




For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
April 16, 2007

Press Briefing by Dana Perino

White House Conference Center Briefing Room

12:58 P.M. EDT

 [Video \(Windows\)](#)

 [Press Briefings](#)

 [Audio](#)

MS. PERINO: Good afternoon. I have several announcements and then we'll go to questions.

The President was made aware of the Virginia Tech shootings. He was horrified and his immediate reaction was one of deep concern for the families of the victims, the victims, themselves, the students, the professors and all the people of Virginia who have dealt with this shocking incident. And his thoughts and prayers are with them; we are monitoring the situation. And while state and local authorities are in the lead right now -- I think that will remain the case, but federal assets are available should they be needed, if Virginia were to request them.

On Iraq, this is the 70th day since the President requested emergency funding for our troops. President Bush spoke with Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki via secure video this morning. That lasted about 50 minutes. The two leaders discussed ongoing efforts among Iraqi leaders to come to agreement on important matters of reconciliation and that determination of Iraqi legislators to continue their important work in the face of the al Qaeda-claimed bombing at the Iraqi parliament last week.

The President and Prime Minister also discussed the importance of garnering more regional support for political and security efforts in Iraq, and the opportunity that the upcoming regional conference in Sharm el-Sheikh presents, on May 3rd and 4th.

In Russia, we are deeply disturbed by the heavy-handed manner in which this weekend's demonstrations in Moscow and St. Petersburg were broken up by the authorities, and by an emerging pattern of use of excessive force by the authorities in reaction to similar events. We also find it intolerable that journalists were detained -- an unacceptable practice that hinders freedom of the press. We underscore that allowing peaceful expressions of protest is an essential element of democracy and a universally recognized human right.

In Nigeria, the United States takes seriously reports of voting irregularities and election-related violence during this past weekend's state and local elections. We would urge that officials address any problems in order to ensure that Saturday's presidential election, that those polls are free and fair and conducted in an atmosphere free of violence. These elections set the stage for an important milestone, as they will lead to the first civilian-to-civilian transfer of power in Nigeria's history at the end of May.

And the last announcement is that the President and Mrs. Bush extend warm wishes to Pope Benedict XVI on his 80th birthday. Pope Benedict is a great moral leader who offers a powerful message of love, faith and reason. Today we celebrate his life and we express our appreciation for his commitment to the cause of human dignity around the world.

Terry.

Q Any talk that President might go to Virginia to comfort the families?

MS. PERINO: I spoke to the President at 12:35 p.m., I was the first to alert him to the tragedy and I think that it's a little bit premature to talk about any other travel arrangements, or anything else. But if that changes, we'll let you know.

Q Might he speak on the topic?

MS. PERINO: If it changes, I'll let you know for sure. He had just been informed, as I said, about 25 minutes ago.

Q Has he communicated these concerns to President Putin, about the demonstrations?

MS. PERINO: I don't believe that they've spoken, no.

Q Will he do so, or might he do that?

MS. PERINO: Well, I know that the --

Q Or bring in the Russian Ambassador to talk about it, or anything like that?

MS. PERINO: I haven't heard of any such plans. Obviously, we've had a consistent position that we think that these types of disruptions at peaceful protests are unacceptable. And we welcome the call by some Russian officials for a thorough investigation of the activities. And we also call for the Russian government to reiterate its commitment and attention to respect fully the international standards of involving freedom of speech and the press and the assembly -- freedom to assemble. And I would refer you to the State Department to find out if any of the ambassadors have been in touch.

Jessica.

Q The Attorney General released a copy of the remarks he'll be making before Congress tomorrow. Has the President read these remarks, and is he satisfied that they're detailed enough about the pattern of decision making?

MS. PERINO: I don't know if the President has read the remarks, but he does believe that the Justice Department and the Attorney General, at his direction, have been fully responsive to Congress and that there will be a hearing tomorrow, and then the AG can continue to answer questions from the members.

Q So were they submitted to the White House, or reviewed by the White House before they were released?

MS. PERINO: I don't believe so. At least I did not see them, and that was one thing I said I would check on from the gaggle, and I didn't have an opportunity.

Just to let you know, the committee asked for the remarks -- or the testimony, 48 hours in advance, and I don't know if it was the Attorney General who first released them. But they asked for the remarks, and the Attorney General also had an op-ed in yesterday's paper, and I think that he's working very hard to make sure people have answers to the questions that they have.

Q Did the President read the op-ed?

MS. PERINO: I don't know.

April.

Q Dana, going back to Virginia Tech, what more does this White House think needs to be done as it relates to gun issues? The President says current laws need to be strengthened, anything beyond that -- you had a conference on school violence with guns -- what more needs to be done?

