

Newsmaker Transcript

White House Daily Briefing

Thursday, February 9, 2017

SPICER:

Good afternoon, everyone. Appreciate that. As you just saw, the President was honored to host the swearing in of Attorney General Sessions in the Oval Office just a short time ago. Under Attorney General Sessions, the Justice Department will return to its original core mission, to uphold the rule of law, to ensure that justice is administered and enforced fairly and impartially for all Americans. Attorney General Sessions -- come on in.

(UNKNOWN)

A little crowded (ph).

SPICER:

I'm sorry. Well, you know, it's a Trump briefing.

Attorney General Sessions is a world class legal mind and an experience prosecutor, and the President is pleased to have him finally in place as our nation's top law enforcement officer. After the Attorney General's swearing in, the President signed three executive orders dedicated to standing behind the police officers who risk their lives every day to protect us in our communities, reducing crime, and stopping cartel violence.

The first executive order directs the newly installed Attorney General to develop a strategy for more effectively prosecuting people who commit violence against member of law enforcement. We must better protect those who protect us. Our men and women in blue need to now that we're with them 100 percent as they patrol our streets. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case. Law enforcement officials have been vocal about the lack of support they received under the past administration. This lack of support demoralized many officers and in some case led to their discouraging, their engagement with local communities, only causing further harm and deterioration.

SPICER:

It's imperative that federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies better coordinate and share information across jurisdictions to better serve and protect our communities. This order will start the important work of doing just that, instituting a holistic approach that involves the whole of government.

It also directs the Department of Justice to work with other federal agencies to come up with ways to further reduce violence against law enforcement and orders a hard look at how the Department of Justice and other agencies use their law enforcement grants.

The second order establishes a task force led by the new attorney general to reduce crime and restore public safety in communities across America. Together, the members of this task force are going to come up with specific recommendations on how we can change existing federal law to better prevent crime and improve public safety, and develop stronger working relationships with our state and local partners.

The president is confident this task force will develop a systematic strategy to help further protect the American people. Communities across our nation have been devastated by a surge in violent crime rates, particularly our major cities. Over the last eight years, we've experienced declining focus on law and order. Crime reduction will clearly be a priority for this White House.

The last executive order refocuses the energy and resources of the federal government to dismantle transnational criminal organizations such as drug cartels. It's important to emphasize that we cannot reduce crime in the United States without additionally addressing illegal immigration and illegal drugs. Through this executive order, the president instructs the attorney general to form a comprehensive and decisive approach to destroying transnational crime organizations and drug cartels.

These cartels represent a clear and present danger to our nation. They bring dangerous criminals, drugs and violence to once-peaceful neighbors, both here at home and in other parts of the world. They fuel addiction and overdose deaths and they can no longer be allowed to operate with impunity in our country or our hemisphere.

This order pulls together the experience and resources of federal agencies to work towards emphasizing specific goals in this regard. Number one, to upgrade our information gathering about these transnational organizations and cartels. Without accurate information about these threats and the ability and willingness to share this information, we're not going to be able to tackle this problem.

It's important to note that prior to this administration, if you had called the Department of Justice to ask for these statistics, they never kept them. So knowing what we're facing is a big part of addressing the problem.

Number two, improving the speed and efficiency of removing criminal aliens, cartel members and people who help cartels from our nation. Unlike during the last eight years, these criminals are finally going to go home.

Shift -- three -- shift whatever resources we can to tackling these organizations and prevent them from disrupting our society any further.

Now, on to the president's schedule. This morning, the president held a breakfast and listening session with key stakeholders in the airline industry. We've got a participation -- participant list if

you're interested. The president thanked the attendees for the 10 million jobs and \$1 trillion in annual economic income activity they contribute to our economy, and praised them for moving approximately 2 million passengers per day in spite of the outdated infrastructure and equipment that they have, in terms of air traffic control and other infrastructure measures.

The president asked aviation leaders what the government can do to help their industry grow and create more well-paying jobs for Americans. The leaders commented that they'd never been given the opportunity to work truly alongside the president in such an open and constructive way, and they were unanimous and asked for the president to offer relief from the duplicative and burdensome regulations that are stifling job creation, which he assured them he'd do.

