

From: "Mamo, Jeanie S."
To: "Kavanaugh, Brett M."
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Thank you very much for all of your help.

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

ROUNDTABLE INTERVIEW WITH REGIONAL PRINT MEDIA

Tuesday, September 16, 2003

9:30 a.m. - 10:15 a.m.

Roosevelt Room

Dan Bartlett

I. PURPOSE

To discuss the economic outlook and the war on terror with regional reporters from key states.

II. BACKGROUND

This roundtable will be the ninth regional or specialty press roundtable. Your last regional press roundtable was held on March 3, 2003.

III. PRESS PLAN

Closed Press (except those in attendance).

Note: A White House Photographer will take pictures for release to the newspapers and for the reporters' personal use.

IV. PARTICIPANTS

Rob Hotakainen [Hote-ah-KEYE-nen], *Minneapolis (MN) Star-Tribune*

Mike Madden, *Sioux Falls (SD) Argus Leader*

Jeff Miller, *Allentown (PA) Morning Call*

Jane Norman, *Des Moines (IA) Register*

Mei-Ling [MAY-ling] Hopgood, *Dayton (OH) Daily News*

Tom Detzel, *The Oregonian*

Charlie Pope, *Seattle (WA) Post-Intelligencer*

Bart Jansen, *Portland (ME) Press-Herald*

Dave Lightman, *Hartford (CT) Courant*

Tammy Lytle [Light-ul], *Orlando (FL) Sentinel*

Dave Montgomery, *Fort Worth (TX) Star-Telegram*

Gary Martin, *San Antonio (TX) Express-News*

Scott McClellan, Press Secretary
Jeanie Mamo, Director of Media Affairs
Ken Lisaius, Deputy Director of Media Affairs
Taylor Gross, Spokesman, Office of Media Affairs
Jim Morrell, Spokesman, Office of Media Affairs

V. SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

- Reporters will gather in the Roosevelt Room.
- You will enter the Roosevelt Room and may begin by making remarks on the economy and the war on terror, then take questions from regional reporters.
- If you choose to do so, you may invite your guests to the Oval Office for a brief, informal tour at the conclusion of the session.

VI. REMARKS

List of Possible Questions and Answers provided by Media Affairs

VII. ATTACHMENTS

Background of Print Media Participants and List of Possible Questions and Answers

BACKGROUND OF PRINT MEDIA ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS
and
LIST OF POSSIBLE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
September 16, 2003

ROB HOTAKAINEN, MINNEAPOLIS (MN) STAR TRIBUNE

Rob Hotakainen is the Washington Bureau Chief for *The Minneapolis Star Tribune*. Recently, he has written about the Administration's proposed changes to overtime rules, and about Congressman Gil Gutknecht's bill that would allow Americans to buy their prescription drugs from other countries.

Possible Questions and Answers

- Q.** What is your reaction to the Senate blocking the Administration's proposed changes to the Nation's overtime rules for white-collar workers? What is your reaction to the criticism levied on the proposal from many labor unions?
- A.** The House voted down a similar attempt to block these proposed changes. Congress is divided and we will continue our efforts to work with Congress on the issue. These changes would guarantee overtime to 1.3 million additional low-wage workers. The proposed rulemaking will strengthen overtime rights for workers by making the rules easier for employers to comply with, easier for workers to understand and easier for the Department of Labor to aggressively enforce. Following a 90-day public comment period, the Department of Labor received nearly 80,000 comments on this proposal. They are reviewing those comments and will use them to help make the best decision.
- Q.** What is your reaction to the bipartisan efforts underway in Congress to make it easier for Americans to buy imported drugs from other nations? Why do you think so many Republicans supported the House bill even over the objections of the Administration and the Leadership? Would you veto this legislation?
- A.** Many Americans, particularly seniors, are hit hard by the high cost of prescription medication. That is why I've been strongly pushing for Congress to get a Medicare prescription drug bill to my desk. I'm strongly opposed to waiving existing health and safety standards with regards to prescription drugs imported from foreign countries. We do not have adequate assurances that these products are safe and effective. I believe this legislation would expose Americans to a greater potential risk of harm and would overwhelm FDA's already heavily burdened regulatory system. In this era of global medicine, the world community must come together to fight the battles of disease.

