

Newsmaker Transcript

White House Daily Briefing

Tuesday, February 7, 2017

SPICER:

Good afternoon. Just before I came up, wanted to let you know that we're monitoring the severe weather that's going through Louisiana at this time. The president's aware of the situation and is going to be reaching out to local and state officials throughout the day.

Also, yesterday evening, the president concurred with the FEMA administrator's recommendation to approve Governor Bryant's request to add public assistance to the previously issued major disaster declaration in Mississippi. Per the governor's request, public assistance will be added for three counties; Forrest, Lamar and Perry (ph).

Yesterday, the president had an amazing day at MacDill Air Force Base where he met with leaders of both southern -- Special Operations Command and Central Command and then had lunch with enlisted service members, thanking them for their service and hearing the ideas that were on their minds.

The president announced his intent to make historic financial investment in the armed forces of the United States, showing the entire world that America has the back of all those who stand in defense of freedom. As he has said many times before, the armed forces are at the very center of our fight against radical Islamic terrorism, and we must protect those who protect us.

The president kicked off today with a listening session of county sheriffs from around the country. The president welcomed leaders from the National Sheriffs Association to the White House and pledged to work closely with all members of law enforcement to keep the American people safe. He assured the sheriffs that the Trump administration will make every effort to stop drugs and crime from flowing into the country, put an end to the opioid epidemic, secure the borders, keep terrorists out and strengthen the bonds between state, local and federal law enforcement agencies.

The sheriffs thanked the president for what they described as this quote, "unprecedented level of support for law enforcement," and offered their full backing of his border security and immigration policies. They expressed how encouraged they've been by the pro-law enforcement atmosphere that has swept the country in the wake of the president's victory. They also presented a letter on behalf of the National Sheriffs Association thanking the president for his, quote, "recent show of support for law enforcement, specifically on immigration and border security issues," end quote, and commending the president's two executive orders for taking, quote, "significant steps to enhancing public safety."

The group engaged in a wide ranging discussion about the issues facing law enforcement, which the sheriffs said was an opportunity they hadn't been given under the previous administration. The sheriffs closed the meeting by thanking the president for defending the rule of law and the president

took them in the Oval Office to honor them and show his appreciation for their outstanding work they do to keep our communities safe.

A list of the attendees is available for those who are interested.

SPICER:

After that meeting, the president held another listening session on how to best fix the V.A. It's a top priority for the president and this administration to ensure that veterans get the care they need, when and where they need it.

Tragically many of our veterans are being failed by a system that does not work. This administration will reform and modernize the V.A. under the leadership of Dr. Shulkin, creating a culture of accountability that puts our veterans first. The president welcomed the group to the Roosevelt room, and expressed his intention to take whatever steps are necessary to improve health care access for the -- and quality for our heroic veterans.

Ms. Tiffany Smiley (ph), the wife of a veteran who was blinded by an IED, detailed her family's difficulty and experience with the V.A.'s healthcare system and offered suggestions on how it can be improved. The president, V.A. secretary-designate Dr. Shulkin, and a group of healthcare experts and veteran advocates, including Ike and Laura Pulmenter (ph) engaged in a wide range discussion on reforming the V.A. so that the needs of veterans come first.

The experts discussed private-sector solutions and innovations that could be used to improve the V.A. The president praised the secretary-designate for his commitment to veterans and thanked the group for their willingness to serve and do what was best for our veterans. They plan to meet on a regular basis to discuss their collective efforts to improve the V.A. and healthcare system. Also this afternoon, vice president had big day on Capitol Hill, where he cast the historic deciding vote for secretary of education Betsy DeVos.

The president believes strongly that our nation's success depends on education of our students. And Betsy DeVos has devoted nearly three decades of her time and talent to promoting educational opportunity. As secretary, she will ensure every student has access to good school, whether it is public, private, parochial, charter or any other kind. The fact we had to get to the point where the vice president had to be pulled into overcome the democrats historic and partisan logjam with the president's qualified nominee is another glaring reminder of the unprecedented obstruction that the Senate democrats have engaged in throughout this process.

