

**Newsmaker Transcript**  
**White House Daily Briefing**

Thursday, March 9, 2017

SPICER:

Whenever you're ready.

(LAUGHTER)

(UNKNOWN)

Sean, if you can wait just a few.

SPICER:

Yes, yes, absolutely. You go ahead. Whenever you're ready.

Thank you to CNN viewers...

(UNKNOWN)

I'll sit down.

SPICER:

... around the world.

(LAUGHTER)

Good to see you guys. Thank you. Good morning, everyone.

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

Thank you, appreciate the -- John Roberts fact-checking from the seats.

(CROSSTALK)

Good morning -- good afternoon.

(LAUGHTER)

It's not my fault -- it's on the paper.

After receiving his daily intelligence briefing this morning, the president led a National Economic Council at a listening session with CEOs of small and community banks.

Since 2008, the number of small banks has declined 30 percent. The dramatic increase in regulation following the financial crisis has been a major driving force in the decline of these banks. Dodd-Frank alone has resulted in 22,000 pages of new regulations.

While large banks can hire armies of compliance officers whose sole purpose it is to ensure they meet the ever-growing number of regulations, it increases the cost of doing business for community banks, leading some not to engage in some forms of lending or simply due to the time and cost involved. Our community banks are key- funding sources for small business owners, entrepreneurs, farmers and ranchers across the country, many of whom cannot qualify for traditional loans. They provide approximately half of all loans to small businesses.

By reforming the regulatory system so that it is efficient, effective and appropriately tailored, we will stop treating these critical institutions in our communities the same as banks that have exponentially more in assets, enabling them to engage even more with small businesses and entrepreneurial things that stimulate local economies.

SPICER:

The banks participating in these listening sessions are members of the National Bankers Association and the Independent Community Bankers of America. A full participant list is available to those who are interested.

Yesterday, I noted the continued signs of good news in our economy in terms of hiring. The morning reports showed that consumer comfort has risen to the highest level in a decade.

I'm sure last night you also saw the report that illegal southwest border crossings are down by an extraordinary 40 percent, a significant deviation even when you consider the seasonal trends. These measures reflect both the economy and the border are already responding to the President's agenda even while we're still in the beginning stages of putting his policies in place.

The country and the world are clearly ready and waiting for the change the President campaigned on and is already delivering. Right now, the President is holding a Legislative Affairs lunch with ONB Director Mulvaney and key members of Congress on his plans for the federal budget and repeal and replace that we've talked about.

This is just the latest opportunity to continue the dialogue between the President and members on Capitol Hill on turning his ambitious agenda into action. The strong relationship between President and Congressional leaders will be key as the budget process moves along.

As Director Mulvaney has been saying, our budget blueprint will be released in mid-March, and the President is working collaboratively with both his Cabinet and Congress to create a budget that

keeps the President's promises to secure the country and make the most efficient use of taxpayer money.

In attendance at the meeting from Capitol Hill are; Senator Crapo, the Chairman of the Senate Banking Committee; Chairman Cochran, the Senate Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee; Senator Mike Enzi, the Chairman of the Senate Budget Committee; Senator Bob Corker, member of the Senate Budget Committee; Congresswoman Black, the Chairman of the House Budget Committee; Congressman Thornberry, the Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee; Congressman Jim Jordan of Ohio, Congressman Meadows of North Carolina, the Chairman of the House of Freedom Caucus and Congressman Rokita of Indiana.

Later this afternoon, the President will meet with former Secretary of Commerce, Pete Peterson. Then the President has a meeting with Secretary of Homeland Security Kelly and the Director of the CIA, Mike Pompeo.

And finally, the President will make remarks to the Senate Youth Program around 4 O' clock today, a tradition that began with President Kennedy and has continued through every administration. The President is honored to be speaking to this distinguished group of young men and women who are interested in pursuing careers in public service.

I also want to mention that right about now the Vice President is giving the key note remarks at the Latino Coalition Policy Summit. His remarks focus on the particularly negative impact of Obamacare on small businesses, many of whom have been unable to hire more workers or were forced to scale down their operation due to high taxes and burdensome requirements that were imposed by the law.

The president is dedicated to improving healthcare system for every American, including small business owners who've especially been suffered or had suffered through complying with thousands of pages of regulations and rules. That's exactly why he's working with Congress to enact the American Healthcare Act, which he was glad to wake up this morning and see approved by the House Ways and Means Committee.

SPICER:

Also today, the President was pleased to see his Ambassador to Israel David Friedman voted out of Committee. We had hoped to see Seema Verma, who would be confirmed as the administrator this week at the Administrator of health centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services at the Department of Health and Human Services. Unfortunately, Senate Democrats continue to unnecessarily delay her confirmation.

At this critical time, while we're talking about healthcare, it's ironic that they refuse to consider someone with such amazing expertise in this area.

Seema Verma has worked for over 20 years in healthcare policy. She has redesigned Medicaid programs in several states, including Indiana, Iowa, Ohio, and Kentucky. She's worked with

governor's offices, state Medicaid agencies, state health departments, state departments of insurance, as well as private companies and foundation.

She's unquestionably and uniquely qualified for her position. And especially now that health reform is at the top of the president's agenda, it's time to get her in place. This delay by Senate Democrats at this critical time is unacceptable.

On a scheduling note for the weekend, the vice president announced yesterday that he'll be in Louisville, Kentucky with Governor Bevin. The vice president's office will have further details for you on that trip as we get closer.

Finally, I wanted to give a moment to acknowledge that today's the 10 -- 10-year anniversary of the disappearance of former FBI agent Robert Levinson from Kish Island, Iran. The Trump administration remains unwavering in our commitment to locate Mr. Levinson and bring him home.

The Levinson family has suffered far too long. And we will not rest until his case is resolved.

And with that, I'll take your questions. Hallie Jackson?

QUESTION:

Thanks, Sean. I got a couple of topics for you if you don't mind.

SPICER:

Of course.

QUESTION:

Julian Assange says the CIA has lost control of its entire cyber weapons arsenal. (INAUDIBLE)

SPICER:

I think as we've commented before, the -- there's grave concern that the president has about the release of national security and classified information that threatens and undermines our nation's security. Obviously, he believes that the systems at the CIA are outdated and need to be updated.

