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Honduran Election Important for Reconciliation, U.S. Says
() (836)

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration welcomes the November 29 presidential election in Honduras as an important part of the country’s political reconciliation after the June 28 coup, and views it as one of several important components to help the country move forward from recent instability and isolation.

Speaking November 20 at the Washington Foreign Press Center, a senior State Department official who asked not to be identified said U.S. officials “are determined to keep moving forward” in working with Honduran leaders to implement the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord that was negotiated between President Manuel Zelaya and the leader of Honduras’ de facto government, Roberto Micheletti, as well as the November 29 presidential and legislative elections.

“In our view, these all go together,” the official said. “The elections are a very important part of the package, but they’re not the whole package,” describing them as “necessary but not sufficient” to bring about national reconciliation.

The official said there will be election observers, and the United States will determine whether the vote is free and fair after the election occurs.

"It's ... important to recognize that the Micheletti regime is not running the election. Under Honduran law, the elections are run by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, a body which predates the coup, which is nonpartisan. These people were not appointed by Micheletti." The de facto leader will also be stepping down from power between November 25 and December 2.

Under the accord, the viability of the elections was never dependent on Zelaya's restitution, the official said. "That's exactly what the parties could not agree to, which is why they passed it to the Congress."

When then-Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Tom Shannon spoke to reporters about the accord (<http://www.america.gov/st/americas-english/2009/October/20091030162334esnamfuak0.7592127.html>) October 30, he described the restitution issue as being "up for grabs" in the legislature.

"I can assure you that both sides are reaching out to members of [the Honduran] Congress right now and trying to build levels of political support that will favor the outcome that each of them would prefer. But I think what's important here is there is broad expectation that they will abide by whatever that decision is," Shannon said.

The senior State Department official said November 20 there is "a very strong sense" that the Honduran people want to vote. "They want to move forward and put this period behind them."

Honduras is one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere, with an average gross domestic product of \$1,300 per capita. "We all want to get to a point where we can help this country get back to an agenda of greater social justice, social inclusion, engagement with the rest of the region and its economy," the official said.

RESTITUTION VOTE TO OCCUR DESPITE SETBACKS

After the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord was announced October 30, Zelaya pulled out of the process to set up a national unity government. The senior official said Zelaya was angry that Micheletti had presented "sort of a summons" or a list of names, and viewed the de facto leader as trying to "head up that government."

However, "it's not correct to say that because of that, the accord fell apart," the official continued, as evidenced by the Honduran Congress's decision to vote December 2 on Zelaya's restitution. In doing so, the Congress "is going to comply with the most sensitive element of the accord. ... In other words, the accord is still valid."

The Honduran Congress has said it will be a "live, televised debate with open voting, no secret ballot," the official said.

In addition, other parts of the accord are moving forward, such as the establishment of a verification commission made up of foreign diplomats to oversee implementation, and plans to set up a truth commission. "We've seen in other countries which have had political turmoil that a truth commission can be a very, very important way to move forward and yet open up the past," the official said.

The Obama administration has criticized the de facto regime for human rights abuses since it assumed power after the June 28 coup. "We have said repeatedly to the regime that they are to be held accountable for the actions that violate abuses," the official said.

The June 28 coup was "an unlawful interruption of power," and the United States believes it is "very important to send the signal that coups should be part of the past and not part of the present and future in our region or anywhere in the world."

"We've been very, very clear about that from the very beginning of this," the official said.

The Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord is "a package of steps to reassert the principle and also help the country move forward, in part, through elections."

"This is a step-by-step process. Honduras will be a different place after the election. It will be a different place after the December 2nd vote," the official said.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>)
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*WPD102 11/23/2009

In Botswana, Partnerships Make Progress Against HIV/AIDS
(U.S. universities, NGOs help reverse medical "brain drain" in Botswana) (994)

By Laura S. Henderson
Staff Writer

Washington — How does Botswana, once seen as one of the most promising developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, fight back against the ominous threat of AIDS? By establishing partnerships with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, U.S. universities and Merck Company, Botswana is providing better health care for Botswana with HIV/AIDS and is helping to reverse the "brain drain" among medical professionals in that country.

One of the most stable democracies in the developing world, Botswana boasts the least corruption in Africa and a post-independence history of unprecedented economic growth. Average life expectancy skyrocketed from 49 years in 1966 to

almost 70 years in the mid-1990s, and at that time researchers projected the average life expectancy would reach 70 years by 2009 — almost as high as that in the United States.

Instead, ravaged by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the average life expectancy in Botswana less than a decade later has been cut in half, falling to 35 years in 2004. From 1998 to 2005, Botswana dropped 35 places on the United Nations' human development index. Analysts estimate that in 2004 there were 33,000 AIDS deaths, and nearly 40 percent of all Botswana between the ages of 15 and 49 were HIV-positive.

"We are threatened with extinction," then president of Botswana Festus Mogae warned in 2001. "People are dying in chillingly high numbers. ... It is a crisis of the first magnitude."

Mogae's proclamation did not fall on deaf ears. In 2001, the Botswana government, in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Merck Company Foundation, formed the African Comprehensive HIV/AIDS Partnership (ACHAP).

Heralding a new era, the government launched a program called "MASA," the word for "dawn" in the Setswana language. It was the first comprehensive national campaign in Africa to provide free anti-retrovirals to all those living with HIV/AIDS. In 2002 Botswana had one clinic, in the capital city, Gaborone. By 2005 it had opened 32 public sites around the country to perform testing, offer counseling and distribute drugs.

As a result of these procedures, according to ACHAP, the percentage of Botswana who knew their HIV status grew from 4.6 percent in 2003 to 56 percent in 2008. By the end of 2008, ACHAP estimates, 84 percent of those in need of drugs were receiving them. Through anti-retroviral treatments targeting pregnant women and the promotion of better feeding practices, the mother-to-child HIV transmission rate has significantly declined, reducing new infections among children by 80 percent.

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Despite the enormous advances Botswana has made, the government lacks sufficient medical professionals to serve the huge influx of patients, in part due to the loss of skilled intellectual and technical labor to countries with better resources and higher pay, or "brain drain."

Many international private and public institutions have responded to this need, working with Botswana health officials to collaborate on research projects and help set up medical training programs. Harvard University, the University of Pennsylvania and the Baylor School of Medicine have begun medical exchange and research programs in Botswana.

Dr. Stephen Gluckman, the director of clinical infectious disease at the University of Pennsylvania (U Penn), arrived in Gaborone in 2001 to work with ACHAP on developing Botswana's national program. Gluckman said he realized Botswana's HIV/AIDS program provided a unique opportunity to provide hands-on training for U Penn's medical students. In 2004, U Penn and the Ministry of Health of Botswana signed a memorandum of understanding that established a partnership for an educational and student-exchange program at the Princess Marina Hospital, now one of the largest HIV/AIDS clinics in the world.

In an interview with America.gov, Dr. Harvey Friedman, the director of the partnership, listed U Penn's main objectives as training, enhancing sustainability and building capacity.

"We want our efforts to be long-lasting and sustainable. You can treat a patient, but you can't build capacity. The goals of our program are long term."

Physicians and students work side by side with local medical officers and nurses, and develop daily teaching conferences and bedside training in the wards. "It's beyond looking at medical care in terms of numbers, but rather seeing it in terms of quality," Friedman said. "Before there were no conferences, and now there are teaching sessions and four conferences a week."

Lauge Sokol-Hessner participated in 2001 as a medical student concentrating on global public health. Speaking to America.gov, he emphasized the collaborative nature of the partnership's teaching and learning model.

"I've learned a lot from listening to people," Sokol-Hessner said, "from asking open-ended questions, being curious, and learning how the people from Botswana view their challenges and the opportunity for improvement."

The University of Botswana has opened its first medical school, enrolling its first undergraduate class in August 2008.

A former U Penn medical exchange student, Jonathan Silverman, told America.gov he is returning to Botswana to work in the new medical school, part of an effort to "keep Botswana doctors rather than spending money to send them overseas."

Before the launch of the new medical school, Botswana sent 50 students a year to attend medical schools in other countries; only 10 percent returned. In 2007–2008, 45 Botswana medical students returned to serve medical internships.

"These medical students are Botswana's future medical leaders," said Sokol-Hessner, who is working on a collaborative project with the staff of the new medical school to understand physician leadership.

"I hope that fostering such relationships can be one way that Americans and Africans learn how to better improve health systems in both locations," he said.

To learn more about enrollment in Botswana's medical school, visit the Web page for the University of Botswana's School of Medicine (<http://www.ub.bw/medicine/sec.cfm?pid=753>). See the Web page of the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs for more information on exchange programs for non-U.S. citizens (<http://exchanges.state.gov/prog-non-us.html>).

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*WPD103 11/23/2009

U.S. Agency Contributes to Health, Education in Middle East
(National Institutes of Health works through partnerships) (1252)

By Carrie Loewenthal Massey
Special Correspondent

Washington — From its early days in 1887 as a one-room, one-employee laboratory charged with caring for merchant seamen, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has protected the well-being of Americans.

The country's premiere medical research agency, the NIH has expanded from its meager beginnings to encompass 27 institutes and centers. In 2009, its reach also extends beyond the weary sailors who once were its primary clients. The NIH, through collaboration with international partners, now promotes worldwide its goals of fostering creativity and innovation in medical research, developing and maintaining scientific resources and promoting scientific integrity, among other endeavors.

Through several projects in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the NIH has collaborated with local organizations and institutions to improve health care infrastructure and practices not only in the host country, but at home as well. These exchanges of knowledge and research range from education programs to collaborative research grants to newborn screening.

IMPROVING RESEARCH ETHICS THROUGH ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

One NIH-sponsored educational exchange program is the Middle East Research Ethics Training Initiative (MERETI). Dr. Henry Silverman, a pulmonary and critical care physician at the University of Maryland, piloted the initiative in 2004 with a grant

from the Fogarty International Center, an NIH institution dedicated to supporting international partnerships that improve global health research.

Silverman leads a 12-month certificate program that brings practicing health care professionals from MENA countries to the University of Maryland. Candidates have come from Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, among other nations. The professionals spend two months in the United States engaging in discussions with each other and their American counterparts on ethical scientific research practices. They then return home and implement what they have learned.

“During course time, the major goal is to enhance the candidates’ skills in research ethics so they can assume leadership positions in their institutions in their country,” Silverman said. “The whole goal is to make sure clinical trials and research are done in an ethical manner.”

Course participants have conducted impressive, informative projects after leaving Maryland. One Egyptian candidate completed a 600-patient survey in hospitals across Egypt that explored patient attitudes about donating blood samples for research. The results from this project and others help candidates design patient-education programs to remedy lack of understanding of the purpose of medical research and the sense of insecurity some patients have about signing consent documents.

Silverman said the course is equally beneficial to the American participants.

“Sometimes people worry we’re training people to take back Western ideas to their countries, but that is not the purpose and it is not what is happening. If anything, it’s a melding of ideas. I learn from them because they come up with excellent ideas on how to do it better,” Silverman said.

RESEARCH TO FIGHT DISEASE, TREAT CANCER, REGULATE HIV/AIDS

The NIH, through its various centers and institutes, supports several research initiatives in the Middle East and North Africa.

In June 2009, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), an institute within the NIH, co-hosted in Tunisia a conference entitled “Leishmaniasis: Collaborative Research Opportunities in North Africa and the Middle East.” Presented in collaboration with the Institut Pasteur de Tunis, an NIAID-sponsored tropical medicine research center, and several other international partners, the conference focused on expanding research on prevention and treatment of leishmaniasis, a disease spread by sand flies that can cause chronic skin lesions and fatal organ damage.

The conference brought together scientists from Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Iran, Mali, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Sudan, Syria, Turkey, Tunisia and the United States to discuss targeted research efforts and funding opportunities.

In his opening remarks at the conference, U.S. Ambassador to Tunisia Gordon Gray said, "One of the goals of this symposium is to highlight opportunities for collaborative international research.

"My hope is this symposium will accomplish this goal and that Tunisian, American and international scientists will continue the dialogues you start here with mutually beneficial collaborations that last for years to come."

Another NIH body, the National Cancer Institute (NCI), funds and provides as-needed governance to the Middle East Cancer Consortium (MECC). The MECC began in 1996 as an agreement between the ministries of health of Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, with Turkey joining in 2004. The organization strives to promote scientific exchange among the participating countries to decrease cancer and improve cancer research in the region.

Today, the MECC also focuses on palliative care, as some countries lack systems to care for cancer patients, said Dr. Ben Prickril, international programs officer at NCI. NCI has helped improve the MECC's palliative care initiative by arranging exchange programs with U.S. hospitals where physicians, nurses, social workers and psychologists from MECC countries spend a few weeks training at facilities in New York and Boston. In 2009, the MECC also sponsored two Jordanian nurses to pursue doctoral degree programs at U.S. graduate schools. The candidates' theses will explore topics related to palliative cancer care.

On the HIV/AIDS front, several NIH institutions together manage the Collaborative HIV/AIDS Studies in the Middle East and North Africa. This program funds research and development work in Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Syria, Tunisia, West Bank, Gaza and Yemen. Projects can relate to epidemiologic topics or social factors that affect the spread of HIV/AIDS in the region. For each project, a United States organization partners with local research teams to help create an ongoing research infrastructure in the region.

JOINING WITH MENA COUNTRIES TO ENHANCE TECHNOLOGY

The NIH's programs also include collaborative technology projects with Egypt and Israel. Established in 1995, the U.S.-Egypt Joint Science and Technology Fund provides grants to American and Egyptian scientists interested in working together on research projects. The fund aims to promote mutual expansion of scientific knowledge for peaceful purposes and increased communication among the countries' scientific communities.

