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PRESS BRIEFING
BY TONY SNOW

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MR. SNOW: Good afternoon. A couple notes, and then I'll be happy to take questions. The President's schedule today: Normal morning briefings; he's consulting with members of Congress, and continuing to work on the speech for tomorrow night. That is the schedule.

Also, the President has selected Fred Fielding to serve as Counsel to the President, replacing Harriet Miers. We have a statement out to that effect. Rather than my reading it out, you can read the statement.

Let's see what else we have. The Domestic Policy Council later today is going to release a report that highlights some new alternative research studies that advance stem cell science without destroying human life; exciting work being done in the area, including an alternative approach to using embryonic stem cells that was reported just this week. The President's policy strikes a balance of supporting funding -- federal funding for research into stem cells, while avoiding federal funding that would encourage the destruction of embryos. And we encourage you to review the report.

And I'll take questions. Terry.

Q Did the President consult with the Hill before the military operation in Somalia?

MR. SNOW: Number one -- let me put it this way: We know that there was a military -- we can confirm that there

was a military operation overnight on Sunday in Somalia. We refer you to the Department of Defense for all other details. I don't believe there was a consultation on that. I'm aware of none.

Q Okay. And on Iraq, switching topics, can you say why the -- what the President's rationale is for sending in more troops to Iraq when --

MR. SNOW: I will be happy to talk about rationales and everything else once we have released publicly what the President intends to do.

Q Can you give us an idea of how the President will try to persuade the public that his plan in whatever form we hear tomorrow night is the right course when so many Americans, according to polling, are very concerned about more troops in Iraq?

MR. SNOW: Well, Americans I think are concerned about making sure that we succeed in Iraq, as are members of Congress. What the President is going to do is to talk about the situation in Iraq, how it has evolved, how the challenges have evolved, and he will also talk about the importance of developing capacity so that the Iraqis have the ability to handle their security needs and will continue to have a democracy that grows and flourishes, protecting the rights of all, creating economic opportunities and the like.

So I think it's important to allow Americans to see not only that, but also how this fits into the broader war on terror. Iraq is the central front in the war on terror. Why is it important? What does it mean? What can success breed? What does failure mean? A lot of those questions I think Americans want to hear answered, and they will be answered in the President's address.

Q Those things we have heard before from the President. Is there something specific now that you will try to do or say or demonstrate that would be more persuasive?

MR. SNOW: Yes.

Bret.

Q Tony, is that all you're going to have on Somalia, as far as pointing us back to the Pentagon and the ongoing operation?

MR. SNOW: Yes.

Q You don't have any other details?

MR. SNOW: No.

Q How about how the President found out, et cetera?

MR. SNOW: You know what, stupid me, I forgot to do the process stuff. We'll try to find out.

Q Okay. Let me change gears then. Senator Kennedy today is going to propose legislation denying billions needed to send more troops to the war unless Congress agrees first. This is even before the President lays out his plan. Can you respond preemptively?

MR. SNOW: No, I really can't. I'll take a look -- we'll take a look at it. I'm sure that later in the week we'll have an opportunity to respond more specifically. And I have not -- I haven't looked at it; I don't know if the President has looked at it; I haven't talked to our Leg Affairs people about it. Give us a little time to take a look.

Q What about this overall premise that Democrats and some are considering holding back money to troops --

MR. SNOW: Well, look, Democrats are going to have to make a choice here and they're going to have to decide where they stand in terms of two issues: Number one, do you want Iraq to succeed, and, if so, what does that mean? And, number two, do you believe in supporting the troops as you say, and how do you express that support? Those are questions that will be answered in the process of public debate and also -- and a lot of other considerations. So we'll just have to see how it plays out.