We are not commenting on the current situation as we've -- as U.S. government policy. But I think the situation technology-wise at the CIA, and the president's acknowledged need to be updated.

The CIA put out a statement regarding the current situation. I would refer you to that.

QUESTION:

Two just follow-ups on that. Is he gonna talk about that with Mike Pompeo today?

SPICER:

He gets a daily briefing from the director. And I -- I'm not privy to -- to the contents of his discussion. But obviously issues of national security, including that are probably something that - that gets discussed.

QUESTION:

And then some Republicans say Julian Assange should be in prison. Does the president agree?

SPICER:

I think the U.S. government had a position on Julian Assange is the position in the past. And I don't see anything that's changed that.

He has compromised in the past and undermined our national security. And I think I'll leave it up to the Department of Justice to further comment on -- on their disposition of him.

QUESTION:

John...

QUESTION:

Second topic was on healthcare.

SPICER:

The second topic? This is like...

QUESTION:

Two topics.

SPICER:

...an interview, not a press conference.

QUESTION:

Just (INAUDIBLE). The president tweeted just a little bit ago that he believed that healthcare is coming along great.

SPICER:

Yeah.

QUESTION:

We've also been watching Paul Ryan deliver a pretty lengthy PowerPoint presentation...

SPICER:

A very good PowerPoint.

QUESTION:

...aimed at convincing Republicans to get on board this (ph) way (ph). Isn't that a sign that healthcare is not actually coming along great?

SPICER:

I think anybody who's been in Washington for a few days or longer recognizes that any major piece of legislation takes a lot of explanation. The president's been very committed to talking to members of Congress.

He had another meeting last night. Something as complicated at this, that deals with one fifth of our economy, and was a major takeover of our healthcare system isn't -- isn't a simple thing. It's a major complicated piece of legislation that's got three prongs to it.

And this is the first one, the reconciliation piece, that starts to chip away at finally repealing Obamacare. When they passed Obamacare, they rushed it so quick, they gave the then-secretary of Health and Human Services great authority to enact certain aspects of it.

We now -- that would be our phase two is have Secretary Price go through the pieces of Obamacare that he has been given the authority to, when they passed it, to help unwind a lot of the things they did. And then phase three is stuff that has to be done through other pieces of legislation that does stuff, like allow people sell insurance across state lines, that allows small businesses to pool (ph).

So, there's a lot of facets to getting this pushed through. And I think that one of the things that we've been able to quite effectively is talk to members, especially in the House.

But the vice president's been very active on both sides of the chambers of both chambers to -- to communicate how this is a comprehensive strategy and three prongs to -- to repeal and replace it with something more effective.

QUESTION:

(INAUDIBLE) compromising? Like, will he for example roll back Medicaid expansion (INAUDIBLE) until 2018?

SPICER:

Look, I -- I -- Hallie, I think is going through the -- the -- the process of -- it's working its way through Ways and Means. Today, there's a -- a markup in the House Energy and Commerce Committee. And I think that's where we're gonna continue to see action in the House and then when it goes to the Senate.

SPICER:

And the president will continue to engage very actively with the House and the Senate to get this done.

QUESTION:

Sean?

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

New York City First Lady Chirlane McCray said in a statement that Donald Trump should keep his hands off women's bodies, women's healthcare and Planned Parenthood, which has done just fine without President Trump's advice. I wanted to know what the response from the White House was on this?

SPICER:

Well, I mean, with respect to Planned Parenthood specifically, the President's very clear that he's pro-life. He's -- we've worked with the -- with them to talk about making sure that there's a difference between tax payer funding of abortion and women's health services. We have, and the President has committed to making sure that funds for women health community centers is going to be reflected by a substantial increase in his budget. He's committed to doing that. And he's trying to figure out a way to make sure that the focus of tax payer money is right towards community centers that provide vital health services to women, and that we're not using tax payer funds for abortion. John Roberts.

QUESTION:

I just want to follow on Haley (ph) --

SPICER:

Which one?

QUESTION:

A non-related topic. Just so your prepared. On healthcare, Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas today sent out a series of tweets in which he basically said this is dead on arrival in the Senate, go back to the drawing board. Adding that it's absurd for the committees to be voting on something that hasn't even been scored yet. What does the President think to what Senator Cotton said today? Does he plan on having a conversation with him?

SPICER:

Well we're going to engage. He -- he has talked to Senator Cotton. We'll continue to talk to any senator that has questions or concerns or ideas. It went through the Ways and Means Committee last night. I think they started at something like 10:15 yesterday morning. It was an 18 hour -- I don't believe he's talked to Senator Cotton. He's meeting with members right now. As I just mentioned, he had dinner last night with Senator Cruz. He's continuing to work both sides of the aisle, both chambers. As I mentioned yesterday, I think you're going to see a very aggressive, a very robust push. We continue to have the team out doing -- talking to local media, local radio, (inaudible), talking to local leaders.

We believe that the more we talk about the comprehensive three prong approach that we have, to doing a lot of the things that conservatives have talked about to bring back cost containment, to get people to be more patient centered in the health care decisions they make, allow more choice. It's going to bring people on board. But, the thing that's really interesting John, about the current approach, is that no matter where you are, especially on the conservative side, you cannot possibly believe that the current healthcare system is an effective program. It is a monstrosity. It is a government -- government gone wrong. And I think --

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

And I -- -and I think that we will continue to engage with him and other members of the House and Senate that have ideas, but it's going to continue to work it's way through the processes. As I mentioned, it went through the House Ways and Means Committee. It's currently going through the House Energy and Commerce Committee. When the House passes it and it goes over to the Senate, I'm sure Senator Cotton and other senators will have an opportunity to have their say. That's -- -that's part of the process. We welcome his ideas and his thoughts as we do with other senators, but the President has continued to do tremendous outreach and our staff has continued to do that. Mick Mulvaney has been on the hill. Vice-President Pence has been -- has maintained a very aggressive schedule, as well as other members of the administration, and we're going to get this thing passed with all their important ideas.