Similarly, the U.S.-Israeli Binational Science Foundation (BSF) awards grants for cooperative research among scientists from the United States and Israel. Also designed to promote peaceful technological research advancements, the BSF began in 1972. The foundation has announced many research advancements, noting in its September 2009 newsletter progress in areas including epilepsy, anti-cancer drugs, depression treatment for terror attack victims, and stem cell treatments for learning disabilities.

PARTNERING TO IMPROVE NEWBORN SCREENING

Since 2006, the NIH's National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) has worked with organizations in the Middle East and North Africa to enhance newborn screening capabilities to better track and treat congenital disorders in the region.

The effort has resulted in an ongoing global dialogue, last revisited in 2008 at the "2nd Conference of the MENA Newborn Screening Initiative: Partnerships for Sustainable Newborn Screening Infrastructure and Research Opportunities." NICHD, other NIH institutions and the Egyptian Ministry of Health and Population organized the conference, which took place in Cairo, Egypt, and brought together more than 30 health care professionals and advocates from 17 countries in the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, Asia and North America.

According to the conference report, participants began to conceive of infrastructure that would enable screening for congenital hypothyroidism. In the future, the countries could replicate the systems put in place to screen for this disease to expand screening to other conditions.

The NIH has begun collaborating with partner organizations on plans for a follow-up conference in 2010.

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*WPD104 11/23/2009

Native American Authors: Linking Past and Present
(Writers tackle wide-ranging themes, often defying expectations) (876)

By Michael J. Bandler
Staff Writer

Washington — As American authors of varied ethnicities continue to gain popularity worldwide, the creative work of Native Americans — in poetry, fiction and history — is becoming ever more visible.

Modern Native American writing (dating from the mid-20th century to today) is often divided, chronologically as well as thematically, into three generations. The first, closest to the mythology of early tribal communities, is represented by such internationally known authors as N. Scott Momaday and Leslie Marmon Silko. The second, a group that includes such familiar names as Louise Erdrich and Sherman Alexie, tends to be more issue-oriented, more contemporary, yet still connected to the past. The third, encompassing young poets and writers of fiction, is just beginning to emerge.

Kimberly Blaeser, an award-winning poet and essayist of the second generation who was raised on a reservation in Minnesota, has remained loyal to Native American traditions and to her own family history that interweaves German and Anishinaabe (Chippewa) backgrounds. In works such as her 2007 collection of poems *Apprenticed to Justice*, she embraces community and family lore as “those pieces of time/all multi-colored and mismatched fashion” that “tell their own stories,” using memory as one of her touchstones. And she blends elements of her mixed-blood heritage with others drawn from the natural world and issues of the day.

She is most driven, she said, to pursue stories about Native American experience that “were not able to be told in the era in which some of my relatives lived, or were not honored, because of racial discrimination or because of a different sort of emphasis within written history.” At the same time, she seeks to represent the essence of a mixed-blood woman in the 21st century.

Blaeser said she is “trying to find some kind of balance between the work I do as a writer and teacher and what is possible to accomplish in making reforms in our society. I’m also very concerned about our natural world — protecting it, but also realizing its spiritual quality. I feel that my writing is less about fighting for a place as a writer as it is about trying to make some sort of gesture — or write some kind of pathway — that helps us all move forward as Native people. I want it to be accessible, and beautiful as a work of literature, but I also want it to do something in the world both affecting and effective.”

Debra Magpie Earling, of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the U.S. Northwest, once served as a public defender in the Tribal Justice System in Montana and was on track for a career in law when she enrolled in a literature course taught by the late Native American novelist James Welch. It changed the direction of her life. Earling, who is on the faculty of the University of Montana’s creative writing program, is known in literary circles mostly for her first novel, *Perma Red*, which was published to great acclaim in 2002.

“My stories are mostly about women and their treatment in Native American communities,” Earling said, citing her forthcoming depiction of the life of Sacajawea, the Shoshone woman who accompanied Meriwether Lewis and William Clark on their exploration of the American West in the early 19th century. Another project,

which earned her a Guggenheim fellowship, focuses on a woman warrior in Montana in the 1940s. "I'm interested in powerful women and how they retreated [in response to violence and abuse]. I think Indian women are ready to speak about this, but they're land mines to write about."

"What I write about is controversial," she said, "because [these themes] really do call into question the treatment of Indian women by men in the past and present. The power of Indian women is what I'm mostly focused on."

"I'm beginning to explore stories and ideas that make some people uncomfortable — sacred stories that were never told or revealed outside the tribe," Earling said. She used to look up the stories "to see if they had been told, and try not to reveal anything. But now, I actually feel that I'm writing what I'm called to write, and being the individual that I'm called to be," even if it means breaking old taboos against sharing tribal stories with outsiders.

In recent years, younger, lesser-known Native American writers such as Gordon Henry, Eric Gansworth, Stephan Graham Jones and Eddie Chuculate have begun to attract attention. In 2007, Chuculate (of Cherokee and Muskogee Creek descent) won the O. Henry Award — a literary prize in the United States that is limited to short fiction. He contributes stories to a number of respected journals, and his first short-story collection, *Cheyenne Madonna*, will be published in the spring of 2010.

"There's a huge variety in what we see in contemporary Native writing," Blaeser observed. Even though Native literature is rich in historical allusions and often evokes the past, "I don't want to suggest in any way that it's stagnant," she said. "People are working with that material in interesting, exciting new ways. Native writing has become a part of the larger indigenous literature."

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>)
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*WPD105 11/23/2009

Transcript: Ambassador Satterfield Discusses U.S. Policies in Middle East
(CO.NX webchat transcript, November 23) (4591)

Ambassador David M. Satterfield, who previously served as the State Department's senior adviser and coordinator for Iraq, participated in a one-hour live discussion to answer questions on Iraq and U.S. policies in the Middle East.

Following is the transcript:

(begin transcript)

U.S. Department of State
Bureau of International Information Programs
CO.NX Event Transcript

CO.NX Chat: U.S. Policy in the Middle East

Guest: Ambassador David Satterfield
Date: November 23, 2009
Time: 9 a.m. EST (14:00 GMT)

CO.NX Moderator (Tim): Join us live on November 23 at 9:00am EST - 1400GMT - 1600 Cairo - 1700 Baghdad when our guest will be Ambassador David M. Satterfield, who is the Senior Adviser and former Coordinator for Iraq.

Ambassador Satterfield: I am delighted to be able to join all of you in this virtual web question and answer session, and appreciate the efforts by the US Dept of State to make this possible. I will try to answer as many of the questions that I have received as possible – but want to identify myself to you all first.

Ambassador Satterfield: In a thirty-year career with the Department of State as a Foreign Service Officer, I served entirely in the Middle East – or held positions in Washington dealing with Middle East affairs. In particular, all but the final four years of my service focused on Arab-Israel issues – including the Middle East peace process. The past four years were dedicated to Iraq, where I served as Charge, Deputy Chief of Mission and finally as Department of State Coordinator for Iraq Affairs.

Ambassador Satterfield: I retired from the US government in May of this year and – following nomination by the US government and approval by the Governments of Egypt and Israel – I assumed my present position as Director General of the Multinational Force and Observers, an international peacekeeping organization headquartered in Rome that since 1982 has been responsible for verifying compliance with the Egypt-Israel Treaty of Peace.

tammam albaazi:tammam albarazi from alwatan alarabi magazine

KARIM: sorry I forget to present myself. I'm karim a poor arabic citizen who need freedom for me and my children

Tjahjokartiko Gondokusumo: Hello there

Arabianman:????

CO.NX Moderator (Tim): We're having technical issues at the moment, but will have them fixed in a minute or two. Sorry to keep you waiting.

CO.NX Moderator (Tim): We are receiving your questions and passing them on to the Ambassador now. Thanks again.

Thomas: patience

Arabianman: well we waiting answers sir?? & thanks

KARIM:im patient since 35 years now .. no matter for few minutes :-)

Tchello KASSE: Hello,I am Tchello in Bamako. I want to make questions.

Arabianman: right karim

Arabianman: Hey, Tim, Should we continue to ask questions or wait for the answer to the previous?

CO.NX Moderator (Sarah): Hi, Arabianman. We are sorry for the long wait. We have all of your excellent questions, and the Ambassador will respond shortly. Thank you so much for your patience.

has: I AM HASSAN FROM GAZA

Tchello KASSE: Welcome Hassan. What is going on now in Gaza?

Oliver: Arabianman you said you are in Morocco too?

has: HELLO TCHLLO GAZA STILL UNDER SIEGE AND SUFFURING

Yusif: Yes,there has never been a greater need for increased international co-operation than now. Is good you are starting on this note and I pray the position does not change you.

Malek: I was thinking that many people say that the gulf war was because of Oil so my question is the following how much does USA gain in oil for been in the Middle East and how much money did it loose over the wars in Middle East is there any gain at all ?

Ambassador Satterfield: While the allegation that the 2003 overthrow of Saddam Hussein and his brutal dictatorship was motivated by "US gain in oil" has long circulated, it is absolutely without basis in the facts – as any examination of how the Iraqi Ministry of Oil and State Oil Marketing Organization have managed that nation's petroleum resources demonstrates. Iraq's hydrocarbon resources – as the Iraqi Constitution makes very clear – belong solely to the Iraqi people and it is for Iraqi authorities alone to determine how those resources are to be managed. Regarding the "cost" of conflicts in the Middle East to the United States, the greatest price of all has been in human lives lost over the past many decades. No value can be

set on those lives, but the sacrifices made by the people of the region and by others, including the US, should be an incentive to further efforts toward the achievement of comprehensive, secure and lasting peace for all.

khaled bamadhaf: I know the ordinary American is nice friendly and very helpful that is at least my experience when I lived in the States, so what makes American politicians different?

Ambassador Satterfield: I appreciate your comment about the people of the United States. Our political leaders, whatever their partisan political identification, share a common commitment to the goal of peace around the world. The strategies to achieve that objective may differ at times – but the goal of peace is and will continue to be part of America's identity.

Kareem: the discussion will consider the Egyptian American relations or just about Iraq?

Ambassador Satterfield: All Middle East-related topics!

adnan: can u please tell me what ur opinion for what going on in Iraq?

Ambassador Satterfield: The people of Iraq, through their elected representatives, are now considering the structure for holding elections for the Iraqi Parliament – expected to take place this coming January. The extensive debate over the elections law has been a signal of the vibrant and open democracy that now exists, but it is important that debate conclude and that the elections process is allowed to move forward. The progress that has been made over the past three years in reducing the terrible toll of terrorist attacks – conducted by al-Qaida and similar groups that reject a democratic, pluralistic government for Iraq – has been dramatic.

Ambassador Satterfield: But, far too many innocent Iraqis continue to be murdered by those who place little value upon innocent lives and whose perverted interpretation of Islam has been rejected by respected Islamic clerics around the region and the world. As Iraq rebuilds after decades of mismanagement and corrupt rule by Saddam and his cronies, it is essential that the country move to attract both return of its own professional and management talent and to attract international investment. This is especially important in the hydrocarbon sector, where a modern and progressive hydrocarbon law that allows Iraq to develop fully this vital resource, is among the most important issues confronting the Government and Parliament.

Oliver: You are at the Ifrane university? arabianman?

Ait Rhanimi Mohamed: on the behalf of the Moroccan people I'd like to address a quick question to

Mr. David, and my question is, knowing that the whole Muslim world is tired of wars and conflicts and we'd like from the rulers of these governments and peace makers to find a solution for such conflicts and wars, leaving a new and clear atmosphere for the new generation to live in peace and harmony. Thanks

Ambassador Satterfield: I agree fully with your statement. The Muslim world, indeed all the peoples of the Middle East and all those who wish for peace around the world – including the United States, believe that – as former US President Bill Clinton once said – Arabs and Israelis alike should be able to enjoy “the quiet miracle of a normal life” for themselves and their children.

Mushtaq Sethi: Unfortunately the US policy has utterly failed in the M.E. For the same reason the UN was moved by Palestine recently and got a resolution passed for recognizing Palestine as a separate sovereign state. So what is there to discuss? This was the most outstanding issue!

Ambassador Satterfield: The US, along with the UN, Russia and the EU, are united in the common pursuit – through the mechanism of the Middle East Quartet – of a negotiated peace between Israel and the Palestinian Authority that provides an agreed basis for the realization of a sovereign Palestinian state. The goal of a lasting peace cannot be imposed nor can it be the product of unilateral actions by either side.

Ambassador Satterfield: The multinational peacekeeping organization that I now have the honor to direct is committed to furthering cooperation to sustaining not only the peace between Egypt and Israel, but to serve as a model for how a comprehensive peace can and must be achieved and maintained.

KARIM: we are the most peaceful people on the world .. we need peace .. help us to change this ..

KARIM: we are happy that the Bush system is end now .. so Obama must do what he promises .. peace for all

Arabianman: yes Oliver I'm from Morocco

Arabianman: Rabat

Khaled Bamadhaf: My question is about Palestine and the peace process. Why is the United States not serious about the peace process? Why do Palestinians must suffer for 60 years and no one wants to help? People cannot visit their relatives even parents at the times like when they are most in need because of check points and humiliation?

Ambassador Satterfield: The U.S. is committed to the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace and continues to exert all possible efforts to help

the parties themselves – Arab and Israeli – to achieve that goal. The suffering of Palestinians and Israelis alike has continued for far too long and both peoples merit the ability to live in full dignity, peace and genuine security.

