

Foster Death - WH Press Briefings

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

May 24, 1994

BY TELEFAX

Mr. Bill Guyton
Assistant to the Independent Counsel
1001 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Suite 490N
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Bill:

Enclosed is the transcript of the July 21, 1993 remarks that you requested.

Sincerely,



Joel I. Klein
Deputy Counsel to the
President

Enclosure

Foster

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

Internal Transcript

July 21, 1993

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
IN ADDRESS TO WHITE HOUSE STAFF

Room 450 Old Executive Office Building

MR. MCLARTY: Good afternoon. Thank each and every one of you for joining us this afternoon. We apologize for being a bit late. We had a briefing with the Alabama press contingency, and we are very sorry we're a few minutes late.

This afternoon, it certainly seemed the right thing to do for us to come together as a group, and a group that values and in many ways reveres the relationships we have, both personally and professionally, to express heartfelt and genuine sympathy for the loss of a colleague; heartfelt and genuine sympathy to Vince Foster's family -- his wonderful wife, Lisa and their three children, and his mother, Alice Mae Foster, who still resides at Hope -- to pay respect for a life that was a full one. One that was rich in accomplishment, but also rich in individual and personal relationships.

Those of you who knew Vince only for a short time, and those of you that had the rare pleasure, as the President and I have had for some 40 years, to know Vince Foster since childhood, you saw those same qualities, regardless of that 40-year relationship, or 40-day relationship, of wisdom, genuineness, substance, a deep commitment to family and to work, and an absolute commitment to friends.

Today is not only appropriate in terms of our coming together as a White House to express our sympathy, but also, frankly, for us to take an appropriate step in working through our feelings individually. Because it is essential that we continue to move forward in this period, in this very important period in the life of our country. We will all feel the loss and express the loss in our own personal way, as it should be.

There always is conversation and discussion about the loss of anyone whose friendship and relationship we value, and there may be particular interest in this situation. I think all of us certainly understand the appropriateness of that situation, and that no one can say with any certainty what causes the loss of a life under these circumstances, and in most cases under any circumstances. And this matter needs to be handled, as I know all of you will handle it, with the utmost appropriateness and dignity and respect for a special individual and friend.

Again, thank each of you for joining us today. It underscores what every one of us knows -- that this is a White House not only composed of very dedicated and capable people and outstanding professionals, but also thoroughly decent and caring individuals whom it's a rare privilege for each of us to have the association in that regard.

With those comments, I would like to ask Bernie Nussbaum, our White House Counsel, to come forward at this time.

MR. NUSSBAUM: Thank you, Mack. The President of the United States had the very good sense to retain a Deputy White House Counsel before he retired. He had a good

sense because the Deputy was a friend of his for 40 years and was truly a wonderful and remarkable person.

Now, when I became White House Counsel, or right before I became White House Counsel I was interviewed by the President of the United States, and it was an interesting and wonderful interview, but it really wasn't nearly as hard as the interview I had before I met with the President with the Deputy White House Counsel. Because the Deputy White House Counsel interviewed the White House Counsel even before the President interviewed the White House Counsel. I think I was pretty smooth in getting past the interview with the President, but I had a lot tougher time with the Deputy White House Counsel, who really put me through the ringer. That was the first meeting with Vince Foster in Early January, when he was interviewing me for my job as his superior, and he was marvelous.

He was tough, he was funny, he was conservative, he was cool and he was warm. And out of that interview, we became partners, and that was our agreement. I agreed to become White House Counsel and he agreed to become Deputy White House Counsel and we would be partners, just like he was used to and I was used to. He came from a law firm, I came from a law firm. And what we were going to do is, we were going to create in the White House a little law firm -- a little bit of his law firm, a little bit of my law firm, but we would be equal partners. And that's what we were on our way to doing. Despite all the bumps, we were on our way to creating a law firm of eight or nine people of which he and I were the two senior partners, which we'd have trust in each other, we'd be supportive of each other and we would work together, and we would laugh together, we would play together, and who would always keep in mind our mission, which is to protect the interest of our client, our wonderful client, the President of the United States and the other people in the White House.

And, really, we were on our way to creating a great little law firm. As I said, despite all the bumps, the last conversation I had with Vince Foster was yesterday. And the last conversation was a wonderful conversation. He walked into my office, the TV set was on. It was about 12:00 noon, 12:15 p.m., something like that, and I was watching Judge Ginsberg's opening statement. And I had just come from the Rose Garden, which he did, with Judge Freeh, who had been nominated by the President to be the head of the FBI. And I was flipping from one channel to another, watching the replays of the Freeh thing, the Ginsberg thing.

And I said to my partner, Vince, I said, "Hey, Vince, not a bad day." I said, "We hit two home runs. Not home runs for you, Vince, or for me, Vince, or even for the President; really home runs for the country. So I think we're doing our job and I think we're doing it well." And he just sort of smiled. And I said, "I'll see you later." And that's the last time I saw Vince. I didn't know Vince a long time; I only knew him for six months, but I'll never forget him and I'll always remember him. Thank you.

I want to introduce our client, the President of the United States.

THE PRESIDENT: First of all, I want to tell you how very glad I am to see all of you here today. I thought it was important that we come together for a few minutes. Forty-two years ago, when I met Mr. McLarty in kindergarten, I lived with my grandparents in a modest little house around the corner from Vince Foster's nice, big, white brick house. And our back yards touched. Yesterday, last night when I finished the Larry King Show and I was told what happened, I just kept thinking in my mind of when we were so young, sitting on the ground in the back yard, throwing knives into the air, and you were adroit enough to make them stick.

When I started my career in Arkansas politics, he was there to help me. When I decided to run for attorney general, he was the first lawyer in Little Rock I talked to about supporting me. When the Rose law firm hired Hillary after I moved to Little Rock, Vince Foster and Webb Hubbell became her closest friends. I have two things to say about that: One is, he was a perfectly wonderful man on whom I relied and on whom I put a lot for a very long time. The second thing is, for all of you who are especially younger, you will find the longer you live, the more you mark the shape of your life by the people you have truly loved who, for whatever reason, aren't around anymore.

And so, I want you to think about the following: In the first place, no one can ever know why this happened. Even if you had a whole set of objective reasons, that wouldn't be why it happened, because you could get a different, bigger, more burdensome set of objective reasons that are on someone else even in this room. So what happened was a mystery about something inside of him. And I hope all of you will always understand that.

The next thing I want to say is, this should teach us all, again, a little humility. We come here and labor and work like crazy as if the idea of progress were a given, if only we worked hard enough, pushed enough rocks up a hill and, yet, every time you'd look around, there is some reminder that we are not really fully in control of our own destiny, even though we are morally obliged to try to be. That is the lesson of the floods in the Midwest, and that is the lesson of what happened to Vince yesterday. And it should give you pause when you catch yourself neglecting your own life and your own family and our own children and your own parents and your own friends, because if you just stayed here 30 minutes more, something wonderful might happen.

And I think we should think about that and take more care of ourselves and our loved ones and, frankly, maybe be a little more alive to the potential depression and frustration of the people with whom we work.

And the last thing I want to say is that Vince Foster spent a lifetime knowing when not to put himself first. And maybe he did that too much. But he had an extraordinary sense of propriety and loyalty, and I hope that when we remember him and this, we'll be a little more anxious to talk to each other and a little less anxious to talk outside of our family. We'll be a little more concerned about how we can help one another look good and achieve one another's goals, rather than how we might pursue our own objectives at the expense of someone else here. Those are the kinds of things that he would never have done.

Those of us who knew him a long time, we're having a real hard time dealing with this. Because everybody who had known him any length of time could remember sometime when we were weak and he was strong, and, virtually, never an occasion where he was weak and we were strong. And so, think about that. We ought to leave here with humility, with more care for ourselves and our fellow workers, and a greater sense of loyalty as well as restraint of what we're involved in.

And the last thing I want to say is that all of us who loved him also did a little bit of laughing last night. Just as it is wrong to try to explain or understand something that cannot be grasped, it is very wrong to define a life like his in terms only of how it ended. And anybody in this room could be proud to have raised the children, done the work, seen the friend that he was. God bless you.

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New CMS file
Vince Foster
Suicide.
press briefing

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

July 21, 1993

PRESS BRIEFING

BY

CHIEF OF STAFF MACK MCLARTY
AND COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR MARK GEARAN

The Briefing Room

3:38 P.M. EDT

MR. MCLARTY: Good afternoon. As I'm sure you can appreciate, this is one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. Like the President and myself, Vince Foster was from Hope, Arkansas, and for more than 40 years he was my friend. And because of that friendship and because of Vince's considerable accomplishments, I took understandable pride when the President asked him to join us here in Washington as Deputy White House Counsel.

For six months, he served his country with distinction in that capacity and, to be sure, the White House has lost a talented and dedicated attorney.

Many of you may not know that Vince graduated first in his law school class and scored the highest grade on the Arkansas bar exam the year he took it, and was made partner in a major law firm in just two years. He chaired the Arkansas Advisory Council to the Legal Services Corporation, and he just recently received the Arkansas Bar Foundation Award and the Arkansas Bar Association's 1993 Outstanding Lawyer Award.

But I'm here today really to talk more as Vince's friend than his White House Chief of Staff. When we received the tragic news last night the President and I joined his family and his friends at the Foster home. And as the President related to the White House staff earlier today, we all shared some warm and some wonderful memories, as well as shed some very real tears.

All of us who have the privilege and honor of calling the White House our place of employment, on either side of this podium, are used to, in large measure, dealing with issues and problems that are tangible, that are knowable, at least in large part, and most times subject to reason. And that is one aspect that makes this tragedy so difficult to deal with. For try as we might, all of our reason, all of our rationality, all of our logic can never answer the questions raised by such a death.

We really can never fully know a person's private pain and what might lead them in their thought process, even a person we have known all of our lives. But what we can do is offer our prayers and comfort to Lisa, Vince's wife of 25 years; their wonderful children; his mother Alice Mae, whom I spoke with this morning in Hope; and to his sisters, Sheila Anthony here in Washington and Sharon Bowman of Little Rock.

As a measure of our affection for them, there has been established a Vincent W. Foster Scholarship Fund with the Arkansas Bar Foundation. Funeral services will be held in Little Rock this Friday. The President and First Lady, as well as Donna and I will, of course, attend. Donna is at the Foster residence this afternoon, and I plan to join her and the Foster family later today.

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It is one of life's ironies that just yesterday, when speaking of what John F. Kennedy had meant to him, the President said -- and I quote -- "The only way to ever honor any memory of someone gone is to do something today which reinforces the validity of that memory in our hearts." And so we will reinforce the validity of our friend's life, even as we mourn the circumstances of his death.

