

Press Briefing by Dan Bartlett, Counselor to the President

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MR. BARTLETT: Good afternoon, everyone. I'll start with a few brief comments, before I take your questions.

The two Presidents are concluding their lunch pretty much as we speak, in which they -- is on the heels of a bilateral conversation with a restricted group, as well as an expanded meeting with various Cabinet officials and members of the delegation. This is an opportunity for the two Presidents, as Presidents -- the President met President Calderon in December, when he was still President-elect in the Oval Office -- but this is the first time that the two Presidents were able to meet, and the President is honored to be here in his country.

And it's been really -- on the docket was a wide-ranging agenda, from issues of trade to border security to narco-trafficking, broader criminal justice issues. And the thing that has struck me and the President, as he meets with leaders from Central America as well as with from Mexico, is the need to have a regional perspective when it comes to fighting crime, particularly drug crimes, because obviously in America a huge demand, unfortunately, for these drugs. A lot of the prosecutors and investigative bodies in the United States have good information and leads on various criminal conduct that happens in their country, that leads back to certain countries.

And what the two leaders and the leaders with -- the President talking to members, leaders in Central America, as well, as to how can we collaborate and coordinate our information and our law enforcement activity so we can have greater focus on busting some of these syndicates and disrupting the flow of drugs in the first place.

So the President has really enjoyed his trip so far. This is his final stop, appropriately, with Mexico. As the President stated himself earlier, he had visited Mexico as governor many times, and now has an opportunity again to come here as President. And the relationship between the two countries is a strong one, it's a vital one. And we will continue to brief you on the various aspects of the agendas that were discussed.

With that, Steve Holland.

Q Does the President condone the remarks about homosexuality by General Pace? And has he asked for him to apologize?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, President Bush has been informed about those remarks. He's also been informed about the comments that he has made as far as clarifying, that he made it very clear that his personal views on this matter has

no influence on the policy of the United States government. The "don't ask, don't tell" policy has been longstanding, one the President supports, for reasons why the Department of Defense has often described for operational considerations. So he thought it was appropriate for the Chairman to make that clear distinction today in the statement that went out just shortly ago.

Q Dan, can you talk a little bit about, by the White House's own account, Senator Domenici at some point went to the President and urged him to fire the U.S. attorney in New Mexico, specifically? What did the President do with that information, after Senator Domenici asked him? And what did the President say to Attorney General Gonzales, when they did speak about this?

MR. BARTLETT: It's important to back up a bit. The issue of U.S. attorneys, as many of you know, these U.S. attorneys serve at the discretion of the President. Many of these U.S. attorneys have served four-year terms. There was a management review process and there was a determination made to remove seven U.S. attorneys for cause. And the members of the Justice Department have been sharing that information, the particulars on each of those cases, as to why those U.S. attorneys were removed, which is completely within the managerial discretion of the Attorney General and something that the President supported.

Particularly, as you can imagine, at the White House, when it comes to complaints, we receive a lot of complaints, whether it be from members of Congress, state leaders, local leaders. Oftentimes that is the job description of a White House employee, is to field complaints. That is not limited to U.S. attorneys. And over the course of several years we have received complaints about U.S. attorneys, particularly when it comes to election fraud cases -- not just New Mexico, but also Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

That information, it's incumbent upon us to share with the relevant Cabinet officers, incumbent upon the President to do that, as well. The President did that briefly, in a conversation he had with the Attorney General in October of 2006, in which, in a wide-ranging conversation on a lot of different issues, this briefly came up and the President said, I've been hearing about this election fraud matters from members of Congress, want to make sure you're on top of that, as well. There was no directive given, as far as telling him to fire anybody or anything like that. That would be under the prerogative of the Justice Department to take a look at those issues, as they obviously were doing.

So I know a lot of people want to make more out of it than that, but that is exactly what happened. The new information that came out here today, and the reason why the Attorney General accepted the resignation of his Chief of Staff is because of an internal DOJ matter in which information was not properly shared with other key members of the Department of Justice. He was willing to inform the United States Congress in a more complete and accurate picture.