As you've seen, Bret, there is disagreement within both parties about how to proceed. But I think one of the unifying elements can be, when the President does lay out the way forward, it offers an opportunity for everybody to have a full and thoughtful debate about this. Right now

many of the debates continue to be conducted in a vacuum -- anticipation that the President is going to say something. And it makes more sense to wait until the President lays out not only military, but also diplomatic, economic, and other actions that he intends to take, and to put them in the broader context of the war on terror and also the context of the security of Americans right here on our own soil.

Q Last one for me. Yesterday you hinted that the President is going to essentially lay out specifics of why Iraq is important to the U.S. as far as our safety. Is that accurate?

MR. SNOW: Well, specifics -- no, we've often described what happens if you have a failed state in Iraq, and we'll continue to make the point, which is, if you've got a failed state in Iraq -- let's draw the image for the American people again -- got Iraq; on one side to its east is Iran, to the west is Syria, two primary terror states who have made it clear that they're going to go after democracies throughout the region. That would include Lebanon, that would include the Palestinian areas. They're trying to send a message that democracy cannot succeed in that part of the world. They're trying to intimidate their neighbors.

If you have an Iraq, with the world's second largest oil reserves, capable of generating incredible amounts of revenue that terrorists can use both to blackmail the West and also to purchase weapons that can be used against anybody else, that creates a situation that's a direct threat to us. So that's really what I was talking about. There is not going to be sort of a roster of specifics, but it is worth reminding the American people of what the stakes are and how they do fit in to the larger war on terror.

Yes, Martha.

Q Back to Kelly's question. The President, beginning in November of '05, I believe, gave a series of speeches on the strategy for victory in Iraq. The American people didn't seem to buy that, the situation in Iraq went downhill. Do you worry about the President's credibility? And is there anything in this speech, or in this plan, that

is really, truly new, or is it trying things that have already been tried before?

MR. SNOW: Martha, I will let you judge it, and I will let you ask questions once we've laid it all out. The President understands, and I think you understand, that a war is not a fixed thing that proceeds along a predetermined or straight path, and as situations change, you must adjust. One of the key changes in Iraq last year was the bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samara and the subsequent flaring up of sectarian violence within Iraq. A year ago a lot of people were feeling optimistic, including members of both parties on Capitol Hill, including people within the military, because here you had the prospects -- you had free elections in Iraq, things seemed to be moving along a pretty good path.

So it's interesting, you can pick whichever wedge of time you want, but there has also been some change in public opinion since late 2005, and in early 2006 there was a sense of optimism. But guess what. The terrorists did succeed in unleashing sectarian violence, and now that has created a new set of realities that one must contend with. The President will talk about that.

I'm simply not going to try to give you a general characterization of how it will be received. My sense is that the American people want to hear what the President has to say. And we're going to spend a lot of time talking about it, because it's not a simple, you know, one-bullet-point plan. There's a lot in it, and as a result, we are going to have an opportunity to take a look at each and all of the aspects.

Q On sectarian violence, is that something the United States should have been prepared for? Or, like the insurgency, you can argue that, who knew? Should they have been prepared for sectarian violence, because we had a letter from Zarqawi, who basically laid out his plan to foment sectarian violence?

MR. SNOW: Well, I don't know, Martha. Apparently, people in Iraq were not quite prepared for it either. The fact is, it happened. And whatever backseat generalship one might wish to practice, the fact is we have important business in Iraq with very high stakes, and the focus now

is to figure out a way forward that is going to lead to success.

Jim.

Q Tony, as you said, a public debate will probably ensue here after the President's speech --

MR. SNOW: You think? (Laughter.)

Q Yes.

MR. SNOW: Good chance.

Q And so often in debate, obviously, language is very important. To your mind, is there a difference between an increase in troops, an escalation in troops, a surge in troops? Because in the last 24, 48 hours these words have all started to become weighted.

MR. SNOW: It just started to become weighted? I think a lot of times people are going to try to find a one-word characterization that allows them to make a political point without perhaps diving into the details in trying to give a proper --

Q Well, what's the difference between an escalation and a surge?

