



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
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January 17, 2001

MEMORANDUM FOR TERRY GOOD
DIRECTOR, RECORDS MANAGEMENT

FROM: KAREN L. BARBUSCHAK *KLB*
TECHNICAL INFORMATION SPECIALIST
EOP PUBLICATIONS SERVICES

SUBJECT: White House Press Briefings

The daily White House Press Briefings for November and December 2000 are enclosed with this memorandum. They have been filed sequentially. I also have enclosed the January 2001 Press Briefings up until January 16, 2001. I will send the rest, if any, at a later date.

cc: White House Press Office

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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

November 6, 2000

PRESS BRIEFING
BY
JAKE SIEWERT

The James S. Brady Briefing Room

10:45 A.M. EST

MR. SIEWERT: The President today has some phone and office time, and he'll be signing -- he's got some meetings with his advisors and he's been out of the office for a couple of days, so he'll get an update from Mr. Berger, an update from Mr. Podesta. He'll be signing a couple of dozen bills, most of them relatively innocuous --

Q Innocuous?

MR. SIEWERT: Yes, that's fine -- minor bills. But he will be signing the foreign ops bill, which I expect you'll hear about at the event in the East Room, which was a significant achievement, particularly on the foreign debt relief piece. He'll also be signing the Needle Stick Safety bill -- he's doing that right now in the Oval Office, which I'm informed has nothing to do with knitting, but involves blood-born pathogen standards under OSHA. But that's a -- there are a number of members of Congress in, along with the American Nurses Association, in the Oval Office right now.

And that's about it. We leave for Chappaqua later today. Haven't set a time yet, but I expect it will probably be later in the afternoon.

Q On this day before the election, what is the President doing politically?

MR. SIEWERT: I think he'll probably get an update from his staff on what the --

Q He doesn't need an update. (Laughter.)

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MR. SIEWERT: -- state of play on the ground out there is. But it's a relatively low-key day. We'll be focused on work here.

Q Is he anguished that he's not out there campaigning?

MR. SIEWERT: I think those of you who saw him over the weekend know that he is having a good time. He enjoyed his time on the road. He's done a couple hundred events this year, another dozen or so over the weekend, and he thoroughly enjoyed it. He enjoyed the time we spent in California and New York and Little Rock, Pine Bluff, and he's --

Q But does he wish he were out there today, Jake?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know. He seemed very pleased last night when I last saw him that we'd had a good couple of days on the road, and he felt like he's played a valuable role this year in helping raise money and energize Democrats and make the case for why Al Gore, Joe Lieberman and Mrs. Clinton and others should be elected.

Q Has he said anything about George Bush finishing his campaign in Arkansas?

MR. SIEWERT: No, not that I'm aware of, although the President made a forceful case yesterday in Arkansas for why George Bush was the wrong choice for Arkansas and for America.

Q Does he expect both Gore and his wife to win?

MR. SIEWERT: Yes, absolutely. He absolutely expects the Vice President -- he said he thought for a long time now, for two years, that Al Gore would win this election and he continues to believe that. And he certainly expects and hopes that his wife will win tomorrow. But these are decisions that are in the voters' hands and, frankly, what we expect here doesn't have much to do with what happens on the ground tomorrow. But we're hopeful.

Q Does he have any private polls that would educate --

MR. SIEWERT: Certainly. I think they'll probably remain private. (Laughter.)

Q Are you speaking from --

MR. SIEWERT: No, look, we over the weekend watched both -- mostly what the press reported about the situation on the ground, although we're in touch with the campaigns -- with Mrs. Clinton's

campaign and with the Gore campaign about the latest surveys, as the President likes to say. But I think that, ultimately, everyone around here knows that this is a very tight election and that no one knows what the outcome will be. But we are hopeful that the Vice President, Joe Lieberman and Mrs. Clinton and Democrats around the country will have a good day tomorrow.

Q Jake, this morning Tipper Gore said that Al Gore was the last, best hope for the nation, not the next best thing for the nation.

MR. SIEWERT: Much has been made of a passing comment that the President made in an interview in which he was harangued a little bit on the success of the last eight years and urged to run again, which you all know is an impossibility. And, frankly, that was a little over-blown in the press. I made that point perfectly clear to those of you who I discussed that with on Thursday. And I don't have anything to add to what we've said about that.

The President clearly believes and has been working very hard to see the Vice President elected, and that's what he thinks Americans should choose tomorrow.

Q Does the President regret saying it?

MR. SIEWERT: No, it was a passing comment on a radio show where he made perfectly clear -- and I saw this very carefully excerpted in a number of different places, where the President went on to talk at great length about why the Vice President is the right choice for America. And most of you didn't note that and focused on a quick phrase that was made in passing.

Q That wasn't news. (Laughter.)

MR. SIEWERT: Well, you all decide that and that's your choice. I'm free to sit here and criticize it.

Q What does he hope to achieve with the meetings on the Middle East?

MR. SIEWERT: We are hopeful -- for those of you who weren't on the road yesterday, I'm sure you've all seen or read now that Chairman Arafat has been invited for the 9th, and the Prime Minister has been invited into the White House on the 12th -- that's Thursday and Sunday. They both accepted the invitation. And we'll continue to work with them to end the violence and to discuss with them how best to move forward toward a political dialogue.

Q Jake, who is going to handle the budget negotiations? The Senate is back in session on the 14th now; the President, obviously, will be gone then or expected to be. How is that work going to get done?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, I think the President is perfectly able to keep in touch with his budget team that will be here on the ground, and I expect they'll be conducting the bulk of the work.

Obviously, Chuck Brain, who runs our legislative affairs shop, will be in town a little later than he expected. And I expect that Jack Lew and Sylvia Mathews and the entire team at OMB will be engaged in that process. And we'll see how it goes.

Q How about Podesta, who's been --

MR. SIEWERT: I'll check with John. I know John had been planning to travel to Vietnam. I don't know if he's revised those plans, but I'll check with him.

Q Is the stop in Korea ruled out now?

MR. SIEWERT: Yes. We will not be stopping in Korea as part of this trip. The President has not made a final decision on whether to travel to North Korea to follow up on the good work that Secretary Albright did there. But we expect to make that decision in the coming weeks, and we will let you know. But it is certainly not going to happen as part of the Brunei-Vietnam trip.

Q What is the reason that the President is not stopping there on this trip?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, I think we made some substantial progress in the discussions on missiles and we're doing that in a systematic way. We want to be perfectly clear about where we are and where the North Koreans are, and have a full understanding of that. But the missile talks are one factor that we'll base that judgment upon, and they were useful in helping clarify where the United States stood, where the North Koreans stood, expand some areas of common understanding. But there are gaps there, and as a practical matter, the trip is very close and no decision is made ultimately on North Korea. But it's just not feasible at this time to do that trip, to pull it together.

Q When is the next round of talks on the missiles?

MR. SIEWERT: You should check with State. I think they're having some follow-up talks at a different level, but why don't you check with the State Department on that.

Q Are you saying there is no stop in North Korea for logistical reasons or for diplomatic reasons?

MR. SIEWERT: No, it's just not feasible to pull together a trip at this point, both because the substance isn't there and it's just not -- we're just not in a position right now where we can make a decision to go forward. But we'll make a decision about whether the President goes there before the end of his term at a later date.

Q Either way on the election, what impact do you think that's going to have on your ability to get things done on the budget after the election, no matter who wins, whether it is Gore or Bush? What impact will it have?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, I think that's relatively unknowable at this moment. We certainly hope that Congress will get back to work when they return. They left a lot of unfinished business, from the education agenda to a middle class tax cut, to the minimum wage and some other initiatives that really demand action. And we'll be pressing them very hard to complete that work. We left tax cuts and new markets, on education, on health care unfinished, and we think Congress has the duty and responsibility to finish up the budget, create a real education budget, raise the minimum wage, do some work on health care.

But it's very difficult to predict how an election that hasn't happened yet will have an impact on a lame duck session -- that's fairly unprecedented. I'm not pretending to know here how that will all play out. But we'll push them very hard to get their work done.

Q But haven't you gambled here? I mean, wouldn't you be in a worse position if Bush won the presidency with less leverage over --

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know that we've gambled at all. They walked away from the table, so we're going to meet them again after the election and we'll see what happens.

Q But aren't you in a worse position if Bush wins the presidency --

MR. SIEWERT: As I said, I'm not going to comment on 15 different hypotheticals based on an election that hasn't happened yet.

Q Jake, jumping back to the Middle East, if I remember correctly, when these meetings between Barak, the President and Arafat were first proposed, they were conditioned on the fact

that you would make progress in the Sharm el-Sheikh --

MR. SIEWERT: No, we have talked at great length about the importance of implementing Sharm el-Sheikh. I have never said here that there is one specific set of preconditions before such a meeting would take place. We've said that it's important to continue to take steps to implement Sharm el-Sheikh, to end the violence and to begin to find a way back to some sort of political solution and how best we could do that.

But we have said all along that we'll make any judgment about any visits based on an overall assessment of whether they might be useful.

Q Jake, on the Middle East again. Iraq has now begun flying passengers in military aircraft into the no-fly zone. What sort of risk does this present and what do you think they're trying to do?

MR. SIEWERT: We have not -- I'm not going to speculate on their motives, but we have never had an objection to civilian flights. But the no-fly zones remain in effect and are designed to protect people on the ground.

Q I think the Iraqis have rejected a U.S. proposal that would give them -- that the Iraqis provide 48 hours notice on these flights.

MR. SIEWERT: Well, we think that notice would be helpful and that we're maintaining a no-fly zone there that's designed to stop military aggression against Saddam Hussein's own people on the ground there and against the Kurds. And we're going to continue to have that no-fly zone in place. It's important that we have the best information in order to do so.

Q Jake, is the meeting that are going to be here designed to shore-up Sharm el-Sheikh or move also beyond that, and try to move somewhere back in the peace process, in other words, to get the President in a position where he can do more with the two leaders before leaving office?

MR. SIEWERT: They are designed to discuss the current situation on the ground, to find ways to restore calm and lower the level of violence there, and how best to move forward towards a political dialogue. But, ultimately, that's a decision the parties will have to make.

Q What state would you say Sharm is in right now, based on what you're seeing on the ground?

MR. SIEWERT: It's not very useful for me to stand up here every day and pretend to assess the situation on the ground. That's best done in the region. We think that Sharm el-Sheikh is the best possible means of reducing the violence and finding a way back to a long-term political solution. That's our policy and that's what we'll be stating and restating as the two parties arrive here.

Q But my question wasn't to ask you what you think of the state of things on the ground. My question was, how do you think Sharm el-Sheikh is going and how do you think the two sides are moving toward implementation --

MR. SIEWERT: I think we've seen some steps -- the Prime Minister said this morning in the region that there have been some steps taken to implement Sharm el-Sheikh, and we certainly share that assessment, there has been some efforts to reduce the violence. But much more needs to be done. There is too much violence still in the streets and that's part of the reason why we're trying to gather both of the parties here, to try to find a way to implement the security measures that were anticipated by the agreement at Sharm el-Sheikh and to begin to restore calm and lower the level of violence.

Q Jake, back on the election. The President said yesterday he'd be making phone calls to radio stations or something like that. Is that happening today or tomorrow?

MR. SIEWERT: We may do some tomorrow. I don't think anything has been scheduled for today. But from time to time, the President has made phone calls during the course of an election day just to remind people of the importance of voting. We may do some of that tomorrow, but we haven't set anything up yet.

Q Jake, do you expect the President tomorrow night to come out at some point and comment on the presidential race and on the Congress --

MR. SIEWERT: I'm not sure. We'll let you know. The reality is that this might be a long night. We'll make an assessment tomorrow and see where we are. But the races, as we all know, are very close and it's not clear when they'll be decided. My guess is that you'll probably hear from him the following day, if you hear from him.

Q How is the President going to spend his day tomorrow, beyond voting and --

MR. SIEWERT: I think he'll vote in the morning and then I

expect he'll spend most of the rest of the day secluded, away from the press, hiding from all of you.

Q Is he voting with his wife?

MR. SIEWERT: No, I think tomorrow we'll, basically -- he'll vote in the morning in Chappaqua, and then at some point during the day he'll go down to New York where there are some events planned in conjunction with Mrs. Clinton's campaign.

Q Do you think he'll spend most of the day, though, in Chappaqua?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know yet. We'll let you know.

Q Is he going to play golf?

MR. SIEWERT: No plans to play golf. What's the weather out?

Q In the rain? (Laughter.)

Q Jake, the events that you just mentioned, in association with her campaigning, are you talking about events before the polls close, or are you talking about --

MR. SIEWERT: No, I'm referencing -- I think he'll spend the day -- she has some sort of thank-you for supporters that he may attend. I don't think he'll speak at that. And then --

Q But they're not going to go shake hands at subway stops or do anything like that?

MR. SIEWERT: We're not planning anything like that.

Q Is Mrs. Clinton going with him to Vietnam?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know, check with her office.

Q Is he disappointed he isn't going to Korea?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, the President has always wanted to go to Korea if he thinks it will be helpful in advancing our agenda there in helping reduce proliferation in the region and helping bring an end to the missile program there. But that's the only reason why we would go, if we think that such a summit meeting would be productive in advancing our interests in the region, our interests in national security. We have not made a final decision on that at this point. As part of this trip, it's too early to make that decision.

Q On the Mideast, Jake, the Jerusalem Post is reporting that the United States is testing the waters in Israel on the idea of an international force in the occupied territories.

MR. SIEWERT: Yes, I'm not going to discuss what we may or may not be exploring with the parties.

Q Why not?

MR. SIEWERT: Because our diplomacy is best conducted, I think, in private there. These are all the final status issues --

Q It doesn't sound very private if they've got it.
(Laughter.)

MR. SIEWERT: Interesting. (Laughter.) As you know, we have a limited ability to control leaks within our own government, not to mention governments around the world.

Q Are you glad you signed the -- vetoed the official secrets. (Laughter.)

MR. SIEWERT: Thank you. All of your views were well represented to the President, and --

Q Are you taking credit for that veto, Jake? (Laughter.)

MR. SIEWERT: No, no. But I did pass on what I heard from members of the press.

Q Seriously, Jake, what did he say about that, why he was doing it? Did you --

Q Just to clarify that point, you're not denying it are you?

MR. SIEWERT: Excuse me?

Q Just to clarify his question, you're not saying --

MR. SIEWERT: I'm not commenting on it, deliberately.

Q How about the position, the U.S. position on an international force? Has that changed?

MR. SIEWERT: I'm not going to discuss those sorts of negotiating issues that -- negotiating stances here at this podium.

Q Jake, did you talk to the President at all about why he decided to veto that intelligence authorization bill?

MR. SIEWERT: Yes.

Q Wasn't it out of great affection for the press corps and its role? (Laughter.)

MR. SIEWERT: I don't think affection or lack of affection had anything to do with it. The President thought that the bill, while other wise well-intentioned, had a provision in there that simply was not worth the risk it might have. It might well have chilled the work that you do, the work that people in government do, important work, and he didn't think that it was worth the risk that this bill would be used by those who might have an interest in not seeing information that should be in the public realm brought to light. He just did not think that this was worth the risks that were associated with that particular provision.

Q When Congress comes back, are you going to go back to this policy of one-day CRs, or how are you --

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know. We haven't made a judgment on that. I expect that we'll probably make a judgment closer to the time that they reconvene.

Q And also, apparently there was a large amount of agreement on some issues, specifically the Labor-H bill. Is it the White House view that things that were agreed to before Congress left are written in stone and are unbreakable?

MR. SIEWERT: I mean, since Congress already broke its word on that bill, it's a little hard to pretend that they didn't. We had what were the makings of an agreement on Labor-HHS bill, and we think that that's worth putting back together. There was a significant education budget there that provided for the needs of America's schoolchildren, and got hung up over a special interest provision that Republicans couldn't accept. But we think that that's work that's well worth doing, but they got -- after having worked out some sort of compromise on the ergonomics rule, they backed down on that and they've thrown the whole bill into limbo.

But we think that the work that was done on that bill was important, it provided significant improvements in investments and modernizing schools and after-school care and class size, and that that's an agreement worth reviving when Congress returns.

Q Okay, so when DeLay says that everything -- Tom DeLay

says that everything is negotiable once Congress comes back, you don't agree with that?

MR. SIEWERT: That's his position. I said that they've walked away from that bill once; I can't limit their ability to walk away from it again. But we think it's well worth doing, and we think that they would have to explain to the American people why it's not worth providing for our children's education simply because Congress can't tell some of the special interests that this isn't the place for that particular provision.

Q Just to be clear, other than the ergonomics rule, you're satisfied with that bill?

MR. SIEWERT: We thought that we had a good-faith compromise worked out the night before that bill was blown up over that one particular provision.

Q Couldn't the election, though, complicate the budget negotiations, in the sense that that ergonomics compromise, for example, wouldn't work very well after the outcome of the election is --

MR. SIEWERT: It was actually our intention on that bill to work that out, to leave some discretion for a future administration to administer that rule, and that was exactly the point of our compromise with the Republicans.

Q Wouldn't it be more difficult to agree to that, depending on the outcome of the election?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't see any reason why the election would change our basic premise, which was to leave some discretion to a future administration to deal with that.

Q And you think Republicans acted in bad faith on that, when that deal broke down on that, on the ergonomics rule?

MR. SIEWERT: Yes, sir. I do.

Any other tough questions? (Laughter.)

Q One more question on the telephone calls. You know, the President had been doing some of these conference calls -- Get Out The Vote conference calls -- thousands of people. Is there anything like that planned today?

MR. SIEWERT: No. No. He did some more calls over the weekend. I think they were slightly smaller. But he's found ways to be in touch with people who either weren't in Washington

or weren't in the states he visited, to emphasize for them how important the election was. And as I've told you, he's taped a lot of phone scripts and radio ads as well, dozens and dozens and dozens, but we have done some calls. There are not any more planned for today, though.

Q And tonight --

MR. SIEWERT: Yes. I don't think -- we don't have anything planned, and I think he will just go to the house. But I'll let you know if anything changes on that.