QUESTION:

Was the President aware that Lieutenant General Michael Flynn was acting as a foreign agent when he appointed him to be the National Security Advisor?

SPICER:

I don't believe that that was known. I would refer you to General Flynn and to the Department of Justice in terms of the filings that have been made.

QUESTION:

Had the President have known that, would he have appointed him?

SPICER:

I don't know John. That's a hypothetical that I'm not prepared to ask. I don't -- I don't -- I don't know what he discussed prior to -- prior to be appointed in terms of his background, his resume, his client base. I don't know any of that. I know that, from what I have read, he has filed the appropriate forms with the Department of Justice and I think you should ask him and subsequently them if you have any questions about the specific filing.

QUESTION:

Following up on Senator Cotton. He told me just a short while ago that he believes that this bill might actually make things worse, that the current Obamacare. What do you say to Senator Cotton?

SPICER:

I -- I -- I respectfully disagree and I think we -- I hope we have an opportunity for the team to continue to, not only talk to him about what we're trying to do and how we're trying to do it, but we'd love to hear his ideas. I mean this isn't, as I mentioned the last couple of days, we're not jamming this down people's throat. We're welcoming ideas and thoughts. We think this is a great vehicle to restore a patient centered healthcare bill, to drive down costs. And I think Senator Cotton clearly recognizes that the current version of healthcare that's out there right now is -- is not sustainable. And so, we welcome him -- his input into the process. We think that the work that we've done prior to putting this together with the House is something that reflects a lot of the best ideas and -- and we would continue to -- to welcome his input on this.

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

Are you open to major changes...

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

I'm not -- it's not -- I'm not open to -- I think the president...

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

... the major changes? Or is it...

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

I think the president has said before he wants to hear members' ideas. He believes that this bill encompasses the best of ideas and the best way forward. But again, we're going to let the process work its will through the House and then subsequently through the Senate.

And if members have ideas, we want to hear them and we want them to be part of it. It's not -- this isn't getting jammed through and we welcome that. And that's why the president continues to meet with folks. You know, he met with individuals yesterday. He continued to meet with them today.

He's going to be hitting the road. He wants to hear members of Congress, outside groups, physicians, healthcare providers, patients. But he wants people to have an input in this to make sure that we have the best possible bill that serves their needs, and that we don't look back, like we do now with Obamacare, and say I wish we had done this right.

We've got a system that, frankly, isn't working. And I think that no matter where you are on the political spectrum, you've got to admit that either you or a loved one or a friend or a colleague isn't getting the care they deserve or isn't paying what they thought they'd be paying. And I think we have to do this right so that we don't look back the way we do now and regret the way that it was done.

Charlie?

QUESTION:

Senate and House conservatives have said that they want a -- sort of a return to the 2015 Obamacare repeal effort. If that effort landed on the president's desk, would he sign it?

SPICER:

I think the effort that's going through right now is -- is the vehicle that's -- is what people are on board with. I think -- one of the things that we have to remember is that the process, this three-pronged process, is done for a particular reason. The reconciliation process, which I know for most people it sounds like a very arcane, inside baseball, congressional term, but it only allows for certain things to happen in that repeal process.

And that's why we've been very clear, and I think Paul Ryan laid out -- Dr. Price has laid it out, and Mick Mulvaney is laying it out when he goes up to the Hill -- that there are -- there's a reason

that we keep talking about it in three prongs. Because there's only so many things that you are legally allowed to do through the reconciliation process.

When the Democrats jammed this through, they did it in a way that -- they did it basically in two steps. They jammed it through the reconciliation process, number one. And number two, they gave broad authority to the secretary of health and human services, the kind that she could unilaterally do certain things with healthcare and implement certain things that we now have to undo in the same way.

What we've done that's different, though, is frankly add a third prong which allows for additional legislative vehicles that will go through the House and then in the Senate, that will allow some of the core conservative principles that we've talked about for, frankly, decades, about allowing more competition, allowing people to pool, allowing people to do things that we think will allow lower prices to come out of the process.

And I think that's a big difference in how...

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

So if repeal lands on the president's desk, he would not sign it...

SPICER:

It is going to land on his desk, because we're going to go through this process...

QUESTION:

... repeal without replace.

SPICER:

Well, again, I think the way that we're doing now I think is the right and the responsible way to do this. This bill will land on the president's desk. He will sign it. We will repeal Obamacare and we'll put into place a system that will be patient- centered; that will allow the American people to have greater choice and lower cost.

Blake?

QUESTION:

Sean, (inaudible) pushback that you're getting so far with healthcare, do you think it is realistic to have both healthcare, (inaudible) tax reform done in 2017? And I ask you that because Mitch McConnell was asked about this (inaudible), and he talked about there being certain constraints, and that the tax reform portion of it could be a 2018 item.

SPICER:

I think we feel very confident that we're going to get a lot done -- continue to get a lot done this year. Tax reform is high on the president's priority list. I think it's high on the American people's priority list. And especially as April grows closer and closer and people look down at the federal tax form and realize how much they're paying, and we see companies pledging to come back, recognizing that these companies bought into the president's vision and agenda to make America more tax and regulatory friendly, so that they would create jobs, manufacture more here.

That's something that -- that he's committed to. He understands how important it is. Look, the president is uniquely qualified as a businessman, a successful businessman, to understand the -- what a good business climate does to job creation and to manufacturing. And I think his commitment isn't just a campaign promise. It's something that he has lived by for decades now, understanding that that's what spurs economic growth. That makes one place more attractive to invest in or to hire more people or to grow jobs.

And so for him, this is deeply personal. And I think that you're going to see Secretary Mnuchin and others work on the contours of that in the next several weeks. But we intend to maintain to the schedule that he laid out.

QUESTION:

(inaudible) the August -- the August portion is still -- is still the timeline?

SPICER:

That's right.

QUESTION:

On drug prices, Congressman Elijah Cummings was here yesterday. He said that the president was enthusiastic about his bill to cut drug prices. Is the president enthusiastic about that? And if he is, how much pain should drug companies be prepared to take here in the Senate (ph)?