The American people sent strong message when they elected President Trump in November. They're fed up with business as usual in Washington. Democrats in the Senate should expect that voters will remember how they stood in the way of the president enacting an agenda that put him into office. Last week, I noted the president had a fair amount of cabinet level appointees awaiting a full vote by the Senate. We are looking forward to seeing more of the presidents pick to lead agencies and departments confirmed in the upcoming week, despite these childish tactics of Democrats in the Senate, who would rather keep the failed status quo, than allowing to put the president's people in place.

Also on the hill today, Judge Gorsuch continues a full week of meetings with Republican and Democratic senators. Yesterday, he met with Senators Tester and Feinstein, today he will meet with Senators Sasse, Schumer, Crapo, and Thune. The president is looking forward to a full hearing for the judge, followed by an up or down vote on this incredibly qualified nominee.

At this moment, the president is meeting with Congressman Jason Chaffetz to discuss how to work together to enact his reform agenda. Later this afternoon, the president will meet with Secretary of State Tillerson. The president was obviously pleased to welcome and confirm -- swear in Secretary Tillerson in the oval office last week, and he is pleased the secretary is now able to bring his unique skill set and deep insights to the important work of the state department.

Following his discussion with Secretary Tillerson, the president will have calls with the Prime Minister Rajoy of Spain and President Erdogan of Turkey. We'll have readouts of both of those calls when they are completed. This evening, the president will host young officers from the United States Army Special Forces qualification course in the oval office.

As the president said yesterday, members of our military and their families are our nation's heroes. It is one of his top priorities to make sure the men and women of our armed forces have the tools, equipment and resources they need to execute their missions successfully. The president is looking forward to conveying his gratitude and support to these young brave captains.

Later this evening around 6:00, the 9th Circuit Court will hold oral arguments per its order from yesterday. I want to quickly run down what we can expect to happen tonight. A career attorney from the Department of Justice will present an argument in defense of the president's order, and to be clear, all that's at issue tonight is the hearing - is an interim decision on whether the president's order is enforced or not, until the case is heard on the actual merits of the order.

SPICER:

It is a simple status quo versus anti-status quo decision. This is just like the case in Boston which started as temporary restraining order. There, once we were able to explain our position, the court lifted and held that the president's executive order could take effect. As I've said before, a U.S. Code 8112, gives the president constitutional authority for this executive order. It says quote, "whenever the president finds the entry of any aliens or of any class of aliens into the United States would be detrimental to the interest of the United States, he may by (ph) proclamation, and for such period as he shall deem necessary, to suspend the entry of all aliens or any class of aliens as immigrants or non-immigrants. Or impose on the entry of aliens, any restrictions which he may deem appropriate." We look forward to a final decision on the merits of this soon.

Looking ahead, I know a few have been asking about more details on Prime Minister Abe's visit later this week. As previously announced, he will visit the White House for meetings on the 10th of February. The president has also invited him down to Mar-a-Lago and the two leaders will travel there for the weekend. This is a testament to the importance the United States places on the bilateral

relationship and the strength of our alliance and the deep economic ties between the United States and Japan.

Needless to say, the president is looking very much forward to welcoming the New England Patriots to the White House to celebrate their fifth world championship. It was obviously a spectacular game.

Lastly, we have our eyes on Kabul today, following the tragic suicide bombing that killed at least 19 Afghan civilians and wounded 14. Just this morning, General Flynn spoke with the Afghan national security adviser to reaffirm our continued support for Afghanistan and for our strategic partnership. We condemn this cowardly attack in the strongest possible terms, and we commend the Afghan security forces for their rapid response.

We also reaffirmed our support for the Afghan government as they work to defend their people and against enemies of peace. And with that, I'll take your questions.

David Jackson (ph).

QUESTION:

The list of 78 terrorist attacks you that released, it looked like it had been prepared well in advance. I mean, was that already on hand when President Trump made his comments? Or did you do it afterward and decide to release it?