Ambassador Satterfield: Attaining that objective will require courage and commitment, actions as well as words, first and foremost from the leaders of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, but also from all in the region and from those who support the goal of peace around the world.

jalal: Do you think that Libya will improve its human rights record ?

Ambassador Satterfield: The issue of respect for human rights in Libya has been and will continue to be an important part of the US-Libya official dialogue.

ahmed mohamed radwan: I want to thank us army for their sacrifice in Iraq and in the Middle East

Ambassador Satterfield: Thank you.

ahmed mohamed radwan :are the us army in Iraq to enter a war vs Iran

Ambassador Satterfield:The December 2008 Agreement between the US and Iraq that sets the terms for the continued presence of US Forces in Iraq makes explicitly clear that Iraq's territory, water and airspace will not be a platform or launching point for attacks against any of its neighbors. And that includes Iran.

Aday Thaer :what will happen to Karkuk after the voting ..?

Ambassador Satterfield: That is exclusively a question for Iraq's government – Executive Branch and Parliament – to determine, in a manner which the US believes should contribute to long-term peace and stability.

shery Muslima: Obama has promised to leave Iraq but Blackwater still exist there spreading chaos and we all know that 2 of the British agent were caught disguising in Iraqi uniform to bomb an Iraqi police station , So my Question is if you already has been caught trying to plotting against Innocent Iraqi and kill them .. So how do you think we believe that Al-Qaida are the one behind all this current bomb in Iraq and Not your Blackwater and your agent? Though Al-Qaida won't really gain anything from bombing Innocent and mosques.. when you are the only one who would benefit from all this bomb to have an excuse to stay in Iraq ?

Ambassador Satterfield: Certain actions by the company formerly known as Blackwater are now the subject of judicial consideration in the United States and the Government of Iraq has determined that this commercial entity must cease operations in Iraq – a decision the US respects. It is outrageous to suggest, however, that the attacks to which you refer in your question are anything other than the

responsibility of al-Qaida and similar extremist groups. The motivation behind such attacks has long been made clear by the writings and pronouncements of senior officials of Al-Qaida in Iraq; to incite the eruption of a sectarian civil war in Iraq that would result in the overthrow of the present democratic and pluralistic system that replaced Saddam's dictatorship.

meryl: Does the US have a clear strategy regarding the crisis with Iran and more specifically the Uranium question and the ability of Iran to develop a nuclear atomic bomb?

Ambassador Satterfield: The United States joins the international community in respecting the right of Iran to a peaceful nuclear program, but rejects – along with virtually the entire international community – Iran's efforts to acquire a nuclear weapons capability. As Secretary Clinton and President Obama have made clear, the time has come for Iran to accept the arrangements supported by the international community with respect to its present uranium stockpile.

Tarek El shiekh: Mr. Amb. The former republican administration highlighted a 30 year war plan against the islamic militancy in the Middle East..do you think that this plan is still going on or it was halted by the entrance of the new Democratic Administration to the scene ?.Thank U

Ambassador Satterfield: The present Administration, like its predecessor, is committed to the pursuit of peace and security for all in the Middle East – and elsewhere around the world. The US will continue to take appropriate actions to defend itself and its allies from those who threaten that goal, whatever the ideology or justification.

Mohammad Shahir: what is the next step of peace solution to maintain the region economy?

Ambassador Satterfield: Economic growth in the Middle East, genuine growth that benefits the peoples of the region, is a critical goal. Such growth requires and environment of peace and security, as well as legal structures (including respect for the rule of law) that encourages both internal and external investment.

Ambassador Satterfield: This is for pasnt moustafa diplomatic editor from arrouiah kuwaiti newspaper - how can you evaluate the security situation in Iraq now?

Ambassador Satterfield: As I noted in my response to a previous question, the overall security situation in Iraq has improved significantly over the past three years. However, the brutal murder of innocent Iraqi citizens continues to occur at the hands of extremists who reject democracy and pluralism and wish to impose their narrow and exclusive vision upon all the peoples of Iraq.

Alaa Balsha: I think Iran success to surround Gulf area, starting from Iraq, Syrian, Hezbollah in Lebanon from north, Hamas narrow from east, Now in Saada Yemen, It's geopolitics for the area, what about the situation in Saada – Yemen, what about the American situation from the fight there after Iran in interfering to control on Bab Elman narrow from the west bank?

Ambassador Satterfield: The US shares the concerns of its friends and allies in the region regarding Iran's hegemonistic ambitions – and regarding actions conducted directly by Iran and by groups closely associated with/supported by Iran. The US wishes to see Iran play a constructive role and has made clear that we want good relations between all the states of the region. But, such relations must be based squarely upon the principle of demonstrated respect for the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of all.

Alaa Balsha: Alaa Balsha - Alexandria - Egypt; Mrs. Clinton strong woman, Compliance and Steadfastness, the apparent rejection of the deal with Israel to recall the peace process could unwind effort to buy time to resolve between two parties one has skepticism and the other readiness. Egypt supports Palestinian demand for settlement freeze, The United States must provide "guarantees about issues of settlements, East Jerusalem and the peace efforts in general," Abul Gheit added. What the next movements expecting in the Middle East?

Ambassador Satterfield: The US supports the goal of a permanent settlement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority that establishes lasting peace and security for both Israel and a sovereign Palestinian state. Unilateral actions by either side, including settlement activity, undermine the trust and confidence necessary to achieve that goal – as the US has made clear. But it is the leaders of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, supported by the constructive actions of other states in the region, whose courage and commitment through actions is key.

Raihan CHERROUK: hello

KARIM: did usa really go out from Iraq or is it just a political promise? thanks

Ambassador Satterfield: The December 2008 Agreement between the US and Iraq mandates the withdrawal of all US forces from Iraq in two phases: combat forces are to withdraw from all cities, towns and villages no later than June 30, 2009. That goal has been completed. Finally, all remaining forces are to be withdrawn no later than December 31, 2011, unless the Government of Iraq requests formally a presence of US forces beyond that date for the purposes of training and/or technical assistance to Iraqi Security Forces. The US is complying fully and will continue to comply completely with these and other detailed obligations entered into in this Agreement.

Arabianman: First, after thanks for this great opportunity, I wonder about why the United States out of Iraq so far despite achieving its goal of overthrowing the regime of Saddam

Ambassador Satterfield: As of January 1, 2009, United States Forces are in Iraq at the specific request of the Iraqi government – and act in compliance with the undertakings entered into between the US and Iraqi governments as noted above.

tammam albaazi: do still think that Iran is not controlling Iraq !!!

Ambassador Satterfield: Iran has never “controlled Iraq” and I, for one, am confident that Iran never will. The Government of Iraq is a sovereign government, as its actions have well demonstrated. As important, the people of Iraq – all the people of Iraq, regardless of their sectarian identity see themselves, as they did during the Iraq-Iran War, as Iraqis. The United States wishes to see positive, constructive, relations between Iraq and all its neighbors – including Iran. But as I noted in a previous response, such relations must be based on mutual respect for sovereignty, security and territorial integrity.

Gregory Szymanski: I am a student of international relations- public diplomacy; I’m wondering how are looking the relations of Iraq and Kuwait nowadays and have Iraq citizens made any steps in the direction of supporting women rights like last time in Kuwait during elections where 4 women were picked to the parliament?

Ambassador Satterfield: The US supports strong and positive relations between Iraq and Kuwait – at the political, economic and popular levels. We have engaged with both sides to encourage steps that build confidence and trust and foster constructive bilateral ties. Iraq has made dramatic steps over the years since the entry into force of its post-Saddam Constitution to expand womens’ rights, including in the political process. Many women serve in both the Iraqi Council of Representatives and in provincial and local government – and respect for womens’ rights is enshrined in the Iraqi Constitution in an exceptional manner.

Arabianman: Do you confess that you occupy a state called Iraq and striking the wall view of international law and the Charter of the United Nations

Ambassador Satterfield: While I believe it is sterile to address at the end of 2009 such an issue, I will respond in the simplest manner possible: The United States Forces were present in Iraq in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions until December 31, 2008. As demanded by the sovereign Iraqi government in December 2007 – with the support of the US and all the Security Council – the United States entered on January 1, 2009 into a bilateral Agreement with the Government of Iraq providing for a continued presence of US Forces on specific terms and conditions set by Iraq, until no later than December 31, 2011.

Arabianman: Yes We Can, YES WE CAN MAKE ARABIAN UNION a REALITY

Arabianman: Do you think in your opinion, private and linked to the official site in the state, that Obama's policy differs from Bush's policy in regard to America's relations with Arab countries

Ambassador Satterfield: President Obama has spoken very eloquently – most notably in his Cairo speech – regarding his respect for Islam, the Muslim world and his strong desire to see a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. As an official who has served under many US Administrations, I can only underscore that these views have always been the foundation of US policy. Strategies and tactics – and, of course, the challenges faced by the region and the United States – have certainly changed and differed over the years and on occasions between Administrations. But the principle of respect for Islam and the desire to have good relations with all the states of the Middle East endures.

passant: passant moustafa: hello sir I am very happy to participate in this conversation I want to ask you about the security situation in Iraq how can you describe it?

Ambassador Satterfield: Please see my answers to several previous questions.

SANOU: what major issue can we retain from the us policy and the Middle East?

Ambassador Satterfield: To both this and the previous question, the goal of US policy in the Middle East is to see the achievement of a comprehensive and lasting peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors; to see the advancement of democratic principles and processes; to see genuine economic and social benefits for all peoples that can only come from modern, open economic markets that encourage investment and from the strengthening of the rule of law. It is the goal of the US to see genuine and lasting security for all states – including Iran – based on the fundamental principle of mutual respect for security, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Arabianman: Why did not activate the President's decision to now, Obama's decision to close the Guantanamo Bay detention camp ?

Ambassador Satterfield: The President has made clear his determination to close Guantanamo Bay detention camp and this Administration is actively engaged in the complex task of making that goal a reality as soon as possible.

djiby: when usa will leave Iraq?

Ambassador Satterfield: Please see my answer to several previous questions.

Arabianman: No Oliver im at Mohamed V university Rabat, Souissi, u know it!!

Tjahjokartiko Gondokusumo: I am from Indonesia. Is there any cooperative action for Gaza?

Ambassador Satterfield: The Middle East Quartet has made clear that HAMAS must accept the fundamental principles laid out by the Quartet – in essence committing HAMAS to acceptance of the right of Israel to exist in peace, respect for agreements negotiated to date, and to the ultimate goal of a negotiated peace and an absolute end to violence – if HAMAS wishes to be accepted as in interlocutor. HAMAS has so far rejected these principles. The US joins the other members of the Quartet in concern for the people of Gaza and continues to work to ensure that essential humanitarian support is available.

has: IF USA HAS A NEW IDEAS TOWARDS ARAB AND ISLAM AS MR OBAMA SAID IN HIS SPEECH IN CAIRO , WHEN USA WILL GO IN PRACTICL STEPS TOWRDS ARABS AND MUSLIMS TO ABOVE THAT SPEECH ,ESPICALY IN PALESTINE ,IRAQ AFGANISTAN

Ambassador Satterfield: Please see my answers to many previous questions.

Gregory Szymanski: Arabianman, about Guantanamo Bay detention camp you should check that:

http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20091118_terrorist_trial_new_york_city

Oliver: I studied with soufiane and the other's

Oliver: Yes Arabianman, I did my licence at Soussi. Tredano was my prof too

Oliver: I may have to leave, cos I think the moderators are being unfairly biased about the questions been submitted to the Ambassador for reaction!

Arabianman: ok Gregory, thanks

Fantamady: The war in Iraq seemed to be an error, what do you think the OBAMA administration might do if Iran refuses to cooperate about its nuclear program, hostilities or negotiations?

Ambassador Satterfield: The President and Secretary of State have made clear that while the US hopes that Iran will accept the arrangements for nuclear fuel currently on offer, time is not unlimited for Iran's decision. The US has not speculated on hypothetical outcomes if Iran does not act.

djiby: in the war between Israel and Hamas what is the stance of USA.

Ambassador Satterfield: Please see the answer to a previous question.

Tjahjokartiko Gondokusumo: I am thinking the model for planning process in the international cooperation.

Tchello KASSE: Ambassador, is it possible to stop conflicts in the M.E?

Ambassador Satterfield: To both the above: please see my answers to prior questions. The short answer is “yes,” but only if there is courage and commitment displayed by all the leaders of the region, not just by the US and the broader international community.

has: MR AMBASSADOR IS THEIR A SECRET TALKS BETWEEN USA AND HAMAS?

Ambassador Satterfield: No.

Oliver: Again Mr. amb, you say, reacting to Mohammed Shahir’s question that economic growth in the Middle East is a critical goal. Critical goal of? the USA? If, so what has been concretely put in place so that we here participating in the discussion do not dismiss this as nothing but political “blah blah”

Ambassador Satterfield: Over the course of the last 16 years and three US Administrations – a bipartisan approach – the US has been the strong supporter of efforts by the World Economic Forum (WEF) to encourage economic growth in the Middle East and North Africa; the US has been the key architect and backer of the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) economic forum and process; the US has engaged on a bilateral basis in intensive fashion with key states – notably Egypt during the Clinton Administration and subsequently – to promote real economic growth, to encourage an investment-friendly environment and to underscore the importance of strengthening the rule of law. However, the key decisions in this as in other areas lie ultimately with the leaders and peoples of the countries involved.

