

Newsmaker Transcript

White House Daily Briefing

Wednesday, March 8, 2017

SPICER:

Good morning. First off, I want to acknowledge, as the President did this morning, that today is international women's day. It's also women's history month. We're going to be holding several events throughout the month here at the White House to honor and celebrate women and how their vital contributions have and continue to be to our society, our economy, our family, and our businesses.

The President tweeted this morning about the surge in hiring in the two months that he's been in office. LinkedIn's workforce report states that January and February were the strongest consecutive months for hiring in over a year and a half. A new report from ADP (ph) and Moody's showed strong private job growth that is far exceeding market expectations. And just this morning, Samsung confirmed that it's planning a quote, major investment in U.S. production facilities, correctly citing the President's election as an influence in their decision. The initial investment is expected to reach around \$300 million.

We keep seeing that the wave of optimism and growth in the wake of the President's pledges to help American businesses continues to produce real results for people throughout our nation.

Yesterday, I forgot to -- there are a couple things that I didn't get to yesterday, so let me mention a couple of those. Yesterday afternoon, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Dr. David Shulkin, and senior White House staff met with several veteran service organizations, including what's commonly referred to as the big six, to discuss the President's commitment to helping our veterans and modernizing our VA.

The meeting represented another step in fulfilling the President's promise to the men and women who have served our nation so honorably. I know the President looks forward to personally following up on that meeting with the VSOs.

Also last night, the President named several individuals whom he intends to nominate or appoint to key administration posts. Courtney Simmons Elwood, General Counsel of the Central Intelligence Agency; Noel Francisco, Solicitor General at the Department of Justice; Jeffrey Rosen, Deputy Secretary of Transportation; John J. Sullivan, General Counsel at the Department of Defense; Ajit Pai, member of the Federal Communications Commission; and Tony Sayegh Jr., the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs at the Department of Treasury. Expect further announcements as the week goes on.

SPICER:

Now onto the event of the day. This morning, after receiving his daily intelligence briefing, the President met with Laurene Powell Jobs, the Founder and President of Emerson Collective, an organization dedicated to removing the barriers that unfortunately prevent some in the world from achieving their full potential. They discussed education and immigration policy, which are two of the areas that Emerson Collective focuses on.

Then, the president held a strategic affairs launch, focused on infrastructure with leaders in the private sector. Infrastructure used to be a point of American pride. But now, an overbearing, ineffective regular system can keep projects in limbo for years.

The president has already started removing the regulatory roadblocks that've been killing projects before they've even begun through his executive actions, streamlining the permitting process and calling for each agency throughout the government to identify regulations that cause undue burden.

As the president has said many times, strong public private partnerships will also be key to revitalizing our country's ruined roads, crumbling bridges and outdated airports. The government has wasted too much of the taxpayers' money on inefficient and misguided projects.

By looking at infrastructure from business person's perspective, as the president and these executives do, we can restore respect for the taxpayer dollar and make the best investment. The president was particularly pleased to be holding this meeting, now that Secretary for Transportation Chao, EPA administrator Pruitt, and Energy Secretary Perry are all confirmed and getting to work.

In attendance at the launch, as I mentioned, were Secretary Chao, Secretary Perry, Administration Pruitt, and then Richard LeFrak, the CEO of LeFrak, Steve Roth, the CEO of Vornado Realty Trust, Josh Harris, co-founder of Apollo Global Management, Bill Ford, the CEO of General Atlantic, Lynn Scarlett, the managing director of the Nature Conservancy, Tyler DuVall, the partner of McKinsey, and Elon Musk of SpaceX.

Later this afternoon, the president will meet with Congressman Elijah Cummings to discuss rising prescription drugs prices. I know the president's looking forward to continuing the dialogue that they started a few weeks ago on the phone.

At 4 o'clock, the president will meet with Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, Senator Murkowski, and Senator Sullivan of Alaska. They're expected to discuss the priorities of the Department of Interior, especially as -- as it pertains to the government-owned lands in Alaska.

This evening, the president will meet with conservative leaders about healthcare. We'll have more details and participants on that meeting a little bit later this afternoon.

The president and the vice president continue to reiterate their support for the House bill on Obamacare, repeal and replace, and look forward to working with Congress to institute a new healthcare system.

Tonight, the president will have dinner with Senator and Mrs. Cruz. And finally, a couple of additional administration announcements.

Today, the president and the first lady announced the initial details for the 139th White House Easter Egg Roll taking place on Monday, April 17. They are honored to continue the traditions of the past, while creating new ones that will play a lasting role in the fabric of our nation's history.

Tickets to the Easter egg roll are free to the public and will be allotted through an online lottery. Further details on the lottery and the information on that day will be released later this month. Keep an eye on WhiteHouse.gov for updates on that.

SPICER:

I'm also pleased to announce -- a little bit proud -- that the Taoiseach Kenny of Ireland will be visiting the White House for the traditional St. Patrick's Day visit on March 16th. We'll have further details on that visit as well as the foreign-leader visits later this week.

With that, some questions. David Smith of the Guardian?

QUESTION:

Hi, Sean. Can I ask about the president's state visit to the U.K. and their -- their timing for that, and what was your reaction to some members of Parliament in Britain saying the president is not welcome, that (ph) actually used words like racist and -- and sexist. Has that led him to reconsider?

SPICER:

The president, as you know, accepted Her Majesty's invitation when the prime minister was here. He looks forward to going over and -- and visiting the United Kingdom.

As we have details to share with you further, we will. But there's nothing further at this time.

Kaitlyn (ph)?

QUESTION:

Does the White House have a reaction to the Iranian vessel coming within 150 yards of a Navy ship over the weekend? Aren't they on notice? And will you offer anything beyond a verbal reaction?

And then I have a follow-up question.

SPICER:

OK. The USNS ship that was in close proximity is obviously something that the president has been made aware of. The president's been very clear that this provocative action is something that won't be tolerated. With that, I would refer you to the Department of Defense who is -- who's monitoring that situation and -- and will talk about the appropriate actions they may take.

And your next one?

QUESTION:

And then secondly, does he have any plans to revamp the H1B visa program by the April 1 deadline?

SPICER:

I think we've talked before about immigration as a whole. I think there is the legal part of immigration and then the illegal part of immigration.

The president's actions that he's taken in terms of his executive order and other revamping of immigration policy have focused on our border security, keeping our country safe, our people safe. And then obviously where there's H1-B Visas or the other one, spousal visas, other area is a student visas -- I think there is a natural desire to have a full look, a comprehensive look at that. He discussed the Race (ph) Act yesterday with Senators Purdue and Cotton. We'll have more on that coming forward but I think as we all mentioned, he was very supportive of their efforts, with respect to how we view legal immigration.

He mentioned in his Joint Address that we're only one of a handful of countries that doesn't use a merit-based system of immigration and that is something that we need to look at in its totality.

Hunter (ph)?

QUESTION:

I have two quick questions. Are you aware of any women who work at the White House who are participating in the strikes today? And also more generally, what is the Administration's reaction to this protest? Do you think it's an effective way -- skipping work is an effective way for women to demonstrate their power and significance?

SPICER:

On the first part, I am not aware of any that are not here. I think everyone that I'm aware of has shown up and is working really hard to advance the President's agenda. They're committed to moving this country forward, those of us who will join the President throughout government I think. But obviously as the President stated today, we want to recognize the contributions that women make to our businesses, to our families, to our economy, to our society.

It's a free country. People have the right to express themselves. But I think we should on a daily basis, not just one day a year but 365 days a year, appreciate the contributions that women make in all of those categories. So, it shouldn't be a daily thing. I mean, hopefully we can help fix that a little bit more.