SPICER:

Well, I think, the answer was we've been getting questions as to what the president's remarks were. We want to be very clear, that there are a lot of examples between 2014 and 2016 that have occurred. And many of them haven't got the attention they have deserved. It's becoming too often that we're seeing these attacks not get the spectacular attention they deserve. And I think it undermines the understanding of the threat that we face around the country.

The reason the president is acting in so many of the ways he has, with executive order and otherwise. The discussions that he had down at CENTCOM and SOCOM yesterday are because he cares about making sure that we don't have attacks in this country. That we're protected, that we're ahead of the curve. And I think what we need to do is to remind people that the Earth is a very dangerous place these days. That ISIS is trying to do us harm. And that the president's commitment is to keep the country safe.

And I think part of this is to make sure the American people are reminded how prevalent some of these attacks are and how much time and attention they have or have not gotten, but more importantly, to make sure that they understand the unwavering commitment that the president has and the actions they will take to keep the country safe.

QUESTION:

Was the list put together after his comments?

SPICER:

Yes, yes.

QUESTION:

After his comments?

SPICER:

Yeah.

Trey (ph)?

QUESTION:

Thanks Sean.

On the call with Turkish President Erdogan later today, does President Trump intend to discuss plans for Syrian safe zones? And does the president expect Turkey to help create those zones?

SPICER:

I think we'll have a read out for you on that. I don't want to get ahead on the two leader's calls.

Alexis (ph), RealClearPolitics.

QUESTION:

Thanks Sean. I have two questions for you.

SPICER:

Yup.

QUESTION:

You were mentioning that voters are gonna remember how senators voted on the president's Cabinet nominees. Two Republicans voted against Betsy DeVos, Senators Collins and Murkowski. Did the president reach out to either of them? And will he not forget what Republicans did in that particular nominee situation?

SPICER:

I think -- look, the president's been very clear, it's not Republicans that have stood in the way of this nomination, of all of these qualified individuals. It's been Democrats that have stalled over and over again, not attending hearings, trying to use every delay tactic possible. It's those people that have a problem. And I think that's the -- the message that the party has missed on the Democratic side.

I don't think that -- I wouldn't paint it with a broad brush because I think it's Senate Democrats frankly, that haven't gotten the message.

QUESTION:

(OFF-MIKE)

SPICER:

Our team has been in contact with all -- with the entire Senate team, to make sure that they understand and they've had visits as requested, but we have been in constant contact with the Senate, members of the Senate, their staffs. Our legislative affairs team has had an extremely robust schedule of meetings with their teams to make these nominees available to them.

But I think the broader issue -- again, and -- and with all due respect, I think it's interesting that we're focusing on the votes of two Republicans. When you look at the spectrum of antics that have gone on in the Democrats. I mean the tactics they have done over, and over, and over again to delay, not show up to hearings, you know, filibuster to the extent that they can, run the clock out, it's not Republicans that have a problem here Alexis (ph), it is the Democrats that continue to do this.

Yeah?

QUESTION:

(OFF-MIKE) president's remarks about the Affordable Care Act and his interview on Sunday? Because he indicated in his response in the interview, that he thought that the repeal and replace was going to take longer perhaps into 2018.

QUESTION:

Can you clarify whether he is frustrated about this, what he is doing about the timing? Because of course, voters who sent him here were anticipating that this might move faster than he was conveying in the interview?

SPICER:

Well, I think luckily (ph), and you saw Speaker Ryan's comments earlier today, I think we can have this done legislatively sooner rather than later. But I think the implementation of a lot of the pieces make take a little bit longer.

It's a big, big bill that the Democrats passed. As you recall, they told us we could read it after they -- after they passed it. We are now going through this to make sure that we do this in a very responsible way, to make sure that healthcare, which is so vital to so many Americans and their families, is preserved while we put a new system in place that both lowers costs and increases accessibility.

But the president I think is very encouraged by the commitment and work that's going on on the Hill to make sure that we get this thing replaced as quick as possible.

Brad Lucas (ph)? Brad.