The president also reaffirmed his commitment foregoing -- to forging, rather, public-private partnerships that will rebuild America's crumbling infrastructure. He pledged to work closely with the airline industry to modernize the technology systems that keep our nation's airports running, and to expedite the approval process for future airline infrastructure projects.

It's the president's goal to make sure the United States has the most advanced airline system in the world, and this meeting was an important first step in achieving that.

After the executive order signing, the president spoke with the president of Afghanistan and the emir of Qatar. My understanding is we should have readouts shortly on both of those calls.

Just concluding a few moments ago, the president held a Supreme Court and legislative listening session and lunch with Democrat and Republican senators. In attendance were chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa, Senator Heitkamp from North Dakota, Senator Tester of Montana, Senator Donnelly of Indiana, Senator Manchin of West Virginia, Senator Moore Capito also of West Virginia, Senator Cornyn of Texas, Senator Alexander of Tennessee, Senator Coons of Delaware, and Senator Bennet of Colorado.

SPICER:

The president expressed his hope that these senators and their colleagues will give Judge Gorsuch a fair consideration and vote based on his qualifications to serve on the Supreme Court. With over 100 federal judicial nominations potentially happening during this administration, it's critical for us to have an open dialogue and work towards bipartisan agreement so that our justice system returns to its important work on the behalf of the American people. Later today the president will speak with the Emir of Kuwait and the Prime Minister of Iraq. He will provide read outs - or we will provide read outs of those calls moving towards the conclusion on them. We also anticipate the senate will hold a vote to confirm Secretary Designee Price this evening into - or into the early hours of Friday to be the next secretary of Health and Human Services.

The president was glad to see that the army core of engineers announced last night the final easement for the decoded access pipeline. With this final federal authorization completed the president - in the president working to reduce further unnecessary delays. This infrastructure project can finally continue to move forward. The construction of the decoded access pipeline was

one of the president's campaign promises and the subject of one of his first executive orders. The administration is pleased that the Americans - that Americans will be going to work building this pipeline and building it with American steel whenever possible. Now looking to the upcoming schedule, tomorrow the president will welcome Prime Minister Abe of Japan.

The president and the prime minister will hold a press conference at 1 p.m. in the East Room. They will depart Washington around 3 o'clock tomorrow afternoon for Mar-a-Largo where the president is honored to host the prime minister at the winter White House. As we recently announced just earlier today, Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada will visit the White House on Monday. The president looks forward to a constructive conversation and strengthening the deep relationship that exists between the United States and Canada. The president will also host Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel next Wednesday. We'll upload our guidance on the press availabilities potentials for either one of those.

One last thing before I take your question, (inaudible) surging levels of CEO confidence and in the wake of an incredible job announcement made by the White House yesterday by Intel, there's also new numbers released today by the Department of Labor showing that unemployment claims are at - near historic lows. The president knows better than anyone what business needs to create jobs and the market is responding to his policy improvements. This administration will continue to roll back burn some regulations and lower the overall tax burden on Americans so they can hire even more people and create even more innovative projects. With that, I'll take your questions. Kaitlan Collins(ph).

QUESTION:

Thank you. Hundred of bureaucrats in consumer financial protection bureau make more than members of Congress, and 40 of them make more than Vice President Mike Pence. Does the president have plans to revamp this agency? And if so, does he feel he should be able to fire the head of this agency at his will?

SPICER:

I know that I have addressed(ph) this before but we have no updates right now on the head of CFTB(ph) as we - if we do I'll let you know. With respect to the part of that question, I think one of the things that you're going to continue to see from this president is a respect for tax payers, dollars, the money they spent and how they're spending it. We are going to continue to review all aspects of government, I think you'll see further announcements as far as how he's going to look at - how he's going to approach and innovate and update government.

The bottom line is that we should be paying people a fair wage for their service to this country, but we should be doing it in the most effective and efficient manner. And I think that's what the president has already shown towards his commitment toward helping reduce the cost of several programs through the government and bring back jobs. But there's going to be a respect for tax payers in this administration, so that whether it's salaries or actual positions or programs, he's going to have a very very tough look at how we're operating government, how many positions they're in, what people are getting paid. The president understands that most Americans are out there working

night and day trying to get by and that Washington truly needs to respect the money that they spend.

