

January 22, 2009
First White House Press Briefing

White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs

[50 minutes]

Press Sec.: Don't clap yet.

Press corps: [Laughter.]

Press Sec.: Give me one second to get a little organized here.

Press Corps: [Off-cam. Unintelligible.]

Press Sec.: [Laughs.]

Press Corps: You don't wear dresses, do you?

Press Sec.: Uh... How are you all? Nice to be here. I'm...I'm great. Uh, before I take a few of your questions, let me start out by letting you know something that we've added each day to the President's daily schedule. It's something that we're calling an Economic Daily Briefing that he'll receive most likely in the Oval Office each and every day. It will be treated and prepared with the same sort of renowned professionalism that the Daily Intelligence Briefing is done with. It is...will be put together each night. The President will receive a memo. It will be updated in the morning. The briefing will be led by NEC Director Larry Somers.

This morning's Daily Briefing was attended by the President, the Vice President, the WH Chief of Staff, OMB Director Peter Orszag, obviously Larry Summers, Domestic Policy Director Melanie Barns, and Jerrod Bernstein, the Vice President's Chief Economic Advisor. They walked through the day's economic news – the myriad of statistics that came out today on jobless claims in housing.

The President asked that this be added each day to his schedule, as the country is in the midst of an economic crisis and an economic emergency. And he felt it was important that each day, he received the most up-to-date information as it relates to the economy, as we put together an economic reinvestment and recovery plan, as well as future financial stability packages to ensure that our economy gets moving again.

And with that, let me entertain a few questions. Jennifer?

J. Loven: [Jennifer Loven, Associated Press] Thanks, Robert. I just want to try again to better understand how you guys are saying that you're not going to use any interrogation techniques that fall outside the Army Field Manual [or approving?] of these techniques. And yet there's a task force that's going to look at whether those techniques provide an appropriate means of acquiring [the] intelligence necessary. Just...I'm still not quite clear on...

Press Sec.: [Voice overlap.] Right. Well, you know, some of the technical questions, obviously we had Greg help you guys understand a little bit of that, and we'll be happy to do that. Let me step back from the process just a little bit and describe, in some detail, what the President asked his team to do. The President believes that there is no more important job that he has than to keep the American people safe, that everybody that works in this building and in this administration knows of his strong belief and understands its importance.

The President believe that what he did today will enhance the security of the American people, that it lives up to our values as Americans, and that it will protect the men and women that we have in uniform. This was done through long consultations, as Greg talked about with folks in and out of government.

I don't want to get...I don't want to prejudge the executive orders, the Commission that's going to happen. I know that as it relates to going forward, that everybody's under the Army Field Manual. The Commission has been tasked with studying any number of different scenarios relating to detainees and interrogation. And I think what's best is to let that happen, and see what happens when they come back.

Obviously, what started today was a process that the President committed to during the campaign and reiterated throughout the transition to close the detention facility in Guantanamo Bay. That process started today with his signature. And that process will go on until the issues that were outlined are appropriately determined.

J. Loven: It sounds like, though, what you all are saying is that the Army Field Manual is going to apply unless you decide maybe it shouldn't.

Press Sec.: Well, again, I don't want to prejudge the Commission that's going to look at any number of different issues. I think the President has been very clear on what he believes protects the American people and protects the values that we have as Americans. Chip?

Chip Reid: [CBS News] Some Republicans on Capitol Hill are already complaining about the Guantanamo decision, saying what's going to happen is you're

going to have a lot of people transferred to countries overseas, they're going to be released for one reason or another, and they're going to go right back to waging war against American troops. How can the President make certain that doesn't happen?

Press Sec.: Well, you know, before he signed the Executive Orders and the memoranda, he met with – and I think the list has been distributed – generals and flag officers that have been involved in keeping our country safe for quite some time. I'm told that there was a special interaction in the room, and a real palpable pride on behalf of these generals and flag officers, that the decision that the President was making today with his signature made America safer, made America stronger, lived up to our values, and protected the men and women that those generals and flag officers have sent out to protect our freedom each and every day.

He believes that with this, we've made our security stronger; we've done it in consultation with, as I said, members of current government, people that have been outside of government, people that have been involved in these decisions. There's certainly going to be people that are going to come at this from one angle. I think there are also a number of people that will come at it from the angle that the steps that were taken today ensure and enhance the security of the American people. Chuck?

Chuck Todd: [MSNBC] You said yesterday it was out of an abundance of caution that you did the re-swearing in.

Press Sec.: Mm-hmm.

Chuck Todd: Out of that same abundance of caution, has he resigned the executive orders...

Press Sec.: No.

Chuck Todd: ...that he did yesterday?