QUESTION:

(inaudible) follow-up related to that. Speaker Ryan has actually said -- I'm quote -- with Obamacare, you can't, quote, "tinker about with the margins and repair it. You can't. It's a collapsing law." Do you agree with that, that you can't build on what's already there, you have to get rid of the entire law?

SPICER:

I think what we're focused on is the end solution. And I think we've been very clear over and over again that the president's going to repeal and replace it and that what Americans will get at the end of this is a healthcare solution that, as I've said before over and over again, is going to give them a lower cost health solution with more options. That's what they were promised in the first place, that's what (ph) we can give.

And I think the president being able to approach this in the business-like manner that he's done so successfully in the past is going to ensure that he negotiates prices, that we look at those business-like practices, force competition amongst states and other things that will help lower cost once and for all and provide that competition.

QUESTION:

On Iran sanctions, does the president have any concerns about the fact that (inaudible) in terms of implementing those sanctions?

SPICER:

No (inaudible) they went off without a hitch.

Brett -- I mean, John Decker.

QUESTION:

Thanks a lot, Sean. As you know, the president spoke over the weekend on Twitter and criticized the federal judge appointed by George W. Bush who imposed the nationwide restraining order and called him a so-called judge. Is the president, as it relates to the argument -- I know you're confident with (ph) the arguments that will be presented this evening. Is he prepared to accept an adverse ruling by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals?

SPICER:

There's no question the president respects the judicial branch and its ruling, but I think that there's now a -- I just read off the U.S. code on that. I don't think there's any other way that you can interpret that, that the president has the discretion to do what's necessary to keep this country safe.

And I think that's -- that's his concern frankly right now, is that when the law is such as it is, that anyone can interpret that any other way, I think he feels confident just like in the ruling in Boston that we're gonna prevail on this on the merits of the case because it has done so in a very lawful way.

Catherine?

QUESTION:

Will the administration's (inaudible) on the (inaudible) building a settlement may not be helpful.

SPICER:

As I mentioned last week, I don't want to get too far ahead of this, but Prime Minister Netanyahu will be here on the 15th. I think that'll be obviously a topic of discussion. Right now, I don't want to get ahead of that.

Charlie (inaudible)?

QUESTION:

Just a quick question. Any response to the calls for impeachment by Representative Maxine Waters?

SPICER:

No.

Hunter Walker -- I mean, I would say -- look, I think -- it is -- the president is doing everything he can to move this country forward, and I think whether it's the Democrats in the Senate who are trying to stall these nominees or these little political stunts on the House side, the bottom line is I

think by and large you see the support that the president's receiving for his policies throughout the country.

And it's because I think people recognize, a, that business as usual is over and that the president's commitment to both keeping this country safe and growing the economy and creating jobs is something that is welcomed by all Americans regardless of party. I think when you see stuff like that, I think it really just shows that they really missed the message that voters sent this past November.

Hunter Walker.

QUESTION:

Thank you, Sean. CNN reportedly declined to interview Kellyanne Conway on Sunday because of questions of her credibility. Is the White House willing to offer alternative representatives to networks that refuse to work with specific spokespeople?

SPICER:

Frankly, I think that -- my understanding is they retracted that, they walked that back or denied it, however you want to put it, I don't care. But I think Kellyanne is a very trusted aide of the president. I think to -- for any characterization otherwise is -- is insulting. I don't think -- if they choose not to work with someone, that's up to them.

But I think we're going to continue to put out key leaders in this administration, including Kellyanne, that can articulate the president's policies and agenda.

Katie? (inaudible)?

QUESTION:

President Trump plans to ask the Senate to expedite legislation allowing for the swift firing of bad V.A. employees?

SPICER:

I think the president's commitment, as you heard both during the campaign and as he's talked to Dr. Shulkin, is to make sure that we're providing the best care, and if there's things that are an impediment to that care being offered up or reformed, then he is going to make sure that we enact policies internally that make sure that people who are not doing their job, not servicing veterans, we can figure out how to expedite that process.