And that we should be doing it in a way that shows that - with a level of respect in terms of how many people are hiring, what their pay, what programs we're looking at, whether or not that programs duplicative. But it's not just about one department or one agency, it's really about looking at how government as a whole operates. (John)?

QUESTION:

Sean questions have been raised after Kellyanne Conway did an interview I believe it was Fox News this morning where she appeared to (inaudible) very briefly, promote the products of Ivanka Trump. Do you believe that she crossed an ethical line?

SPICER:

Kellyanne has been counseled and that's all we're going to go with. She's been counseled on on that subject and that's it.

QUESTION:

And can I ask a question? There's a (inaudible) has a story out that includes a partial transcript of the presidents call with Vladimir Putin, in which he seems to express doubts about the new start treaty. Does he - do you have doubts about the new start treaty whether you would like to see that...

SPICER:

That's the president's conversation with President Putin as a private between the two of them and I'm going to leave it on that. We've put a read out on the call and we have nothing further beyond that. John Gibsy(ph).

QUESTION:

Thank you Sean. One question today...

SPICER:

Wow.

QUESTION:

On February 2nd, Vladimir Kara-Murza who is a well known film maker in Russia and was a close associate of the late Boris Demsof (ph), the dissident found himself in critical condition. His wife has since said she believes this is poisoning, very much like the conditions that almost took his life 2 years ago. And does the administration have any comment about that? Or the frustration of Mr. Navalny the opponent of President Putin to get on the ballot as a candidate?

SPICER:

I think our State Department is aware of the situation, and we're monitoring it and I'll leave it at that. Yeah, right.

QUESTION:

Sean, the President said today in the airlines (inaudible) his meeting that he hopes to have an announcement over the next two, three weeks about lowering the burden of taxes for businesses. At the Super Bowl interview he was asked, can Americans expect a tax break in 2017 and he said I think so yes. I would like to say yes.

Sounds like he's a little bit more confident for the businesses than individual tax breaks for Americans. Is the business component at this point ahead of the individual component?

SPICER:

No it's a comprehensive -- yeah thanks for asking. I think we're looking at in the next few weeks rolling out the outline of a comprehensive tax plan that we've continued to -- that we'll be working with congress on that will address both the business side of the tax ledger as well as the individual rates.

But it's going to be a comprehensive plan, something we haven't seen since 1986. But I think when you look at the Segue into that, we've got two opportunities for reconciliation this year. One is using the FY17 budget which you can easily get Obama care repeal and replace done and then you can use the FY18 reconcile budget to utilize the second opportunity of reconciliation through comprehensive reform. But we recognize the need; I mean it's been since 1986 that something like this -- of this scale and magnitude has happened. The President recognizes that middle class Americans need tax relief that -- and that's going to be apart of that.

But we also recognize and you saw that in all of these business meetings, whether it's inversions - - or other means in which people are shipping jobs overseas or reestablishing themselves or the profits that are kept over there. We need fundamental comprehensive tax reform that addresses both side of those -- of that income stream.

QUESTION:

If this is going to be a mix between what he had put out there on the campaign and what house Republicans have put out there before, because there's some similarities but clearly some differences as well.

SPICER:

I'm just going to say that you're going to have to wait a couple of weeks before we put out that outline. But I can tell you that it's something that's going to spur economic growth, it's going to recognize the need to give so many working Americans the relief that they need.

But more importantly I think part of the issue that we continue to see, over and over again with businesses is that we're facing competition from abroad because of the where are -- of our tax code. It favors companies from not wanting to stay and the President recognizes that and what he wants to do is create a tax climate that not only keeps jobs here but makes it -- incentivizes companies to want to come here, to grow here to create jobs here. To bring their profits back here.

So I think -- don't want to get any further ahead of it, but I will tell you that it is going to be the first time that this nation's seen a full comprehensive tax reform in a long long time. Yeah?

QUESTION:

Yeah the President this morning tweeted that our country is both bogged down in conflict all over the place. Where are we bogged down?

SPICER:

I think there's several places that we've been ...

QUESTION:

What did he mean by that?

SPICER:

I think that if you look at ISIS in particular and the hot spots around the country and the places that we have to monitor. There's a lot of countries through the middle east in particular, Northern Africa, that we are having to address and deal with and monitor because of the threat of radical Islamic terrorism.