Press Sec.: No. And let me step back and address this. And I should call on Mark as well on this, because he had emailed me a question about whether or not there had been discussion of doing this, and I emailed him in the afternoon and said there *had* not been a discussion. The Counsel's Office believed strongly throughout the day that the President had been sworn in appropriately and effectively. Discussion later in the afternoon regarding the misplacement of a word. And because of that, and out of an abundance of caution, Chief Justice Roberts came last night to readminister the oath.

I think in today's papers, there are at least two examples in history where words have been misplaced in the oath, and again, out of an abundance of caution, a similar abundance of caution, the oath was readministered.

Chuck Todd: So why not resign the executive orders out of that abundance of caution?

Press Sec.: Because the Counsel's Office continues to believe that the President was sworn in appropriately and effectively.

Chuck Todd: Well, then, why did you do it if you don't need...? I mean, that...that's what I'm just trying to... If you don't feel like you needed to do it...

Press Sec.: Right. Well, Chuck, you know lawyers. They... [*Laughs.*]

Press corps: [*Laughter.*]

Press Sec.: ...they...

Chuck Todd: [That's what?] I'm counting on Chip to [*unintelligible*].

Press corps: [*Laughter.*]

Press Sec.: Right. I...I was going to say, I don't want to raise a...no raising of hands as to who is... They did not believe that there *was* a problem. But out of an abundance of caution, to ensure that somebody didn't think there might ever be, that it was simply done again. The Constitution, as Greg said in his statement, prescribes an oath. A word was misplaced, and out of an abundance of caution, the Chief Justice, over the course of a 25-second period of time, and under the slow and careful instruction of the President, the oath was readministered.

Chuck Todd: And in terms of transparency, why didn't you show the world this?

Press Sec.: We did show the world this.

Chuck Todd: Well, there was no...you know, [there was a sort of] crackling audio recordings of it; there's some stills; no video. You put your radio address on video. I mean, why not...

Press Sec.: [*Voice overlap.*] Right.

Chuck Todd: ...put it on...

Press Sec.: Well, I mean...

Chuck Todd: ...__ video for everyone to see?

Press Sec.: Well, but let's be clear, that... You just mentioned there's audio. I've heard that audio. I was there. Far easier to get tickets for this one. We took a print pool in there. We released a photograph from the White House. And as I think the pool reported as soon as it happened, we reported it out.

Chuck Todd: But Robert?

Press Sec.: We think it was done in a way – hold on – we think it was done in a way that was up front and transparent. We think that it also did it in a way that demonstrated, again, this was done out of an abundance of caution, and only that. Yes, sir?

Press Corps: [*Male; speaker unidentified*] Did the original concern about the oath-taking originate with the White House Counsel, or with the President?

Press Sec.: My understanding is the White House Counsel.

Press Corps: [*Male; speaker unidentified*] Did he have to persuade the President that it was the right thing to do?

Press Sec.: No, because it was done, again, out of an abundance of caution. It was not done...

Press corps: [*Murmurs.*]

Press Sec.: Why is...that's...

Press corps: [*Laughter.*]

Chuck Todd?: Is there ____ [control] ____?

Press Sec.: [*Voice overlap.*] _____ laugh when I still...don't say something that's not altogether generally funny. No, this was something that was determined, again, at the Counsel's Office, and the President was fine with it. I think you guys read the pool report. He seemed to...he was in a pretty casual mood when he instructed the Chief Justice to do this more slowly and deliberately. Jay?

Jay [*Last name and employer unidentified*] Back to the executive orders today. As you know, there are a lot of intelligence officials in the outgoing administration, or the gone administration, that disagree with both the decisions [that] rely on the Army Field Manual, as well as the decision to close Guantanamo Bay. I'm wondering – obviously, members of the President's administration agree with him, and it looks like

members of this interagency task force, as far as I can tell, agree with these decisions – who did the President talk to? Who disagreed with him? Who made the argument, as the former President did and the former Vice President did, that actually, relying on just the Army Field Manual and closing Guantanamo Bay puts the American people at risk? And how can you be certain, considering that the interagency task force has not met yet, that these decisions are the right ones?

Press Sec.: Mm-hmm. Well, I think based on the consultation – I don't have the list; I can certainly look into something like that – the President felt satisfied that the charge that he gave to his national security team was done in a broad enough way to ensure that any decision he made – to reiterate what I said earlier – that he understands his most important aspect...the most important aspect of his job is to do everything humanly possible in his power to keep America safe. He believes that the consultation was done in a way that was...that it's structured, the executive orders and the memoranda, in a way that ensures that the American people are safe. _____?

Jay: _____ just follow up with that. I'm sorry. The current CIA Director disagrees about the Army Field Manual being sufficient. What does the President and his team know that the current CIA Director doesn't know?

Press Sec.: Well, I think the current CIA Director has an opinion. I think the generals and flag officers that were in the room with the President prior to his signing of the executive orders have an opinion. I think there have been varying opinions in any number of administrations. The President's opinion, based on all that he heard and all that he saw, was that these executive orders lived up to the very high standard that he holds to do everything in his power to protect the American people.