Thank you.

Q When are you going to put out more information on this trip?

MR. SIEWERT: I think we'll have a briefing later in the week, probably -- well, I don't know, Thursday or Friday. And then we'll have a schedule on Wednesday. Okay.

Q And he's not going to Hawaii, right?

MR. SIEWERT: He will go, but it's shorter now. It's just one day, 24 hours.

END

11:07 A.M. EST

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

November 9, 2000

PRESS BRIEFING

BY

JAKE SIEWERT

The James S. Brady Briefing Room

11:45 A.M. EST

MR. SIEWERT: I have one personnel announcement and then we will -- I will be available to take questions.

We will have a new face in the Lower Press Office starting tomorrow. Sarah Gegenheimer, who many of you know -- there she is -- will join the Lower Press team as the Deputy Press Secretary. As you know -- (applause) -- she will be occupying the Nanda Chitre Memorial Closet. (Laughter.)

Q Arboretum?

MR. SIEWERT: Arboretum, yes. Before joining the White House here in '98, Sarah worked at the Department of Health and Human Services for Donna Shalala and, as you know, she has been an Assistant Press Secretary here for a while and has more recently been running our media relations office, overseeing all the regional specialty press. So we're very happy to have her here and I'm sure that you'll see more of her now that she's down in these environs.

We won't have a Week Ahead since we're on travel. But I'll let you know just that the Radio Address will be taped tomorrow, and on Saturday morning, the President will participate in a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery. That's at 10:55 a.m. It will be open to the press.

He will then address a Veterans Day memorial service at the Memorial Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery. That's at 11:15 a.m., also open press. And later that day, in the early afternoon, he will make remarks at the World War II Memorial groundbreaking ceremony on the National Mall and that is at 12:45 p.m., also open to the press. And that's it.

Q What time is the Barak meeting scheduled for on Sunday?

MR. SIEWERT: I expect it will be sometime Sunday morning. We will probably -- we are exploring ways -- since the press will be leaving that day for Brunei -- or Hawaii and then Brunei, we will be trying to find some way to make sure that we have a way to read that out that meets your needs. We may just do something on the plane, but we will let you know as we get closer.

Q Has the President had any conversations today with the Vice President about the election? And what's the President's view of this

jumble of what's going on in Florida? Is he concerned? A lot of Democrats have raised concern about voting irregularities. Does the President share this concern?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't think -- I think you heard the President speak to this yesterday. He said that he was a fascinated observer of the election results. I don't know that has changed much. He obviously spoke to the Vice President the morning after the election. We told you about that conversation. I don't think he has spoken to him since then, but I'll double-check.

Q He's more than just a fascinated observer of the election results. I mean, he's also the President of the United States.

MR. SIEWERT: But he told you yesterday that it might take some time for this process to play out, but the American people have voted and it's going to take a little while to sort out exactly what the end result of that is, but we'll wait and see. We don't have any --

Q Jake, since then, I mean, complaints have been lodged with the Justice Department and the situation has changed.

MR. SIEWERT: Yes, and I understand the Attorney General said she is reviewing that. She is the proper person to do that. She also said this is primarily a matter of state law, but she will take those complaints seriously. I don't have anything to add to what she said.

Q Do you know if the Gores are coming to the White House tonight for the --

MR. SIEWERT: They are not planning on being here.

Q They were invited, though, right?

MR. SIEWERT: No, I think the invitations went to presidents only. Obviously, there are other guests, but the Carters, Fords, Bushes, Reagans --

Q Are the Bushes coming?

MR. SIEWERT: Yes, I expect they are. We'll be here.

Q Could you give us the lineup of who you expect tonight?

MR. SIEWERT: I believe that President Carter and his wife will be here, President Bush and his wife will be here, President Ford and his wife will be here, the Reagans are unable to attend, but --

Q Are they staying over?

MR. SIEWERT: Yes. Some will be staying in the Residence, and I think the Bushes will be staying across the street -- it's called the former Presidents' Residence. I had never even heard of it before, but apparently it's in and around the Blair House complex. And that was at their request.

Q Does the President have any view on whether there should be any kind of limit on the amount of time this should go on before it harms the transition, before it harms the confidence of the American people and the whole election?

MR. SIEWERT: Look, this is a process that's underway. There is a recount underway, and we'll take this one day at a time here. I'm not aware that he has any views on that, other than --

Q Can you talk about under what grounds --

MR. SIEWERT: Other than what he said yesterday, which is --

Q Will the President be in favor of a vigorous court challenge by the Democratic Party and by the Gore administration?

MR. SIEWERT: I'll leave the -- I'm not going to comment on whether he is or is not in favor of that. That's something for the candidate to request, and we'll allow them.

Q But does he have a view as to whether that would be good for the country?

MR. SIEWERT: I'll check; I don't know.

Q There have been calls for a civil or criminal investigation through the Justice Department at a federal level. Can you talk about under what grounds he might be supportive of such a --

MR. SIEWERT: Those should be reviewed by the Department of Justice. And I think the Attorney General has already addressed those questions.

Q Has he given any thought to Maureen Dowd's invitation that he stay on for a while?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know that he's read her, but I know he always reads her column with some degree of trepidation and -- (laughter) -- I'll check.

Q Everybody does.

Q He has not spoken to the Attorney General, though, about this?

MR. SIEWERT: No. And I got the question from one of you earlier. We have not made any comment -- made any contact with state officials in Florida, although we did receive one call from a local official in Florida. We simply referred them back to the state, didn't do any business with them.

Q Jake, with respect to the President's comments on Veterans Day, will those be focused to a larger extent than usual on Vietnam, in light of his upcoming trip there?

MR. SIEWERT: I think you can expect him to talk a little bit about the trip and the purpose of the trip, and particularly about America's experience in Vietnam, yes.

Q What does he think about the result? I mean, whatever happens in Florida, does he view this at all as a referendum on his legacy? And whatever happens in Florida, it looks like it's about 50-50.

MR. SIEWERT: This was a vote that was about two candidates that were running for the Presidency. I don't know that it speaks much beyond the views that the American people had of those two candidates and their respective qualifications to be and serve the country as

President.

Q I mean, every piece of paper we get here says Clinton-Gore on it. Why isn't this the view of the President as well?

MR. SIEWERT: The President has said for a long time the Vice President was on the ballot, not the President. The President said for a long time now that this election was between two candidates and two people, and that the American people were choosing between them, and not between him. He wasn't on the ballot, and he made very clear that the election was about the choice the American people faced about the future direction they wanted to take the country in.

Q That doesn't involve him, and his policies?

MR. SIEWERT: He was not on the ballot.

Q I understand that. I saw the ballot myself, but --
(laughter.)

MR. SIEWERT: I hope you voted.

Q Doesn't the President regret he spent a little more time in Arkansas?

MR. SIEWERT: The President had a good visit to Arkansas, and it was, I think, probably helpful in providing a comfortable margin -- not a comfortable margin, but a winning margin for a candidate down there we wanted to see elected. But I don't -- I think in the end, the President has said repeatedly, throughout this process, that it was Vice President Gore who was running for office and that he chose -- we conducted our schedule, did more than 200 events, based upon what the Vice President's campaign thought would be most effective.

Q So he doesn't think that he should have gone to Arkansas more often or places like Dade County, Florida where he might have been --

MR. SIEWERT: I think we made a judgment that we would look to the campaign, which was in the best position to make that assessment of where the President could be most helpful and where his time would be best spent.

Q And the judgment was correct that you made?

MR. SIEWERT: Yes. They made judgments based on what they saw, their internal polling, their internal assessment of what was going on. The President was deferential to the people who actually knew what was going on in the campaign who wanted to make that judgment.

Q Has he talked to Bill Daley, though, today or yesterday?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't think the President has; I know that others -- I know that we talked to Bill Daley during the election, during that morning after the election, and I expect we've had some contact with the campaign just to see where things are. But I don't think that was at the President's level.

Q Jake, you referred to the internal polling -- internal polling, you know, according to the Gore people was that there were a lot of states where the President would hurt Gore with swing voters because he was unpopular. Are you saying that the President agreed

that, yes, that was right?

MR. SIEWERT: What the President agreed was that the Vice President's campaign was in the best position to assess how the President might be most useful in this election. We're still waiting for the results of that election and we'll see how that plays out.

Q Jake, what's the assessment of the White House of the impact of both the uncertainty over the presidential election and the outcome of the Senate and the House races on lame duck session of Congress and the work that you have yet to accomplish?

MR. SIEWERT: We think the session of -- Elliott was telling me earlier that when he took this job, that he expected that at this point in the day that at least at some point, the election will be over and Congress will have left town, and neither of those has come to pass. (Laughter.) So he wants to review his contract. But he has a case.

We think that the session of Congress that's set to begin later this week or early next week should be spent ratifying existing agreements that we had on education and other budget initiatives, resolving some outstanding differences in a way that is honorable, the differences on workers' safety, on immigration, and they certainly could use that time to raise the minimum wage.

Q Jake, have you heard the President say anything about the congressional elections and how he feels about it?

MR. SIEWERT: I think he's pleased to see, obviously, to see Mrs. Clinton elected, and the stronger-than-expected showing that Democrats had in Senate campaigns and some great races in the House that he's pleased to see the winner of a number of those seats. We had a great showing in California; he was very happy with that. Obviously we wanted to win back the house outright, but Democrats made some gains, and it's clear that the next session will be one in which Democrats in both the House and Senate have a great deal to say about the direction the country is going to take.

Q Is the President or are any senior advisors, are they offering any advice to the Gore campaign about how to proceed?

MR. SIEWERT: Not that I'm aware of. These are decisions that have to be made by the campaign, and I understand they're talking about that today, and what decisions they'll make, but those are decisions that are best made by the campaign of the candidate who is on the ballot.

Q Jake, if it turns out that Bush is elected President, the Republicans, a lot of them have talked about having -- when they come back for a lame duck session, having a CR that would simply take us through the inauguration, and then they would deal with Bush on these matters of dispute. How much --

MR. SIEWERT: I think we all ought to wait and see what happens, but first of all we think that there were agreements that were resolved on education spending, on after-school care. There's no reason why tomorrow's Congress -- why we should have to wait for tomorrow's Congress to take care of today's business. We think that there was plenty of work that we'd agreed upon that should be done, including raising the minimum wage and funding some of these education initiatives. The American people don't want a Congress that meets in next February to resolve differences that are taking place today.

Q So, the President will veto any attempt to have a CR going up to Inauguration Day?

MR. SIEWERT: Well look, Congress hasn't even come back to town yet. I haven't seen all these comments. I've seen various reports of what they may or may not do, but we'll wait and see.

Q Jake, just to be clear about tonight's dinner, Vice President Gore was never intended to be a guest tonight?

MR. SIEWERT: No.

Q You mentioned what should be discussed when Congress comes back. Do you think that any of the issues that have sort of been put to the side, like a patients' bill of rights and prescription drugs, that those are worth discussing again?

MR. SIEWERT: It's hard to imagine that in the time they have left that they'll tackle some of the more contentious issues when they haven't been able to resolve some of the simpler ones. So we'd like them to focus on what's achievable. Certainly if anyone's willing to consider those, we are. We think Congress should have moved on a patients' bill of rights, should have moved on prescription drugs, but our focus is going to be on trying to get some work done on the education budget, raising the minimum wage, and resolving some of the disagreements on workers' safety, immigration. Hopefully we can maybe work out something on some tax relief. Those are issues that also we've been very close to working through, and on the balanced budget give-backs for health care providers.

Q Jake, do you know if the President is going to stay on a Navy ship in Brunei, rather than the designated --

MR. SIEWERT: I heard your question. I don't know anything more than Sandy did about that. I think he's staying on land, pretty sure in fact, but we'll double check that.

Q Jake, if and when the election is resolved, what are the transition plans of the White House? Has the President designated someone to oversee the transition on his staff?

MR. SIEWERT: I believe John Podesta, who's the Chief of Staff, will be in charge of that effort. He may have designated someone internally to work on that, but we're committed to doing everything we can to insure that the transition is a smooth one.

Q Jake, a lot of Democrats are angry at Ralph Nader and feel that he may have cost Al Gore the presidency. Is the President angry at Ralph Nader?

MR. SIEWERT: I think the President -- (laughter) -- feels that the Nader candidacy didn't serve any larger purpose in advancing

Q A lot of Democrats are angry at Ralph Nader, feeling he may have cost Al Gore the presidency. Is the President angry at Ralph Nader?

MR. SIEWERT: I think the President feels that the Nader candidacy didn't serve any larger purpose in advancing our agenda here and the President certainly believes that the Vice President was the correct

choice for Americans and that he was the best choice for a more progressive, more inclusive society.

Q Does he believe Nader cost him Florida and cost him, thereby, the election?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know. I'll ask him that. Obviously, you saw -- you can analyze the election results as well as we can.

Q How does he feel about the electoral college? Does he think it's time to reform it?

MR. SIEWERT: Not that I'm aware of, no. Although, since I am at the podium, I'd like to point you to some comments made by Republican leaders over the last couple weeks that, in retrospect, they may wish they hadn't said. I notice a lot of them were on the talk shows talking about the -- when there was some prospect that the presidential candidate might not receive the majority -- that the winning presidential candidate might not receive a majority of the votes, they had a lot of disdainful things to say about that process, but maybe they've revisited those views.

Q Well, Jake -- upholding the Constitution? Will the President speak to that?

MR. SIEWERT: Excuse me?

Q Will the President speak to that himself, if there is a discrepancy?

MR. SIEWERT: I think we'll take this one day at a time.

Q Has he talked to any world leaders about the election and is he concerned about, you know, the message this sort of election, which still hasn't been decided, could send on the world stage?

MR. SIEWERT: I think Sandy addressed that. I mean, the business of America goes on. We're meeting today with Chairman Arafat. We have a meeting with Barak planned. The President has a trip planned where he expects to meet with a lot of the world's leaders. I don't think he's spoken to anyone in the last day or so, but I can double-check.

Q Jake, one of the major sticking points on getting agreement on the Labor-Health Spending Bill was this ergonomics regulation. OMB apparently now has a copy of that rule. Is there any possibility that you would publish that rule before Congress has finished work on that appropriation?

MR. SIEWERT: Sure. I don't know if we have a specific timetable now but, we will publish that rule when the work is completed.

Q When do you anticipate the work will be completed?

MR. SIEWERT: I said I didn't have any specific time line yet. But if the work is done, we'll certainly publish it.

Q Why is the President satisfied with the results of the congressional election? After all, every house seat is in play and the American people still voted for a Republican House and you all are constantly accusing him of thwarting the will of the American people and it looks like they've spoken in favor of the Republicans.

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know about that. I mean, the Democrats made some inroads and there were very -- it was a very, very tight election in which the American people were very evenly split as we're seeing today. And I think the President feels comfortable, a lot of Democrats won. He is encouraged that the Senate Democrats did as strongly as they did and we have the prospect of an evenly split Senate which would be a pretty dramatic reversal of the electoral gains the Republicans made in 1994.

He is certainly pleased that Mrs. Clinton was able to prevail in her contest, and we'll see how the presidential race is resolved.

Q Does he have a sense of satisfaction that two of the main House prosecutors were defeated, Mr. McCollum and Mr. Rogan?

MR. SIEWERT: He certainly followed those races with a great deal of interest, but I think he was satisfied that Democrats won all over the country.

Q Over the weekend, the President said that the Labor Department in a couple weeks would be issuing final rules to extend certain patient protections to order base plans. This would affect about 130 million people. And they would be issuing this as a final rule. Is there any reason why this is being treated differently than other rules that usually go through proposed rules in the rule-making stage?

MR. SIEWERT: I'll check. I know that the work has been under way on that for several years now, so I imagine it's gone through a pretty extensive clearance process. But I don't know about the precise nature of how it would be published.

Q Can you give us some idea -- Sandy didn't go over this -- about how large the delegation will be that is accompanying the President to Vietnam? Is there a delegation of business people that will be going with the President, and how large is the congressional delegation?

MR. SIEWERT: The congressional delegation is relatively sizeable. I know there was a lot of interest, and we're trying to finalize --

MR. CROWLEY: I think part of the issue on the congressional delegation is the impact of the session that they have coming up.

MR. SIEWERT: Right. And some people might want to have come are now reviewing whether they should come in light of the session that's underway. But in terms of business people, I think obviously there will be some people who are flying to Vietnam on their own, and I expect that we will have a chance to meet with some of the local American and Vietnamese business organizations in some setting or another. But I don't think we're taking an official co-delegation of business people.

On the congressional delegation, we had a lot of interest and we're trying to finalize the list now in light of the new session of Congress.

Q Is it dozens, or a handful, or --

MR. CROWLEY: There will be a fairly substantial number of business people.

MR. SIEWERT: Business people that we meet within Vietnam, yes.

But I don't think there's a co-del plane.

Q Will Hillary be going, too? And Chelsea?

MR. SIEWERT: I will check. I think she was intending to join the President in Vietnam, but she may be looking at her schedule in light of her election and plans she has to put together an office in the Senate.

Q Why did he curtail the Vietnam visit? Because he thought the lame duck --

MR. SIEWERT: We never officially -- we gave him a number of options, and I know that probably those were shared privately with you. But we never put together a comprehensive schedule and published it. We gave him a number of options that involve three or four days and he ended up choosing one. But I wouldn't say that we curtailed the visit. We had given the President a number of different options, and he chose one that involves spending a fair amount of time in Hanoi and a day in Ho Chi Minh City. But it's a pretty substantial trip for -- it's rare that we spend this much time in one country.

Q But did he want to get back because of possibly the lame duck Congress will still be around? Was that one reason, or --

MR. SIEWERT: No, I think his decision was just made on the merits of how long he thought we should spend there and how long he wanted to be out of the country.

Q Next week, will taxpayers have to underwrite the expense of flying new continuing resolutions over to Brunei for his signature?

MR. SIEWERT: I hope not. I think we should be able to work that out in a way that involves the least amount of expense. We actually have some planes that are heading over separately from the President, that will skip the APEC portion of the trip.