I mean there's no question that the spread of it has gone in the last eight years, has proliferated. And I think that the resources that we have to spend -- this isn't a traditional war, where you're just looking at the other, you know, enemy with the uniform and saying here's the country we're fighting. The proliferation of ISIS throughout this country has made it so that we have to focus a lot more in a lot more places and expend a lot more resources because it's more of a desperate approach that we have to employ as opposed to having one country that you're facing at one time.

QUESTION:

But bogged down suggests ...

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

I understand, but I just answered the question though, I understand. Thanks. Yeah.

QUESTION:

Thank you Sean. And happy (inaudible) festival to you.

SPICER:

Happy (inaudible) festival to you.

QUESTION:

Thank you. And regarding the very nice letter that President Trump sent to President Xi Jinping last night. I'm curious about the time and also in a way President Trump says (ph) he's looking forward to the event (ph) of constructive relationship with China. So would you elaborate the importance of the peace (ph) by letter relationship to the U.S.

SPICER:

Well I think it's obviously important to us and the President understands that. I think he's spoken fairly often about -- about China and he understands both the national and economic interests that we have, the desire for our companies to access the Chinese market, but also the national security interests that we have.

And so he obviously wants to do what he can to have a fruitful and constructive relationship with China. And he looks forward to developing that as we go forward.

Sarah? (ph)

QUESTION:

The top U.S. commander in Afghanistan said today that -- that they could use a few thousands more troops in Afghanistan to help the coalition efforts there. Going off Mike's question that we're trying to get out of conflicts like that, does the administration plan to send those additional forces to Afghanistan?

SPICER:

I think the president will heed the advice of the generals and Secretary Mattis. That conversation has yet to happen, and if we have any further announcements. But I think that -- that's right now a Department of Defense issue that we -- that you should (inaudible).

QUESTION:

Sean, two questions (inaudible), but first on the comment from Judge Gorsuch that have been reported out.

SPICER:

Yes?

QUESTION:

I just have a two-parter for you. Does the president still stand by his nomination?

SPICER:

Absolutely.

QUESTION:

Given where Gorsuch stands...

SPICER:

Is that number one?

QUESTION:

(inaudible) second part of the question (inaudible).

(LAUGHTER)

QUESTION:

Given where -- given Judge Gorsuch's position on the president's attitude toward the judiciary and given that the president has praised Neil Gorsuch for his intellect and for his integrity, does the president have any regrets about the comments that he's made about federal judges?

SPICER:

I think the president's comments (inaudible). No, he has no regrets. But he's very proud of the selection he's made. He's going to make a great associate justice of the Supreme Court.

QUESTION:

(inaudible) about the comments that he said, for example, about Judge Robart (inaudible).

SPICER:

I (inaudible). He has no regrets. Thank you.

(CROSSTALK)

(LAUGHTER)

QUESTION:

(inaudible) I know the White House I'm sure has been following the situation of Guadalupe Garcia de Rayos. And so I want to know does the president believe she should have been deported? And what message does he have to others (inaudible)?

SPICER:

Yeah, I'm going to refer you back to ICE on that. That's an ICE matter. And -- I -- I -- the issue is developing in Arizona right now, and I would refer you back to ICE.

Margaret?

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

In that lunch meeting, the president said that -- he basically said Senator Blumenthal's comments were taken out of context, and that...

SPICER:

Well, no -- Judge Gorsuch's...

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

His relaying of Judge Gorsuch's comments were taken out of context. However, Senator Ayotte, who is working with the White House to help shepherd Judge Gorsuch (inaudible) released a statement confirming those same remarks -- disheartening and demoralizing...

SPICER:

So here's what Senator...

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

No, no. Of course, (inaudible). This is what Senator Ayotte said. Judge Gorsuch has made it very clear in all of his discussions with senators, including Senator Blumenthal, that he could not comment on specific cases, and that judicial ethics prevent him from commenting on political matters.

He has also emphasized the importance of an independent judiciary. And while he made clear that he was not referencing any specific case, he said that he finds any criticism of a judge's integrity and independence disheartening and demoralizing.