Jay: How can you say the Executive Order on Guantanamo Bay, you can say clearly made the America safer today when it doesn't seem like you really have a plan yet about where the detainees are going to go?

Press Sec.: Ed [?], one of the...I think one of the things that the Commission, and one of the thing that the executive orders does, is begin the process whereby the current administration can examine what exactly is going on, and who exactly is there. Those are in some ways records that have to be acquired, and that's the Commission will undertake is a study to determine that. Again, the process...

Press corps: [*Unintelligible.*]

Press Sec.: Hold on...yeah, hold on.

Jay: My question is that there's a study...

Press Sec.: Right.

Jay: Go ahead. Make your point. I'm sorry.

Press Sec.: Well, the process – again, this is not something that was done...is not done with one signature. That's why I was careful in saying that the process by which this will undertake over the course of up to one year will determine, as Greg laid out, who's involved in what status of detainee, which group that they're involved in, and ultimately study how best to deal with them in a way that protects our country, protects our values, and administers justice.

Jay: So these are terrorist suspects, and the American people are hearing, Washington's going to study it. They're going to find out for a few more months, like, what are we going to do with these detainees? So what...?

Press Sec.: [*Voice overlap.*] Well, this is Day 2, okay?

Jay: Okay. But you've been talking about this for months and months.

Press Sec.: We worked late last night. We didn't work *that* late.

Jay: No, but he was talking about it on the campaign for months...about Guantanamo Bay.

Press corps: [*Speaker unidentified*] This is Day 3.

Press corps: [*Laughter.*]

Press corps: [*Speaker unidentified*] It's Day 3. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday.

Press Sec.: Depends on when you [guess] he got sworn in, right?

Press corps: [*Speaker unidentified*] Depends on when he got sworn in.

Press corps: [*Laughter.*]

Press Sec.: I want the record to reflect that Chuck stole my line. I just...

Jay: But the bottom line is that you've been talking about it...the President talked about it on the campaign trail. People have been studied this for a long time. And you're now signing the executive order...

Press Sec.: [*Voice overlap.*] Well, again...

Jay: ...without a plan for where the detainees will be.

Press Sec.: No, I...no, we've...

Jay: What assurances can you give...?

Press Sec.: ...we've signed an Executive Order to establish a plan for what happens.

Jay: Well, what assurances can you give the American people these detainees just won't [wind] out from out on the streets?

Press Sec.: All of what you just enumerated will be undertaken and studied as part of a commission to look into these very complex, very detailed questions. The President believes that he enhanced the security of the American people. He understands that's his most important job; that justice has to be rendered, and that our values have to be upheld. All of those are going to be determined as it relates to going forward in Guantanamo. Karen?

Jay: Well, ___ executive order yesterday on lobbying. The President say [*sic*] he was going to be closing the revolving door, and that basically, anybody who had been a lobbyist that comes into his administration, they can't work on the issues they lobbied on.

Press Sec.: Mm-hmm.

Jay: You've got William Lynn, who's the nominee to be the Deputy Defense Secretary...

Press Sec.: Right.

Jay: ...who was a lobbyist for Raytheon, a major defense contractor.

Press Sec.: Right.

Jay: How can the President say that he's preventing people from working in the areas where they lobbied when the number two at Defense was a Raytheon lobbyist?

Press Sec.: The...and I think you saw in today's papers, we had experts that studied the issue of transparency and ethics, laud the steps that the President took yesterday to end gifts, to end lobbying, to strengthen ethics and openness, that that exceeds what any administration has previously done in the history of this country. That's what the President pledged in his campaign, and that's exactly what he did yesterday in signing these executive orders.

Those very same experts that lauded the greatest ethical standard ever administered to an executive branch also believe, as the President does, that any standard is not perfect; that a waiver process that allows people to serve their country is necessary. In the case of a Mr. Lynn, he's somebody who obviously is superbly qualified. His experience going back to his Pentagon jobs during the Clinton administration make him uniquely qualified to do this. The President believes that, as these experts do, that a very limited number of waivers that don't...

Jay: *[Voice overlap.]* But he's not really closing the revolving door, though.

Press Sec.: No, I...any of the people that work here, and myself, are prohibited, as the Executive Order states, from walking...

Jay: *[Voice overlap.]* The Deputy Defense Secretary is a pretty big job. We're at war in two countries right now. So he's a lobbyist, and now he's going to be Deputy Defense Secretary.

Press Sec.: Right. And if he ever leaves this administration, he'll never, as the President said, be able to lobby this administration as it relates to the work that it does, for the length or entirety of that administration. Again, what the President did yesterday was institute the strongest ethical and transparency guidelines that any administration has lived under in the history of the country. Major?