The work which he was devoted here at the White House will go on, and Vince Foster's spirit will live on in the hearts of those of us who loved him.

Thank you very much. I would now like to ask Mark Gearan to respond to any questions that you may have. Thank you.

Q Mack, did you know of any personal reason why he might have done this?

MR. GEARAN: Thank you. Let me provide you some background information, if I might, and walk through some things and then we'd be happy to take some questions.

In terms of the chronology for the White House notification, the Park Service police made the initial contact to the White House security and administrative officers about the report of a body being found. The Secret Service and the Park Service respectively notified the administrative and security officers of the White House. That set into motion calls to the Chief of Staff. We were here for the Larry King Live show in the Residence.

Soon after the show began, we were pulled from the staff room where the Chief of Staff Mack McLarty was informed of this -- that it was an unconfirmed report. In the intervening 50 or so minutes, efforts were made to both confirm the report and to make preliminary calls to individuals that needed to be contacted. Mack McLarty was with us in the Residence and coordinated the activity.

Just about five minutes before 10:00 p.m., before the Larry King Show concluded, we had the confirmation that indeed Vince had been confirmed as deceased. And the President concluded the show, went up to the Residence with Mack, at which point Mack informed the President of Vince's death. Following the indication -- following that report, then the President visited the Foster family with Mack and with several of their friends from here in Washington, senior staff members and folks from Little Rock that went to be near the Foster family at that time.

Secondly, let me tell you a bit about Vince's day-to-day responsibilities here at the White House. He's the Deputy Counsel to Bernie Nussbaum, and as such, assisted Bernie in managing all of the day-to-day activities in the White House Counsel's Office. In a staff meeting that the President had at noon today in the Old Executive Building, Bernie spoke very movingly of what they tried to do in the White House Counsel's Office, and that is to establish a law firm. They view their work as partners, senior partners in the firm in putting together the law firm there. He advised the President in the selection of judicial nominees, was a key advisor to the Health Care Task Force, and provided day-to-day management assistance to Bernie overall in the Counsel's Office.

Yesterday, Vince attended Judge Freeh's announcement ceremony, returned to his office and did some work in his office. Around noon, he stopped by and visited with Bernie in Bernie's office, which is adjacent to his, ate lunch at his desk. And soon thereafter --

Q Had lunch at Bernie's desk?

MR. GEARAN: Ate lunch at his own desk. Soon thereafter, left the office and said he would be back. Mack has gone through some of Vince's bio that I think we've provided to you as well, so we'll let it stand at that.

Let me say a bit about the investigation, where we're at at this point. At the request of the White House Counsel's Office, the investigation will be coordinated by the Department of Justice and the Office of the Attorney General and her deputy, Phil Heymann. And that's where we would refer you to any questions. We'll be providing scheduling information and details of the funeral services set for 11:00 a.m. on Friday at St. Andrews Catholic Cathedral in Little Rock. And burial will be later in Hope, Arkansas.

I'd be happy to take any questions.

Q Is there any doubt -- I mean, the Justice Department investigation -- is there any doubt as to the apparent suicide?

MR. GEARAN: I'm sorry. As to the --

Q You say an investigation is underway.

MR. GEARAN: No, it's standard operating procedure, I think, that following a death of this nature that there is an investigation, and that's being coordinated by the Attorney General.

Q Do you know anything about the weapon that was used? To whom it was registered or any of those details?

MR. GEARAN: I don't, but I think it's general procedure that there's research on that by the appropriate agency. And again, Justice can provide you the status of that to determine --

Q Did the Secret Service have a role in the investigation?

MR. GEARAN: It's being coordinated by the Department of Justice. The Park Police, because that was the -- was where Vince's body was found was -- is also involved in the --

Q Was it unusual for him to be out of the office all afternoon? What was going on yesterday that -- did he say anything to anyone before he left the White House?

MR. GEARAN: He did not. He said he would be back. A different points during the day Bernie said, is he back yet? But it was not atypical. They did have meetings or availability, but certainly there was --

Q There was no concern about his welfare?

MR. GEARAN: No.

Q Mark, had he ever given anyone any indication that he needed help or was in a difficult psychological condition?

MR. GEARAN: No. He never said anything to indicate that anything was out of the ordinary to his colleagues.

Q How did he go when he left? Did he have his personal car? Was it a White House car?

MR. GEARAN: His personal car.

Q And no one tried to page him or no attempt to reach him?

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MR. GEARAN: No.

Q What time did he leave?

MR. GEARAN: Soon after 1:00 p.m. or soon thereafter.

Q Was there any indication of the time of -- we know when you guys were contacted, but the time of death or the time that his body was found?

MR. GEARAN: The Park Service can provide that information. I think that we can --

Q Did he go home at all before --

MR. GEARAN: We don't believe so.

Q Do you have the information, Mark?

MR. GEARAN: I'm sorry?

Q Do you have anything that answers Ruth's question?

MR. GEARAN: About the time that his body was found?

Q Yes.

MR. GEARAN: -- 6:00 p.m. I think is what the Park Service report --

Q You don't know -- that period of five hours -- 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. --

MR. GEARAN: We do not.

Q No one knows where he was in those five hours?

MR. GEARAN: That's correct.

Q Mark, was he under any treatment that was -- was he seeing any kind of doctors? Was he under any kind of medication that you're aware of?

MR. GEARAN: Not that we're aware of, no.

Q Did the Park Service investigators -- I'm sorry, Terry.

Q I was just going to say -- he wasn't seeing a psychiatrist or getting any kind of counseling as far as you know?

MR. GEARAN: Not that we're aware of.

Q Did the Park Service investigators tell anybody on the White House staff what they thought the time of death might have been?

MR. GEARAN: Not that I'm aware of. The exact time of death?

Q Well, or approximate time of death. You say the body was discovered approximately 6:00 p.m. How long had he been dead?

MR. GEARAN: I don't know the answer to that. We can refer you to the Justice Department for that.

Q The Justice Department has a policy of not ever commenting on pending investigations, so in essence, Mark, by referring us to the Justice Department we're not going to get any answers.

MR. GEARAN: Well, I think if the question is what -- the question is at what time was the death recorded?

Q No, when do they think death took place. They can estimate these things and they normally do.

MR. GEARAN: I don't know the answer to that.

Q Was there a note?

MR. GEARAN: There was not.

Q Are you sure there was no note, computer note --

MR. GEARAN: Not that we're aware of.

Q Do you know of any personal problem that could have driven him to this?

MR. GEARAN: No. As I said, he never said anything to his colleagues here in the White House or his friends here in Washington that would indicate that anything was out of the ordinary.

Q And when things were going wrong at the White House in terms of appointments and the travel office, this did not upset him? I mean, he didn't have any undue stress?

MR. GEARAN: No. I think I've kind of summarized as best, Helen, in terms of talking to other colleagues or friends, and obviously, we spent the preceding -- whatever it is -- 12 hours all visiting with each other on this topic to search our own minds, and there's nothing to indicate that.

Q People have said, though, that there was a change in his demeanor and attitude over the last week or so. Are you aware of that either personally or by report from Bernie or others?

MR. GEARAN: I think people have observed in the White House there are good days and bad days here in the White House. I don't think anyone had an indication that it was out of the ordinary.

Q Had he been, in fact, depressed, down in the dumps in the last few days or weeks?

MR. GEARAN: Some people might have observed it, but again, nothing to indicate anything out of the ordinary, obviously.

Q Had he left the White House for afternoons before? Have you any evidence that he'd taken such long departures?

MR. GEARAN: I'm not aware of it, but I would not be, frankly.

Q Are you providing any counseling to any members of his staff about his death? And is there any attempt to counsel people on perhaps the pressures of the job and --

MR. GEARAN: Not at this point, although the President and Mack McLarty, the Chief of Staff, convened a staff meeting today that Bernie spoke at and that Mack spoke at, and the President spoke at. And I think it was a good session for us all certainly to be together and an opportunity to share some thoughts.

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Q The whole staff, Mark?

MR. GEARAN: The entire White House staff was invited.

Q Mark, what time --

Q In 450?

MR. GEARAN: In Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building.

Q Mark, what time did you say again that the White House was first notified -- 9:15 p.m.?

MR. GEARAN: Nine fifteen p.m., soon after 9:00 p.m. --

Q Well, what accounts --

MR. GEARAN: -- is when we Mack was notified, because we were at the Residence.

Q What accounts for the lapse in time then between 6:00 p.m. and 9:15 p.m. before you or the White House was notified, and who made the positive identification?

MR. GEARAN: The White House, our security administrative officers were notified at 8:30 p.m. or so and 9:00 p.m. respectively.

Q That's still two and a half hours, presumably. Did he have his identification on him?

MR. GEARAN: It was --

Q It seems like -- I don't know, it just seems like an inordinate amount of time, two and a half hours --

MR. GEARAN: I don't know if that's inordinate or not.

Q Okay, but did he have identification on him, do you know?

MR. GEARAN: Yes, he did.

Q Okay -- no --

MR. GEARAN: I do not know. And I don't know if that's inordinate.

Q Who made the positive identification?

MR. GEARAN: Craig Livingstone went to the Fairfax Hospital, accompanied by Bill Kennedy.

Q Who is Craig Livingstone?

MR. GEARAN: He's our security officer.

Q And when you say the administrative and security officers were --

MR. GEARAN: Craig is the security officer, and David Watkins is the administrative officer -- the official point of contacts on all matters of this.

Q The President has spoken of this as a suicide, and so did Mack. What is the evidence that it was a suicide?

MR. GEARAN: The Park Service report indicated that.

Q Is there any doubt at all?

MR. GEARAN: That's what the Park Service report concluded. We have no reason to dispute it.

Q Did his wife know he owned a gun, or did this come as a complete surprise to her that he even had a gun in his possession, or that he might have secured it only yesterday?

MR. GEARAN: I don't know. I don't know his gun ownership or the nature of this gun. This is, again, part of the standing procedure, and an investigation of this type is that they do look at the number and determine the ownership of it.

Q When he didn't return to the White House in the afternoon, did his secretary or anyone in his office become alarmed, or try to contact the family?

MR. GEARAN: From visiting with Bernie, he did say from time to time and then by the end of the day, they thought he might have then returned home. It was not necessarily atypical.

Q What do you mean by that? Can you explain that?

Q What do you mean it was not atypical?

Q A minute ago you said you didn't know if he had done this before.

MR. GEARAN: That's their observation. I do not know from personal --

Q What had he gone in to talk to Bernie about? You said he visited with him.

MR. GEARAN: They were watching -- he came in to talk about Judge Freeh's announcement and the opening proceeding of the Ginsburg hearings.

Q Mark, Bernie said --

Q Nothing out of the ordinary?

MR. GEARAN: No.