(LAUGHTER)

SPICER:

Ironic that you're talking about drug companies and pain. But -- maybe there's a pill for that. I think the president, as you know, one of the reasons that he reached out to Elijah Cummings initially is because they share that and I think frankly yesterday came to a lot of other areas where I think that they can find common ground and work on issues.

And I know that drug prices is something that he understands near and dear, is helping many people get the care that they need but the rising cost is something that is -- so I think as we look at the

vehicle in terms of the specific legislation, they share a commitment to it and I think that there will be continued follow-ups not just between Congressman Cummings but others as to what the best piece of legislation is and how we get that home.

QUESTION:

Democrats said that they're going to drop this bill in two weeks (ph).

SPICER:

OK.

QUESTION:

Is the president prepared to push against them on Capitol Hill (ph)?

SPICER:

Well, I think -- yeah, I don't -- I think that's a bigger conversation that we have to have with House leadership in terms of some, you know, maybe it is that right vehicle. Maybe Speaker Ryan and Leader McCarthy and -- and Chairman Brady have other ways to achieve the same goal or work with Congressman Cummings.

I don't want to be prescriptive to the House as to how they work their will but I know that the president has a commitment to that topic and that he wants to work with Congressman Cummings and others who share that same commitment. John Givesty (ph).

QUESTION:

Thanks a lot, Sean.

SPICER:

John Givesty (ph).

QUESTION:

Givesty, oh.

SPICER:

You're both good-looking Johns, but.

(LAUGHTER)

I'll come back.

QUESTION:

Thank you, Sean. Two questions. First, a Japanese news service is reporting this morning that the president will have a meeting with President Jinping of China in April. Does this mean that there is a new meeting before their scheduled meeting at the G20 in July?

SPICER:

I'm not going to comment on the president's schedule or foreign leader visits at this time. I think I've pretty much gotten that one down. So until I have something further for you, I'm just going to let you get on to your next question.

QUESTION:

All right, thank you. Going back to the meeting and to your opening statement about the banks; in the last campaign, Candidate Trump campaigned hard on restoring the Glass-Steagall Act which put a barrier between commercial and major investment banks. It of course was repealed in 1999, the repeal signed by President Clinton.

Senator Sanders campaigned on this as well, noted that it was in the Republican platform in Cleveland and said in December he'd be happy to work with the Trump administration on restoring Glass-Steagall. Is there any plans for the president to meet with Senator Sanders and is repeal of Glass-Steagall on his agenda.

SPICER:

There's no current schedule to meet with him. I'm sure that as he has done with several other members of Congress from both sides of the aisle, that at some point that will be scheduled. We don't have anything on the books for now but look, he's shown -- and I think today was -- or yesterday was another example, today another example of his willingness to reach across the aisle, his willingness to look into both chambers and, you know, and not just business but labor unions and other industries where we can find common ground.

And I think if Senator Sanders and others want to work with the White House on areas of ways that we can improve the financial industry, we're going to do that, so.

QUESTION:

Is he still committed to restoring Glass-Steagall?

SPICER:

Yes.

QUESTION:

On infrastructure, can you give us timing, where it is on the priority list and if these new reports that say that the infrastructure in the nation is in really bad shape (ph), does that give it new urgency?

SPICER:

I think the president mentioned in the joint address, I think we're looking at a public-partner private -- public-private partnership as a funding mechanism. There is a lot of work being done behind the scenes. And I don't want to put a timeline on that, obviously as I just mentioned to Blake (ph), we've got -- currently dealing with the repeal and replace of healthcare.

I think we need to move on to tax reform but that is definitely somewhere that is trying -- we're trying to figure out how to move that vehicle. There'll be further discussion of that as we get closer to the budget as far as where that fits into the piece.

QUESTION:

The president had this meeting last evening here at the White House with some conservative groups.

SPICER:

Yeah.

QUESTION:

Out of that meeting, can you tell us whether the president was successful in twisting arms, getting these conservative groups to back this particular healthcare bill? And just separately, I see on the president's campaign website that there is an event, a campaign style rally planned in Nashville, Tennessee next week. Can you confirm that and why did you choose Nashville, Tennessee? There's a democratic Congressman who represents Nashville, it's Tim Cooper. Are you hoping to get some democrats behind this bill?

SPICER:

On the first part of that, you saw a lot of the statements that came out last night for some of the various groups, they were very encouraging. Their guiding principle is we want to get to yes.

I think one of the things that's really interesting and I addressed it earlier is that there's a lot of members, a lot of interested parties, a lot of groups that haven't fully heard the three-prong approach. I think Speaker Ryan did a phenomenal job today of really laying this out -- Dr. Price has done a good job -- that people need to understand the totality and the comprehensive nature of this, that there are three pieces of it.

I think what happens sometimes is that the reconciliation piece of this gets lost as defining the totality of it and people need to understand there are two other pieces that achieve many goals that health care advocates and conservatives have fought for a long time, that allow greater competition, that allows small businesses to pool those resources together.

But there's a lot of things that occur in phase two and phase three that help bring down costs and create greater choice. It's amazing when you listen to some of these meetings how often people say I didn't realize that and I didn't understand the full scope and totality of what the plan was. It's very encouraging.

And then I think, without getting into details, I think in a lot of cases they've shared some ideas with the President that we might be able to find some common ground on. We'll take it one step at a time.

Go ahead.

QUESTION:

On the campaign-style rally?

SPICER:

I would refer that question to the campaign. I think the President is going to be travelling next week. But there will be -- the details of that are listed on the campaign site. There is going to be additional travel announced for next week on the official site, and as we get closer to the end of this week or the beginning of next week, I'll try to have more for you.

Katie (ph)?

QUESTION:

Do you have any comments to immediately terminate (inaudible)...

(OFF-MIC)

QUESTION:

...nearly seven weeks tomorrow and you still haven't done it. Can you definitely say if he's going to get rid of JAKA (ph) and if not, is he giving them legal status? What's the plan for dreamers?

SPICER:

We've talked about the status of that and how many steps we have to go through on immigration. In the past, I think we've made significant headway in achieving the President's priority of starting the wall, driving down illegal immigration.

The numbers that came out last night showed that even when seasonally-adjusted we see a 40 percent dip in the people crossing our southern border. That's a very promising sign.