MS. PERINO: I would point you back to the fact that President, along with Secretary Spellings, hosted last October -- October 10, 2006 -- a conference on school gun violence after the Amish school shooting and the other shootings that had happened, because the tragedies are the ones that just collectively break America's heart and are ones that we deeply feel, because all of us can imagine what it would be like to have been at your own school, your own college, and to have something happen. And those of us who are parents, or brothers or sisters

of people at the schools have to take that into consideration.

As far as policy, the President believes that there is a right for people to bear arms, but that all laws must be followed. And certainly bringing a gun into a school dormitory and shooting -- I don't want to say numbers because I know that they're still trying to figure out many people were wounded and possibly killed, but obviously that would be against the law and something that someone should be held accountable for.

Q Columbine, Amish school shooting, now this, and a whole host of other gun issues brought into schools -- that's not including guns on the streets and in many urban areas and rural areas. Does there need to be some more restrictions? Does there need to be gun control in this country?

MS. PERINO: The President -- as I said, April, if there are changes to the President's policy we will let you know. But we've had a consistent policy of ensuring that the Justice Department is enforcing all of the gun laws that we have on the books and making sure that they're prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Q Lastly, in Texas, if I'm correct, he passed legislation, no age restriction on possession of weapons, if I'm correct. Should there be some kind of federal age limit, as far as the President is concerned, raising the age for gun possession in this country?

MS. PERINO: Unfortunately, I'm going to have to go back and look at what the record was in Texas. Maybe Ken Herman could tell us. We'll go to Ken next.

Q Dana, what is the outcome the President hopes to see at Wednesday's meeting on Iraq at the White House?

MS. PERINO: The President hopes to find out if the Democrats are going to be able to come together, resolve their differences, and stop being so unreasonable and come to him and say how they are going to pass a clean bill that can get to his desk that will fund the troops.

As you continue to hear from them, they are not consistent in their position, they refuse to take arbitrary timetables off of the table, and other restrictions against our generals. And the President has said that he hopes that they can come down here and talk about how they're going to get a clean bill to his desk, because they've also said that they're not going to let the troops go without funding. So there has to be a reasonable discussion on Wednesday, and the President hopes that that will be the beginning of that, on Wednesday afternoon.

Q Does he expect them to give up on timetables?

MS. PERINO: I'm going to let them have a conversation on Wednesday, and I'll update you from there.

Q I guess a logical follow up to that question is, what is the President perhaps willing to compromise if the timetables have to be taken off the table?

MS. PERINO: The President was very clear today in his remarks of what he is for and what he will accept. What he will not accept is an arbitrary timetable for withdrawal, a date for withdrawal that tells our enemies exactly when we're going to leave. He is not going to accept armchair quarterbacking from Capitol Hill on the generals who are in Baghdad and around Iraq trying to prosecute this war. And he is really disappointed that they had to include pork barrel spending in order to get this bill across the goal line.

So it is the President who has a very principled stand, one that is consistent. And the Democrats don't have any agreement on their side. So, hopefully, they can come to agreement on their side. And if they come on Wednesday and they don't, we'll have to see where we go from there.

Q Doesn't he have to give something, maybe? I realize you're not going to negotiate here, but --

MS. PERINO: No, I'm not going to negotiate from the podium. The President invited them to the meeting on Wednesday and he's looking forward to it, and we'll update you after that.

Peter.

Q Dana, a lot of the stories about the Gonzales appearance tomorrow framed it as "his job is on the line." Is it?

MS. PERINO: Look, I think there's a lot of hype about the hearing. This issue has been ongoing for I think over a couple of months now. The Justice Department has been fully responsive to the committee, and that's going to culminate tomorrow in a hearing. But I think that one day's hearing does not necessarily mean -- I've heard it described as "make or break," and I would submit to you that the Attorney General, as you've reported, has been as forthcoming as he possibly can be, has laid it all out on the table for them and tomorrow he looks forward to answering their questions.

Q Is this a job security issue?

MS. PERINO: No, I don't think so. The Attorney General has the full confidence of the President, and the President wanted the Justice Department to be fully responsive and they have been. The President also said he needed to go to Capitol Hill and continue to talk to those members. He's had many conversations with members of Congress by phone, while they were on their two-week recess, and tomorrow he'll have a chance to talk to them in person.

Q Well, does he, and he alone, have to dig himself out of this controversy?

MS. PERINO: Look, the Attorney General has taken full responsibility for it, and I think that the Attorney General looks forward to answering those questions tomorrow.

Q Dana, General Sheehan, one of the names that's come up as a potential war czar, says the administration does not have an "agreed-upon strategic view" for Iraq. Do you buy that?

MS. PERINO: Well, first of all, I would take issue with the idea that he was a potential war czar. As Steve Hadley has said and as we have said, that no list of candidates has been narrowed down and no names have been sent to the President for consideration.