Major: *[Possibly Major Garrett, FOX News]* Two questions, Robert – one on the executive orders and one on the economy. Just so the American people have an understanding: if, for example, American forces were able to capture Osama bin Laden or someone less well known but of operational significance, are they to understand the American people, that only the Field Manual and...the Field Manual only will be the interrogation method used to interrogate a target as valuable potentially as Osama bin Laden or someone of that operational significance?

Two: You said at the end of your remarks that the administration is contemplating future financial stability packages. Tim Geitner, on the Hill yesterday, led the Finance Committee to believe something may be in the works, a second TARP-type intervention into the financial system. Can this administration say one of its benchmarks for that [is that] there'll be no more Lehmann Brothers, no large bank or financial institution, will fail on his watch?

Press Sec.: Mm-hmm. Well, as relates to your first question, let me get some guidance from Greg and members of the NSC. Let me take your second question. And let me start by saying, the President is very pleased that the Finance Committee voted out in a strong bipartisan manner the

nomination of Tim Geitner to head the Department of Treasury. Both Secretary-designate Geitner and Larry Summers outlined a series of principles that will go into the formulation of a larger financial stability package that the President will make decisions on shortly.

Those principles include ensuring that executive compensation is limited, so that the American taxpayer can feel confident that any money that's used as a part of a financial stability package doesn't go to line the pockets of a CEO; that there's transparency in looking back at what we've done; and maybe more importantly, that any money that a financial institution receives, that that money's lent to the American people so that families can borrow money to send a kid to college or buy a car.

Those are the principles that the economic team has been working with. Those are principles that were forwarded to the Senate last week in preparation for the vote on the second \$350 billion. Larger decisions on how exactly to use that money going forward are part of an ongoing process that the economic team is formulating so that the President can make some decisions on...

Press corps: [*Possibly a follow-up by Major Garrett*] [*Voice overlap.*] [Let me follow up.] Are you not prepared today to say that it would be an administration benchmark not to allow any major financial institution in this country to...?

Press Sec.: [*Voice overlap.*] Well...let me...I'm prepared to say, and I will reiterate what the President said throughout the campaign and transition, that the President will do everything possible to prevent a financial catastrophe, to ensure the working of the financial system, to get credit and lending moving again, to create, or save or create, three to four million jobs to get the economy moving again. The President comes to work each and every day, and understands right now that he has to work, his team has to work, and Congress has to work, on passing an economic plan that gets the economy moving again.

Press corps: [*Possibly a follow-up by Major Garrett*] [*Unintelligible*] you said you need to get guidance from the NSC on my first question. Is it fair for me, then, to conclude that it is an open question, what you [*unintelligible*]?

Press Sec.: [*Voice overlap.*] No, it's fair for you...it's fair for you to conclude that I want to make sure I don't make a mistake. [Julianna]?

[Julianna]: [*Speaker unidentified*] You talked about the financial stability package; Geitner. Yesterday, when he was on the Hill, he said that would come in a few weeks. Looking at the economic data the President saw today, Microsoft's slashing 5,000 jobs, can it wait a few weeks?

Press Sec.: The financial stability plan? Well, I think the charge that the President's given his economic team, as well as what he said regarding Congress' activities in approving an economic recovery and reinvestment plan, is that we need to work as quickly as possible.

We have to do everything in our power, and Congress do, too, to get that package moving, to get that money into the economy, to begin to create those jobs, to put people back to work, to give the American people some confidence going forward in their leadership. The President hopes that's what everybody's here to do; he expects that's what everybody's here to do; and he'll work, as he said, with Democrats and Republicans to ensure that that happens each and every day.

[Julianna]: But Geitner yesterday that said that [*sic*] the President would lay out a comprehensive financial package in a few weeks, and...

Press Sec.: Well, I don't want to... The President will make a decision as soon as the financial team gives him those recommendations. He believes, obviously, that we have to act expeditiously and to get this economy moving again. I don't want to set artificial deadlines as it relates to that testimony. I think you can be assured, and the American people can be assured, that the President is working throughout the day, every day, to ensure that a rescue plan and a financial stability package are implemented quickly.

I think many of you heard the criticism that the President had during the campaign about the previous \$350 billion, and the principles that he and his team outlined for how that should change going forward. The American people understand that things are likely to get worse before they get better. But I think they can be reasonably assured that he's working hard every day to get the economy moving again as quickly as possible. [*Intelligible*]?

Press Corps: [*Male; speaker unidentified*] Following up on that, the President's team has said that this financial stability package will have three components: it will have a major housing component that probably...at least a hundred...

Press Sec.: Which I forgot to mention is in there.

Press corps: [*Same as above; unidentified*] ...\$100 billion. There will be a provision to start buying up these toxic assets. And there'll probably be some more capital injections into these banks. Can you do that with \$350 billion, or are you now looking at something considerably larger than that?