MR. SNOW: Well, why don't we talk about characterizations once we have a plan?

Q Because I think it's part of a conversation that's going on right now.

MR. SNOW: I understand that, and, guess what -- it's a conversation, as I've said before, that is a bit in a vacuum and I'm not going to get into the business of preemptively characterizing something that we have not released in full detail.

Q But, somehow, "escalation" has become this Democratic word -- the Democratic Party language.

MR. SNOW: Well, ask the guys who do their focus groups. They're going to have an answer for it. Look, the President is talking about a way forward, and rather than

getting involved in trying to assess a description of a plan that has yet to be released publicly and, therefore, about which I am not in a position to characterize publicly, it seems a little silly for me to start quibbling about adjectives without discussing what they purportedly describe, don't you think?

Q Well, the President apparently told Gordon Smith and others yesterday that the 20,000 troop increase/surge/escalation is part of the deal. So that's why I'm asking specifically about -- we are going to see some kind of increase.

MR. SNOW: Rather than looking for a one-word handle, look at the policy. And, actually, this is your challenge -- you guys do words for a living; figure out -- rather than trying to ask Democratic or even Republican lawmakers what the proper descriptive term is, you figure it out. I mean, you're going to have an opportunity --

Q I'm trying to, but that's what --

MR. SNOW: Yes, but what you're doing is you're listening to what other people are saying and saying, is that the right one? Well, I can't help you on that.

Q Yes, that's exactly what I'm doing --

MR. SNOW: Can't help you on that one.

Q -- I'm listening to other people describe it, and I'm asking the administration, what's the proper word?

MR. SNOW: I understand. But what we will say is, look at it, then we'll talk.

Q Do you have a problem with the word "escalation"?

MR. SNOW: As I said, look at it, we'll talk.

Q Could you take us behind the scenes a little bit of these meetings that the President is having with the lawmakers? Is he now giving final details of his plan, or is he still listening to advice? Just a little bit of the atmosphere.

MR. SNOW: Well, no, because as we've been saying, these are meetings where the ground rules are, we don't tell who is in them and we don't tell what's going on behind the scenes, but they're free to go out and give whatever characterization they may. The important thing to do is to wait until you've got a chance to see the full thing. Look, there are going to be opportunities for members of Congress, Democratic and Republican, to characterize their conversations with the President. It's a good and healthy thing that they're happening.

And furthermore, the President has made it clear that conversations are going to continue to take place. The address the President is going to give to the nation is not the end of the debate, it is the beginning of an important consideration of how we move forward in Iraq in a way that we send a message to the world that the United States is here to finish the important work of securing liberty, and issuing the definitive refutation of terrorist tactics and strategies. And that is the basis on which I think both parties can fruitfully work together.

Q Can you talk about where the address is at this point? You said the President was looking at preliminary drafts. Is it pretty much done? Is he just --

MR. SNOW: We're getting pretty close.

Q Because he still has consultations going on?

MR. SNOW: There are some, but also just -- now it's the point of going through and looking at language and saying, you know, I want this point, or, let's emphasize this one, or, what about this issue? It is more now at the sort of fine-tuning point. But on the other hand, anybody who has ever done a term paper knows you keep working until the very end. And my guess is that there will continue to be tweaks and practices into tomorrow.

Q Is it fair to say, though, even as he still continues to meet with these lawmakers, his mind is essentially made up?

MR. SNOW: What I would direct you to do -- there are two things. I have noted before that when you're talking about a war, the idea that you have your mind made up, that you have absolute -- this is in stone, this is it -- what

you have is a framework for moving forward. And within that framework, there are going to be plenty of opportunities for people to talk and to share their opinions. And the President has made it clear from the very first consultations with Democrats and Republicans that he intends to have more talks. So, to that extent, I think we are going to be open-minded and always looking for good ideas and good, constructive advice.

Q After yesterday's session, and yesterday's were just Republican senators who came, correct?