Q Bernie said this was not atypical for him not to have returned by the end of the day?

MR. GEARAN: It was not viewed as any way unusual in that sense. They weren't sure of his exact schedule.

Q In what sense, Mark?

Q Had this happened before then?

MR. GEARAN: I don't know the answer to that.

Q Can you check that for us?

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q Mark, what was his -- how did Bernie describe his demeanor at that lunch before he left?

MR. GEARAN: He had -- Vince had lunch by himself at his desk. He went into --

Q But Bernie was the last one to meet with him at the White House?

MR. GEARAN: Yes. Dee Dee has got the statement we're releasing that from the staff meeting when Mack and Bernie and the President spoke. He did speak about that visit that we can provide you some of the excerpts from.

Q Mark, it's not unusual in a case that seems so unexplainable as this for the person's friends to take on some sense of the guilt that, gee, maybe I did something or maybe I should have -- does President Clinton feel any sense that the pressure or the work load or being part of this administration contributed to his decision?

MR. GEARAN: Well, I think we're all saddened beyond words at Vince's death. Obviously, he was enormously well-respected here. We all feel like we lost a very valued colleague. It's also the case that when we met today we talked -- the President spoke as he had before of the need to balance all of our lives and this provides --

Q The President said that work isn't everything, that you have to pay more attention to friends and family. Does President Clinton feel that he has, perhaps in some way, neglected friends and family?

MR. GEARAN: No, I think we're just speaking to, as he has since we got here, that at moments like this you're reminded of the importance of friends and family.

Q How and by whom was Mrs. Clinton notified? And can you characterize her reaction?

MR. GEARAN: She was -- Mack McLarty, the Chief of Staff, called her from the Residence at 9:40 p.m. -- somewhere -- 9:45 p.m. --

Q Told her before he told the President?

MR. GEARAN: The President was on Larry King Show -- that there was this report. She was in Little Rock.

Q And was this report the reason for the last half hour of the program being cut off?

MR. GEARAN: The original agreement with the show was that it would be an hour, and then it was extended midway during it. But, obviously, as events and our knowledge of the circumstance became more clear, then we agreed to terminate --

Q This was the reason? The stated reason was that there was an appointment. That's the way -- but the appointment was a cover --

MR. GEARAN: The President did not know until he left the set.

Q The appointment was a cover for this event.

MR. GEARAN: The President did not know until he left the set.

Q Was Foster related in any way to the President or anybody else on the staff here?

MR. GEARAN: I'm not aware of any familial relation. They grew up in Hope, Arkansas, and their backyards joined each other

growing up. The President's grandparents that he lived with growing up and in the foster home --

Q Was he related distantly, if at all, to anyone else on the White House staff?

MR. GEARAN: On the White House staff? I'm not aware of it. His sister, Sheila Foster Anthony, serves in the Justice Department.

Q Mark, I have two questions. One, can you tell us who else besides Mack and the President sat in on that conversation among friends last night at the Foster home?

MR. GEARAN: Webb Hubbell, the Fosters --

Q Including Sheila?

MR. GEARAN: I believe so.

Q Anybody else? Was Lindsey there?

MR. GEARAN: Bruce was not -- David Watkins was there.

Q David Watkins and Pat --

MR. GEARAN: I don't believe so.

Q David called Chief Langston and Major Hines here today, I understand, from the Park Service to brief on this investigation so far. Who did they brief and what did they tell you, please?

MR. GEARAN: Well, the agreement today was, as I said, at the request of the Counsel. The Justice Department is going to coordinate the investigation.

Q And you were told that? Is that what they were brought here to be told?

MR. GEARAN: They discussed that and the Chief agreed to that. Thought that was a good idea.

Q Did they brief you on anything they had gotten? Did they bring you up to speed? Who did they talk to?

MR. GEARAN: No, no, they did not brief me.

Q Mark, just a -- let me follow Ruth's question. Is there anyone of all the people who you've talked to in your discussions, either Bernie or others, who really were in a position to see him over a period of time and measure, who felt or believed there had been a change in his behavior -- a discernible and obvious change in his behavior in the last week or two?

MR. GEARAN: I can only repeat what I've said in that there was nothing people felt that he said anything in the extraordinary, that was out of the ordinary to his colleagues or to his friends. Something we've all thought about.

Q How long did the President stay at the Fosters last night?

MR. GEARAN: He stayed 45 minutes.

Q Mark, back on the investigation. What is the specific goal of this investigation that you're undertaking?

MR. GEARAN: This is a standard operating procedure.

Q It can't be standard for the Deputy Attorney General to investigate a suicide.

Q Mark, can I follow that, please?

MR. GEARAN: No, to coordinate it with the Park Service and the Secret Service.

Q What do you want to find out?

Q -- the factors that might have contributed to this?

MR. GEARAN: I'm sorry.

Q Are you looking for collateral factors that might have contributed to this, whether it be financial problems or blackmail or something that's unseen at this point?

MR. GEARAN: No, we're looking just to ensure that the standard procedure is followed in the sense of the Counsel's Office here because some of it may require the broadened focus of the Justice Department only in the sense of the Counsel's Office.

Let me just -- I don't want to confuse anyone here. The Department of Justice has been asked by the Counsel's Office, Bernie, to coordinate this from the Park Service to any of the other procedural investigatory authorities on behalf of the White House. That's all that's --

Q Mark, I'm sorry, isn't the nature of this -- in the case of this kind, if I'm not mistaken, at its first impression for the authorities, an investigation to see if, indeed, it was a suicide, and, if not, if it were some other kind of crime? That being the case, I wonder is it standard procedure for the White House, despite the fact that the victim worked here, to be involved in directing how the investigation is coordinated or having the federal authorities do that? Is that standard procedure to your knowledge?

MR. GEARAN: I can provide additional details on the specific legalities as to why that was suggested. I think the instance of both from the scene of Vince's death, it's the Park Service, to any -- another part of the investigation would be any information that would provide background that would also involve his place of work or whatever.

Q You're talking about the White House as supervising cooperation with the investigation, or are you talking about the White House actually having the Justice Department supervise the investigation and run it itself?

MR. GEARAN: What we -- and I will be more precise when -- I didn't come in here prepared fully on this, and we want to make it very clear. My understanding is that the Department of Justice has been asked to coordinate this because of the various investigating authorities. Let me come back to you on it completely so as not to confuse anyone.

Q Who made the request?

MR. GEARAN: The Counsel's Office.

Q Are you going to get back to us on that --

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q So you're going to take a question, in effect, and get back to us?

MR. GEARAN: Absolutely.

Q Are you going to try and get back before our deadlines this evening?

MR. GEARAN: Yes, we don't want to have any confusion on this.

Q Mark, will you explain to us also what this is that they're investigating if the Park Police is convinced it's a suicide?

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q Is there any doubt as to whether it's a suicide?

MR. GEARAN: No, as I said, there's no reason to doubt that.

Q -- tell both agencies or --

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q Mark, did the President personally request that the Justice Department --

MR. GEARAN: No, the White House Counsel's Office.

Q Can you say what the wife felt? Was there any indication -- did she get any kind of an insight? You weren't there last night in the house, but has there been any word from her, any expression that she might have known he was not feeling --

MR. GEARAN: Not that I'm aware of, no.

Q Do you have any word on a medical exam?

MR. GEARAN: I do not know that.

Q The autopsy has been concluded, has it not?

MR. GEARAN: It was to be conducted today.

Q Are White House employees routinely asked whether they own firearms upon being employed?

MR. GEARAN: I don't recall.

Q What was the question?

MR. GEARAN: Whether White House employees are asked whether they own firearms. I don't recall from the questionnaires that we were provided. I do not know.

Q Did he park on campus here? Did he park his car routinely on campus here on the White House grounds?

MR. GEARAN: I believe so, yes.

Q What's your understanding of how Mr. Foster reacted to The Wall Street Journal editorials about him?

MR. GEARAN: I think people, again, just to state the broader point here because I know where a lot of the concerns are here from folks, is that, generally, in conversations with colleagues that Vince had and as we've all been following up on, no one ever

felt there was anything extraordinary. In the White House there's good days and days of more stress than others. No one ever felt that he was unduly burdened by it.

Q He seemed to take it in stride, is that what you're saying?

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q Mark, how about this travel office report? That concluded that the White House Counsel, among others, could have done more to avert the damage that was caused. Do you have any indication that Vince took that to heart and that had a particular impact on his state of mind over the last couple of weeks?

MR. GEARAN: No, we don't. As you know, Mack and Leon have spoken from this podium about the travel office, and, as you know, there was no instance of conduct that was noted there to necessitate any reprimand of Vince.

Q Mark, do you have anything more on the travel? Is he going to stay overnight?

MR. GEARAN: We don't.

Q Mark, you've left the impression with a comment earlier about his unexplained absence during the afternoon was not atypical -- it left the impression it kind of was not unusual for him to kind of go AWOL in the afternoon.

MR. GEARAN: I don't want to leave that impression.

Q Can you go back to the atypical line and say what you meant?

MR. GEARAN: Yes, thank you. I think what I was trying to suggest is that while he was out of the office, whether this was at a meeting or whatever, people did not feel, based on any comments that he might have given anyone or any behavior that would necessitate further inquiries, that other than the fact that his schedule was not known that he might have left earlier in the afternoon for home after an appointment. It was within that kind of context that there was --

Q Mark, can you give us a rundown on what the President's day and night was like after he left the Foster home last night?

MR. GEARAN: He came back to the Residence.

Q We were told that he didn't get much sleep.

MR. GEARAN: He visited in the Residence with Mack for some time. And this morning he conducted his meeting with the Congressional Black Caucus and then had the staff meeting. The public schedule today out in Maryland was conducted by the Vice President. He's been in the office. This evening's schedule I don't know.

Q Can you go back on Mrs. Clinton's contact with Foster's family and tell us a little bit about her friendship with --

MR. GEARAN: She was Vince's partner at the Rose Law Firm and was friendly with Vince and his wife and their family, as was President Clinton and many of the folks around the White House.

Q Did she call her last night? Did she have any contact with the people who were at the --

MR. GEARAN: I need to confirm that for you, the timing of the call.

Q Was anyone else on the White House staff or in the President's family or inner circle -- did anyone hear from him yesterday other than the context you've mentioned before this happened?

MR. GEARAN: Not that we're aware of.

Q Or in the 24 or 48 hours before?

MR. GEARAN: Wait a minute, Brit. One more time.

Q I gather that yesterday, apart from the contacts in the office, no one is aware of any discussions he may have had that would shed any light on how he felt or what might have led to this.

MR. GEARAN: No.

Q In the two days -- did anyone else in the White House hear from him yesterday who did not work in the immediate office that might have given some sense on this?