That being said, the executive order, the second one, there was a lot of effort put into making sure that that was rolled out effectively and achieved the goal of protecting the country that the President sought out to do initially.

So, we're continuing to take steps on immigration, both legal and illegal immigration. And as I've mentioned in the past, we'll have more as we go forward.

QUESTION:

So he does still plan to get rid of JAKA (ph)?

SPICER:

I think the President has been very clear about how he plans to address immigration as a whole, both legal and illegal.

Katie (ph)?

QUESTION:

The President (inaudible) opposition on the left.

SPICER:

Yes.

QUESTION:

Do they plan to (inaudible) bipartisanship (inaudible). Does the President plan to meet with the AMA, AARP, which supported Obamacare are not supporting this bill

SPICER:

I don't -- it'd be ill-advised for me to start saying who he's going to but I think that what we've shown over the last couple of weeks is the President's willingness to meet with individuals, Senators, groups.

So, I don't want to rule-in who's going to meet or not, but I think I've said before, with respect to members and I'll say it again with respective groups, that I think that if people have ideas that will help provide a more patient-center healthcare system that drives down cost, the President and the team here -- we'll be willing to meet with them.

So, I don't want to be prescriptive in terms of telling them who they have to meet with. Their day is pretty busy right now with the Hill. But I will get back to you on some of the other groups that they're going to meet with and we'll go from there.

Brian (ph)?

QUESTION:

Two quick questions. One, this morning at the National Press Club, a local business in D.C. proper (ph) secured a suit (ph) against the President and regarding Trump Hotel. I don't expect you to speak to that issue specifically, but their feeling was as much as this Administration has supported small business, how can they divest and self-remiss and support small business in the District? First question.

SPICER:

I'm really not sure -- how where these -- in terms of what?

QUESTION:

Well, there's 25 small business -- restaurants in the area and they're saying that the Trump Hotel is taking all that business away from them. Could he walk away from it and help out the small business owners?

SPICER:

As far as the president -- obviously the President has made very clear in that December press conference at Trump Tower he doesn't have conflicts and he's done everything in accordance with the guidance given and gone well-beyond what he ever needed to do.

But obviously, you know, you can't -- you -- your name's on certain things. And that's -- that's a very big difference in terms of some of the properties that he owns.

But, you know, he understands the importance of small business. That's why we're meeting with community banks this morning to talk about the lending that they need, whether it's small business, entrepreneurs, farmers, ranchers throughout the country.

You know, he understands the role of small business in our economy and -- and how many jobs they provide. And -- and I think he's been a -- a -- a champion of it.

April (ph)? OK.

QUESTION:

My other question was in his speech before Congress last week, he said it wouldn't -- it's not too much to dream in some point in time. I'm paraphrasing RP (ph) could be on foreign soil and I'm guessing other planets.

With the NASA budget being released yesterday I believe, is there a major initiative by this administration for space exploration? Or, is that -- are we just talking dreams?

SPICER:

Yeah, look, I'm gonna let Director Mulvaney get into the details of the budget next week...

QUESTION:

(INAUDIBLE)

SPICER:

....or whenever that -- I'm trying to remember the -- the calendar here. But when -- when the director comes out, he'll talk about the specific funding levels.

As you know, we're in the middle of this we call pass-back provision where we sent them some top-light (ph) numbers. They're sending us back their recommendations and their observations and edits and questions with respect to their budget. So, we're gonna take this one step at a time.

QUESTION:

But (INAUDIBLE), I mean does he -- when he said...

SPICER:

No, he's -- he's obviously -- he's -- he's very keen on America's role in space. And I -- I don't wanna get into specific budget priorities or numbers until we're ready to release them. John (ph)?

QUESTION:

You called on me.

QUESTION:

You called on me.

SPICER:

I'm sorry -- I'm sorry, April. (INAUDIBLE) remember that.

QUESTION:

It's very important.

SPICER:

I know. I saw the hand (INAUDIBLE).

QUESTION:

So, Sean, just really fast, following up on John. We're seeing the campaign information for next week in Nashville.

Who -- you said something about (INAUDIBLE). Who's the campaign?

SPICER:

I -- I'll try to help you get a name or -- but we're -- there is a campaign infrastructure still in place. It's -- it would be inappropriate for me to be commenting on campaign activities from the podium.

So, there's a website up. The same one that was on the -- on the -- during the campaign. And I would suggest that you utilize that. But I don't -- I'm not here as a -- I'm only here as a -- an official in the government, so I don't wanna get into that.

QUESTION:

Now, yesterday, going back to Congressman Cummings. You talked about some other issues that they talked in that meeting.

SPICER:

Yeah.

QUESTION:

(INAUDIBLE) They talked in (ph) it (ph). I wanna hit two issues. The voter irregularities or fraud and voter suppression, where does the president see this coming together? We heard from Congressman Cummings.

But where does he see (ph)? We -- we understand he know -- he's saying that voter fraud is real when there are other people saying it's not. But then there are factual documented cases of voter suppression.

So, what does -- how does -- how is there a marrying of that in these pressing (ph) times?

SPICER:

Well, I think that's why he's asked Vice President Pence to look into it.

I would disagree with the assertion. I think there -- there's also factual, you know, evidence of -  
- of people voting illegally. We saw that in Texas a couple weeks ago and in other places.

So, part of the reason that he's asking Vice President Pence to chair this task is to look into the issue. But we welcome input and -- and other areas. And -- and it's an area that they'll continue to discuss. Sarah (ph)? How are you?

QUESTION:

Nice to see you...

SPICER:

OK.

QUESTION:

Now, also Congressman Cummings said that when he talked with the president...

SPICER:

Right.

QUESTION:

...and he brought up the issue of funding for age (ph) disease (ph), President Trump said to -- to Congressman Cummings that presidents did not ask for money.

Now, they came here, according to many of the president that I have hammered (ph), they came here with the intent of the fact that they were gonna get some money from this executive order. And...

SPICER:

I don't think the executive order is the...

QUESTION:

But that's -- but I'm -- they were -- that's what their belief was. But then what I understand that there was talk about investment in these colleges with Steve Bannon.