Q But one quick follow. When you say that this was based on managerial decisions, performance -- the Justice Department's own evaluation of Iglesias,

the New Mexico U.S. attorney, in 2005 gave him a strong recommendation. So how does that square with then firing him for poor performance?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, he was fired two years later than 2005, and there was a series of issues that they looked at. They looked at his managerial responsibilities and what they had found in a review process that was undertaken at the Department of Justice, that they felt that he was not managing the office as well as it should be; there was issues about his lack of leadership on key committees that prosecutors, U.S. attorneys serve in capacity for the Attorney General. He served on a key immigration subcommittee, and they felt like he didn't possess leadership skills there and fulfill that job in a way that he should have.

And, also, they took into consideration the complaints that they were fielding from local officials about the lack of prosecution of cases, and the fact that he had lost a high-profile case, when I think 24 or 25 counts were thrown out by a jury against the government. It was a devastating loss for the government.

So there is a complete picture there that is important to understand. And at no time did the White House bring to or edit or modify or add to or subtract from the list of seven U.S. attorneys. We ultimately approved or signed off on the list when that was completed by the Department of Justice. But those were decisions that are appropriately made at the Department of Justice.

The Attorney General made the right decision. We support the Attorney General in his decision.

Q But this is somebody picked by the President, and he gets a high recommendation, and in two years he loses all these skills and becomes an awful prosecutor?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, again, people like myself, other members of the administration serve at the pleasure of the President. There are a lot of factors that are taken into consideration. He had served many years. You look at the totality of evidence. They believed it was important that they could bring in fresh blood, new leadership in this position -- and the other key positions, six U.S. attorney positions.

But when you look at it in its totality, they believe that the U.S. Prosecutor's Office in the state of New Mexico would be better served, the people of New Mexico be better served with a new U.S. attorney.

Tom.

Q Well, let's look at it in its totality.

MR. BARTLETT: I'll talk to Tom, and I'll come to you. And we will talk about it in totality.

Q Dan, the Attorney General said he took responsibility for mistakes. Does the President still have full confidence in the Attorney General? And given the White House role in this, does the President acknowledge that there were mistakes made -- and take responsibility for them?

MR. BARTLETT: He absolutely has full confidence in the Attorney General, and the reason why he does is for exactly what he said today: He's a standup guy; he's a person who comes to the job every day, doing the best he can to serve the United States of America; he takes that job very seriously. And when he saw problems, he's pledged to the American people and to the United States Congress to fix those problems. So the President has all the confidence in the world in Alberto Gonzales as the Attorney General for the United States of America.

He also feels it's important that the information as to how these decisions were made be provided. He accepts the decision so far that has been made by the Attorney General for the resignation of Kyle Sampson. And he is satisfied that we are addressing the concerns. But make very clear the decision, the original decision to remove the seven U.S. attorneys who serve at the discretion of the President was the right decision.

Bill.

Q Let's look at the totality here.

MR. BARTLETT: Okay.

Q These are political jobs. Why are you so anxious to keep these seven firings away from the White House and in the Justice Department? Wouldn't it have been appropriate for the political shop in the White House to take a look at this? What's the big deal? Why are you so anxious to say it was all the Justice Department's doing, we had nothing to do with it?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, we've made clear the role the White House has played in this, and the White House Counsel's Office, in which they approved the list. I think most people would expect that the U.S. Attorney General would be the person who actually is in charge of making management decisions for that agency. That is common for the Department of Justice, it's common for the Department of Defense, the Department of State, the Department of Commerce. Going down the line, the President, as he manages this administration, relies upon his Cabinet officers to make the type of managerial decisions.

What would also be appropriate, though, and is a common practice not only with the Department of Justice, but with agencies across the board, is that as information is received by the White House directly -- and it happens often; like I said, whether it be from members of Congress, state and local officials -- that information, if it's complaints, if it's accolades for somebody, we typically pass those on to the Cabinet officer. In this case, it would have been to the Department of Justice. That is appropriate.