MR. GEARAN: People saw him at the Judge Freeh ceremony.

Q He seemed fine.

MR. GEARAN: He was doing legal work after that at his desk and with a colleague.

Q His secretary had no sense of anything wrong?

Q How involved in the review process for Dr. Elders was Mr. Foster? Was he very involved in the review of her nomination and the questions about Social Security taxes from last weekend?

MR. GEARAN: I don't believe so. I don't believe so. I can clarify that for you, but I do not believe that was part of this.

Q Mark, what did the --

Q He didn't go home during the afternoon, did he?

MR. GEARAN: Not that we're aware of, no.

Q And did the authorities call his family, or did the White House contact Mrs. Foster?

MR. GEARAN: The authorities went to the Foster residence.

Q Has his office been searched at all for clues? And is it now being sealed as part of the investigation?

MR. GEARAN: It's secured, yes. It's secured.

Q And was it searched for notes or clues or anything?

MR. GEARAN: There was nothing remaining, no.

Q What are the ages of the children?

MR. GEARAN: We can provide the exact ages. Two are in college and one is about to enter his senior year.

Q Of college?

MR. GEARAN: I'm sorry -- in high school.

Q I'm sorry. You said there was nothing remaining in his office?

MR. GEARAN: The question was a note, I believe, wasn't it?

Q Was it searched for a note.

MR. GEARAN: Is the question --

Q For any clues or nothing remained?

Q Why has it been sealed?

MR. GEARAN: That's part of the standard procedure as --

Q Was there any indication, Mark, that he had tried to put his affairs in order in some way --

MR. GEARAN: Not that I'm aware of.

Q -- like tidy up legal matters?

MR. GEARAN: Not that I'm aware of, but I don't know the answer.

Q And the police informed Mrs. Foster?

MR. GEARAN: Yes, yes.

Q They came to the house?

MR. GEARAN: They go to the house.

Q Do you know did they --

MR. GEARAN: The question was did the police inform Mrs. Foster.

Q Did they inform Mrs. Foster before they informed the White House? That might account for the lapse in time. Do you know what time they informed her?

MR. GEARAN: They informed -- they went to the house right before 10:00 p.m., I think. They wait for confirmation -- somebody to identify the body.

Q What particular official made the ruling that the death was by suicide, and what particular official was conducting the autopsy?

MR. GEARAN: The Fairfax County Coroner's Office in the instance of the latter question, and the Park Service police report indicated that.

Q What kind of hours has he been working and when is the last time he had a vacation?

MR. GEARAN: Vince was very hard-working. I don't know his exact hours. I think --

Q Is it 18 hours, is it 14 hours, is it seven days a week?

MR. GEARAN: It's at least 12 hours, I would suspect, or more.

Q When was the last time he had a vacation?

Q Do you have any details on how he was found, who found him?

MR. GEARAN: I don't know the answer to that.

Q Do you have any details about how he was found or who found him?

MR. GEARAN: No, I don't.

Q What is the President's schedule? Do you have any details over the weekend?

MR. GEARAN: No, we'll have to provide that for you.

Q Will he go to the burial?

MR. GEARAN: He's going at least to the funeral at this point.

Q Mark, can you tell if that's the only business relationship that Vince and Hillary had was in the law partnership? Do you know if they had any other business relationship?

MR. GEARAN: I'm not aware of any other business relationship, no.

Q Mark, did the President phone the First Lady last night?

MR. GEARAN: Yes, he did.

Q Do you know how long they spoke?

MR. GEARAN: I don't know that. Mack was -- it was from the Residence and Mack was there.

Q Can I ask you a question on another issue?

MR. GEARAN: I want to get back to you on this Justice thing --

Q Mark, has she returned to Washington?

MR. GEARAN: No, she's in Little Rock.

Q Will you release the Park Service police report? Is that a public document you can release?

MR. GEARAN: I can check. I think they have released it, yes.

Q What was Foster like to deal with in the office on a day-to-day basis?

MR. GEARAN: Vince Foster was a delightful guy. He was solid. He was someone that you'd want as your lawyer. He was earnest and exhibited a tremendous sense of honesty and integrity, and also enjoyed the good humor and respect of -- people who worked with him liked working with him and for him.

Q You're giving an impression that he didn't wear his emotions on his sleeve. Is that accurate?

MR. GEARAN: I think we'll leave it as where I left it.
I think it's --

Q Mark, was he driving home? Was this the route to his home?

MR. GEARAN: He lives in Georgetown or Northwest.

Q Mark, can I ask you a question on another subject? The Congressional Black Caucus said today that the President indicated he was considering adding a black and a woman to his inner circle. Where do things stand on that? Is that an accurate portrayal of where things are?

MR. GEARAN: I wasn't at the Black Caucus meeting, so I'm not prepared to take the question.

Let me leave it there because I don't want to leave any misunderstanding on the status of the coordinated effort with Justice.

Q When did Mrs. Foster last see her husband? Did she have any indication? Did you say yesterday morning before he left for work?

MR. GEARAN: I can't confirm that. I don't know the answer to that.

Q Thank you, Mark.

END

4:15 P.M. EDT

Cliff Sloan
Room 128 OEOB

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

Immediate Release

July 22, 1993

PRESS BRIEFING
BY DEE DEE MYERS

The Briefing Room

1:32 P.M. EDT

MS. MYERS: I have a brief statement. President Clinton held a cordial and constructive meeting this morning with President Jean Bertrand Aristide of Haiti. The meeting lasted about 30 minutes. This was their first meeting since the signing of the so-called Governor's Island Accord on July 3rd, although they spoke by phone on July 4th.

The President commended President Aristide on his signing of the agreement, which establishes a sound timetable for the restoration of democracy and for President Aristide to return to Haiti on October 30th, just 100 days from now.

The President described the agreement as an historic step forward for democracy, economic prosperity and freedom for all Haiti. He reaffirmed that the United States will continue to play a leadership with the international community and help fostering a better life for the Haitian people.

The President and President Aristide discussed the steps that need to be taken to fulfill the terms of the agreement, including naming a new prime minister by President Aristide in consultation with members of the Haitian parliament.

Q How do you distinguish a sound timetable from an unsound one? What does that mean?

MS. MYERS: One that is specific and will be implemented.

Q Realistic, you mean?

MS. MYERS: Realistic, solid.

Q And he agreed to all this?

MS. MYERS: Yes -- as he did when he signed the Governor's Island Accord on July 3rd.

Q Can you tell us if a search has been conducted in Vince's office and if anything was found, and whether the President got some rest last night? How is he feeling today?

MS. MYERS: I'll take the second part of that first. He seems to be feeling fine. I think, of course, these things take a while. However, he started his schedule early this morning and will conduct it in full. And I think he's going about business sort of professionally as possible. I think he's doing fine.

As for the second part, the Park Service Police were in this morning. They've interviewed a number of staff members about Vince's last day, and will be sort of, I think, finishing up with

their look at it today here in terms of Vince's office. They're simply trying to confirm their preliminary notion that it was, in fact, a suicide.

Q Did they find any, or take any paper with them or find any note?

MS. MYERS: I don't know. When I last checked they weren't done.

Q Has a note been found to the best of your knowledge?

MS. MYERS: To the best of my knowledge no note has been found. That's sort of what they're looking for just to determine -- just to confirm their observation that this was, in fact, a suicide.

Q Is the President getting any routine briefing on this from them? One would think that he would be, you know, wanting to monitor this very closely in terms of whether there was anything here that happened that could have in any way contributed.

MS. MYERS: Well, just to be clear, what they're really looking for is just anything that would confirm that it was a suicide, such as a note. I think the President is certainly being kept abreast of what's happening, although there hasn't been a whole lot of movement today. The Park Service has talked to a number of people, but simply to determine his schedule on Tuesday.

Q Any new developments today? And can you give his itinerary for tomorrow?

MS. MYERS: No, new developments today. His schedule is as released. And I actually do have the details of tomorrow's schedule. He'll leave here at 8:15 a.m. It's a family pool. At 11:00 a.m. he'll attend the funeral service at St. Andrew's Catholic Cathedral. Then he'll go to Hope for the burial; I believe a reception at the Foster's house. And this is all fairly open-ended. I think they'll do these things when they get there. He will return to Washington tomorrow night and proceed with his Saturday schedule as previously announced.

Q Tomorrow night?

MS. MYERS: Yes. Spend the night in Washington. So, Saturday morning, he'll do the radio address live at 10:06 a.m. and then have the reception with Boy's Nation in the Rose Garden after that. I think it's after.

Q Does he feel that there's any progress being made at all on the budget. Can you tell us of his meetings this morning?

MS. MYERS: Yes. I think that the general attitude is that I think people are fairly optimistic. They think that the members of Congress are fairly upbeat about this; that there's a real willingness to get it done and that progress is being made.

Q Is it a five or six cent a gallon --

MS. MYERS: They haven't -- obviously, the conferees are working out the specific details of the energy tax, but I think that there's -- by all accounts, there's a real willingness and a desire to get this done, to move forward, to make progress. And I think members are pretty upbeat.

Q But you never answered the question.

MS. MYERS: As far as I know, it's not resolved.

Q No, I mean, do you know what he wants, what he'll go for?

MS. MYERS: He's made it clear what his priorities are. The conferees will have to work out the specific details about how many cents.

Q Just a couple more questions on the Vince Foster thing. Have they gotten an ID on the gun ownership yet? And you spoke about the President's mood. Could you give us a feeling for the mood in the White House in general?

MS. MYERS: As far as I know, ATF has not communicated to us if they've made a positive ID on who owned the gun. According to their folks, it is a little more difficult since it was an old weapon and didn't have a serial number.

The mood in the White House -- I think people have gotten back to business today. I think there's always a lingering sadness when you lose a friend, particularly in such a tragic way. But I think people are pretty much back to business and focused on the tasks at hand. I think it will take a while for people to fully get over the circumstances of Vince Foster's death, but we're doing pretty well.

Q How many members of the staff will be going out to Little Rock?

MS. MYERS: I don't know. I haven't seen the manifest. I think there will be a fair number who will travel down there. As you know, a number of people here have known Vince for a long time and will certainly go to pay their last respects.

Q Two questions. Can you tell us who the Park Police interviewed and was the President among those that were interviewed?

MS. MYERS: No, the President was not among those. I don't have a list, but it was primarily people -- or perhaps completely people on the staff on the Counsel's Office staff, people who had contact with him on Tuesday.

Q The other question is, the President yesterday in the Rose Garden said he was urging his staff to perhaps slow down and pay more attention to family and friends. He made that comment yesterday. Are people following up on that? Is there any recognition of a need to concerning recognition of a need to -- not to work so hard, not to put in long hours?