Q Jake, given the President's commitment to campaign finance reform and limiting the role of money in elections, is he at all uncomfortable with the election of Corzine in New Jersey?

MR. SIEWERT: Not that I'm aware of. He thought that Jon Corzine ran a strong campaign and that he campaigned on the issues and the voters of New Jersey made a decision.

Q So he has no problem with someone spending -- considering that campaign finance reform, trying to get fat cat's out of elections, so forth, a guy spending \$50 million of his own money on --

MR. SIEWERT: Well, it was his own money, but in any case, the President feels that the campaign finance system is badly broken, needs fixing, but that people like Jon Corzine and some of the other senators that were elected are committed to fixing it.

Q Back on Vietnam for a second. Will members of any family groups, leaders of any family groups or MIA groups be going with the President to Vietnam?

MR. SIEWERT: They have been invited and I expect we'll have a full list in the next couple days of the delegation. But we have invited some members that represent Vietnam veterans groups and they'll be accompanying the President.

Q Jake, on Crs, as in any other legislation, can't the President now sign electronically?

MR. SIEWERT: I think that is what the lawyers would call a case of first impression, it would be subject to some -- it might be subject to challenge. We haven't made any decision to do it electronically.

The legislation that was signed governed private commercial contracts, and didn't amend the Constitution in any way, shape or form. And that is a question -- the legality of an electronic signature, in terms of legislation, will be governed by the Constitution and not by the e-signatures law.

Q Jake, is the President concerned at all that the impeachment played a roll in the presidential election may have limited some votes for Gore?

MR. SIEWERT: He didn't seem to. No, I don't think -- I haven't seen any data that would suggest that.

Q Well, I think 44 percent of the people said that they based their vote on feelings one way or another about the President. I think one in five of them said they voted against Gore for that reason. Does he feel any sense of responsibility?

MR. SIEWERT: I can't imagine those people would have voted for him.

Q So he thinks that they would have voted for Bush, anyway?

MR. SIEWERT: I haven't seen that data. If we want to sit there and look through polls and analyze them, we can do that privately. I'm not going to do that from this podium.

Q Does he feel any sense of responsibility --

MR. SIEWERT: No, I don't think that -- it's not clear to me at all that this candidate was anything -- this campaign was about anything other than a choice between two candidates who had two different views of where to take the country.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

MR. SIEWERT: Thank you.

END 12:10 P.M. EST

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam)

For Immediate Release

November 15, 2000

PRESS BRIEFING BY
PRESS SECRETARY JAKE SIEWERT

National Stadium
Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam

8:25 P.M. (L)

MR. SIEWERT: I'm not sure there's anything else to say, but we are prepared to take any questions about the domestic front or other areas of the world.

Q When is the meeting with the Japanese Prime Minister?
It's not in the schedule.

MR. SIEWERT: Tomorrow afternoon.*

Q Do you know when?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't have an exact time, but we'll let you know. I think we'll probably just -- it's going to take place at the Polo area where the APEC Summit is taking place.

Q Coverage?

MR. SIEWERT: Probably be stills only, or we may try to arrange some opportunity to have some footage of it. But I don't think you can expect that there will be a pool spray.

Q Jake, has there been any decision on sanctions or moving in the direction of sanctions regarding Japanese whaling, and is that going to -- that will come up, I would imagine, but has there been any --

MR. SIEWERT: I expect the President will raise that issue. As you know, the President directed on September 13th his

agencies to take a look at potential measures in this area. It's something that we take very seriously, and the Japanese have indicated that they're proceeding with their plan to hunt whales. That's something that we're preparing, but I don't think we'll have a decision before the meeting. But it is something that we're getting word back from the agencies on now, and preparing to send a report to Congress on.

Q When you say you won't have a decision before the meeting, will there be one in the meeting?

MR. SIEWERT: No. I expect that we'll raise it in the meeting, continue to state our concern about the plans that the Japanese have stated to hunt whales. But we will actually identify specific measures sometime after that meeting takes place.

Q Jake, there are reports coming from Tokyo that the U.S. and Japan have already agreed to set up a panel of experts on the subject. Is that correct?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know, I'll check on that. I don't think that we've resolved this issue to our satisfaction yet.

Q Jake, in the President's speech this morning to the business leaders, he suggested that the reason for the one-day delay to his trip was, in fact, the election controversy in Florida. Was that what he intended to suggest? It seemed to be a slight revision of what -- the official statement on the subject.

MR. SIEWERT: I think -- the primary reason for the delay was the meeting that we had with Prime Minister Barak on Sunday. That's the main reason why we were delayed in coming. He obviously spent the time there following developments on the election, but that's not the reason we delayed the trip.

Q Jake, has he talked to the Vice President or to Chairman Daley or anyone affiliated based on the results -- I know the time difference, but based on --

MR. SIEWERT: He has not talked to the Vice President as far as I know since the last call that we outlined for you, I think which was late last week. But he's been provided updates pretty regularly from his staff on the road here. He's obviously interested, as all of you are, in what's transpiring there. But I don't -- I think he's been pretty careful to avoid

a running commentary on this. He has told you all that he thinks we'll be able to work this out, and work it out in a way that's fair. He hasn't really received much in the way of comment on this from other leaders, contrary to what you might have heard from some people back in the United States.

This has come up, but really only around the margins, and in a mostly good-humored way. It doesn't seem that there's any real anxiety among the leaders here about this problem. I think they recognize that this can be worked out.

Q Jake, you answered the question about talking to the Vice President. I'm not sure I heard the answer.

MR. SIEWERT: Daley, I don't believe he has spoken to Chairman Daley. We have been trying to provide him updates through the traveling chief of staff on the road and through Mr. Ricchetti, who is back at home. And they have been in contact - the White House staff has been in contact with Chairman Daley. I don't believe the President has. I'll double-check, though.

Q Can we presume that he has not talked to Governor Bush?

MR. SIEWERT: Governor Bush? Which Governor Bush? No, I don't believe he has spoken to either Governor Bush on this matter.

Q Do you have any reaction to Chairman Arafat's call to Palestinians to stop firing on Israelis?

MR. SIEWERT: As I told the pool earlier, the President spoke with Chairman Arafat late last night when he arrived here, and that conversation was focused on ways to end the violence. We believe that it's very important that both parties take immediate steps to reduce tension and lower the level of violence in the area. We obviously welcome any public assertions that -- public declarations that are aimed at ending the violence. But what is going to be important is that they take the concrete steps that were envisioned at Sharm to provide a more secure environment for people in the region.

Q What's the latest on the budget? Is there a continuing resolution on its way to Brunei?

MR. SIEWERT: Yes. The President spoke to both Majority Leader Lott and the Speaker before he left, and they agreed

that, given Congress's diminished appetite for finishing up its work this week, that we would sign a CR that would extend the government through December 5th, I believe. And that CR has been passed by both Houses and is on its way to Brunei. I expect the President will sign it sometime tomorrow, local time, which should be sometime today in the United States. And I will let you know exactly when it gets here. That's all contingent upon commercial flight travel, so we will hopefully get it in time and have it signed.

Q Jake, how did the administration go from the position where the President wasn't willing to sign any CR of greater than 24 hours in length to what is now I guess a two-and-a-half week CR?

MR. SIEWERT: We had said for a long time now that we thought Congress had ample time and opportunity to finish its work before the election and that there was no reason why we needed a lame duck session. Congress just didn't get the job done; they left a lot of unfinished business on the plate. And, as a result, we are into a new session and a set of new realities.

That essentially means that we're going to have to work with them in finding the best time and place for them to do that work. We had thought we could get that work done before Thanksgiving. Turns out they are not interested in coming back to town now and doing that. So just recognizing that reality, we've agreed to postpone the session until December 5th. But we were trying to use the pressure of an election, the pressure of Congress presenting itself to the voters as an opportunity to see them do some work.

And I don't think there's any question that particularly the Senate, which blocked progress on a lot of important measures that even the House had taken seriously -- the Senate stifled the debate on a patients' bill of rights; they stifled the debate on a number of different issues that were very important. And I think the leadership there played a pretty heavy price in the elections for not completing its work on time.

But that's all over now and we want to see what we can do to get back to business when they return, and finish up the education budget, finish up some of the minimum wage work and some of the other differences that we have.

Q What are the changes that, when December 5th rolls around, the President might be asked to go along with a CR through the end of his term in office?

MR. SIEWERT: We don't think that's necessary at all. We think that Congress could easily finish up the work on education that we had agreed to before they left town for the election. We had an honorable compromise on education funding that would be pretty easy to put back together in fairly short order. We need to resolve differences on immigration and a couple other matters. But they could also raise the minimum wage pretty easily. That would not require a great deal of heavy lifting.

So, ultimately, we will make a decision when they get back to town on how much work we want to get accomplished. But there is no reason why they couldn't come back together, and they've indicated an interest in coming back and getting some of that work done, so we take that at face value.

Q Hey, Jake, how does the CR physically get here? Does a White House staffer courier it here and then back?

MR. SIEWERT: Essentially, yes. That's the long and short of it. Someone will --

Q Which staff person?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, I don't know that we want to make him famous. Someone who is young enough to handle a lot of air travel in a very short period of time. But, no, there is someone in the Staff Secretary's office who will actually fly out here commercially and then return directly after it's been signed.

All right, thank you.

END 8:33 P.M. (L)

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

November 21, 2000

PRESS BRIEFING BY
JAKE SIEWERT

The James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

11:30 A.M. EST

MR. SIEWERT: Ms. Jenni, also known as "Tiger," Engebretsen helped me select this shirt. So any comments on it should be directed to her. Thank you.

Let me begin with just a little schedule information, since we didn't have a chance to do the Week Ahead last week. The President has no public schedule today. Tomorrow, he will do the annual Thanksgiving Turkey Presentation at 10:05 a.m. At 11:00 a.m. he tapes a video message for Ramadan. And at 11:10 a.m. he will sign the Health Care Fairness Act in the Oval Office. That is White House photo only.

At noon, he will travel to the Capital Area Community Food Bank where he will do a tour and some sorting and boxing of items. I think he's done that in the past -- speak to the volunteers at 12:35 p.m. He then returns to the office, has phone and office time. We expect he'll depart for Camp David sometime in the afternoon, early evening, and remain at Camp David throughout the weekend, returning either Sunday or Monday.

Q Is Mrs. Clinton staying the whole time, too?

MR. SIEWERT: I believe so. You should double-check with her office, but I expect they'll travel together.

And on a sad note, we were very sorry to hear this morning that Lars Erik Nelson passed away yesterday, and I think we'll have a statement from the President on that this afternoon. But he is someone whose work we read very closely around here; someone who never accepted the conventional wisdom, and clearly a veteran reporter who spent a great deal of time not just reporting, but thinking through the larger issues. The President enjoyed his writings and will issue a statement later today.

MORE

#14-11/21

Q Jake, do you have any details on his death or age or anything?

MR. SIEWERT: No. But I expect your colleagues at The Daily News will probably have some announcements on that.

Q Jake, will the President and Mrs. Clinton be attending the funeral or memorial services for Charles Ruff?

MR. SIEWERT: There hasn't been -- I expect they'll participate at a service of some sort. Nothing has been set as of this morning, but I expect -- I'm sorry, you're referring to Mr. Ruff?

Q Yes.

MR. SIEWERT: As you know, the President visited the family yesterday, and I expect he'll be attending some sort of service. But they haven't set anything up as of this morning.

Q Jake, is there any -- on the Middle East -- anything that can be done to salvage the --

MR. SIEWERT: I think the President addressed that yesterday in his -- Sunday, on his interview with CNN. He says that it's a very difficult process, and one that he continues to work on. He's just going to continue to do everything he can. As we said in various venues yesterday, we condemn the attack against the school bus that was filled with innocent Israeli children, and we expect the Palestinian Authority to do the same, and to do all it can to stop the violence and restore calm in the region.

Q What about the withdrawal of the Egyptian Ambassador?

MR. SIEWERT: We understand that emotions are running very high in the region. At the same time, it's now more critical than ever for those in the region who are committed to peace to remain engaged despite the difficulties and all the differences. Engagement is needed to help cool the situation and serve as a bridge between Israelis and Palestinians.

Q Does the administration view this, though, as a potential major diplomatic setback -- the recusal of --

MR. SIEWERT: Well, I don't know about that. We do think that it's important for those who have served as a moderating influence in the past to remain engaged and to continue talking to the

various parties that are involved in the process.

Q That sounds like you think Egypt's making the wrong move in withdrawing its ambassador.

MR. SIEWERT: Well, do -- we think those who are committed to peace need to remain engaged with the parties. It's a difficult situation and there are a lot of differences between the parties. That was clear at Sharm El-Sheikh. But at the same time, there are ways to work together to narrow some of the differences and to implement the agreement at Sharm El-Sheikh. It's going to be important that everyone remain engaged in the process.

Q Jake, can I ask about the Peruvian situation?

MR. SIEWERT: Sure.

Q On the fact that Fujimori has resigned. What is the U.S. doing?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, we've had a State Department and NSC representatives have been in the region. They're returning today. And in the end, this a matter for the Peruvian people to decide, but we support the process that's underway at the OAS and in Peru towards free and fair elections that will deepen democracy in Peru. But it's not for the United States to back any particular individual in that succession. Peru will decide who their interim president is, and they expect -- we expect that the congress there will take up this matter today.

Q Have we had free and fair elections here?

MR. SIEWERT: We always have free and fair elections in the United States.

Q Is the President yet concerned about the amount of time that it's taken to work out the results of the election? It's now day 14, and speaking really in terms of the transition that needs to take place, particularly if it's Governor Bush, who would need to set up an entirely new team, you might think that he'd want most of the 73 days that he's allowed.

MR. SIEWERT: Well, I don't think the President is particularly concerned now about the time that this has taken. It's understandable, given the closeness of the election, that both sides will want to make the case and get the most accurate count of the votes in Florida and some of the other contested states. So he said as recently as Sunday that everyone should take a deep breath

and let the process play out.

In the meantime, he's focused on the work that he has to do, and we stand ready to help a president-elect when there is one. In the meantime, either campaign can contact -- can begin its preparations on its own. That's a decision that they will make on their own.

Q Jake, when you say the process plays out, though, does the President believe the ruling by the Florida Supreme Court should be sort of a final --

MR. SIEWERT: We're not providing any sort of guidance on the various twists and turns that this will take. That's not useful really for us to say what the ultimate decision on this will be at this point, and I think that the President has tried very carefully not to get wrapped up in the legal wranglings here, and I think we will continue to do that from this podium.

Q Jake, to follow up on John's question, does the President think it would be useful for both Gore and Bush to go ahead with transition planning, given the fact that we're only two months from Inauguration Day?

MR. SIEWERT: I think that is a decision the candidates will have to make. They obviously have to decide how best to use the resources and staff that they have. They are obviously very engaged in trying to determine the final outcome of the vote, and they're directing most of their energies that way. At the same time, I understand from news reports that both of them have taken some measures to begin planning; that's understandable. But I don't think the President has a particular view on that.

We stand ready to help the new president when there is a clear winner of the election, and the President has already asked his staff to do everything we can here to make this transition work effectively. John Podesta has been spearheading that effort and we've done quite a bit of work, and we're ready to spring into action when there is a clear victor.

Q Given the fact, though, that if a lot of these federal departments and agencies have to take their marching orders from the new administration that's going to be coming in and that process now has been put on hold, how much longer can that get backed up before the agencies now, with all of the concerns that they have to deal with going into this new millennium, can't make the transition by January 20th?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, I think that it's important to keep in mind that the President will continue to serve until January 20th, and they're career professionals at many of these agencies that do a lot of the hard work that those agencies undertake on a day-by-day basis. And we're ready; we'll do everything we can to help. We understand there are unusual circumstances here, but we're ready to do everything we can to help make that transition a smooth one when it happens. But I don't think it's helpful or even advisable for us to try to provide a timetable for that.

Q Has the President spoken to Vice President Gore since he got back, or Daley or anyone else on the team, or does he plan to?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't believe so, but I'll double-check. He had not spoken to him during the trip. He spoke to him before he left, but I don't think that he's spoken to him since he got back, but I'll double-check.

Q Jake, the way you're talking, you say either campaign can call for transition information and help. But I mean, the way the situation is looking now, is there still hope for the President's second in charge, Al Gore, to be here?

MR. SIEWERT: I'm not trying to decide the results of the election. There are plenty of other people focused on that.

Q Jake, -- said a lot has been done in advance of a transition. Can you tell us what?

MR. SIEWERT: John Podesta has asked -- he's had some experience with this in the last -- as we came in, and has taken a hard look at it. We've done some work throughout the agencies, asked the agencies to prepare materials that would be helpful, and John has taken a number of steps that I think will help smooth the transition. But in the meantime, those transition plans are on hold and he's directed the agencies to wait until there's a clear designee, because that's what the law calls for under the Presidential Transition Act.

Q Is there concern, though, Jake, in terms of the FBI, just the large number of background checks and reporting that agency will have to do over the shortened time period?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, those background checks are extensive. Anyone who has gone through them knows that it takes a long period of time, months usually, to sort through them. But that's something that we had to confront as well. I'm not sure that a week or two here or there makes an enormous difference.

But obviously, I expect that the FBI, like other agencies, is probably taking measures to speed that process up as best it can, given the fact that they'll be looking at a slightly shorter time frame. But those, as you remember from the early part of this administration, often took months and months. A lot of people here had to wait some time for those clearances to come through. But they continued to function and do their jobs.

Q Jake, have any of these agencies or departments expressed to Mr. Podesta that there is a date by which, if this election is not settled, that they will not be able to complete the work needed by January 20th?

MR. SIEWERT: Not that I'm aware of. I've heard no such concern.

Q Jake, can you go back to Peru for a moment? Have you received any information about what will be the situation of President Fujimori in Tokyo? And do you think his resignation will help democracy in Peru?

MR. SIEWERT: We haven't heard any information about what motivated his decision or what, if anything, that Japan has told him. So those are questions best put to him and to the government of Japan.

