

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks Prior to White House Press Secretary James "Jay" Carney's Briefing and an Exchange With Reporters

July 19, 2011

The President. Hello, everybody. I wanted to give folks a quick update on the progress that we're making on the debt ceiling discussions.

I was in contact with all the leadership over the course of the weekend and continued to urge both Democrats and Republicans to come together around an approach that not only lifts the debt ceiling, but also solves the underlying challenges that we face when it comes to debt and deficits.

Some progress was made in some of the discussions, some narrowing of the issues. Speaker Boehner and the Republican House caucus felt it necessary to put forward the plan that they're going to be voting on today. I think everyone's estimation is, is that that is not an approach that could pass both Chambers, it's not an approach that I would sign, and it's not balanced. But I understand the need for them to test that proposition.

The problem we have now is we're in the 11th hour, and we don't have a lot more time left. The good news is that today a group of Senators, the Gang of Six, Democrats and Republicans—I guess now Gang of Seven, because one additional Republican Senator added on—put forward a proposal that is broadly consistent with the approach that I've urged. What it says is we've got to be serious about reducing discretionary spending both in domestic spending and defense, we've got to be serious about tackling health care spending and entitlements in a serious way, and we've got to have some additional revenue so that we have an approach in which there is shared sacrifice and everybody is giving up something.

And so for us to see Democratic Senators acknowledge that we've got to deal with our long-term debt problems that arise out of our various entitlement programs and for Republican Senators to acknowledge that revenues will have to be part of a balanced package that makes sure that nobody is disproportionately hurt from us making progress on the debt and deficits, I think, is a very significant step. And as I said, the framework that they put forward is broadly consistent with what we've been working on here in the White House and with the presentations that I've made to the leadership when they've come over here.

So here's where we stand. We have a Democratic President and administration that is prepared to sign a tough package that includes both spending cuts, modifications to Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare that would strengthen those systems and allow them to move forward and would include a revenue component. We now have a bipartisan group of Senators who agree with that balanced approach. And we've got the American people who agree with that balanced approach.

My hope, and what I will be urging Speaker Boehner, Nancy Pelosi, as well as Leader Reid and Mitch McConnell, is that they, tomorrow, are prepared to start talking turkey and actually getting down to the hard business of crafting a plan that can move this forward in time for the August 2 deadline that we've set forward.

Just a couple of other points I will make. Some of you may ask, what does it mean for the plan that Senator McConnell and Senator Reid had been working on? Our attitude is, is that that continues to be a necessary approach to put forward. In the event that we don't get an

agreement, at minimum, we've got to raise the debt ceiling. So that's the bare minimum that has to be achieved, but we continue to believe that we can achieve more.

And so I want to congratulate the Gang of Six for coming up with a plan that I think is balanced. We just received it, so we haven't reviewed all the details of it. It would not match perfectly with some of the approaches that we've taken, but I think that we're in the same playing field. And my hope is, is that we can start gathering everybody over the next couple of days to choose a clear direction and to get this issue resolved.

So far at least, the markets have shown confidence that leadership here in Washington are not going to send the economy over a cliff. But if we continue to go through a lot of political posturing, if both sides continue to be dug in, if we don't have a basic spirit of cooperation that allows us to rise above immediate election-year politics and actually solve problems, then I think markets here, the American people, and the international community are going to start reacting adversely fairly quickly.

So I think it's very important for in these next couple of days to understand we don't have any more time to engage in symbolic gestures, we don't have any more time to posture. It's time to get down to the business of actually solving this problem. And I think we now are seeing the potential for a bipartisan consensus around what that would take.

It will be hard. It will be tough. There are still going to be a lot of difficult negotiations that have to take place in order for us to actually get something done. And as I said, we have to have that fail-safe that Senator McConnell and Senator Reid are working on. But the hope is, is that everybody seizes this opportunity.

All right? Okay, guys, I'm going to let Jay answer questions today. I think I've been pretty good to you guys. [*Laughter*] But after the votes today in the House, I'll call up Speaker Boehner and the other leadership, and we'll arrange for times where we bring folks back here, and hopefully, we'll be able to report on some additional progress over the next few days.

All right? Thank you very much, guys.

National Debt and Deficit

Q. When will you announce whether you will be supporting the Gang of Six plan? Would that be in the next day?

The President. Well, as I said, I think what you're going to be seeing is an evaluation of that plan versus the things that we've been looking at. I think what you're going to see is some significant overlap. But obviously, just because we might agree in principle with a range of issues with six Senators or seven Senators, that doesn't get us out of the House of Representatives; that doesn't get us out of the Senate. There's going to have to be a broader agreement on the part of all the leadership that we're going to get this done in a serious way, and we've got a tight deadline to do it.

All right? Thanks, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:32 p.m. in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Sens. Saxby Chambliss, Thomas A. Coburn, Kent Conrad, Michael D. Crapo, Richard J. Durbin, and Mark R. Warner.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : White House Press Secretary James "Jay" Carney briefing, remarks prior.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Boehner, John A.; Carney, James “Jay”; Chambliss, Saxby; Coburn, Thomas A.; Conrad, Ken; Crapo, Michael D.; Durbin, Richard J.; McConnell, A. Mitchell; Pelosi, Nancy; Reid, Harry; Warner, Mark R.

Subjects: Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Budget, Federal : Entitlement spending, reform; Budget, Federal : Government programs, spending reductions; Congress : Bipartisanship; Congress : House of Representatives :: Minority leader; Congress : House of Representatives :: Republican caucus; Congress : House of Representatives :: Speaker; Congress : Senate :: Majority leader; Defense, Department of : Funding; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Social Security and retirement : Social Security reform; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Press Secretary.

DCPD Number: DCPD201100512.