MS. MYERS: I think the President has always urged balance between -- in work, and particularly here in Washington. I think people will certainly take it to heart. I don't know what people's specific plans are for the weekend, but I think something like this always gives you a little pause, and I think it's good if people spend -- you know, take a little time just to make sure that they think this through. But I don't know if it's made any specific change in people's plans.

Q Dee Dee, back on the Vince Foster story. Lawyers for the seven employees fired in the Travel Office suggested to the FBI and to the public integrity section of the Justice Department that the investigation be expanded to include officials who were involved in the dismissal of those seven employees. Had Vince Foster, anybody in the White House Counsel's Office, or anybody else in the White House staff received a call from the Justice Department

public integrity section or the FBI asking for cooperation in an expanded inquiry?

MS. MYERS: Not that I know of. I'll take it, but --

Q Would you know?

MS. MYERS: I think so, but I'd be happy to take it.

Q Are you sure you're confident you can answer it if you do take it?

MS. MYERS: No. I just --

Q What I'm saying is are you willing to go to Justice and ask any contact or -- is that what you're prepared to do?

MS. MYERS: What I think I can do is find out the status of the Justice Department's review, which I think is complete. If there were another inquiry, I'm not sure that I -- that's a good question; I don't know if I would be in a position to know, given my relationship with previous investigations, I think.

Q Complete on the travel -- you mean, the FBI investigation is over?

MS. MYERS: No, no. Justice Department --

Q Oh, of the death.

MS. MYERS: I just don't know.

Q We asked Janet Reno that yesterday.

MS. MYERS: And what did she say?

Q It's not complete. Today it's gotten complete?

MS. MYERS: Well, it was in its final phases a few days ago, I was told, and I certainly --

Q We asked her Monday.

MS. MYERS: You asked her Monday -- this is now Thursday.

Q It just feels like yesterday.

MS. MYERS: Yes. So, anyway, I will take that question and provide what information I can.

Q Two questions on loose ends. Have any of his friends or family confirmed that he actually owned a revolver? And have any friends or family filled in any of those five hours? Did anybody hear from him?

MS. MYERS: Not that I know of. And I don't know about whether he owned -- what his gun -- again, we'll wait for the results of the ATF investigation as to the ownership of the gun.

Q So negative on both questions?

MS. MYERS: Yes.

Q Do you know who in the White House staff is going back with the body today?

MS. MYERS: No, I don't.

Q Do you know if anybody is?

Q Can you repeat the question?

MS. MYERS: Who on the White House staff is going back with the body today. And the answer is, I don't know that anybody is. I'm happy to take that. I think, certainly, the family.

Q The family is traveling today?

MS. MYERS: I believe that was the original plan. As of yesterday, but I haven't confirmed to see if that was -

Q How will members of the White House who go to the funeral go?

MS. MYERS: Some will travel with the President, and others may go on their own. I don't know.

Q Do you know whether he was undergoing any sort of psychiatric care, or was any --

MS. MYERS: Not that we know of.

Q Is the President providing transportation for the family?

MS. MYERS: That's a good question. I don't know.

Q What was the question?

MS. MYERS: Is the President providing transportation for members of the Foster family back to Arkansas.

Q Dee Dee, is there a policy concerning firearms that would apply to Vince or you, or any other member of the White House staff on bringing them in in your automobiles, or bringing them into your office, or anything else within the White House compound?

MS. MYERS: I don't believe that that's allowable, but I would refer you to the Secret Service on that, since they're the ones that enforce those rules.

Q You haven't been told or that wasn't part of when you came on board whether you weren't supposed to have firearms in your car?

MS. MYERS: It is my belief that you're not allowed to bring firearms on campus. But, again, I would refer you to the Secret Service.

Q Did he park on West Executive?

MS. MYERS: Yes, he usually does. That's where his spot is.

Q What specifically did the Park police do besides interviewing people who talked to Vince on Tuesday?

MS. MYERS: That's all they had done as of half an hour ago.

Q Did they check through his office at all?

MS. MYERS: As of a little while ago, I don't believe that they had, but I think they expected to go in and look for signs of a note or some other evidence that he might have taken his own life.

Q How does the President's attorney-client relationship protected when they do that phase of the investigation?

MS. MYERS: Again, the Park police are simply trying to establish that this was, in fact, a suicide. It is a fairly limited investigation.

Q I mean, do they go through computer files or does someone else --

MS. MYERS: I think they may go through -- they may take a look to see if there's a note, something that is specifically a suicide note. I don't think they have any intention of evaluating the contents of the other documents.

Q Did they interview his secretary?

Q Is the Justice Department doing some broader investigation?

MS. MYERS: No, the Justice Department is simply serving as a point of contact at this point for the Park Service and others. The reason being is that normally the White House Counsel's Office would serve as a point of contact for investigating agencies and we didn't think under the circumstances that that would work.

Q So, what you're essentially saying is that the only thing being looked into is whether or not there was like a suicide note, something that would confirm this. Not whether or not there was some other reason unknown by anybody at the White House now that might be evident in papers or computers or any other --

MS. MYERS: Yes. At this point the Park Service is just looking into -- again to establish -- to confirm what they believe was a suicide.

Q Dee Dee, is anybody doing --

Q Is it correct, though, that there were supposed to be members of the Counsel's Office involved in the investigation physically when the Park Police go into his office in order to take care of what Gene is talking about -- the client relationship with the President?

MS. MYERS: Yes, I would imagine that there will be somebody from the -- I don't know exactly how that's -- and I can certainly get back to you on exactly physically how that works. But I think that there will be somebody from the Counsel's Office there just to help to assist with that. Actually, I should take that question, because I'm not sure how it's going to work.

Q We were told yesterday that it would be somebody from the Justice Department monitoring to preserve the executive privilege?

MS. MYERS: Yes, and let me take that question and see how that's going to work in practice.

Q Is there any inquiry beyond the Park Police to try to determine why he died, as opposed to just whether it was a suicide or not?

MS. MYERS: No, not at this time. And I'm not sure any investigation could ever determine why. These things are mysteries.

Q Dee Dee, you mentioned that he had lunch alone and just had a sandwich at his desk. Is there any way of checking the phone log during that period of time when he was alone to see who might have called him and perhaps might have called him away?

MS. MYERS: At this point, I don't know that there's any move afoot to do that. Again, the Park Service Police's role in this is the cause of death.

Q Did he have an assistant, a secretary anywhere?

MS. MYERS: Yes.

Q Who?

MS. MYERS: I'm not sure what her name is.

Q Could you get it?

MS. MYERS: Sure.

Q Again, about the President's words about work not being everything. That's a very desirable goal, but is it a realistic goal? Take yourself and your people, for example. Is there any way you can lighten the work load on people or do you have plans to do that, or on yourself?

MS. MYERS: I think we try. I think all White Houses work very hard. It's part of the nature of the beast. It's something that you do once in your life and it's something that I think people are fairly dedicated to and care a great deal about.

At the same time, I think most people in the White House -- and I know my shop, the press office -- we try to rotate and make sure that people have days off and that people don't certainly work all weekend and that they get out of here in good -- and I think that's important. It's something that the President has emphasized. The President, himself, has said he tries never to work more than 12 hours which, by his standards, is sort of a half day.

Q Since when?

MS. MYERS: It's true.

Q Considering Mr. Foster's position and his status, isn't it reasonable to assume that law enforcement agencies are at least going to make some attempt to determine a motive here? For example, if you don't do that, you'll leave open wild possibilities, such as that he may have been being blackmailed or anything like that -- just to rule those things out? Don't you think it's reasonable that a law enforcement agency will attempt to establish a motive?

MS. MYERS: My only point is that at this point, the Park Service Police is the only agency that's investigating, and that the objective of their search is simply to determine that it was a suicide. There's no other federal agencies that are investigating at this point, but --

Q But that means there will be no attempt -- are you saying that the Park Service was making no attempt --

MS. MYERS: I don't think that that's within their purview. I mean, this is --

Q They're clearly the investigating agency, aren't they?

MS. MYERS: I don't think that they haven't been here, but they would again contact the Justice Department if they wanted to come here for some reason. I don't believe that they are involved.

Q Let's assume that the Park Service Police determine to its satisfaction that, in fact, this was, as everyone thinks, a suicide. From the White House perspective, does this simply end there in terms of further examining what the circumstances might have been, or whether this was related to work or whatever? Does that --

MS. MYERS: I think it's been our position that it's impossible to know what --

Q -- the President -- this is one of his closest friends from boyhood --

MS. MYERS: It is a mystery, and I think the President made that very clear yesterday. It is a mystery. It is one of the things -- you can take -- you can create a whole set of objective reasons why it may have happened. But no one will ever know. And I --

Q I don't mean mushy little reasons --

MS. MYERS: But how can you know? How can you know? Even if you come up with --

Q All I was trying to ask was whether or not, beyond establishing whether it was a suicide, whether an effort would be made to go further than that to see if there was any evidence to indicate why -- not trying to get back into somebody's mind to know how they were feeling, but --

MS. MYERS: That's what you have to do.

Q Yes, but, Dee Dee, suicide is always to some extent kind of in inexplicable act.

MS. MYERS: Right.

Q Nonetheless, in many, many cases, one can understand at least the chain of events that could have driven someone to that level of despair. In this particular instance, no one can offer any reason why this man, at the prime of his life, the seeming pinnacle of his career, would do this. This is, I think everyone would agree, a particularly mysterious set of circumstances that raises potentially troubling questions, or maybe it doesn't. But all the questions here are focused on is trying to find out if anybody in the government, at this level or anywhere else, is trying to see if there were any circumstances that could at least explain how he became at least deeply troubled. Obviously, it's inexplicable that anyone would go that far.

MS. MYERS: Right.

Q But it does leave that question open, and all I can say to you is, this is a question that is going to be asked, and is going to be asked again and again. And from what you are saying, I take it, no one is trying to answer it.

MS. MYERS: All I've said and what I'll say again is, at this point, there are no other investigations.

Q How about his phone logs?

MS. MYERS: At this point, there are no other investigations.

Q Have his phone calls been checked?

MS. MYERS: At this point, there are no other investigations.

Q But that would be included in the Park Service's look at the office, et cetera, wouldn't it?

MS. MYERS: I don't know what the details of their investigation are. They don't necessarily have to tell us what --

Q When you say the Justice Department is coordinating the investigation, is there anyone who would make a decision to go further than this Park Service? The Park Police have to wrap up their case.

MS. MYERS: Not at the Park Service.

Q Yes, but, say, once they're done, whose responsibility is that to --

MS. MYERS: There are a whole slew of federal agencies that can make a decision to investigate or not to investigate.

Q What about within the White House?

MS. MYERS: There is not an investigative agency within the White House.

