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Press Briefing by Dana Perino

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MS. PERINO: Good afternoon. As I was able to tell you this morning, you know that Tony Snow went into surgery yesterday. He told everyone last Friday that he was going to have this surgery. You remember that he said that the doctors had found a small growth, that they had seen over a series of CAT scans and MRIs, that had been identified on his abdomen. It was in the area where his previous cancer had been located. Tony called us this morning and informed us that despite all of our best hopes and expectations, that his doctors, unfortunately, learned that the growth was cancerous and there has been some metastases, including to the liver.

This news has obviously saddened everyone at the White House; from the President and the First Lady, his team, the entire staff, the outpouring has been quite amazing. You heard from the President in the Rose Garden. Of course, all of Tony's family is in our prayers. The President said, Tony should stay strong, and "know a lot of people love you and care for you and will pray for you." And we'll all look forward to the day when Tony can come back and take the podium again. Believe me, we're looking forward to that.

I spoke to Tony briefly this morning, around 9:30 a.m. He told me he was up, walking around and comfortable. He will remain in the hospital for several days. That was already part of the plan because it was major surgery that he had. He did not have a lot more detail. I will try to answer your questions as best I can, but the ones that I can't answer I will endeavor to get you the answer, or I'll just have to tell you that we're not going to be able to answer those questions. Some of them are privacy concerns and health related.

If you know Tony, then you know that he's a fighter. He plans to take this on with the advice of his doctors. They are in consultation right now, talking about an aggressive treatment to go after the cancer that he said will likely include chemotherapy, but could include other things, as well. And when I have more on that I can provide that to you, as well. All of us -- we gain a lot of strength from his optimism. He told me that he beat this thing before and he intends to beat it again.

The other thing that I would say about Tony Snow is that he doesn't skip a beat; he had obviously been paying attention to the news and he was really fired up about the Iraq war supplemental. And I said that I would make sure that I delivered the President's message today, regardless of this. So if you'll bear with me -- I don't know if you were able to see it, given the news this morning, while we were all focused on Tony -- the President did issue a statement of administration policy on the Senate's Iraq war supplemental. And just a couple of points -- I'm going to read it from -- just a little bit just to make sure I fulfill my promise to Tony and make sure that you heard this before we go to questions.

The administration strongly opposes the Senate bill. The legislation would substitute congressional mandates for the considered judgment of our military commanders. The bill assumes and forces the failure of the new strategy even before American commanders in the field are able to fully implement their plan. Regardless of the success that our troops are achieving in the field, this bill would require their withdrawal. This and other provisions would place freedom and democracy in Iraq at grave risk, embolden our enemies, and undercut the administration's plans to develop the Iraqi economy. If this legislation were presented to the President, he would veto the bill.

The war supplemental should remain focused on the needs of the troops, and should not be used as a vehicle for added non-emergency spending and policy proposals, especially domestic proposals, which should be fully vetted and considered on their own merits. This bill adds billions in unrequested spending that is largely unjustified and non-emergency. And because of the excessive and extraneous non-emergency spending it contains, if this

legislation were presented to the President, he would veto the bill.

Congress should reject this legislation and promptly send the President a responsible bill that provides the funding and flexibility our troops need, and without holding funding for the troops hostage to unrelated spending.

And with that, I'll go to questions. Jennifer.

Q Dana, our thoughts really are with Tony, so if you would pass that on, we'd appreciate it.

MS. PERINO: Absolutely.

Q Just one quick question, if you're able to answer. During the surgery, do you know if they were able to take the area out of the liver that was cancerous? And you mentioned that it had spread to areas, including the liver. Does that mean it's gone beyond to other areas, as well?

MS. PERINO: I can -- I don't know the answer to the first question, in regards to if they did any further surgery or - on the liver at the time. Again, if I can find that out, I'll let you know, if I can get back in touch with him today. What he told me is that the small growth that they had found was in the general area of where the first cancer had originated those years ago, and that when they went back in, even though the blood tests have been negative and the PET scans had been negative for cancer, that they discovered it was cancer, and then he said, and it had spread to the liver, and there has been some metastases -- plural. So that's as far as I can go on that.

