

**THE WHITE HOUSE REGULAR BRIEFING**  
**BRIEFER: SCOTT MCCLELLAN, WHITE HOUSE SPOKESMAN**  
**WHITE HOUSE BRIEFING ROOM, WASHINGTON D.C.**  
**11:55 A.M. EST, TUESDAY, MARCH 7, 2006**

**On the U.S. position on Iran's nuclear program:**

Q Scott, can you characterize -- on the nuke deal with Iran -- can you characterize what the Russians have been hearing from the administration today? Have they backed off their initial position as far as trying to work something out with Iran? And is the administration's position that any kind of research is a bad thing? Anything that allows the Iranians to become more familiar with the process of creating potential to have nuclear energy is a bad thing?

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, let me -- a couple of things.

One, this is not about us or the international community. It's about the regime in Iran. So let's keep the focus where it should be, and that's where it has been.

But, no, I'm not able to characterize meetings that have taken place so far because those meetings have taken place over at the Department of State, and I think that you just a short time ago -- some of your colleagues were able to hear from Secretary Rice and Foreign Minister Lavrov of Russia.

He will be coming over here shortly and meeting with the president as well. He met with the secretary of State and our national security advisor, Steve Hadley, last night. They had very good discussions. My understanding was that the foreign minister reiterated what Russia has previously said; they said that -- my understanding is he said there's no new Russian proposal out there, that any enrichment and reprocessing activities would take place on -- under their proposal on Russian soil, and that there would be a fuel takeback provision in place.

And we had previously expressed our support for this approach because it would allow the Iranian people to realize the benefits of peaceful civilian nuclear energy in a way that provides an important guarantee.

Remember, this is -- the international community has made it very clear that they're concerned about the Iranian regime developing nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian program, and a very clear message has been sent to the regime that the international community will not allow that to happen. And that's why the board of the International Atomic Energy Agency has reported this matter to the United Nations Security Council. And now the board is reviewing the latest report from the director-general of the Atomic Energy Agency, which continues to raise very troubling concerns about the regime's behavior.

The regime continues to move in the wrong direction. We have made it very clear, as well as the international community, that Iran needs to suspend ALL its enrichment-related activities. And the reason why is because of Iran's history. The regime has a history of defying the international community, of hiding its nuclear activities for some two decades and of refusing to comply with international safeguard obligations, and that is why the international community is continuing to grow more concerned about the regime's provocative actions and behavior. It continues to refuse to come into compliance with what the board just said.

**On the Russian position on Iranian enrichment:**

Q I wonder if I can ask again Jim's question, which I don't think you answered. Given that Sergei Lavrov did meet with the president's national security adviser last night, did you get the impression the Russians agree that Iran should do no enrichment, not even a limited amount, and that there should be a take-back of all materials, and that there is no space between Washington and Moscow on that -- on that issue?

MR. MCCLELLAN: One, I'm not going to speak for the Russian government. I just don't do that. I will express our views, and --

Q You could tell us whether Sergey Lavrov gave Hadley assurances.

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, he just spoke publicly to this very issue over at the State Department, and the foreign minister said that there is no new proposal that the Russians are talking about, something along those lines. He said that their proposal would mean that the enrichment and reprocessing would take place on Russian soil, the fuel would be provided to Iran, and then they would take back that fuel. So -- we previously expressed support for that approach, so I don't think anything's changed in terms of our view on that.

### **On small-scale uranium enrichment within Iran:**

Q But some members of the international community -- it's not like a monolithic bloc -- there are some members of the international community that seem open to the idea that some research can be done on Iranian soil.

MR. MCCLELLAN: Let's talk about where we are because this is an issue of trust. And what the regime needs to do is make a dramatic shift in its course and behavior. It needs to come into compliance with what the board of the International Atomic Energy Agency said. Otherwise, the international community must hold the regime to account.