So there is a big difference between commenting on the specific comments that have been made in the tweet, and his general philosophy about the judiciary and his respect for his fellow judges. That's (inaudible) and I think the senator's comments were very clear about how those are two distinct issues.

QUESTION:

Right. And the judge's...

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

... throughout were also in that context of the president's attack on the judiciary, which is what the senator, as you just read out, was also talking about there.

SPICER:

Right. OK. So...

QUESTION:

Was the president aware of that? Because Senator Ayotte was sitting right across from him when he said that those comments were inaccurately...

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

No -- the way that -- the way that Senator Blumenthal characterized them, he was talking about the tweet and saying that he was disheartened. That's not what the judge said. He was making two very complete, distinct arguments about how he views the comment -- that he should not be commenting on a political matter or on specific things.

But as a whole, he doesn't like attacks in general on the judiciary. It was a very distinct argument that he was making. And I think that that's where I think we've got to be clear, and that's what Senator Ayotte was saying this morning -- very, very different.

Cecelia?

QUESTION:

(inaudible) on board?

SPICER:

Does he what?

QUESTION:

Is he taking that on board? I mean, you just said he doesn't regret his past attacks on the judiciary.

SPICER:

Right.

QUESTION:

But now you have these confirmed remarks, which you are saying were exactly what the judge was talking about.

SPICER:

No, no. Hold on.

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

But again, I think it's important to understand that -- that the judge was very clear that he was not commenting on any specific matter. Right? And then he was asked about his general philosophy. So you can't then take that and equate it back to the specific. He literally went out of his way to say I'm not commenting on a specific instance.

So to take what he said about a generalization and apply it to a specific is exactly what he was intending not to do.

QUESTION:

(inaudible) the president will continue to speak like that?

SPICER:

Of course, he will. The president's going to speak his mind. It goes back to Thomas Jefferson that presidents have commented on judicial nominees -- I mean, the idea of one branch talking about or commenting on another branch is as old as our republic. So I don't know why --

And I find it interesting when President Obama criticized the Supreme Court for its Citizens United comments in the State of the Union, there wasn't a similar concern about that. There's -- the idea that this is a --

QUESTION:

(inaudible) so-called judge (inaudible), a personal attack.

SPICER:

I get it. I mean, look, but at some point, it seems like there's clearly a double standard when, how this is applied. When President Obama did it, there was no concern from this briefing room. When he does it, it's a ton of outrage. So I just -- with all due respect, I think the President's made very clear that he was concerned about how that executive order in particular, which is what we're talking about, was applied. And I think we have addressed it from this briefing room over and over and over again that the U.S. code gives the President very clear authority to make this happen. Cecelia --

QUESTION:

Are you -- I want to make sure I understand what you're saying. Are you saying that demoralizing and disheartening (ph) was not specifically about the President's comments, and what he said? And if so, how does the President know --

SPICER:

No, I think the judge literally made it very clear in his comments --

QUESTION:

(inaudible) they corroborate (ph) --

SPICER:

I -- I understand that. Senator Ayotte, who was there, made it very clear that he was commenting in general about attacks on the judiciary. That was it. Plain and simple.

QUESTION:

Three other senators --

SPICER:

I understand that, Cecelia (ph). I can tell you, with Senator Ayotte, who has been with him on every single thing, was very clear about that. There's no -- so I understand that, and that is -- she has made it very clear over and over again. Yes.

QUESTION:

Sean, your answer about the context doesn't make sense when you think about what Senator Ben Sasse said today and this morning on TV. He said that he asked Judge Gorsuch specifically about the President's so-called judge tweet, and in response --

SPICER:

Phil (ph), this is like the fourth time I've asked and answered --

QUESTION:

No, but this is a different context, Sean.

SPICER:

I understand that, Phil (ph). I've asked --

QUESTION:

This is directly about --

SPICER:

I understand that. And I've said exactly what Senator Ayotte said about it. I don't know how many times you're going to ask --

QUESTION:

(inaudible) was only about --

SPICER:

I understand, thank you. Yes.

QUESTION:

Sean, I'm going to continue on this line despite what (inaudible). Why isn't the White House, why isn't the President concerned about the influence or the appearance of the influence on the independent judiciary?

