and answer the questions, and I'll just sort of nod.

Q So, no? There isn't a -- there isn't a "do this for the party," "do this for the President" pitch?

MR. GIBBS: Do this for the country. Do this for your constituents. Do this for the people that you represent, who as I said to Chip, are losing their health insurance every day, who are being discriminated against by insurance companies who are watching their businesses be unable to provide them health insurance.

Q Quickly on the economy, during your economic briefings, is there a sense of how the America -- America's economic recovery compares to what's going on in Europe, compared to what's going on in Asia? And is there concern that it's -- America is recovering slower than other places? Are you guys looking to see how the U.S. recovery is going compared to the rest of the world?

MR. GIBBS: I think that during some of this, we've heard different statistics when GDP is released in other countries. But I don't -- I can go back and see if there's been a fairly extensive conversation. But I don't recall one. Jonathon.

Q The President, when he was talking about signing the unemployment insurance -- and other issues -- bill today, emphasized that it was revenue neutral, that it did not add to the deficit. Does that mean that at this point job creating bills like the -- or measures like the ones he was intimating later should be revenue-neutral, and not be -- that the emphasis is now going to be on targeting assistance without adding macroeconomic stimulus?

MR. GIBBS: I'm not entirely sure I understood your --

Q I mean, in other words, not add -- not pumping more money into the economy, because you're going to be off-setting it.

MR. GIBBS: Oh, because of the neutrality of it? Oh, I see. Let me just simply leave it at the evaluation of what the President talked about, whether it's in additional investments in infrastructure, tax incentives for businesses that create jobs. I don't know that the full evaluation

on that has been done to know quite honestly what the answer ultimately would be.

Q Would those additional measures that he's talking about, would those be something that he would like to see done in the near future, maybe this year, or is this something that he would be including in his budget in February?

MR. GIBBS: I don't think that we would preclude -- I don't think that we would -- let me figure out how to phrase this. I don't think that the President is asking that the evaluation be done for next year if the economic team comes up with ideas that they think can create jobs this year.

Q And you're getting a lot of heat today from Republicans and some Democrats on the Hill who really want, who really believe that the focus of policymaking right now should be on jobs, not on --

MR. GIBBS: It is. It is.

Q Do you think that the health care bill is a jobs bill?

MR. GIBBS: I think there are -- I think -- do I think health care is part of economic concerns? Absolutely. I think if you have a job and you lose your health care, it's an economic concern. I think people that are sitting down each month to pay their premiums or see how much they pay for their premiums, yes, I think when that's reflected in your paycheck, those tend to be economic concerns. Absolutely. Mark.

Q Robert, it wasn't clear to me in the Rose Garden statement if the President and his advisors believe the unemployment rate has topped out or



whether it's still going to get higher before it starts to go down.

MR. GIBBS: My sense is that we -- if you look at the graph of job loss from January until now, we are --

Q Monthly job losses?

MR. GIBBS: Right, I'm sorry, monthly job loss, we've gone from roughly 700,000 down to less than 200,000. I think if you look at -- almost a stair-step in terms of bracketing three- and four-month periods together. You've heard me say for months that we believed that 10 percent was going to come. I think we are heartened by the decrease in unemployment -- weekly unemployment claims, monthly unemployment claims, and in increases in productivity and economic growth as part of GDP. But I believe and I think most would tell you that the rate is more likely than not to get a little worse before it gets better.

Q Back to health care. If the Democrats don't have the votes, would the President cancel his trip to the Hill?

MR. GIBBS: We'll have scheduling information updates for you as they're warranted.

Q Is the trip to the Hill fixed? I mean, he's definitely going, you just don't know when?

MR. GIBBS: No, I started the briefing by telling you -- and clarifying for those in the back that it was on Saturday.

Q And there's no chance he'll cancel?

MR. GIBBS: I'm going to start taping these and

sort of just referring back to earlier questions. I think I've said now on maybe multiple occasions that if we have scheduling updates you will be among the first few hundred to hear.

Q Just one more, just a housekeeping thing. Should we expect he'll make remarks to the pool at Walter Reed later this afternoon?

MR. GIBBS: I doubt it. We haven't done that usually in the past. The President looks at these as generally private affairs. Yes, sir.