In terms of whether his resignation helps or hurts, I think that's not for us to judge. What we're doing is everything we can to help the Peruvian government and the OAS ensure that there are free and fair elections next April, and that, in the meantime, they have a constitutional process underway to determine a successor. It's not for us to pick a particular successor, that's something that they'll have to sort through.

Q One more on Mexico. Has the White House responded to the invitation of President Fox to President Clinton to be in his inaugural ceremony?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't believe that we have. I think we are putting together a delegation for the December 1st inauguration, but I don't think we've finalized that delegation list.

Q That means the President is not going to Mexico?

MR. CROWLEY: No decision has been made.

MR. SIEWERT: No decision has been made on that front. I know that they've invited him.

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Q Jake, do you know if the NSC is still giving updates to the Bush people on foreign policy matters?

MR. SIEWERT: I'll check. I think that one thing that Mr. Podesta made clear is that we could continue to provide the kinds of information that we would provide to a candidate in the interim process while this is being sorted out.

Q Jake, is the White House taking any affirmative steps to put a structure in place so that the transition can proceed more speedily than usual once it does get started?

MR. SIEWERT: I think in general that is exactly why John took some steps, and I'll try to get you some more detail on that. But John did ask the agency heads and the White House itself to put together some plans to help make sure that we had the most efficient and speediest transition possible. I don't know that there's any additional steps that we've taken in light of the prolonged period here in which the election is being decided, but I do think that the entire purpose of his work there was to ensure that this could go more quickly in some ways than our own transition did.

Q What kind of information would that be, transition steps? I mean, what kinds of things would the agencies need to provide to be able to smooth the transition?

MR. SIEWERT: I think it's fairly common-sense, but what kinds of information -- you prepare a list of what -- I'm not going to go through it in great detail, but a list of what the major issues are, what the outstanding decisions are, a list of the appointees that are -- what's in place, what's not in place, those sorts of things. The kinds of things that I worked on the transition and tried to put together on our own in '92.

Q Jake, did the President watch the hearing yesterday of the Florida Supreme Court, and does he have any reaction to it?

MR. SIEWERT: I haven't heard any reaction from him. I think he did catch some of the proceedings. I don't know if he saw them live.

Q Jake, is the President as Commander-in-Chief concerned with any of those challenges by Democrats to the absentee ballots from military personnel overseas?

MR. SIEWERT: I haven't heard him address that issue at all,

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one way or the other.

Q Jake, as far as things the President can do before he leaves office, is the administration planning to issue medical privacy or medical records privacy rules, and do you have a timetable --

MR. SIEWERT: There is work underway at HHS on that initiative. As you know, we're required by law to issue such regulations. But I don't have a particular time frame right now. But we are working on that. Congress, as you know, passed a law forbidding the administration from issuing such regulations for a certain time frame, but then requiring it to do so if Congress failed to act. Congress did fail to act, so the work is underway to provide such regulations.

Q And also, there were some unlikely allies that got together yesterday -- Families USA and HIAA -- to propose coverage of at least half of the uninsured. Does the White House have a comment on their approach?

MR. SIEWERT: Yes. Actually, we think that it's an encouraging sign that there was such a diverse group, people who are often at odds, that came together to support initiatives that would advocate significant new investments in health insurance coverage. We've said and have always believed that it's necessary to create bipartisan consensus to work through health care reforms, so we've been pleased that we've laid the foundations for progress in this area and, hopefully, that's something that a future administration will take a hard look at.

Q Jake, the President was sent a letter by some influential people asking for a moratorium on the death penalty. He is to make this decision on Mr. Garza's case in the next couple weeks. Is he going through any sort of process to make that decision, or where does that stand?

MR. SIEWERT: We did receive a letter from, I believe, it's the Citizens For A Moratorium On Federal Executions. The President has said as a supporter of capital punishment, he feels a strong responsibility to ensure that the death penalty is implemented fairly, that people feel strongly on all sides of this issue, and we welcome their views on that matter. This is something he's spoken to a number of different times.

He has said that he is troubled by the geographic disparities that were turned up by the Department of Justice report, and he's asked for people to take a harder look at that. That's something

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that we're still examining.

On the Garza case, we don't comment until there is a final determination on clemency petitions.

Q Jake, wouldn't the President naturally be concerned with the possibility that military personnel may be unjustly being denied the right to vote?

MR. SIEWERT: I'm not going to speculate on that. You asked me a question about whether or not he had expressed a view on that; he has not to me.

Q Can I ask you another question now, whether you think he would be concerned about that?

MR. SIEWERT: Whether he would naturally be concerned. I don't know, I'll check and see.

Q Jake, have you heard anything from the President saying that in light of all of these problems from this election, there needs to be some kind of change, maybe bringing some type of universal uniformness within the election system here in this country?

MR. SIEWERT: I haven't heard him say any such comments. I'm sure they'll be lots of people who have lots of ideas about how to change the system. I've seen some of them expressed, but I don't know that we've -- the President has anything to say on that matter.

Q Have there been any talks with Congress in the last 10 days or so? Any progress on the issues that were outstanding --

MR. SIEWERT: On the budget accounts? None that I'm aware of. We did have some discussions before the President left for Brunei with the Speaker and the Majority Leader. We agreed to postpone the session until December the 5th, and I expect that we'll be talking to some of the members as they return to town. But I don't think there's been much discussion while they left town, although I can't rule out any kind of contact. I don't think there's been any serious discussion of the outstanding budget issues.

Q Is that ergonomics rule, is that immutable now that its been published, or is that -- is there still some negotiation where that could be changed and returned for some of the priorities that you want?

MR. SIEWERT: I'll have to check. I believe it was a final rule, but there are obviously always changes to rules as concerns come up. But I believe it's a final rule, which means that any change would have to go through an entire separate process.

Q No decision has been made about going to Mexico. Does the President plan any more significant travel between now and January 20th?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, I think there are two outstanding travel issues which we haven't -- we just haven't made a final decision on. One is obviously the trip to Northern Ireland. The President has expressed an interest in going, but we haven't made a final determination. And the other is a potential trip to North Korea. Again, the President was actually very specific about that in a recent interview he did about why he might or might not go, but that is not an issue that we've made a final decision on.

Q What about Nebraska?

MR. SIEWERT: The President -- I can assure you that the President will travel to Nebraska before the end of his term, but I can't tell you when. It's a tired line, but I might as well repeat it. Joe said that we're saving the best for last, so I'll say that again today.

Q Jake, back in the military vote for a second. Does the President have an opinion on which statute takes precedence here in relation to the postmarking of the ballots? Does the state statute, which requires a postmark take precedence, or does the federal statute that doesn't require a postmark take precedence?

MR. SIEWERT: I haven't heard him express such an opinion. I guess I've said it a couple times today, and certainly before, but I don't think it's very useful for the President to weigh in on some of the more arcane legal issues here. Those are matters that are before the courts and ultimately the courts are the ones that are best equipped to make those determinations.

Q Isn't it generally held, though, that the federal statute takes precedence?

MR. SIEWERT: I went to law school, didn't take the bar. (Laughter.) So I don't remember how I did in that course, and I think I'll pass.

Q Jake, does he support the hand count?

MR. SIEWERT: Excuse me?

Q Does he support the hand count?

MR. SIEWERT: Again, I don't think it's particularly helpful for us to comment on the various positions that both candidates have taken. And they are well-equipped to make the best case for their own case. I told you before, I'll tell you again, I don't think it's much of a secret who the President wanted to win this election, and we don't know who the winner is yet. But the candidates are the ones who are best equipped to make their case before the courts, before the public and the President is going to stay focused on the work he's doing here.

Q Jake, not talking legal matters or transition, is the President at all concerned if this keeps going on for weeks and weeks that it somehow affects the standing of whoever becomes the next President?

MR. SIEWERT: I think again, he addressed that. He said very specifically in an interview with your network that there are lots of very divisive and ugly election battles in American history, and yet trying to draw one particular historical conclusion from those is very difficult. There were very bitter, divisive election campaigns that produced very unified governments. Jefferson being one the President particularly cited. There are also contrary examples. So I think trying to divine the future on this is extraordinarily difficult, and we're in no better position to do it than you all are.

Q Does the President support a contest of election by the Vice President under Statute 102.168? (Laughter.)

MR. SIEWERT: That's one of many matters that the President -- well, he may have an opinion on those; I'm not saying he doesn't have an opinion on those -- many areas where we will defer to those who are in a better position to make the case about why someone should or should not take a particular course of action.

April?

Q Does he support the First Lady's call to abolish the Electoral College?

MR. SIEWERT: I have not heard him express a view on that. He was asked that, actually, in an interview with the Associated Press, and said that he had somewhat mixed feelings about the Electoral College, and then made both cases for it. You can read

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that interview, it's available on the White House web site --
(laughter) -- if Terry Hunt won't provide you with a copy.

Q Thank you very much.

MR. SIEWERT: All right, thank you.

END

12:15 P.M. EST

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

November 22, 2000

PRESS BRIEFING BY
JAKE SIEWERT

The James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

11:25 A.M. EST

MR. SIEWERT: Quick announcements, and then we'll go -- we'll try to make this quick, so everyone can go home and enjoy the holiday.

The President will be sending a delegation to the inauguration of Vincente Fox in Mexico, headed by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and including Senior White House Representative Maria Echaveste, the Deputy Chief of Staff. He will not, himself, be attending that, although he is sending the highest level delegation possible.

And the President this morning signed the District of Columbia appropriations bill for fiscal year 2001. He was pleased that we were able to work out a good-faith compromise on this, under the leadership of Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton. That bill will provide roughly \$446 million in federal funds that are central for District courts, correction facilities and the rest. It also provides \$17 million to fully fund the D.C. College Access Act. That's something the President has championed that provides tuition assistance for District residents, a bill that the President signed into law last year. It also fully funds the New York Avenue Metro Station, and provides a strong start for brownfields work in Anacostia, and economic development there.

The entire bill builds on the economic development program that the President has championed in the District, which includes the tax legislation he signed in 1997 that provides tax relief for D.C. residents and businesses, and some projects that were also provided for last year to revitalize the Nation's Capital.

There were some riders in the bill that we didn't like,

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as there have been other years. But in general, this was a bill that needed to be signed and does a lot of good for the District.

And that is all I have. He is signing about 2 dozen other bills. If you need details on those, check with Nanda or Sarah. Most of them are relatively small measures, although there is one that he is having a ceremony on now, called the Health Care Fairness Act, a small private ceremony.

Q Jake, what does the President think of Secretary Baker's statements last night that no one should be surprised if the Florida legislature involves itself in this election and seeks to turn back the decision that the Supreme Court of Florida made?

MR. SIEWERT: I have been reluctant from this podium to say much on the comments of both sides about the proceedings in Florida. I think we'll try to stay out of it again today. I'll do my best. The President -- this is a matter that's before the courts in Florida, and the President expects both sides to make their case as forcefully as possible and litigate that matter in the courts. I don't know that he has any view on whether the legislature should or should not get involved. I'll check.

Q Do you know if he sees that as circumventing the constitutional process, which is what sources inside the Gore campaign are saying?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know. I haven't discussed it with him.

Q Any comments on the illness of Dick Cheney?

MR. SIEWERT: I talked to the President about that this morning. He saw that news and wishes Mr. Cheney well and a speedy recovery.

Q Jake, you said you expect the President will expect the two sides to fight this out as aggressively as they can. But how about some of the rhetoric that's now there, statements today from members of the Congress who are Republican saying this election is being stolen? I mean, not alleging that, stating that as their point of view. As far as the President is concerned, how damaging does he think statements like that from members of Congress are to the entire public's confidence in the way elections are run in this country?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, there's a lot at stake here and I

expect that you'll hear a lot of rhetoric. We already have heard a lot of rhetoric. But I think what's important is that we get past the rhetoric and let the American people have the confidence that this will be worked out in a way that follows the rule of law and that we get the fullest and most accurate count possible, as the President said before.

Q Does the President feel that the Republicans are not following his earlier advice, to take two aspirin and --

MR. SIEWERT: That was not advice for Republicans, it was advice for the American public at large to relax and let the process play itself out. It is playing itself out. It's understandable I think that there would be quite an emotional period for a lot of different people, that there be some heated rhetoric. But what's important is that everyone let this process play out in a way that's fair and equitable.

There are plenty of lawyers, plenty of advocates on each side to make the case, and we expect that they'll continue to do so forcefully. But I think the President said that the American people expect this to be worked out in a way that reflects the will of the people of Florida, and let's let the courts and those who are responsible in the state figure out exactly how that should proceed, and not get involved ourselves.

Q Gore said last night that both sides ought to start getting going on their transition. Does that change anything about the White House policy that nothing would be done until there's an apparent winner?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, I think that we -- as I said yesterday, we're prepared to help the winner of this election move as quickly as possible to establish a transition team, and we'll provide them with whatever assistance we can, as soon as possible.

I don't think our plans have changed, other than, understandably, we've lost a couple weeks of planning. I don't think that's an enormous problem, as I said yesterday. But I think we'll probably take the opportunity next week to remind the Cabinet of the importance of having everything available, reminding the White House agencies the importance of having everything available for the winner when the election is resolved. And I think the President actually has a Cabinet meeting which will focus on a host of other topics, as well, but that will probably come up on Monday when the President meets with his Cabinet.

Q Jake, realistically, by law, until one of these candidates is declared President-elect, just how far down the road to transition can they go?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't think there's much we can do -- there's some, but there's not a lot we can do in terms of providing assistance directly to a transition team, because there isn't one yet that we can work with. But we can get everything ready so that we have -- typically, I think what happens -- I worked on the '92 transition -- typically, what happens is that you prepare materials after consulting with the transition team of the President-elect.

I think in this case we can begin preparing some of that material, getting that material ready. Maybe it will need to be reformatted or rejiggered a little bit when you've consulted with the winner, but there's no reason why some of that work can't be started now and some of that work can't be ready when there is a designate. But it shouldn't be an enormous problem. Some of that work can get done now. We know the rough -- roughly, what the Cabinets expect, and as I said yesterday, we'll be ready to move quickly when there is a clear winner.

Q Jake, based on your experience on the '92 transition, which some have observed did not go as smoothly as it might have, and yet you had all the available time, why don't you believe that whoever wins would be hamstrung by losing three, maybe four weeks, of that vital transition time?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, I probably don't have enough time to rehash the entire experience of the '92-'93 transition, but I'll be happy to spend time with you if you'd like later on that one. I don't know that -- I think some of the -- I'm not sure the length of time was the problem that we experienced in '92. It's a little more difficult than some expect to put together some of these teams, but there's no reason why it can't be done in relatively short order. And there's no reason why we can't do what we need to do to help the new President and his team get ready quickly. We can begin that work now; we have begun some of the work and there's no reason why we can't accelerate that, given that we're looking at a so much shorter time frame for that team to work in.

Q Jake, the President is on his way to the food bank to volunteer this afternoon, on the day before Thanksgiving. I wonder if you could tell us what he's learned over the years doing these kinds of volunteer activities, and also what, if any, volunteer activity he has planned for after he leaves office?

MR. SIEWERT: I haven't talked to him about what he's planning on doing after he leaves, although I expect in between supporting his family he'll find time to do a lot of work that probably is not reimbursed. And he's already indicated an interest in helping people around the world who are disadvantaged build better lives, better opportunities for themselves.

He thinks that service is critically important. He'll be joined today by Harris Wofford, who heads the Corporation for National Service. This is something he's worked on with members of both parties, with General Powell and the Service Summit, to encourage community activism, to encourage volunteerism, and it's something that obviously we'll be highlighting a little bit today and I expect he'll continue to do so after he leaves office.

Q Anything he's learned from these experiences?

MR. SIEWERT: That it's richly rewarding to help others.

Q When does he go to Camp David?

MR. SIEWERT: Sometime this afternoon. I don't have a precise time yet.

Q Jake, has the President spoken with the Vice President since the court ruling was announced?

MR. SIEWERT: I checked this morning. Not that I'm aware of. I'll double-check that, but I don't think he's spoken to him since he returned from Vietnam.

Q While this election drama, circus, you call it -- has the President received any call or has spoken with any world leaders privately or -- what they feel, how they feel?

MR. SIEWERT: No, I don't -- nothing specifically on this topic at any length. It did come up around the APEC meeting a little bit, but not in any serious way. I think foreign leaders understand that this is a -- that we have a constitutional process and a legal process to work this out, and most of them seem relatively unperturbed by that.

Q Jake, how is it that President Clinton has talked to the Vice President since he's been back from Vietnam? We know that during the campaign, before the election, that he was talking to Daley, the President was talking Daley. But wouldn't you think now that he and the Vice President would --

MR. SIEWERT: He has talked to him a couple times since the election, but I think the Vice President has been -- obviously been working pretty hard on this effort, probably working --

Q Well, even as moral support. I mean, he was --

MR. SIEWERT: Yes, he's had a couple conversations like that. I think I've detailed them from the podium here.

Q Yes, but lately, in the midst of all --

MR. SIEWERT: I'll check. I don't know. Obviously, he was out of the country for a great deal of time, and then he got back and we put him to work again. He's been working pretty hard today. But I'll check and see. I'm sure he'll talk to him sometime in the near future.

Q On a separate note, completely different note, are we coming out with final rules any time soon on these -- that would ban companies that violate labor and tax laws from getting government contracts?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know that specific issue. I can check on it. Companies that violate --

Q Yes, these proposals came out I think in June, and we got -- there's a report that these rules --

MR. SIEWERT: Oh, the final rules coming. I'll check. I don't know the timing of the final rule on that. But I can check with -- you may want to check with OMB.

Q Jake, does the White House have any concern that the atmosphere that's around the election becoming more poisonous could undermine efforts to reach agreements with Congress when it comes back in this lame duck session on a lot of the pending business you're going to try to get done?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't see why that should have any impact really. I mean, we've worked with Congress through some pretty contentious times, and we were able actually to agree on a great deal of important work. In the middle of some pretty serious wrangling over whether the President should be removed from office or not, we were able to strike budget accords that funded the President's priorities on education, on health care, welfare to work, on the environment, at a time when many of the members that were voting to fund the President's initiatives were

also trying to remove him from office.