Q But is there any desire to learn? I guess that's the bottom line here.

MS. MYERS: At this point, all I can tell you is there are no other -- the Park Service is doing its thing. There are no other investigations.

Q Nobody has any question that this might have been foul play?

MS. MYERS: I don't think there's any evidence to suggest foul play. Obviously, the Park Service is going to finish up its investigation to determine exactly that. I think they will give a final -- their final cause of death when they finish this investigation. I don't think there's any evidence -- at this point there's no evidence to suggest anything other than suicide.

Q You're convinced there was a reason, aren't you? A reason you don't know?

MS. MYERS: Oh, of course. There's always a reason I would think.

Q There is a tendency, though, for the various agencies which could take an interest in this not to want to upset anybody at the White House. And they may in fact stay out -- if they are in anyway encouraged. So all I'm asking in a mild way is wouldn't it be worth the effort to have someone with a practiced eye to go over phone logs, correspondence and recent contacts, looking for anything that might have contributed?

MS. MYERS: All I can is what I've already said. I don't know where this is going to go.

Q Has the family asked that this kind of investigation not be undertaken?

MS. MYERS: No, no.

Q Dee Dee, it seemed from yours and other peoples comments yesterday in terms of this is a mystery, it's ultimately unknowable that you've already decided that further investigations are not necessary?

MS. MYERS: No, I think yesterday's comments were dedicated to the larger spiritual questions: people ask you, do you know why, and I think everybody -- there's nobody in the White House that pretends to know why or would presume to know why.

Q What I'm asking is --

MS. MYERS: You're asking the same question that's been asked 20 times. I don't have any more to say about it.

Q On Somalia, there is this growing disagreement between Italy and the United Nations, especially on the use of force. The Italians think that the use of force has been a total failure. They think that puts a risk on the peacekeepers. Have you a comment? What is your position?

MS. MYERS: We continue to support the U.N. effort in Somalia. We think it's been, overall, rather successful and continue to support the objectives of that, which are to continue to provide humanitarian aid and the ultimate restoration of civil order. We've made dramatic progress, both the U.S. and the U.N. operation, and we're going to continue in our effort there.

Q But the failure of the use of force.

MS. MYERS: Again, I don't believe that there has been a failure of the use of force. It's part of an overall activity dedicated to reducing the threat of people who would disrupt civil order, including some of the warlords, or one in particular. And we'll continue to pursue that operation.

Q Can you tell us when the deputies might be meeting on Bosnia? Did they meet yesterday, are they meeting today? When will these options be discussed?

MS. MYERS: I assume you're referring to the President's comments. We've had a number of discussions with Europeans about things that are ongoing.

Q But aren't there some NSC generated meetings about to take place?

MS. MYERS: Well, the NSC meets on -- I mean, discusses Bosnia on a regular basis, but what we've discussed with the Europeans are ways to improve the delivery of humanitarian aid, how to protect UNPROFOR forces in the safe havens, continuing to enforce the no-fly zone, and to monitor sanctions.

Q Are you suggesting that there's not some internal review that's taking place as we speak?

MS. MYERS: I think there's an ongoing -- I just got a couple of questions about the President's comment earlier which I was sort of reading into your question. But there's an ongoing discussion about Bosnia. I think the Secretary of State spoke to

that yesterday. There's certainly been no change in our position as to the use of force.

Q Is there a deputies meeting today?

MS. MYERS: Not -- I don't know.

Q But the Secretary basically wrote off Bosnia yesterday.

MS. MYERS: No, he didn't.

Q If you read the stories, basically -- this was the interpretation. And the President did contradict that.

MS. MYERS: No -- and I think the people who spoke after the Secretary made clear that we have not written off Bosnia. We're continuing on a number of fronts, including delivery of additional humanitarian aid and ways to protect the UNPROFOR forces in the safe havens. We have not -- and the President made that very clear today -- we have not written off Bosnia. It is a thorny, complicated problem, but --

Q Do you think that he was misinterpreted?
Christopher I mean.

MS. MYERS: Yes, and the President said so. He thought there were a couple of sentences in there that were misinterpreted.

Q -- the other day went through a whole laundry list of things the United States is not doing, including no participation in the peace talks, Bartholomew has not been in the region or talked to anybody about it in months --

MS. MYERS: We continue to encourage the parties to participate in the peace talks and have said repeatedly that if the parties reach a good-faith agreement, we will help to implement and enforce it.

Q Other than delivering humanitarian aid, which you've been doing all along --

MS. MYERS: Correct.

Q -- what, if anything, is the administration doing to help bring this process -- bring peace to the region or bring this process to an end?

MS. MYERS: I'm happy to go through the litany with you. I mean, we've --

Q So far you've done nothing but talk about PR stuff that you're doing.

MS. MYERS: It's not PR stuff. We've delivered literally hundreds of millions of dollars in humanitarian assistance. We've enforced stricter sanctions against Serbia, which have had some effect. We continue to enforce the no-fly zone. There have been no fixed aircraft wing bombings in Bosnia.

Q There weren't any before.

MS. MYERS: I think we've done a number of things that move this policy forward. And as the President made very clear today, the President --

Q How have you moved the policy forward?

MS. MYERS: Well, from where we started six months ago, enforcing the no-fly zone, stricter sanctions, safe havens, which we've presented a plan to the U.N. which they're going to start to enforce. We have moved forward on this and the progress has been made because of U.S. leadership.

Q What progress? The country is falling apart.

Q Will he save Sarajevo from falling?

MS. MYERS: It is a very difficult problem. No one is suggesting that it's easy. But to suggest that we haven't done -- I mean, the President made it very clear and continues to make clear what his preferred option would be. The allies rejected that. He believes that we should have lifted the arms embargo.

Q You're talking about what you would have done, which helps no one.

MS. MYERS: Well, we've talked both about what we would have done because it is relevant when you say that we've done nothing, and we talk about what we have done, which is also relevant because it has not been meaningless. Now, it is a difficult situation and we have said that all along. It is the most difficult foreign policy problem we face. It does not have an easy solution. But the President has made clear we are not talking about injecting ground troops into that theatre.

Q How close does the U.S. believe that Sarajevo is to falling? And apparently, there's a State Department reports saying that -- suggesting that the U.S. secure some of the utilities for the city. Does the White House think that that would be a good idea?

MS. MYERS: I'm not going to characterize how close Sarajevo is to falling. Again, the only thing I would say is that we're not going to send ground forces in there.

Q Jay Stephens said the other night that the administration had sought to delay -- impose upon him to delay the indictment of Postmaster Rota. Do you have any response to that?

MS. MYERS: I think the facts in this case speak for themselves.

Q Well, wait a minute, Dee Dee. What facts? There are a lot of facts --

Q He said he was prepared to proceed for indictment prior to his removal in April and was told not to. That's a statement that he made on Nightline the other night.

Q He didn't say that.

MS. MYERS: The Postmaster has been indicted, and I think the process moved forward under the new or the acting U.S. Attorney in Washington.

Q Can you represent to us today that the administration in no way will make any effort to discourage that inquiry or anything that might come out?

MS. MYERS: Absolutely not. That is proceeding exactly as it was.

Q You mean absolutely yes, don't you?

Q -- pending the budget or anything like that --

MS. MYERS: Absolutely that we will not do anything to delay the -- be clear.

Q Can you tell me where the Elders hearings are and what the White House expects to happen?

MS. MYERS: As you know, they will take place tomorrow. Senator Kennedy spoke about that a little bit today. The hearing will be held publicly and it will be one hearing. And we expect that the hearing will go forward and that Dr. Elders will be confirmed.

Q To sew up one more loose end on the Foster thing, did the President have any contact with him on Tuesday, and did he speak to the Park Police today?

MS. MYERS: The answer to both questions is no.

Q Back on Bosnia. You seemed to suggest that there was something constructive or positive going on with regard to safe havens. The Secretary said yesterday that with regard to some of the safe havens, the policy has not been effective.

MS. MYERS: My comments were in reference to the U.N. resolution to protect UNPROFOR forces in the safe haven which are now with the Secretary General of the U.N. and we expect to have his approval of that some time soon, in the next day or so.

Q Let me just ask you a broader question. With regard to Christopher's press conference yesterday, is the White House taking issue with anything the Secretary said, or are you simply taking issue with media reports about what he said?

MS. MYERS: Yes, I think the President took issue this morning with the way some of the reports characterized the Secretary's comments and made it clear that the administration has not in any way written off Bosnia.

Q But was there anything in what he said that the White House would like to clarify?

MS. MYERS: I think only in the interpretation which is that, again, the administration has not written off Bosnia.

Q Do you have a week ahead, since I assume there will be no briefing tomorrow?

MS. MYERS: No.

Q Do you have any sense of what is after Monday?

MS. MYERS: I don't have it with me. Maybe we can try to post some of the details at least for Monday later today.

Q A NAFTA czar?

MS. MYERS: Monday's Chicago. We do have Monday, actually, which is Chicago.

Q NAFTA?

MS. MYERS: I don't have a time line on it. Sometime soon.

Q Might it happen in Chicago?

MS. MYERS: I don't know.

Q On NAFTA if I could, Congressman Matsui from California told a trade group earlier this week that the administration's on the verge of loosing NAFTA, as he put it. He gave a head count. Is that the administration's assessment?

MS. MYERS: No. Our assessment continues to be it's difficult, it won't be easy, but that we would like to see it wrapped up this year, and we think we can get it passed.

Q Dee Dee, if I could follow on that. Legislative initiatives, once the budget is done, will NAFTA be the next initiative or will it be health care or something else?

MS. MYERS: How to proceed after the budget is something that's being discussed now. I think it is not inconceivable that you can do more than one thing at one time.

Q Is the U.S. prepared to do anything to prevent the fall of Sarajevo?

MS. MYERS: I think we're continuing to do things and one of the things we're going to do is to implement the U.N. resolution protecting the safe havens.

Q When?

MS. MYERS: The Secretary General, again, has the NATO plan and we expect that it will be approved soon -- in the next day or so.

Q Dee Dee, the House killed the rule on flood aid and a lot of people are objecting to the fact that it's deemed emergency spending. And I'm wondering if there's any fallback plan to include it in the budget if they can't get it passed as emergency spending.

MS. MYERS: The President proposed the emergency relief outside of the budget caps, as was made possible by the 1990 Budget Act and continues to believe that that is the best approach. The deficit is somewhat lower this year than anticipated for reasons that we talked about earlier. He continues to believe that's the best approach. We'll see what Congress can work out.

Q What happens now? If the rule went down --

MS. MYERS: I think they're reviewing what their options are at this point. I'm not sure what the next step is.

Q Will the President speak at the funeral service tomorrow? Is he offering a eulogy either at this funeral or at the burial service?