MR. SNOW: Right.

Q Thad Cochran came out and said, well, I told the President I'd be able to support him, but I was alone, I didn't hear anybody else saying that. Is that an accurate reflection of what happened?

MR. SNOW: You know, as I said, we permit people to come to the sticks and say what they wish. Our ground rules are, we don't talk about it, so I don't talk about it.

Q I'll try and make you talk about it.

MR. SNOW: You'll fail.

Q Is this real consultation, Tony? Senators went in yesterday and came out saying that the President had, effectively, told them what he was going to do, that he was clear about his intentions. Some of these senators had not been in before to talk to the President about his plans for Iraq. So how can you characterize this as consultation?

MR. SNOW: Thank you. As you said, what you're trying to do is to get me to characterize the conversations they've had, and I can't do it, Sheryl.

Q No, I'm asking you to say -- do you believe this is genuine consultation?

MR. SNOW: As I said, Sheryl, it's one of these things that the President has made it clear that he's going to have exchanges of views, but I'm not taking you in the room with them.

(Cell phone rings.) (Laughter.) Does Martha have a hip-hop ring tone? (Laughter.) Play that funky music, white girl. (Laughter.)

Q A nice musical interlude from Martha, but, seriously --can we talk about this issue of consultation? Is the President really soliciting views, and do these lawmakers -- are they having an input into his thinking?

MR. SNOW: Yes, of course. And as I've said before, Sheryl, look, the President still has to make choices and he still has to make decisions, and he still has to lay out a proposal with a way forward. On the other hand, he has made it very clear to one and all that he's interested in hearing from people, he's interested in ideas, and that will continue.

Q But the speech is 30 hours away. That's not that much more time for --

MR. SNOW: I'm not saying that the President is going to go back in and shred it and start over. Again, what I'm saying is the President still continues to have an open mind because this is a way forward. This is not, wave a wand and it's all going to happen. This is a way of talking about the important business of building capacity on the part of the Iraqis to take care of their own security, and to build a strong, independent democracy that really does, as I said, stand as the definitive refutation of terror; and also the example to other countries in the region that hope freedom and democracy are possible and are things that they all ought to pursue.

Go ahead, April.

Q Tony, how far does the President go into the issue of public opinion in weighing this out and in making this new way forward? And, also, what singular group or person has the most influence on the President in his thinking on the way forward?

MR. SNOW: The second question is unanswerable. The President has received a great deal of input from a lot of people, and to try to single one out is probably futile.

As far as public opinion, the President will not shape policy according to public opinion, but he does understand

that it's important to bring the public back to this war and restore public confidence and support for the mission.

Q But the public doesn't want to go back to the war. They want to go away, they --

MR. SNOW: No, April, you --

Q -- the midterm elections, did people -- did they or did they not vote for leaders who basically said they wanted to --

MR. SNOW: April, let me ask you a simple question: Do opinions change?

Q Yes, they do.

MR. SNOW: Do they change on the basis of arguments?

Q They change on the basis of results.

MR. SNOW: Exactly, they change on the basis of results. That is absolutely right. So that's what --

Q The results have been more deaths. We went in supposedly to stop the war on terror -- I mean, to stop terrorism around the world, as a result which stemmed from the 9/11 issue. And everyone is saying now, look, you have more people dying than they did in 9/11, and you have more U.S. soldiers dying and the world is not as safe.

MR. SNOW: I'm not sure the world is less safe. The world is -- I guarantee you the world is less safe if the United States withdraws and leaves a vacuum in Iraq. I guarantee it. And I guarantee everybody in this room is going to be less safe, and everybody in this country is going to be less safe. And that is the challenge the President faces, and it is worth explaining that to the American people.

You see, I think Americans believe in liberty, believe in this nation's destiny as a country that does advance the boundaries of liberty not simply because it is a good and noble thing, but because it is good for us and it is good for future generations. And the President will talk about how this advances that not only noble goal, but one that is of great interest to everybody who worried about their kids

on September 11th, as you and I did, and who worries about how our families are going to be secure in the future.