John (ph)?

QUESTION:

First of all Sean, there seems to be this ground swell of conservative opposition to the health care bill that was offered up by leadership in the House of Representatives. You mention the President is going to be meeting this evening with conservatives. What is his message to those individuals? Are they members of the Freedom caucus? Will Senator Rand Paul be there? Can you give a sense about what the President intends to do to turnaround that opposition that was quite apparent yesterday.

SPICER:

A few things on that. One, as I mentioned, we'll have a list of participants later. Two, I think there has been a lot of -- from business and conservative groups have been very supportive of this, whether it's Americans for Tax Reform, Americans Tax Payer Union, the Medical Device Manufacturing Association, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, (AlbaMed) (ph), One Nation Health, Consumer Health Products Association, the Association of AMAC, the National Association of Wholesale Distributors, the American Legislative Exchange Council and others.

There's been tremendous support for this. We've had people throughout Washington D.C. going to different associations and groups throughout the day, the last couple of days, talking to them about the benefits of this. We're going to continue to do outreach.

Amit (ph), as you know yesterday with the House Whip team expressing his un-wavering support for the bill and the process that he's about to encounter. He'll work with these individuals today and we're going to have a full court press.

Our team is, throughout the Administration on local radio and local television to get that message right to the American people to talk about both the things that I talked about yesterday. Why we have a crisis right now in healthcare and why Obamacare is failing.

But then secondly, why the solution that the President has worked on with the House is the right one to bring down costs and to re- institute choice. So, that message is going to continue to get delivered both today and for the next several weeks, until it passes the House and the Senate and it comes back to his desk.

But again, one of the important messages that I think those are on the conservative side need to understand is right now there's an uneven playing field. If you get your insurance through Medicaid, Medicare, through the government or an employer-based healthcare, you are untaxed, your employer is untaxed.

It is those self-employed individuals, those small businesses that are paying the penalty for this. And that's where I think we have to remember is that we talk so often on the conservative side and on the republican side about the importance of entrepreneurship, the importance of small businesses to our economy. And yet, they're the ones who suffer right now with an inequity in the tax system.

I think that by leveling that playing field and by giving them more options and driving down costs, we're actually doing a very conservative thing here. By removing the mandate of a government-mandated, you must buy this program or you will pay a penalty and eliminating choice. We are enacting, I think a very strong conservative values in healthcare that gives all Americans more choice at a lower cost. So, I think that should be a very positive message.

John (ph)?

QUESTION:

Yes, thank you. As a brand-new federal employee, I'm sure you aware...

SPICER:

I'm current actively.

QUESTION:

Welcome back. Well, at the moment.

SPICER:

Thank you.

QUESTION:

I'm sure you and your family are aware that the Office of Personnel Management offers a very comprehensive health care program called the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program.

SPICER:

Yes.

QUESTION:

You -- anyone in this building, on the Hill, their staff, their family, their friends -- not their friends, their family. Well maybe, who knows? Very generous. So it's state-of-the-art.

The individuals involved in the health care situation right now, the debate, no matter how it plays out, can they really have the kind of sympathy and empathy for individuals who may not benefit nearly as much when they're negotiating this -- all these plans, Sean?

SPICER:

In what respect?

QUESTION:

Well, I mean they're -- you're fine. You're covered.

SPICER:

Sure. But it's unfortunate.

First of all, I'm not fine, because I think because of Obamacare premiums on everybody have gone up. No. If you -- regardless of what you pay, federal employees make a contribution to their health care plan as well. And I think that all premiums have increased over the last -- whether you're in an employer-based system or not.

So one of the big issues with Obamacare was in order to fix a problem that faced you know 15 to 20 million people, is that the entire system got shattered. And prices on everybody got ratcheted up. People on Medicaid suddenly lost their ability.

So the issue was that in an attempt to solve a problem that affected a very specified and defined group of people, we affected the entire health care market. That -- so whether or not you get it from an employee or not, an employer or not. But to your question, that's part of the issue.

Hold on. Hold on. Here's the issue. You're right. You're absolutely right.

Right now if you're a federal employee in a lot of cases in state (ph), you get to open a book and you get to look at what plan matters to you. What plan is best for you or your family. What -- how much do you want to pay? How much coverage do you want to have? What's the copay you're willing to risk (ph)? What services or benefits do you want as part of your plan? Absolutely.

But the issue is so many Americans, they don't have that choice. For a third of everyone in -- for a third of the counties in this country, they've got one choice, one. And in a lot of states they've got you know none, or the exchanges are becoming fewer and fewer. The number of doctors and plans that take Medicaid fewer and fewer.

So to your point, I think actually we're in a unique place because we get to understand what the average American should get. It shouldn't be limited to a specified number of people.

QUESTION:

I appreciate your argument. Very well taken.

SPICER:

Thank you.

QUESTION:

However, I'm going to compare a GS-5 or a GS-9 to a senator or a secretary of one of the agencies.

SPICER:

OK.

QUESTION:

I mean the safety net on those individuals gives them a certain cushion. They're negotiating, but do they really have that kind of compassion or that kind of empathy for the people who in fact may be thrown off the health care?

SPICER:

I mean I think that just because somebody has health care doesn't mean that they can't empathize with somebody who doesn't. You know, we all have family and friends that are suffering. I mean that's like saying because I have a job I can't be empathetic to somebody who doesn't have a job.

I mean we all have family and friends. It's the same thing. When we watch a friend or a family member suffer through a terminal disease, because we haven't suffered through it doesn't mean that we can't have compassion toward that person or be concerned on how much that bill is costing them.

I mean that's actually, in some ways, you know, depending on you know the relationship we have with that person, you can even feel worse. You can feel guilty about how much you have and how you're not able to help that person. I think in many cases that's what drives us is to know there're options available to some Americans and not others.

QUESTION:

I appreciate your response.

SPICER:

Thank you.

QUESTION:

Sean?

SPICER:

John.

QUESTION:

Sean, we confirmed that there is a criminal investigation into this alleged theft of cyber tools from the CIA by WikiLeaks. What can the White House tell us about the situation?

Particularly the fact that it seems like there's another leak for the intelligence community that's on the scale of Edward Snowden? And can you share the American people that none of these tools have ever been used against them?

SPICER:

Well, there's a couple things in that.

Number one, for obvious reasons, it is our policy as a government not to confirm the authenticity of any kind of disclosure or hack. That would be highly inappropriate for us. But you know all of these occurred under the last administration. That is important. All of these alleged issues.

And I think it's interesting to have it asked this way about the damage that could've occurred or what tools could've be used in light of what's been going on recently. I mean we've had you know your own network's correspondent, James Rosen, had his phones -- multiple phone tapped. What is -- was that appropriate back then?

I think there's a lot of concern out there about alleged leaks. I mean there is a -- there's two steps to this. And I think what you saw over the last week in terms of -- this should be a major concern to people in terms of the leaks that are coming out, and the desire to get to the bottom of them. Whether or not -- not specifically with respect to the disclosure that you're referring to.

But I think the idea that we are having these ongoing disclosures of national security and classified information should be something that everybody is outraged in this country.

This is the kind of disclosure that undermines our country, our security, and our well being. And you've seen over the last two years, you know, depending on the leak, it depends on the outrage. It's interesting how whenever the -- whether the leak occurred under the last administration, you had member after member talking about disclosures that occurred during the last administration, whether it was members of Congress -- you know, Elijah Cummings expressed concern during the last thing -- last administration in terms of the Americans that were -- you know, when it deal with Hillary Clinton, there was complete outrage about the leaks that occurred; members calling for investigations to the leaks.

It's interesting how there's sort of a double standard with when the leaks occur, how much outrage there is.