MIKE MADDEN, SIOUX FALLS (SD) ARGUS LEADER

Mike Madden has recently written about Representative (former Governor) Bill Janklow's (R, SD-at large) traffic accident and trial.

Possible Question and Answer

- Q.** Do you have any reaction to Governor Janklow being charged with felony manslaughter? Have you spoken to him? Do you think he should resign his seat in Congress?

- A. It's obviously a great tragedy for everyone involved. My heart goes out to the victim's family. I know that Governor Janklow is recovering from his injuries and we will let the system run its course.

JEFF MILLER, ALLENTOWN (PA) MORNING CALL

Jeff Miller has written many articles about the Senate primary between Arlen Specter and Pat Toomey. In addition, he may ask about the vacancy in the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals.

Possible Questions and Answers

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- Q. Has the White House disqualified Judge Franklin Van Antwerpen from consideration for the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals?
- A. I haven't made any decisions about that seat yet. We're still taking a close look and working with Congress and local officials to find the most qualified nominee. Nobody has been ruled in or out at this point. We have nominated nearly a dozen individuals over the age of 60 for positions on the bench, including a recent nominee to the 9th Circuit who is 68 years old.

BACKGROUND

Last month, a prominent Republican in Pennsylvania – Charles Snelling – began telling people that the White House had decided not to nominate Judge Van Antwerpen for the 3rd Circuit seat because “he was too old.” Judge Van Antwerpen is 61. It has since been made clear to Snelling that no decision has been made on the seat and that such speculation is unhelpful. (Your previous nominees to the 3rd Circuit were Brooks Smith and Mike Fisher.)

JANE NORMAN, DES MOINES (IA) REGISTER

Jane Norman has recently written about the Medicare Prescription Drug issue and Senator Grassley's role in crafting the legislation. She is particularly interested in funding for Medicare reimbursements since Iowa receives the lowest Medicare reimbursement per beneficiary in the country.

Possible Questions and Answers

- Q. Do you think we will have a Medicare prescription drug benefit enacted this year? And do you prefer the House version or the Senate version?
- A. I appreciate Senator Grassley's leadership on this issue. Medicine has changed and improved over the years, but Medicare hasn't. We have to ensure that all seniors have access to the prescription drugs they need. I appreciate the good work done by the House and Senate, and now I want them to work out their differences as quickly as possible so that we can deliver this needed benefit to our Nation's seniors.

- Q.** Will you demand that a Medicare modernization bill include Medicare reimbursements for rural states?
- A.** In April of this year, I sat down with (Senate Finance Committee Chairman) Chuck Grassley to talk about the current inequity in Medicare payments to rural providers of medical care -- hospitals, doctors, home health providers, and others. In the House, Congressmen Earl Pomeroy, Jim Nussle, and Greg Walden were real leaders on this issue.

In that conversation, Chairman Grassley and I agreed that we needed to address this problem in legislation this year. I sent a letter supporting Chairman Grassley's efforts to help rural Medicare providers when we did the Jobs and Growth bill.

That letter helped create the momentum that has resulted in significant increases in payments to rural health providers in both the House and Senate Medicare bills. I am confident that the final Medicare bill will (and should) provide fairer Medicare payments to rural hospitals, doctors, and home care services.

It's also important that seniors living in rural areas have the same kinds of choices available to them as Members of Congress and federal employees. A park ranger in Wyoming and a postman in Nebraska can choose from among several competing private health plans, and their Congressmen can do the same. I think that seniors in Medicare should have these kinds of choices, and I'm working to make that happen in this year's Medicare bill.

MEI-LING HOPGOOD, DAYTON (OH) DAILY NEWS

Mei-Ling Hopgood is the Washington correspondent for *The Dayton Daily News*. She has recently written about community objections to an Army decision to ship byproducts of VX nerve agent to a company near Dayton for disposal. She has also been working on a series (not yet published) about safety concerns for Peace Corps volunteers.