Gregory Szymanski: thank you for answering former question; how U.S. are looking at relations between Switzerland and Libya? Libya was isolated in the past by U.S. and now is having good relations with countries like U.K. (last time releasing a prisoner), Italy(rebuilding the Libya state) and Switzerland (visiting Libya by chief of MFA and then also by a President), what’s your view on that?

Ambassador Satterfield: Bilateral relations between any states, including your citations of Libya and Switzerland or Libya and Italy, lie with the countries involved to determine.

Tchello KASSE: Thank, and bye

Tchello KASSE: Thanks.

Fantamady: thank you very much and see you

Arabianman: what about Morocco sir?, what you can say about American-Moroccan relation?

Ambassador Satterfield: The US has long had strong and constructive relations with Morocco and values highly Morocco's positive role in many regional and international issues.

djiby: thanks

SANOU: Many thanks for your answers

Ambassador Satterfield: I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this exchange and wish all the questioners the very best.

Oliver: Thank you for your time

CO.NX Moderator (Sarah): Thank you all for joining us today. And thank you to Ambassador Satterfield for answering so many questions.

CO.NX Moderator (Sarah): We are sorry if your question did not get answered, but please visit our Facebook page (<http://co-nx.state.gov>) to find out about future programs.

Thomas: Thank you!

Oliver: Arabian man, how can I find you on Facebook?

Gregory Szymanski: thank you, bye

Tjahjokartiko Gondokusumo: so long friends

Arabianman: ah ok tell m your name on FB Oliver?

Oliver: Barker vorgmor

Arabianman: I will add u OK

Arabianman: thanks Mr Ambassador, & thank you Sarah & Tim

CO.NX Moderator (Sarah): Thank you all for joining us today. A link to the transcript from this chat will be posted here within 3 business days.

(end transcript)

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Transcript: White House Press Briefing by Robert Gibbs
(Press secretary briefs reporters November 23) (6714)

(begin transcript)

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
November 23, 2009

PRESS BRIEFING BY
PRESS SECRETARY ROBERT GIBBS

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

1:35 P.M. EDT

MR. GIBBS: Let's just go through a -- I'll let Chip get seated here and then we'll -- you're good -- just go through a quick week ahead, obviously somewhat truncated and abbreviated because of the holiday.

Tomorrow the President and the First Lady, as you know, will welcome Prime Minister Singh of India and his wife to the White House for the first official visit. The arrival ceremony is at approximately 9:15 a.m. on the South Lawn. The President and Prime Minister Singh will then meet in the Oval Office. Following the meeting, they will hold a joint news conference in the East Room at approximately 11:35 a.m.

Q: How many questions?

MR. GIBBS: I think it's one and one.

Q: That's all?

MR. GIBBS: It's either one and one or two and two.

In the evening at 7:00 p.m., the President and the First Lady will welcome the Prime Minister and his wife to the White House for the first State Dinner. The dinner will begin at approximately 8:15 p.m. on the South Lawn.

Tomorrow afternoon, the First Lady will host young women from the White House Leadership and Mentoring Program for a presentation on the history and the protocols surrounding state and official visits in honor of the first State Dinner here.

On Wednesday at 11:30 a.m., the President will participate in the traditional turkey pardoning ceremony in the Rose Garden. No questions for the turkey. In the afternoon, the First Family will participate in a service event in the D.C. area.

The President will spend Thanksgiving Day here at the White House.

On Friday at 2:00 p.m., the First Lady will be presented with the official White House Christmas tree, which comes this year from Shepherdstown, West Virginia. The tree will be on display in the Blue Room throughout the holiday season.

All right. Yes, ma'am.

Q: The Afghanistan meeting tonight was added to the schedule. Is that -- let me just back up. The last meeting he sent folks back to kind of take another look at some of the options and reorder things. So is tonight about looking at what they're coming back with or blessing an option?

MR. GIBBS: My sense is more the former. I think they're -- they'll go through some of the questions that the President had, some additional answers to what he'd asked for, and have a discussion about that.

Q: What is it that he wants to hear, that he needs to hear still?

MR. GIBBS: Well, leaving -- picking up where we left off in the previous meetings, I think I characterized a decent part of it as not just how we get people there but what's the strategy for getting them out. And I think that was a series of questions that the President had on that and that we'll go through tonight.

Q: And are there more meetings scheduled after this one?

MR. GIBBS: Not that I'm aware of.

Yes, sir.

Q: Will the President be ready to roll out a decision the week after Thanksgiving or will it take longer -- on Afghanistan and Pakistan?

MR. GIBBS: I think you guys wrote on Friday based on an answer that I gave you guys that it wouldn't be rolled out this week, so obviously the first possible time would be sometime next week.

Q: So it's possible time -- would it likely be done then or will it take beyond that time?

MR. GIBBS: When the President tells me what's likely, then I can add that to it. I would simply say that it's not going to happen this week, obviously.

Q: Okay. Two senior lawmakers are saying that there should be a war tax levied to pay for any increase in troops to Afghanistan. Is he considering the sensibilities about raising the deficit beyond where it is? Is the White House willing to give that consideration?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I'm not going to get into how one funds a decision that's yet to be made. I don't doubt we'll have some time to do that. I would say, to take a little bit of a broader view of the deficit, I mean, I think obviously one of the things -- two of the biggest changes -- the two biggest changes in our fiscal situation over the past nine years and the two biggest drivers for deficit spending for the next -- from here to the next 10 years are tax cuts and a prescription drug benefit -- programs that were added and ultimately not paid for.

I think that one of the things that has happened in this health care debate is a changing of the conversation in Washington by talking about not just how do you pay for it, but a piece of legislation that CBO estimates in either the House or the Senate version would actually cut the deficit over the next 10 years.

Jake.

Q: While we're on the subject of the deficit, the President said last week, "I think it's important though to recognize that if we keep adding to the debt, even in the midst of this recovery, at some point people could lose confidence in the U.S. economy in a way that could actually lead to a double-dip recession." What steps is the President prepared to take to get us out of this hole?

MR. GIBBS: Well, again, we'll broaden this just slightly. For the entirety of our administration, we've dealt with in many ways dual challenges: How do you get the economy back on track, what do you have to do to both create economic growth, which then is what you have to have in order to create job growth; as well as understanding a dramatic change in the past decade in our fiscal situation. So obviously, both of those have to be taken into account.

Like I said a second ago, the biggest driver in -- the two biggest drivers were tax cuts and prescription drug benefit programs that weren't paid for. The second biggest driver is a downturn in our economy. So first and foremost, the President will focus on what can be done to get our economy moving again, what can be done to help spur the creation of jobs and continued economic growth. And like I said, I think the conversation in some ways has been changed. The discussion that's being had now, as you know, is how to pay for health care.

Q: I mean, that's not really any major -- I mean, so the answer to what can be done to get us out of the \$12 million hole is to get the economy back in --

MR. GIBBS: Well, first and foremost that's -- yes, that's -- a downturn in the economy, caused by the recession, a change in tax receipts, is first and foremost what can be done. Obviously there are meetings that continue today in terms of putting the budget together for next year, understanding that the President believes that we are going to have to continue next year to balance what has to be done to create -- continue economic growth and create demand for jobs, as well as balancing our fiscal situation, which the President also said last week in those interviews.

Q: Right, but how could -- okay, understood, the economy -- getting the economy back on track, that will increase revenues. But the President said specifically, even if, when the economy bounces back and --

MR. GIBBS: Well, and you've heard the President talk quite a bit about the fact that we most assuredly have to get our fiscal house in order. Again --

Q: Right, so what does he think should be done to do that?

MR. GIBBS: Well, that's -- they're working on putting together the budget for next year. One of the first things he talked about was taking into account the massive amounts of money that the government spends on health care each year -- which passing health care reform, over the next 10-year period cuts about \$130 billion, according to the Senate bill, out of the deficit.

Q: Well, that's \$13 billion a year. That's not even a quarter of what we borrow from China every year.

MR. GIBBS: Well, but if you don't start somewhere, Jake, you're not going to get anywhere. I think the President understands that we've got, again, very dual challenges that have to be addressed in getting our economy moving again, as well as taking into account our long-term fiscal health.

Yes.

Q: Just to follow up on the taxing for troops question. As part of the discussions that the President has been holding with his war council, has that issue come up in terms of how to pay -- if you increase --

MR. GIBBS: Well, how to pay for the war, yes.

Q: And has taxes --

MR. GIBBS: No.

Q: -- come up? Tax --

MR. GIBBS: They haven't gotten deeply into the discussions on that. The President did mention in one of the meetings specifically with the Joint Chiefs that we had to take into account how much all of this was going to cost over a five- and 10-year period, and that --

Q: But nobody brought up, you know, should we tax Americans for --

MR. GIBBS: No, that is not a specific proposal that has been talked about in a meeting that I've been at.

Q: And over the weekend -- I know you put out a press release on the votes on health care, but what was the reaction from the President? Can you sort of give us a sense of how he reacted when this occurred?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I was not with him when it happened, but I think the President continues to be pleased that we're making progress in moving this legislation forward. Keep in mind that for 70 years people have wanted to get health care reform done and in that 70 years we haven't had a vote on health care reform in the full House or the full Senate. This is -- legislation has passed the House and goes to the floor of the Senate this time next week.

Q: And one final question. India -- why was India chosen for the first State Dinner?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I think it's the importance of our relationship with India on a host of issues. Obviously, counterterrorism is important; the economic recovery and the world economy; our relationship with them in terms of energy and climate change. I think India obviously is in a very important region in the world. And I think it demonstrates the importance that that relationship has in the world.

Q: Can I just follow? One, if President is going to ask Prime Minister of India tomorrow when they meet in the White House as far as doing India more in Afghanistan than -- rather than infrastructure but maybe on the military side? And second, if President has any announcement to make -- India's quest to have a U.N. Security Council seat?

MR. GIBBS: Let me -- we'll have a chance to talk about what the two leaders talk about tomorrow. I don't want to get ahead of, in here, what the President might ask of the Prime Minister tomorrow.

Q: And as far as Afghanistan is concerned, are you thinking that --

MR. GIBBS: Again, I don't want to get ahead of what the two discuss tomorrow. I'd rather give a sense of what they did discuss rather than what I think may discuss.

Yes, sir.

Q: Thank you, Robert. On Afghanistan, it's been more than a month since Dick Cheney accused the President of dithering on this decision; he's now got this ninth meeting. Are you concerned that Americans are increasingly looking at this President as simply indecisive and uncertain on this --

MR. GIBBS: No.

Q: -- because he's taking so long? Is he having trouble making a decision?

MR. GIBBS: No.

Q: Can you give us any more information why it's taking so long?

MR. GIBBS: Look, Chip, this is a complicated decision. I'm not going to re-litigate what we litigated when the former Vice President offered his advice previously. There are a series of decisions that have to be made and the President is working through many of those decisions in order to come to what he believes is the best way forward for our national security.

And I think the American people want the President to take the time to get this decision right, rather than to make a hasty decision.

Q: But certainly there are a lot of allies out there who are concerned that it does look like indecisiveness and it makes their jobs look more difficult in their roles in Afghanistan.

MR. GIBBS: Like?

Q: Numerous -- I can tell you that there are allies who have -- who are very concerned with how long this is taking, that it looks like indecisiveness.

MR. GIBBS: Yes, well, I -- maybe you can get back to me -- maybe you can get back to me on some of the specifics.

Q: Well, we don't go around giving our sources to you in the newsroom, but I mean, you certainly have heard these reports. Are you saying you have not heard any reports like that, that allies are concerned that it's taking so long?

MR. GIBBS: Is there nobody that you can tell me with any specificity that won't remove somehow some sourcing agreement that you have with them?

Q: Well, with all due respect, I'm asking you the question, and are you not aware of any allies who have voiced concerns about it?

MR. GIBBS: You posed the question, Chip. I was asking for a little bit more texture to what you were asking.

Q: Well, I think you would know, wouldn't you, about allies that were --

MR. GIBBS: I can't -- your sourcing agreement --

Q: You don't -- you're saying you're not aware of any allies who have voiced a concern about how long this is taking?

MR. GIBBS: I didn't pose the question, Chip. I'm wondering if you have some more specificity on --

Q: Yes, I do, but -- I'm sure you do, too. I mean, it's been --

MR. GIBBS: We could play the Jeopardy version of this, or if you -- do you have any more specificity you'd like to add?

Q: Well, I don't think I'm going to get an answer on that, so let me try the trip. There are --

MR. GIBBS: It doesn't appear as if you're going --

Q: -- number of analysts saying -- even Leslie Gelb, a very respected foreign policy analyst -- who called this trip amateurish because there was nothing set up deliverable ahead of time that the President could come home with, and he's pulling for a shakeup of the foreign policy team. Response?

MR. GIBBS: I have not read Mr. Gelb's --

Q: It's not just him. It's other analysts, too.

MR. GIBBS: Are we going to play this game again? (Laughter.)

Q: No. But if you've been reading what everybody else has been reading --

MR. GIBBS: Look, the President set out to reengage our foreign policy with Asia after many years of quite frankly dealing with that region of the world on only one topic, and that was terrorism. I think we all understand that our relationship with that part of the world is a little bit more complex than just one issue.

So the President went to Asia to talk about the international economy, to talk about human rights and Internet freedom, as he did in China, and again to reengage our country with that side of the world. And the President is quite pleased with how the trip came out.

Q: But shouldn't there have been more homework ahead of time so that he had something to bring home, rather than simply reengaging?

MR. GIBBS: Well, we had been absent for quite some time on the world stage. I don't think that you're just all of a sudden going to elect a new President and have thousands of things thrown at your feet to bring back. I think diplomacy takes hard work, Chip. We've reengaged in that, and I think the President is quite pleased with the outcome of the trip.