And so I do think it's important, while I don't want to get into confirming or denying this particular thing, I think it is interesting that -- how different subjects are approached. This one everyone is immediately rushing to and there should be a lot more coverage of this. This alleged leak should concern every single American in terms of the impact it has on our national security.

QUESTION:

Can I ask something unrelated?

SPICER:

Of course you can.

QUESTION:

Robin Shahini has been imprisoned in Iran since last October for collaborating with a hostile government, that government being the United States of America. He's on a hunger strike. Apparently, his health is suffering. Is the president aware of Mr. Shahini's plight and that of three other Americans who are being held in Iran? And what, if anything, might the president be doing about it?

SPICER:

Yes. So, obviously, we're aware of the situation. In that particular case, I would refer you to the State Department.

QUESTION:

I'd like to go back to an earlier question. What is the president personally going to be doing in order to sell this healthcare bill? And what's he going to do to convince (inaudible) lawmakers (inaudible) who don't (inaudible)?

SPICER:

Well, I mean, we're on day two. As I mentioned, we've been out in local talk radio and local markets. The president yesterday met with the House deputy whips. Today, he's having a series of additional meetings with conservative groups, with others. He's already talked to insurance agents (ph).

I mean, we've talked about the lead-up to this with the insurance executives, with companies, with various members of the House and the Senate from both parties. He met with governors, attorneys general. I think there's a group of lieutenant governors coming in.

We're going to be aggressively going after the -- talking about the solution that we have for healthcare, both the need to repeal the current Obamacare system, and the need to replace it with something that gives patients the choices and the costs that they need.

As I mentioned yesterday, and I can't overstate this, there's a difference between having a card and having care. Being told you have coverage and not being able to use it is no good. And that's the thing that I think is really important. It's -- when we get asked the question so often: How many people are going to be covered? It's -- that's not the question that should be asked.

How many people are going to get the care they need? Having coverage with a high deductible and, in some cases, or not having a plan that allows you to get the coverage you need, or afford it, isn't real coverage. It's a card. And I think that's the big difference in the approach that we're taking here, is how do we get people the affordable care they need; that there's more choice; that more doctors are coming into the system instead of leaving.

And that is a big, big difference in the approach that's happening now.

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

(inaudible) on the road to try to sell it?

SPICER:

I think you will see a lot of travel and a lot of activity by the president and all of the administration. And it's not just going to be the president. It's going to be, you know, the secretary, the directors, key administration staff. The vice president's been actively engaged in meeting on the Hill, on talk radio, on local radio, on local television.

You've seen a flurry of meetings with outside interests, with op/eds explaining the problem and engaging groups and associations and -- that have an interest in this, and industry leaders.

This is going to be a very, very aggressive, comprehensive approach to making sure that every American understands that there is a major problem and that we are here to fix it.

Cecelia? (ph)

QUESTION:

(inaudible) I want to go back to that -- two parts. Is the president outraged by this?

SPICER:

Well, I mean, again, I don't want to -- the allegations -- he has been very clear about the concern that he has for leaks. This is...

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

Well, again, Cecelia (ph), if I -- I think he is very concerned about the allegations that are out there in terms of what may or may not happen. It is -- it is an allegation. It is something that we are not going to confirm at this time. But as you can imagine from the president's previous comments, he is extremely concerned about this -- about these allegations, about this -- about the potential that something, if this were true, would have on our national security.

And make no mistake about it. I think the President has talked before that anybody who leaks classified information will be held to the highest degree of law. We will go after people who leak classified information. We will prosecute them to the full extent of the law. This is -- playing with our nation's national security is not something that should be taken lightly under this administration.

QUESTION:

When it came to the campaign and Hillary Clinton, the President said quote, I love WikiLeaks. Does he still feel that way today?

SPICER:

There is a big difference between disclosing Podesta -- John Podesta's gmail accounts about a back and forth and his undermining of Hillary Clinton and his thoughts on her on a personal nature, and the leaking of classified information. There is a massive, massive difference between those two things. And I think it is, again, the interest and the outrage that occurred last year by a lot of Democrats when it came to leaks, it's interesting that we're hearing not as much outrage now when it comes to some of our issues of national security.

April --

QUESTION:

Sean, a couple (ph) questions. One, you said Congressman Cummings, you affirmed Congressman Cummings is meeting with President Trump today.

SPICER:

Yes.

QUESTION:

In the last press conference, (inaudible) the President had, he (ph) talked about Senator Schumer telling Elijah Cummings not to come. What happened to smooth this over, and what is the conversation going to be about? Is it just going to solely be on the high cost of prescription drugs?

SPICER:

Well I think the nature of the meeting stems from the conversation they had on the phone, which was on prescription drugs. And that I'm sure that if Congressman Cummings or the President brings up another subject, it'll go there. I'm not -- we'll try to have some sort of readout afterwards, depending on how that goes.

But it's -- the nature of it is an area where they agree. And if you remember, one of the things that they talked about on the phone is that they -- there were probably several more areas that they would agree on and find that they would agree on throughout a conversation. And I hope that that conversation does exactly what they said that it would in terms of getting to those areas of common agreement where they can work together to help solve additional problems that our country faces.

QUESTION:

So you don't have any knowledge of what happened to smooth that over --

SPICER:

I know our teams were in touch with his office immediately following. And as you know, there were a couple times when the meetings had been -- tried to be scheduled and it just didn't work out, and hope, luckily now, they will.

QUESTION:

He's one member of 49 of the CBC (ph). Right after that press conference, the White House reached out to the Congressional Black Caucus, to Cedric Richmond, the head of the caucus. Where is that meeting? Where does that meeting land (ph)? Is it happening --

SPICER:

I know that we've reached out, and we're looking for a date on that as well. So we're pleased that this one was able to come together, and then we'll get to the next one. Yes --

QUESTION:

Last question. Yesterday, there was a compare and contrast with visual, show and tell, if you will --

SPICER:

Yes. I saw that (inaudible) --

QUESTION:

Yes, you were there (ph), yes. So -- you compared and contrasted about how you're going about it and how the Obama administration went about Obamacare. One difference that they make note, and I want to get your response to this, is the fact that you may have this and said you're doing this versus what they're doing -- the one thing that they say that you did not do that they did, had their bill scored (ph) by CDL (ph), and you did not score --

SPICER:

Sure. It is being scored. Look, I know -- look, with all due respect to that, this is the same group that said -- who passed it and then told us we could read it. I mean, this bill is online for every American to go to readthebill.gop. It's on the speaker's website. We linked to it on several accounts that we've --

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

I understand that. And again, if that's the complaint, this is the same group that didn't let anybody read it, that did it -- that jammed it through with no bipartisan support. This President has reached out to both sides of the aisle, had governors here, had senators here, to get their input -- there's no contrast between what we did and what they did. This was a full effort to reach out to members in the House and the Senate. It's going through regular order in the House. Every member of the House and the Senate will be able to have their opportunity to have amendments offered through the committee process and on the floor.

So the idea that they can compare the date that they got a score is pretty reaching deep on this, because there's been an opportunity for members to have their input on this and to talk about their concerns, to give their input on it, especially the governors, who were left on the sideline last time, and who have such an important role in administering healthcare when it comes to Medicaid. The idea that anyone talks about when the score was issued -- there will be a score in all due -- in all good time.

But the other thing is, let's be honest, the irony of the score is that the CBL (ph) was way off the last time. I don't think that -- that we're waiting to -- that that's a big issue to us right now.

QUESTION:

Doesn't cost matter, though --

SPICER:

Of course cost matters. But look at how off they were last time. If you're looking at the CBO for accuracy, you're looking in the wrong place. I mean they were way way off the last time in every aspect of how they scored and projected ObamaCare.