Q And on Somalia. What is the administration's thought about the containment of al Qaeda in Somalia, since you're not getting into other issues?

MR. SNOW: I think that, again, without talking about military issues, it is pretty clear that this administration continues to go after al Qaeda. We are interested in going after those who have perpetrated acts of violence against Americans, including bombings of embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and we will continue to conduct whatever operations we can to go after that. We've made it clear that this is a global war on terror, and this is a reiteration of the fact that people who think that they're going to try to establish safe haven for al Qaeda anyplace need to realize that we're going to fight them.

John.

Q Thank you, Tony. Two questions on the budget, if I might. First, given the published reports that Karl Rove is betting people that there's no way the administration is going to raise taxes, can we now say --

MR. SNOW: Taxes on Social Security.

Q Taxes on Social Security -- can we now say that taxes are off the table in the negotiations?

MR. SNOW: We never said that they are on the table. What's happening is that there's -- here's what's been going on. Hank Paulson, the Treasury Secretary, has been asked by the President to find out a way to work with members of Congress to deal with something everybody knows needs to be addressed, which is the Social Security system is unsustainable in the long run and, ultimately, unless somebody fixes it, it's going to betray old people and it's going to bankrupt young people. You've got to fix it.

The President has made it clear he doesn't want to raise taxes on Social Security, but he's also said, you got a better idea, let's hear it. The people have interpreted that as a way of saying, oh, there they are, they're going to go ahead and permit a back-door tax increase. So far we haven't heard of anybody proposing tax increases. We'll

let the debate proceed. But you know what the President's bright lines are; he believes that it's important to have an investment component that allows people to take advantage of the far superior rates of return that one gets investing in the marketplace rather than any system like Social Security where, if the fund doesn't have the money you were promised to have, you don't get it. You've got no recourse. So it's important to deal with those problems.

Q Understood, but why don't you simply say, instead of, I'm not ruling it in or I'm not ruling it out, that it's being ruled out?

MR. SNOW: Well, think through it, John. It's interesting to see what people may have to propose and to listen to everybody's proposals. The President has already made his.

Q A follow-up question on it. The Financial Times reports today that the administration is more than considering raising the contributions that richer Americans -- and I'm quoting from the FT -- make to sustain Medicare. True or false?

MR. SNOW: I'm not aware of that. But -- I'm not aware of that.

Q Venezuela President Hugo Chavez said today he's going to nationalize the country's utilities -- utilities that have a significant American stake in them. Any response from the White House?

MR. SNOW: Well, nationalization has a long and inglorious history of failure around the world. We support the Venezuelan people and think this is an unhappy day for them.

Q Tony, this goes to your previous acknowledgment that the President is aware of public anxiety about the situation in Iraq. What would your guidance be to a public that has seen the President stand under a "Mission Accomplished" banner, proclaim an end to major combat operations, the Vice President talking about the "last throes" -- how should the public go into viewing this speech tomorrow?

MR. SNOW: I think the public ought to just listen to what the President has to say. You know that the "Mission Accomplished" banner was put up by members of the USS Abraham Lincoln. And the President, on that very speech, said just the opposite, didn't he? He said it was the end of major combat operations, but he did not say it was the end of operations. Instead, he cautioned people at the time that there would be considerable continued violence in Iraq, and that there would be continued operations for a long period of time. That single episode has been more widely mischaracterized than just about any aspect of the war.

Q We can debate whether the sign should have been there, whether the White House should have not had it there, but the fact is he stood under it and made the speech.