Kevin.

Q Dana, do you have a sense of how his treatment might differ this time, versus the first occurrence of cancer?

MS. PERINO: I don't. I know that he's working with the same doctors, at least a core of the same doctors that he worked with before. And, so, obviously, they were successful in their first attempts to beat it back those couple years ago. I think it was just last month that he had reached the two-year mark of being cancer free.

So he just said that he's in consultations with his doctors, and I think that they'll -- it will take some time, I think, for them to figure out what's the best course of treatment. But as soon as I can tell you, and to the extent that he's comfortable with me being able to share that with you, I will do so.

Q Dana, where other than the liver? You said metastases, plural.

MS. PERINO: I don't know, he didn't say.

Jonathan.

Q Dana, just two questions. One, when was this growth first detected? And then a question about the first episode. Do you know at what stage the cancer was at the time in 2005 that it had actually penetrated --

MS. PERINO: Stage 3, that first -- when he was first diagnosed those years ago, it was stage 3. I do not know which stage this cancer is that they found.

Q But when was it that they first detected the growth?

MS. PERINO: This new growth?

Q The new growth, yes.

MS. PERINO: All I know is that he said, "in a recent series of CAT scans and PET scans and MRIs, we have found a small growth in my lower abdomen." I don't know specifically, but I do know that as a cancer patient, and many others who either have cancer patients in their family or are survivors themselves, you get regular

checkups. And he would go in for a checkup every three to four months. And I believe that this goes back -- maybe just a couple of the tests before that. They've been keeping an eye on this growth.

Q How big was the growth, Dana?

MS. PERINO: On Friday he said that it was about the size of the tip of his pinky finger. And so -- his pinky finger is probably a little larger than mine.

Q And do you have any information on his family? Obviously, his wife and his children --

MS. PERINO: I don't. I know that Jill Snow, his wife, was with him at the hospital today when I spoke to her. Obviously, this is a family that has been through a lot. And they -- I have never seen such a close-knit family. They really just love each other so much. They're very supportive. Being a Press Secretary of the United States -- to the President of the United States is not an easy job, but Tony really cut out time for his family whenever he possibly could and they were very close. And so I'm sure that this is difficult for them. And I know that they appreciate all the prayers that people are offering.

Q Did he express that he was feeling ill prior to the surgery, or anything that might have been -- looking back now --

MS. PERINO: No, he said that he felt fine. He said he felt fine.

Helen.

Q How does the President feel about his Republicans on the Hill tossing the ball back to him and letting him hold the bag, basically, on a veto on pullout, which is against the will of the American people?

MS. PERINO: Yes, I read reporting this morning that indicated that somehow the Senate Republicans were defying the President. Actually, that's not the case. In fact, last week, when the President met with the Senate Republican leadership, they talked about needing to go ahead and get this vote over with, and get the bill to the President's desk so he could veto it, so that they could go on and get to the business of presenting the President a clean bill.

Q So it was a plan, really?

MS. PERINO: Yes, and if you look at the President's remarks on Friday, he indicated that.

Q Doesn't this go against the will of the American people who want to pull out?

MS. PERINO: I think the President has been very clear that they don't want to pull out if it means losing. And the President has said that --

Q How does losing -- losing what?

MS. PERINO: The President has made it clear that the goal is to make sure that we can stabilize Baghdad, especially, so that the politicians in Baghdad can do the work that they need to do in order to reconcile politically and get the economic engine going, so that the security situation can not only stabilize in Baghdad, but then spread throughout the country.

Q At any price?

MS. PERINO: We understand fully the sacrifice that our men and women and the innocent Iraqis --

Q And you still think it's worth it?

MS. PERINO: We do.

April. We'll go back to Tony.