Press Sec.: Well, let me not get ahead of an economic team that's going to make recommendations to the President. I know that the President is, as I stated a minute ago, believes that we'll do what is necessary to ensure financial stability; that banks that get capital or lending that capital, as you mentioned, that we address the home foreclosure crisis that millions of Americans, whether they're in those homes or live near those homes, whether that impacts them every day, we're working on that. And I don't want to get in front of the recommendations that the economic team might make as it relates to that. Helen?

H. Thomas: [*Helen Thomas*] Is the President against torture?

Press Sec.: Yes.

H. Thomas: Is the goal of these executive orders against torture, which the President [*unintelligible*]?

Press Sec.: Yes. The President believes that torture is wrong. He said that throughout the campaign. And we've taken steps today to make sure that those beliefs are upheld, as it relates to detainees and interrogations. Karen?

H. Thomas: [*Unintelligible*] that we control?

Press Sec.: Well, as Greg said, the charge that the administration – I'm sorry, the charge that the President gave to his administration was to look at Guantanamo Bay, and that's what we've been working on today.

H. Thomas: And many outrages have occurred in others – in Iraq, in Afghanistan.

Press Sec.: Well, I think that the President...I think that's one of the reasons the President acted, was to uphold our values, while ensuring that the country is safe. That's what the...

H. Thomas: [*Unintelligible*] torture in Iraq and Afghanistan?

Press Sec.: Well, under him, that will certainly stop as it relates to Americans.

Press corps: [*Speaker unidentified.*] Robert, two questions. Just following up on that TARP issue, how seriously is the President considering this idea of a so-called bad bank that would buy up these toxic assets? And then secondly, on...the President has signaled an intention to engage early on the Middle East, but he hasn't said anything publicly about Iran, and during the transition period, said there was only one President at a time.

Press Sec.: We still believe that.

Press corps: [*Same as above; unidentified*] Well...yes. But can you give any indication of when he plans to start engaging Iran and following through on the campaign promise to engage?

Press Sec.: Well, let me take... As it relates to TARP – again, I don't want to get ahead of the economic team making determinations as to the best way forward to ensure financial stability, but we are working on that as we speak. Let me step back for a second and address part of your question on the Middle East.

The President, as you know, started his day in the Oval Office yesterday morning, and I believe made one call on the way to the prayer service, to four Middle Eastern leaders to reiterate his strong commitment to ensuring that his administration is actively engaged in seeking long-term peace in the Middle East. That's something he stated throughout the campaign, and said something he was anxious to begin, which is why that started to quickly in the administration.

The President believes that as it relates to Iran, as he stated, again, in the campaign, that we are going to have to engage our friends and their enemies in order to make our country safe and secure. I don't have anything specifically on what's going on with that now. I know the President will make some announcements shortly at the State Department.

Press corps: [*Same as above; unidentified.*] Are those announcements about the envoys?

Press Sec.: They are.

Press corps: [*Same as above; unidentified.*] Is there going to be...?

Press Sec.: I learned long ago – [*laughs*] – not to get in the way of the principal as he's about to make news. So I'm happy to take some questions after that, but I shouldn't get ahead of the President on what he's going to say at the State Department, except to say this, and I think this will be reflected in his remarks: He thought it was important that the announcement today be held *at* the State Department; that we honor the commitment that members of the State Department and the Foreign Service make to ensuring the safety of our country, and advancing our diplomatic goals throughout the world. I think that was important for him to do. I know that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton believes that's important as well. Peter?

Peter Baker: [*New York Times*] Robert, two quick ___ questions. Clarification on the swearing-in: Did you all ask the Chief Justice whether *he* thought there was a problem with the original one?

Press Sec.: No.

Peter Baker: ...and he didn't volunteer an assessment of ___?

Press Sec.: No, not that I'm aware of.

Peter Baker: Okay. Secondly, in the inaugurals...

Press Sec.: He brought a robe, so I assume he thought it was the real deal.

Peter Baker: No, but I mean, if he thought the first time was not valid or not. [*sic*]

Press Sec.: No. Again, it was just a discussion in the Counsel's Office.

Peter Baker: Second question: In the Inaugural Address, the President talked about this idea of responsibility. Who does he think needs to take responsibility who hasn't taken it so far, and what does he want Americans, regular Americans, to do to take responsibility that they don't do now?

Press Sec.: Well, I... Bear with me for a little bit longer answer. I mean, I think, specifically, I think two entities that he had in mind regarding responsibility were the actions of this government in acting responsibly, and particularly, in financial institutions in acting responsibly. And obviously, one of the things that he'll do, and...on short order is talk about some re-regulation of the financial sector to ensure that what's happened up until now doesn't happen to us again.