MR. SNOW: You're right, after people had been on a 17-month deployment, and had said "Mission Accomplished" when they're finally able to get back to their loved ones, the President didn't say, take down the sign, it will be bad. Instead what he did is he talked about the mission. And I would direct you back to the speech he gave then, Peter, because the President --

Q No, I know --

MR. SNOW: Well, then, you know that the President has made it clear that in a time of war you are going to have different phases and you're going to have different responsibilities. I think what the American people will ask themselves is, do we want to win this war? Do we understand what the costs and dangers of not succeeding in Iraq are? And do we think that this is a sensible way forward, given what we know?

The American people now know a lot more about Iraq and about the realities of the region than they did before. This is a serious plan that's got a lot in it. And I think the idea of sitting around and trying to sort of play polling questions or whatever is inviting, but it's a lot less interesting than asking yourself the simple, basic, important question: Do you think it's going to work?

Q I guess another way to ask the question, Tony, would be, why does the President find himself in a position

right now to, as you put it, to have to bring the people back to the war?

MR. SNOW: Because what happened last year was the -- how should I put this -- the ignition of sectarian tensions, primarily in the Baghdad area, the vast majority of it a 35-mile radius around Baghdad. But it's the sort that has shaken the confidence of people within Baghdad and people around Iraq, because suddenly you have these groups engaged in a sectarian violence that they had not been engaged in before. And there had been great hopes just months before that, in fact, we would be in a position to be recalling people. So what happened is that there was a development that people had not fully anticipated. And I will allow the President to give his own analysis of the situation tomorrow, and you can judge it.

Q Tony, could you tell us how much it will cost a month to fight a war in Iraq under the President's new plan? Because I understand there's going to be a lot of initiatives to put Iraqis to work, to try to shore up --

MR. SNOW: It's a great way of trying to get me to divulge details before their time, so, no. But we'll get back to you.

Q Is this something that will impact the street? Is this is a significant increase in cost?

MR. SNOW: Okay, you want me, without details, to answer a question, will this move the street. You've got to be kidding me.

Q -- go into details.

MR. SNOW: Well, I know, and you know what, when we're ready to share the details, we'll share the details. I can't do it right now.

Q Tony, at least twice in this briefing you've said that the President would lay out how Iraq could become the definitive refutation of terrorism. What would make a democracy in Iraq more definitive than democracy in the United States, Britain, France, Israel, India, other places that are open societies that have been the subject of terrorism? What's the difference?

MR. SNOW: I think what's happening is that you have seen a deliberate attempt on the part of al Qaeda, and also on the part of players within the region, to try to use everything within their power to destroy that government in its infancy. That's different. The United States now has a long history of democracy. A number of other countries have long histories where they didn't have to work through these kinds of problems. This is one where it is clear that members of the terror network have decided that this is where they want to make an example, this is where they want to make a stand. And for that reason, success there would serve as, I won't say "the" definitive, but "a" definitive refutation of their tactics and aims.

Q I'd like to ask you a question -- we've danced around this a little bit -- the question here about "mission accomplished." Does the President worry at all about his own personal credibility as the messenger, as the person carrying this message? He has given a number of speeches, all of which were designed to tell the American people, I have a plan for victory. And I think that hasn't worked out the way he had hoped, and you're asking them to, again -- almost hear him again to say much the same thing.

MR. SNOW: Well, let me ask you -- I'll turn it at a different angle. If you had asked any other President in American history during a time of war whether they had a credibility problem because they had not foreseen changes on the battlefield, you probably would have had plenty of cause. I mean, Abraham Lincoln constantly guessed from Manassas straight through until the final months of the war. You had George Washington going from defeat to defeat to defeat to defeat to victory, and there was considerable consternation.

So there's the notion here that it is incumbent upon a President to have perfect knowledge of what the conditions on the battlefield are going to be. It's important for a President to have the determination to succeed. Winston Churchill -- was Winston Churchill responsible for the Blitz? What Winston Churchill did was talk about the conditions for victory. And the President, adjusting to constant changes on the battlefield, is adjusting and talking about conditions for victory, and that's the most important thing to do.