Q: Robert, does the President approve of some of the horse trading that went on to get the health care vote to the floor, for example, Senator Landrieu getting the \$300 million --

MR. GIBBS: I have not talked to him about that.

Q: Does the White House know of anything unseemly about kind of paying for this vote?

MR. GIBBS: I think that's a better question for members on Capitol Hill.

Q: But I mean, this is his key domestic initiative so it takes an interest.

MR. GIBBS: We're happy that progress was made.

Q: At any cost?

MR. GIBBS: Again, that's better directed to the Senate.

Q: Fair enough. Beyond the stimulus, does the White House believe more should be done in terms of government intervention for job creation?

MR. GIBBS: Well, Savannah, I think the President and his team are evaluating different policies as to whether they can make a difference in helping to spur job creation. You mentioned the Recovery Act. I think anybody would tell you that before we can create jobs, we have to have economic growth that's on the positive side of the ledger. Last quarter for the first time in four quarters, we actually had positive economic growth, so I think that's a precursor to a more sustained recovery. The team continues to meet and evaluate what proposals, in working with Congress, might help spur job creation.

Q: There's a report that the White House is sort of lukewarm on proposals that are being bandied about by House Democrats.

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, we're going to work with members of Congress to try to come up with sensible and reasonable measures that might spur economic growth. And I know those conversations continue.

Q: Robert, I have only two -- (laughter) -- only two, that's all.

MR. GIBBS: Now, don't drop your notebook.

Q: No, I won't.

MR. GIBBS: Okay.

Q: When before in U.S. history has an enemy combatant been tried in a civilian court?

MR. GIBBS: It wasn't -- I don't know what Moussaoui or some of these -- or I know both Zacarias Moussaoui and Richard Reid were both tried in federal courts. I don't know if their status was enemy combatant.

Q: Regarding Senator Durbin's hope that we can house Guantanamo inmates in an under-utilized Illinois state prison, does the White House agree that this would bring badly needed jobs to the area, and that this prison could also be used for illegal aliens?

MR. GIBBS: On the latter part I don't know the answer to that. Obviously on the first part, this was a facility that was built under the auspices of housing prisoners in a town that is in need of economic development. I think there's no doubt that housing prisoners at Thomson would create jobs and I think it would also help in a big way in closing down Guantanamo. No final decisions on any of that have been made, obviously.

Q: Thank you very much.

MR. GIBBS: Yes, sir.

Q: Robert, if there are no more meetings scheduled after tonight, is today's meeting the one at which he'll lock in a decision?

MR. GIBBS: I don't know the answer to that, Mark. It may be tonight, it may be over the course of the next several days.

Q: Will there be a readout, statement of any kind after the meeting?

MR. GIBBS: There will be -- I think the meeting is scheduled at this point for 8:00 p.m., so --

Q: And how long?

MR. GIBBS: It's scheduled to go I think an hour and a half, but I'd have to re-look at my schedule.

Q: Will you describe the process? You said it was complicated. Has he anguished through this process?

MR. GIBBS: I don't know if he's anguished through this process, Mark, I just think the President understands that there are a lot of different layers to our involvement in Afghanistan, how it relates to the region, what its impact is on our forces, what its impact is on our fiscal situation. I think there are a host of things that go into making the type of decision that the President is working through.

Again, understanding that there are about 30,000 more American troops in Afghanistan now than there were when the President came into office.

Roger.

Q: You said in response to a couple of questions that people were working on the budget and stuff like that, in connection with some of the jobs questions. Should I read into that that whatever the White House might be doing over the next few weeks or months won't find its way into -- until a budget --

MR. GIBBS: No, no, no, I think -- I think that when I was talking about the budget I was just discussing Jake's question on what has to be done in the long term to deal with the fiscal situation.

Q: So there would be some sort of jobs proposal coming out --

MR. GIBBS: There certainly could be.

Q: -- before (inaudible). And also, what does the President think of Feingold's tax credit for jobs proposal?

MR. GIBBS: I don't know what -- do you have a little more detail? I don't --

Q: A proposal giving businesses -- small businesses, primarily -- a tax credit in exchange for jobs created.

MR. GIBBS: Look, I think that's one of the ideas that was brought up in the -- with the President's Economic Advisory Board and I believe that and other proposals are some that are obviously being discussed on Capitol Hill and some inside the White House.

Q: The Association of Business Economists came out with fairly positive economic report today. Does the White House believe that technically the recession is over?

MR. GIBBS: Wendell, I'll leave the delineation of when it started and when it's over to a board of economists.

Q: On the President's choice of his principal attorney, Gary Bauer, to be White House counsel --

MR. GIBBS: Not Gary Bauer -- (laughter.) That, my friend, would be some news. (Laughter.) That I can tell you I'm certainly unprepared to discuss. (Laughter.)

Q: Bob Bauer.

MR. GIBBS: I'll tell you Bob's number and you can apologize.

Q: It's a question about William [sic] Bauer as

Q: Could you send us all that number, please? (Laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: As if you all don't have it. (Laughter.)

Yes, sir.

Q: His focus having been on election law, for the most part, some critics are saying he doesn't have a broad enough experience in legal matters to take the White House Counsel's Office. I presume you do not share that opinion.

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, I've worked with Bob for probably eight years. I think many of us have worked with Bob for quite some time. I think you could find -- and you have found -- Democrats and Republicans alike that believe Bob possesses certainly the knowledge, the experience, and a relationship with the President to do the important job of being the White House Counsel. I think we're all tremendously fortunate that he's decided to take a break from private practice and be the White House Counsel.

Q: And on a third matter, there's a conservative gun owners group saying that a provision of the Senate passed -- or the Senate -- the health care plan being debated in the Senate would require the government to accumulate information about gun-related injuries, that they are then concerned might be used to impact gun laws. How would you address that?

MR. GIBBS: I'm unfamiliar with that -- with any of that provision. If you can -- we can certainly take a look at that and maybe get a better answer.

Mike.

Q: Two things, Robert. Do you know if he's planning on talking to the Cabinet today about AfPak and the decision -- not necessarily informing them, obviously, what the decision is, but talking through with them his sort of thinking on that?

MR. GIBBS: I don't believe that's extensively on the agenda. I will -- I think they're preparing for that now and I can certainly ask when they come out of that if that was something -- obviously some members of the Cabinet have been involved in and will be involved later on today in the meetings themselves and also meet periodically with the President, and that's a discussion that's been had. I don't think that -- let me get a better sense when they come out of the meeting if that was something that was covered.

Q: Okay. And then the second thing on TARP, do you guys have a sense of the timing of when you guys plan to make the decision and announce the decision on whether or not to officially extend TARP? And do you have some thoughts about the conversations going on up on the Hill about different ideas of how you folks want to use the money that's left over in that fund?

MR. GIBBS: All I know is that -- I don't have a timeline on the decision. Obviously those are conversations that -- some happened late last week with members of the economic team and senators. I assume those conversations will continue, but I don't have a timeline on that.

Q: Robert, may I follow up on the question on the India State Dinner tomorrow night? I'm wondering if you could explain a little about the role of diplomatic entertaining in the Obama White House?

MR. GIBBS: I'm sorry, diplomatic --

Q: The role of this kind of diplomatic entertaining. People might wonder when they see a black-tie dinner and what -- from everything I hear, what will be a lovely evening in the tent on the South Lawn -- what the role of having a party like that is, given that some people might say there is two wars and a lot of joblessness going on in the country. Just explain why this happens and the way it will unfold.

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, again, I think it's -- this is a very important relationship with a very important country that we have in the world. That's why India was chosen to be the first visit. I think that's why the White House wanted to have something as formal as this to discuss throughout this process the issues that we have bilaterally -- again, what I talked about in terms of --

Q: Talk about the party specifically, the 400 people --

MR. GIBBS: I understand. Let me -- let me wind through my answer here -- the issues of, again, of counterterrorism, of the economy, of energy and climate change -- a lot of which we read about each day in the news and obviously will be topics throughout the conversations that are had between the President and the Prime Minister.

Again, I think is a show of respect for the value that we put on that relationship. I think India is the world's largest democracy, and I think the relationship that we have

with them and the issues that we're dealing with them are tremendously important going forward in our future.

Jeff.

Q: The President said last week, I believe, that he would consider it a firing offense -- the people who have leaked information about his AfPak decision. What type of after-action report does he plan to ask for, if any, to review this? And he is -- is he serious about pursuing some type of investigation or inquiry into this?

MR. GIBBS: Well, let me just leave it at this, Jeff. The President has on a few occasions in meetings like this talked about the importance of being able to have an open discussion amongst his advisors as part of this process. He reminds people that we have these meetings in the Situation Room and not at a local restaurant because of the importance and the sensitivity of some of the information that's discussed throughout those meetings.

I think it -- I think the President believes strongly that being able to get the type of information he wants, discussing the sensitivity of much of it, as well as being able to ask questions and get more information, is something that is important in formulating his decision and is important to do in a way that people feel confident that they can be candid with the American President.

I have not talked to him about whether or not -- what specific measures he might have in mind to follow up. I know in that interview he echoed what Secretary Gates had said in a previous interview about the same topic.

Q: Robert, back to health care and the upcoming vote in the Senate, is the President going to take a personal role in trying to iron out some of the Democratic differences that stand in the way?

MR. GIBBS: I think the President will continue to play the role that he and the team have played here. I don't think we'd be at this point if the President and his team hadn't played roles in getting this process to the point of where it is.

Q: Is he going to work the phones? Is he going to have public events next week and stuff?

MR. GIBBS: I don't have a week ahead for next week, but I can assure you the President will continue to talk to legislators about the importance of getting this done.

Q: And what then -- on the subject of the importance of getting it done -- the President's top domestic priority -- the Senate, should it actually clear it next week, is there any chance that this will actually be on his desk for signature this year, or is --

MR. GIBBS: That's our hope. That continues to be our goal.

Q: Do you still think that that's possible?

MR. GIBBS: I do. I also don't think I would remove the deadline here and now. I think, as I said earlier, this is a goal that people have had for 70 years. We've never been closer than we are now. We've never had a vote in the full House or the full Senate. And we're going to start debate next week in the Senate, the second part of that process already having gone through the House.

So I think we're continuing -- the President is pleased that we're continuing to make progress on a bill that would make health care more affordable for people that have it, provide increased accessibility for those that don't, provide some important insurance reforms, as well as bend the cost curve and chance the deficit over the next 10 years.

Q: But realistically, given the lift that it has taken to get to this point, it's not going to -- what are the odds of it actually being reconciled this year?

MR. GIBBS: You guys are better odds makers than me.

Ann?

Q: The Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, David Obey, is against sending any more troops into Afghanistan, and says that it would be a "mistake that could wipe out every initiative we have to rebuild our economy at home." He wants to know where the President would pay for an infusion of troops. And do you think that that does jeopardize in some sense any of his domestic agenda?

MR. GIBBS: Well, on the first part, in terms of discussing about the specifics of paying for it, I'm going to wait for a decision to be made before we get to that point. Second, look, this is an issue that the President talked extensively about during the campaign, the need to focus our attention on the dangers of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

You know, I don't -- Presidents don't get to decide what issues ultimately get to their desk. I think the President understands that the war in Afghanistan is -- was one that he was always going to have to deal with, and I don't think that dealing with that as an issue threatens the President from also being able to deal with very important issues like the economy, like health care, and many other things that are either part of his agenda or might not be planned but end up on his desk anyway.

Q: Follow on that?

MR. GIBBS: Peter.

Q: Robert, just on the jobs question, does the deficit constrain the scope and ambition of any jobs program, initial jobs program, the President might support?

MR. GIBBS: Well, again, I would reiterate what you heard the President say in interviews that he did last week, which was in many ways we have dual challenges. In order to deal with the deficit, one of the most important things that we control going forward -- or have some input on, I should say, going forward -- is an economic recovery; that we shouldn't shy away from doing what needs to be done to continue economic growth and to spur job creation in the future.

At the same time, we have in the medium term and the long-term fiscal issues that have to be dealt with. And the President has had to balance this, in all honesty, Peter, since the very first day of his administration. And I have no doubt that it's a balancing act that we'll have to continue moving forward.

Q: Robert, just to follow up on Jeff a little bit on this question of whether leaks are a firing offense. Does the President think it's a firing offense only in the Pentagon or in the White House also?

MR. GIBBS: I don't think the President would discriminate against where the person sits.

Q: And just to be clear, he's made no indication that he wants to find out if anyone committed --

MR. GIBBS: I have not talked to him, post that interview, about it. So I just haven't gotten any more fulsome answer than what I heard him give in the interview.

Q: On the issue of the Copenhagen summit, the climate treaty, is the President disappointed that it looks like there won't be any treaty with any binding commitments? Does he feel that the United States and other nations of the world have failed when the goal was to try to come up with a treaty that actually had binding commitments, rather than setting up goals for those down the road?

MR. GIBBS: Well, first and foremost, I think that getting a political agreement out of Copenhagen after years and years and years of inaction on clean energy and climate change the President would view as a very positive development. You know, David, I don't think any of us were under the illusion that, again, having been off the world stage for so long, in dealing with this issue and in understanding what it was going to take to get developing nations of the world at the table that all these issues might be neatly wrapped up by December of this year.

I don't think that has caused the President to -- not to act. Obviously the House has taken action. The Senate is in the process of moving forward on clean energy and climate change legislation. And I think the President is going to spend his time

focusing on what we can get out of Copenhagen in terms of a binding political agreement moving forward.