(OFF-MIKE)

In terms, no, but, neither did they. I mean, last time, if you look at the number of people that they projected that would be on ObamaCare, they are off by millions, so the idea that we are waiting for a score, it will be scored. But, the idea that that is any kind of authority based on the track record that occurred last time is a little far fetched. (Jessica)?

QUESTION:

(Inaudible) the bids for the prototypes that went out today, and I just was curious about the timing of that. How much pressure there was to get the going quickly. And, secondly, is there guidance from the White House about what kind of vendors can build the wall, especially international vendors build the wall.

SPICER:

I think that process is working through as the President has talked about before, we are trying to move ahead with existing funds that DHS has and then we'll continue to create a time line to ask Congress for that funding. We're working with Congress on that. And, then, you know, I don't think it will be any surprise to know that the President is going to favor American workers and American companies when it comes to an American project. That shouldn't be any kind of surprise. (Blake)?

QUESTION:

(OFF-MIKE) increasingly likely that the Federal Reserve, next week, will hike interest rates? Two or three questions, one, how does the President feel about that and secondly, does he have the full confidence of Janet Yellen, who he described during the campaign, to political to leave the Federal Reserve (OFF-MIKE).

SPICER:

Let me get back to you on that one, I don't have any comment on the Federal Reserve. I'll look at the team, what I will say is that, you know, as I mentioned at the outset, when you look at the hiring and the jobs and the manufacturing and the pay, the consumer confidences and the CEOs indexes that are going -- that have already come out in the first two months. We see a resurgence and optimism in the economy by job creators to want to hire here, who want to manufacture here, who want to grow here.

And, I think that our economy is clearly on the up-swing. And, I think you see statement after statement, company after company coming out and sharing the in President's vision for moving

the country forward and for renewing the optimism and building and being part of an American resurgence, in terms of economy.

QUESTION:

Let me clear this, the no thoughts were on Mrs. Yellon or on his thoughts for rate hike?

SPICER:

I'll get back to you on both, how's that?

QUESTION:

(OFF-MIKE) the last question on, give us (OFF-MIKE). One thing the Obama administration did do is get a few (stake holders) to the table, AARP, American Medical Association, both of those (inaudible) came out strongly opposed to this proposal. So, what's your message particularly, with respect to the AARP?

SPICER:

It think the AARP got a really good deal the last time when it came to prescription drugs in particular. I think this is a patient centric bill. It's about patients, it's about people, it's about the Americans who got left behind. Look at what those deals got people last time.

I mean, for all those people who are on Medicaid, in particular, they don't have choices anymore. So, I would argue that the President has put the American people first and has put patients first. So, you can talk about, you know, we're glad to have support, no mistake about it. But, I think that the support that this administration, and I think that the house is focused on, is getting every American their buy-in and their support.

That's, you know, obviously, I not going to -- we would love to have every group on board, but this isn't going to be -- every single deal isn't going through, the cornhusker kick-back, this and that, over and over again it was one deal after another to get to buy votes to get it though the Senate.

So, if you want to line up how many special interests got paid off last time versus now, they'll probably win hands down, hold on, this isn't about figuring out how many special interests in Washington we can get paid off. It's about making sure that patients get the best deal, that lowers prices and brings back cost.

But again, I think, what I'm trying to figure out at some point your defending the indivisible. Nancy Pelosi put out three criteria for how they judge ObamaCare, and by their own standards, they fail on all three. Costs were up, choices are down. That's -- there is no other way to judge that. By every account, every single premium, by every standard is up. Choices are down across the country.

So, there is a horrible deal that the American people got sold and what we're trying to do is put patients back first in line.

QUESTION:

So, the AARP is specifically talking about patients in the 50s and 60s. AARP describes this as an age tax that will disproportionately affect people who, right are now, low income, benefit from subsidies under ObamaCare and could stand, according the AARP's estimate, take a hit of thousands of dollars in their premium payments each year when their subsidies go way and the tax credits go away. What's your message to those people? The message from the President

SPICER:

And, the message from the President is that we want you to get more choice a lower cost and I think as we work this bill through, through daylight, not jam it through in the middle of the night -- that they are going to see, as more and more people will, that this is a deal for the American people that's gonna put patients first, lower their costs, and give them more choices.

But again, I -- I don't -- there is probably not a person out there, either through themselves, or a loved one, or a friend, or a colleague that has seen choices go down and premiums go up. So what people are dealing with now is not acceptable.

And I think that the idea that anyone is defending the current status quo... And even in some of the statements of some of the groups, they admit that there's a problem right now. And so my advice to those people is join the process. Share your ideas. Share your thought. Let the process work its will so that it is a bill that has input.

But the bill, the way it was done last time, is not something that's acceptable.

QUESTION:

Is the president worried, though, that every major doctor's group -- the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Physicians -- have all come out and said they have serious concerns? For all the talk of doctors, and patients, and choice, that doctors' groups are all so far unanimously coming out saying they're not supportive of this. Is that concerning?

SPICER:

No, I -- I think when you look at a lot of doctors, versus the associations here in Washington, we have had tremendous input from doctors themselves. Dr. Price himself a -- a doctor, is the one who crafted this.

So you have a doctor in charge of the -- the administration's effort to work with Congress. You've got several physicians and other medical professionals in Congress that are talking about the

experiences they have. In fact, many ran for Congress because of the concerns they saw in their own industry.

So with -- while I -- I'm not -- I have respect for some of the work that some of these Washington, D.C.-based associations do, at the end of the day, this is about patients, and about the input from doctors who are on the front line of seeing patients and talking about the care that they're able to give, or not to give, to people. I'm sorry.

QUESTION:

Do you mind if I follow up on something else you said?

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

I do. I don't -- sorry.

QUESTION:

I'm sorry. The -- you've talked about people having a card. You've got a card, but it's a \$2,000 deductible, and there's only ten doctors in your town that'll (inaudible)...

SPICER:

Right.

QUESTION:

Well, and... But that's better than nothing, if you get cancer or hit by a car. So maybe that's an (inaudible) access... Right. But it is better than no insurance. So if this expands access to people and choice, but it reduces the number of people who actually have health insurance.

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

But I don't think it...

QUESTION:

So can it do both?

SPICER:

But, yeah, of course it can, and it will do both by ensuring that more people... Right now, you've got more people not -- you know, paying the penalty and saying, "I don't want health care. I'm not going to pay the penalty." Because costs are too high. P

You know, and was it probably five, six, seven years ago, before Obamacare went into place, a single individual, young, individual person on the -- on the open market could get a premium, a -- a plan with a premium of, you know, \$100, \$150 a month. It's in the high 300s now. And I think that there's a big difference. You're not -- for young people just entering the workplace, for example, your -- your -- your example. They go get into an accident. Right now, you've got a lot of individuals that get off their parents' health care and say, "I'm healthy. I have no desire to go get health care. It's another, you know, few hundred dollars a month that I don't have, or that I'd rather spend on something else."

If we can get that cost down, it makes a lot more sense, and get them plans that are tailored to them. 27, 28-year-old individuals don't need care that's for folks, you know, that -- that talks about certain things that -- a plan that has certain things that -- that are towards the end of life.

But right now, you've got one size fits all, government-run, government-mandated plans that offer people a suite of -- of -- of medical services that they do not need, because there's no choice. And it's a government-mandated system.

I think offering more choice and more competition allows people to pick a plan that is more tailored to your needs. And this goes back, exactly what John was asking, that if you can get -- if you can actually pick a plan, and across state lines, find one that suits you as an individual, as opposed to, you know, maybe there's a family plan that's more comprehensive. It has dental, and vision, and all the things that your kids are going to need, because, you know, of all the things that you anticipate. They're not -- That's a plan that, you know, a -- a -- a young family might need, versus an -- an older person that's single, or a younger person that's just entering the workforce.