What we are working on right now is implementation of a long, deliberative process of a policy that was created and announced by the President on January 10, 2007, and is being implemented right now by General David Petraeus. We are quite unified. And we are starting to see some small signs of success, despite the very real challenges and the violence that the enemy continues to perpetrate.

Suzanne.

Q Can you give us an update on the emails from the RNC side and the White House side? Last week we talked about the organization, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, a figure of 5 million missing emails. You had mentioned in the gaggle you thought -- you would check with the Office of Administration and perhaps that wasn't correct.

MS. PERINO: Look, the left-wing group, CREW, came up with a number of 5 million. We don't know where they came up with that number. We've told you what we know, which is that we are aware that there could have been some emails that were not automatically archived because of a technical issue. And we have talked with the Office of Administration about that, and we're looking into those details. But given the complex nature of this issue, it might take us a little while to identify those. We do, however, know that most -- all of those emails should be available on backup tapes. And so we'll continue to look at it. This is separate from the RNC accounts, and as soon as we have more information, we'll provide it.

Q Are you confident they're on backup tapes, or you're still in that phase of investigating?

MS. PERINO: There should be, and we just want to make sure that there are all of them. And, remember, there's a huge amount of email that comes in and out of the White House. And it's quite a feat for the IT folks to be able to keep up with software upgrades and storage and the amount of -- just the amount of traffic that's coming in and out on emails. On any given year, I think I've read upwards of 50 million emails are sent and received, not to

mention forwarded or copied or blind copied, or all of those different features that you can use with email. So it's a massive number.

Q And what was the agreement between the White House Counsel and members of Congress regarding an independent investigator, computer IT?

MS. PERINO: Sure, that was regarding a separate issue, which is on the small number of people that have access to RNC-hosted email accounts, based on the job description that they have in order for them to avoid violating the Hatch Act. And the agreement that we came to was -- was suggested by Senator Leahy and Senator Specter, I believe, in which they said, why don't we work together to see if there's an outside consultant, forensics consultant that can help us identify if there are any potentially lost emails. Fred Fielding and the rest of the White House thought that was a reasonable idea. And so Fred Fielding and the Senator spoke on Friday, and their staffs are going to meet today to talk about how to move that process forward.

Q Is there any sense of a timetable, when you might have some more details?

MS. PERINO: No.

Q Weeks or days?

MS. PERINO: I don't know. I'm not going to put a date on it.

Q Dana, can I come back to the Gonzales testimony again? One of the things Senator Schumer said is that there's a lot of "I don't know," and "don't remember" in it. You've heard the testimony. Do you think that the Attorney General has been specific enough in how he has answered some of the questions about the --

MS. PERINO: I think that the Attorney General has been perfectly honest. And I do have to -- I think all of us have to remember that this was an issue that took place over now almost two-and-a-half years. And so if there are certain things that somebody can't specifically remember, I wouldn't consider that necessarily to be without -- outside the realm of possibility, and I think the Attorney General has been very honest and he looks forward to that hearing tomorrow.

Q Does the President plan to speak to the Attorney General or offer him any guidance?

MS. PERINO: They spoke this morning.

Q And can you give us any sense of --

MS. PERINO: I don't have a readout of it, but they -- obviously they speak regularly, and this morning, when they spoke, they talked about his testimony.

Go ahead, Jim.

Q I was just wondering, because there was a while where they weren't speaking so regularly.

MS. PERINO: That's not the case. The Attorney General has been here for regular meetings with the President.

Q Wait a minute, we asked several times if they talked, and I know that a week had gone by or, say, eight days --

MS. PERINO: They don't speak every day, but I can assure you that I have seen him coming in and out of the Oval Office for the regular meetings that he has, especially for FBI --

Q And have they discussed this incident?

MS. PERINO: They have many other things to discuss, as well, but again, this morning when they spoke, they did

talk about tomorrow's testimony.

Q And you have no readout for us at all about what was said?

MS. PERINO: No, I wasn't there. But I can tell you that they spoke, and obviously, as I've told you, the President has full confidence in the Attorney General, and there's a hearing tomorrow, and once we get that behind us, we'll see how we can get about the business of the people.

Q I was listening to Vice President Cheney yesterday on "Face the Nation," and he seemed --

MS. PERINO: Nice self-promotion. (Laughter.)

Q -- and it seemed to me that he was less than resolute in his backing of the Attorney General.

MS. PERINO: I think that is an over-interpretation. The Vice President said the Attorney General has the full confidence of the President, and he said that the Attorney General is going to have to go up to Capitol Hill tomorrow and speak with the senators and answer their questions. And that's exactly what I'm saying here today.