Q: Do you think -- does he have to ramp up his efforts at home here to get something out of the Senate?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, I think the President has certainly spent time on this issue in dealing with members of the Senate. And, again, go back to my health care analogy - we had an issue that had been something that scientists had talked about for quite some time, is through half of the process in getting the House to agree on a bill. We understand that's not all of what has to happen, but it's certainly a good start, after years of not dealing with the issue.

April.

Q: Robert, understanding the scope of what the President is dealing with, with these meetings, the severity of dealing with the NSC, dealing with people at the Pentagon and within his administration, at the end of the day, could this actually happen where the President might say, look, at this time I choose not to have additional troops stand in Afghanistan?

MR. GIBBS: Again, I think there are a plethora of decisions that could ultimately be the outcome of this. I don't want to prejudge what it might be. I will wait for him to make that decision and announce it.

Q: Well, could that be one -- is that a viable -- is that a viable possibility?

MR. GIBBS: I think there are a lot of different options on the table.

Yes.

Q: Thanks. Yes, going back to the GAO report last week, the GAO report talked about almost 78 percent of -- 78 percent has not been spent out of the stimulus money this year. And I wanted to ask, first of all, why was it rushed through --

MR. GIBBS: Why was what rushed through? The GAO report?

Q: No, no, I'm sorry -- the stimulus bill rushed through if 78 percent of the money was not going to be spent in the first fiscal year?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I appreciate the characterization. I can't agree with the fact that the bill was -- I don't know how much time we spent discussing it in here. I don't consider that time wasted. And I'll be honest with you, I don't know whether -- I assume that the measure that you're looking at is final money that's gone out the door and doesn't include obligated money, which allows, for instance, on a road project, the check might not come until the very end, but that doesn't mean that a

contract can't be agreed to, that the money can't be obligated, and that the effects both with the construction company as well as the indirect jobs that are ultimately created as part of that -- that money isn't spent.

I can get you an updated figure, but I think more than 50 percent of the money has thus far been obligated.

Q: Also, if I could just follow up, with regards to the report, there was talk of nearly 4,000 jobs that showed no dollar amount since 50,000 jobs were created, and also in a case where \$1 billion was allocated, there were no jobs created. And reports came in like that --

MR. GIBBS: Obviously there has been an unprecedented amount of transparency involved in the Recovery Act, unlike we've seen, in all honesty, in any piece of legislation before. In getting, I think, 110,000 awards and contracts on the Internet, as we said, there were bound to be some errors. I think what is indisputable, if you ask economists, has the bill had a positive impact on our economy and our economic growth. And the only factors that I can point to are the GDP of the previous four quarters -- again, remember the first quarter of this year, we were, I think the revised figure was negative-5.9 percent, right? The initial estimate for the third quarter of 2009 was plus-3.5 percent, right? So, not even good at math and I know that that's a pretty big variance in terms of an economy that's contracting and an economy that's growing.

A lot of people are rightly concerned about employment in this country. I don't know of an economic model where an economy that is contracting, particularly at a quarterly rate of almost 6 percent, is adding jobs. In fact, in that period of time we saw months where 700,000, 741,000 jobs were being lost. The President and Congress took the necessary action to institute a Recovery Act that has helped spur our economic growth, has led to the first positive economic GDP growth in four quarters.

And, again, you're not going to create jobs in this economy in a scenario with negative job growth. We're on the road to that recovery through this plan.

Thank you.

END 2:16 P.M. EST

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Transcript: U.S. Official on The Hague Convention on Inter-Country Adoptions
(In recognition of National Adoption Day, official briefs on adoptions) (3338)

(begin transcript)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
November 20, 2009

On-The-Record Briefing

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs Michele Bond on National
Adoption Day

November 20, 2009
Washington, D.C.

MR. TONER: Good afternoon. It's my great pleasure to introduce Deputy Assistant Secretary Michele Bond, who has been our Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Directorate for Overseas Citizens Services since July 2007. Previously, she was the Director of the Office of Policy Coordination and Public Outreach in the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs, and she's also served as the managing director of the Office of Overseas Citizens Services, so she brings a wealth of experience to her job.

And today, in light of National Adoption Day tomorrow, we thought it a good opportunity to have her come down and give us an update on some of the activities of our embassies vis-à-vis adoption services. So with that, I'll introduce Deputy Assistant Secretary Bond. Thank you.

MS. BOND: Thank you very much. Good afternoon. As the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Overseas Citizens Services in the Bureau of Consular Affairs, I am really happy to be here this afternoon to celebrate the fact that November is National Adoption Month. There are hundreds of Department of State employees who adoptive parents, foster parents, or adult adoptees. So this is an important and personal issue for State Department staff.

More officially, the Department is the U.S. central authority for The Hague Convention on Inter-Country Adoption, and is deeply committed to promoting and facilitating adoption as a permanent, loving alternative for children who cannot remain in their birth families.

As mentioned, tomorrow, November 21, is National Adoption Day. The day is being marked around the United States at courthouses where hundreds of children in foster care will have their adoptions finalized. Many U.S. embassies around the

world are also celebrating National Adoption Month through their own outreach activities that emphasize the importance that the United States attaches to adoption and especially to inter-country adoption.

Here at the State Department, we continue to work with other countries to develop and implement standards and procedures to help ensure that as many children as possible can find permanent, loving homes. We believe that inter-country adoption can be an important option for children in need, and that every child deserves a loving home.

In April 2008, the United States joined more than 75 other nations as a party to The Hague Convention on Inter-Country Adoption. It's a fundamental tenant of the convention that when a child cannot be reintegrated into his or her birth family, the first option should be adoption by a family in that child's country of origin. When that domestic adoption in the child's country of origin is not possible, then inter-country adoption opens another opportunity for a child to find the loving home that he or she deserves.

The United States is committed to ensuring that all inter-country adoptions to the United States or from the United States protect each child's fundamental rights and prevent the abduction, sale, or trafficking of children. We also encourage all countries to take the necessary steps to join and implement The Hague Inter-Country Adoption Convention. Since the convention entered into force for the United States, nearly 900 children have been adopted both into and out of the United States in accordance with Hague Convention procedures. Several thousand additional children have been adopted under non-Hague procedures because their cases had begun before The Hague went into force for us.

Several Hague partners have contacted our office here at the Department to discuss the interest of their citizens in adopting waiting children in U.S. foster care, an option we strongly endorse for those who have not found permanent homes in the United States. In Fiscal Year 2009, almost 13,000 foreign-born children were adopted by U.S. Citizen families. More than 70,000 domestic adoptions were completed in the United States during the same period. Adoption is more common in the United States than in any other country, and we adopt more foreign-born children than the rest of the world combined. Those are facts that we can all be proud of.

No matter where or in what circumstances children are born, they deserve the opportunity to grow up in a loving family. The Department of State is proud to be part of National Adoption Month and to add our own recognition and thanks to all of the families that have opened their hearts and homes through adoption. Thank you.

Questions? Sir.

QUESTION: Charley Keyes from CNN. You and I have talked in the past. What are some of the remaining problem countries in regard to U.S. adoptions? I know that

the United States has voiced concerns in the past about China. Can you just bring us up to date on that?

MS. BOND: All right, yes. To talk about China, which I would not call a problem country as far as adoptions are concerned, but I certainly can talk about that a little bit – in Fiscal Year 2009, just over 3,000 children were adopted from China to the United States. China --

QUESTION: Is that the largest number among –

MS. BOND: No, that's down a little bit from – oh, you mean the largest among all – I think it probably was the largest for that year, yeah.

QUESTION: So the largest among all countries?

MS. BOND: That's right. China is a party to The Hague Adoption Convention and has been for some time, and so all adoptions now starting between China and the United States have to be under Hague procedures. The U.S. Consulate in Guangzhou estimates that it takes about 38 months to complete an adoption absent special circumstances. It is possible to complete an adoption more rapidly if the child who is being adopted has been identified as a special needs child.

Normally, the children, when they are adopted, are not 38 months old or older. It takes that long for the adopting family to complete the arrangements, but that doesn't mean that the child they're adopting was already born at the time they began the procedure. A growing number of the children now available for inter-country adoption from China are being adopted through what's called the Waiting Child Program. They are kids who are older or they have special needs. And many American families are now pursuing this option.

QUESTION: Is the United States satisfied, though, that the incidents in China where some public officials were arrested for dealing in illegally obtained infants, that that's been resolved to the United States satisfaction?

MS. BOND: Well, what we see is that the Chinese who have taken it very seriously are investigating, are proceeding to file charges and prosecute. The situations where we get very concerned around the world are when we can see that there's clear evidence of a problem, and the country where it's occurring is not taking that problem seriously – not investigating, not prosecuting. That would be a matter of concern, and that's not the case in China.

QUESTION: Where might it be the case?

MS. BOND: Well, for example, in September of 2008, we allowed a bilateral agreement with Vietnam to expire because of our own concerns that there were very clear evidence of corruption and of bad paperwork, of falsification of children's

identities and backgrounds in order to make them available for adoption. And we couldn't resolve the questions that were raised without the cooperation of Vietnamese officials, and we weren't getting that cooperation.

QUESTION: And where does that stand – sorry, just one more – where does that stand now with Vietnam?

MS. BOND: At present, Vietnam has drafted a new adoption law that is being considered by their parliament. We've had an opportunity to talk to them and still have another – other countries that adopt from Vietnam. There's a lot of interest in working with Vietnam to improve their procedures. And so what we see right now in Vietnam is the government moving in a very good direction, and doing so very seriously. It will, however, be quite some time before Vietnam has and has implemented a new and good adoption program.

I think you were first and then --

QUESTION: Thank you. Is there a different category as far as the adoption program concerned from India to the U.S., or are there any cases of – because I heard in the past that the – it is very difficult – somebody to bring – as far as adoption is concerned. Or is there some kind of criteria, how old one should be for adoption?

MS. BOND: The question has to do with adoptions from India. And we are working very closely with the Indian authorities to make sure that those adoptions that occur are taking place in full conformity with our law and Indian law. I think some of the problems that have come up have been when American citizens of Indian origin adopt in India, and without realizing that they shouldn't, they sometimes adopt as Indian citizens instead of as Americans as foreigners.

And they – that procedure is different from the procedures for foreign citizens adopting Indian children. And because of various steps that they take, none of them meant to be wrong, they can sometimes find themselves in a situation where it's very hard to process the paperwork for the child to come to the United States. So we've been working with Indian authorities to try to make sure that courts know that they can't process as a local domestic adoption a situation where the child is intending to come to the United States and live here.

QUESTION: But as far as somebody in the U.S., whether it's a U.S. Citizen or green card holder, it's the same rules or it's only U.S. Citizen can --

MS. BOND: You have to be a United States Citizen to adopt a foreign-born child and bring that child to the United States and --

QUESTION: And finally – and – I'm sorry --

MS. BOND: No, fine.

QUESTION: Finally, any age limit, how old one should be to – for adoption?

MS. BOND: Well, those rules are set by individual countries, and I don't know offhand, although I can – I would like to take this opportunity to refer you to our excellent website, adoption.state.gov, which gives a great deal of information, including country-specific information of the type that you were asking.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS. BOND: You had one in --

QUESTION: Yeah. Which countries do you see the sharpest increase in children ready for adoption? Is it related to conflict or poverty such as Zimbabwe?

MS. BOND: Well, the – one country that I could point to that had a sharp increase this year is Ethiopia, where the numbers that – it was up about 30 percent, and let me just – the – it was just over 2,200 children who were adopted this year from Ethiopia. That is not related to conflict. By and large, conflict is not one of the issues that tends to lead to a spike in adoptions, because children may be separated from their families but haven't necessarily permanently lost those families as a result of population movements.

So we are watching adoptions and examining the situation in Ethiopia very carefully, because it's a very serious concern when you – if you see the number of adoptions start to increase sharply, you want to be sure that the infrastructure if that country is equipped to monitor and carefully vet every one of those cases. Rapid growth isn't necessarily a good thing.

QUESTION: You are mentioning experiences from other continents. How is the experience here in the Western Hemisphere between Latin American countries and the U.S.?

MS. BOND: When the United States joined The Hague Convention in April 2008, that made us a Hague partner for quite a few countries which prefer to limit their adoption interchanges with fellow – to fellow Hague countries. So there are some countries where we – American are now eligible to adopt that they might not have been before. And developing those contacts and those relationships is not something, again, that happens overnight. But I think that we may see a shift in some countries of more interest in looking for homes for children in the United States if they haven't been able to have them adopted locally.

More generally, we have Guatemala, which is a country in which new adoptions cannot begin at this point. Guatemala is a Hague country and they are working to establish Hague-compliant procedures --

QUESTION: In Mexico?

MS. BOND: Mexico is a country where there are surprisingly few adoptions to the United States, and that is – it's surprising in the sense that we have – we share such a long border. But there is a pretty strong reluctance in Mexico to allow children to be adopted by foreign families, even Mexican American families. And so by and large, the majority of the adoptions that we see are intra-family adoptions, not adoptions by people who are unrelated to the child.

QUESTION: On Ethiopia, you're not entirely clear what's causing the spike of adoptions?

MS. BOND: Well, I think what's causing the spike of adoptions is that there are, first of all, many children in the country who are homeless and/or living in institutions and need homes. And there are people who are working to try to identify those children and match them with people in the United States and in other countries who are interested in adoption. Our concern about it is that you can easily find yourself in a situation where it's difficult to tell the difference between children who genuinely don't have a family and those who have been documented to look like they don't.