So I don't see any reason why we can't work together in a lame duck session to fund education, to take care of some of these other priorities that the President has mentioned. It doesn't seem to me that that's an insurmountable task. We've certainly been through more difficult periods.

Q Does that mean the President would reject any continuing resolution through the end of his term?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't see any real reason for that. The President spoke to the Majority Leader and the Speaker before they left town. They said they wanted to come back December 5th and go to work, so I don't think there's any real reason to push this off until January.

Q Has the President spoken to any of the leaders in the Middle East today, or will he before he departs? And is there any reaction to today's shooting or car bomb?

MR. SIEWERT: We strongly condemn the latest violence there. The President hasn't spoken to anyone yet; he's actually been in an event since that happened. But it's very unclear so far what the facts are and who's responsible, so I think we'll probably leave it at that for now.

Q Will he make a comment before he --

MR. SIEWERT: No, I don't expect so. But I think, if anything, this latest incident, the latest violence underscores the importance of all sides who share an interest in seeing peace and breaking the cycle of violence, working to implement the arrangements we agreed to at Sharm el-Sheikh.

Q Will he speak to them before he departs for Camp David?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't think we have anything planned.

Q Has a date been set for the departure of the fact-finding commission?

MR. SIEWERT: I think Secretary Albright is meeting with Mr. Mitchell, former Senator, Ambassador Mitchell, sometime today. But I don't think that we have anything to announce.

Q Is the Vice President going to be with the

President at the food bank this afternoon?

MR. SIEWERT: No, the President will be there by himself.

Q Does he have any comments about the Prime Minister of India announced cease-fire in Kashmir, and also he has invited all the parties, delegation now -- if President has spoken with him recently, in the last week or so?

MR. SIEWERT: With the Prime Minister?

Q Yes.

MR. SIEWERT: No, I don't think he has. But we welcome the Prime Minister's announcement. We have been saying for some time now, the President said that for the Kashmir dispute to be resolved that it's important that there be restraint by both sides and respect for the line of control, and that both sides reject violence and work towards a renewal of dialogue.

The Prime Minister's statement was fully consistent with those principles and we hope it represents an opening toward a process of dialogue that's needed to bring about a lasting settlement in Kashmir.

Q Any word from Pakistan, if the President is in touch, or anybody from the administration --

MR. SIEWERT: I don't think we've -- I think that, yes, Ambassador Inderfurth has been in touch with the Pakistani government. And we certainly -- we saw the statement that was issued by the Pakistanis and we know it does not reject the Indian announcement. It says that it will closely watch the developments in the region. And we certainly urge the government of Pakistan to respond to the Prime Minister's announcement in a positive fashion.

Q Jake, has the President been kept abreast of the situation in Peru?

MR. SIEWERT: Yes, he has. We noted yesterday and I'll note today that there is a constitutional process underway there. We don't back a particular party or person, but we are working with the Organization of American States to ensure that there is a democratic transition in Peru.

Q Jake, who is joining the President at Camp David

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tomorrow, and what's on the menu?

MR. SIEWERT: Turkey.

Q We know it's not Jerry. (Laughter.)

MR. SIEWERT: Not Jerry. Jerry's safe. I think he will be joined by Mrs. Clinton and Chelsea and some other members of his family, and some friends, as well. We'll try to get you a full list and menu later today -- excellent -- according to Nanda.

Q Is there any word from Chuck Ruff's family as to plans for a service or a memorial or anything?

MR. SIEWERT: I think that they will hold a private service this weekend, and then they will hold some sort of a memorial service early next month. I expect that we should have a date for that pretty soon. And that's where you would probably see the President attend.

Q Do you have a week ahead for next week, Jake?

MR. SIEWERT: No, other than -- since it's a little early to put together next week, other than the Cabinet meeting on Monday, I don't have anything else yet for you.

Q Do you have a time for that, Jake?

MR. SIEWERT: It will be late afternoon. We're working on the time.

Q Is Clinton coming back Monday or Sunday?

MR. SIEWERT: Hasn't decided yet. Either Sunday night or Monday morning.

All right. Happy Thanksgiving.

END

11:46 A.M. EST

#15-11/22

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

November 27, 2000

PRESS BRIEFING
BY
JAKE SIEWERT

The James S. Brady Briefing Room

1:22 P.M. EST

MR. SIEWERT: I'll begin with a statement on the trip announcement. Welcome, to our visitors -- do we have some folks from Tennessee, do I understand? It's a great state, the volunteer state. I spent some time there in '96.

President Clinton will travel to the United Kingdom and Ireland, December 12th through 14th this year. The visit, response to invitations from Prime Minister Blair; the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern; and Northern Ireland First Minister David Trimble; and Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon. Building on the progress that's been achieved in implementing the Good Friday Accords, the President hopes that this visit will help to overcome current difficulties on the path to lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

Other than that, I have a week ahead for this week, which I'll do at the end. And I have no other announcements, other than to note that there was a release today out of the Commerce Department which was interesting, which showed that e-commerce sales spiked sharply in the last quarter, which is a -- this is a new figure that was developed by the Clinton administration to track the new information age economy. And e-commerce sales were up 15 percent, so that's a very interesting statistic -- shows that the information age economy, despite the ups and downs, day in, day out that you read about in the .com world is still growing and building a stronger U.S. economy.

With that, I will take your questions.

Q How's the transition?

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MR. SIEWERT: Do you have a more specific question? We are meeting today with the Cabinet to discuss the transition. As you know, we're in somewhat uncharted waters here, but we think that we can maintain a steady course in making sure that the new President has all the information and resources they need to get in the job and be fully up to speed right away. John Podesta has sent a number of memos to the Cabinet agencies and to the executive departments within the White House to let them know about the importance of providing good information to the new President, the President-elect.

At this point, given the unclarity of the elections and the lack of a final winner, and given the ongoing litigation that's being pursued by both sides, we can't provide information to just one candidate; but we're going to do everything we can to proceed on a parallel track and make sure that the eventual winner has the information that he needs to conduct their business.

Q Does this mean you will start providing information to both sides immediately?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, I think what we're focused on now is making sure that we have the best information available. John sent a memo to the Cabinet agencies last week, that will be the subject of some discussion today at the Cabinet meeting, ensuring that we have briefing materials, a carry-over designee in each agency and that they begin to prepare transition offices within the agencies so that the eventual winner can avail themselves of that.

Q A follow up, if I may -- but nothing has been given to either side, and there is no plan to give anything to either side until a final victory is declared?

MR. SIEWERT: We'll do everything we can to proceed along a parallel track. There are obviously very discreet issues, but generally we're in the phase of gathering information now and making sure that we have the best possible information to give to candidates. There's an exception, obviously, on national security -- in the wake of the convention, Governor Bush received a full security briefing, and we're looking at ways in which we can continue to provide information on some sort of ongoing basis to him. The Vice President, obviously, receives regular updates on national security.

Q What will it take for Bill Clinton to actually fully cooperate with Governor Bush on transition?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, we're doing everything we can to provide information -- to get information ready. It's important to keep

in mind that there's always a lag time here. In the '96 -- after the '92 campaign, it wasn't until even December that we reached an agreement with the then Bush designee that would allow for sharing of information. I believe it was December 5th. So there's always some lag time in dealing with these kinds of issues.

Most of the work, the vast bulk of the work that we do is gathering information, preparing offices, and ensuring that there's a smooth transition within the agencies.

Q Do you think the American people are happy to see that transition office empty with no work apparently being done?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, I think the American people -- there's a very specific statute governing that, the Presidential Transition Act of 1963. We've solicited from the Department of Justice an interpretation of the law. But it's pretty clear that given the legislative history there, that if there's any doubt about the outcome of the election, that no funds, no taxpayer funds should be dispersed. So I think the taxpayers actually have a right to ensure that the law is carried forward in a way that honors the intention that Congress had. This was discussed at the time. We've asked for a further legal opinion on that, but I think it's pretty clear that when it comes to actually turning over the office and actually expending taxpayer funds, they wanted to make certain that no money was spent until there was some certainty.

Q So the funds haven't been expended yet, is that what you're saying -- the GSA money has not been distributed?

MR. SIEWERT: No. No.

Q Jake, does that mean that the administration does not accept the certified vote from Florida?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, there are legal proceedings, and the highest court in the United States is going to rule on this election. That's a proceeding that was brought by one side. There are obviously -- there are other legal proceedings that are underway. And as I've said for some time now, it's not for us to decide how the law in Florida should be interpreted. That's for the courts to decide, and that's what the courts are reviewing right now.

Q -- the head of the administrative GSA is a Clinton appointee. Isn't there an appearance problem here? And who are you going to go to for this further opinion you spoke of?

MR. SIEWERT: We'll get an interpretation from the Justice

Department.

Q Are you telling us that this would be handled just the same way if Al Gore were the certified winner in Florida?

MR. SIEWERT: I'm telling you that while the outcome of the election is in doubt, is before the courts, is being litigated, that we're going to move forward in a way that the law requires. The law is very specific on this. Take a look at it.

Q Given that the administrator is a Clinton appointee, wouldn't it have been better for appearance sake to tell the Bush people you can go ahead and occupy the office if you want, but if the courts rule --

MR. SIEWERT: That would be okay if it were a matter that allowed a great deal of discretion, perhaps. But the law is pretty clear. They contemplated that there might be some uncertainty about this, and they said if there's any doubt about the ultimate outcome of the election, that no taxpayer funds should be disbursed.

Q Jake, why not start turning over information to both sides so that whichever one ultimately prevails would be in a better position to actually --

MR. SIEWERT: I'm not precluding that option. As I've said, we've provided some national security information. We're going to begin -- we are in the process of gathering more information. This is something that the President wants to discuss with his Cabinet. We understand that we are moving at a different pace than we were.

But keep in mind that in '92 a lot of this information wasn't disbursed until later than this date right now. Most of the work that we're doing, the bulk of the work can go forward and eventually be provided to either candidate, as it has been in the past.

Q Jake, is it the White House position that this election is not over until one of the two candidates concedes? Is that what Gore has to do before any of this process will be set in motion?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know that that's for us to decide. What we're doing is doing everything we can to provide information --

Q How is --

MR. SIEWERT: Well, that's a matter that's before the court. And I've sat here for two weeks now and said I'm going to be very careful about trying to provide running commentary about various court decisions, about various rulings by the state. There have been a lot of different rulings; both sides continue to litigate the matter. And we cannot get in the middle of that process. There's something underway before the U.S. Supreme Court; there's something underway before Florida courts. And we're not here to comment on the law and what it means; that's for courts to decide.

Q -- transition until the last court case is settled? No transition until then?

MR. SIEWERT: I'm not saying that, at all. But there's substantial litigation before the courts. There's a lot of different ways in which that could play out. This has taken a lot of twists and turns. In the meantime, we have a law that governs how transitions are handled and we're following the law and we've asked for further elucidation of that.

Q Well, Jake, what is enough clarity for this administration to cooperate with one side or the other?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, that's something that we'll obviously have to judge. This process has played out in a very unexpected way from the beginning, and it may continue to do that in the future. But I'm not going to put a litmus test down right here, right now.

Q -- by the White House Counsel's Office, will they make a recommendation to the President? Will the President make this decision on a political basis --

MR. SIEWERT: There is a very specific law governing the use of the offices. In terms of transition material, we're moving forward, we're preparing that information, we're on track to provide that information to either candidate or both candidates, if that becomes necessary. But the reality is that we're on track to do that. We're speeding up the process because of the unusual nature of the situation here. But we're doing everything we can to make sure that the new President, whoever he is, is ready to govern.

Q Jake, was this interpretation of the Presidential Transition Act of 1963 left to this administrator of GSA or was the White House in any way involved in saying, this is how this is going to be interpreted?

MR. SIEWERT: No, I don't believe -- I mean, obviously,

we've talked to them, but I don't believe that we've given them an interpretation of the act. If anything, we've asked -- we've gotten a preliminary finding from the Department of Justice, and we'll continue -- we're looking for a more comprehensive one.

Q Jake, did you ask -- the Gore campaign to designate people to be the contact people with the departments and agencies?

MR. SIEWERT: Excuse me?

Q Have you asked, or are you going to ask, both the Bush and the Gore campaign to designate the contact people for departments and agencies?

MR. SIEWERT: That's a decision that's up to them. But we wouldn't -- we would have no -- I don't suspect that there would be any problem to giving at least a macro briefing about the situation to either candidate at this point.

Q Jake, what do you say to the Bush supporters who say this move is not fair and it's technically in support of Gore?

MR. SIEWERT: I'd say that there's a law, and we're following it.

Q Jake, on a more important subject than this, the trip to Ireland. The President has said constantly the last few months that he's not going to go over there unless there's something concrete that he can do, some help he can offer. You said that he's going over there to help overcome some of the obstacles. Does that mean it's going to be more of a working trip? More meetings with some of the leaders than he has done in the past?

MR. SIEWERT: I think that particularly the visit to Northern Ireland, Ireland and even -- will be focused on the implementation of the Good Friday Accord. I expect he'll have meetings both in Belfast and somewhere in Ireland with the leaders. And as you know, he has, from day one of this administration, been deeply engaged in that process. He's going to go at the final days of his administration staying engaged, trying to do everything he can.

So I expect, particularly in Northern Ireland, he'll have an opportunity to meet with all the key leaders and actually talk to the people of Ireland directly, both of Northern Ireland and the Republic, to explain the importance of implementing the Good Friday Accord and building on the foundation that that brings for a lasting peace.

Q To follow up on the President's travels, does the President plan to visit the troops any time during the holiday season? And, if so, where and when?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't have anything to announce on that.

Q As a follow up, please. Is it his desire to do so?

MR. SIEWERT: We regularly do something to stay in contact with the troops and wish them well around the holidays, but I don't have anything to announce. Sometimes it's in person, sometimes it's --

Q Just to follow up, since Mrs. Clinton -- is Mrs. Clinton attending --

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know, you should check with her office.

Q If she were, since she's now going to be the Senator designate from New York, will she have more of an official visit than just a visiting --

MR. SIEWERT: Well, Mrs. Clinton, on a lot of the trips the President has done, has done official events, as well as more social events. And that's something she's done throughout the administration. But I don't know of anything particular she has planned. I don't even know if she's planning on going; you should check with her office.

Q Is Dublin on the travel plan, or is it going to be somewhere in Ireland, you said --

MR. SIEWERT: We have not set the specific itinerary for the trip, but when we do, I'll let you know.

Q Jake, back to the transition for a minute. Where does the Governor's personal request from last night to this administration to work with him on transition stand, at this point? And has anyone from this administration talked to the Bush campaign about that direct request?

MR. SIEWERT: Not that I'm aware of, I don't think. I checked with the Chief of Staff, he had not heard from them directly.

As far as the request goes, the GSA matter is specifically before the GSA. I believe they've addressed that. On the larger issue of the transition, they should be confident that we're doing everything we can, given the unusual situation, to prepare

materials rapidly and that we'll be in a position to hand them over should he be declared the victor.

Q But at this point you're not ready to work with them?

MR. SIEWERT: If they request a meeting -- excuse me?

Q You're not ready at this point to honor that request?

MR. SIEWERT: To have a meeting or to -- I mean, I don't see any reason why we wouldn't provide them with a briefing on where we stand, what's going on. We would do the same for the Vice President.

Q Jake, I'm perplexed as to why you feel the need to speed things up in terms of handing over of materials that you're now amassing. It's not a surprise that there was going to be an election on November 7th, why should you speed things up now? Why wasn't some of this done --

MR. SIEWERT: A lot of this has been going on. And I said that -- I've told you before that John has actually been engaged in this from day one. He sent a memo out to the agencies right after the election saying there's some uncertainty about the election, about providing direct information to the candidates. He said, since we cannot do that in the absence of a clear victor, what we need to do is make sure that we're getting all the information available, given that the new team will have a shorter period of time in which to use that material.

So the work has been ongoing. If anything, we're just speeding up some of the preparatory work so that when -- given the shorter time frame that the new President and the new team will have to work with that material.

Q Jake, another part of the transition is obtaining security clearances, through the FBI, of West Wing employees for either side. Has the administration ordered the Justice Department not to provide those sort of background briefings for any names submitted by either campaign?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know that we've given any specific guidance on that. What I can tell you is that we have consulted -- we've been consulting with the Department of Justice to make sure that the FBI has the adequate resources to deal with this. As you know -- that's something that we're consulting with them to make sure that they have the resources to do this very quickly.

As you know, I've said this before from the podium, those

clearances take a long period of time and a lot of the time actually is chewed up by people gathering their own personal information and putting that together in a form. I've done that myself; it takes longer than you think. And until that information is given over to the FBI, they actually don't have much to work with.

So that information process -- there's no reason why both candidates, both campaigns couldn't begin collecting that material on their own, designating personnel. There's always some lag time there. A lot of the work gets done on the part of the individuals long before the FBI gets involved.

Q If some were submitted by Bush people, for example, to the FBI, would there be any marching orders for them not to begin the process?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't -- as I said, I'm not aware that we've consulted with the FBI on that specific issue.

Q You would -- the White House officials, transition officials, would meet with Bush campaign transition officials if they requested such a meeting?

MR. SIEWERT: If they wanted to get an overall view of where we are in the transition and what steps we're taking to make sure that everything is going as smoothly as possible given the unusual circumstances, we'd be happy to provide that kind of a briefing to either the Vice President or the --

Q But you would not turn over any of this information you are gathering?

MR. SIEWERT: That is something that we have under review, given that the law is pretty clear. It says that you have to wait for a clear victor.

Q Jake, has President Clinton been consulted at all by anybody in the Gore campaign on either the PR battle going on here or the legal strategy?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know about every private conversation he had, and obviously I imagine he has some views on that, but he has not been in regular contact with the Vice President or his staff about their strategy. He has obviously discussed this. Everyone in America has probably discussed it at some point or another. So I can't rule out very -- that some of his thinking might have made its way back to someone.

But the reality is that he's not in regular contact with

Bill Daley or the Vice President. He's mostly been getting his information from the Chief of Staff here, the Deputy Chief of Staff, who have been in contact with the campaign.