You know, to the American people, I think the President spoke often throughout the campaign about reinvigorating our democracy and understanding how powerful it is when all of them are involved. I think that's part of a renewed call to citizenship. Obviously there are things that we can do each and every day to, as he said, again, on the trail, to make sure our children are educated by taking responsibility to read to them, help them with their homework; energy independence – specific actions that we have to do.

I think what the President was demonstrating was that the American story has always been that when the American people come together across any sort of line to work together, that even in a country that faces challenges, problems, and hardships, that working together, we can get past those hardships and pass onto the next generation a country that's stronger than the one we inherited. Steve.

S. Thomma: [Steve Thomma, McClatchy News] Robert, the Executive Order this morning's very specific about the dates when it tells the federal government to ignore any legal advice on interrogation from September 11th of '01 right through January 20th. Do you suspect, or have any reason to believe, there were late orders from the previous administration on interrogation?

Press Sec.: I don't, no.

S. Thomma: There's nothing...nothing necessarily that they had to ignore.

Press Sec.: Not that I'm aware of. Yeah, [Kim].

S. Thomma: Can you tell us a little bit of how the First Family is settling in?

Press Sec.: Yeah, the... I know that at the end of the first night, he had to ask somebody where he was supposed to go next. It's a pretty big house. You know, I've known the President a long time, and he looked very comfortable in his surroundings yesterday. I know the family's moved now three times in only a few weeks. But if you know them and you know their family, they've had a routine for a long time. This is a monumental testament to Michelle. The girls have always had a very strong routine that's kept them away from all of this and all of the political campaign.

They're very much the same four people that I met five years ago when I went to work for him. Obviously it's a little different. It's a... I do think he enjoys, to use a phrase, living above the company store; that he'll get to spend a little bit more time... I know yesterday, he, between two events, went upstairs to have dinner with them, and I think that obviously means a lot to him as a father.

Ken Herman: [Cox News Service] Robert, why did the administration believe...? Why did the administration believe it was important for the American people not to know the name of the two senior administration officials who briefed us this morning on the Guantanamo [unintelligible]?

Press Sec.: I'm sorry – say that again?

Ken Herman: Why do the American people not have a right to know the names of the senior administration officials who briefed us this morning on the Guantanamo and related orders?

Press Sec.: I hope that you all found the exercise that we did this morning helpful in further understanding [sic] the process by which the President had tasked his team to establish policies that he thinks enhances the security of the

United States, and to do so in a way that helps inform you of the decisions that he's made and the decisions that he will make over the course of this, and do so in a way that's helpful to your job.

Jonathan: [*Speaker not identified*] Do you know that you've used the name of one of those senior official's first name several times in this briefing?

Press corps: [*Laughter.*]

Press Sec.: I do, Jonathon. [*Laughs.*]

Jonathan: [*Unintelligible*] to repeat that, then?

Press Sec.: Sorry?

Jonathan: Are we allowed to repeat that name?

Press Sec.: If you want to...I'm tempted to ask you to see if you can get one person's name into the paper so [if?] people will think he might be a Brazilian soccer star. [*Anne*]?

[Anne]: [*Speaker not identified*] Did any of the mil...?

Press Sec.: Hold on one second. I'll get right back to you.

[Anne]: Did any of the commanders who spoke to the President on that video conference yesterday express any reservations or concerns about the speed with which he would like to withdraw troops from Iraq?

Press Sec.: Well, let me discuss a little bit about that meeting yesterday afternoon. The President, the Vice President, members of – I'm sorry, the Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the National Security Advisor – trying to go around the room and not – Commander in Chief for Central Command – I'm invariably going to leave people out – were assembled in order that the President could give them a new mission as it relates to going forward in Iraq.

The President outlined, both in the campaign and again yesterday, the goals that he has moving forward; that we responsibly remove, in 16 months, the combat brigades that are in Iraq, that we do so in a way that protects their safety; that provides the necessary opportunity for the Iraqis to take more responsibility; and also, has started a process that the President thought was important to hear from commanders on the ground and in the region.

In addition to the military component that was at the meeting, you had former Ambassador Burnes, who's at the State Department Obviously, Ambassador Crocker was involved in the meeting to discuss the political developments both currently and going forward in Iraq, and what adjustments have to be done as it relates to that side of the equation. The status of forces agreement that was...been approved by the Iraqis sets an end date for our military involvement in Iraq.

What the President believes is – I want to reiterate this; it's tremendously important – is that he hears from all of those that are involved in this decision. I know participants in the meeting said that specifically. The process that will now be undertaken over the next several weeks will be to provide him access to all of those commanders in order to make a decision to responsibly remove those troops in accordance with what he said in the campaign.

Press corps: [*Unidentified woman*] Well, one [*unintelligible*] question is, did he learn anything yesterday – anything he didn't already know?