Q Tony, I apologize if this has been asked at some point before, but the President has clearly consulted with a wide variety of people on troop levels in Iraq. What happened to the statements that he had made for years that the people who decided troop levels in Iraq were the generals on the ground?

MR. SNOW: Well, he's talked to them, too. And as you probably know, generals are not of one mind. Generals are independent individuals, as well, and there are a number of opinions within the ranks of the military about this.

Q That "he's talked to them, too" is not good enough, because really what he had said previously was that those were the people who make the decisions, and those were the people that he was listening to. And now, very clearly, he's talking to people outside of the military, people on Capitol Hill, generals not in Iraq -- he's talking to a wide variety of people on the issue. What happened to this rule, a real hard and fast rule that he --

MR. SNOW: No, no, it wasn't a hard and fast rule. What he was trying to do was, again, talk about his confidence in generals, and he still has it and he still consults with --

Q Well, he --

MR. SNOW: Let me continue. There also, though, is -- every day I get questions, what about the polls, what about Congress? Well, guess what. When you're trying to build consensus -- now when what the President is trying to do here is lay the foundation for consensus, moving forward in Iraq, it is important to consult people and to take into account a wide variety of ideas so that you have taken advantage of every possible insight you can. It is obvious that the two Baghdad security plans didn't work. And, therefore, you have to ask yourself why, and, how do we move forward.

The other part is that you have to ask yourself, how can we work better with the Iraqis and how can we work better at making them effective? And that also entails a series of conversations with them.

So, in broadening -- and, furthermore, let me add, even before we got to this point, there were still regular

invitations of people who had differing views on the region to come in, because the President, whether it is apparent to one and all, constantly takes a look at the situation and tries to assess and reassess and to figure out not merely how it impacts what's going on in Iraq, but within the neighborhood and within the broader diplomatic and economic community.

Q Was it a mistake in earlier years, then, to rely so strongly on the advice of generals in Iraq on troop levels?

MR. SNOW: The President asks for the advice of generals and others in the military on troop levels to enact policy recommendations that he himself has set. And he will continue to do so.

Q Tony, you were saying earlier that the President wants the American people and members of Congress to ask themselves the question, do we want to win in Iraq. Does the President want the Iraqi people to understand that his policy is also stating to them that their country is lost if this --

MR. SNOW: I think there are more positive ways of doing it. The Iraqis understand that it is important for them to step up and succeed. Again, the end point of this -- when we talk about the President's policy, what you're aiming at is an Iraqi government that's fully capable of handling all the responsibilities, from the rule of law to security to economic rules, and so on.

Q What message does he want them to take away --

MR. SNOW: Again, wait until tomorrow night, and you'll have an answer.

Q Is he going to address the Iraqi people directly?

MR. SNOW: As I said, just wait.

Q You may have already addressed this, but have you guys decided how you proceed after the speech? You have the Georgia event. Is that the start of a series of speeches out in the country? And also, do you continue consultations with members of Congress on how to implement what he's talking about?

MR. SNOW: As I said, on the procedural matters, I will allow you to wait and see what the President says tomorrow. We need a sock puppet for this now. (Laughter.) But the fact is that -- make it more interesting, at least briefly -- but let me -- he will be speaking to troops. And we're going to talk about this a lot. This is not, give one speech, dust your hands off and walk away. This is the beginning of an important process for the American people and for the political community to think seriously about it. So you're going to be hearing more about it, absolutely.

Q Will there be a military tour, though --

MR. SNOW: As I said, we'll release the schedule when the schedule is ready to be released.

Paula.

Q Does the White House have any comment on the universal health care plan that has been announced by the California Governor?

MR. SNOW: No. We tend to let states go ahead and make their own policies.