But as I've said before, we're not providing running commentary on this, and the President is focused on ensuring that the nation's business is getting done.

Q What do you think about the path that Bush said that they would now follow -- establish their own transition committee and their own transition office. Is that going to be a problem?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know that its really up to us to decide that. If they want to take steps to move forward, if the Vice President wants to take steps to move forward to make sure that they're ready, that's up to them.

Q Also, what is the -- what is the mood like among the White House staff with all this going on?

MR. SIEWERT: We're working, focused. I don't know that -- since the election we've obviously been engaged in a lot of different work here, and the work of the White House goes on. It's not a -- we're obviously, as the President said, watching the proceedings in Florida with a great deal of interest, but I don't think that has stopped us from doing our work here.

Q What's the week ahead?

MR. SIEWERT: Are we there? (Laughter.)

Q Not yet. Was Gore not invited to the Cabinet meeting today?

MR. SIEWERT: He's always welcome at a Cabinet meeting. I think he chose not to come.

Q Do you know why?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know. Check with him, but I'm sure he's busy.

Q His office doesn't know. (Laughter.)

MR. SIEWERT: Oh, really? Well I don't speak for them on a regular basis, so I won't start today.

Q If the Bush people go ahead and expend their own money on transition expenses, and then later on, the White House is satisfied that he, in fact, is the President-elect, can the money

then be --

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know the answer to that question. I just don't know the answer to that question.

Q Let me ask you a question on national security. Are there two levels of briefings for a presidential candidate and another one for a presidential-elect? In other words, do you get more sensitive information if you're the President-elect? Here's an example. In 1960, after Kennedy got elected, Eisenhower saw that he was briefed on the upcoming Bay of Pigs operation. There has been talk that this administration is preparing some kind of retaliatory strike against Osama bin Laden or unnamed others. Would George Bush, if he were the President-elect, get that kind of high-level --

MR. SIEWERT: Well, I'm certainly not going to comment on that kind of specific hypothetical. I can tell you that the briefings they're receiving are high level. I'll check on the exact nature of them. But Sandy Berger has also been in touch with their national security team and given them briefings when sensitive issues came up.

Q Do they go to a higher level, though, if the White House --

MR. SIEWERT: I'll check. I don't know.

Q One more on Middle East. Has the President given up on peace in his time in the Middle East situation?

MR. SIEWERT: Not at all. In fact, Senator Mitchell was in New York today trying to put together the fact-finding mission. They will travel to the region shortly to gather information. There were some good signs in the region over the weekend in that President Mubarak met with both sides and continues to play a role in trying to influence the -- bring people back to the Sharm el-Sheikh accords. And there's clearly much too much violence there and more needs to be done; but that work continues, the fact-finding work goes forward, and the President's diplomacy will continue.

Talked you into silence. Paula?

Q If the upcoming election is still uncertain by December 5th, does it make much sense for Congress to reconvene, given that they delayed coming back until they thought the election was certain?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, I don't see any reason why they can't

come back next week and get some work done. But that's obviously, ultimately, up to them. We'll be happy to discuss what they can or can't do when they reconvene in December.

Q Jake, any North Korea developments?

MR. SIEWERT: No.

Q -- go on any Northern trips?

MR. SIEWERT: Northern -- (laughter) -- no. In fact, no one should read the decision about the Ireland trip as in any way, shape, or form, impacting the potential of a trip to North Korea. We have not made a decision on whether or not to travel to North Korea. That will depend on the substance of what we could accomplish there.

Q What about Nebraska, is he ever going to visit Nebraska? (Laughter.)

MR. SIEWERT: We are going to visit Nebraska.

Q Before or after North Korea? (Laughter.)

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know.

Q We're waiting for what?

Q On the way. (Laughter.)

MR. SIEWERT: We will go to Nebraska. I promise you.

Q For a football game or --

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know. I'd love to see a football game, but I don't think that's why we'll go there. Do something substantive, serious.

Q So that is a commitment, he's going to visit Nebraska?

MR. SIEWERT: Ironclad commitment. I will not let us not go to Nebraska. Never been there myself. No, that's not true.

Week ahead? Okay. Today, the President will hold a Cabinet meeting; pool spray. I'm sure everyone will enjoy that. The President has no other public schedule today.

And at 11:25 a.m. tomorrow, the President and Mrs. Clinton, along with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, will convene the White House Conference on Culture and Diplomacy. The opening

remarks and the opening plenary session will both be open press. That will include other luminaries, such as cellist Yo-Yo Ma, and the former Poet Laureate of the United States, Rita Dove, and others.

At 5:30 p.m. in the East Room the President will make remarks at a reception to celebrate the 200th Anniversary of the White House and the publication of *An Invitation To The White House*. The press coverage of that event will be in-house pool. *An Invitation To The White House*, for those of you who don't know, is a book by Mrs. Clinton which explains how the President and the First Lady have worked to make the White House a showcase of American art, ideas, culture and people. And I believe she's doing some other events and press in conjunction with that.

On Wednesday at noon, the President will host a visit by the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic athletes. He will make brief remarks and take a group photo with athletes at the South Portico. That will be open to the press. He has no other public schedule.

On Thursday, the President will travel to New York City where he will make remarks at the G&P Foundation Gala, returning to Washington that evening. The G&P Foundation supports the development of more effective therapies for patients with leukemia, lymphoma and related cancers.

On Friday, the President will make remarks at an event commemorating World AIDS Day. We're still finalizing the details of that event. He has no other public schedule.

And on Saturday the President will broadcast live a weekly radio address.

Q The --

MR. SIEWERT: Excuse me? I don't know. The Race Book. And for those of you who need a laugh, go to the Upper Press Office and see what my assistant, Jenni Engebretsen, is wearing today.

Q Thank you.

END

1:47 P.M. EST

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

November 28, 2000

PRESS BRIEFING
BY
JAKE SIEWERT

The James S. Brady Briefing Room

1:23 P.M. EST

MR. SIEWERT: Good afternoon. You've all been following the conference closely? Okay. I have nothing to start with, so I'll be happy to entertain your questions.

Q Tell us about the Podesta phone call with his counterpart in the Bush team.

MR. SIEWERT: John had a good conversation, a cordial conversation with Mr. Card, who Governor Bush has designated to serve as his Chief of Staff for his transition. Last night they finally reached each other. John offered to meet with him and offered to meet with either the Vice President's transition staff or separately, whatever their choice was. And we will wait to hear back from them, and then we'll be happy to arrange such a meeting to give them an overview of where we are in the transition and what we hope to do going forward.

Q What about the Berger briefings for Bush?

MR. SIEWERT: As I said yesterday at the podium, we are happy to provide more regular briefings. John Podesta offered regular briefings to Mr. Card yesterday.

Q Daily briefings?

MR. SIEWERT: Daily briefings, yes. Sandy Berger is following up with Condi Rice today. So the CIA would provide the kinds of briefings that are provided after the convention to Governor Bush. And those are the kinds of briefings that the Vice President receives today.

Q Are they written briefings, Jake?

MR. SIEWERT: For security -- a lot of the specific details will be worked out between Sandy Berger and Governor

Bush's security -- national security team. But I'm not going to get in to the whos, whys, wheres, whens for a host of security reasons.

Q So did they say that they want the daily briefings?

MR. SIEWERT: Yes, they agreed that they would appreciate those updates. This has been done for administrations going back all the way to -- at least to President Truman, the CIA has provided this sort of service. They provide it after the convention to the nominee of the opposing party, or of both parties. And in this case, given the unusual circumstances, this hasn't started until now, but with the encouragement of the Vice President, John Podesta made that offer yesterday, and they are following up today to set those up.

Q Have you heard anything more back from the Department of Justice on their interpretation of the transition law and whether its different from what you have?

MR. SIEWERT: We have received an advisory -- we've received the advise, essentially, that they have provided, and I think I went through it yesterday in some detail. Some of you asked about the --

Q You said you were waiting for --

MR. SIEWERT: But we're actually waiting for a formal written opinion from them on what the Presidential Transition Act entails. But I thin the legislative history makes pretty clear that if there's any doubt in the mind of the GSA Administrator, that they should not move forward and no money should be expended. In fact, I'll just quote from the Congressional Record briefly from 1963. This very issue was raised. Someone said, well, if the GSA administrator were to give such help to someone who was in a position in a close election, it might give them a psychological advantage. And the author of the legislation, Dante Fascell, said, no, that is exactly what is not intended by this. And he said, if there's any doubt in his mind, and if he cannot or does not designate the apparently successful candidate, then the act is inoperative. You cannot do anything, there will be no services provided, and no money expended.

So that's very clear in the Congressional Record. They actually spent a fair amount of time discussing the possibility of a close election, and a decision by the GSA administrator to provide such services as proving a crucial edge to someone who is claiming to have won the election. And they make perfectly clear that if there's any doubt, taxpayer money shouldn't be dispensed because it would create -- might create some sort of an edge for one candidate or the other.

But, in any case, the law, the statutory language, for

those of you who looked at it, is very clear. And if you go back and look at the legislative history, it's also very clear that the decision to provide this aid shouldn't be made when there's any doubt in the mind of the GSA administrator.

Q Do you intend to release a more detailed --

MR. SIEWERT: I'll talk to -- I don't see an particular reason why we couldn't at least make you familiar with the general thrust of that opinion by the Office of Legal Counsel, but I haven't heard back from the lawyers about whether it would be possible. In any case, we don't have a final written draft yet.

Q Given your interpretation of that, of that language regarding that act, is the Bush campaign, in fact, trying to get --

MR. SIEWERT: It's not my interpretation. It is something provided by the legal counsel. And as I said, those of you who have been reporting on this should probably -- it would be best to go back and take a look at the actual language and the language of the legislative history, because this has been portrayed in the media in large sense as some sort of decision that we've made here. In reality, there's a law governing this. I think anyone who is familiar with transitions, as the Bush people are, as the Gore people are, can take a look at that law and see what it says for themselves.

Q Given that emphasis on not wanting to give an unfair edge to one party or another in a contested election --

MR. SIEWERT: Again, that's not my emphasis, that's something that was raised by Congress who passed this law and something that they decided.

Q Do you feel the Bush campaign is seeking an unfair advantage by --

MR. SIEWERT: I'm not in a position to make any judgment. I'm just saying that this was an issue that was raised when the statute was debated, and answered in the floor debate.

Q Well, is there any possibility still of what the President raised yesterday of having the funding for both candidates --

MR. SIEWERT: That is actually one of the specific questions we put to the Department of Justice, and they said that

that was something that was specifically contemplated again by Congress and rejected.

Q Will there be a GSA administrator after Friday?
David Barram --

MR. SIEWERT: David Barram told the White House Chief of Staff yesterday that he planned to stay through the 15th.

Q Did Andy Card specifically ask for this, the access to the GSA facility and the money, during his conversation with --

MR. SIEWERT: Not that I'm aware of. They discussed the security briefings, they discussed the possibility of a meeting. But I don't think that this specific issue came up. It may have come up, but I'm not sure that it did in any -- I think they know what our point of view --

Q Has the Chief of Staff had a similar conversation with Roy Neel this morning?

MR. SIEWERT: I know he's tried to reach him. I'm not sure if they've actually touched base, but I think you can expect he'll be in contact with him.

Q Was Barram asked to stay on longer?

MR. SIEWERT: No. He told us that he would.

Q And the reason that he gave?

MR. SIEWERT: I think you should ask him, but I think he probably feels like it's as important a time as a GSA administrator has ever had to stay in the job.

Q So the Bush people and the Gore people will be getting the exact same daily briefing on security issues every day, right?

MR. SIEWERT: You should maybe check with the CIA on exactly what the hows and wherefors are on that. I said I would not get into the specifics for security reasons here. But they will certainly get the same briefings that have been provided for administrations since the Truman era, according to --

Q Gore gets some kind of briefing a day anyway, doesn't he, some written thing?

MR. SIEWERT: Sure. I mean, as you know, different Presidents choose to receive this information in different ways. Some Presidents have gotten their daily intelligence briefing orally, some have done it on paper. And that's largely issues that have been just historically decided by the President, what they prefer.

Q Since the convention, Sandy has, on occasion, called the Bush representative to inform that person about ongoing developments, international policy and military policy, has he not?

MR. SIEWERT: Yes. Sandy has been in contact, I think usually with Condi Rice about security matters when they arise and he feels it's appropriate.

Q These daily briefings will start tomorrow, is that right?

MR. SIEWERT: We're still working out the specific details, but they've accepted the offer to have them.

Q Jake, what is your reaction to the Canadian election? Is there any envy that Chretien has three terms? (Laughter.)

MR. SIEWERT: Is that final, or have the absentee ballots from Florida come in yet? I think the President considers Jean Chretien a very good friend and is pleased with won't work that we've done together with our -- one of our closest allies and our largest trading partner. And obviously, the Canadian people have recognized the tremendous record that Jean Chretien has accomplished in his two terms as Prime Minister. And the President looks forward to talking to him later this afternoon -- they have a call scheduled -- and he will inherit the President's title as the longest-serving leader in the Western democratic nations in January, at some point. He started in '93, as the President did.

Q Jake, in quoting Dante Fascell, do you find any particular harmonic convergence that the voice from the dead from the Congress, articulating how transition works, comes from a politician who cut his teeth, of all places, in Miami Dade County?

MR. SIEWERT: Miami Dade County. No. I noted that this morning, for those of you who are unfamiliar with Mr. Facell's work. But, no, I had no knowledge until this morning

that Mr. Facell was the author of this legislation. But it's obviously something that he took a great deal of personal pride in.

Q Jake, question on -- earlier we had a conference on diplomacy and culture in the East Room. Could you please find out why India is one of the oldest cultures on this Earth and also largest film-producing countries in the world and exporting around the world, but India was not represented in the audience or on the panel? There were several U.S. ambassadors overseas here and even though -- U.S. Ambassador to India or Indian Ambassador to the U.S. were also not in the audience.

MR. SIEWERT: Well, I'll check. I'm not -- I'll check. It may well be that they were invited and couldn't attend, but I will check on that. We certainly appreciate the distinct contribution that India has played to world culture. And the President noted that many times when he was visiting the sub-continent.

Q Also, this conference, how will this play a role as far as the U.N. and UNESCO is concerned?

MR. SIEWERT: Let me check on that.

Q Jake, on the budget, what do you expect when Congress gets back next week? Do you have -- you sign one-day CRs, or any meetings scheduled at this point this week or next week?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, we've met internally to discuss how to proceed, and we certainly hope that when Congress returns we can at least focus on the achievable -- on an education budget, on some of the key funding measures that are before Congress, where there's a great deal of bipartisan agreement. We think there's no reason at all why we couldn't memorialize the largely bipartisan agreement on education that we were hammering out before they left town.

There are obviously some very difficult issues that prove very divisive, and made it difficult to wrap up before we left. And we may need to set some of those aside in order to achieve consensus before we leave. But I don't think we've met yet with the Republican leadership, although we've had some discussions with Democrats. They haven't come back to town yet.

As to CRs, I don't think we've made any determination, but we'll consult with them. We'll be as flexible as we can be on

how to let them achieve the work that they want to achieve in that one week or two weeks or however many days they think it will take to wrap up.

Q Jake, has the President been fully briefed on the failure of the Kyoto meeting in the Hague to try to reach a consensus on the global warming treaty issues, and does he see a method to push forward or reconvene or do anything on that front?

MR. SIEWERT: He certainly received an update. I don't know about a full briefing. And as you know, he was in contact during the talks with some of the parties that were involved. I know he spoke to Prime Minister Blair and a couple of the other key players in that.

Our delegation worked very hard to reach a deal and we thought that we had the basis of an agreement worked out with the EU. Unfortunately, they backed away from that deal. We're not in the business here of assigning blame for that, but we thought that we had hammered out a good-faith compromise. And Under Secretary Loy's closing statements speaks for where we think we should go from here.

Q Jake, are you aware of the story circulating in New York that the President might want to consider running for mayor after he leaves the White House? (Laughter.)

MR. SIEWERT: He already has the second toughest job in American politics, so why would he want the first? (Laughter.)

Q Is that a "no"?

MR. SIEWERT: Yes, that's a "no." (Laughter.) It's also a New York pander, in case you were wondering -- in that business here. I have no idea.

Q Did you actually ask about that?

MR. SIEWERT: No. But I'm sure he'll find it amusing.

Q Jake, finally, can you update on this problem of terrorism? State Department officials and also some high-level officials for the White House have been meeting the Taliban on the future of bringing Osama bin Laden to justice in this country.

MR. SIEWERT: That's something that we've been pursuing for some time. I'm not aware of anything new, but, obviously, we're intent upon bringing him to justice and we're always working on that. Most of that work, for obvious reasons, is not best

discussed from this podium, but best discussed privately with law enforcement officials in the region.

Q Did the President watch the Vice President's speech last night? And, if so, have you had a chance to talk to him about his reaction or has he spoken to the Vice President about it?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't think he's spoken to him today, but I'll check on that. I know he saw it; I don't know if he saw it live or not.

Q Did you talk to him about it?

MR. SIEWERT: Briefly.

Q What was his reaction?

MR. SIEWERT: I won't characterize it, but I think he thinks the Vice President did a terrific job laying out the case. As you know, the President said yesterday that --

Q But that's not his characterization, that's your description of what you think he thought?

MR. SIEWERT: Exactly. (Laughter.) Two very, very controversial questions.

Q Back to the CRs for a second. You mentioned one two-week period for getting work done. Is that the outside limit?

MR. SIEWERT: That's, I think, the kind of framework that congressional leaders have been talking about, about coming back and trying to wrap it up under a week or two. But as I said, they're not back in town yet, we haven't sat down in any sustained way and discussed this with them. The President talked to them before he went to Vietnam and Brunei, agreed to extend the CR until December, which seemed like a reasonable time frame. And when they get back into town next week, there's a new member orientation, as well, we'll have a chance to sit down with them and discuss it in greater detail.

