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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

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PRESS GAGGLE
BY DEPUTY PRESS SECRETARY BILL BURTON

Aboard Air Force One
En Route Seattle, Washington

9:17 A.M. PDT

MR. BURTON: Okay. Welcome onboard Air Force One. You all saw Secretary Locke is joining us today. At his remarks at a small business in Seattle, the President will discuss the fact that the Senate is going to take on the small business bill when they come back into session and the importance of Republicans stopping their obstruction so that small business owners can get the assistance that they need as soon as humanly possible to create an environment where small businesses can be creating jobs and the economy can continue to grow.

With that, I'm happy to take any questions you might have.

Q Hey, Bill, with all the campaigning the President is doing, how far is he willing to go in saying that he's confident the House and Senate will stay Democratic? Is he willing to guarantee it? How confident is he?

MR. BURTON: How far is he willing to go? Interestingly put. The President thinks that this election is a choice between the policies that move our country forward or the policies that got us to the crisis that we're in right now. But he's confident that given that choice in the voting booths

in November that Democrats will be successful and he does think that we will hold on to both the House and the Senate.

Q So you think -- so the White House's feeling is that things are trending well right now; with all of these campaign stops it's making a difference?

MR. BURTON: Well, I'm not going to get into the punditry of it, but the President thinks that this is fundamentally a choice and it's a choice where the Americans will choose to continue making progress.

Q Is the President having fun on the campaign trail right now, considering every day the polls are beating him down, every day he's getting a lot of backseat-driving advice? Is this fun for him?

MR. BURTON: The President has gotten a lot of advice from all corners ever since he started out on the campaign trail February 10, 2007. But he appreciates the opportunity to go out there and make the case to the American people about what his policies have done to help make our economy stronger, what he's done to make our country safer, and the choice that people have in this election between continuing on our economic policies, like the small business bill that he'll be talking about today, that get more loans to small businesses; that cut -- that end capital gains for their investments. So he does enjoy making that case to the American people.

Q Enjoying the campaign trail this week?

MR. BURTON: He enjoys making the case. He obviously would enjoy it more if he could spend more time with his family. But I think that as one of the hats that he wears as the leader of the Democratic Party, as President of the United States, he does like going out and talking to the American people, hearing what's on their minds and explaining how he sees the choice in this election.

Q Can you talk about Senator Reid's disagreeing with the President on the mosque issue? Has the President spoken to him? Did Reid's people give you guys a heads-up about that? What was his reaction?

MR. BURTON: We did have a sense that that's what they were going to do. But if you look at what the President said on Friday night, he respects the right of anybody -- Democrat,

Republican, independent -- to disagree with his opinion on this. That's one of the other fundamental rights written into the DNA of our Constitution.

Senator Reid is a fiercely independent individual; it's one of his strengths as a leader of the Democratic Party. So the President feels completely fine that he might disagree.

Q -- you view Senator Reid and the President disagree on this issue?

MR. BURTON: Well, the statements are different. What the President said was that he thinks that there's a fundamental right for individuals and groups to be treated equally. But the President, like he said on Saturday, didn't comment specifically on whether or not he was pushing for the site to actually to be put in that spot. Senator Reid's comment was he thinks that it shouldn't be.

Q So it is a different statement. It's a different statement -- do they agree? Do they disagree?

MR. BURTON: I'll leave it to the smart guys like you, Chuck, to decide whether or not that means disagreement or different statement or what's up and what's down. But it's a different take on this issue.

Q -- decide not to speak to the insurance commissioners today?

MR. BURTON: Just postponed it for a month.

Q Sorry, didn't hear you. What --

MR. BURTON: Just postponed it for a month.

Q Why?

MR. BURTON: I just think that the President thought it was important to talk about small businesses and the importance of getting moving on that right when the Senate gets back.

Q Can you comment on reports today that the President may announce loosening travel restrictions for groups to Cuba?

MR. BURTON: Sure. I've seen those reports and I don't have anything new to announce. But the President is going to

continue to do things that are in the best interest of the United States and that help to create a more democratic environment and expand freedoms for the Cuban people.

Q Some members of Congress are saying they did not get a heads-up about the mosque comments, even though the President spoke to Mayor Bloomberg. Why not discuss this with the senators, or even Representative Gillibrand?

MR. BURTON: I don't know that the President spoke to Mayor Bloomberg -- I don't think that that's accurate -- about this beforehand. We have very close relationships with our partners on Capitol Hill, and sometimes -- we talk to them every day at different levels of the West Wing, but we take each issue on a case-by-case basis. This wasn't something that the President viewed through a political lens. This is something that he saw as his obligation to address. So there you go.

Q Was the President briefed on the Iraq bombing this morning?

MR. BURTON: Yes, made aware. And the President condemns those attacks. There are obviously still people who want to derail the advances that the Iraqi people have made towards democracy, but they are firmly on track and we're confident that we're moving towards the end of our combat mission there.