Q Now that Tony has become more of a public face for cancer, and it's shaken the White House, can we expect the White House, as it does other health issues like heart awareness, heart health awareness, can we expect to see something from the White House as to something on cancer prevention, something that's been a pet project of Tony's?

MS. PERINO: It's a great question. Obviously, the President and Mrs. Bush do lots of different focus -- as Mrs. Bush is really focusing on heart health for women, and we have, obviously, AIDS prevention issues. It's a good question about cancer prevention. I think -- well, one thing I know for sure for myself and my team, and -- our team at the White House, everybody, we are much more aware about cancer and also about the treatments that people get, and the things that a family goes through when they go in for their checkups, and there's that huge sigh of relief that they have whenever that test comes back negative

And so it's a great question. I don't have any specific programs to think about right now, but I know that we have had some increases in cancer funding, and especially cancer research funding. And I'll work with Tony Fratto, we can get you the details on that.

Anybody else? On Tony? Sheryl, then Connie.

Q Dana, a couple more questions on Tony. He went for a series of checkups recently. There were -- a couple weeks ago he told us he was going off to Walter Reed, and then I believe he went back again for an MRI. Did something come up at that Walter Reed checkup that then prompted this series of --

MS. PERINO: From what he told me and from what I understood -- and again, I'm not a doctor, so I probably didn't ask all the right questions -- but he had had the CAT scan and/or the MRI -- I don't know if anyone else remembers -- but he had the CAT scan. And because the growth -- they continued to see it and they had seen it had grown over that time period between the last checkup, there was a decision to do a PET scan and possibly -- I don't know when the MRI came in. Maybe around the same time. But the PET scan was, as I understand it, a more in-depth look as to what was going on with the growth. And so he did that PET scan, and it was from there that they decided and weighed options about how to go in and tackle it.

Q And also, last Thursday, when Elizabeth Edwards made her announcement, Tony spoke rather eloquently about her. And it was only the next day, Friday, that he told us that he would, himself, be going in for surgery. Did he talk at all about this being on his mind on Thursday, as he was speaking --

MS. PERINO: It was on his mind. He had been wrestling with the decision with his doctors. I think that early on Tony Snow had decided, given the options, whether laparoscopic surgery and just doing a biopsy, or going in and doing the full surgery, that that was something he and his family and his doctors had to weigh. And Tony decided -- I think he told you last week that he was very -- he's an aggressive cancer patient. And once you decide to be that optimistic person and you have the will to live, that you are a person that's a really good patient for the doctors. And he had decided that he wanted to do the full-blown surgery.

He needed to get some things in order, and he needed to make sure he talked to the President; he needed to find -- he wasn't sure when the -- on Thursday, I can tell you, he wasn't sure when the surgery was going to be. I believe they were still talking with the surgeons to figure out schedules.

Q But, Dana, you remember that moment, that quite emotional moment, when he was talking about Elizabeth Edwards, and he paused -- was he aware of something at that point that was causing such emotion for him?

MS. PERINO: No, if you remember -- well, I think anyone who is a cancer survivor -- and I am not one, so I cannot put myself in their shoes -- but anytime I think that you're talking about a fellow human being -- and I don't know how well he knows the Edwards family, but I think that you have a kinship and an understanding and a connection that maybe some of us don't have. And of course, I'm sure he was thinking of his own family and he knew that he had made the decision to go in for the surgery.

But remember, he told all of us not to jump to conclusions because the blood tests and the PET scan had been negative for cancer. And he really believed that the best thing to do for himself and for his family was to aggressively go after the cancer and just to see -- I'm sorry -- aggressively go after the growth, see if there was any problem with it. And unfortunately, there was.

Q Did he talk to you today about a feeling of shock? I know that when I spoke to him, he seemed -- he was very upbeat about it and he told us all, don't jump to conclusions, as you said. So did this -- how did he take this news?