Press Sec.: No. Obviously, this is a group that's been assembled before in front of the President. I think there's an ongoing discussion, an ongoing planning process. We'll have some...probably some stops in the next week or two to continue that comprehensive planning process to ensure that those reasonable goals are met. Bill – I'm sorry – yes?

Bill Plante: [*CBS*] How is it transparent when you control the only image of the re-swearing. There's nobody in there [*before*] press reporters; there's no stills; there's no television. And the only recording that comes out, as I understand it, is one that a reporter made, not one that the White House supplied. And how is it transparent when it looks like pay-to-play when the President gives his only interview on inauguration night to a network which paid \$2 million for the privilege of exclusive coverage of an event – the [*neighborhood*] ball?

Press Sec.: Let me take your questions separately there. I think that – again, I think the procedures yesterday with which we brought in a print pool and released a photo provided the documentation of exactly what happened yesterday afternoon.

Bill Plante: But it's *your* photo. It's not a photo made by the journalists who cover the White House.

Press Sec.: No, but I think that...I encourage you to speak to any of the four journalists that were in there. I think the pool report accurately reflects the events and the time [*that*] was in there. I think that's what the pool is normally charged with doing.

Bill Plante: No argument.

Press Sec.: Good. [All right.]

Bill Plante: But we have a tradition... We have a tradition here of covering the President.

Press corps: [*Speaker unidentified*] _____ only had four people at an event that everyone _____.

Press Sec.: Well, we'd had to get a bigger room.

Press corps: [*Speaker unidentified*] Well, you could've had more than four.

Press Sec.: Well, let... Yeah. Let me...the second question – you know – the... We've done interviews throughout the transition process. We've done...we've answered questions from reporters, and no interview is decided on by me or anybody else who works for the President based on who might sponsor an activity. David?

David Corn: [*Mother Jones Magazine*] Thanks. When he was signing the Order today banning torture, he referred to the ongoing struggle against violence and terrorism. He did not refer to the war on terrorism. And I want to know if this is purposeful. Has he decided to drop the war metaphor?

Press Sec.: I think the language today was consistent with what he said in his Inaugural Address on the 20th. I'm not aware of any larger changes than that.

David Corn: There's been no decision not to use that phrase?

Press Sec.: Not that I'm aware of. April?

April Ryan: [*American Urban Radio*] Robert, the President has asked his senior staff to take pay freezes. Now, is the President going to lead by example by returning money to the Treasury from his own salary, or signing an executive order to cut his salary?

Press Sec.: Well, I think his salary's determined by law, and I think augmentations to his salary, and to even some salaries outside of the Executive Office of the President but still in the executive branch of government, would have to be augmented by a change of law approved by Congress.

April Ryan: Is he going to push for that?

- Press Sec.:** I will certainly...I will see.
- April Ryan:** You think he should lead by example? He says he wants to lead by example. He is the top. Should he lead by example?
- Press Sec.:** We'll check on that. I think the charge that he set out yesterday in signing that pay freeze as part of strong ethical guidelines was to ensure that the American people could feel confident that some of the very same things that they're having to do each day are also...you see the example of that right here at the White House.
- John Ward:** [*Washington Times*] The third category of detainees that were discussed in the earlier briefing, that really kind of symbolizes a lot of why the Bush administration created Gitmo in the first place. Now, if the panel finds that a lot of the 245 folks still down there fit in that category, and they're just moved up here to the U.S., they're not put into core proceedings, which will have actually changed except for the "now on U.S. soil"?
- Press Sec.:** In your question, you've got the phrase, "if the panel decides." So that we don't start to prejudge or answer a series of hypothetical questions, I think it's best to let the panel decide, and bring recommendations back to the President to ensure the safety and security of the American people, and that people that would seek to do this country harm are brought to justice. I just don't want to get ahead of the process that's only a few hours old that the President instructed members of his Cabinet and other officials to take today.
- Press corps:** [*Speaker unidentified*] The economic stimulus plan, as you know, is moving through the House right now. The President had hoped for a big bipartisan vote – lots of Republicans on board. It looks like he's *not* going to get that. Republicans have been very vocal in recent days about the spending. Is the honeymoon over already?
- Press Sec.:** [*Laughs.*] I should ask that of you. No... Again, I think we've got a legislative process that's continuing to happen on Capitol Hill. The President, before coming here, was a senator, and he understands the role that the legislative branch dutifully plays in our government. I don't think it makes a lot of sense to prejudge now what the final outcome of the legislative proposal might be.
- The President has sought the ideas of both Democrats and Republicans. Yesterday, a group of Republicans sent a letter to the White House asking for the ability to talk to the President about the economic recovery and reinvestment plan that a bipartisan, bicameral group of leaders will come

to the White House tomorrow to discuss the progress that we've made on a plan to put millions of people back to work.