Possible Questions and Answers

- Q.** What is your response to the concerns of Dayton citizens about byproducts of VX nerve agents being disposed of in their community?
- A.** I know that the Army is working with the interested parties to explore alternative options. Obviously, it is very important that this process be done safely and with the input of the community.
- Q.** Many Peace Corps volunteers have faced dangerous situations during their tenure, and some have been victims of horrible crimes. What is your Administration doing to address this problem?
- A.** The safety and security of our volunteers is the Peace Corps' top priority. Peace Corps volunteers work in some of the least developed areas in the world, where health, safety, and security risks are an unavoidable part of life. The most important thing we can do is make sure that volunteers are aware of the potential dangers and take the proper

precautions to ensure their safety. I know that the Peace Corps assesses and approves where volunteers will live and work to ensure that placements are safe. And it is important that volunteers report safety concerns or incidents to Peace Corps staff members as quickly as possible so those concerns can be addressed.

TOM DETZEL, *THE OREGONIAN*

Tom Detzel is one half of *The Oregonian's* Washington, D.C. bureau. Tom focuses on energy and economic issues facing the Northwest. With his colleague, Jim Barnett (Jim participated in the very first regional roundtable in 2001), he has written about the Klamath Basin and your Healthy Forest Initiative. Detzel has written about the recent death of U.S. Senator Gordon Smith's son.

Possible Question and Answer

- Q.** Any updates on the Klamath Basin situation?
- A.** The Administration formed a cabinet-level working group in 2002 to address the issues facing the Klamath Basin. Chaired by Secretary Norton, (and including Secretary Evans, Secretary Veneman, and CEQ Chairman Connaughton) the group is pursuing a cooperative approach that has led to beneficial actions – and may well serve as a blueprint elsewhere in the West.

In addition to meeting all tribal obligations, the working group's actions this year have ensured that Reclamation Project farmers have water, key fish habitat restoration projects are underway, and ranchers and farmers are participating in a water bank and water conservation programs under Farm Bill programs.

BACKGROUND

The Klamath Basin, which straddles the Oregon-California border, does not have enough water to meet the needs of farmers, tribes, and threatened or endangered fish.

Two years ago, the farmers in the federal project went without water, causing severe economic hardship.

- **2003 spending in the Klamath Basin:**
 - \$10 million for Farm Bill conservation projects
 - \$16 million for a technologically sophisticated screen to protect sucker fish
 - \$3 million for wetlands restoration
 - \$14 million for salmon recovery in Oregon and California through NOAA
 - Total: \$43 million**

CHARLIE POPE, *SEATTLE (WA) POST-INTELLIGENCER*

Charlie Pope is *The Seattle P-I's* Washington, D.C.-based reporter. He is fair and focused on matters that impact the Northwest. He covers both the White House and Congress for the Hearst-owned newspaper. He has recently written on the Boeing tanker issue and economic concerns in the Northwest.

Possible Questions and Answers

- Q.** What is the current status of the Boeing tanker lease issue?
- A.** The Administration has responded to DOD and bipartisan Congressional requests for the quick deployment capability and flexibility that this tanker lease provides. We are committed to providing the men and women in our military with the best equipment and this lease provides the Air Force with the resources they need. In working on this lease, the Administration pursued the dual goals of meeting our defense needs and protecting taxpayers. Indeed, the Administration was successful in lowering the cost of the tankers.

BACKGROUND

Currently, the Department of Defense Inspector General is looking into charges that a former, senior Air Force official (now Boeing employee) gave Boeing confidential price information from one of its competitors. On Thursday, September 4, 2003, the Senate Armed Services Committee requested DOD look into trimming the lease from 100 tankers to 25, with a direct purchase of 75 of the aircraft. DOD is currently reviewing that request.