But the idea that we're sitting around having a discussion about personnel inhibiting the care that veterans deserve really does not bode well for the reflection that we want in this country. I mean, people who have served this nation -- we should be bending over backwards to make sure that the

benefits and the care and the services that they frankly earned is something that is given the highest priority and something that the president remains highly committed to.

Miriam (inaudible)?

QUESTION:

Hi (inaudible). The president (ph) is going to -- to speak later today with (inaudible) and I would like to know how President Trump sees the relations with Spain? And which are the main issues they are going to -- to be (inaudible)?

SPICER:

So, I'm not going to -- we'll have a readout after the call, but I imagine that they're going to talk about shared commitment to defeating ISIS and that they'll discuss our bilateral relationship and reaffirm our commitment to our two countries.

I think -- we will have a readout on that call with Spain, as we will with all the countries and all the other leaders that we'll talk to and we have in the past. So I don't want to get too far ahead of it, but I would -- I would imagine that the current relationship that we have with Spain and our commitment to ISIS will be at the forefront of that.

Maria Pena?

QUESTION:

Yes, here. Thank you. Kind of loud in here. So it's a two-part question. One, can you confirm whether or not the White House has accepted the credentials of the New Mexican ambassador, Geronimo Gutierrez? And also, Representative Mike Rogers, I believe, this morning said that he plans to introduce a bill to impose a two percent tax on all remittances that Mexicans send to their country to pay for the wall. Would the president rally behind that bill?

SPICER:

So first, I -- I'd have to get back to you on the ambassador's credentials. I don't know. We can check with the Department of State and figure that out. I don't know that right off the top of my head and I'm not gonna comment. We don't put out statements of administration policy until the bill has gone through the process.

Allie (ph)?

QUESTION:

Two questions for you. One, following up on healthcare, the president, as you know, campaigned for 18 months on replacing the Affordable Care Act. Where is his plan?

SPICER:

He's working with Congress. I just answered that question. But he's working with Speaker Ryan -
- I mean, you're acting...

QUESTION:

Specifics of it, though. I mean, does he owe the American people something now...

SPICER:

And I think he's been very clear that he owes the American people a result that's gonna lower costs and provide more access. That's what he continues to work with Speaker Ryan on. I think the speaker was very clear on it, that they are having meetings both legislatively and at the principle level to make sure this gets done.

And I think as you heard Speaker Ryan, we continue to be optimistic about getting this thing completed by this year. It's a mammoth bill what they passed and did it -- and I think we've got to make sure that we do this right. We don't want to end up with the same result the Democrats did. They rushed it through. No one was able to read the bill. And premiums have sky rocketed, access and options have gone down. We need to make sure that we don't do this in a way that's gonna, you know, end up with the same result.

John Roberts?

QUESTION:

I had a question for you, Sean, though on Yemen.

SPICER:

Yeah.

QUESTION:

I did say two. One of the world's most wanted terrorists is now taunting President Trump, calling him a fool after that raid.

SPICER:

Right.

QUESTION:

Any response from the White House? And do you still stand by your characterization that (inaudible)?

SPICER:

Absolutely. That -- he was not -- that was -- the raid that was conducted in Yemen was an intelligence gathering raid. That's what it was. It was highly successful. It achieved the purpose it was going to get, save the loss of life that we suffered and the injuries that occurred. The goal...

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

... that he was he is target?

SPICER:

Absolutely. He was not -- that -- the goal of the raid was intelligence gathering, and that's what we received and that's what we got. That's why we can deem it a success.

John Roberts?

QUESTION:

I know that you believe that you have a good case on the merits to lift the temporary restraining order. If the president does not prevail at the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, will he take this to the Supreme Court?

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

Let's see where we go. I mean, I think he's made it very clear...

QUESTION:

Could I just finish?

SPICER:

Yes, you can. I'm sorry.

QUESTION:

And is he concerned that if this does go to the Supreme Court with this current 4-4 makeup that this temporary restraining order may become a little more permanent?