SPICER:

Why isn't he -- he is -- I mean, he is free to speak his mind. Where has this outrage been for the last hundred years? There has been --

QUESTION:

(inaudible) -- Obama administration or any previous administration. I'm talking about this president --

SPICER:

I understand. And the President has -- part of the reason the President got elected is because he speaks his mind. He doesn't hold it back, he's authentic, and he's not going to sit back, I think, when he feels very passionately about something as much as the executive order. He was doing it to make sure Americans were safe. The order -- the U.S. code is crystal clear on this. I think I've read it for like three days in a row. And he can't be any clearer how much authority gives the President to do what he can to keep it safe. He's concerned that he's doing what he can to keep this country safe, and there's been a lot of activity to stand in the way. So I'm not sure how many more times I can read the code to you, but eight U.S. code eleven-eighty-two --

QUESTION:

You and me talking about it is not how the judicial process works.

SPICER:

Thank you. You've asked the question now eight times.

QUESTION:

One more, I'd like to ask you -- excuse me, one more -- I've got a different set of comments --

SPICER:

You've got -- hold on. I understand, thank you. Go ahead. Go ahead.

QUESTION:

(inaudible) that have been made, Sean, also from Kellyanne Conway earlier this week --

QUESTION:

Let him go.

QUESTION:

Earlier this week. You say the -- this is in context of the Nordstrom -- and not about what she was counseled about, but about something she said to CNN earlier this week, is that the President doesn't comment on everything. And so I want to contrast the President's repeated statements about Nordstrom with the lack of comments about some other things, including for example the attack on the Quebec mosque and other similar environments. Why is the President, when he chooses to --

SPICER:

Do you -- hold on, before that, because you just brought that up. I literally stand at this podium and opened a briefing a couple days ago about the President expecting (ph) his condolences. I literally opened the briefing about it. So for you to sit there and say --

(off mic)

I know. So why are you asking why he didn't do it when I literally stood here and did it? I don't understand what you're asking.

QUESTION:

Kellyanne's comment were about that the President doesn't have time to tweet about everything. He's tweeting about this. He's not tweeting about something else.

SPICER:

Right. I came out here and actually spoke about it and said the President spoke --

QUESTION:

(inaudible) President's time --

SPICER:

What are you -- you're equating me addressing the nation here and a tweet? I mean, that's the silliest thing I've ever heard. OK, this is silly. Next.

(CROSSTALK)

OK, thank you. You've asked your question. Thank you.

QUESTION:

Does that not diminish the language that you're using?

SPICER:

Go ahead.

QUESTION:

One of the criticisms levels at President Trump's predecessor, President Obama, by Republicans was his excessive use of executive orders. The President signed three more executive orders today. Why isn't that criticism applicable to President Trump in the same manner --

SPICER:

I think when you look at the context of what they -- yes. What those executive orders did -- and there's things that are within the bounds of trying to protect this country and ordering police officers, nothing that I think even Democrats would complain with the exception of the one that we've had conversations on. Most of them have been widely -- widely praised by both parties to keep this country safe, to get jobs creation back, most have been widely applauded.

I think the difference with what President Obama did was stretch the executive order to take actions that had largely been within the realm of Congress and to do things that didn't allow for -- for prior input. The stuff that the president is doing is by -- almost entirely highly applauded by both sides of the aisle and won tremendous praise. There is a big difference in the context in which those two administrations operated.

QUESTION:

One of the criticisms in addition to that was that President Obama in using those EOs was governing by executive fiat. He wasn't working with Congress. Does the president plan to...

SPICER:

...But again, I think that...

QUESTION:

...Use Congress in a legislative manner?

SPICER:

Absolutely and I just mentioned both tax reform and repealing, replacing Obamacare, immigration, there's so many areas where the president's -- you know, he literally just -- we held up this briefing a little so that eight United States senators could walk out and talk about -- and again, that meeting while it was focused on the judiciary, they talked about infrastructure, they talked about other priorities that they have.

He has shown a commitment to work across the aisle to bring folks in, to listen, to hear their thoughts, to get ideas on a legislative agenda that they can move together with so I think there's a

big difference between the last administration sort of shunned Congress' role and this administration, with a president who's actively seeking their input and ideas and helping them craft an agenda to move the country forward.

QUESTION:

Can I now follow up on the tax...