MS. PERINO: Our conversation was about five to six minutes long. When I talked to him he had already talked to the President. It's hard for me to describe if he was shocked, or not. Disappointed, surely; but resolute, and almost immediately ready to get up and start fighting. Like I said, he said, you have to make sure that you deliver the message on the Iraq war supplemental. But in addition to that, he had said that his doctors are top-notch, and that they were already in consultations. So they did the surgery yesterday, and within a 12-hour period, they're already discussing the treatment for the way forward.

Q Dana, is it his expectation, his desire, to be back here on the job while he undergoes this treatment? I mean, obviously, we don't know what the treatment is yet. But if that is physically possible, is it his desire to be back here?

MS. PERINO: Well, I certainly hope so. But he -- I can't say what his treatment is going to be, because he hasn't decided yet. And I did talk to Dr. Tubb just to understand the range of possibilities with chemotherapy treatment, and he doesn't know what the doctors are going to decide, but it just depends on what they decide to do and what the needs are.

I do know that Tony Snow loves this job. He says it is the best job he's ever had in his life. He, in fact, has called it "communications Disneyland." (Laughter.) So he loves the job, and I think his intention, of course, is to come back. The President wants to have him back, as you heard today. So as soon as we have more on that, we can let you know. But the intention is that he'll be back, and I just don't know when.

Q Is he watching you now, do you think?

MS. PERINO: Is he watching me now? I hope he's sleeping. I hope he's not watching me now, I'll start blushing. (Laughter.)

Connie, go ahead.

Q Thank you. By the way, we are all sorry, and we appreciate you talking to us. Two questions. Abdominal surgery is really painful. What is being done to control the pain?

MS. PERINO: I don't know. I don't know the answer to what's being done to control the pain. I'm sure his doctors are taking very good care of him, and if he's in pain, that they're addressing it.

Q And one more. He made a huge financial sacrifice to take this job, even though he loves it. Is the White House or the government doing anything to help --

MS. PERINO: Tony Snow is paid the salary that he's paid, and he has health insurance, and I'm sure he's taken care of that way.

Q How bizarre is this for you?

MS. PERINO: How bizarre is this for me?

Q Yes, I mean, now suddenly you're up there, it's an incredibly intense time, as far as the administration goes. I'm sure you weren't prepared to --

MS. PERINO: Anticipating this?

Q Yes.

MS. PERINO: No. As my team laughs. But the great thing about the White House is the people that you work with. That is by far what everyone says, whenever they leave, that the thing that they miss the most are the people that you work with. And we are so supportive of each other. And Tony has really given all of us a lot more opportunities as deputies, and we have tried to step up to the plate where he has allowed us to -- or given us opportunity to. And so, for me, I don't have really any other feeling but concern for Tony, a little bit of shock for myself. I thought he was going to call back and they were going to say, oh, he's fine, no problems.

And so all of our energies are going to be concentrated on making sure that we do the job Tony would want us to do, and we will make sure that we try to fulfill every need that you have and that the President has, and we'll be in touch with him for advice.

Roger.

Q Would the President be considering a visit to him in the next few days or early next week?

MS. PERINO: We'll let you know. I know there's nothing on the schedule right now. Remember, Tony didn't tell you where he was. And if we take the President, then you'll know where he is.

Q When I asked him Friday, he wouldn't say, either.

MS. PERINO: No, he doesn't want to say.

Q Dana, do you know enough about what's in Tony's short-term future to know whether he will be in a position to be in daily contact with the White House, or is he --

MS. PERINO: Seems so. I don't know for sure, but it seems so. I talked to him -- he talked to the President in the 7:00 a.m. hour this morning; he talked to me at 9:30 a.m. And again, he said, none of us should bug him for details about his medical condition, but I think that if we need him, we need his advice, I'm sure that if we need to find him, we can. But it's just too early to say.

Q So he's making the afternoon meeting this afternoon by phone? (Laughter.)

Q Have any doctors discussed what the survival rate is for cancer victims who have had cancer metastasize --

MS. PERINO: I'm sure all of you have access to medical experts or medical correspondents that -- I'd have to refer you to them. I know of no such thing.