But right now, there's no competition. There's no choice. So it's not an either/or situation. We're - - we're facing a situation where more and more people are getting less and less, and paying more and more for it. And that's -- that's the wrong way to go.

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

My apologies. Anita, then Maura (ph)

QUESTION:

The (inaudible) The military has recently conducted some kind of exercise at the naval base at Guantanamo Bay, and it was preparing for an migrant crisis. And there is a DHS migrant center there. And I wondered if the administration has considered, and what -- what you all thought -- think about using that facility for immigrants.

SPICER:

Well, I mean, I would just -- I would -- that -- that particular exercise, to the best of my knowledge, is a -- is a rather regular exercise that occurs, as do many of the exercises that the military prepares for in a whole host of contingency operations.

So, that is a routine military operation.

QUESTION:

(inaudible) consideration, though?

SPICER:

No, I'm not going to -- there is -- it is a routine military operation. As several of them do with our -- our partners throughout the world where we plan for random, you know, contingencies that may or may not happen. That's the job of the military to practice for contingencies that may or may not happen on a whole host of issues.

But to try to ascertain, you know...

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

Are you all going to -- considering using the facility for immigrants?

SPICER:

There is nothing to consider it for. I think we're fine right now. There's nothing that we would need to use it for.

But again, I mean, I think part of the goal of preparing the military going through various exercises is on a whole host of issues -- on refugees; they prepare for natural disasters. We're not prepare -- we're not anticipating a natural disaster, but we prepare for them.

We -- at the White House when we were coming in as an administration, we did -- I think we briefed -- during the transition period, we did -- we called it a "right-seat/left-seat" operation with the outgoing administration. So we sat down and talked about cyber attacks and natural disasters, and the whole-of-government response in some of these things.

It doesn't mean that we anticipate them. It doesn't mean that we want them. It means that we're going to prepare for them, in the same way that many organizations do fire drills. It's not that you anticipate or expect a fire, but you prepare for them, as many families do.

Preparedness is the key to executing well. And I think that's all we're doing.

QUESTION:

And secondarily, the Louisville media is reporting that President Trump will be here on Saturday. Can you confirm that? And is this about healthcare, as you've just (inaudible) going to make the rounds?

SPICER:

Yeah, I would -- I've seen that report. We have nothing to announce with respect to the president's schedule at this time. But as I mentioned earlier to I think it was Shannon, that we will have -- or is it Jill -- I can't -- one of -- somewhere in this area -- we will have an update on the president's schedule later this week.

But I -- I do anticipate the president to be very active in his support for the repeal and replace effort. And so this is what you should -- you should expect.

Now, Mara (ph)?

QUESTION:

The CBO score is supposed to come out next week, and you just called into question their credibility.

SPICER:

I didn't call into question -- just so we're clear. I'm just -- I'm just -- thanks, Matt (ph), I appreciate it. I can answer.

They -- their record is what I'm calling into question. When you look at the number of people and the cost on what they scored the last Obamacare bill on, it's way off. That's not -- that's a fact. That's not anything more than that.

QUESTION:

Well, people base their votes on what they think is going to happen to the costs and the coverage...

SPICER:

That's right.

QUESTION:

(inaudible) coverage. Is there any analytic organization that you would accept to score from?

SPICER:

Well, I think that there's -- yeah, I mean, I think -- I mean, OMB will probably put out a score on that.

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

No, no. I'm not saying -- but Mara (ph), hold on. Before -- all I'm saying is look at what the CBO's record is on Obamacare. It's vastly off. I think they projected 20 million people to be on Obamacare this year. I believe the number of 12 million. They're -- they're way off in terms of the millions.

So it's not a question of whether I'm questioning anything. Anyone that can actually do basic math can understand that their projections for Obamacare the last time were way, way off the mark. And so my only point is that I think when they come out with this score, we need to understand the track record when it comes to healthcare.

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

(inaudible) the track record (inaudible) scoring (inaudible)?

SPICER:

I'm sorry. Well, there's probably a lot. And I think members have to look at a lot of things to cast their vote on. The -- the -- they're going to have to look at the totality of the bill; the support of their constituents; the current state of things.

I think that there is no question -- look, when you look at the trajectory of the cost right now in terms of premiums, you can either say -- and not just the premiums, but Obamacare is going to collapse on its own weight very soon. And the president made it very clear in his press conference and a lot of previous statements, the politically easy thing to do is just let it collapse and let Democrats come back to the table.

I don't think that's the right thing. The president has made it clear he doesn't think that's the right thing. This is an opportunity for him to show the American people that the right thing to do is to care about their healthcare options and the costs that they're paying.

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

One last thing...

SPICER:

Of course.

QUESTION:

... you mentioned deductibles before and how -- how they're going up under Obamacare. Are you promising people that their deductibles will come down under this plan?

SPICER:

Everything that we have been led to believe about how this is -- is yes, this will drive costs down. When you talk about opening up pooling; when you talk about driving costs down because you can buy it over state lines, everything that has driven up costs, all of those market forces will come in. And I think every leading economist who has looked at this says it will drive costs down.

John Gizzi (ph)?

QUESTION:

Thank you, Sean.

The premier argument by Democrats, notably former President Obama today, is that enactment of the act that we were -- that was illustrated yesterday would lead to many people losing their health care.

You certainly heard that from Democrats. But also several of the Republican governors who were here for the National Governor's Association, including strong allies of the president, Gov. Bentley of Alabama, Gov. Hutchinson of Arkansas voiced the same concern. They did not want any plan that would lead to anyone losing their present health care.

What does the administration say to what is the leading argument against a new plan? And then I have a follow-up question.

SPICER:

Of course.

I would say that any governor that's concerned about people losing care right now should join us. They're losing their care right now. They're losing their options. And they're paying too much.

So the answer is that if you're concerned about those principles, then you should be concerned with what's happening right now. And you should be concerned and want to join in this administration and work with this Congress.

Again, the biggest differences here is instead of us jamming a bill down Congress and not allowing the American people to read it until it's passed, as was done with Obamacare with then Speaker

Pelosi, is if this bill is out in the open for every single person in the world to read. It is open for people to let their member of Congress feel -- share their thoughts, share their ideas. And it's done out in the open.

I think that is a vastly different approach with how this is going about than the last time. And that makes a big difference with the approach. And it gives people an opportunity through the process, what they call regular order, to have input on this. And if it can be made better, then great. But I think this time we recognize that there's a lot of work that needs to get done on behalf of the patients that are having trouble getting care.

Alexis?

QUESTION:

Oh, wait...

SPICER:

I'm sorry.

QUESTON:

My follow-up question...

SPICER:

Of course.

QUESTION:

... is a follow-up question about the wall.

During the recent Governor's Association meeting, Gov. Graco Ramirez, who is the governor of Mexico's Association of Federated Governors, warned that continued discussion about the wall, and the president's talk of building it, might very well lead to the election of Mr. Lopez Obrador as president of Mexico. And he is considered the most anti-American, most hostile to America of any of the candidates.

Are these any concerns that come up in the discussion of the wall, namely the impact on Mexican politics?

SPICER:

No. The president's -- that's pretty good. The president's number one concern is the safety of our country. Number two is the jobs that are impacted by this and the ability of Americans to get the wage that they deserve.

But again, this is a national security issue. Something that frankly, when he's discussed this with President Pena Nieto of Mexico that there is at least -- there is a shared concern about drug cartels, drug trafficking, arms sales over the border. There is a shared concern for the respect of the border because it means a lot to both sides.