It's not -- this was an issue that the Attorney General managed out of his department; he's taken full responsibility for it. And so I think the Vice President was accurate in his statements yesterday.

Q Has the White House received a letter from some conservatives asking for Gonzales's resignation? Has the President seen that?

MS. PERINO: Not that I'm aware of.

Go ahead, Les.

Q Thank you, Dana. Two questions: Yesterday The New York Times quoted Houston Baker, an English professor at Duke who has now relocated to Vanderbilt, as condemning what he called "rapacious white athletes given license to rape, maraud, deploy hate speech, and feel proud of themselves --

MS. PERINO: What's your question, Les?

Q -- scummy bunch of white males living like farm animals." The question: Does the President believe that this man and 87 other Duke faculty who also maligned these three lacrosse players found not guilty should now apologize, or not?

MS. PERINO: As much as you have tried to drag me into this story, I'm going to continue to resist it, Les. What's your next question?

Q Okay. You, Dana, we're quoted --

MS. PERINO: Uh-oh.

Q -- in yesterday's New York Times, with your 61-word announcement, beginning with, "The President has full confidence in Paul Wolfowitz." But the large Times headline above your quote was "the mounting storm on Wolfowitz," which The Washington Post headlined as "furor." And my question: Do you or the President believe that Mr. Wolfowitz has been libeled by these newspapers publishing details of his personal life?

MS. PERINO: Let me just reiterate for you that the President does have full confidence in Paul Wolfowitz. He has done a very good job at the World Bank, where they are working to lift people up out of poverty around the world. He's focused on Africa and other areas around the world that need the World Bank's attention. And the President continues to have confidence in him.

Q You don't think that he has been libeled, then?

MS. PERINO: I'm not going to comment on that.

Q Does the President think he used good judgment in this incident, however?

MS. PERINO: Look, what he knows is that Paul Wolfowitz has apologized, and the board at the World Bank is undergoing a review and I think I'll have to leave it there.

Victoria.

Q Does the President not remember having a phone conversation with Senator Domenici about U.S. attorney Iglesias? Or is he clear that one did not take place?

MS. PERINO: I've never asked him that question. I do know that his vague recollection was that he had heard complaints. And then I'll refer you to his statement -- or his answer to a question that he got in Mexico, in which he was asked that question, and he said that he recalls being at a meeting on the Hill in which this issue was brought up -- a meeting of senators on the Hill in which it was brought up. But I've never heard anything about a phone call.

Q So he's never actually answered the question.

MS. PERINO: He answered the question. And I don't know anything about a phone call; I've never heard that -- except for questions from you all.

Q You mean the phone call --

MS. PERINO: I don't know that the President ever received a phone call. I don't have any record of that, or any recollection of it, and I've been dealing with this issue for many weeks.

Q When he was at the meeting on the Hill where it was brought up, it was Senator Domenici --

MS. PERINO: I don't think people remember, necessarily, who it was. And, remember, complaints about voter fraud cases were coming in from various different places.

Q Right. Just to be clear about this, then, Senator Domenici and the President, has there ever been a direct conversation between the two?

MS. PERINO: I don't know. I don't believe so, necessarily, about this particular issue, but remember, when -- the President sees members of Congress all of the time, and as I think I said last week, whenever a senator has the President's ear, whether the issue -- whether the topic of the meeting is the Iraq war supplemental, if they have a chance to talk about other issues, they will. And so I'm not going to rule it out, but I just can't say that Senator Domenici and the President ever had a one-on-one conversation about it.

Sarah.

Q Thank you. Dana, is the President running out of patience on North Korea, which appears to be stalling again? What does he plan to do if North Korea refuses to end its nuclear program?

MS. PERINO: The goal here is denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. As Chris Hill said yesterday, that the host of the six-party talks, the Chinese, have asked the Americans to have some patience. And so we think that that would be the prudent thing to do, and we believe that everyone will and should live up to its obligations from the February 13th agreement.

Q Follow up on Terry's question about the letter from conservatives. And whether you know any specifics on this letter or not, I'm just wondering, in general --

MS. PERINO: I've not seen one.

Q In general, though, when the President receives a letter like this from, in this case, conservatives who include longtime supporters of the President, expressing concern and criticism and calling for Gonzales to step down, does a letter like that get the President's attention more than other letters, given the fact that they are long-time supporters?

MS. PERINO: A lot of things come across the President's desk. Usually in a case like that, if the letter didn't make it directly to him to look at, then one of the senior staff members would have brought it to his attention, sure.

Q The phone call -- did he speak with Gonzales by phone or face-to-face?

MS. PERINO: By phone, by phone this morning.

Q Okay. Thank you.

END 1:19 P.M. EDT

Return to this article at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/04/20070416-1.html>

 [CLICK HERE TO PRINT](#)