Q For viewers who want to send a get-well wish, a card, anything like that --

MS. PERINO: Can I look into that and figure out the best way to do that? And we'll get you a good address to make sure -- make sure they get there.

Jim.

Q Are we ready to --

MS. PERINO: Lester, is yours on Tony, or not?

Q It begins with Tony, but I'll --

MS. PERINO: Why don't we save you to the end?

Q Sure.

MS. PERINO: Best for last. Still on Tony? Okay, April.

Q It's kind of a procedural -- understanding cancer, how will -- as the process goes, we just don't know how long it takes and what kinds of treatments have to be done -- what will be in place procedurally here for us? Will it be you or someone else?

MS. PERINO: As Tony said on Friday, that I'll be assuming as acting press secretary or deputy -- I am his deputy. I'm not the press secretary; I'm the deputy press secretary, but I'm acting in his position. So if you need things that you would have taken directly to Tony, I'll try to help you out.

Moving on. Okay, Jim.

Q I'd like to ask you about Monica Goodling. Her decision to take the Fifth contradicts the Attorney General's promise that his staff would be forthcoming. What are your thoughts about that?

MS. PERINO: Well, I think it's unfortunate that a public servant no longer feels that her testimony would be treated fairly before the Congress. And, yes, the Attorney General, with the support of the President, urged all the members of the Justice Department to cooperate with Congress's request for testimony. However, we must respect the constitutional right of the individuals involved, and we are not going to question decisions that she made in private conversations with her and her attorney to protect those right.

Q But, clearly, the Attorney General is unable to deliver on a promise about getting to the bottom of all this now.

MS. PERINO: Again, I am not going to question someone's constitutional right that they made the decision based on with their lawyer. I would refer you to her attorney, who made a statement yesterday, to pursue that, or to the Justice Department as to --

Q Does this interface at all, or underscore for you the other part of this discussion, which has been about the terms in which White House staff will be able to have conversations with the Judiciary Committees? Because it just shows the complexity of communication, that perhaps the rules that are in place, how we do this, transcript, so forth, should be in place here?

MS. PERINO: I still believe that what we could have done at the White House is told the Judiciary Committees that no one at the White House was going to talk to them at all. Instead, what the President did was say, I've got -- you have requests to speak to four individuals, four members of my administration, close advisors, and I'm willing to have them meet with you and to have a meeting and discuss this. And I don't think that anything that she would have said, or her lawyer would have said on her behalf yesterday changes that for us.

Q Senator Specter also said that he had heard comments from Senator Leahy that he felt were prejudicial. Did the President think that the Senate Judiciary Committee had a presumption of guilt, and did that weigh in to his decision to not let Karl Rove and Harriet Miers be sworn and --

MS. PERINO: No, I've not heard the President express it that way. What we've talked about, going back, is to the principle of the equal branches of government as established by the founders of our nation under our Constitution. That was the President's principle that he was thinking of.

Q So separation of powers, and not a presumption of guilt?

MS. PERINO: Correct. But I will tell you what the President said, as well, is that what he provided was an opportunity for the members of the Congress to get to the facts that they said that they wanted to get to, in a way that was consistent with presidential prerogatives, and that he was going to resist subpoenas, of course, because of the desire on behalf of some Democrats, it seems, that they would rather have a public spectacle made out of this whole deal, rather than get to the facts that they said they want.

Peter.

Q What's the White House view on the congressional Democrat calls for safeguarding political emails by the party

or by anyone in the White House who may have a sort of political email account?

MS. PERINO: What I know -- I checked into this -- is that certain White House officials and staff members who have responsibilities that straddle both worlds, that have responsibilities in communication, regular interface with political organizations, do have a separate email account for those political communications. That is entirely appropriate, especially when you think of it in this case, that the practice is in place and followed precisely to avoid any inadvertent violations of what is called the Hatch Act. And so there are some members of the administration that do straddle both worlds. And so under an abundance of caution so that they don't violate the Hatch Act, they have these separate emails.