The International Atomic Energy Agency board spelled out what the regime needs to do. It needs to adhere to the Paris Agreement it made with the Europeans, meaning it needs to suspend all enrichment-related activities. It needs to come into full compliance with the International Atomic Energy Agency, and it needs to work in good faith through negotiations with the Europeans.

The Europeans have put forward a significant proposal with Russia that would allow the regime to -- or, allow the Iranian people to realize the benefits of peaceful nuclear energy. But the regime has continued to reject the proposals that have been put on the table. But if the regime were allowed to pursue any sort of enrichment-related activity on its own soil, it could use the technology it develops in a clandestine way to develop nuclear weapons. That is simply not acceptable, given the regime's history and its continued defiance.

### **On U.S. rhetoric emboldening Ahmadinejad:**

Q Is the president at all concerned that the position that the U.S. and others are taking could actually embolden the Iranian leader, who may feel that he can gain politically by being the target of Western concern? And with the vice president today saying every option's on the table, implicitly implying a military option, is that a concern at all for the president?

MR. MCCLELLAN: We're pursuing a diplomatic solution to this. The matter is being reviewed -- the report by the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency is being reviewed this week by the board of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

That report continues to raise troubling concerns. It shows that the regime is failing to comply with the International Atomic Energy Agency. It shows that the regime continues to engage in enrichment-related activities. This is in direct confrontation with the international community and the demands of the international community. This is -- as I said, it's an issue of trust here with the regime in Iran.

Our concerns are broader than just the nuclear issue, as you point out. We are concerned about the regime's behavior when it comes to its sponsorship of terrorism. We've concerned about its behavior when it comes to the repression of its people. We're concerned about its behavior when it comes to its role in the region. It has been -- the regime has been a destabilizing force in the broader Middle East. And we have made it very clear that we stand with the Iranian people, who have democratic aspirations. The Iranian people want to chart their own future, and we stand firmly with them. And the provocative actions of the regime and its leaders only further isolate the Iranian people from the rest of the international community.

And you know, the regime has options that have been put before it, but it has refused to seize those opportunities.

### **On the definition of “meaningful consequences”:**

Q Scott, when the vice president says Iran could face meaningful consequences, what does that mean?

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, those will be discussions that take place with other members of the Security Council. As I indicated, the matter is being -- been referred to the Security Council. After the review --

Q He's talking about a military --

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, after -- we're pursuing a diplomatic solution. It's going through a new phase of diplomacy now when it heads to the Security Council. After this review is complete of the latest report, we expect that it will very shortly go to the Security Council, and then, those issues will be discussed before the Security Council. The regime in Iran has continued to defy the international community instead of join with the international community and work in a cooperative way.

Q So the vice president didn't mean to threaten military action today?

MR. MCCLELLAN: He stated what the president has repeatedly stated, and what we have repeatedly stated. He was stating our policy.

### **On Rep. Peter King's proposal to salvage the Dubai Ports World deal:**

Q On the ports deal, the president has said he would veto any movement to block it on the part of Congress. Does the White House have any reaction to Congressman Peter King's suggestion that one way to salvage the deal would be to have a U.S. company come in as a subcontractor, to have a U.S. company have the access to do work on the ground --

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, I think, as you can imagine --

Q -- underneath the Dubai Ports World, which would -- on paper operations?

MR. MCCLELLAN: Yeah, first of all, we appreciate Congressman King's comments last week when -- or a couple of weeks ago when the company agreed to submit a new transaction to the Committee on Foreign Investment and ask for a 45-day investigation. That was at the request of the company. It is now going through the review process, and we expect it to go through that 45-day investigation shortly. And Congressman King and some others expressed appreciation for that step. They felt it was an important step for the company to take.

What we are doing is continuing to work very closely with Congress. There have been ongoing discussions, as you can imagine, between the company and congressional leaders. We have been involved in those discussions, and we will continue to work with members to make sure that they have the information they need and that they have the facts that they need, so that they have a greater understanding of this transaction. And we believe that, as they come to that greater understanding of the facts, that they will be more comfortable with the transaction moving forward. But there's a lot of discussions going on, and I think a lot of those discussions are with the company.