MS. MYERS: I believe he will speak tomorrow. And in terms of how we're going to handle that from a press perspective, we're discussing that later today.

Q Which event will he speak at?

MS. MYERS: He's speaking at the funeral. I don't know about the burial.

Q Will you post that today so we'll know before he leaves tomorrow?

MS. MYERS: Sure -- what the arrangements --

Q Yes.

Q On Friday, will the President oppose the idea of coming up with cuts to correspond to the aid if this is --

MS. MYERS: Again, he's favored a different approach, and we'll see what gets worked out. But at this point, he continues to believe that the approach that he proposed is the best approach.

Q Dee Dee, on the energy tax, Director Panetta yesterday said that you would need about \$30 billion to \$32 billion in a final package in order to meet your \$500-billion deficit reduction goal. Is it accurate to say, then, that if you have that amount, that that would translate into upwards of five cents a gallon and no more?

MS. MYERS: The specific numbers are being worked out, but we've said consistently this week that we're moving closer to the Senate number. We believe it'll be less than half of what was originally proposed somewhere in that ballpark. But in terms of the exact numbers, the House and Senate conferees are still working that out.

Q The President also, a few days ago, said he wanted to hold this energy component to no more than a dollar a week. And my understanding from Director Panetta is, that would translate into about a \$28-billion, perhaps a little more, package. So are you working with at most \$32 billion --

MS. MYERS: Again, we've I think said all we're going to say about the size of the energy tax. It's going to be significantly less than it was in the House version, and we're moving toward working that out now.

Q What's the coverage of the New York-New Jersey --

Q -- flood bill that somehow ends up loaded with nongermane items? Is he prepared to veto that?

MS. MYERS: That's a hypothetical. There is no flood bill loaded up with nongermane items at this point.

Q Does the White House have any ethical qualms about the President attending a \$5,000-per-person fundraiser in Chicago hosted by Mr. Daley, who they're also negotiating with to be the NAFTA czar?

MS. MYERS: It's a DNC event, I believe organized and coordinated by the DNC, if I'm not mistaken.

Q Actually, the cocktail party ahead of time for \$5,000 for corporate contributors is organized by Mr. Daley. The letter inviting -- But have you looked at that at all? I mean --

MS. MYERS: No.

Q -- some of the corporations that he sent the letter to are heavily affected by NAFTA and its outcome.

MS. MYERS: No. I think that this is a fundraiser organized according to existing laws, and the President is going to attend. I think it's fine.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

2:18 P.M. EDT

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

July 27, 1993

PRESS BRIEFING
BY DEE DEE MYERS

The Briefing Room

1:20 P.M. EDT

MS. MYERS: I have no announcements, so if you all have -- on the unlikely chance you have questions.

Q David Boren today on the floor of the Senate called for a budget summit. He called for the President to invite Republicans to sit down for a budget summit. Has there been any consideration of that? Would the White House consider a summit?

MS. MYERS: I think summits have been tried in the past six times; and five out of those six times, the deficit went up, not down. We're in the midst of a process, I think making good progress, working out the final details of the budget package, and we expect to continue with that process.

Q Making progress without Republicans?

MS. MYERS: Making progress without Republicans. I think the President would welcome support from any Republicans. I don't know that that's likely at this time, but we'd certainly welcome the support.

I mean, I think that the idea of a budget summit in some ways ignores the partisan nature of some of the Republican opposition to this budget bill. This, again, is similar to some of the packages that they've supported in the past. In 1990 there were certain similarities, although this package definitely goes farther, and the Republicans found a way to support that. So I think a lot of their arguments are partisan in this instance, and I'm not sure that a budget summit would resolve them. I think the President's been open to input from Republicans throughout this process. I think he'd still like to see Republicans support this; that may not happen.

Q What is the reason for Christopher's returning? Can you explain what can be accomplished in a meeting in Washington that couldn't be accomplished by communicating by phone?

MS. MYERS: As you know, the President and Secretary Christopher spoke yesterday evening, and I think decided that it would be best if Christopher came back here in order to be closer to his team, in order to monitor some of the developments in the Middle East and to discuss a number of issues around the world. But I think he felt that he could monitor the situation more effectively, prepare for his trip there if he was here with his team, and the President supported him in that.

Q How serious is the concern, the level of concern about the current outbreak and the possibility of escalation -- further escalation?

MS. MYERS: Obviously it's something that we're concerned about, and we're urging all the parties to show restraint. So far, they seem to have done that. We will be -- I think Secretary Christopher and others will be in contact with the governments of Syria, Lebanon and Israel over the course of the next couple of days, and I think we're hopeful that the violence will stop.

Q Is there any contact with the government of Iran since Secretary Djerejian testified today that he holds Iran responsible for the Hezbollah --

MS. MYERS: No, but Iran and Hezbollah are responsible. I think they clearly instigated this. Hezbollah has the backing of the Iranian government, and they are enemies of the peace process. I think this administration; the President, Secretary Christopher, and others are committed to not letting enemies of the peace process disrupt or interrupt or dismantle it in any way. So we're going to continue to push forward.

Q Is there any feeling though that they could operate as freely as they have operated in Southern Lebanon without this sanction and protection of Syria? Is Syria opposed to the peace process?

MS. MYERS: Syria has been a party to the peace process and has not signaled any intention to change their participation. Obviously, we have urged the Syrians to take more aggressive action against Hezbollah and hope that they will do that. But at this point, we're committed to making sure the peace process goes forward.

Q Is that Secretary Christopher's mission, to make sure that the peace process doesn't collapse? Or will he also be trying to end the hostilities?

MS. MYERS: Well, I think the fundamental mission of the peace process is to address the underlying problems that lead to these hostilities. The best solution to the problems that we're currently seeing would be a negotiated settlement in the Middle East. That's what we're going to continue to push for.

Q But the acute situation right now between Israel and --

MS. MYERS: I think that obviously you want to do both. You'd like to stop the violence in the short term. We've called for an end to the violence, but continue to press forward on the peace process and make sure it stays on track. And all of our expectations at this point is that it will.

Q How concerned is the White House that the group of members that Congressman Stenholm speaks for may not vote for this package in the end if the kinds of changes he was talking about here today are not made?

MS. MYERS: Well, I think obviously we are going to do everything we can to make sure that this package gets passed. We'll work with Congressman Stenholm and others. We're obviously concerned about all the elements of the package and maintaining the support we need to ultimately get it passed. That's what the negotiations are about.

Q Well, they talked about the difficulty of trying to get done the things they want to get done when they're going to get no Republican support, which I take it has something to do with what Mr. Boren is trying to achieve as well. Is the White House still determined to put a package through that will be supported only by Democrats?

MS. MYERS: I think we'd like -- clearly, the President has said time and time again that he would welcome support from Republicans of this package, and there are certainly enough elements in it that the Republicans ought to be able to support it.

Q But you're not -- the question is whether you were going to change it in such a way that you will be able to count on public support; that's what I'm asking.

MS. MYERS: I think if there was a way we could change it to count on Republican support we'd be interested in doing that. But I'm not sure that that's possible. I think that a lot of their -- the questions that they raised about it are fairly straightforwardly partisan. I think the President made that point yesterday. He'd like to see the package passed with as much support from as many elements of Congress as possible.

But I think the most important thing to do is to get this package passed, to get it done, to keep it on track. And I think we're in good shape to do that. It won't be easy over the course of the next week or two, but I think our expectation is that we can get it done.

Q How serious, Dee Dee --

Q On the Perot idea of completely starting from scratch and instead going with a --

MS. MYERS: That's just not our position.

Q So are you at all taking it seriously or --

MS. MYERS: No, we've been taking the process seriously for the last six months, which is why we've --

Q No, his proposal. Are you taking his proposal seriously?

MS. MYERS: No. My answer is that we have taken this process seriously for the last six months, which is why we've carefully put together a package that does all the wonderful things that you all know about. And to do it at the 11th hour, to try to say that there's some easy answer and some way to start from scratch to build a better package I think is just not consistent with reality.

Q Dee Dee, how serious is the National Service legislation? Is it in deep trouble right now because of the threatened filibuster?

MS. MYERS: Well, we'll see. We're still hopeful. We believe that that legislation has the support of a majority of members, that should it be allowed to come to a vote that it would pass. Hopefully the Republicans will end their filibuster. The American people support this program. It was something that the President ran and is very committed to, something that engendered tremendous bipartisan support around the country and has bipartisan support of Congress. So we'll see, but we're hopeful that with a few perhaps minor changes, nothing that would sort of affect the major thrust of the bill, that we can get it done.

Q -- support of consumer confidence numbers today are again way down. How do you read that?

MS. MYERS: I think that the economy isn't working for everybody, that I think people are concerned about the lack of job growth and the lack of income growth, problems that have plagued this economy for the last several years. There are some indications that

things are getting better, but it is not working for everybody and I think that that's one of the reasons the President would like to see this package passed. I think, should a serious deficit reduction effort get through Congress, that will help keep interest rates low, it will help get the economy back on track, stimulate job and income growth.

Obviously, it's always discouraging -- somewhat discouraging when you see numbers like that, but it reflects, I think, people's uncertainty about the economy, and that's something that this package is designed to address.

Q Could you comment on the Newsweek report that President Clinton spoke to Vince Foster on Sunday? A, is it true? B, do you know whether what he said to him -- why the President didn't mention it when he was asked about it --

MS. MYERS: I think it is something that we've said before.

Q No. Trust me.

MS. MYERS: No? I don't think there was any -- he did speak to him on Sunday. He called him, as he often did. Vince Foster was somebody that the President spoke to frequently.

Q Did he call him to "buck him up," as Newsweek suggested?

MS. MYERS: He called to talk to him, I think -- a number of things. I think that he knew, as a number of people did, that Vince was having a rough time.

Q Wait a minute. That's the first time you've said that from this platform.

MS. MYERS: No, it's not. I think what we have said in the past was that people have their ups and downs and that --

Q Well, you've acted like this was just --

MS. MYERS: No, that's not true, Brit.

Q Yes, it is true, Dee Dee.

MS. MYERS: No, it's not.

Q It is true, Dee Dee.

Q Your tone has completely changed.

MS. MYERS: Okay, I apologize. I'm sorry. It is not. Okay. Let me just try to say what I think -- what I said certainly on Thursday, which was that people -- there was absolutely no reason to believe that Vince was despondent, that he was in any way considering doing what happened. Nobody believed that. At the same time, I think that the Counsel's Office had had its trials and tribulations. And I think a number of people in this White House have gone through -- have had good weeks and bad weeks. The communication department certainly hasn't been immune from that, and people have had troubles and had bad weeks.

I think that was the sense of what we thought was happening. There was absolutely no reason to think that Vince was despondent. Nobody believed that.