But I think it is important, though, whether it be wrong or not, that the facts be what they are. And the facts are that we did not play a role in the culmination of the list of the seven U.S. attorneys.

Q The Congress is upset that they were not properly informed of how the White House did play a role. But the Attorney General knew that the White House was involved, people at the White House -- Harriet Miers, Karl Rove, the President, himself -- knew the White House had played a role. Isn't the White House, then, responsible for not informing Congress properly?

MR. BARTLETT: I think it's very important, Kelly, to make a distinction between what we knew and what role we played. And right there, I think is where this can be very complicated, because there's a clear distinction between having approved of a list, and playing a role in the compilation of the seven U.S. attorneys. The White House did not play a specific role in the list of the seven U.S. attorneys.

The decision in which it was not given all the information in its totality and context by the Justice Department to members of Congress was because the information that Kyle Sampson had wasn't adequately shared with other members of main Justice who were going up to testify before Congress.

It's very important that if they go before Congress that they give a complete and accurate picture of the decisions that were made and why they were made. It's not to say the decisions were wrong -- in fact, we had very good reasons for the very reason why the seven U.S. attorneys were removed. But it is very important that when they go up and testify, and they go to their oversight committees, that those members of Congress have confidence that the information they're receiving is in complete and full context. And in this case, it wasn't. That's why he's accepted the resignation of chief of staff. And he's going to redouble his efforts to regain the confidence of those who are questioning that. And that's something the Attorney General spoke directly to today.

Q But wasn't their knowledge beyond Kyle Sampson? People in the White House Counsel's Office understood that they had participated in this process, and Congress was not properly informed of that.

MR. BARTLETT: Again, "participated in the process" is inaccurate because --

Q I understand what you're saying about they didn't do the names, but they were aware of -- and that's the whole reason we're here. You were aware of this beforehand --

MR. BARTLETT: Well, I think it's important to understand what this is, Kelly, because they did -- the Deputy Attorney General and other members of the Department of Justice went up there and talked about why these people were not -- were let go. The context they wanted to give is from 22 months prior, when there was a conversation between Harriet Miers and Kyle Sampson had talked about after the start of the second term, in 2004, would it make sense to maybe have a clean slate and start with a full range of new U.S. attorneys

across-the-board. That was quickly rejected not only by Kyle Sampson at the Department of Justice, but also not viewed as a good idea within the White House.

Twenty-two months later, there is a very specific managerial decision made about seven U.S. attorneys. That's in context that the Congress should have known, but it doesn't change the underlying facts of this case.

Q Dan, obviously Kyle Sampson is taking the fall for this. But Attorney General Gonzales just said, I can't be aware of all the decisions that are made in my department. So which is worse: if he knew, or he didn't know?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, what he is saying is he's accountable. He made it very clear that he's accountable for the decisions he's made. He's just talking about the fact that he runs a very large organization.

But I take issue with the fact that he is the fall guy in this. All the decisions that were made with regards to the removal of these U.S. attorneys were proper decisions. What was not done properly, and didn't live up to the standards of the Attorney General of the Bush administration, was the fact that Mr. Sampson didn't share that information as freely as he should have with members of his own team there at the Department of Justice, who were going up to Congress to testify about this. Mr. Sampson offered his resignation. He understood, himself, that he should have done a better job with this.

So I think it's very important to make a clear distinction about the difference between decisions made about why these U.S. attorneys were fired and why Mr. Sampson, himself -- but I don't take -- I take issue with the fact about --

Q Are you suggesting Sampson is the only person who had this information? Why did it take media exposure for it to come out?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, that's not true. What it took was as they were preparing for DOJ -- members of the Department of Justice to go up to Congress to meet with them more thoroughly about how this decision was made, many emails and things were compiled. And based on the recollection, based off reading emails or previous memos, did jog memories of people both at the Justice Department and the White House.