So this is something that we care about from a national security standpoint. And then obviously the president's concerned on it both as well as on an economic standpoint.

Alexis?

QUESTION:

(OFF-MIKE) your answer was that if the health care bill could be made better, the president is interested in that. So can I just clarify?

Once he meets with the congressional conservatives this evening, who are -- who have misgivings about the legislation, is he intending to talk to them about what they would like to change? And is he open to making those changes? Is that what the -- is that the mode he's in rather than a sell mode...

SPICER:

No...

QUESTION:

... in a listening mode?

SPICER:

I think he's in a very much of a sell mode. The president has -- and his team have worked very hard on this. They're proud of the effort and the product that they have produced with -- in consultation with the House and the Senate.

But obviously it's going through the process. And so if somebody has an idea -- and that could be on the administration side, that we believe that after a consultation with individuals or groups that there's a way to improve upon this. But that's the beauty of going through the process that we are.

But make no mistake, the president is very proud of the product that we have produced. We're out in full sell mode all around the country talking about how we think this is the best way to solve the problem that the American people face. And that -- why we believe that the solutions that we put forward in this bill are the right ones, and it will benefit them.

QUESTION:

Sean?

SPICER:

Go ahead.

QUESTION:

Can I follow up and say, before the president meets with Chancellor Merkel next week, is it possible that we could see the president for a more general multi-question news conference?

He's been a little press shy this week. And from North Korea to health care selling to CIA leaks, we'd love to talk to him. Could we see him...

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

I will ask...

(CROSSTALK)

(LAUGHTER)

SPICER:

I'm sure -- I'm not -- is there anyone else? I could be glad to ask. A show of hands.

(CROSSTALK)

(LAUGHTER)

SPICER:

Thank you, I appreciate it. I would be glad to ask the President. I'll share your request with him and I'll see what we can do on a schedule. But as you know, he is very busy these days. He's done a lot of sprays. He will continue to interact with you guys, but I will be glad to make your request known.

Katie (ph)?

QUESTION:

Sean, yesterday...

(OFF-MIC)

SPICER:

Yes.

QUESTION:

...Capitol Hill there was a lot of talk of the starting point being a non-starter. So it seems like there are some negotiations that need to be made. Does the President have any non-negotiables in his bill that he will not take out, even after...

(OFF-MIC)

SPICER:

Well Katie (ph), I think as I was just saying to Alexis (ph) that it is a starting point. It's going through regular order in the House. And so, part of that process as it goes through the Committee Mark-up hearing, both in Ways and Means and House Energy and Commerce Committee, that by its very nature allows for input through both of those committees and ultimately on the floor before it moves over to the Senate.

The Senate goes through a similar process. So I think frankly we're just acknowledging the reality of where the process is. But we're proud of the process, we're proud of the input that we've received from Governors, from Senators, from individuals, associations and companies. We feel very proud of the work that is encapsulated in this bill and the results it will yield.

And so that being said, I think the President understands as a business man that if someone has got a really good idea, then he's going to listen it. If he can be part of the process to help make something better, there's nothing that's going to preclude that. We have been very open to listening to people. We're very proud of it. We're going to go out and as I said in full sell mode, but if there's an idea that comes across, we're going to entertain that to make it clear.

Hallie (ph)?

QUESTION:

Two topics here.

SPICER:

Yes.

QUESTION:

The first on healthcare and then I'll have a follow-up on that. In the past, you and others have accused democrats of rushing through the original healthcare law. Now, there are some republicans

including today who say this is simply moving too fast. Is the President willing to accept a delayed timeline if it pushes repeal and replace into later in the year?

SPICER:

I don't -- going through the process can't be delay -- I mean by its very nature. We are going through the committee process. There are two House Committees --

QUESTION:

...timelines being mid-Easter break...

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

That's subject -- right. But I would argue it's subject to the House does its will, and then how the Senate does. I think obviously we would like this to move forward. There's a lot of stuff in the queue.

We've talked about tax reform. This bill is attached to the FY17 Budget Reconciliation and I know that for a lot of Americans that means nothing, in terms of the phrase and the nomenclature that surrounds how Congress does it. But it's important to recognize that that vehicle allows Congress to do certain things and not others with a 50 vote -- a majority vote in the Senate.

That's important. There are certain things you can do through that, that you can't do through other vehicles. It will take a 60 vote and that you can do administratively. So, it's actually if you heard Dr. Price (ph) talk yesterday about the three phases, it's actually multi-phased, it's going through regular order, but there are simply no contrasts between how we are approaching this and how democrats approached it last time.

Number one, there's actually been input from across the aisle, both from the governors who are here, attorney generals, outside groups, House and Senate democrats have been able to provide input to both staff, to the senior administration officials to the President. And then secondly, it's actually going through the process.

So while we can forget the timeline, ultimately it's going to be up to the House and then the Senate to determine how fast it goes. But there are members on each of those committees, and then ultimately every member on the floor that has the ability to give input.

QUESTION:

One other question. I'm just curious about this meeting with Senator Cruz tonight. He has come out and expressed some skepticism on the bill as it stands now, presumably that would be part of the topic of conversation, but as you mentioned Heidi Cruz is coming too and I'm wondering if the President has any plans to apologize to her for the insinuations he made on the campaign trail?

SPICER:

I think they're looking forward to a great dinner. He's had -- he had dinner with the Rubio's a couple days ago, maybe a week ago. He had lunch yesterday with Senator Graham. This is, as I stated weeks ago, the President is going to continue to have outreach to members of Congress, both parties. He's meeting with Congressman Cummings today.

This is a President who wants to engage with members of both sides of the aisles and both houses, but also groups, business leaders, union leaders, the AFL/CIO head -- which if Trump goes here yesterday. This is a President who is going to engage with everybody who can help join in proposing ideas and thoughts and opinions on how to move the country forward.

So, he looks forward to dinner tonight with Senator and Mrs. Cruz, as he has with several others. And I think you're going to see more, and a continuation of this kind of effort to reach out and get people's ideas.

Margaret?

QUESTION:

(inaudible) a second topic.

SPICER:

Yes?

QUESTION:

Does the president believe the CIA has been compromised in any way?

SPICER:

With respect to the disclosures? Is that what you're -- again I'm not going to -- it's U.S. government policy not to confirm this. I think he has obviously been very concerned, as I stated, about the disclosure of national security on any level. It undermines our country's national security.

And I think that, you know, I just will say, I think there's also been a big double standard when it comes to disclosures of national -- of classified information, and the outrage or the -- that exists when one side has it happen versus another.

There was...

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

Well, I think that there has -- there has been a lot of disclosures about national security that occurred last cycle when there was the potential that the FBI had been -- leaked certain information. The members of Congress on the other side of the aisle, Hillary Clinton and others, talked about how there was so much concern about classified information. Seeing such silence on outrage from the media, from others, with the current disclosures now, with things that may or may not have happened towards the 2016 election when it comes to this side.

So I think there's a vast difference when it comes to how the disclosures are approached.

Yes?

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

... on North Korea (inaudible). And what is the President Trump (inaudible) North Korea (inaudible) and what is (inaudible) North Korean (inaudible)?

SPICER:

On the -- on the -- which...

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

North Korean (inaudible).

SPICER:

On the politics?

QUESTION:

No, policies.

SPICER:

Policies -- well, I mean, we're very troubled by the launch of missiles that occurred from North Korea. I think that's why the THAAD missile system that we've started to deploy into South Korea is so important. We're continuing to work with the government of South Korea to make sure that they have the defenses necessary to protect themselves.

