

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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PRESS GAGGLE
BY
ROBERT GIBBS

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MR. GIBBS: You guys ready? Yes, sir.

Q Robert, what are the expectations on tomorrow's auto bailout? And I know you said in the past you're not worried about one-day market reactions. But is the White House planning to do anything to ease worried Wall Street investors?

MR. GIBBS: Well, let me take the first part. I mean, obviously, as you heard administration officials say throughout the weekend, a strong, vibrant auto industry as the basis for our manufacturing in this country is extremely important. We have to ensure that the cars of tomorrow are built here by Americans, for Americans.

Obviously we are anxious to see the plans that will be offered by the auto companies. We've had teams of people from our economic team working on this issue throughout the transition, in the first few weeks of this administration. So we're anxious to take a look at the plans, understanding that it is extremely important to have a strong and viable auto industry. Obviously that is likely to require some restructuring to ensure its viability, and we think some of that will be in those plans and we look forward to going through and analyzing that in order to see where the companies feel like they are and what the most important next steps are for both the American economy, for the workers, as well as the companies.

Q And what about Wall Street worries? Are there any plans -- are there any worries about what Wall Street might do after these reports are given to the administration tomorrow?

MR. GIBBS: You know, I don't know of any particular concerns that Wall Street might have over these. Obviously, I think Wall Street and Main Street continue to be concerned about where we are economically. But, again -- I'll paraphrase part of your question, which was to put our economy back on a path toward sustained, long-term economic growth is likely going to require us looking beyond one day's market reaction to anything, in order to get us on that pathway.

Q Robert, why did the President -- has the President moved away from the idea of a car czar and in favor of the broad team approach? And when will he announce, unveil his new task force on autos?

MR. GIBBS: Well, the approach that the administration has settled on I think provides a vast amount of expertise that crosses a number of governmental agencies and departments, and brings in the vast amount of experience that the administration has to deal with the auto restructuring -- any auto restructuring issues.

So I think that the model that's been set up with Secretary Geithner and Dr. Summers is one that will help coordinate throughout the federal government the responses that include energy, transportation, as well as the economic team. And I think also reports of Richard Bloom as somebody who has vast credibility on a lot of these issues will be a big boost for this task force.

Q What about the announcement, when the President wanted to unveil this task force formally?

MR. GIBBS: Let me check. I think the unveiling could come later today.

Q Today?

MR. GIBBS: Yes. I think that's right, but I will double-check on the exact time.

Q How will that be done?

MR. GIBBS: I assume mostly just through a press release; I don't think there are any events planned.

Q The car czar idea was one that was floating and seemed to have picked up some currency -- the idea of giving some one individual, empowering one individual to kind of run the process. I know there was some Michigan lawmakers came, preferred a committee approach. But was there some reason?

MR. GIBBS: I think this just gives us a broader array of people that can, as I said, bring their expertise and understanding of a lot of complex issues together in a presidential-level task force that can deal with the many challenges that this is going to face over the course of the next several months.

Q Can I ask the latest long-running question about when the Afghan troop decision is going to be made? There was a report today that the President perhaps is not imminently ready to make a decision, but -- should we read -- believe what we read in the papers?

MR. GIBBS: I'd admonish you to never believe what you read in the papers, but I know that's awkward, given my present company. (Laughter.)

No, again, I think he has -- he's been working on this in consultation with military leaders and in conjunction with his foreign policy team. As you know, Ambassador Holbrooke is in the region and has met with the Afghans and the -- I believe has met with the Pakistanis, I should double check -- but is in the region. The administration continues its review of our policy relating to Afghanistan. And I would expect that the President's decision could come shortly -- without laying out a firm timetable of when, exactly, that might be. But I would think shortly.

Q You've been saying "shortly" for a while. So there's no change, really.

MR. GIBBS: No, I don't think so. I mean, I think as soon as he's ready to communicate that to commanders and to families that would have to implement anything like that, I

think at that point we'll be able to communicate that decision to you all.

Q Can you pin that down to days or weeks?

MR. GIBBS: Shortly. (Laughter.) I don't think it will go -- without getting into broad time lines, I wouldn't -- I don't think this is anything that involves weeks.

Q When do you think the President is going to make the decision about the new Marine Ones, the 28 new Marine Ones?

MR. GIBBS: I saw the article. I don't have any guidance on even what a time line for a decision might be. I'd have to check with somebody over at the Pentagon.

Obviously the one thing I would say, and I think the one thing the article pointed out is any number of programs that start out at a certain level budgetarily, and at a certain time line you see get off that time line and certainly increase exponentially in budget quite quickly. And I think there's no doubt that as we deal with our long-term fiscal constraints, that procurement at the Pentagon is something that is going to have to be looked at closely. Whenever you have a system that starts at a certain level, and like I said, ends up costing twice that amount of money, I think there are concerns -- well, concerns that in terms of what that means for the taxpayers, as well as what that means for the military. And I think those are many questions that have to be addressed.

Q Robert, what about the reports that Steven Rattner was a lead choice for car czar? Did he decline?

MR. GIBBS: Well, as I think I've cautioned many times, I hesitate always to put names out there for selections that the President has yet to make. Again, I think the President feels like the task force is an idea that combines a lot of smart people and a lot of different governmental jurisdictions with a senior advisor who has some real expertise in doing some of this restructuring and representing both the concerns of investors and bond holders, but also the livelihoods of tens of thousands of

auto workers in the Midwest who need to have a seat at the table, as well.

Q Can you confirm, though, that he was in the running or that he was going to be part --

MR. GIBBS: I'm not going to get into the back-and-forth of -- or anything involving people that have not or are not announced.

Q Sticking with that hypothetical, are we any closer to an HHS secretary this week? Any guidance on timing?

MR. GIBBS: I don't have any guidance on timing. Obviously the President and the team continue to -- they're going through qualified candidates, and as soon as we have news on that we will let you know. I don't have a time line on that at this point.

Q So we shouldn't read anything into the Kansas governor cancelling her schedule today?

MR. GIBBS: Not that I'm aware of, no.

Q Thank you very much.

END

12:05

P.M. EST