So this is not a situation we were sitting on information and just not sharing it. In fact, the fact that I'm standing up here and we've made -- I think now documents are posted on the websites up on Capitol Hill -- demonstrates that we have nothing to hide. And we want to make sure that all this information is understood and in complete context. But it doesn't change the underlying fact, and that is that this was a proper decision.

Peter.

Q Dan did Attorney General Gonzales offer his resignation to the President?

MR. BARTLETT: He has not.

Q Has he spoken to the President?

MR. BARTLETT: Not since we've been on this trip, no.

Q How about Karl Rove? Will the President agree to allow Karl Rove to testify if Congress wanted him, and/or Harriet Miers?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, I think -- there's a lot of rhetoric flying around about who's going to testify and who's not, and I don't think -- we have not received any specific requests. And I think we've demonstrated through the Department of Justice, with members of that team going up and interviewing and providing information, demonstrates the administration's willingness to work with Congress so they have a greater understanding of how these decisions are made.

So we will wait to see if there's a specific request, with this context, and that is, as you know better than most, that decisions about White House staff testifying to the United States Congress has a precedent that dates beyond this -- prior to this administration. I find it highly unlikely that a member of the White House staff would testify publicly to these matters, but that doesn't mean we won't find other ways to try to share that information.

Like I said, it's speculative right now, because we have not received a formal request.

Q Dan, you mentioned the White House fields a lot of complaints. Was the President specifically aware of these election fraud cases that were not, according to the White House, being vigorously prosecuted? And did he mention that specifically to Attorney General Gonzales late 2006, about the specific cases -- Philadelphia, Milwaukee, New Mexico?

MR. BARTLETT: He, in a very brief conversation, said that he is receiving complaints about U.S. attorneys in those particular states. He did not mention any prosecutor by name. That was something that the Attorney General was fully aware of already -- he says, I know, and we're looking at those issues. But he gave him no directive. And, again, it's important to understand that this will be routine not only for the President to do, but also for members of our staff to share those complaints with the Attorney General.

Q When the President had this conversation with the Attorney General about specific concerns, doesn't that send the message that he has concerns about these attorneys?

MR. BARTLETT: It means exactly what it says, is that he's sharing those concerns. And, in fact, the Attorney General was fully aware of those complaints, as well, because I think they were received independent of the President. So I don't think that it's a big surprise that there would be an offhand conversation about that, but there was, again, no directive given.

Q Last one. Harriet Miers' revelation that there's this idea that she wanted to clear house of all the U.S. attorneys, why is this coming out now and what's the timeline of this?

MR. BARTLETT: It's coming out again because of the Kyle Sampson emails and papers that were being collected in order to respond to the request being made by the Department of Justice, that there's email traffic that jogged the memory of people at the White House and with Kyle Sampson, particularly -- because what Harriet Miers was doing was taking a look and floating an idea to say, hey, should we treat the second term very similar to the way we treat a first term? Because, remember, when Bill Clinton came into office he removed all 93 U.S. attorneys. The President chose not to remove all 93 U.S. attorneys -- removed significant numbers of them, but we left people in key positions because of the role they played.

So those discretionary decisions made by a President, by an administration are often done. And what Harriet floated was the idea of saying should we treat the fifth year as the first year -- give new blood -- an opportunity for new blood to come in. Kyle, to his credit, and others said, that would be highly disruptive to the process, there are a lot of good U.S. attorneys that are performing; some of them have not served full four-year terms because we hadn't removed them all in the first place.

So it was appropriate for Harriet to raise the idea; it was quickly rejected. These seven U.S. attorneys who were then ultimately removed for cause was done 22 months later, almost two years later. So I think -- but it's important to have that context.

Jim.