Q So is that traffic being safeguarded, if you will, for Congress to look at, if it decides?

MS. PERINO: With respect to presidential records, an email that is sent to or from a White House email address is automatically archived, even if the other person is not using a White House email account. I believe our -- well, I know that our White House Counsel's Office is in communication with the RNC's general counsel to make sure that those archivings have taken place.

Q So if someone sent aide X an email at one of these political accounts, are you saying that it would be archived on the --

MS. PERINO: As a general matter, I believe that to be true, but as I said, the White House -- our White House Counsel's Office is talking to the RNC just to make sure that that's the case. In some cases -- I don't know how far back that goes. I think that -- even though that there was email use in the '90s, I do think that our administration is the first, in a lot of cases, to be dealing with the volume of email that all of us deal with on a daily basis and that now you guys get to have fun with looking through.

Q So how's the White House going to respond to the request for them?

MS. PERINO: As I said, our White House Counsel's Office is talking to the RNC, and then we'll try to get back to you.

Q Is that in response to Senator Waxman's call?

MS. PERINO: The archiving?

Q The archiving, yes.

MS. PERINO: No, this has been something that was in place long before that.

Q So it's automatic?

MS. PERINO: Let me get back to you in terms of dates and how far it goes back and for which individuals.

Q I'm not sure I understand. The White House Counsel has asked the RNC to make sure which emails are archived?

MS. PERINO: Well, I took your question to be -- I took your question just a second ago to be that we all knew -- started archiving once Waxman made a request; that's not true.

Q That's not true?

MS. PERINO: No.

Q No, no, no. But you said that Attorney Fielding is in contact with the RNC to ensure -- to make sure some archiving took place. What archiving is that? I'm sorry.

MS. PERINO: The archiving that would have been for any of these -- over the past few years, of emails that had been going back and forth between people that would have these accounts to the outside.

Q How many people have those accounts?

MS. PERINO: I think it's a handful, I don't think it's a lot. Obviously, the Office of Political Affairs, because they straddle these -- both worlds. I know I don't have one.

Can I go to the back and come back? Victoria.

Q Is the White House also in touch with Bush-Cheney 2004, over their email accounts?

MS. PERINO: Not that I know of. Bush-Cheney 2004 --

Q Bush-Cheney 2004 email accounts were also --

MS. PERINO: I don't know. Let me get back to you. I don't know how those emails were -- you mean if people had both an RNC email and a Bush-Cheney email? I think, in some cases, I think those were forwarded to one place, but those are technical questions I can't answer from here right now.

Q Is it the White House's position then that it would be, or would have been inappropriate to have disposed of any emails of RNC or Bush-Cheney 2004 email accounts?

MS. PERINO: I don't know all the policies that have been in place, but I know that anything -- that we would want to make sure that we are in compliance, not only to avoid any inadvertent violations of the Hatch Act, which carries criminal penalties, but we also want to make sure that we are in compliance with the Presidential Records Act.

Q Why did you not come forward and tell the committee about this? This came out as a result of the committee's investigation they we're about; otherwise, they would never have known about it.

MS. PERINO: Well, I don't think there was anything to hide. I think people have been having these email addresses since the beginning of the administration. It's nothing hidden.

Mark.

Q The Attorney General continues to meet with prosecutors around the country. What is his message to them? Is he going to complete that? And then is there a plan for him to come see President Bush in the near future? And is there any plan to advance that testimony that, as you know, is still three weeks hence?

MS. PERINO: I'll let the Attorney General talk about his conversations with the U.S. attorneys that he's meeting with around the country. I'm sure that he's got -- I saw reporting that he had had a conference call with them, I think maybe it was last Saturday, maybe the Saturday before, in which he told them how much he appreciated all of their service.

As to whether or not the Attorney General will be coming back to the President to report, I don't have anything on the schedule, but of course, if the Attorney General wanted to talk to the President he would be welcome to do so.