SPICER:

Well, remember, tonight is about just a restraining order. We're not...

QUESTION:

(OFF-MIKE)

SPICER:

Right. I understand, but I think that it's important to explain this to everyone, John, because I know you get it and so many -- but I just want to make sure.

SPICER:

Tonight is about the restraining order. It has nothing to do with the merits of the case, and that's why I think we feel confident. The question is, does the restraining order get lifted or not? But regardless of what happens tonight, the merits of the case still need to be discussed and I think the merits of the case, as they were in Boston, are ones that we feel very confident on because the law is crystal clear on this.

The president has the authority to do this, it was done so in an interagency process that ensured that all the appropriate people were consulted, we went through that with flying colors. I have zero concern that at the end of the day we'll be fine. It's just a question of going through the process.

QUESTION:

And I get all that, as you pointed out. But, if he does not prevail at the 9th Circuit, will he take this decision further (ph)?

SPICER:

I'm not going to get - let's see where it goes first. I think our goal right now is to get to a point where we can argue it on the merits. We feel confident based on how the court has reacted in Massachusetts that we're - we're going to be good on the merits.

QUESTION:

Does President Trump still plan to immediately terminate President Obama's executive annexes (ph)?

SPICER:

With respect to what? DACA and DAPA? As I've said this before, we'll have further updates on that. I - go ahead.

QUESTION:

But just in the - I think I said immediately to enact some sort of law...

SPICER:

...I understand that and I - and I - and I've said before, the president will have further updates on both DACA and DAPA very shortly. We've been very clear on immigration what the president's priorities would be. As you heard Secretary Kelly testify in front of Congress today, there's going to be continued progress on the wall and on immigration as a whole.

So we're going to have plenty of time to distress - address this. Right now he's trying to do it in a very systematic way in accordance to where we find the biggest problems. And so, he's been very clear in the past that those who are in this country that pose a threat to us or with a criminal record are where his priorities are going to be first and foremost and we're going to move through the rest of folks that are in this country illegally.

QUESTION:

Back to Iran, the Ayatollah Khamenei said today that Trump has, quote, "helped Iran reveal the true face of America." He said "Iran doesn't fear Trump" and he encouraged Iranians to march in the street against America later this week. Does the president have a response to those very aggressive comments and does he plan to take additional action against Iran as its leaders seem to need to escalate tensions?

SPICER:

I think the president - or the Ayatollah is going to realize that there is a new president in office. This president's not going to sit by and let Iran flout its - its violations or its apparent violations to the joint agreement. But he will continue to take action as he sees fit. The president's also made clear time and time again that he's not going to project what those actions will be and he will not take anything off the table.

But I think Iran is kidding itself if they don't realize that there is a new president in town.

QUESTION:

On Thursday, weather permitting, the president is going to meet with airline executives from throughout the country. Two complaints from airline executives as well as the Pilots Association have been, one, that Norwegian Airlines got a special advantage, a foreign carrier permit from the Obama administration. And also, that the airlines of the Emirates, the Arab Emirates are state subsidized and both cases are violations of the Blue Skies Act between the U.S. and the E.U.

Is this something he's going to address and is he considering upending President Obama's foreign carrier permit?

SPICER:

Well, again, that would be something that - that that'll be decided when they - when they meet, what they'll talk about. Obviously the president's going to want to talk about economic growth and job creation, how he's enacting orders to make sure the country's safe. On the case of Norwegian, my understanding if I'm correct that they - there is a deal in which they're having 50 percent of the crews and the pilots are American based.

They're flying Boeing planes, there is a, you know, a huge economic interest that America has in that deal right now. I don't want to get ahead of the president on that but just to be clear, we are talking about U.S. jobs both in terms of the people who are serving those planes and the - and the person who is building those planes. That's a very big difference.

QUESTION:

A few minutes ago you said that the president wanted to remind the American people of how prevalent tariffs and taxes are and that the Earth is a dangerous place. That kind of breaks with the rhetoric we've seen in bipartisan administrations used when it comes to tariffs and tax. By encouraging the American people to go about their daily lives, does this president have a different message to the American people...