Q Dan, first of all, in the October conversation what was the President told about the removal process? Was he informed about what was going on by the Attorney General? And, also, secondly, who else can you say in Congress expressed concerns to the President, aside from (inaudible)* New Mexico? And also did Rove hear concerns and pass them on to the President? Did Bolten pass concerns on to the President? Did Candi Wolff pass concerns on?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, many -- many offices within the White House were receiving these complaints: leg affairs office, those who deal with state and local leaders that report to Karl Rove. So it wouldn't be surprising that Karl or other people were receiving these complaints. And I can't rule out that those complaints weren't also shared with the President, as well. And as he said, the President was directly hearing from members of Congress to that effect. But at the time, the President was not informed of any specific course of action being taken on the removal of those U.S. attorneys, and I think the Justice Department has greater detail and I would refer you to them.

Q But just to clarify, so in October the President was not informed about anything going on in terms of a removal process?

MR. BARTLETT: That's correct.

Q And are there any other names you can share, in terms of members of Congress who mentioned concerns to the President directly?

MR. BARTLETT: I can't. No. Ann.

Q Dan, exactly what did the President say in that October meeting? And who else was there besides the Attorney General?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, Ann, I'm not going to go into details about internal White House conversations, who was there, who was saying what, what kind of coffee they were drinking. I will just say that this was passed on; we're sharing that information. We felt it was important context so the members of Congress and others know. But the President routinely meets on an individual basis with members of his Cabinet, and in the course of having one of these routine meetings in which a lot of different issues are addressed, this issue briefly came up, and I'll leave it at that.

Q I didn't ask about the coffee. Was it just members of the --

MR. BARTLETT: And I answered first that I was not going to talk about other participants in the meeting.

Q But, I mean, was it members of Congress in this, was it --

MR. BARTLETT: No, no, this was an internal White House meeting with the Cabinet officers.

Q And the President did not take any specifics or even express an opinion whether these complaints had any validity? He was just kind of being an honest reporter of them?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, he would not be in a position to weigh into the facts of complex cases of fraud or corruption cases. Those would be something that he would leave to his Attorney General and their staff to handle for him.

Q Dan, you said that members of Congress were bringing these complaints to many parts of the White House and directly to the President. Was the President aware that some of these members of Congress were calling these U.S. attorneys directly? And does he think that those phone calls were appropriate?

MR. BARTLETT: He was not aware of those conversations, and he's not in a position, nor am I, to say whether they're appropriate or not. I think that is something that the Congress, themselves, are looking at. So I don't have the facts in that case, in those various conversations that apparently took place.

Q These U.S. attorneys would answer to the Justice Department. Is it appropriate for members of Congress, in general, to make phone calls to attorneys?

MR. BARTLETT: My understanding is it's more distinct. It is -- they can have conversations with U.S. attorneys, but should they talk to them about an active investigation -- I'm not in a position to weigh one way or the other what the regulations say. I'm not an expert on that. But I do believe this is something that the Congress is looking at it.

Q Dan, you said that he has not offered his resignation. But has he talked to anybody in the White House about resigning?

MR. BARTLETT: No.

Q Dan, can you just clarify --

MR. BARTLETT: Hold on --

Q Thank you. A couple of questions. How many members of Congress took these complaints directly to the President, himself?

MR. BARTLETT: I'm not going to be able to give a number on that. Like I said, this has been a topic of conversation in which, when the President is meeting with groups of senators or congressmen, in which something like this or other types of complaints come up, typically what happens is that the President recalls one of those complaints, sees a Cabinet officer, he'll pass them on. But I'm not going to be able to go into specific detail about numbers -- the numbers of congressmen or the particular nature of those conversations.

Q Is this typical for the President of the United States to be the complaint department for --

MR. BARTLETT: Unfortunately, it is. At the top, at the highest levels of government, when people feel like they've got the audience of the President of the United States, it is very common -- very, very common -- that people feel compelled to unearth every complaint they have. It happens at his level, it happens at my level, it happens at every level in the legislative affairs office.