The President believes that we can change the way Washington works; the President believes that we can reach across party lines and share ideas; and that all of that is a part of the process that will lead to what he hopes Congress will pass and he will sign [by President's Day] recess, a plan to get this economy moving forward again.

Press corps: [*Speaker unidentified*] He's not disappointed by what he heard.

Press Sec.: No, he's not disappointed by what he's heard so far. I'd look at some votes that have happened on Capitol Hill. We had a pretty strong bipartisan vote on legislation to increase the number of children that are covered by health insurance. We've had... we had a pretty strong vote yesterday to approve Senator Clinton to be the next Secretary of State. We've had...we had a very strong vote this morning to send Tim Geitner from the Finance Committee to the floor with a strong bipartisan vote.

I think throughout the nominations process, throughout the legislative process, I think you can find a lot of quotes from Republicans that show they're anxious to work with this President. And most of all, I think the American people are anxious to watch a President and a Congress, and members of both parties, work together to get this economy moving again.

They understand that we're in a period of real economic crisis, one that we haven't seen in quite some time, and that the only way for Washington to adequately respond to the crisis that the American people face *is* to work together. I think that's what's going to happen in this process, and I think as we get closer to that final passage and ultimately the President's signature, that that will be demonstrated.

Press corps: [*Speaker unidentified. Inaudible.*]

Press Sec.: Let me take this real fast. Almost as exciting as the Presidential dog. The President has a Blackberry. We'll... Oh, everybody's stirring for... Look at that. Well, make sure the pen still works and get a...

Press corps: [*Speaker unidentified. Inaudible.*]

Press Sec.: Yeah, I know. [*Laughs.*] Why did I wait?

Press corps: [*Speaker inaudible.*]

Press Sec.: Hold on. Let me just...

Press corps: [*Speaker inaudible.*]

Press Sec.: Good question.

Press corps: [*Speaker inaudible*] ____ [don't come].

Press Sec.: [*Laughs.*] The President has a Blackberry through a compromise that allows him to stay in touch with senior staff and a small group of personal friends, in a way that use will be limited and that security is enhanced to ensure his ability to communicate, but to do so effectively and to do so in a way that is protected.

Press corps: [*Male; speaker unidentified*] Are records kept? Will the records be kept?

Press Sec.: Yeah, the presumption regarding those emails are that they're all subject to the Presidential Records Act. There are, as *you* know, some narrow exemptions IN the Presidential Records Act to afford for strictly personal communications. But again, the presumption from the Counsel's Office is that...that they will be subject to the Presidential Records Act...

Bill Plante: [*Unintelligible*] already at work.

Press Sec.: [*Laughs.*] That's why I didn't give the email address. Let me...let me...

Press corps: [*Inaudible question.*]

Press Sec.: Nobody can do that. I think he believes that...he believes it's a way of keeping in touch with folks, a way of doing it outside of getting stuck in a bubble. You know, he...I've gotten emails from him – not recently – [*laughs*] – or not in a few days, I should say – that go from anywhere from something that's very strictly business to why did my football team perform so miserably on either...any given Saturday or any given Sunday. So he thinks he finds it as an important way to continue to communicate. You know, there's a process by which people that have access to the email will be briefed before anything like that can happen. Jeff?

Jeff Zeleny: [*New York Times*] How specifically will this be allowed to be used? Will all members of the senior staff be able to email him? And how will you keep a proper chain of command and chain of communication with him? Who can email him and who can't?

Press Sec.: Well, I'm not going to get into all those specifics, for obvious reasons. But a limited group of senior staffers and some personal friends. It's a pretty small group of people.

Jeff Zeleny: Can you give a rough number on it?

Press Sec.: Let me get some guidance from the Counsel's Office before I do something like that so that...the hackers that Bill is instructing won't start... [*Laughter.*] Kurt?

Kurt: [*Last name/employer unidentified*] Robert, a number of Democratic chairmen were miffed at not being given a head's up on your cabinet post. These are chairmen who have jurisdiction over these members, and they've spoke up [*sic*]; they were miffed about that. Does that suggest how you're going to share information going forward with the Hill?

Press Sec.: Well, I think the President is greatly encouraged by the strong bipartisan reaction that his cabinet members have gotten thus far in moving out of committee, and many through the Senate to be confirmed. Obviously – [*laughs*] – and you have well documented them, some failings on our part to keep appropriately apprised some members of the House and the Senate. But we are working closely with members of the House and Senate on anything from nominations to an economic recovery and investment plan that will get our economy moving again.

Again, the President's most previous job experience before coming here was as a member of the Senate, and he understands the importance of consulting with and keeping apprised to Congress. Thanks guys. See you tomorrow.

Press corps: [*Speaker unidentified*] What do you think of the [*unintelligible*], Robert?

Press Sec.: We can sell tickets and have the money go to the deficit or something as a way of [*unintelligible*]. See you guys tomorrow. Thank you.