And we will continue to work with members of Congress on these issues. One area where we're focused is on reform of the Committee on Foreign Investment process. We've been talking with members of Congress and congressional leaders. We've been listening to their ideas. We're continuing to engage on that issue and look at ways that, as we move forward, we can reform that process.

Q (Off mike) -- specific to their suggestion, though?

MR. MCCLELLAN: I'm sorry?

Q (Off mike) -- specific to this proposal?

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, like I said, there are a lot of discussions going on with congressional leaders and the company, and we're working to make sure that Congress has the information they need. And we appreciate the step by the company that it took, in agreement with congressional leaders, to pursue a 45-day investigation.

### **On the U.S. position on Lebanese President Emile Lahud:**

Q Some of the Lebanese opposition visiting Washington these days seeking the support from the White House to force the Lebanese president to step down. How can you assess that?

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, we support the Lebanese people and their desire to live in a free and sovereign nation free of interference from Syria and Syrian influence. We've made that very clear. I mean, in terms of political decisions within Lebanon, that's up to the Lebanese people to decide. And I'm not sure -- you know, I don't have a readout of any of the meetings that have taken place. I imagine some of those are taking place at the State Department. They can probably provide you additional information on that.

Q Before March 14th, they're insisting Lahud to step out before March 14th.

MR. MCCLELLAN: Yeah, I don't know if there's anything different to what we've previously expressed when it comes to Lebanon and our support for the people of Lebanon to live in a democratic and sovereign nation free from outside interference.

## **FULL TEXT:**

MR. MCCLELLAN: All right. Hello, everybody.

To those who are not going on to Texas and the Gulf Coast -- (chuckles) -- let me first begin by talking about tomorrow. The president looks forward to visiting the Gulf Coast region tomorrow to get a firsthand look at the progress that's being made. This will give the president an opportunity to get an up-close look at the ongoing recovery and rebuilding efforts.

There has been much progress made, but there is much work to be done. The size and scope of the devastation from Hurricane Katrina was unprecedented. There are many needs that we are all -- at the federal, state and local level -- working together to address.

The president has made it clear that the federal government will do what it takes to help residents of the Gulf Coast rebuild their lives and rebuild their communities. We have already allocated some \$88 billion in federal resources to help, another 20 billion (dollars) is being requested, and there are some -- more than 16,000 federal personnel deployed and working with state and local authorities to help the people along the Gulf Coast region.

Tomorrow the president -- we're still finalizing the specific details, but tomorrow the president will visit the New Orleans area, including participating in a briefing and a tour of the area. And following that the president will visit the Gulfport-Biloxi area in Mississippi.

And with that, I'll be glad to go to your questions.

Q Is this trying to make up for a lot of criticism of his handling of the whole New Orleans situation?

MR. MCCLELLAN: No, this is focusing on how we're working together to help the people of the Gulf Coast rebuild their lives and their communities. The president made a very strong commitment, and we are following through on that commitment, and he has visited the Gulf Coast a number of times, as has a number of our Cabinet secretaries and other high-ranking officials in the administration. And we will continue to visit the Gulf Coast region.

Q Does he think that the criticism has been unfair?

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, I talked a little bit about that yesterday and pointed out how I think last week while we were traveling, there were certainly some reports that ignored key facts, and people then twisted some of those facts to fit a certain storyline that simply is in clear contradiction to the public record. There is a very public record in terms of all those events.

Q Scott, can you characterize -- on the nuke deal with Iran -- can you characterize what the Russians have been hearing from the administration today? Have they backed off their initial position as far as trying to work something out with Iran? And is the administration's position that any kind of research is a bad thing? Anything that allows the Iranians to become more familiar with the process of creating potential to have nuclear energy is a bad thing?

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, let me -- a couple of things.

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And we had previously expressed our support for this approach because it would allow the Iranian people to realize the benefits of peaceful civilian nuclear energy in a way that provides an important guarantee.