It's a -- the deployment of the THAAD system is critical to their protection, as witnessed by this weekend's ballistic missile test. China and the United States in particular both understand the threat

that North Korea poses to the region. And I think that there's areas of concern that we can work together to protect the country.

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

(inaudible) was international women's day. There's a lot of concern about access to healthcare for women.

SPICER:

Right.

QUESTION:

Will the president commit to reaching out to female Democratic lawmakers as the next two phases of this healthcare bill continue? And additionally, what is the president's stance on access to birth control for women across the country?

SPICER:

Well, I think that's -- that question was asked and answered by Secretary Price yesterday. With respect to women's health, the president has also made it clear that he intends to have a substantial increase in funding towards women's -- community centers that fund women's health services. And that will be reflected in his budget.

Margaret?

QUESTION:

Thank you.

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

Sorry.

QUESTION:

Sean, is the president the target of a counter- intelligence investigation?

SPICER:

I think that's what we need to find out. There's obviously a lot of concern. I mean, I mentioned to John, there was considerable concern last cycle when a reporter was the target of one. But part of the reason that we have asked the House and Senate to look into this is because of that.

And I think, you know, it was interesting. I think if you look at last week, all of a sudden these stories that keep coming out about the president and his links to Russia. It has -- it has continued to be the same-old, same-old (inaudible) over and over again.

The president has made clear he has no interest in Russia, and yet a lot of these stories that come out with respect to that are, frankly, fake. They are a series of fake allegations that at the bottom no -- while there's no evidence to substantiate any of this, it's the same unnamed sources, quote-unquote, "associates" that we get tagged with.

And yet, there is no evidence that continues to be shown, and every single person that gets briefed on this shows that whether it's Senator Cotton, Chairman Nunes, who has done a phenomenal job of trying to get to the bottom of this. But it's interesting I think the double standard that exists between the concern about getting to the bottom of the allegations that -- with respect to the president that there are on so many other issues.

When you talk about...

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

So he doesn't know whether he is the target...

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

No, no -- but -- but I think that's one of the issues that we have asked the Senate and House to look into. I can tell you with respect to the other (inaudible), you look at DNI -- former DNI Clapper's comment. He literally said the DNI, which he said, the DNI, which includes the NSA, FBI, and CIA, did not find any evidence of collusion between the Trump campaign and Russian agents.

Senators Rubio, Cotton, Burr, Chairman Nunes -- all of the people who've been briefed on the situation -- have come to the same conclusion. And it is -- it is interesting how many times this fake narrative gets repeated over and over and over again. And yet no evidence has ever been suggested that shows the president has anything to do with any of the things that are being said. It's a recycled story over and over and over again.

And I think that there is a bit of -- you know, it's amazing. The president goes out last week, does this joint session. And then a couple -- you know, literally 24-hour stories start getting recycled about you know, potential issues that come up that literally continue to offer no fact, nothing but the unsubstantiated rumors over and over again.

And yet what is ignored is when you have someone like former DNI Clapper go out and literally say, quote, that they "did not find any evidence of collusion between the Trump campaign and Russians [sic]." You have Rubio, Cotton, Nunes all say the same thing, that they've been briefed that there's nothing.

And yet there's this fake narrative...

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

Sorry. I just want to make sure that I'm understanding. Are you saying that there is a possibility he is the target of a counterintelligence probe involving...

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

I don't know the answer...

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

You just connected those...

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

No, no, no. I think what I'm saying is that there is a difference between that narrative and then the narrative that has been perpetuated over and over again.

The concern that the president has, and why he asked the Senate and House Intelligence Committees to look into this is to get to the bottom of what may or may not have occurred during the 2016 election.

But the interesting, Margaret, is that when you look at every single person that's been briefed, they've all come to the same conclusion, that nothing happened during the 2016 election tying him to Russia. And yet the fake narrative continues over and over and over again. And the idea that it has -- it continues to be recycled without any substance, without any evidence needs to stop.

QUESTION:

(CROSSTALK) the president...

SPICER:

Chris?

QUESTION:

(CROSSTALK) as that fact?

SPICER:

I understand that. And that's why we're very...

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

(OFF-MIKE)...

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

No, no. That's not what I said. What I said was...

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

(Inaudible) the target...

SPICER:

Hold on...

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

... of investigation. His wires were tapped.

SPICER:

Hold on. One at a time.

I said that the president made clear on Sunday that he has asked the House and the Senate Intelligence Committees to use their resources and their processes to examine the facts and come to a conclusion.

Chris?

QUESTION:

Since you're talking about whether things are true or not, let me ask you, following up on something yesterday.

You seem to acknowledge the president was wrong when he Tweeted that 122 prisoners released by the Obama administration from Gitmo had returned to the battlefield. In fact, it was mostly by the Bush administration. Will he retract or even apologize for that, given that he also called it a terrible decision by the Obama administration?

And given that that was incorrect, that there still has been no proof either of his Tweets about widespread voter fraud or the wiretapping, does the president have a credibility problem?

SPICER:

You know, look, I said yesterday, I think Trey asked the question that the president meant the total number of people. And that -- hold on...

QUESTION:

(Inaudible)...

SPICER:

I understand -- OK. I understand that. I'm actually explaining it. That's the way you asked the question. I -- just he meant that the total number of people released from Gitmo was 122.

What the president -- but just to be clear, there is a big difference. Under the Bush administration most of those were court ordered. The Obama administration took great steps. They talked about -- it was a campaign promise, frankly, from day one to close Gitmo.

This president is very clear that he understands the nature of the threat that the people in Gitmo pose to our nation, and the recidivism rate that there are among people we have released. That is a concern that he shares.

The reason the Bush administration did it was in many cases they were under court order. The Obama administration made it actually a priority to let people go, and to actively desire to close that camp and to release more and more of those people, especially in the waning days.

There is a huge contrast between the posture and the policy of the last two administrations on how they were dealing with Gitmo. This administration understands, and the president has been very clear. He understands that they -- people that are kept in Gitmo pose a danger to our country and to the rest of the world. There's a big, big difference between the posture of those two.

QUESTION:

(OFF-MIKE) that the Tweet was wrong?

SPICER:

I just said it. I said that the Tweet -- he meant that it was the totality of the people. That's what I said to Trey yesterday. I'll say it again to you today.

Dave Boyer?

QUESTION:

(inaudible) on something else you said, Sean...

SPICER:

I'm sorry.

QUESTION:

It's a totally different topic. Because you said that you're in a full -- you're in sell mode...

SPICER:

Yes.

QUESTION:

... completely in sell mode. And I wonder if the president sees this as a test of his ability to make a deal. Something that he really talked about, something that voters responded to on the campaign trail. Is this essentially, does he feel, on him, that this is him going to show the American people that he can get this deal done?

SPICER:

Well he gets -- I mean he is a dealmaker. He's a negotiator. He's a world-class business leader. And he's been highly successful at it. So if anybody can get a deal on something, it's going to be Donald Trump.

I mean that's part of the reason I think that the American people, what they saw in him. That there was so much broken with Washington. Then when it came to the big problems, whether it's domestically or internationally that if somebody could come in and work across party lines, work with another country to get a deal that was in the country's best interest he had that skill set.

And, that's why they, frankly, elected him President. So, I think he feels very good about the product that we've put out we are in sell mode, we want to get this done, but the President has an open mind.

He enjoys meeting people and hearing ideas on how to make this country better, how to create jobs, how to create a better healthcare system, how to create better schools. And, if there's someone who comes up with a better idea that will help lower cost and increase access he's certainly gonna listen to them. (Inaudible).

QUESTION:

Sean, yesterday, in the President's meeting with the deputy (inaudible) he was talking about his tax cuts again. He said it's gonna be the biggest since Ronald Reagan maybe even bigger.