Q Jake, did his order on ergonomics remove that as a bone of contention with Congress to try to reach final resolution?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, that's a rule that we thought was worth pushing. But in terms of whether Congress thinks that it's off the table, I mean, I'll leave that to them to discuss. We

told them for some time that we're intent upon moving towards a final rule. We've now put that rule in place. It may change the debate a little bit. I assume that those who oppose that rule will continue to find ways to undo it.

Q Is it your understanding that the President would refuse to sign a CR to the end of his term in office?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, I think that we -- I don't see any real reason to get into that now because Congress has indicated an intention to come back and work. And that's what we hope they do, that's what we expect they'll do, and that's what we'll certainly urge them to do.

Q Is the President at least open to that idea?

MR. SIEWERT: No, I think there's no particular reason why the work of today should be put off until tomorrow. I mean, there is a cost to putting off work until next year. It means that rather than have a robust education budget that provides new Pell grants, new student loans, more education funding for students today, we essentially punt on a decision and leave a lot of people without those benefits. And that's -- it's really not an acceptable choice. I mean, there's a lot that's achievable. We've reached bipartisan agreement on much of the education budget and there's no reason why we can't do it when they get back.

But we're already two months in the fiscal year. And what that means essentially is that for a lot of the programs that are being run around education, that the funding is flat-lined over last year, which is actually a real decline in the value of student loans, of Pell grants and a lot of other education funding when you factor in inflation. So there's no reason why we shouldn't be able to take the reasonable increases that were contemplated by both parties before we left and memorialize those into law.

Q As far as focusing on the achievable, are you defining that then as limiting it just to the appropriations bills?

MR. SIEWERT: No, we're willing to work on the Medicare piece as well, certainly; and tax pieces where there's bipartisan consensus. There is a bipartisan consensus, for instance, on the importance of alleviating some of the harm that's been done by overly strict measures in the Balanced Budget Act, and there's no reason why we couldn't hammer out some of those differences. So we think that's worth working on.

We also think that certain of the tax credits and tax cuts are relatively uncontroversial and could be worked through in pretty short order.

Jake? Q When do you think it could be wrapped up then,

MR. SIEWERT: Well, that depends on the pace that Congress sets for itself. But they've said they want to come back and try to do this work in very quick order, in a week or so. It may take longer, it may take less. But we're willing to provide whatever assistance is necessary to get it done quickly.

Q What portions of that \$240 billion tax cut package do you think could be achievable in short order?

MR. SIEWERT: I guess that depends in large part on Congress' mood when it returns.

Thank you.

END

1:42 P.M. EST

#17-11/28

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

November 29, 2000

PRESS BRIEFING BY
JAKE SIEWERT

The James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

11:15 A.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Can anyone name that tune?

Q The Nebraska fight song.

MR. SIEWERT: You got it. "Hail Varsity." There will be a special souvenir for the man in the back. On December 8, President Clinton will travel to Nebraska to make remarks at the Kearney campus of the University of Nebraska. There will be special prizes for reporters who can answer the following questions: What does the word, "Nebraska," mean?

Q Sounds like -- (Laughter.)

MR. SIEWERT: No winners there. We'll defer that one.

Q Bob Kerrey.

MR. SIEWERT: Flat water is the correct answer. It's an Indian word.

Q Never been there.

MR. SIEWERT: Never been there? Really? Well, we'll be learning a lot about it. For those of you who don't know, we have a lot of facts back in my office, compiled by Liz, one of our star interns who is from Nebraska, attends school there, including the fact that the following items, according to Nebraskans, were developed there -- the TV dinner, in 1953; Kool-Aid, in 1927 -- who knew? The Reuben sandwich, which seems unlikely, but apparently true. (Applause.) Cliff Notes, which I've used from time to time. The ATM machine, as well; and also, 911.

MORE

#18-11/29

So the details of that trip are still TBD, but we'll be trying to -- all set.

At 11:45 a.m. today, John Podesta will chair the first meeting of the Presidential Transition Coordinating Council in the Roosevelt Room. There's no coverage of that, but I'll give you a little rundown on what's going on there. They'll run through the basic agenda of the meeting, run through the executive order, what the Presidential Transition Act of 2000 -- how's that's changed the transition process a little bit; some of the materials required under legislation and the executive order, that was issued. And it's essentially the first organizing meeting of this council to prepare for a smooth transition. We'll be trying to determine which agencies have which responsibilities, identify areas for improvement to assess the work that we've already done and some of the work that's going on; run through reports from the various agencies and what the next steps are.

As we've said before, given the unusual situation we're in, we're doing everything we can to ensure that the transition is a smooth one. We're proceeding on parallel tracks now as much as possible in terms of intelligence briefings, in terms of giving both teams an opportunity here where we are and what we're doing.

John Podesta has been in touch with both the parties to arrange meetings. Those haven't been set yet, but we expect they'll happen in the near future and give them all a chance to hear what we are and what we're planning going.

At the meeting today, John will chair it, as I said. Maria Echaveste, who is his principal deputy on this matter, will probably be the one sharing future meetings, responsible for that work. Beth Nolan, our counsel, will be there, along with some other lawyers; and the head of administration, Mark Lindsay, Goody Marshall, who runs the Cabinet for us; Bob Nash, who is in charge of personnel; and Jack Lew, Director of OMB.

From the Cabinet, the people that were mentioned in the EO will all be there, or representatives from their agency, including Director Freeh, Director Lachance, Dave Barram and others.

That, I think, is it in terms of business, except for the President made a brief call to President Zedillo this morning

-- received a call from him. Zedillo requested the call. He thanked the President for his leadership and support, and the President saluted the work that President Zedillo has done. He leaves office with the admiration of the people Mexico.

The President told him that he should be proud of what he's accomplished there. As you know, the President did meet with President-elect Fox, and we are sending a delegation headed by Secretary Albright to Mexico City, along with Barry McCaffrey and Maria Echaveste.

So there's no -- if a call or something happens around the inauguration, we'll let you know about that.

Q Does the President plan to meet with the Vice President when he arrives this afternoon? Is that going to be one of the Vice President's meetings?

MR. SIEWERT: No. I believe there's nothing planned. The Vice President is coming in around 12:15 p.m., I believe, for a meeting across the street that he's having, and his working lunch at this -- I don't expect -- I don't know if they'll run into each other. But I think he's planning on actually meeting across the street with some members of his team, office.

Q Has the President talked to the Vice President?

MR. SIEWERT: He told all of us in the Cabinet Room the other day that they had talked on Thanksgiving. I'm not aware that they have talked since then. The President called the Vice President's family to wish him well on the holidays.

Q Has Governor Bush received the intelligence briefings yet, starting as of today?

MR. SIEWERT: No. We're still working out some of the details. I think Sandy Berger has been in touch with their team and I think Condi Rice, and they may talk again in the near future. We're still working through some of those details and expect that we'll have -- work that out in the next couple of days. They may begin as early as next week.

Q Jake, where is Justice in deciding whether or not the FBI can start background checks while this process goes on?

MR. SIEWERT: I think you should check with them, but I think generally they're in the same place the rest of the

administration is in that they may be able to provide some preliminary information about what work -- what the process entails, but they can't begin the full transition process until there's a clear victor. But you should check with them.

There's obviously -- I mean, we've just said more generally that a lot of the transition work involves personnel matters that can be completed, that can be undertaken by the team -- by either team right now. That involves selecting personnel, telling people where they're going to be so that they can begin to get a sense of how best to focus their efforts in preparing for the job. And a lot of the material that is the focus of these background checks needs to be compiled -- it takes a great deal of time. Anyone who has been through it knows that it's a pretty laborious process.

But until you've gathered all that information and filled out the forms, most of which are available on the web, the FBI can't begin its work anyway. In the Clinton administration in '92 -- we did a little research -- the first background check didn't even begin until the very end of November and there were really only a handful that even began in December. Most of them really began in January. The early work was mostly done by the candidates for the jobs, themselves, gathering their own information and putting together that, most of which could begin now by either the Bush or Gore likely appointees.

Q How often do you expect this transition group to meet?

MR. SIEWERT: I expect they'll meet regularly. Maybe once a week. I don't expect they'll need to meet on a daily basis, but I'll get back to you on that. But the work has been going on for some time and will continue to go on in the agencies and in the White House. Just today John sent around a memo to the White House staff asking them, as is customary, to submit letters of resignation. That gives the new President, whoever he is, maximum flexibility in determining how best to allocate -- make their staffing decisions. I'm working on mine right now. No, I haven't started, but --

Q Is that group going to eventually be brought to include whoever gets the transition keys, or is that strictly an internal White House group, the Podesta group?

MR. SIEWERT: No, that's an administration group that would be in charge of coordinating with the team that comes in.

But that group itself is, yes, an internal administration team.

Q So do you see these meetings that you've been talking -- that John has been talking to Andy Card about and also the Gore people about just being between Podesta and somebody from the transition teams, or would they meet with some of these other people on the Transition Coordinating Council?

MR. SIEWERT: I think John would be the primary contact at this point. There's a limited amount of work that they can cover at the moment in terms of the other agencies. I think John may well have Maria there; they may decide to bring some other people. We haven't worked out those details. But the purpose -- I think I've said it before, but it's worth repeating that much of the work that is involved in the transition, both on our side and the side of the two campaigns, can go on right now, and is going on. We're proceeding on a parallel track.

We're gathering written information, information about staffing, about scheduling, about hot issues in the Cabinet and the White House. That's going on now, we're doing it. And there's no reason why that information eventually can't be provided in a reasonable time frame to the victor when one emerges. But that work is on track. As I said, I was involved in the '92 transition -- we didn't get a lot of that material until really the end of December, and a lot of the most important information actually came in later in the process.

A lot of the work that's being done on the part of the teams that are aspiring to the presidency can do on right now, in terms of selecting personnel, giving people assignments, collating the personal information that will form the basis for background checks can go on right now. There are limits. There is the well-known issue of the office and the presidential funds that's governed by a statute, and other agencies are sort of following the guidelines that are set by that law. But there's a lot of work that is going on now, both internally in the administration and within the two campaigns. And that work is proceeding apace.

Q If this does drag, you know, for another couple of weeks, those lists of decisions, of hot issues, is that information barred from being transferred to both sides under any statute?

MR. SIEWERT: I'll check. I think typically there is some sort of memorandum signed between the administration and the

new team that governs the sharing of that statute. But I'll check on that specifically, whether there's any sort of legal barrier to sharing that information at the moment.

Q Jake, the letters of resignation, is that something that a lot of people write, or a handful of very senior people?

MR. SIEWERT: No, it basically goes out to many Clinton administration appointees and it's consistent with the practices of previous administrations.

Q Are these all the, basically, Senate confirmation folks?

MR. SIEWERT: Let's see. I think it is -- it goes out to virtually almost all Clinton administration appointees, so all the Schedule Cs and confirmed positions. There are certain categories of appointees that have been excluded: inspectors general, heads of independent agencies and the like.

Q What's the language of it? Does it set a date for the resignations to be active?

MR. SIEWERT: Yes, January 20th.

Q Jake, could you explain to us the process of how Governor Bush would be briefed -- for example, a national security -- and would he be welcomed at the White House for these briefings?

MR. SIEWERT: I think we usually -- that is something that is a subject of ongoing discussion. This has been done in administrations past and it's typically been done at -- they're designed in part with the desires and wishes of the President-elect, or in this case, both the Vice President and the Governor will be receiving those briefings. The hows and wheres of that are still being worked out, but I can't see any reason why he would want to come to the White House to do those.

Q Jake, in normal times, the outgoing President invites the incoming President -- usually in December -- these are not known times, you have the electors that have been chosen by the 12th they would vote in their respective votes on the 18th, and you've got Christmas holidays. So would you expect that the President's invitation to Bush or Gore to come to the White House would be in January, early January?

MR. SIEWERT: It's impossible to say at this point, given that we have no sense right now, nor do you, of when this may all draw to a close. So I expect as is customary, that meeting will take place. But I don't -- we don't certainly know of any plans of kicking it off soon or sending off the invitations.

Q -- on the phone with any Democrats in the past day, and is he concerned about some public opinion polls showing that some Americans, the majority, may want this to be wrapped up sooner rather than later?

MR. SIEWERT: I haven't heard him express that concern. I think he said to you the other day that there are some fundamental legal questions that have to be addressed. Those are being litigated, and we don't see any use in commenting on them because they're before the courts, before the U.S. Supreme Court, and that's being argued by both parties. They're both making very forceful cases to the public and to the courts, and the President is trying to stay out of that particular fray.

On talking to Democrats, I mean, he talks to Democrats all the time. I, myself, am a Democrat, I confess, and I don't know whether he's particularly discussing this in any great detail with anyone in particular. I know he's talked to Daley from time to time, not nearly as much as he did during the campaign. But, yes, he's interested and he's going to talk to his friends about it from time to time, but I don't expect that we'll detail those conversations from here.

Q Does it seem inappropriate for him to help with the Gore strategy?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't think we really have been involved in the strategizing of this in any way like the way that we played a role in the campaign, for instance, and for the most part, the President's public comments have reflected that. I don't think it's inappropriate entirely for us to share thoughts with the Vice President's staff from time to time. We do that all the time. We work with them, we've worked with them for eight years now.

Q But has he made any calls to Democrats telling them not to abandon Gore at this point?

MR. SIEWERT: Look, this is -- no, not that I'm aware of. But this is a topic that comes up in his conversations, just

as it does in kitchen tables and dinner tables around the country. And if he's talking to a senator, I mean, there's no reason why this wouldn't come up -- or a congressman, for that matter. And as you know, he made a round of congratulatory calls after the election to people who won their elections, people who were involved in those elections. And did this come up? Sure.

Q Jake, about this Nebraska visit, what does the President say to Nebraskans who are genuinely offended that it has taken him this long to come to their state?

MR. SIEWERT: There's absolutely no reason to be offended. I mean, very few Presidents -- I don't even know -- Mark, you may know this, but I don't know that any other President has ever been to all 50 states --

Q Bush.

MR. SIEWERT: Bush has as well? Okay, but inevitably, one state will be the last of those states. But that doesn't -- there's nothing much to be read into that other than sheer happenstance. The President is looking forward to going, will spend some time there, and we expect to have a good visit. But this is something he's going to enjoy, and we'll all be there on next Friday -- is it next Friday?

Q Do you know the subject of his speech?

MR. SIEWERT: We're still working on that, but I expect it will be a serious speech to the students there on a topic of national importance. But there's still an ongoing debate about how best to use that time and that opportunity.

Q Can you be any more specific about what Podesta believes the meeting with Card will be about? You previously indicated that it will be a very general meeting. Is that still the outlook?

MR. SIEWERT: Yes, I think we'll let him know what we're doing, what we're doing to prepare, solicit any thoughts he may have, any thoughts that Roy Neel may have, the Gore representative, about how to make the process work better, given that it's so late in the year and we still don't have a clear victor. So I think that the President has instructed his staff to do everything they can to make this transition a smooth one, given how late it is. And we'll give them an update on what kinds of materials we're preparing, what kinds of efforts we've

undertaken at the White House to clear the decks for the new President. And I think what we'll do is just give them an update and solicit their thoughts on how this could better proceed.

But we're proceeding very much along parallel tracks. We offered to have that meeting with Andy Card together with the Gore people or separately, so that they literally had a choice to get the same information that was given to both teams.

Q Is there a date yet for that?

MR. SIEWERT: No.

Q Have they decided to do it separately?

MR. SIEWERT: We haven't heard back I don't think, definitively, on how they want to do that.

Q So what is off limits then at that kind of discussion, given that there hasn't been a decision? Is there something that would have been done in this meeting that won't be done since there's, in your view, not a clear result?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't think anything -- we're not setting parameters on discussion. Obviously, any question can be asked and will be answered. But I think there are -- we've already said that there are limits on what we can do under the law in terms of turning over the taxpayer money that's allocated for this because Congress has spoken on that issue and given us pretty clear guidelines.

Q Jake, if it is determined that Governor Bush is the winner of the election, will his transition team that he's setting up here in Washington, will they be reimbursed for any money that they're expending?

MR. SIEWERT: That's a hypothetical question at this point. I mean, obviously, eventually, one team will emerge as the victor and we'll have to confront that issue. But that has not come up yet.

I might point out it's not unprecedented to raise private funds, and they're not necessarily reimbursed. The Clinton team raised a lot of private money, primarily to hold an economic conference in 1992, which was held in Little Rock which helped chart a new path for the country, a new economic path, that proved largely successful, helping eliminate deficits. And

that got a lot of attention at the time, was helpful in focusing, as the President wanted to do at the time, focus on the big economic questions, questions that hadn't been addressed in a while, and help set a new course. But we raised private money for that, raised several million dollars for it. And that money was not reimbursed. So that's something, obviously, the new administration will have to deal with after all this is done.

Q If the presidential contest is still up in the air when Congress returns next week, what pieces of legislation do you think will it be possible for them to reach final agreement on?

MR. SIEWERT: That's something we've been discussing internally. Obviously, we want to get the appropriations bills done. We think that's very important. And as I said yesterday, the education budget that we had agreed to with Congress got held up over some side issues. But the basic thrust of that bill was bipartisan in nature and provided a significant increase on the order of \$7 billion or \$8 billion in new investments in education. Just not addressing that issue, in essence, means a cut of \$8 billion for education this year. That's a cut that will affect elementary schools, high schools, colleges, student loans. So we think that issue definitely should be addressed when Congress returns and shouldn't be kicked down the road for a while.

We have other issues that fund agencies, fund the White House, fund the Treasury, fund a host of other agencies. There is no reason why those can't be addressed when Congress returns. So the appropriations bills seem as though they should be able to get done when Congress returns in December.

It's a little tougher, obviously, to work through the tax bill and the bill that would help health care providers. But we think that there is some bipartisan support for some pieces of those legislation and we're certainly willing to work with Congress to make them happen.

Q You don't think that those bills in their entirety have as good a chance as they did before --

MR. SIEWERT: Well, the tax bill obviously -- the President indicated -- can't even remember if we vetoed it or not -- but, in any case, that bill was unacceptable to the President, so obviously we'll need to go back to the drawing board and try to find a bipartisan solution there.