Remember, this is -- the international community has made it very clear that they're concerned about the Iranian regime developing nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian program, and a very clear message has been sent to the regime that the international community will not allow that to happen. And that's why the board of the International Atomic Energy Agency has reported this matter to the United Nations Security Council. And now the board is reviewing the latest report from the director-general of the Atomic Energy Agency, which continues to raise very troubling concerns about the regime's behavior.

The regime continues to move in the wrong direction. We have made it very clear, as well as the international community, that Iran needs to suspend ALL its enrichment-related activities. And the reason why is because of Iran's history. The regime has a history of defying the international community, of hiding its nuclear activities for some two decades and of refusing to comply with international safeguard obligations, and that is why the international community is continuing to grow more concerned about the regime's provocative actions and behavior. It continues to refuse to come into compliance with what the board just said.

Q But some members of the international community -- it's not like a monolithic bloc -- there are some members of the international community that seem open to the idea that some research can be done on Iranian soil.

MR. MCCLELLAN: Let's talk about where we are because this is an issue of trust. And what the regime needs to do is make a dramatic shift in its course and behavior. It needs to come into compliance with what the board of the International Atomic Energy Agency said. Otherwise, the international community must hold the regime to account.

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Q Is the president at all concerned that the position that the U.S. and others are taking could actually embolden the Iranian leader, who may feel that he can gain politically by being the target of Western concern? And with the vice president today saying every option's on the table, implicitly implying a military option, is that a concern at all for the president?

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Q Scott?

MR. MCCLELLAN: Go ahead, Kathleen.

Q On the ports deal, the president has said he would veto any movement to block it on the part of Congress. Does the White House have any reaction to Congressman Peter King's suggestion that one way to salvage the deal would be to have a U.S. company come in as a subcontractor, to have a U.S. company have the access to do work on the ground --

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Q (Off mike) -- specific to their suggestion, though?

MR. MCCLELLAN: I'm sorry?

Q (Off mike) -- specific to this proposal?

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, like I said, there are a lot of discussions going on with congressional leaders and the company, and we're working to make sure that Congress has the information they need. And we appreciate the step by the company that it took, in agreement with congressional leaders, to pursue a 45-day investigation.

Go ahead, Terry.

Q Does the administration support the approach being taken by Senator DeWine on the NSA surveillance program?

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, we've previously talked about that. Senator DeWine has put forward some interesting ideas. We've made a commitment to work with congressional leaders on legislation that would codify into law what the president's authority is. The president has not only the authority but the responsibility to use every available tool at our disposal to save lives and prevent attacks from happening. And the terrorist surveillance program -- the terrorist surveillance program is what you're bringing up. The terrorist surveillance program is a critical tool that helps us to detect and prevent attacks from happening in the first place. It helps us to connect the dots so that we can save lives. And it is vital in our efforts to defend the American people and to save lives. And as you've heard from people like General Hayden, our number two person in the intelligence community, it has been a successful program and it has been an important program.

Now we've had discussions with congressional leaders -- Senator DeWine is one of them. There are a lot of interesting ideas out there. We've said from the beginning that we are open to listening to ideas. The president -- the one thing the president said was that he would resist efforts if it compromised the program in any way or undermined his authority to protect the American people. This is about protecting the American people. Now, we did make a commitment with leaders -- like Senator DeWine and others -- to work with them on legislation that would codify his authority in to law.

Q (Off mike) -- do you think that you're nearing an agreement? I think that working with -- I've heard that he's talking about is that it would exempt the surveillance program and allow -- for 45 days and allow it without warrant. Is -- is that --

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, I'll let -- I'll let Senator DeWine talk more specifically about what he is proposing. He has talked publicly about some of those ideas. We want to continue to work with him and others, as I said, on legislation that would codify in to law what the president's authority already is. And I think that you're going to be hearing more from members in a short amount of time on some of their ideas. And Senator DeWine, I understand, is coming forward with a legislative proposal soon. So I'll let him speak to that.