So, I know exactly what we're looking at. Most of us know exactly the plan. So, my first question is really easy. Tell us about the plan.

SPICER:

What the plan is?

QUESTION:

The tax cut.

SPICER:

Well, again, I'm gonna wait - I appreciate the layout, Dave. But, I'll leave it to him to work with Congress. When we're ready to roll it out we will do just that. We're not there yet. So, let's go on with the next hopefully ...

QUESTION:

Secondly, building on these jobs numbers today and they look very positive obviously there's a lot of CEOs out there who are excited about the possibility of a tax cut plan and yet, the president has also express a lot of concern about the national debt.

If you're going to get a tax cut on the level of Ronald Reagan, a historic size tax cut how are you gonna do that balance the needs for continued job growth with the concerns about the debt?

SPICER:

Because, I think that one of the best ways to get the national debt down is to grow the economy. The more the economy is growing, the more we can get it at three, four, five percent, the more the deficit goes down. That's just the best way to tackle the deficit is to grow the economy and put people back to work, create a deeper manufacturing base.

I mean, that is - between that and some of the efforts the President has put in to make government more efficient and effective and save money at that level. Those are the two things that I think combine to get the deficit down. Jennifer?

QUESTION:

I just wanted - of the more than 13,000 Syrian refugees who are in the country 150 of them - or less than 150 of them are Christian, Shia or (inaudible) same group the U.S. government acknowledges are literally being at risk of being wiped off the map.

So, I wonder now that Secretary Tillerson has time to settle in and as you review the refugee program, immigration policy is this something that's being discussed, is this a priority to give these groups relief?

SPICER:

Well, I think that when we talked the first time about the executive order was something that we acknowledged. There is definitely an area where in the executive order that we just passed one of the areas that we talked about was and I have to go back and look at the exact phraseology but we recognized that certain group and they can be religious in nature are being persecuted.

And, I think, that's gonna be a factor how we look at that program. It's something that the President - he's talked about in the past. It's something that Secretary Tillerson has acknowledged. And, that's not just refugees coming in this country but I think one of the reasons we need safe havens in Syria is to make sure that groups and individual, whether they be part of a group or religion who are being persecuted have a degree of safety that they can count on. Yeah.

QUESTION:

(Inaudible) Thank you so much. So, the President's on the record saying that he supports some sort of legalizations for many of the (inaudible) people in the country and you know there's a Dreamer that was caught in the race (ph) in Seattle, Washington, we don't know if he's gonna be released or not.

Does the President want to or plan to meet with Dreamers to talk about what's on his mind about you know gathering ideas for some sort of legalization and if so when would that meeting occur?

SPICER:

The President, I think, has talked about how he wants to tackle this holistically and back to Chris's question a second ago, I think, he's made it clear that if there's someone's ability to strike a deal to get people in a room and acknowledge we have to stay true to our principles that we can get a deal on a way to fix our broken immigration problem, that's him.

We are not at that phase yet. And, this is something he's talk to senators about and I think that as we continue to move forward, obviously, the focus now is on Obamacare. Repealing and replacing it with this program.

But, it is something that we're gonna continue to move forward with and as a comprehensive thing not just the illegal issue but the visa issue, how we deal with the other folks that are in this country. But -- but stay tuned. We've got more to go on this. We'll go further.

QUESTION:

Sean?

SPICER:

What's that?

QUESTION:

No meeting on the works (ph) with DREAMers?

SPICER:

No, there's nothing on the schedule at this point. Yes.

QUESTION:

(inaudible) pose a question. I'm sure you're aware that (inaudible) the president has ordered a (inaudible). Does this mark a -- a new strategy, rather? And does the president (inaudible) on the attacks from either ISIS or Al Qaeda?

SPICER:

Well, I think the -- the president talks about this a lot during the campaign, about giving the authority and -- and trusting the generals and the decision makers in -- of -- of his national security team with -- with executing what they need to to prosecute the war on terror, and the war against radical Islamic terrorism.

So it's not a question of delegating authority. There are certain things, and we addressed this in the briefing in previous weeks. But there's a big difference. He's not delegating the authority, but making sure they have the ability and the timeliness to act in an appropriate manner to -- to prosecute the case, and to go after terrorists in a way that they probably weren't last time.

So I think there's a big difference between the approach of this president and the last administration in terms of giving the generals, and the leaders, and the national security team and the defense department the tools and authority they need to prosecute the case against ISIS. Sara (ph) -- Gabi (ph). I'm sorry.

QUESTION:

Hi. You'll get it next time.

SPICER:

Get it switched.

QUESTION:

Israel's defense minister said yesterday that U.S. officials had sent a direct warning to Prime Minister Netanyahu against annexing parts of the West Bank. I wanted to know if that was at the request of President Trump. And then also, if you could tell us where the White House is in terms of reaching a deal with Israel on what they consider permissible settlement construction?

SPICER:

Well, as you know, yesterday the president spoke with Prime Minister Netanyahu. That conversation largely had to deal with areas of -- of regional security. I don't have anything further to read out on that, and I know that when they met here at the White House, there was discussion of settlements, and -- and the president was very clear about, you know, his -- what his desires and his wishes were.

I think as we continue to follow up with Israel in the coming weeks, we will have more on that. Yeah.

QUESTION:

Sean.

SPICER:

Yeah.

QUESTION:

Thank you. I have a follow-up question. It's actually asking about the thousands of women who have chosen to strike today. And you're saying that it is a free country. But at Channel 5, we've reported quite a bit on the schools and the districts that are closing...

SPICER:

Right.

QUESTION:

...because so many women chose to strike today. So, you know, it is a free country, but what would be the president's sort of reaction to, if you will, what is more important: the students being at school today, or that the woman's right to strike, and kind of make a statement, if you will, on this day?

SPICER:

Yeah, thanks. I think it's an important question. I mean, you've -- I know locally, this affects a lot of individuals throughout northern Virginia, and Maryland, and -- and the District.

So, I -- look, I -- I think -- I haven't talked to the president specifically about this. Obviously, as I've mentioned, people have a right to express themselves in our First Amendment. As the president's doing today by making sure that we appropriately salute the contributions that women make to this country.

But there's clearly an impact, in the -- in the case of schools. Localities throughout the country, here, and in the greater Washington, D.C. area. But I think that that concern is best utilized by parents through their local school boards, and through their city councils and mayors, whether or not they found it appropriate for that to have occurred.

I have not spoken to the president about this, but I think there's a balance. And I think that -- I would hope that -- that we should use this opportunity to recognize the role of women in the workplace, in the family, and throughout society for the contributions that they continue to make, and have made in the past in making the country as great as it has.

So with that one last thing, just to clarify, I think Jill asked this. But I just want to be really clear on one point, which is, there is no reason that we should -- that we have to think that the president is the target of any investigation whatsoever. I'm sorry, that was Margaret (ph). I apologize.

QUESTION:

(inaudible)

SPICER:

Right, and there is no reason to -- to believe that he is the target of an -- of any investigation. I think that's a very important point to make. And so ...

QUESTION:

(inaudible)

SPICER:

No, no, no. It doesn't -- What I'm saying is that -- that --

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

(inaudible)

SPICER:

Hold on. That one question dealt with whether or not -- the tweet dealt with wiretaps during the thing. The other is an investigation. They are two separate issues. And there is no reason to believe there is any type of investigation with respect to the Department of Justice. Thank you, guys. I'll see you tomorrow.

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

Thank you. I'll see you guys.

QUESTION:

(inaudible)

SPICER:

I'm not going to -- I can't comment. Thank you guys.

QUESTION:

Are you aware of an investigation?

(CROSSTALK)