Q Robert, you said the message on the phone calls to the Hill is to pass health care, correct?

MR. GIBBS: Yes. You were listening.

Q Yes, I was. (Laughter.) And so that message is about a bill that the President has yet to endorse -- am I still correct on that?

MR. GIBBS: The President supports the passage of the bill.

Q So he does endorse it?

MR. GIBBS: Support/endorse --

Q Okay. Because getting back to what Jake was asking about earlier, there are still some unresolved issues, so I'm just curious if the President supports it in its unresolved --

MR. GIBBS: The President wants the --

Q -- form or it's resolved form?

MR. GIBBS: The President wants the House to pass it. The President wants the House to pass health care reform.

Q On August 7th, the President said, "The worst may be behind us" --

MR. GIBBS: I'm glad we got to -- I'm glad it took, like, six questions to get to the fact that the President would travel from here to the House to say, "Pass the bill."

Q Well, when I asked him yesterday, he didn't say it, and neither did you. So I'm just trying to nail it down.

MR. GIBBS: I don't think it -- I hope it wasn't news that we were going up there to have them pass the bill. Apparently, it was.

Q On August 7th the President said, "The worst may be behind us. Today we're pointed in the right direction ... that's why we're turning this economy around. I am convinced that we can see the light at the end of the tunnel." Was he correct on August 7th?

MR. GIBBS: Yes.

Q Based on what we've seen is happening since then? And there's nothing about that, that you wouldn't want to revise?

MR. GIBBS: As I've said here and I think you'll hear economists of all political stripes say, Major, you're not going to have economic growth -- I'm sorry, you're not going to have job growth without economic growth, right? The figures that were released recently denote that we have for the first time in more than a year seen positive economic growth. We see figures like unemployment claims, as I mentioned, go down, productivity go up. I think the President would believe that we're on the right path, yes. Is he

satisfied? Of course not.

Q But the worst is behind us?

MR. GIBBS: I believe that's the case, yes.

Q Two publications, The Guardian and The Weekly Standard, are both reporting about IAEA possession of documents that suggest Iran has tested what they called a advanced nuclear warhead, or a two-point implosion device, and has brought this to the attention of the Iranians in the most recent conversations, not only about -- trying to find out if they're in favor or not in favor of the low-enriched uranium transfer to Russia, but about this apparent new technology breakthrough. And also, they suggest that the intelligence committees on the House and the Senate have been briefed about this. I'm curious, is the White House aware of this? Is it concerned about it in any way, shape or form?

MR. GIBBS: Let me check with the NSC on that. I don't have anything on that part. Q Quickly, you had said earlier you weren't sure -- you didn't know enough about the motive yet, or whether or not to characterize it as an act of domestic terrorism. Is John Brennan the person that would normally be briefing the President on an issue, on a situation like this? MR. GIBBS: Well, John obviously is here as developments warrant as they have in the past 24 hours. Director Mueller, Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen will also, I assume communicate over and speak with the President. Before we went to talk to the President at one point yesterday, John was outside the Oval Office on the phone with Director Mueller. So I assume that that will continue.

Q Robert, also on Fort Hood, following on Chuck's question, the President in his speech in Cairo talked about reaching out to the Muslim world, and presumably, though, he also wants, within our own country, to reach out. I'm wondering, is he concerned at all about this shooting fostering anti-Muslim sentiment? And if so, what will he do as President to try to prevent that?

MR. GIBBS: Well, Sheryl, let me -- that may be a good question to address a little bit later on. I just don't want to get ahead of the investigation and what we all know.

Q But let's stick with this. Why is it getting ahead of the investigation? We do know that there's a suspect in custody, and we know from news reports and interviews that he is a devout Muslim, he prays at a mosque, was raised in this country as an American citizen. I mean, aren't these --

MR. GIBBS: He was born an American. So he wasn't raised here as an American citizen.

Q Right. So aren't these -- aren't these issues that -- and it's a topic of debate -- aren't these issues that the President will want in some way to address?

MR. GIBBS: And at some point, he -- when we know more, he may.

Q And just one more on health care. Why does he want to go closer to the vote? What does he -- what does he think he will achieve by going closer to the vote?