SPICER:

...That's not the point - no, no, I - I think yes, his message to the American people is that he's fully committed to doing everything that he can to keep the country safe and I think that there's a big difference between what you're saying and what the point that he was making yesterday. And I think that what he's getting at is making - he was making a point to the exposure that attacks get.

And I think that's what he was getting at, is that we see these things and it's - and they're becoming too prevalent. And that's why I think he wants to become ever vigilant to make sure that we don't ever get lax, that we need to be reminded that places and groups like ISIS continue to seek to do us harm and that it is his job as commander in chief to do everything he can to get ahead of the curve and keep this country safe.

I think when you look at the poll that came out last week, I think 67 percent of the American people agreed with - with his proposition to put further restrictions on people, to make sure that we have countries who are sending people to our country, that they are coming here for peaceful purposes. And that if we can't guarantee those countries have the proper vetting and systems in place when they are out bound of the United States, then we need to do what we can, and he will do what he has to as president, to make sure this country is safe.

And so I think the point that he was making was not -- was not to put fear into anybody, but to rather reassure them that as president of the United States, he is taking every single step to do what - to do what he has, to get ahead of the threat, to get ahead of the concern so we're not looking in the rear view mirror and thinking what should we have done, what could we have done? That we're

preventing lives -- whether it's the raid in Yemen, the laws that he's enacting. He's going to do whatever he can to make sure this homeland and our people are protected and safe. Laura (ph)?

QUESTION:

Thank you. I just have two questions; one on his tweet and one on healthcare. When the president tweeted "If something happens blame the judge and the court systems," did he mean if a terror attack is committed by somebody from these seven countries or any terrorist attack, he blames on the judge?

SPICER:

Well, I think the point -- the tweet is pretty clear. But I think point is, is that kind of dove tails what I was just saying to Aziz (ph). He's doing everything he can. He walks into office, there are seven countries that the Obama administration has already identified as not having the proper systems in place to guarantee our safety. His immediate reaction is to do what he has to do to make sure that we're not looking back and saying do you know what we should have been done? We should have made sure we had stricter vetting in place for those seven countries.

So he took immediate and decisive action to make sure this country and our people are protected. That's what he's talking about. It's making sure that we don't have a regret a month from now, two months from now, a year from now, we haven't done something to protect people. And so he acted as quick and decisively as possible to make sure that we put the systems in place to protect our people. I don't think there's any other way to read that.

QUESTION:

I'm up here (ph), can I get my second question?

SPICER:

Of course.

QUESTION:

You just said he'll negotiate prices, and that's something...

SPICER:

(Inaudible).

QUESTION:

He ran on negotiating prices for Medicare drug prices. And I just want you to clarify where he is on that, because when he met with big pharma the other day, he -- before the meeting, he said we have no choice, we have to get prices down. After the meeting he said he would oppose anything

that makes it harder for these companies to bring their drugs to market including price fixing by Medicare. So is he for Medicare negotiating drug prices or not?

SPICER:

He's for it, yes. He wants to make -- absolutely. The president's clear - I mean when you look at the cost -- not just drug cost. The U.S. government has not done -- I mean, you look at what other --frankly, the easier way to look at this is what other countries have done -- negotiating costs to keep those down.

As drug prices continue to escalate, that drives up health care costs for every American. But particularly, it's a burden on America's seniors who are so much more reliant on drug prices, and I think in many cases, you have people living on a fixed income. And health care costs -- rising healthcare costs and prescription drugs continue to be a burden on their ability to live out their lives in a much more enjoyable manner. And so his commitment is to make sure that he does what he can, and I think rather successfully uses his skills as a business man to drive them down. Margo (ph)?

QUESTION:

Sean, can you clarify two things?

SPICER:

Sure.

QUESTION:

Secretary Kerry - Kelly, excuse me -- when he was on the hill today, said that the administration right now is not looking at adding other countries to this temporary travel ban list. Is the white House still giving itself room to add some countries to that list?