Q Any other one -- the give-back bill?

MR. SIEWERT: Again, we had some objections to that bill. We need to work through those in order to make that bill a reality. But we said at the time that our objections to both bills were relatively minor, could be addressed in short order; it's a question of hours or a day or two, not weeks. And there is no reason why if we sat down together, we couldn't work those through in pretty short order so that we can give health care providers the benefits they need and give some tax relief to working families.

Q Does the President see the uncertainty of the election at all as a crisis, and has he given any thought at all about addressing the country?

MR. SIEWERT: I think the President said a number of times that he thinks things are -- that the American people are taking this in stride, that we ought to give the process a chance to play out, and that the American people seem to be taking it in stride. I don't see a sense of great alarm around the country about this. There's obviously a great deal of uncertainty, but people are dealing with it, and they recognize that this is before the courts and is being addressed by the Supreme Court this week and by a state court over the weekend.

So the President thinks that people ought to relax, as he said, take a deep breath, and let the process play itself out. Both sides are making a compelling case for why they think that they've properly won this election, and we ought to let the courts decide issues that are proper for the courts to decide.

Big room, no questions. We'll see you tomorrow.

END

11:40 A.M. EST

#18-11/29

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

November 30, 2000

PRESS BRIEFING BY
JAKE SIEWERT

The James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

11:30 A.M. EST

MR. SIEWERT: Good morning. I'm sorry I'm late.

Q No fight song?

MR. SIEWERT: No fight song today. But I've gotten a lot of good response from people in Nebraska. They're very happy. And we learned today that someone that we know here grandfather worked at the restaurant that invented the Reuben. So apparently, there's some truth to that. So we'll continue to apprise you with updates on Nebraska.

I have nothing to announce other than that President is shortly going to conduct an event with Jim and Sarah Brady, the man for whom this room is named, to celebrate the progress we've made fighting crime by cracking down on illegal gun sales, and strengthening our ability to enforce illegal gun sales. And that will happen shortly, so we'll try to make this happen shortly.

And we're releasing a new report and forwarding some new recommendations, directing some new action to help crack down on illegal gun sales, in conjunction with that event.

Q Jake, yesterday when the President met briefly with the Vice President, did President Clinton give some advice, like stay the course, or get out, or what did they talk about?

MR. SIEWERT: They met privately together -- I had a very brief discussion with the President about it, but I think we will keep the meeting private. It was a chance for them to catch up and discuss what's been going on in the world. But I'm not going to characterize it beyond that.

Q Are they going to meet again today?

MR. SIEWERT: The Vice President will be back at the

White House today, and I expect he'll probably spend some time in the West Wing office. So they may again run into each other, but we don't have anything planned.

I understand there's a great deal of interest in their comings and goings, but now that the President and Vice President are both in Washington, both working on a daily basis, I'm not sure I'm going to be able to provide a running commentary on their every movement, short of a surveillance camera or something that we could play, if CNN would be willing to provide the resources.

But if they do run into each other, I'll let you know, but we don't have anything planned.

Q How long did they meet?

MR. SIEWERT: They met for about 15 to 20 minutes.

Q Jake, there was a meeting on the weekend in Singapore -- the ASEAN plus three that is South Korea, Japan, China and the ASEAN countries. And they decided on a series of rather wide-ranging measures they're discussing. Their experts' group is talking about creating a free trade zone in the area. They've revived the notion of the Asian Monetary Fund, which was very strongly discouraged by Treasury when it was raised by the Japanese about a year ago. But they have taken strides towards more regional cooperation and are taking measures to avoid a new Asia financial crisis.

I was wondering, how does the White House see this development -- cooperation in the region, and would they be supportive of, say, an Asian monetary fund if, in fact, it does lead to that --

MR. SIEWERT: We obviously have worked with the Asian economies to foster greater trade liberalization and economic reform in the area. We think that's the surest recipe to ensure growth in that area, and in the past I know Treasury has thought that the primary means for dealing with crises when they arise is through the International Monetary Fund, and that that's the best way to address those crises in a multilateral setting. I'll check with Treasury and let you know if their views have changed.

But we have tried, through APEC and through other consultations with our allies in the region, to encourage trade liberalization there. That was the focus in large part of our discussions this year in Brunei and, in fact, we did reach agreement with them to push through the WTO in a multilateral way. Further trade liberalization, we think that's the surest path to a more stable Asian and U.S. economy, ultimately.

MORE

Q But is the cooperation that has been achieved now, especially where the other ASEAN countries no longer seem to view China with as much hostility as they did earlier, and there is a greater cooperation also between China and Japan. Is that not beneficial to U.S. goals?

MR. SIEWERT: Anything, any effort to liberalize trade in a multilateral setting is welcome, and that's something we've encouraged both through APEC and through the WTO.

Q Jake, can you discuss specifically what the United States and Russia will propose at the U.N. next week, as far as sanctions against Afghanistan, the Taliban government, in hopes of perhaps closing down bin Laden terrorist camps or getting their cooperation in finding bin Laden himself?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, we already have some, as you know, measures in place, that call for the Taliban to hand over Osama bin Laden so he can be brought to justice. We continue to work with the Russians and with the other members of the Security Council on ways to step up the pressure on the Taliban, not just to turn over bin Laden, but to shut down the terrorist camps, as you said, and also to improve its treatment of its own people, its human rights record, and to bring Osama bin Laden to justice. So we're discussing some ways to step up the pressure on the Taliban. We've met with them from time to time to express our concerns, and we'll continue to work with the U.N. and with our partners there to find new ways to increase the incentives for them to do that.

Q Is part of the resolution an arms embargo itself?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, I'm not going to discuss anything before it's finalized, but we have some sanctions in place now, and we're looking for new ways, working with the U.N., to encourage the Taliban to bring Osama bin Laden to justice.

Q Could you describe China's level of cooperation and/or interest in assisting the U.S. and Russia in this pursuit?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, I think that work is ongoing. We don't have a new resolution put on the table yet, but when we do, we'll let you know. And we're always exploring ways to encourage the Taliban both to improve its own human rights record and to help bring Osama bin Laden to justice.

Q Jake, there is a whole slew of rules and regs waiting for the President's possible action. Would you

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anticipate he would be invoking any of those rules or regs when the next -- say, before he departs for Ireland?

MR. SIEWERT: I wouldn't rule that out. I mean, there are a number -- throughout the administration, obviously, we've explored ways in which, through executive action we can accomplish the interests of this administration and better the lives of the American people. As you know, since the election we've moved forward on a number of fronts. But before the election, frankly, there's a lot of executive action we've taken.

Our preference always is to work with Congress to solve some of these problems, but there are times when executive action is called for and sometimes is the only recourse. But, in any case, there's some work going on on medical privacy that some of you reported about. We have an interim rule on that. I wouldn't necessarily expect anything in terms of the timing of that one. But there are a number of issues that we're looking at, and we'll probably be taking action over the next days and weeks.

Q Jake, on another subject, President Clinton said that he feels that every vote should be counted. And tomorrow the U.S. Supreme Court is going to be the focus of -- well, it's going to be the place where Reverend Jesse Jackson is going to have a prayer vigil/demonstration, because a lot of the African American votes were allegedly discounted in Florida. What's the President's thoughts about this rally and the fact that the African American vote was supposedly discounted there?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, there are a lot of people who have strong feelings, obviously, about what happened in Florida and how the votes are being counted there or not counted. The President just stated it as a very simple principle. He also said that that was a matter that is before the court and that it was best resolved by the court, and that while he was free to state that principle I don't think we're going to get involved in any way, shape, or form in a case that's pending before the United States Supreme Court where two presidential campaigns are arguing and stating their case very forcefully.

Q A follow-up to that, though, Kweisi Mfume just made a statement yesterday and today saying the fact that the Justice Department hasn't done what the NAACP feels it should have in reference to this issue, that the black vote was not counted there. And that does not jive with what the President is saying.

MR. SIEWERT: Well, I think the President laid out a

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principle that he thinks is important. At the same time, the specific application of that principle, the particular legal interpretation of that is a matter that's before the highest court in this land. There are able lawyers on both sides of this issue for both campaigns arguing that case. As to -- I had not seen Mfume's comment about the Department of Justice's rule, but I'll take a look at that and let you know.

Q One thing I don't think he has even spoken in a general sense about is the question of whether a state legislature -- whether it's appropriate, whether it's legal, or whether it's constitutional for that legislature to select its own electors.

MR. SIEWERT: I haven't heard him express an opinion on that either. Again that's a matter that bears directly on the Florida vote, and he's been pretty careful to say that that is a matter that's before a number of different judicial bodies and he didn't want to comment on it. I'll check and see if he had anything to add on that, but I think anything that could bear on the outcome of this is something that we've been pretty judicious about avoiding commentary on, because it might be misinterpreted. And there are plenty of people out there who are making the case on both sides that are in a better position to do so than we are.

Q He says every vote should count. He's not just stating a principle, he's echoing the Gore camp's sentiments. The Bush camp is saying they should be counted within a deadline, and he's saying the same thing as Gore.

MR. SIEWERT: Well, there are very specific legal arguments about what that means and how Florida law should be interpreted, how the Constitution should be interpreted. And I think those are matters that are before the courts. They're being litigated by lawyers, and we're going to refrain from trying to figure out exactly how that principle applies to the very specific situation -- there are plenty of other more able people to sort through than us.

Q So he's not taking sides by saying every vote should count?

MR. SIEWERT: I've said a number of times here that I don't think it's any secret who the President wanted to win this presidential election. At the same time, we've been very careful to avoid providing a kind of running commentary and all the legal twists and turns this has taken, for very obvious reasons.

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Q The Gore campaign, on a daily basis, through conference calls and other outreach, have been trying to keep Democratic governors, Democratic House members, Democratic Senate members "on the reservation," to use their words. Is the President or any of his senior staff augmenting or in any way assisting in those efforts with phone calls or other communications?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't believe that we're part of that strategy, per se. I think what I said yesterday is true, that Democrats, from time to time, contact the White House. We have a lot of friends in the Democratic Party and the Democratic Congress, and so it's inevitable that some of these -- that this entire topic would arise. But I don't believe we've been enlisted by the Gore team to assist them in that effort. I'm not saying that they're haven't been discussions about what's going on, but I don't think we're part of any greater lobbying effort.

Q When you say you don't believe, are you saying you don't know?

MR. SIEWERT: I'm just saying that it's very hard to characterize every conversation that ever happened at the White House with everyone who is on the Hill or out in the Democratic Party. At the same time, we're not part of any -- I don't believe we've been enlisted in any sort of more concrete way to help the Gore campaign. They're perfectly capable of running that operation on their own. But I think it's just impossible to rule out that at some point, someone might have said something that could be interpreted that way.

Q But, Jake, isn't something missing -- many Americans are saying this whole thing is just a mess. Republicans are saying that the election process is not perfect, but it's fair. The Clinton administration is saying that every vote should count. But where is the person coming in the middle saying, let's do something about this, let's change this, let's fix this? Why not the Clinton administration?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, in the middle of what is essentially a fight about an election, about a political process, it's important that both campaigns make their case and make their case before courts that are interpreting these decisions. I think our view is that the President has a role to play, as the head of the Executive Branch and as someone who needs to tend to the nation's business, and keep his eye on the ball, and that's what we're doing.

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Q But, Jake, Mrs. Clinton came up the day after the election, saying the electoral college should be abolished, and now she --

MR. SIEWERT: Well, as a Senator-elect, that's her prerogative. That's absolutely -- that's something -- she has a new role and she's speaking out in a way about legislation that she may be considering when she takes a role in the Senate. That's perfectly appropriate.

Q Does the President feel the Republicans are engaging in a spin campaign to lay claim to the presidency even without it being resolved through any other legal --

MR. SIEWERT: That's hard to imagine. I do think that there has been --

Q -- leading the witness. (Laughter.)

MR. SIEWERT: That's a tough question. Do you want to rephrase that question? I think -- look, I think there are a lot of able communicators on both sides of this issue that are making their best case. I do think it will be best if there was a little bit less of the kind of heavy-handed tactics that were detailed in the Washington Post today, in terms of trying to intimidate lawmakers. But I don't think -- generally, I haven't heard him express an opinion on that other than to say that both sides are actually out there, trying to make the best case they can.

Q If I can follow up on that. Is he now encouraging Gore to take steps in the same direction to do what he could to also --

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know. The Vice President has been out on TV, explaining his case, and he's been making a very forceful case. But there are, frankly, people on both sides of this issue that are in a better position to state their case than we are.

Q Jake, did anything of value come out of Podesta's transition group yesterday?

MR. SIEWERT: Absolutely.

Q What was that?

MR. SIEWERT: They agreed to meet again, for one.

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(Laughter.) No, there was some discussion. Basically, it gave us a better sense of where people were and where they were in the status of preparation, and I think we got some more specific understanding of what the task was ahead of us. But I think the work is on track and it's proceeding. I submitted my own letter of resignation today, effective January 20th, so you'll have to deal with me until then.

But every day we're obviously taking concrete measures to prepare for the next President-elect, and we'll continue to do that. And that meeting was helpful in crystallizing where we were and what the gaps were and what we need to fill in.

Q Jake, a NAFTA panel apparently has ruled in favor of Mexico on the trucking dispute between the U.S. and Mexico. Do you know whether the administration might try to overturn -- get that reversed?

MR. SIEWERT: I'll check. I just saw that report before I came out here and I don't have anything on that yet.

Q Jake, what's your reaction to a report today saying that Medicare, as a result of higher health care spending, may run out of money sooner than you've projected?

MR. SIEWERT: We believe that our projections on solvency are solid; they're actually very conservative. So while we saw that report -- and, obviously, there's been some renewed inflation in the Medicare sector, what the report indicates, regardless of projections in out-year growth, is that the Medicare trustee projections that we've made about solvency continues to be very strong.

As you know, when we came into office, the trust fund was scheduled to bankrupt in '99; now, it's in much better shape than it's been in over the last quarter century or so. So I mean, I think we can argue about some of the specific projections in there, but that's the job of the Medicare trustees, and they'll be updating their report next year.

Q You're trying to get more money for Medicare providers as part of the final legislative session. Does that undermine that argument for more spending on Medicare?

MR. SIEWERT: No. In fact, I think one of the arguments we've made for more spending is that you have a more stable market in some ways, and that as survivors get squeezed, more and more are going to try to drop out of the Medicare

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program or find ways around it. What we want is a stable market so that seniors can get the quality health care they need. And that's what the whole point of increased payments are.

Q Prime Minister Barak, in a speech today, suggested an interim peace deal that would leave Jerusalem aside and the question of refugees aside, but would allow the Palestinians to declare a state and take some other measures that they have been trying to negotiate over. What is the overall assessment of that idea from the administration?

MR. SIEWERT: Well, we'll support any agreement that the two parties can agree to, and we're prepared to help them resolve their differences and help them reach any agreement. I think throughout the process, we've tried to play the role of the facilitator, and that was what we tried to do at Camp David. But one of the ways in which we've done that is not to weigh in publicly on what we think of each individual proposal that each side has floated. But we will support anything the two parties can agree upon.

Q Is it true that in ongoing conversations since Sharm el-Sheikh, that's one of the questions the administration has put to both sides -- could we possibly work something out that would set aside Jerusalem? Any progress on that front?

MR. SIEWERT: For good reasons, we've tried to -- studiously avoided making comments on the individual proposals that have leaked out and been reported on, just because we don't think there's much utility in that at this point. What's important is that the two sides work through their differences and come up with an agreement themselves, and we're prepared to do anything we can to help.

Q Jake, you referred to heavy tactics in Florida. Were you including in that the indoor demonstration that was allegedly organized by the Republicans?

MR. SIEWERT: I'm not singling any particular demonstration out. Certainly, people have a right to make their views known. There's just been a lot of -- there have been some lawmakers complaining of undue pressure recently, and there are some detailed stories about that in The Washington Post today that seemed a bit over the top. But I'm not trying to single any one particular person or group out.

Q And you're reflecting the President's sentiment there when you say --

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MR. SIEWERT: Well, I think the President said that we ought to relax, take a deep breath, let the court solve this, and these are matters that are before the courts and should be resolved by the courts.

Q In yesterday's transition meeting was anything decided about the FBI getting a jump-start on background checks?

MR. SIEWERT: The FBI is -- we've talked to the Department of Justice, and that's a topic that came up, about how they could speed up that process, given the unusual situation, and it's something we're continuing to work on. There may be some things we can do that are pretty straightforward that could help speed up the process for either side, but we're still looking at that issue. We haven't reached any final conclusions.

Q It's unresolved?

MR. SIEWERT: It's unresolved, but there may be some simple things. As I've said before, a lot of this work can be done by the campaigns on their own. People can begin compiling on both sides, if they think they're slated for a job, compiling the information that will be necessary for such background checks. The forms are available on the web. So you can begin to compile that information. And as I reminded you yesterday, the background checks in our administration in '92, when we were taking over, actually really commenced in a serious fashion in January. Most of the work up until January, with one or two exceptions, was just done by the parties that were slated for jobs, gathering information themselves. The actual hard field investigations commenced in earnest in January, although there were some that began in December.

Q In retrospect, wasn't it concluded that it would have been better for many involved to have begun that process earlier?

MR. SIEWERT: Oh, absolutely. We encourage people to get going early. But that's something, again, that either campaign can decide now, by giving people a sense of what their jobs will be, and encouraging them to gather that information. There are a lot of people around here who either didn't know that they were going to have a job, or didn't gather the information in time to get those background checks done. And we lived to regret it.

Q Jake, do you expect the Clintons to spend

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Christmas and New Year's here or at Camp David, as opposed to someplace else like Chappaqua or Renaissance or --

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know. I know they have a lot of holiday activities planned at the White House, and the President has said that he would like to spend a lot of time at the White House, since it's his last couple months here. But I don't know specifically on Christmas Day or New Year's whether he'll be -- whether they've made a final decision. But I'll let you know.

Q Are they doing Renaissance Weekend this year?

MR. SIEWERT: I don't know, but I'll check.

All right. Thank you.

END

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