MR. GIBBS: To have a chance to talk to them closer to the point at which they're going to cast

their votes to move health care reform.

Q Robert, is the President confident that votes are there? Is he going there to prevent last-minute Democratic defections or to rally votes?

MR. GIBBS: I anticipate that the President will lay out why he thinks health care reform is important. He'll talk about it as an economic issue. I assume he will rally the troops. I anticipate that he'd answer questions that people have, probably tell "fired up and ready to go," and do all those things.

Q Is he making calls?

MR. GIBBS: Probably, yes. I have not seen the latest call sheet, but I assume so, yes.

Q I didn't hear you say he's confident the votes are there.

MR. GIBBS: We're going to go up there to talk to the House about passing health care reform, and believe they will do so, yes.

Q Mention Cousin Pookie, perhaps? (Laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: We're still trying to find Cousin Pookie from Tuesday. (Laughter.)

Q When the President sits down to make his final decisions on Afghanistan, how does he incorporate in that decision his concern about American military, the stress on them, the stress of combat? How will Fort Hood play into his decisions on how to go forward?

MR. GIBBS: Ann, the President, even back to being a senator, worked as part of the Veterans Committee on issues about PTSD and TBI --

traumatic brain injury -- and the effects that it had on the well-being of our force. Obviously part of the role of the Joint Chiefs in the process was to talk to the President about the health and the strength of the force, understanding that a lot has been asked of it over the past eight years.

Q Did they?

MR. GIBBS: Did they --

Q Talk to him about the strength --

MR. GIBBS: Absolutely. And there was discussions with the Army and the Marine Corps, who are both working to institute policies that allow those that are deployed overseas to have a certain amount of time at home before they are redeployed. I think that is certainly one of the things that the President -- one of the things the President will have to take into account in making any decision about resources in that region.

Q When was the last time the President spoke to Speaker Pelosi, do you know?

MR. GIBBS: I don't know the answer. I would assume some time this week, but I honestly -- I don't know the answer to that off the top of my head.

Q Is he urging her to compromise on the abortion issue, seeing as that is where the holdout Democrats are?

MR. GIBBS: I don't know when the last time they spoke so -- I know that there's discussions about that going on, on Capitol Hill.

Q A follow-up on that? Does the President believe that the current language -- some Democrats

have argued that the current language does bar federal funding of abortion because it would theoretically be (inaudible) funding. Does he believe that that language fulfills his pledge or --

MR. GIBBS: I'm not going to get involved in those -  
-

Q He doesn't have a --

MR. GIBBS: I'm not going to do the negotiating here. Steve.

Q Robert, the Pentagon is obviously focused on the Texas shooting and the aftermath of that. Does this impact the timetable on the Afghanistan decision? MR. GIBBS: I don't -- I've not gotten that indication from any of the participants that have been here for those meetings.

Q Robert, I have one question and one clarification. First, the new TV series on ABC, "V," a lot of people are talking about how this show draws very strong --

MR. GIBBS: I got to tell you -- I'm going to start with this: I don't want to give anybody the impression I have time to watch anything other than what most of you all do each night. So I can't even tell you what that is or what it's about. If that makes me fairly un-cool, I tend to watch more "SpongeBob" than "V."

Q There have been a lot of news stories about this --

MR. GIBBS: Makes me a hit with one six-year-old, and that really is all that counts.

Q You haven't seen the news stories about how



this show compares your administration to the alien invaders? (Laughter.) Seriously, really, you haven't heard about it? Q He couldn't admit it if he had. (Laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: Because there's a chip in the back of my head that requires me -- (laughter) -- I don't mean to -- I honestly -- I got to tell you, I spend -- I watch a little football on Saturday, a little football on Sunday, and a lot of news every other time.

Q Get a life. (Laughter.) Q (Inaudible).

MR. GIBBS: Pardon me?

Q Fourteen million people watch it, and the show --

MR. GIBBS: And clearly, me not being one of them. Again, I -- [Cross-talk.] (Laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: Hold on. I'm not entirely sure who I'd check on since I don't watch the show.

Q Well, check with the President, see if he has a reaction --

MR. GIBBS: I will assume that the President watches --

Q -- comparing him to a space alien.