And unless you have the host government with – well equipped to investigate itself, to document, to lock in the identity of these children, then it can be very hard to prevent the missed documentation of children, and situations where, for example, birth parents are coerced or persuaded to relinquish their children for money or not, but – when it's something that they wouldn't have considered doing if someone hadn't been pressuring them to do it. Obviously, that's not something that we want.

QUESTION: So there are some suspicions maybe that there's a racket going on or –

MS. BOND: It's something that the Ethiopian Government is carefully looking at and so are we and so is every other government whose citizens are adopting there. Ukraine, as it happens, is another country where we saw a 30 percent increase in adoptions last year. In the case of Ukraine, however, that's not – it's not something that we see as a trend. The numbers tend to go up and down a bit. So it can be hard to know whether you're definitely seeing a movement in one direction or the other.

QUESTION: Let me just follow on quickly, if you don't mind, please. What we want to know clearly, not just from one particular country (inaudible), let's say from around the globe. As far as criteria for – like it's a conflict or poverty or what causes or brings those children for adoption basically to the U.S.? Is it the regional conflicts? You are saying (inaudible) or elsewhere, war or homeless or the parents are dying and that – I mean, what are the major causes of the adoption of people (inaudible) of people, or children coming here?

MS. BOND: All right. The question is what are the typical reasons that children are placed for inter-country adoption. And when you talk about countries around the world, including the United States, which also has children that are adopted by foreign families and leave here to go and live in a foreign country --

QUESTION: Yeah. I'm sorry, let's say India or let's say sometimes they say -- they seek asylum. What's the difference between asylums or other adoption for children, let's say? Are there children also in that category or for --

MS. BOND: Okay. Let me get to that question in a moment, if I may. The reasons that children are available for adoption by foreign citizens vary in different countries. In China, typically the reason has been that there were children, little girls, who were born and placed for adoption by families who were hoping that they might have a son.

And the fact is that -- there was a reference in one question to age requirements and other requirements being imposed on adopting parents -- the number of children available for adoption in China has diminished. And the number of people who are interested in adopting in China is much higher than the number of children that are -- that need homes. And that's one reason that the Chinese Government imposed the changes and the requirements for adopting parents. They were simply trying to reduce the pool of all well-qualified people who were applying to adopt. They had many more than they could vet and many more than they needed.

In some other countries, the children are in care because of local poverty. But what's important is that in some countries, children may be placed in institutions by their families because the families know that's a place where the children will be fed and cared for and educated. And there are countries where the families then anticipate that the children will return home when they're a little bit older, maybe 10 or 12, old enough to contribute to the family and help their parents.

And so that's one of the things that we have to be on guard against. The fact that a child is in an orphanage and has been there for some time doesn't make him an orphan in the sense -- well, in any sense, he's not a child who needs a home. He has a family.

I think -- I hope that that's helpful in terms of the --

QUESTION: Yeah, only about asylum, if -- if you had any case of the child or somebody had asked asylum for a child rather than adoption.

MS. BOND: The question is about whether children also come into the United States as asylees, as people who are seeking asylum from our government as opposed to adoption. Getting asylum is a very different sort of process. And in order to apply for asylum, a person has to show that he is facing some sort of persecution or threat in

his own country. Typically, unaccompanied children would not be likely to apply for asylum. That would be rare.

MR. TONER: We have time for just one more question.

QUESTION: Can I just ask very quickly for you to speak in a little more detail about your comment that some other countries are approaching the United States about adopting American children? Who are those countries and how many American kids are adopted overseas?

MS. BOND: Since we joined The Hague, so since April of 2008, there are 71 American children who have been adopted by foreign families. Thirty-seven of those were adopted under The Hague, so that means that they were adopted to Hague partner countries and the adoption began after April 1, 2008 – the work on it, because as you know, it takes months to complete these things. So we're still at a stage where the majority of outgoing adoptions are non-Hague, but we anticipate that they're going to be primarily Hague.

The typical countries – Canada, Western Europe, Australia, countries that are our Hague partners and where local adoption opportunities are very limited, they're very – relatively few children available for adoption. To their credit, several of the governments that have approached us have said that they are particularly interested in identifying waiting children in foster care as candidates for adoption by their citizens. They are not trying to compete for healthy newborn infants.

MR. TONER: Thank you very much, I appreciate it.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(end transcript)

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*WPD108 11/23/2009

Transcript: Interview with PEW Center's Manik Roy, Part 1: Waxman-Markey Bill
() (1764)

(begin transcript)

This is an America.gov podcast (
http://stream.state.gov/streamvol/libmedia/usinfo/4770/eng/ia_eng_112009_cop_roybill.mp3).

For print versions of articles, multimedia and subscription information, visit www.america.gov.

Manik Roy:

I think the most significant departure is that this is not just an energy bill, it's a climate bill as well. This is the first time that we see Congress dealing with the fact that climate policy and energy policy are inextricably linked.

Narrator:

In the first of a two-part series on the politics of climate change in the United States, America.gov discusses the American Clean Energy and Security Act and how energy legislation is shaping up in the U.S. Senate. Joining us is Manik Roy, vice president of federal government outreach for the Pew Center on Global Climate Change in Washington, D.C.

Energy and climate change were two of the top priorities for the Obama administration when it took office in January 2009. In June 2009, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the American Clean Energy and Security Act, also known as the Waxman-Markey Bill after its two sponsors: Democrats Henry Waxman of California and Edward Markey of Massachusetts. In his June 27th weekly address to the American people, President Obama laid out the benefits that the bill hopes to achieve.

President Obama:

Yesterday, the House of Representatives passed a historic piece of legislation that will open the door to a clean energy economy and a better future for America. The energy bill that passed the House will finally create a set of incentives that will spark a clean energy transformation in our economy. It will spur the development of low-carbon sources of energy. Everything from wind, solar and geothermal power to safer nuclear energy and cleaner coal. It will spur new energy savings like the efficient windows and other materials that reduce heating costs in the winter and cooling costs in the summer. And most importantly, it will make possible the creation of millions of new jobs. This legislation has also been carefully written to address the concerns that many have expressed in the past. Instead of increasing the deficit, it's paid for by the polluters who currently emit dangerous carbon emissions. It provides assistance to businesses and families as they make the gradual transition to clean energy technologies. It gives rural communities and farmers the opportunity to participate in climate solutions and generate new income. And above all, it will protect consumers from the costs of this transition.

Narrator:

This new legislation sets out a policy to cut U.S. carbon dioxide emissions 17 percent from 2005 levels by 2020 and 83 percent by 2050 — targets comparable to those set by European Union nations and other developed countries. And, like the European Union, there is a major similarity in how the legislation will provide incentives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Manik Roy:

At the heart of the climate aspect of this bill is a greenhouse gas cap and trade program. To us, this is a terrific division of responsibility: government sets the environmental objective and the private market decides how to meet the objective. There's no government regulator telling you how many tons you're allowed to emit this year. That's up to you as long as you can buy the pieces of paper to cover your emissions. And there's no government person coming in and telling you what machinery to put in there. You're allowed to innovate, you're allowed tremendous flexibility and inventors, investors are rewarded basically for being as clean as they can.

Narrator:

Many in the United States would prefer that the federal government use a carbon tax instead of a trading scheme to put a price on carbon. Roy helps us understand the differences between the two approaches.

Manik Roy:

Cap and trade is like a tax in that it'll raise the price of uncontrolled emissions of carbon dioxide, but it's different from a tax in that a tax brings money into the government, then you spend money on government programs. 85 percent of the allowance value under the cap and trade program that passed the House would initially go out of government; it would be given for free out. So in that respect it's not a tax. And with a tax, government sets the price of the piece of paper essentially and you hope that you're hitting the emissions target that you want. With a cap, one thing you're certain of is the emissions decline and the market comes up with the price.

Narrator:

While the president has expressed confidence that progress is being made to move an energy bill through the Senate, it is ultimately up to Senate leadership, not the president, to determine how quickly a bill moves from its committee to a Senate vote.

Even if an energy bill passes the Senate in the next few months, it is unlikely to be identical to the bill that passed the House in June. The two versions would go to a congressional conference committee where representatives from both chambers

work to reconcile the differences. The new bill that emerges from the conference committee then must be approved again by both the House and Senate before it can go to the president for his signature into law.

Manik Roy:

The Senate bill – their bill actually draws very heavily from the bill that was passed by the House. One difference is that, where the House would cap U.S. emissions at a level 17 percent below what U.S. emissions were in 2005, the Boxer-Kerry bill actually would bring the emissions down to 20 percent below 2005 levels. So it's just a little bit more aggressive environmentally. The House bill would initially give 85 percent of those allowances away for free. The Senate Bill is silent at the moment on the distribution of allowance value and there are different theories there. I think most people feel that Senators Boxer and Kerry are doing that because they're still sort of negotiating with their colleagues about the right mix there. The distribution of allowance allocation, because it is so important economically, is really one of the places where some of the most intense negotiations are going to go in the passage of this bill, and I should say that you can use that economic value to provide for transition for areas of the country and for various industry sectors that are used to high-emitting energy sources and now we want to move them to low-emitting energy sources but we don't want to destroy them during that transition. You can use that value to protect consumers. You can use that value to fund research and development and deployment of clean technologies, to start adaptation to various climate impacts, not just in the United States but internationally. There are a lot of very legitimate uses to which you can put this allowance value.

Narrator:

The question of how to distribute emissions allowances – whether to give them away or auction them – remains one of the principal issues for lawmakers in large part due to the differences in regional energy use in the United States.

Manik Roy:

President Obama's initial thought on the way to give out the allowances was to auction them. What he wanted to do was auction 100 percent of the allowances and then use the revenue to provide for tax cuts, basically. The reason he had to step away from that is that because we generate electricity from the Midwest and the South mostly from coal and less so from other areas of the country, an auction would have disproportionately raised money from the Midwest and the South and then allocated the benefit of that money across the country. It would have essentially been a transfer of wealth from those parts of the country to the rest of the country. People in the Midwest and the South – yes, they're using coal, but they started using coal at a time when nobody was really focused on climate change, 30-40-50 years ago, so they're innocent. And so, we want as a country to provide a transition to get those regions of the country and the manufacturers who depend on

that cheap energy, we want to provide a transition to allow them go to the cleaner sources of energy. There's no thought of punishing people here, for that.

Narrator:

U.S. officials have long been familiar with the idea of using trading systems to reduce pollutants. The federal government has also observed regional initiatives in the U.S. and greenhouse gas trading systems overseas. We asked Roy how closely U.S. officials have followed developments in the European Union's emissions trading scheme.

Manik Roy:

I think they looked very closely. The Europeans did something that I think is very commendable, and actually I would say that Europe has just been the world leader on this by being the area that committed to reducing its emissions ahead of everybody including the United States. But then I would say specifically, in the way they carried out this emissions trading system, it was really remarkable. They decided to set up a trial period of this emissions trading system, 2005, 2006, 2007, and they found a few problems with the system. They did not have good data on what entities were emitting greenhouse gas, what the total emissions were. They overestimated that so even before people knew this, there was a glut of emissions allowances. Remember I talked about the stacks of paper there – how you hand that paper out through the economy has – it doesn't have any environmental implications, but it has huge economic implications. So they had done some things with the distribution in good faith that they found later did not make sense. So they've corrected those two problems. They seem to have ironed all those problems out. I think we've learned a lot from their experience, I think we've learned a lot from our own experience with SO₂. There are 10 Northeastern states here in the United States – the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, called “RGGI” - they are trading carbon dioxide emissions from power plants so we're learning from that experience as well.

Be sure to join us for part two of our conversation with Manik Roy, when we'll discuss energy politics in America and how different interests are influencing climate and energy policy in Washington, D.C.

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(end transcript)

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*WPD109 11/23/2009

Text: Presidential Proclamation for Thanksgiving Day 2009

(Thanksgiving is a time to renew bonds with one another, Obama says) (478)

(begin text)

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

November 23, 2009

THANKSGIVING DAY, 2009

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A PROCLAMATION

What began as a harvest celebration between European settlers and indigenous communities nearly four centuries ago has become our cherished tradition of Thanksgiving. This day's roots are intertwined with those of our Nation, and its history traces the American narrative.

Today, we recall President George Washington, who proclaimed our first national day of public thanksgiving to be observed "by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God," and President Abraham Lincoln, who established our annual Thanksgiving Day to help mend a fractured Nation in the midst of civil war. We also recognize the contributions of Native Americans, who helped the early colonists survive their first harsh winter and continue to strengthen our Nation. From our earliest days of independence, and in times of tragedy and triumph, Americans have come together to celebrate Thanksgiving.

As Americans, we hail from every part of the world. While we observe traditions from every culture, Thanksgiving Day is a unique national tradition we all share. Its spirit binds us together as one people, each of us thankful for our common blessings.

As we gather once again among loved ones, let us also reach out to our neighbors and fellow citizens in need of a helping hand. This is a time for us to renew our bonds with one another, and we can fulfill that commitment by serving our communities and our Nation throughout the year. In doing so, we pay tribute to our country's men and women in uniform who set an example of service that inspires us all. Let us be guided by the legacy of those who have fought for the freedoms for which we give thanks, and be worthy heirs to the noble tradition of goodwill shown on this day.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United

States, do hereby proclaim Thursday, November 26, 2009, as a National Day of Thanksgiving. I encourage all the people of the United States to come together, whether in our homes, places of worship, community centers, or any place where family, friends and neighbors may gather, with gratitude for all we have received in the past year; to express appreciation to those whose lives enrich our own; and to share our bounty with others.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twentieth day of November, in the year of our Lord two thousand nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-fourth.