And that's to be expected, actually. I mean, when you do have -- people typically don't come in to say, boy, you're doing a great job and everything's hunky-dory. When you have the President of the United States or you have other people, you want to say, hey, I've got a problem here, I want to solve it. When the President goes down to the Gulf Coast and meets with members -- local officials in New Orleans, yes, they'll talk about some progress, but, more importantly, they're bringing issues they have, complaints they have. That's the way government works. It's not inappropriate, and it would not be inappropriate for the President to then share that information with his Cabinet officers, and that's what took place here.

Q Just one more. How could the Chief of Staff of the Attorney General deal with something of this magnitude without the boss knowing about it?

MR. BARTLETT: Which boss?

Q The Attorney General.

MR. BARTLETT: Well, he said he had general understanding of what he was doing. But did he know that his Chief of Staff was not talking to somebody else in his office? That's why you have a Chief of Staff, somebody like him who had the expertise in dealing with personnel matters, working in the White House Counsel's Office, where he dealt with U.S. attorney issues. He had a lot of confidence in Kyle, for good reason, to handle these issues and know that they were being taken care of.

Unfortunately in this case, that information wasn't shared with other members of the Department of Justice. But, ultimately, as the Attorney General said himself, he is accountable, and he's going to take corrective action to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Q Some members of Congress have said they would like to subpoena Karl Rove and maybe others in the White House. Would they resist any subpoena? And what, explicitly, was Karl Rove's involvement in all of this?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, again, I think it's important that we not get ahead of ourselves. We have no subpoena requests. We've had preliminary conversations which -- particularly with the focus on Department of Justice. I'm sure there will be conversations with the White House Counsel's Office about what the White House knew, who was involved in those things. And we're going to work with them as much as possible. But I think it's way too early to start talking about subpoenas and those things.

But as I answered Peter's question, there is a long-time precedent when it comes to White House staffers, themselves, testifying in public. We did it -- there was an extraordinary case when Secretary Rice, when she was National Security Advisor, testified on the bipartisan 9/11 commission after our country was attacked. Whether this rises to the similar level, like I said, I think it's highly unlikely. But we will wait to see the specific requests we get from them. There have been no subpoenas issued, and if there's a way that we can share information with them, we will definitely explore it.

As far as to Karl Rove, as we've said and has been expressed in public on several different occasions now, that as you would expect, people who have relationships in local and state communities have complaints, they share them with various aspects of the White House apparatus, including Karl Rove. Karl Rove passes those on to the General Counsel's Office, shares them with other staff members.

Q But didn't Harriet Miers brief him early on, even before there were complaints, about removing all the attorneys?

MR. BARTLETT: Yes, and his recollection was that that was not a good idea.

Q Dan, I just want to clarify. When you told Kelly there was a distinction, that the White House involvement was to approve the list of seven U.S. attorneys, okay,

but that the White House did not shape that list in any way. When you look at the case of Iglesias in New Mexico, you've got New Mexico Senator Domenici goes personally to the President of the United States and says, I have a problem here, I want this guy out. Okay, the President then talks to the Attorney General in October. And then the Attorney General's staff forms this list. And on that list is Iglesias, he's one of the seven. So doesn't that sound like there was -- that the White House did help shape at least one of those names?

MR. BARLETT: But as I said, Ed, the reaction from the Attorney General when the President raised it is, I know about those issues. The Justice Department, themselves, were receiving very similar phone conversations, as well, and they have information. They were fully aware of those complaints. And as I stated earlier, there is multiple reasons why Mr. Iglesias was removed as a U.S. attorney.

One factor of that was the complaints we were getting from local and state officials. The fact -- the complaint was that these high-profile cases were not being pursued or not being won. I think, as I said, there was 24 out of 25 counts were thrown out -- a really embarrassing loss for the government.

It is totally appropriate for the President to pass on these comments. But the Attorney General's office was already fully aware of those, and those other factors. And I think it's important -- for important context in that regard is we were also receiving some complaints, as I said, about Wisconsin and about Pennsylvania. Yet we have not removed those U.S. attorneys. Other factors are considered before decisions are made, and I think that's an important distinction to make.

Peter.

Q Dan, what does it say about the administration, that you hire eight so ineffective prosecutors in the first place? (Laughter.)