MR. GIBBS: What's the -- which would probably, like, be one of the least worst things he's been called today.

Q One clarification from yesterday on the meeting with Clemente, it sounded to me like you were saying that Clemente requested the meeting. Can you --

MR. GIBBS: We both wanted to get together. April. Is "V" on -- what network?

Q ABC.

MR. GIBBS: Okay. Can I get a little briefing after this from the --

Q We'll send you a tape before the end of the day.

MR. GIBBS: Excellent.

Q He's serious.

MR. GIBBS: All right, hold on. Settle down. April. Back to your corners. (Laughter.)

Q Anyway, going back to what Ann was talking about, on the mental state of the troops, since this has happened and understanding that there have been studies on suicide rates and things of that nature with troops, has there been any kind of effort or push, extra push, since -- within the last 24 hours, to do more mental health wellness types of things among the troops?

MR. GIBBS: Obviously, the President -- I want to break this question up just a little bit, April. Obviously, the President signed into law advance appropriations for the VA, and the amount of money appropriated for the VA this year is at a record amount, understanding, as I said to Ann, that the tremendous stress that has been put on the force and the needs of more and more coming back from combat deployments overseas. That having been said, I would point you to DOD specifically on what you've asked about in terms of the last 24 hours, because like a series of other questions, I don't want to get ahead of what we know per the investigation. The President, again,

in that meeting with the Joint Chiefs, had an opportunity to talk to the service heads about the stress that has been put on our active-duty force, the stress that's been put on the Guard and reserve as the individuals charged with having a ready, rested, and well-equipped force for our protection.

Q Follow up on that, and one more question. Talking to some of the troops who have been in Iraq and Afghanistan who come back, is it a healthy thing for this White House to understand that some of the troops actually may not want to go back but understand that it is their duty that they have to? Is it healthy for that thought process from some of the troops who've been there and who --

MR. GIBBS: I'm sorry, let me make sure I understand. Healthy -- whose thought process? The thought process --

Q Some of the troops.

MR. GIBBS: -- of returning troops --

Q Right, troops who know that they may have to go back into harm's way who dread it, but yet understand they have to go. Is that healthy to you?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, I think it is -- I think, again, I'd encourage you to talk to the Department of Defense. Obviously the President and all of his team want to ensure that forces that are coming back are well treated, that they get the services that they need when they come out of an extraordinarily stressful environment. And quite frankly, one of the things that the President worked on as part of the Veterans Committee and

what we talked about -- what we've talked about is ensuring that as those come home that more and more meet with professionals to assess and ensure that they're getting all that they need when they do come back.

Q And on the unemployment numbers, the new numbers, black teen unemployment, male/female 16-19, 41.3 percent with this latest report. Is there a concern at this White House that the unemployment rate of teens in one group may be larger than that of adults, where some of -- many of these teens are living with families but at the same time some of them are helping to contribute to the --

MR. GIBBS: Sure. Well, look, I think obviously when you have numbers like we have, there are any number of groups that comprise that larger number that denote just how serious the economic crisis is. I boiled it all down just simply to say that the President obviously is deeply concerned, as you heard him talk about today, and he's working as hard as he can to find ways to create an environment for job creation for young people, for adults, for anybody in this country that wishes to find work and can't. David.

Q Yesterday at the rally on Capitol Hill, Congressman Boehner said that he considers the health care bill to be "the greatest threat to freedom" he has ever seen. I just was wondering what your response is to that.

MR. GIBBS: I think we could take up the better part of our afternoons and probably significantly into the weekend thinking of other conflicts that we've seen or read about throughout the history of the world that might be a greater threat to

freedom than what Congressman Boehner was discussing. I will continue to say what I've said before. You hear -- in this debate you hear analogies, you hear references to, you see pictures about and depictions of individuals that are truly stunning. And you hear it all the time. People -- imagine five years ago somebody comparing health care reform to 9/11. Imagine just a few years ago had somebody walked around with images of Hitler. Hopefully we can get back to a discussion about the issues that are important in this country, that we can do without being personally disagreeable and set up comparisons to things that were so insidious in our history that anybody in any professional walk of life would be well advised to compare nothing to those atrocities. Thanks, guys.

END 1:01 P.M. EST



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