Q -- the work of al Qaeda in Iraq?

MR. BURTON: I don't know. I would point you to the DOD for that.

Q Given that attack and how bad it was and the fact that there's still no government in Iraq, how can you -- how can the United States go ahead, continue with its plans for the drawdown?

MR. BURTON: The fact that, as the Vice President said, politics has broken out in Iraq is a good thing. It means that democracy is thriving there already. There's a transitional government in place that's functioning in a stable fashion, and we're confident that they will be able to put together a government. But that fact that there's a lot of competition for who is going to be leading that country is a good thing. It's a political process at work.

Q So it's not going to affect the schedule? This kind of attack is not going to affect the U.S. schedule?

MR. BURTON: No. We're obviously helping the Iraqi forces to keep that country secure. Our combat mission ends at the end of the month, but we will still have troops there who are helping to support them as necessary.

Q -- preview tomorrow?

MR. BURTON: Tomorrow in Columbus, the President is going to be visiting with a middle-class family, where he'll talk -- I think it's right at their kitchen table -- about some of the concerns that they have about what -- things are going on in the economy. And then afterwards, he'll go outside and have a conversation with some neighbors and folks from the community about questions and concerns that they have.

Q -- a town hall?

MR. BURTON: But smaller. More like a --

Q Will he take questions?

MR. BURTON: He will be taking questions, yes.

Q From -- that will be folks in the community?

MR. BURTON: Yes.

Q How was the family chosen?

MR. BURTON: I think that our folks at the White House talked to local community leaders about finding an appropriate venue where such a conversation could take place.

Q Whose house is -- who is hosting the fundraiser in Seattle today, the one at the private residence?

MR. BURTON: I don't know. I would check in with the Murray campaign on that.

Q The questions that he'll have, it's like a town hall we'll be seeing? Or he'll just sit alone with them?

MR. BURTON: Yes, it will be town hall-style, but it will be pretty small -- it will be like 40 people.

Q Okay, but we'll be in there?

MR. BURTON: Yes.

Q Hey, Bill, I knock on wood as I ask this last one, but after this, the President goes off to Martha's Vineyard. Is his expectation that that is a genuine vacation?

MR. BURTON: The President is definitely going to spend a little time recharging his batteries. I would, as the spokesman who's going to go on that trip, encourage anybody else who's going in the media to think that this is going to be the hardest that they will have ever have worked in their entire lives. You'll probably be working every day, early till late, maybe really early in the morning till really late at night, and over the weekend as well. And you'll probably never see outside of your bed and breakfast where you'll be staying.

Q Don't laugh. Those of us in print -- that was the schedule, actually.

Q And it was your fault.

Q And it was all your fault.

Q -- your reverse psychology.

MR. BURTON: I'm just trying to set expectations appropriately. I know what I said before the last time we went to Martha's Vineyard and it turned out a little bit differently.

Just one last thing on this. So a couple folks have asked me who all is going on the trip. Valerie Jarrett will be out there, as well as Pete Rouse --

Q To Martha's Vineyard?

MR. BURTON: Yes. John Brennan will be on the trip. I'll be there doing spokesman duties. And I think Denis McDonough is going to show up at some point to help out as well.

Q Do you have any other details about where they're staying, what they're doing, or who's going with them for vacation purposes?

MR. BURTON: Not other than that, really. I mean, as far

as what they're doing, I think it will be a lot like last year. There will be some hiking, some time at the beach, some time at the ice cream store -- all the sort of things you do when you're at Martha's Vineyard. You enjoy the people and the good food.

Q Will he be playing golf?

MR. BURTON: Say that again?

Q Golf?

MR. BURTON: I don't know. You'll just have to wait to see how it all shakes out.

Q They're staying at the same house?

MR. BURTON: I'll keep you posted on where they're staying.

Q Any plans for a Thursday morning press conference before he leaves and he's down for 10 days?

MR. BURTON: None that I know of. (Laughter.)

Anything else?

Q What does the President think of the reaction to his comments on the mosque? Has he been sort of -- does he have his -- he's very critical sometimes of the news media. Is he as critical on this one?

MR. BURTON: The President thinks that this is an issue that people are going to come to with strongly held opinions, and he respects the fact that they're going to express them. He doesn't -- he's not surprised necessarily that a lot of people are coming out and talking about this forcefully. So I would say that he's happy that our thriving democracy is continuing to produce vigorous debate.

Q He's not critical -- this isn't one of those moments where he thinks the media is doing something it shouldn't do?

MR. BURTON: I don't want to miss an opportunity to just criticize the media, but -- (laughter.) This is debate that's just happening in the country.

Q Does he have any regrets about coming out and saying anything, given that it's stoked the flames in this way?

MR. BURTON: No. He felt it was his obligation to address this matter.

Q Thanks, Bill.

MR. BURTON: Thanks.

END

9:29

A.M. PDT

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