Go ahead.

Q I wonder if I can ask again Jim's question, which I don't think you answered. Given that Sergei Lavrov did meet with the president's national security adviser last night, did you get the impression the Russians agree that Iran should do no enrichment, not even a limited amount, and that there should be a take-back of all materials, and that there is no space between Washington and Moscow on that -- on that issue?

MR. MCCLELLAN: One, I'm not going to speak for the Russian government. I just don't do that. I will express our views, and --

Q You could tell us whether Sergey Lavrov gave Hadley assurances.

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, he just spoke publicly to this very issue over at the State Department, and the foreign minister said that there is no new proposal that the Russians are talking about, something along those lines. He said that their proposal would mean that the enrichment and reprocessing would take place on Russian soil, the fuel would be provided to Iran, and then they would take back that fuel. So -- we previously expressed support for that approach, so I don't think anything's changed in terms of our view on that.

Go ahead.

Q Some of the Lebanese opposition visiting Washington these days seeking the support from the White House to force the Lebanese president to step down. How can you assess that?

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, we support the Lebanese people and their desire to live in a free and sovereign nation free of interference from Syria and Syrian influence. We've made that very clear. I mean, in terms of political decisions within Lebanon, that's up to the Lebanese people to decide. And I'm not sure -- you know, I don't have a readout of any of the meetings that have taken place. I imagine some of those are taking place at the State Department. They can probably provide you additional information on that.

Q Before March 14th, they're insisting Lahud to step out before March 14th.

MR. MCCLELLAN: Yeah, I don't know if there's anything different to what we've previously expressed when it comes to Lebanon and our support for the people of Lebanon to live in a democratic and sovereign nation free from outside interference.

Go ahead.

Q Why does the White House think that the CFIUS process needs to be reformed? What are the problems --

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, actually, our deputy Treasury secretary spoke to this last week, and there have been some concerns raised by members of Congress in terms of

their oversight role and the consultation during that process. This was a congressionally mandated process, so we have been following through on that process that has been in place for quite some time, well before this administration came into office. But Deputy Secretary Kimmitt last week testified and talked about how -- and I'd previously, I think, expressed it as well -- talked about how we support working with Congress to improve that process. And so I think there are ideas from members of Congress. We've been engaging members of Congress and listening to those ideas. I think we will continue to talk more about it as we move forward. But one area is looking at ways that we can make sure Congress is getting information in a timely manner.

Q How about internally within the process?

You're talking about sort of the oversight role. But internally, within the --

MR. MCCLELLAN: All I can say is we're having discussions with members of Congress and we're continuing to look at ways we can move forward on reform. And we'll continue to talk more about it as we move ahead.

Les, go ahead.

Q Two parts. Given the U.S. Supreme Court's overwhelming support of the right of our military to recruit on all college campuses, does the president hope that his alma mater, Yale, will begin allowing the ROTC onto their campus now that they have accepted as a Yale student the former deputy foreign secretary of the Taliban?

MR. MCCLELLAN: We were strongly in support of that ruling. We welcome the ruling by the Supreme Court. We believe that military recruiters ought to have the same kind of access that other employers have on campuses. And so we appreciate the ruling by the Supreme Court. It was a unanimous decision.

Q How many hundreds of thousands in lecture fees from foreign countries does former President Bill Clinton have to accept before he's required to register as a foreign agent?

MR. MCCLELLAN: I think you should look at the laws and ask those questions of President Clinton.

Q (Laughs.)

MR. MCCLELLAN: Go ahead, Paula.

Q Yesterday when the president announced a proposal on line item veto authority he also emphasized the need to rein in mandatory spending. So I wondered why the entitlement reform panel, why no one's been named yet to head that commission.

MR. MCCLELLAN: Because there are ongoing discussions with congressional leaders about how to move forward. The president made it very clear that he wants this to be a bipartisan commission that would include members of Congress from both sides of the aisle.