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BART JANSEN, PORTLAND (ME) PRESS HERALD

Bart Jansen is the sole Washington, D.C.-based reporter for Maine's *Portland Press Herald*. He is a fair reporter who does not shy away from tough news stories here in the Nation's capital. Jansen has recently covered a wide range of issues from national park user-fees to Medicare reform. He covers both the White House and Capitol Hill for the paper.

BACKGROUND

Jansen is inclined to ask about the status of the Nation's economy.

DAVID LIGHTMAN, BUREAU CHIEF, HARTFORD (CT) COURANT

David Lightman is the Washington, D.C.-based bureau chief for *The Hartford Courant*. He has most recently been covering the Presidential campaign of Senator Joe Lieberman. He is a fair and balanced reporter.

BACKGROUND

Lightman has recently been covering the Presidential campaign for *The Hartford Courant*. He may well ask about the status of your re-election effort. He is also apt to ask general questions about the economy.

TAMMY LYTLE, ORLANDO (FL) SENTINEL

Tammy Lytle is the Bureau Chief for the *Orlando Sentinel* and covers Congress and the White House. She is also the President of the National Press Club. She covers national issues, such as the war on terror and the economy, but occasionally writes about NASA.

Possible Questions and Answers

- Q.** How is it possible for 88 percent of the schools in Florida to be deemed “failing” under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), while other states have a much lower percent of schools deemed to be “failing?”
- A.** First of all, the Education Department does not label schools “failing.” It requires states to identify schools in need of improvement because specific student group’s performance falls below the target. This is positive. It helps principals and teachers identify areas where they need to improve. You can’t fix a problem you don’t know exists. The law calls for states to set standards and set the progress for achieving those standards. NCLB asks states to measure the progress of ALL students and ensure ALL students attain proficiency, but leaves it up to states on how to achieve these goals. Florida designed its accountability system under NCLB to meet its purposes, as did every other state. Florida had a large number of schools that missed Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the first time in 2002-2003, which, one can argue, means they held their schools to a very rigorous standard. Other states designed different systems to meet their needs. Comparing the number of schools missing AYP is an unfair comparison that ignores variables like student demographics, school size, and, again, ignores the standards and assessments that the state decided was appropriate for its students.
- Q.** How is it possible for a school in Florida to be given a high grade under Florida’s system, yet still be deemed in need of improvement?
- A.** Florida’s state grading system and NCLB examine two different, yet complimentary measures. Florida’s state system focuses on growth (how many students moved from a lower level of achievement to a higher level of achievement) and NCLB focuses on how many students have reached proficient and advanced levels of achievement in reading and math.
- Q.** How will you know if states are setting their standards too low?
- A.** The establishment of standards and assessments is under the purview of individual states. No two states are the same and it is the responsibility of the individual states to determine the standards that are appropriate for its students. Under NCLB, states must measure the achievement of all their students and have all their students proficient in reading and math by 2013-2014 and each state determines how it will reach the goals it has set for itself. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is one means to monitor each State’s performance. Every state is now participating in NAEP’s reading

and math assessments which will give us a national snapshot of states' performance. If significant differences exist between a state's performance on its own assessments and its performance on NAEP, parents, policymakers, and the public will be empowered with the information they need to ask why and to determine what, if anything, should be changed.

Q. What is the future of NASA?

A. Our journey into space will go on. But we want to be sure before we send another human into space, that we get it right. We are pursuing a process within the Administration to address the broader vision for U.S. space exploration.

BACKGROUND

Administrator Sean O'Keefe has stressed major messages for NASA's Return To Flight (RTF):

- NASA is milestone-driven, not calendar-driven
- We will comply with all the recommendations of the CAIB to the best of our ability
- Our RTF efforts are reinvigorating the Agency and we are rededicated to safer flying
- We get it
- When we are "fit to fly," that's when we'll go

[NOTE FROM POLICY: We have not said anything about the Commission idea Senator Brownback (R, KS) is floating (we're just in listening mode).]

Q. Are you aware of the NAACP discrimination complaint against the Florida Department of Education?

A. The Office for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education is reviewing the complaint to determine how it will proceed and what—if any action to take.