MR. BARTLETT: These are --

Q I mean, these are your guys, right? I mean, what's the --

MR. BARTLETT: Well, they do, they serve at the pleasure -- that doesn't mean that at some point that he was doing well, but as the totality of his tenure there we felt like somebody else could do a better job. This is not about knocking him down as much it is, is saying, hey, somebody was given an opportunity to perform, we actually think somebody could do a better job. There are disappointments all the time when it comes to appointments, when it comes to people serving in various positions.

So I don't think that's a fair characterization. It's unfortunate it has to become so public. That was not the intent -- if you see the talking points that the Department of Justice was using when they gave this -- when they informed the U.S. attorneys, there was not talk about cause for removal, they didn't want to make this a big public embarrassment about the managerial decisions internally

being made in the Department of Justice, which, unfortunately left a different impression as to why there were left.

But at the end of the day, you have to -- the American people expect nothing less than for us to critically judge those who serve our country. And if they're not serving up to par, then it's incumbent upon us to make a decision to remove them.

Q How much of that (inaudible) in the Cummings case when Karl's deputy, Griffin, was installed in his place --

MR. BARTLETT: That's a very different issue. That is one in which, as I said, because a U.S. attorney serves at the broad discretion of the President. Mitch Cummings had served a four-year term; thought it was important to give a new person to serve in that capacity. This is somebody that was a very skilled lawyer, somebody who had served in the U.S. Attorney's Office before, served over in Iraq as a military attorney, had all the credentials to serve our country well.

And those decisions are made, on occasion, because each of us -- myself and others, and members of the Justice Department, members of key agencies throughout our government -- serve at the pleasure of the President. And to give a new person an opportunity to serve is in the full prerogative of the Justice Department.

Q Can I ask a question -- switching gears -- on General Pace? What message do thousands of gays in the military right now serving in Iraq -- what should they take from General Pace's message regarding mortality, when their lives are on the line --

MR. BARTLETT: I have no way to identify whether your premise is right about how many people are serving in Iraq, but all I can say is the President appreciates the sacrifice and service of every service member, and what they're doing on a daily basis to improve the situation on the ground and we can accomplish our goals there.

Steve.

Q The Democrats are in an uproar over the -- here's a statement here from John Edwards, Gonzales betrayed his public trust. Do you think they're being fair in their criticism, or piling on, or what?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, I imagine before the day is out, every presidential candidate will call for his resignation. I think they'll be looking themselves as feverishly as possible to all get out there comments. And I know there's going to be a lot of partisan rhetoric around this and there's going to be breathless commentary about what has happened here from these people who are trying to fight for a little bit of oxygen in this political atmosphere. But the bottom line is the facts speak for themselves. The reason why these U.S. attorneys were removed were for good reasons.

The issue about an incomplete picture being provided to the Congress by certain members of the Justice Department is something that needs to be corrected. The Attorney General has taken the proper action to correct that, to make sure it doesn't happen again. And I think that's what the American people would expect.

Q Can you talk about why some perceived failings by three of U.S. attorneys. What were the failings of Carol Lam in San Diego? Particularly in light of the successful prosecution of Randy "Duke" Cunningham and the ongoing prosecution of members of the Arellano Felix cartel?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, I'm not an expert on each one of these, the profiles of each one of these U.S. attorneys. I think in the Carol Lam case, there was a specific refusal to follow administration and Justice Department policy to pursue immigration cases. I'll correct the record if I'm wrong on the specifics of that. But you have to look at a lot of different factors, and if somebody is not pursuing Justice Department priorities, that is a reason and cause.

So I can't speak to those other cases because I don't know the details of them, whether they were successfully prosecuted or not. But if you have a situation where a U.S. attorney is consciously not pursuing Justice Department priorities, that has to be taken into consideration.