Q And how about advancing the schedule date for the testimony? Because even you were saying yesterday that that is a long time.

MS. PERINO: Yes, that's something the Justice Department is going to have to work out with the committee. I don't know of any efforts underway by the Justice Department to speed that up.

Q One last question. Did the President have any reaction to the musings that the Attorney General made on his future in that interview last night, about, well, I've put some thought into whether I should stay?

MS. PERINO: I have not talked to the President about it. I talked to the President this morning about Tony Snow, but as the President -- we've said that the President has the confidence -- the Attorney General has the confidence of the President.

Q On the White House's offer right now for lawmakers to have these interviews, as you call them -- you talk about that being basically the point at which -- that that's the compromise that was reached by the White House that was presented. But was it ever really seriously considered to not make anybody available at all? I mean, was that really an option?

MS. PERINO: It's certainly an option. It's certainly an option, sure.

Q But at a time when, obviously, this is such a politically charged atmosphere and there are questions, that even the President has expressed concerns about --

MS. PERINO: I think that whenever -- I'm not going to discuss internal White House deliberations as to how we arrived at the offer that we arrived at. However, lots of things go into that consideration. And the decision that we made was one to be as forthcoming as possible to Congress and still preserve the President's prerogatives.

Sheryl.

Q Dana, it would seem that on the issue of testimony interviews by Rove and others, you're at an impasse. The Judiciary Committee has sent Fred Fielding a letter formally rejecting the White House offer, and saying that it would like further negotiations. Is Fred Fielding preparing a response?

MS. PERINO: I'll check -- as far as I know -- and I saw him this morning -- I don't know of any negotiations that are ongoing. I will check to see if there have been any discussions. I know that Fred was willing to listen respectfully and attentively to members, but that we felt that our offer was one that we would hope that they would see wisdom in accepting.

Q The Democrats seem to feel that the ball is in your court to respond to that letter.

MS. PERINO: The ball is on the fence.

Q Do you feel that the ball is in their court, and that theirs --

MS. PERINO: We do.

Q -- and theirs is the next move, and they can either accept or issue subpoenas?

MS. PERINO: Look, we -- I would say that they initially said that they wanted to issue subpoenas. We said that's not necessary. We said we will make these four individuals available to you to talk to in a way that's consistent with the President's prerogatives. And they decided not to take it.

However -- so they went ahead and they authorized subpoenas anyway. So they said they were going to do it; we said you didn't need to; they went ahead and did it, in terms of the authorization. And I haven't heard anything more about whether or not those subpoenas are forthcoming. But we believe that if they wanted to get to the facts of the matter, we have presented them a way to do that.

Q So whose is the next move?

MS. PERINO: I think it's Congress's.

John.

Q Dana, if Justice officials are taking the Fifth, does that put any pressure on you guys to possibly negotiate? Because Tony has been saying you can get everything you need from all the key players at Justice, and we're

being extremely generous, as well.

MS. PERINO: Well, first of all, step back. You're saying if Justice Department officials, plural, are going to be taking the Fifth -- and I want to make it clear that there was one individual who, through her counsel, made a statement yesterday regarding that. I don't know of anybody else that has, but I am not in regular contact with them, and I'm not inquiring to their counsels of what they're going to do.

And I can see -- I can see your point, as to why someone might think that that we would want to change our negotiations stance. However, I think that lots of people can find lots of different reasons for us to change our negotiation stance, and I don't see any reason to at this point.

April.

Q Dana, is pleading the Fifth signifying that a crime has been committed?

MS. PERINO: Well, I think that's an unfortunate interpretation of the Fifth Amendment, which is available to all of us, that in our public -- in our judicial system, invoking the Fifth Amendment is not an admission of guilt. But I would refer you to her lawyer for anything more.

Jonathan. I'm sorry, go ahead.

Q Once again -- and I asked Tony this last week -- was a crime committed in firing --

MS. PERINO: There is absolutely no indication that there was any crime committed, nor was there anything improper done.