BACKGROUND

The NAACP filed a complaint on August 25, 2003, that alleges widespread racial discrimination in Florida's public elementary and high schools, and alleges the state of Florida has never remedied past lawful school segregation going back to *Brown v. Board of Education*. In addition, the complaint alleges that Florida has perpetuated segregation of African-American students through several state policies and practices, including:

- Student enrollment and assignment policies
- Gifted and talented education and AP courses and policies
- Special education policies
- Student discipline policies
- Standardized testing (FCAT)
- Dropout policies and programs
- Graduation policies
- Faculty and staff qualification policies
- School financing

- Q.** Florida's testing system is also under question. The Office for Civil Rights has received 13 individual complaints alleging that Florida's testing system (FCAT) discriminates against students with disabilities.
- A.** This is an open investigation (at the U.S. Department of Education).
- Q.** The House of Representatives recently voted to ease restrictions on traveling to the island and sending money to Cuban households. You have threatened a veto of the spending bill if the restrictions were eased. Will you veto the bill?
- A.** I am firmly dedicated to a proactive Cuba policy that will assist the Cuban people in their struggle for freedom. And I remain committed to the goal of achieving a rapid, peaceful transition to democracy, by using the dissuasive tools of the economic embargo and travel restrictions.
- Q.** Recently, your Administration repatriated 12 Cubans after getting assurances that they would not be executed and would receive prison sentences no longer than 10 years. Your own brother is quoted as saying, "Despite the good intentions of the Administration to negotiate the safety of these folks, that is an oppressive regime, and given the environment in Cuba, it's just not right." Do you think that was the wrong decision? And would you consider changing the so-called wet-foot/dry foot policy?
- A.** First, I want to make very clear that my Administration has not negotiated with the Castro Regime. Until Cuba undertakes meaningful political, economic, and labor reforms; conducts transparent elections; and respects human rights; my Administration will oppose any effort to loosen sanctions and travel restrictions. But, as I announced in May 2002, with my Initiative for a New Cuba we are committed to deepening our outreach to all Cuban people, especially those brave and independent activists for democracy and human rights. (I support the current policy on wet foot/dry foot.) There needs to be safe, orderly and legal migration. TV Marti has announced it will begin satellite transmissions into Cuba in an effort to break through Cuban jamming efforts. The Attorney General in Miami recently indicted Gen. Ruben Martinez Puente and the MiG-29 crew, brothers Lorenzo Perez Perez and Francisco Perez Perez, who are accused of attacking unarmed planes operated by the Miami-based Brothers to the Rescue in 1996.

BACKGROUND

Cuban exile leaders and state representatives in Miami have recently criticized the Administration for not doing enough to end Castro's rule in Cuba. The criticism was sparked by an incident in July in which U.S. officials returned 12 Cubans who were intercepted as they attempted to come to the United States by hijacking a vessel. After getting assurances from Havana that they would not be executed and would receive prison sentences no longer than 10 years, they were repatriated to Cuba. Cuban exiles perceived this as "negotiating" with Castro.

DAVE MONTGOMERY, FT. WORTH (TX) STAR TELEGRAM

Dave Montgomery is a Washington-based reporter for the *Ft. Worth Star Telegram*. He covers Congress, Texas-related issues, and the war in Iraq. Montgomery traveled to Saudi Arabia at the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom to cover the war.

Possible Question and Answer

- Q. What role has the White House played, if any, in Texas redistricting? Some Texas Democrats have accused the White House of orchestrating the redistricting efforts.
- A. While I am always interested in Texas politics, I still feel this is a matter for the people of Texas to decide. I know the governor well and feel he is doing a great job for the people of Texas.

GARY MARTIN, SAN ANTONIO (TX) EXPRESS NEWS

Gary Martin, Bureau Chief of the *San Antonio Express-News*, covers Capitol Hill and the Administration. He is a fair reporter and has participated previously in a roundtable with you in 2001.

Possible Question and Answer

(See Above for Texas-Related Questions.)