Q Dan, this is happening at a time when people are dropping like flies at the Pentagon, over at Walter Reed; the IG report says the FBI abused the national security letters; Scooter Libby was just convicted -- all these things are sort of happening at one time and it's just -- in your view, a reflection of where this presidency is at, at this point? Is it a reflection of the fact that it's a Democratic Congress with subpoena power that will be pursuing these matters? Just a bad streak? What's your sense of it?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, I think you're trying to connect a lot of dots that aren't connectable. They're all unique in their own circumstances of why they've happened. And the corrective action that's being taken in those various situations you've just described have been the appropriate ones.

But I don't -- I think if you look back at any presidency, issues like this come up all the time, particularly when we are such an active government that is engaged in the war and issues of national security letters and those things, in which we serve in an unprecedented time, where we're trying to prevent terrorists from attacking our homeland. These are tough, tense times. But that doesn't negate the fact that those who serve our country and serve in this administration have to live up to the highest ethical standards. And the President will insist on nothing less.

Jim. I'm going to take one more question after this.

Q Dan, in the October conversation, do you know how specific the President got with the Attorney General? Did he mention specific prosecutors' names?

MR. BARTLETT: He did not.

Q Have specific complaints that --

MR. BARTLETT: He did not mention his name.

Last question. I'm sorry?

Q Can I ask a Mexico-related question? (Laughter.)

MR. BARTLETT: I don't know what to do. (Laughter.) S .

Q Was the President surprised at the tone of President Calderon's remarks this morning? He had some fairly sharp criticism for the United States on immigration and drugs.

MR. BARTLETT: Not at all. In fact, since we have such a strong working relationship with Mexico, or Guatemala, or other Central American governments, who are very concerned about their fellow citizens who are living in the United States during this time. And it's -- the enforcement measures that the President discussed yesterday in Guatemala being taken are the appropriate ones. He thought it was important to make sure that people understand that no one specific country is being targeted in these raids, which is an important distinction to make.

But it's a very emotional debate. It's an emotional debate in our own country, and I'm sure it's a very emotional debate in this country, because the lives -- so many lives are affected, and children are affected, and moms and dads are affected. So that's why the President is so eager to get this issue resolved in a comprehensive way, not only for the fact that the concerns of people here in Mexico, but more -- just as importantly, and in many cases, more importantly, for the people of our country, that they understand that we will be a nation of laws, we will uphold the law. We'll make sure those who break the law are held accountable, at the same time that we meet the needs and demands of our growing economy, to make sure those jobs aren't being done by Americans can be filled, because it really has been the backbone of our economy in many ways, in many parts of the country.

So it's a volatile issue, it's a divisive issue in our own country, and it's not surprising that it would be in other countries, as well.

Q What about the fact that emotions are fairly high here over the sense of neglect that they feel the administration has paid to Mexico over the last several years? Are they right in feeling that we've kind of --

MR. BARTLETT: I don't think so. If we had -- many countries in which we could spend more time. The President is in high demand as the leader of the free world, the leader of the most powerful country in the free world. And it is always important when he gets to spend this personal time with leaders. But the special relationship we have with Mexico has been embodied in our -- the way we

approached it from the beginning. It was the President's first trip as President, was to Mexico. One of the President's closest friends and advisors, Tony Garza, serves as the ambassador to this country. I think that demonstrates the type of importance he puts on this relationship.

We have met with, formally, President Fox many, many times and developed many, many strong relationships. And he looks forward to developing similar relationships with President Calderon, because the issues are very important. They not only affect the Mexican people, but they affect the American people, as well.

So it's a vital relationship. It's one the President takes very seriously. And I think the reflection of this visit will demonstrate, in style and in substance, how much he takes -- he understands the importance of it.

Thank you very much.

Q Can we expect any concrete agreement for any announcements about something, after the visit?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, a lot of things are already in motion on the security issues, on issues of how we can help in the areas of education and health care in which we're working in a collaborative way. I think you will -- you'll hear the two leaders talk tomorrow about the progress we're making on that. So I'll leave it to the leaders to speak about the conclusions of this meeting.

Thank you very much.

END 2:37 P.M. (Local)