One president wrote this down saying that we are looking -- our (ph) full (ph) from you to invest in HBCUs. And we will execute it when we get it.

So -- and they're looking for full funding for title three, Pell (ph) Grant full funding, fall, spring, as well as the one-time \$25 billion investment. What does this White House think about this plan that they're trying to get back to this White House, especially in a time when you're looking at cutting domestic spending?

SPICER:

Well, I think when they were here, we were pleased to roll out the executive order that talked about making historically black colleges and universities and priority in this administration. Moving that sort of point person into the White House to, you know -- so that we could coordinate a whole of government opportunities for whole -- you know, we talked about this.

Looking at the different education opportunities that expand government, whether it's -- it's health or investment in sciences, or even stuff like ROTC and NROTC programs that are some of these that span out of the Department of Defense.

But we've gotta look at how we're providing government assistance in a whole host of ways to historically black colleges and universities. I think the issue of funding will be properly addressed in the budget and at that time. But obviously, this is something that has been discussed. The president...

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

... funding request...

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

I don't -- April, I'm not going to negotiate the budget from here. But I think that the president has made very clear that -- the vital role that they play in our society. And I think he's shown that initially by the executive order that he unveiled, and we will have further information for you as we get close to the budget.

Sarah?

QUESTION:

Thanks, Sean.

(inaudible) question about critics characterizing the budget reconciliation bill as the entirety of repeal-replace. How quickly does the president want (inaudible) Republicans move on phase three, the companion legislation? Does he envision those unfolding simultaneously?

And then given the early opposition to the budget reconciliation bill, does the president maybe want Republicans to recalibrate their strategy when it comes to that companion legislation?

SPICER:

I am not going to start to tell Speaker Ryan or Leader McCarthy or the whip, Mr. Scalise, how to release and when to release legislation. But I think obviously we need to make sure that members and all Americans understand the totality of this.

So -- at a schedule that they see fit, and I'll let them unveil that schedule; that they talk about the totality of this plan and the comprehensive nature, and all three prongs that make up the repeal and replace part of this.

It's important I think, though, for people to do understand that there's a commitment to do all those things that we've talked about, whether it's pooling or across state lines. There's a lot of principles and things that we've discussed that I think are important to let people to know about.

I'm going to to (inaudible).

QUESTION:

Thank you, Sean.

What (inaudible) Afghanistan? What is (inaudible) of Afghanistan? Because (inaudible) that this (inaudible)?

SPICER:

So, on troops, I'd refer you to the Department of Defense on that one. I think we are in the middle of a comprehensive review on our policy in Afghanistan, that -- working with our Afghan partners and the Department of Defense and our key military leaders to create an approach to address Afghanistan to defeat ISIS.

So I -- I -- we're in the middle of that process. When we have more, we'll update you. But I think the Department of Defense is probably the best place to go to get that.

Trey?

QUESTION:

Thanks, Sean.

Today, hundreds of U.S. Marines were deployed to Syria. So I'm wondering how involved was the president in that decision-making process? And is this part of his wider anti-ISIS strategy?

SPICER:

Obviously, the president was made aware of that. This is something that was done in consultation. He understands the regional issues that need to be addressed there. And again, I would refer you back to the Department of Defense on that.

QUESTION:

Sean, thank you.

I have a followup question to Haley's (ph) first set of questions on (inaudible).

My question is...

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

(inaudible) like eight questions (inaudible).

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

... the Republicans are calling for Julian Assange to, you know, be in jail or be arrested. What about the tech companies that he says that he will work with to give them the CIA hacking techniques? Should there be any legal repercussions for tech companies willing to sort of embrace and use this technology that you're taking a stance against, if you will?

SPICER:

So, number one, I'll go back to the statement that we don't comment on validating or authenticating allegations of this sort as a U.S. government, in terms of U.S. government policy.

I will say that, you know, the president obviously feels deep -- deeply concerned about anybody - - an individual or anybody that seeks to undermine the national security of our country. I don't want to, you know, staying within my purview here, but I do think that I would check with the Department of Justice in particular about if a program or a piece of information is classified, it remains classified regardless of whether or not it is released into the public venue or not.

And so I would just suggest that someone consult with them regarding the legal repercussions of any individual or entity using any piece of still-classified information or technique or product that hasn't been declassified. There's a reason that we have classification levels and that's to protect our country and our people.

And that's -- that's, you know, that's something that we have to maintain regardless of how (inaudible).

Zeke?

QUESTION:

Thanks, Sean. Two questions for you.

One, back to General Flynn, how concerning is it to the president and to the White House that a registered foreign agent was selected to become the -- was the national security adviser for a brief period of time?

SPICER:

Look, I think this is -- this is what he did for a living. I mean, he talked to -- you know, and as the president said in the press conference, talking to individuals that are within the realm of the duties you're going to perform are -- is part of your job.

QUESTION:

He was being compensated (ph).

SPICER:

I understand that. But he was being compensated -- he wasn't -- he wasn't being compensated as part of the transition as far as I'm aware and so he was a private citizen at the time. And when you're a private citizen, you're allowed to engage in legal activities. I don't have anything further on that but I think there's a -- there's nothing nefarious about doing anything that's legal as long as the proper paperwork is filed.

QUESTION:

Just real quick, there's just several reports out of the State Department from our colleagues there that on Secretary Tillerson's upcoming trip to Asia, he will not be taking any press with him on that trip. That's a breach of precedent certainly of the last several bipartisan administrations. Is it concerning to the -- to the White House that the -- the administration's foreign policy might not be effectively communicated to the American public and around the world because there isn't a press corps with the secretary of state?

SPICER:

I -- this is the first I'm learning of it, I'd be glad to follow up with you. I don't know that -- I think you all know that we have been a very transparent administration in terms of access to the president and his activities here. I'd be glad to follow up with the Department of State and follow up that you can share that with your colleagues.

QUESTION:

Yesterday you said the president has no reason to believe there's any type of investigation (ph) with respect to the Department of Justice. Did the Justice Department give you that assurance? Because they're telling the "New York Times" they did not.