BARACK OBAMA

(end text)

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*WPD110 11/23/2009

Transcript: U.S. and Russian Negotiators Cutting Nuclear Weapons, Launchers
() (299)

(begin transcript)

President Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev agreed in April to reduce nuclear arsenals below the levels called for in the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START I. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said at a press conference October 13 in Moscow with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov that the United States and Russia are making progress in replacing the current treaty and easing perceived tensions over nuclear weapons.

Clinton said she is looking forward to Russia's leadership in the Global Nuclear Security Summit next April, and that the global initiative to secure vulnerable nuclear materials is another important joint endeavor. Lavrov agreed that the technical negotiating teams working on the successor agreement to START I have shown "considerable progress."

President Obama has said that the world's two leading nuclear powers must lead by example. Obama and Medvedev signed a joint understanding to reduce nuclear warheads and the means to deliver them by up to a third from current levels. Between them, the U.S. and Russia own more than 95 percent of the world's nuclear weapons.

The mutual agreement to reduce nuclear arsenals is part of a broader goal of reducing nuclear tensions across the globe and preventing rogue states and extremists from obtaining some of the world's most dangerous weapons. Obama and Medvedev said they wanted to take concrete steps toward the long-term goal of disarmament while sending a powerful message to countries such as North Korea and Iran, whose controversial nuclear development programs are subject to U.N. Security Council sanctions and expanded scrutiny.

The United States and Russia have agreed to reduce their strategic nuclear warheads and the means to deliver them, which includes long-range strategic bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles and nuclear-powered submarines.

(end transcript)

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*WPD111 11/23/2009

Transcript: Ambassador DiCarlo on Peace, Stability in Bosnia-Herzegovina (DiCarlo says U.S. supports Euro-Atlantic integration for future prosperity) (913)

(begin transcript)

USUN PRESS RELEASE
November 23, 2009

AS DELIVERED

Remarks by Ambassador Rosemary A. DiCarlo, U.S. Alternate Representative for Special Political Affairs, During a Security Council Debate on Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the Security Council Chamber, November 23, 2009

Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to welcome His Excellency, Nikola Spiric, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, back to the Council, and thank him for his comments. Let me also welcome High Representative Valentin Inzko and thank him for his comprehensive briefing and express our gratitude for his dedication and hard work. The United States fully supports the actions taken by the High Representative to implement the Dayton Peace Accords.

Mr. President, Bosnia-Herzegovina has made extraordinary progress in the years since the war that tore the country apart in the early 1990s and caused such suffering for all its people. Since the signing of the Peace Agreement 14 years ago, Bosnians have worked hard to rebuild their economy and infrastructure, and they have begun the long, difficult process of reconciliation.

The country has assumed its obligations as a responsible member of the international community. It has dedicated itself to playing a constructive role in the region and the world.

The members of NATO have welcomed it into the Partnership for Peace, and Bosnia-Herzegovina has signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union. At the United Nations, we are proud to sit on the Human Rights Council with Bosnia-Herzegovina, and we look forward to welcoming it to the Security Council in January.

Mr. President, the United States is committed to helping the Bosnian people achieve their aspirations to become members of the European Union and NATO. In this spirit, the United States and the European Union have engaged with party leaders, civil society representatives, and parliamentary committees in Bosnia-Herzegovina in what has become known as the Butmir process, so named since meetings of these groups took place at the military base outside of Sarajevo that has served the headquarters of international peacekeepers since IFOR. The Butmir process is an effort to help Bosnian leaders not only resolve the remaining issues in the “five-plus-two” agenda set by the Peace Implementation Council for closure of the Office of the High Representative, but also to reform the Bosnian constitution within the Dayton framework so that the state can advance toward joining the European Union and NATO.

For all the distance that Bosnia-Herzegovina has come, several aspects of the High Representative’s report are indeed troubling.

First, we are greatly concerned that very limited progress has been made toward meeting the outstanding requirements that the Peace Implementation Council set for the transition from the Office of the High Representative to an enhanced European Union Special Representative mission. We are similarly troubled by the lack of progress on the priorities and conditions required for Euro-Atlantic integration.

Second, Bosnia-Herzegovina has witnessed a sharp and dangerous increase in nationalist political rhetoric that could stir up anger and resentment — and undermine the very state institutions that must be strengthened for the country to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Such divisive and aggressive rhetoric is particularly troubling as the campaign season for the October 2010 presidential and parliamentary elections approaches.

Third, the High Representative has noted that war crimes prosecutions and reform of the justice sector have suffered due to the inability of leaders to reach political decisions that advance national goals.

We agree with the highest state-level judicial and prosecutorial officials: the mandates of international judges and prosecutors in the war crimes and organized crime chambers of the State Court and prosecutor's office should be extended past December. Extending the mandates of these international officials is critical to the successful completion of related investigations. The practical, political, and budgetary preconditions that would let this vital work continue without international assistance are not yet in place.

Finally, and fourth Mr. President, we are deeply concerned about the lack of support for the authority of the Office of the High Representative. Let me state once again that the United States continues to fully support the High Representative and his work. We look forward to the day when the office can transition to an enhanced EU Special Representative mission, but first, the agreed-upon reform agenda — the five objectives and the two conditions — must be completed. A successful transition will require action and support from all Bosnians, including the country's leaders.

As the High Representative points out, Bosnian leaders have taken some positive steps recently, including the adoption of legislation that will help fulfill the conditions necessary for visa-free travel within the European Union and steps toward resolving issues among the entities that had threatened the state electric-transmission company, Transco.

Finally, let me note the one-year extension of the mandate of the European Union's peacekeeping force, EUFOR, which this Council adopted last week. As High Representative Inzko has pointed out, EUFOR plays a key role in contributing to a safe and secure environment. We believe that EUFOR should remain in its current executive mandate and configuration for the time being.

Mr. President, the United States remains fully committed to supporting peace and stability in Bosnia-Herzegovina and to supporting its greater integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. We stand ready to assist the Bosnian people in these efforts.

Thank you, Mr. President.

(end transcript)

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*WPD112 11/23/2009

Text: Fifteen Years of U.S.-Brazil Science and Technology Cooperation
(Joint commission meeting brings together government officials, researchers) (422)

(begin text)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
November 20, 2009

MEDIA NOTE

U.S., Brazil Celebrate Fifteen Years of Science and Technology Cooperation

United States and Brazilian representatives met today at the U.S. Department of State to mark 15 years of science and technology cooperation at a U.S.-Brazil Joint Commission Meeting on Science and Technology Cooperation. Dr. John Holdren, Assistant to the President for Science and Technology and Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, led the U.S. delegation which included high-ranking representatives from more than a dozen U.S. government agencies and research institutions. Minister Sergio Rezende of the Brazilian Ministry for Science and Technology headed the Brazilian delegation.

Dr. Nina Fedoroff, Science and Technology Adviser to the Secretary of State and Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, made welcoming remarks at the opening session. Dr. John Holdren described the Obama Administration's strategy for American innovation and presented the United States government's newly invigorated outlook for scientific and technological cooperation. Minister Rezende provided an overview of Brazil's expanding science and technology initiatives as well as directions for future U.S.-Brazilian collaboration.

The U.S. and Brazilian delegations discussed a range of ongoing bilateral cooperation and joint research endeavors relating to space and earth observation, climate change, agriculture, biofuels, emerging green energy technologies, and public health. Delegates also agreed that it would be mutually beneficial to increase university-to-university student and faculty exchanges and to promote science and technology innovation as engines of economic development. Delegates also explored further collaboration in agricultural research between the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Brazilian Agency for International Cooperation, and the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA) to benefit Mozambique.

The Governments of the United States and Brazil signed two cooperative memoranda during the one-day Joint Commission Meeting. Dr. Patrick Gallagher, Director of the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology and Dr. João Alziro Herz da Jornada from the Brazilian National Institute of Metrology, Standardization and Industrial Quality of the Ministry of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade signed a memorandum furthering technical cooperation in chemical, physical and engineering measurement sciences.

Dr. Richard Wyatt, Director of the U.S. National Institutes of Health's Fogarty International Center, and Dr. Jorge Almeida Guimarães, President of the Brazilian

Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education Foundation, presided at the memorandum signing ceremony on post-doctoral training and professional development in the health sciences.

(end text)

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*WPD113 11/23/2009

Thanksgiving Day a Time for Reflection, Gratitude, Sharing

(American tradition rooted in 1621 New England harvest celebration) (987)

Washington — Thanksgiving Day in the United States is possibly the premier U.S. family celebration — typically celebrated at home or in a community setting and marked with a substantial feast. Thanksgiving provides an occasion for reunions of friends and families, and it affords Americans a shared opportunity to express gratitude for the freedoms they enjoy as well as food, shelter and other good things.

Many Americans also take time to prepare and serve meals to the needy at soup kitchens, churches and homeless shelters. Others donate to food drives or participate in charity fundraisers; in fact, hundreds of nonprofit groups throughout the country hold Thanksgiving Day charity races called “Turkey Trots.”

And on a more worldly note, Thanksgiving marks the beginning of the “holiday season” that continues through New Year’s Day. The Friday after Thanksgiving is one of the busiest shopping days of the year.

Every year, the president issues a proclamation (<http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2009/November/20091123150727eaifas0.5840723.html>) designating the fourth Thursday in November (November 26 this year) a National Day of Thanksgiving. It is an official federal holiday, and virtually all government offices and schools — and most businesses — are closed.

“As Americans, we hail from every part of the world,” President Obama says in his proclamation. “While we observe traditions from every culture, Thanksgiving Day is a unique national tradition we all share. Its spirit binds us together as one people, each of us thankful for our common blessings.”

THE FIRST THANKSGIVING

A variant of the harvest festivals celebrated in many parts of the world, Thanksgiving is popularly traced to a 1621 feast shared by the English Pilgrims who founded the

Plymouth Colony (located in present-day Massachusetts) and members of the Wampanoag Indian tribe.

The Pilgrims had arrived in 1620, crossing the Atlantic Ocean to separate themselves from the official Church of England and practice freely their particular form of Puritanism. Arriving at Plymouth Colony too late to grow many crops, and lacking fresh food, the Pilgrims suffered terribly during the winter of 1620-1621. Half the colony died from disease. The following spring, local Wampanoag Indians taught the colonists how to grow corn (maize) and other local crops, and also helped the newcomers master hunting and fishing. The Wampanoag were a people with a sophisticated society who had occupied the region for thousands of years, says the National Museum of the American Indian.

Because they harvested bountiful crops of corn, barley, beans and pumpkins the Pilgrims had much to be thankful for in the fall of 1621. The colonists and their Wampanoag benefactors — who brought deer to roast — held a harvest feast to express gratitude for God’s blessings. Although it is known that the colonists provided fowl for the feast, the rest of the menu remains an educated guess; the Pilgrims likely offered turkey, waterfowl and other wild game, seafood such as mussels, lobster and eels, vegetables, grapes and plums, and nuts.

President Obama’s proclamation recognizes “the contributions of Native Americans, who helped the early colonists survive their first harsh winter and continue to strengthen our Nation.” It is a reminder of the Native American role in the first American Thanksgiving, a feast held to thank the Indians for sharing their knowledge and skill. Without that help, the first Pilgrims likely would not have survived.

The legacy of giving thanks, particularly with a shared feast, has survived the centuries. Several U.S. presidents — starting with George Washington in 1789 — issued Thanksgiving proclamations, but it wasn’t until President Abraham Lincoln’s 1863 proclamation that Thanksgiving became an annual national holiday. He called for it to be celebrated on the last Thursday of November. It was in the dark days of the Civil War, but Lincoln said that difficult times made it even more appropriate for blessings to be "gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American people."

A 1941 congressional resolution moved it to the fourth Thursday to assure a longer post-Thanksgiving, pre-Christmas shopping season in years when there are five Thursdays in November.

Each year, the president also “pardons” a Thanksgiving turkey — actually two turkeys, since one is a backup in case the other decides to misbehave during the ceremony. The two fowl, spared from the oven, live out the rest of their lives at a children’s petting zoo.

TRADITIONS OF THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving sees the most air and car travel of the year as families and friends try to reunite for the holiday. Many Americans enjoy a local Thanksgiving parade, or the annual Macy's department store parade, televised live from New York City. Others watch televised American football. Overseas, U.S. troops are served a traditional Thanksgiving dinner.

Turkey with stuffing, mashed potatoes and gravy, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie are staples of the Thanksgiving feast, although there are meat substitutes such as "tofurkey" (combining the words tofu and turkey), a loaf made from seitan (wheat protein) or tofu (soybean protein).

Thousands of charitable organizations serve hot Thanksgiving dinners to the needy — and to anyone who shows up — and millions of frozen turkeys are donated to families each year.

"As we gather once again among loved ones, let us also reach out to our neighbors and fellow citizens in need of a helping hand," says President Obama. "This is a time for us to renew our bonds with one another."

He also asks Americans to "pay tribute to our country's men and women in uniform who set an example of service that inspires us all. Let us be guided by the legacy of those who have fought for the freedoms for which we give thanks."

For more information see the U.S. Census Bureau fact sheet on Thanksgiving (http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/014332.html) and the National Museum of the American Indian poster

American Indian Perspectives on Thanksgiving (http://www.americanindian.si.edu/education/files/thanksgiving_poster.pdf) (PDF, 4.7MB). Also see "An Overview of U.S. Holidays (<http://www.america.gov/st/diversity-english/2008/January/20080113151228abretnuh0.5784265.html>)."

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