Q And Social Security -- a moment ago, you talked about how the President feels very strongly about the opportunity to have personal savings accounts, and that when you have these talks, that there's no preconditions set. So one of the ideas is to allow for these, but rather than have it carved out, to have it as an add on. So is this among the --

MR. SNOW: As I said, I'm not going to get into characterizing, A, because Hank Paulson is driving it, and, B, we're allowing anybody to say whatever they want. And we're not going to assess the President's conditions -- the President's proposals have been pretty clear, and now we want to see what other people have to put on the table.

Q Isn't there a difference between saying, we'll allow anyone to say what they want, or, the President is listening to your ideas, and actually incorporating any of those ideas?

MR. SNOW: Well, what's interesting is the President has made his proffer. If somebody else wants to put another proposal on the table --

Q Two related questions. One, the global war on terrorism started from Afghanistan, and now there is a war going on, global war between the two Presidents, President Karzai and President Musharraf, as far as border crossings are concerned, because Pakistan is saying that they want to build these land mines along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, and President Karzai is objecting to it --

MR. SNOW: Goyal, I'm not going to get into disputes between states, both of whom are allies. It is clear that the issue of border crossings is one of shared interest and concern, and it is important to make sure that terrorists are unable to -- that at least there's a greater capability of intercepting terrorists who try to make their way from the border regions into Pakistan.

Q And second, there are allied forces or NATO forces in Afghanistan that are angry at the British forces because British made a deal with the Taliban, and Assistant Secretary of State Mr. Richard Boucher also said that there is no need, there was no need for any negotiations with Taliban.

MR. SNOW: The Taliban is clearly trying to reorganize. It has also been getting smashed in engagements with NATO forces in the southern parts of Afghanistan.

Les.

Q Tony, thank you. Two questions. Tomorrow Congressman Ted Poe, who, as you know, is a Republican --

MR. SNOW: No, I didn't, but thank you.

Q -- and from Texas -- he's also from Texas, -- will hold a news conference about the 250,000 petitions asking presidential pardon for U.S. Border Patrolmen facing 10 year prison sentences because they shot a fleeing Mexican drug-pusher in his buttocks. Does the White House believe that the White House believe that the President's fellow Texan and fellow Republican was wrong to do this?

MR. SNOW: I think -- you know Les, I thought I brought my points on that -- why don't you ask that -- because that will be entertaining to do tomorrow, and I want to get back to you on it. I thought I had packed that with my materials today, but I didn't.

Q The AP reports that the U.S. Army sent letters to 75 officers who were killed in action encouraging them to reconsider -- to consider returning to active duty. And while General Richard Cody has apologized for this computer error, there's no report of anyone being disciplined for this. And my question: What does the Commander-in-Chief of the Army have to say about this horrendous error, and about what else such computer errors could do?

MR. SNOW: I'd refer that to the Pentagon, Les.

Q Tony, how much did the Fielding appointment have to do with the expectation that there will be a number of congressional investigations?

MR. SNOW: No, everybody keeps trying to -- look, members of Congress are going to have to decide whether they want -- how they want to respond to the President's open and repeated offers to cooperate on key and important issues. We've also said that if people want to try to mount a series of investigations, we're going to be prepared. But Fred Fielding is a guy of enormous experience and competence. It is gratifying to have a guy of his quality coming into the White House. And he wants to come in because he sees this as a place where there's a lot of constructive work to be done over the next two years in the war on terror, on domestic policy, on judges and a number of other things. And as White House Legal Counsel, he's going to have a real hand in all of those things. That's the reason he expressed.

Q Tony, we haven't talked about Jack Abramoff in a long time, and there's a new photo showing him with the President.

MR. SNOW: The President said he didn't know Abramoff, wasn't buds, and my guess is there are plenty of photos around town with Jack Abramoff and Democrats and Republicans.

Q What about the change in interpreting entrance records to the White House as being the property of the White House and not of the Secret Service?

MR. SNOW: That is a fairly abstruse issue, and I will see if I can get you guidance from the Office of Legal Counsel. I don't want to tap dance around that. I'll try and get you a straight answer.

Thank you.

END

12:52 P.M. EST