There are serious challenges facing our entitlement programs, whether it's Social Security or Medicare or Medicaid. And the president has made it very clear that we need to slow the growth in those programs so that we can protect those vital programs for our children and grandchildren. We want to make sure it's there for them. And he believes this is an area where we can work together in a bipartisan way to get something done for the American people. But it will require a true bipartisan effort. And that's why we're continuing to discuss it with members of Congress. The president is firmly committed to it.

We also are firmly committed to addressing the mandatory spending side of the budget. The president has made it clear that if we're going to address the long-term challenges when it comes to fiscal discipline, we must reform our entitlement programs and slow the growth in those programs. That's why we took an important step recently by working with Congress to pass nearly \$40 billion in savings in mandatory spending. That's the first time that happened, I believe, since 1997. The president has proposed an additional \$65 billion in mandatory savings in the current 2007 budget proposal. And we look forward to working with Congress to build upon that.

The president is serious about fiscal discipline and reining in wasteful spending. That's why he put forward the line item veto legislation yesterday. We believe that there is a good atmosphere to move forward and continue to build upon the progress we've made to reduce the growth in spending here in Washington, D.C. and to make sure that taxpayer dollars are being spent wisely.

Q Well, are you planning, then, to wait and set a deadline for recommendations --

MR. MCCLELLAN: I'm sorry?

Q Are you planning to set a deadline for --

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, those are the discussions we're having with congressional leaders as we move forward to put this commission in place.

Q But are you having trouble getting bipartisan support for this --

MR. MCCLELLAN: I think there are good discussions going on with congressional leaders right now.

Go ahead.

Q Scott, as you probably know, the governor of South Dakota has now signed this abortion measure that the state legislature passed. Do you anticipate the administration will weigh in on this as it makes its way through the courts?

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, let me express to you the president's views on -- the president believes very strongly that we should be working to build a culture of life in America, and that's exactly what he has worked to do. We have acted in a number of ways, practical ways to reduce the number of abortions in America. The president strongly supported the ban on partial birth abortions. This was -- this is an abhorrent procedure, and we are vigorously defending that legislation. We have acted in a number of other ways as well.

Now, I think this issue goes to the larger issue of the type of people that the president appoints to the Supreme Court. And the president has made it very clear he doesn't have a litmus test when it comes to the Supreme Court, that he will nominate people to the bench that strictly interpret our Constitution and our laws. But this is a law that was passed by the South Dakota legislature and signed into law by the governor of that state. And the president's view, when it comes to pro-life issues, has been very clearly stated, and his actions speak very loudly, too.

Q So, again, it -- now it's going to wend its way through the courts. Will the administration weigh in in the appeals process that is --

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, the president has -- again, this is a state -- this is a state law.

Q No, but it's going to become a --

MR. MCCLELLAN: And it's a state matter. The president is going to continue working to build a culture of life. He believes very strongly that we ought to value every human life and that we ought to take steps to protect the weak and the vulnerable. And that's exactly what we have done. Now you're getting into the question of a state law, and so that's something that the state will pursue.

Q But Scott, maybe you don't understand, it's going to become a federal issue because it's going to --

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, let me reiterate, maybe I'm not being clear, because the president has stated what his view is when it comes to the sanctity of life. He is committed to defending the sanctity of life. He is pro-life, with three exceptions -- rape, incest, and the life of the -- when the life of the mother is in danger. That's his position. This is a state law, Peter, and I'm not going to --

Q So he would embrace this law as passed by South Dakota?

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, the state law, as you know, bans abortion in all instances with the exception of the life of the mother.

Q And not rape and incest. So therefore, he must disagree with it, doesn't he?

MR. MCCLELLAN: The president --

Q Doesn't he, Scott?

MR. MCCLELLAN: The president has a strong record of working to build a culture of life, and that's what he will continue to do.

Q I know, but you're not answering my question. You're dodging it.

MR. MCCLELLAN: No, I'm telling you that it's a state law.