SPICER:

...Sure.

QUESTION:

Question? Because there is a revenue element of the Affordable Care Act if it is repealed and replaced, there's the discussion on the Hill about what would be the appropriate track to get that into tax legislation or how to treat that in tax legislation. The president is interested in unveiling a tax package that is as comprehensive as you just described.

Would the revenue elements of the Affordable Care Act be on a separate track or is he talking about folding them into one reconciliation package?

SPICER:

So right now, as I mentioned at the outset, I think we're primarily looking at two reconciliation tracks. One -- one utilizing the 2017 budget so you can put your Obamacare repeal and replace in the 2017 reconciliation package. And then, you could potentially do tax reform -- comprehensive tax reform in the 2018 budget. But I also want to say -- I mean, just so we're clear, these aren't prescriptive.

I think we continue to work towards Congress on a range of options and ideas to accomplish both of those and other goals. Those seem primarily the two most opportune ways to get this thing done but I wouldn't want to rule in or anything out. I think both Speaker Ryan and Leader McConnell are going to weigh in on what best vehicles are -- can be utilized to make this thing happen.

So I just -- don't want to be prescriptive.

QUESTION:

You talked about the president's tax reform plan in the coming weeks. Is that something he's talked about with leaders in both houses of Congress? Are they prepared for this?

SPICER:

Absolutely. I mean, as I mentioned, he has met with, you know, just wrapped up a meeting with Republicans and Democratic Senators but this is something that the legislative affairs team as well

as the president himself have -- has engaged with members of Congress to talk about this both privately and in bigger groups. But there is a very large conversation going on to achieve bipartisan support for a package of this nature.

QUESTION:

Does the president believe it's possible to balance the budget without measuring how it will ripple (ph) and if so, how so (ph)?

SPICER:

I think one of the things that the president has looked at is not just the cutting side but the revenue stream. And one area in particular, natural resources, regulation and tax reform, how we can grow the economy and bring in additional revenues to the government on the revenue side, so it's -- there is a balance to how the president's looking at bringing down the deficit and I think before I get -- he's going to -- we'll have a budget out, you know, in a few weeks.

I think that will answer a lot but I -- but I -- again, I just -- when it comes to deficit reduction, which is something that he is very interested in that is not a one side of the ledger option, one -- a lot of what he is trying to talk about in these meetings and with business executives is how we can expand the economy and that expanding economy, that job creation, those explorations of natural resources and additional new jobs also bring additional tax revenue.

So there's a way to do this. If we start bringing businesses back, creating more things, creating more jobs, that creates a revenue stream that has a significant impact on the deficit -- on being able to drive down the deficit and balancing the budget. So I -- I think it's not something I want to get in too much detail now but I will tell you that I think the president has been very, very keen on trying to make sure that we look at the revenue side as much as we're looking at the spending side.

When it comes to the spending side, again, you're looking at a whole-of-government approach at how we look at every department, every agency, every job, the spending freeze -- or the hiring freeze being one of them. How do we make sure that we're looking at are these positions necessary; are they duplicative; are we using taxpayer money in the best possible way.

Those are the -- I mean, it isn't a single, like, look at those particular programs and try to figure out what we can do. He's looking at everything and figuring out if we can make it more effective and efficient.

Yes, Scott?

QUESTION:

On Monday, House Oversight Committee is going to mark up Congressman Chaffetz's bill to strike down the District of Columbia's Death With Dignity Act, the assisted suicide law. It could soon come to the White House. Has the president articulated any thoughts on that or the other bills to

strike down D.C.'s gun laws, marijuana, funding for abortions in the District? Any thoughts on all these things that are coming your way?

SPICER:

As -- as they come our way and they get passed by both Houses and come this way, we will issue statements of administration policy. At this time, they are not at that position.

So thank you guys very much. We'll see you tomorrow with the prime minister.

Take care.

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

Sorry, one quick on. Mar-a-Lago -- someone asked about it yesterday, so a quick followup.

The president has offered as a gift to the prime minister, he will be his guest at Mar-a-Lago. No one else will be staying there, as far as I know, from the Japanese delegation. They will stay out in town with the rest of the staff. But that is a gift that the president is extending to the prime minister.

Thank you, guys.