Q You're saying, "indication;" you're not giving me a flat-out no.

MS. PERINO: I'm telling there's absolutely no indication that would point to that. Absolutely no indication to point to that.

Jonathan.

Q Ask about Iran?

MS. PERINO: Sure.

Q The Pentagon has announced naval exercises in the Persian Gulf involving two aircraft carriers, quite an elaborate exercise. Is this an effort to send Iran a message, particularly in regards to those captured British sailors --

MS. PERINO: No -- I checked on this right before coming out, and I understand that those are long-planned naval exercises that they're carrying forward. They were long -- they've been on the schedule for a while, and so I'd have to refer you to DOD for more.

Q Actually, what the Navy said is that the two aircraft carrier groups were scheduled to be in the Persian Gulf for a long time, but this exercise was planned after the seizure of those British sailors.

MS. PERINO: Then perhaps I misunderstood what I heard. I understood the exercise was planned, as well. But can we look into it and get back to you?

Can I go to the back, and then Lester? Then maybe we'll be done? Okay. (Laughter.) Steve -- help me. (Laughter.)

Q We can stop now. (Laughter.)

MS. PERINO: Go ahead.

Q Are you aware of how many conversations the President had about the eight U.S. attorneys in question prior to them being dismissed?

MS. PERINO: No, I have said on the record for several weeks now that there is no indication that the President knew about any of the ongoing discussions over the two years, nor did he see a list or a plan before it was carried out.

Q If that's the case, what is the White House position, as it relates to executive privilege? My understanding of executive privilege, as it was decided by the Supreme Court, is that if the President has not had a conversation about the issue at hand, the people involved in the Office of the President would not be covered by executive privilege.

MS. PERINO: No -- well, first of all, we have not asserted --

Q What is the White House position regarding --

MS. PERINO: Okay, I'll answer you. First of all, we have not asserted any privilege at all, whatsoever, and that includes executive privilege. I have laid out for you the principles that we have. But I will tell you that conversation amongst and between the President's closest advisors are included in that principle that a President should be able to get advice from his closest advisors. That includes the conversations that happen in between them, even if they don't reach the President.

Q So as it relates to congressional committees' requests to meet with members of the White House staff, you have not gone back to those senators and congressmen and said, the reason why we don't want our members of the Office of the President meeting with you is because of executive privilege?

MS. PERINO: I think if you look at the letter that we sent to the Hill, we spell that out pretty clearly.

Okay, Lester. Make it quick.

Q Yes. Two questions.

MS. PERINO: Okay. I figured.

Q What role does the President believe government should play in advocating or requiring higher fuel efficiency standards for vehicles?

MS. PERINO: Well, we said that in the President's 20-in-10 program that he is seeking to reduce gasoline consumption by 20 percent in 10 years. You get there two ways. One is by reforming the CAFE system, and the other is by replacing 35 billion gallons of traditional gasoline with alternative fuels.

Q And second question: Senator Hillary Clinton said that Attorney General Gonzales should resign "because he is at the center of a widening scandal over the firing of several U.S. attorneys, a grand total of eight." But in March of 1993, when Janet Reno fired all 93 U.S. attorneys at once, President Clinton said -- a quote -- "All of those people are routinely replaced," noted The Wall Street Journal. And my question: What is the President's reaction to the Clinton appointment of Paula Casey as U.S. attorney in Little Rock who never brought any major Whitewater indictments?

MS. PERINO: Well, first of all, let me back up and say that people might want to use -- use the word "scandal" to describe the President's absolutely proper and reasonable reasons to -- or the reasonableness of being able to hire and fire U.S. attorneys at will because they serve at the pleasure of the President, and the President sets a broad prosecutorial agenda which the U.S. attorneys are there to fulfill.

And I will let other people, and your listeners, make conclusions about Hillary Clinton's statements.

Q Thank you.

MS. PERINO: Thank you.

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