Q He is opposed to abortion laws that prevent it for rape and incest.

MR. MCCLELLAN: Les, look at the --

Q Isn't that true, Scott?

MR. MCCLELLAN: Les --

Q That's what you said.

MR. MCCLELLAN: Let me respond. Look at the president's record when it comes to defending the sanctity of life. That is a very strong record. His views when it comes to pro-life issues are very clearly spelled out. We also have stated repeatedly that state legislatures, when they pass laws, those are state matters.

Go ahead.

Q He disagrees with South Dakota on this one, though, doesn't he --

MR. MCCLELLAN: Les, I've addressed the question.

Q -- (inaudible) -- on rape and incest.

MR. MCCLELLAN: I've addressed the question.

Q Thank you.

MR. MCCLELLAN: Go ahead.

Q Scott, concerning the president's quick trip to Texas today, has the plan all along been for him to vote in person, or is the result of some inability to get a mail ballot in time?

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, as I indicated previously, and I've already talked about this issue, the president has voted in person in some instances and he's voted by absentee mail-in ballot in other instances. So he's done it both ways. I know that in 2002 and 2004, he voted in person. The president looks forward to traveling to Texas later today and voting in person. It works out in a way that we are traveling to the Gulf Coast region tomorrow, so that happens to work well in this instance. But, you know, I'm not going to get into --

Q Crawford being right there on the Gulf Coast.

MR. MCCLELLAN: -- you know, mail-in ballots versus voting in person. The president looks forward to voting later this afternoon in Texas.

Q (Off mike) -- piece of property there in Crawford? (Laughter.) Scott, was this the plan all along, or did something happen and necessitate it?

MR. MCCLELLAN: Yeah, I think I've answered the question. I'm not going to get into it beyond that.

Q (Off mike) -- cost the taxpayers to make this trip for something he could have done with a 37-cent stamp?

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, like I said, he's done it both ways, if you look at the past. Sometimes he's voted in person, sometimes he's voted by absentee mail-in ballot.

Q What about Mrs. Bush and voting?

MR. MCCLELLAN: Yeah, she'll be voting today too.

Q Scott, on --

MR. MCCLELLAN: Go ahead.

Q -- back on Katrina and New Orleans. Yesterday the general from the Army Corps of Engineers made a very important statement, saying that the new levees would prevent against catastrophic results like Hurricane Katrina, but it would not prevent flooding and overtopping. Now, with that information, why hasn't this administration gone in to the local government in New Orleans and said, look, let's talk about this, in the midst of their planning for whether to rebuild in the low-lying areas or in the higher elevations?

MR. MCCLELLAN: Well, I think that General Strock also talked to you about that very issue.

Now let's keep in mind when you have hurricanes, I don't know of instances where there's not flooding. So I mean, I think that's stating something that could be fairly obvious.

Now, in terms of the levees, the president has laid out a plan where we will rebuild the levees by this hurricane season to be equal to or better than they were prior to Hurricane Katrina. General Strock briefed on that yesterday. We've provided substantial

funding to make sure that that happens. And the Army Corps of Engineers, under General Strock's direction, are on schedule to meet the deadline of this hurricane season.

Now we are also going to work to make the levee system stronger and better than before, and that's something that's under way, but it's a two- to three-year process at this point.

Now in terms of decisions when it comes to issues at the local level, I think the president has repeatedly said that we will provide funding and resources and assistance, but the plans will be developed locally and the strategies will be developed locally. And we'll continue to work with state and local officials and answer any questions they have and provide them help, but he believes it should be locally inspired in terms of the approaches that are taken when it comes to rebuilding those communities.

Q So these levees that are being built stronger and better than before, are these levees being built for homes built in the low-lying areas? Are they being built in -- just in case of a hurricane, or are they being built with the homes in low-lying areas in mind as well?

MR. MCCLELLAN: General Strock talked about it at length yesterday and I think answered those very questions.

Q Thank you.

MR. MCCLELLAN: Thank you.

Q Thank you.

END.