SPICER:

I'm not aware of it but that's my point is that we're not aware of anything and that's why...

QUESTION:

...You haven't been told by the Justice Department that there is no investigation?

SPICER:

No.

QUESTION:

So there might be one, you just don't know.

SPICER:

No, I said -- right, I said I'm not aware and -- we're not aware and that's why we want the House and Senate to do what the president has asked of them, to look into this. But no, we're not aware.

QUESTION:

To discover if there is an investigation?

SPICER:

No, to look into the situation.

QUESTION:

The Justice Department is saying, though, that they never gave you the assurances that you gave us.

SPICER:

OK. No, the assurance I gave you, Margaret (ph), was that I'm not aware and that is 100 percent accurate.

QUESTION:

So when you said "no reason to believe," it was "I'm not aware there's an investigation..."

SPICER:

...That's right. Right, I mean I don't know that they're not interchangeable. I'm not aware, I don't believe. Look up in a thesaurus and find some other ways, but I don't know that there's a distinction there that's -- that's noteworthy but we're not aware, I don't believe that that exists.

QUESTION:

What's that based on (ph)?

SPICER:

That's based on that I've not been aware of.

(LAUGHTER)

I mean -- but that's the answer. Someone's asking me if I'm made aware of something and the answer is no then the answer is no.

QUESTION:

But the question was whether he was the target of counterintelligence (ph)...

SPICER:

...Right and the answer is we're not aware. I don't know how much clearer we can be on this.

QUESTION:

So it's just the White House is not aware if the president is the target of a counterintelligence post (ph)?

SPICER:

Correct. I'm not sure what we're -- dancing around the same question.

QUESTION:

Well because I think yesterday when you came out and corrected and clarified, people took that as a definitive answer that in fact that wasn't...

SPICER:

...No, it means we're not aware. I don't -- that should be the definitive answer.

QUESTION:

I have two questions then a really quick follow-up to Zeke (ph).

SPICER:

So that's three.

QUESTION:

Two and a half.

(LAUGHTER)

So can you elaborate a little bit on how and to what extent Michael Flynn was involved in shaping the current Turkey policy for...

SPICER:

...I don't know...

QUESTION:

...President Trump? I mean, was he engaging with the Turkish leaders and reasoning with them (ph)?

SPICER:

I don't -- I don't have anything on that.

QUESTION:

OK.

SPICER:

You can contact NSC (ph) on that. I'm not aware.

QUESTION:

OK. So my two real questions, first, is there any official response to the lawsuit in Hawaii over the revised travel ban?

SPICER:

I think we feel very comfortable that the executive order that was crafted is consistent and we're going to go forward on this. But I think, by all means -- I don't want to -- we feel very confident with how that was crafted and the input that was given.

QUESTION:

OK thank you. And the second thing is Nigel Farage was at the Ecuadorian embassy in London today.

SPICER:

OK.

QUESTION:

Where Julian Assange happens to be staying, don't know if they met or not. But was he there -- I mean, he's a close ally of President Trump. Was he there in any official capacity...

SPICER:

...We don't keep his schedule.

QUESTION:

Was he delivering a message? Do you know if there was any contact on that (ph)...

SPICER:

...I have no idea. No, I -- I have my own concerns here keeping track of what everyone's doing, I generally don't worry about what's going on across the pond.

QUESTION:

You already gave one but it's false but do you (ph)...

(LAUGHTER)

SPICER:

...Wow, all right, hey, hey.

QUESTION:

But -- but -- but on Farage -- the question's not what but Farage, can you tell us he wasn't there on behalf of the White House?

SPICER:

Sure. I don't -- he's not -- I'm not -- this is silly. I really don't think asking where random foreign leaders are and whether or not they're there -- I'm sure he was there doing whatever on behalf of...

QUESTION:

...He's not a foreign leader (ph).

SPICER:

He's a member of -- OK.

QUESTION:

He had dinner with the president (ph).

SPICER:

OK, I understand that but I -- I am not -- I don't keep his schedule. I'm not sure.

QUESTION:

Thank you.

Sean, two questions on two different topics. First, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin sent a letter to Congress saying that Congress should raise the debt ceiling. We know that the Office of (inaudible) Budget Director, Mick Mulvaney, when we was in Congress he voted against raising the debt ceiling multiple times. Is Mulvaney going to support the raising of the debt ceiling and does the President support that? He is going to push Congress to do that?

SPICER:

I think we've got a few months to do that. I think the Secretary was making Congress very much aware we got into -- now been in the White House six weeks, we're approaching the 50th day here at this Administration. I don't -- I think we're trying to deal with the situation at-hand.

Part of the reason why the President has addressed our budget the way he has is try to get our nation's debt deficit and budget in order. I think he's continuing to show a tremendous respect for tax payer money, the way we spend money and bring it down.

But obviously, there are certain things that are a little beyond our control when we walked into this building and we're going to work with Secretary Mnuchin and Director Mulvaney to address this issue and obviously work with Congress.

QUESTION:

Second question on another Cabinet Secretary. Scott Pruitt said today that carbon dioxide was not a primary contributor to global warming. That obviously is at odds with the global scientific consensus. Does the President agree that --

SPICER:

Well, that's a snippet of what Administrator Pruitt said. He went on and said I don't think we know conclusively, this is what we know. I would suggest that you touch base with the EPA on that. But he had a very lengthy response and that is just one snippet of what the Administrator said.

Anita (ph)?

QUESTION:

Two things. One, I think you mentioned at the top but I'm not sure that apprehensions were going down across the border. There was a question yesterday about the wall. Is the wall still needed if the apprehensions are down?

SPICER:

I think so, sure. The President was very clear. It's not just needed. The President committed to doing it to the American people. I think while we can have a good month and I think we'll see if that continues, that the President made a commitment to the American people to make sure that this isn't just an anomaly and that while they may be down, I think we have to do what we can to protect our country both in terms of national security and economic security.

It's of course still needed and it's a commitment the President made and I think one of the things the American people, regardless of where they stand across the aisle appreciate about this President is he's a man who has kept his word. He talks -- he made commitments to them and he's fulfilling them to make the country better.

Cora (ph)?

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

Sean, I said there was a second question.