SPICER:

Well, I think what - what he -- what his point was is that right now he's not doing it. You have to look at his testimony in context. I think he went through the fact that we're still in this review process, that he is committed to making sure that we look at all other countries. But as of this moment, there is no immediate desire to add to that. But he is looking at all of the other countries, the procedures that we have with them, the systems that we have in place to check them. And so nothing is final until the end of the review period.

QUESTION:

I have a second question.

SPICER:

I'm sorry.

QUESTION:

You said still leaving room to do that. Something that the president continues to say as a phrase, and I'm hoping you can define it for us. Is that this is about testing who truly loves America and making sure those entering the country are those who truly love America. How do you quantify that? What's the president thinking of? Is that a specific test? What does that mean?

SPICER:

I think there's a - I think the president's goal is to make sure that people aren't coming here to do us harm. That they're going through the proper extreme vetting in cases where we don't have the information required to make a good judgment on them based on what their country is willing to provide, that we are taking the proper and necessary steps to protect our people.

But he doesn't -- if someone's coming here to do us harm or to espouse things that would give us a good indication that they're not coming here for the right reasons, then we need to do everything we can to, a, vet them and, b, unless we're 100 percent certain, keep them out of the country. I -- but...

QUESTION:

It's a background check?

SPICER:

It's a background -- but again, I wouldn't just -- it's not. I mean it is -- to the extent that we can, it's gonna be extreme vetting is what he's talked about, that it's not gonna be just letting someone in on a quick check. If there's any cause for concern, he wants to go to every step possible to make sure that people who are entering this country are doing so because they want to come here for the right reasons and for peaceful reasons.

Yeah?

QUESTION:

Thank you, Sean. On Korea, the South Korean (inaudible).

SPICER:

What, please (ph)?

QUESTION:

What was most important (inaudible)?

QUESTION:

Most important part of the policy (ph).

SPICER:

Thank you. He had a conversation the other day and we look forward to fulfilling that conversation. I think obviously, the threat of North Korea is the most prominent issue that faces South Korea and our alliance right now. He wants to reassure the South Korean government (inaudible) that we are gonna do what we can to make sure that we stand with South Korea and that we prevent any further hostile actions from North Korea.

So I think that -- the safety of our country, of South Korea, of the region are gonna be clearly the greatest focus of this.

Yeah?

QUESTION:

Chris (inaudible) news.

When the president submits his budget, is he committed to pushing Congress to approve sufficient funding for all American students to have either an outstanding public school education or the public funding for them to reach an outstanding private school education?

SPICER:

Look, I think the president's talked extensively about education during the primary. Whether it's an Associate's degree, a Bachelor's degree or PhD or vo-technical education, that we've got to give students these days the options they need for the work force. A vo-tech education, in some cases, is what's in the interest of students in terms of their success and giving them the skills to work on cars or become a computer engineer or whatever.

But as we head into -- as we look towards the future, we've got to make sure that we're preparing our students to have the skill set that they need. And it's also the re-training aspect of that, that as people get older and certain industries start to turn the corner because of technology, that we're allowing people the opportunity for retraining, to give them the skill set that they need to re-enter the work force and continue to be productive.

So I think as you will see -- look, we literally will swear in the secretary of Education hopefully later this evening, which we will let you all know, probably around the five or six o'clock hour. But that will be something that's he's gonna continue to have a conversation with Secretary DeVos about. Something that she's made clear, and it's unfortunate that we haven't been able to have this conversation sooner because it was held up for so long, but I think that's something that -- that

Secretary DeVos will be speaking a lot about, about the education funding and skill set and opportunities that we give not just our children but people older in life who are looking to get back into the work force through another avenue.

QUESTION:

I understand. How about the K through 12? How about the youngsters?

SPICER:

Right. I think we'll have plenty of time to discuss the president's budget as we get closer -- as he sort of develops that. Today, we're excited that Secretary DeVos will get sworn in. We can begin to formulate that.

Thanks a lot, guys. Have a great one. Take care.