SPICER:

I'm sorry, you did.

(LAUGHTER)

QUESTION:

You have not -- I think you have been asked this before but have been reluctant to say whether President Obama and President Trump have spoken since the inauguration, although President Trump was very forthcoming about that during the transition, so I'm not sure why you wouldn't mention it. I'm just asking that again.

Then, there was a report yesterday that said aides for both Presidents have spoken. Can you talk to us about either of those things?

SPICER:

I'll be glad to follow-up. I don't -- unfortunately, I did not ask the President whether or not he's spoken. I'll be back tomorrow and I --

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

Yes, I can.

QUESTION:

-- aides?

SPICER:

I will.

QUESTION:

Okay, thank you.

SPICER:

I keep my words here.

Go ahead.

QUESTION:

I was just --

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

...all the way in the back.

(LAUGHTER)

SPICER:

Well get back.

QUESTION:

You talked about Pocona (ph) and Guantanamo, how it may have changed (inaudible).

SPICER:

Where, what, please?

QUESTION:

On Guantanamo.

SPICER:

Yes.

QUESTION:

On whether the Guantanamo will be ended or whether the detainees will be brought to Guantanamo, will they be transferred out...

SPICER:

I don't have anything to announce with respect to its expansion or its use -- expansion use. I think the President has commented on the importance of Guantanamo in the past and the need to maintain. If the people where they are not people who seek to do anyone good, they're there for a reason.

I think there's no plans to close it if that's what you're asking. As far as the future use goes, in terms of expansion, I don't have anything to comment on at this time.

All the way in the back, yes.

You got --

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

No, no, Goyle (ph).

(LAUGHTER)

SPICER:

You keep trying to steal his question.

(LAUGHTER)

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION:

One is that as for the attacks on the American Indian communities have got about (ph) nation. That's not new, that happened in the past also but the American Indian community recently has been candle vigils and prayers and all and those things are now solved. An Indian American met with State Department officials and also with the President Trump recently. So, any Presidential message for the American Indian community how to stop these attacks against them?

SPICER:

I think with respect to -- are you talking about the event in Kansas City specifically?

QUESTION:

And another one also (inaudible).

SPICER:

Yeah, I think the president, whether it's the event that happened in Kansas City, other events, the attacks on Jewish community centers that continue to plague us -- I guess we saw another report this morning, some unfortunate activity.

I think we've got to continue to call it out. We've got to continue to root it out. We've got to continue to engage law enforcement -- whatever the applicable level of law enforcement depending on the event.

But it's something that I think all Americans should be outraged and disgusted by and stand up for the principles that united us. And that's what the president spoke so eloquently about during his -- his joint address. He made it very clear that while certain policies may divide us as individuals, there are certain principles that can unite us.

John Frederick?

QUESTION:

(inaudible) sorry.

As far as the U.S.-India relations are concerned, they have been great in the past and now we have two businessmen in India -- Prime Minister Modi is also a businessman. And here we have President Trump, of course, a very successful businessman. So (inaudible) high official visits have been going on from India to the U.S., meeting Trump -- President Trump (inaudible) officials, including (inaudible) secretary and commerce secretary and (inaudible) and also from the energy department for India.

So where -- where do we go -- what is the future under President Trump administration (inaudible) U.S.-India relations economically, trade and bilateral (inaudible)?

SPICER:

I -- thank you. I think we, as talked about during the campaign and the transition, establishing a deeper relationship with Prime Minister Modi and U.S.-India businesses. And I think as we move forward in terms of our foreign policy, we'll have further updates on that. But he -- he, as you know very well, he spoke very clearly and frequently about the relationship that we have and hope to continue to grow with India.

John Frederick?

QUESTION:

(inaudible) during the campaign, President Trump was not shy about his desire to get the United States out of these Middle Eastern wars. Yet to the question earlier, we just sent 250 Marines into Syria. Is President Trump committed to going to Congress to receiving authorization for an AUMF or a declaration of war if we continue to deploy United States troops overseas?

SPICER:

Well, John, I think there's a big difference between an authorization of war and sending a few hundred advisers. And I think most in Congress would probably agree with that as well. I think that's a big difference between a hostile action and going in to address certain concerns, whether it's certain countries in the Middle East or elsewhere.

I would refer you to the Department of Defense on that one. I think the -- the actions that he has done and taken with -- with the advice that his generals have given him, his admirals as well...

(CROSSTALK)

SPICER:

Hold on.

... is something that we will continue to work on.

Yes?

QUESTION:

Two questions. One, first off, kind of clarifying the difference between, you know, the campaign stops and also the healthcare rollout. So Nashville will be kind of the campaign stop. How will the White House kind of pick and choose how that goes, whether it's to be a presidential visit trying to sell the healthcare rollout, or one for the campaign?

And then a second question (inaudible).

SPICER:

Well, I mean, I think the campaign will make decisions with respect to how they want to spend their money and where they want to go. And the official -- the White House will do the same. But I -- I think that's -- that's something that every president back as far as modern history has done as well.

The president will be visiting several cities over the next coming weeks to engage the American people on the need to repeal and replace and other steps that he's taking to deliver on the promises that he's made as commander in chief.

QUESTION:

And a second question. I know Senator Cruz was here for dinner last night. Can you characterize the relationship between the two men? 2018 will be here before you know it. Do you anticipate the president will be there to support him in that effort?

SPICER:

Well, I think we've got -- we've got a few battles to get through legislatively, but I know that he enjoyed welcoming Senator and Mrs. Cruz and their two daughters last night to the White House. They had a very enjoyable time and a very fruitful discussion.

But it's -- it's something that he is going to continue to do with members of both parties and both chambers, and not just here in Washington. I think you're going to see him engage -- continue to engage with governors and attorneys general and lieutenant governors.

The president truly enjoys this level of engagement. He likes to sit down and talk about ideas, talk about the future of this country and get their input and ideas. And I think they talked a little business and a lot of personal last night. And it was a very enjoyable thing.

With that, thank you, guys. Have a great day. I look forward to seeing you tomorrow. I think tomorrow's going to be one-question Friday.

(LAUGHTER)

Thank you all.