Q Questions were asked, though, to you, I believe, about whether he was depressed, whether there was indications of that --

Q We can't hear what he's saying.

MS. MYERS: He's saying we were asked whether Vince was depressed.

Q And the answers all were, well, he had his ups and downs, everybody has their ups and downs. There was no indication that there was a widespread awareness at the high levels of the White House that this man was going through a particularly rough patch.

MS. MYERS: And I don't mean to change that impression.

Q What prompted the call?

MS. MYERS: He talked to him regularly about things.

Q Dee Dee, you said he was having his ups and downs. What were his downs?

Q He called trying to cheer him up, because he was aware of his --

MS. MYERS: I think that would be an oversimplification of his -- I think that would perhaps be evaluating his motive in hindsight. I think --

Q -- a rough time. The President knew he was having a rough time?

MS. MYERS: In the broad context that the Counsel's Office was -- had gone through the trials and tribulations, as had a number of departments in this administration. And --

Q But it was Vince Foster-specific as opposed to -- how did that --

MS. MYERS: I don't think it was anything outside of the broader context of ups and downs that have certainly been part of the first six months in this White House.

Q Did he call Nussbaum?

MS. MYERS: Pardon?

Q Why on Sunday? What had --

MS. MYERS: Because the President -- Vince Foster was somebody that he had known 25 years. As you all know, the President tends to pick up the phone and call --

Q This is in the context of a weekend in which it is said, at least, that friends -- or after friends had taken him or his family had taken him to the beach and that there had been some concerted effort among those close to him who cared about him to try to give him a lift to try to get his mind off the things that might have been troubling him and so on -- so what's evident in all this scheme of events as described is signs of a man who was worried and troubled. No indication that what happened was going to happen, but a widespread recognition among those close to him that he was going through a particularly bad patch, and perhaps an effort on the part of the President to give him a lift. And you seem unwilling to acknowledge that.

MS. MYERS: No. What I'm trying to steer away from here is somehow to change the evaluation of this in hindsight. That's what --

Q Does it have to be in hindsight? Could you ask the President why he called?

MS. MYERS: I've talked to him about this and he --

Q And he said?

MS. MYERS: He called him for a number of reasons, and -- because he called him frequently and he wanted to see how he was, among other things, because, as was well known and documented, they had -- they, the Counsel's Office, had had a rough go of it.

Q A rough go in what respect?

Q What specific -- I mean --

MS. MYERS: There have been a number of editorials and other things quite recently, Andrea, and I don't -- the President obviously was close to Vince. It was somebody that he talked to regularly, somebody that he cared a lot about, and somebody who -- he checks in on people regularly. That's not to say that the President was oblivious to what might have been going on, but nobody, including the President, expected that to happen.

Q We understand that. No one is saying that.

MS. MYERS: So all I'm trying to do is stay away from this notion that somehow --

Q You knew.

MS. MYERS: -- that things were different than what we've thought they were last week.

Q Did Foster's wife --

MS. MYERS: No.

Q -- somebody such as Mack went to the President and said, you know, Vince really seems down -- or Bernie -- and give him a call?

Q Did Foster's wife call the President?

MS. MYERS: No. There was -- and to my knowledge -- and I will double-check this -- nobody asked the President to call him. There was no specific precipitating factor. And I -- we've discussed this --

Q Was he aware of the weekend and the effort to give him a lift about that?

MS. MYERS: I don't know if he knew that Vince -- I think he knew that he had gone to the shore. I don't know if there were any other circumstances that were -- the President was aware of if there were, in fact, any.

Q Did he know why or what was the hoped-for outcome of that?

MS. MYERS: No. I think that he -- the President believed that they were -- Webb Hubbell and his wife and the Fosters had gone because they needed -- it was a much-needed break. And I

think that that didn't seem unusual to anybody who's been working here.

Q What did he tell him?

MS. MYERS: They had a conversation. I don't know the contents. It was a personal conversation.

Q Was there any outstanding appointment? In other words, did he call at least with a pretext of, let's talk about this latest screw-up in the -- I don't mean to sound pejorative.

MS. MYERS: I don't know what the top order of business was. As you know, again, the President frequently calls people with whom he deals regularly -- people like Vince, people who have both personal and professional contacts -- do business with. And he did call him on Sunday.

Q Dee Dee, you said that the President went -- I've been trying to get this in for a long time, but get interrupted. You've been saying that he was up and down. Would you please tell us what were the downs?

MS. MYERS: I think they've been well documented, Sarah. I think that the --

Q No, they have not.

MS. MYERS: Yeah, I believe --

Q They have not.

MS. MYERS: Sarah, they have been well documented.

Q Would you run them down now, as you know them?

MS. MYERS: I'm not going to go -- no, I won't.

Q This is the first time that you have told us that he had ups and downs.

MS. MYERS: The Counsel's Office had ups and downs, Sarah. And I think they have been well documented. I don't think we need to go through them here.

Q Well, he wouldn't kill himself over this travel business. He wouldn't kill himself over The Wall Street Journal trying to get his picture.

MS. MYERS: I would certainly never intimate that he would. There's no way we'll ever know why.

Q Are you aware of his rough patch being related to anything other than work?

MS. MYERS: No. I mean, I think what we were aware of was that the Counsel's Office, like a lot of other offices in this administration have had good weeks and bad weeks, and the Counsel had had their share of tough times.

Q Are you saying that Vince Foster did not appear to the President or anyone in the high command here to be in any worse shape in terms of his mood and spirits than anybody else in the Counsel's Office?

MS. MYERS: Did not appear to be in any worse shape in terms of his mood and spirit than other people have been as they've

gone thorough difficult times in their jobs. Yes, that's what I'm saying.

Q Was there any one of these issues that has affected the Counsel's Office that hit him particularly hard?

MS. MYERS: Not that I know of, and I'm certainly not in the position to speculate about that.

Q Dee Dee, when he left at 1:00 p.m. and didn't return, there seemed to be a question of, did he periodically do this, and at the time we were told it was not atypical for him to sometimes leave without an explanation. And several people here are wondering, did he have a pattern of leaving for period of time for unexplainable reasons?

MS. MYERS: No, but he had a lot of meetings in the OEOB, and the executive residence and other offices around the West Wing, and it was not at all unusual for him to go to a meeting which would lead to another meeting, which might take a couple of hours. He always carried a beeper with him, which he had with him on Tuesday, and his secretary and support staff and colleagues always knew that if they needed him, they could reach him by beeper. And so his being gone for a few hours on Tuesday afternoon didn't strike anybody as particularly strange.

Q What have you learned about whether he brought the gun into the White House?

MS. MYERS: I don't know anything about that. You'd have to check with the investigating agency -- I guess the Park Service.

Q To follow up, if an individual like that wanted to bring a gun into the White House, would he be stopped, or would he, by virtue of his pin or pass, be waved on through the security?

MS. MYERS: You'd have to check with the Secret Service about exactly what precautions they take. I don't drive in.

Q It doesn't go through security, correct?

MS. MYERS: No.

Q Dee Dee, has it been determined that the gun actually belonged to him?

MS. MYERS: I don't know. I haven't gotten any more word on that. You can check with the Park Police, but I don't know that they've made a conclusion.

Q I was gone last week, but this notion that there was a newspaper that was looking into some aspect of this --

MS. MYERS: The Washington Times completely and thoroughly shot that down.

Q Dee Dee, did the President call any other members of the Counsel's Office on Sunday or over the weekend?

MS. MYERS: I don't know.

Q If there --

MS. MYERS: He didn't know --

Q If it was the Counsel's Office that was having the rough patch --

MS. MYERS: That's an oversimplification. He talked to a number of -- he didn't talk to everybody, every day, every time he thought that things were -- Vince Foster was somebody he'd known for 42 years.

Q -- was this call one in a sequence of calls perhaps to buck up or find information, or --

MS. MYERS: He calls people regularly. The President calls people on his staff, particularly people with whom he is personally close regularly.

Q Other people in the Counsel's Office?

MS. MYERS: He doesn't have the same relationship with other people in the Counsel's Office. It's apples and oranges. But, yes, he calls Bernie Nussbaum regularly -- at home, in the office, when he has questions, he calls people --

Q But not over the weekend, as far as you know?

MS. MYERS: I don't know who else he called that weekend; I didn't ask.

Q Do you know when he made this call? Was he still in Arkansas, or was it in the evening after he had come back?

MS. MYERS: I don't know what time it was.

Q Dee Dee, one of the things we've read is that he was here all day long, like a lot of people, like yourself, and that these very long hours and weekends helped add up to the stress. Has there been any change in the policy about how much time you guys put in and whether -- has Clinton as the administrator of this building, said in some way you should cool it down, change your habits?

MS. MYERS: I think he said that -- I think we provided the transcript that he said last Wednesday and again to you all on Wednesday afternoon that people need to take a little more time for their families and their friends and themselves, and that work shouldn't be everything in one's life.

Q I was on vacation last week, but are you guys -- is that, in fact, happening? Is there a change?

MS. MYERS: I haven't gone around, office to office, but I think this kind of event always gives people pause and makes them reevaluate a few things about their own lives.

Q (Inaudible.) (Laughter.)

MS. MYERS: A little before you guys did, I think.

Q Yes, but you have the Dodgers.

MS. MYERS: That's true. And they won 15-1 yesterday, I might point out. (Laughter.)'

Q Has the President been questioned by the Park Police?

MS. MYERS: No.

Q Dee Dee, has the Park Police determined --

MS. MYERS: I don't believe they've asked. I think, in fact, I read a comment from one of their spokesmen in the paper said

that they didn't think that would be necessary, but you might check with them.

Q If the Park Service finds that in fact it was -- there was no foul play other than it was a suicide, does the White House believe that should be the end of it, or should there be some further analysis or inquiry or investigation to seek to determine what caused this close aide and friend of the President to commit suicide?

MS. MYERS: Well, obviously there are a number of independent agencies who can make their own determinations as to whether or not to investigate.

Q Would the White House support that?

MS. MYERS: I think we'll cooperate to the best of our ability, given certain privileges and things that exist with any investigations that other federal agencies choose to conduct. I think it is important to confirm, obviously, that this was a suicide and there are a number of things that would certainly -- had there been a suicide note or were one to be turned up, something like that that would confirm that. But I don't think that it is particularly useful to try to piece together the broader aspects of his life to try to ascribe some motive to something that we can never know.

Q But you will not actively for some sort of further investigation than the Park Service?

MS. MYERS: No. The Park Service police is the lead agency. They're doing the investigation. If other federal agencies choose to investigate, we will do what we can to cooperate.

Q Dee Dee, it's been determined by -- why is it -- what you just said that's necessary to confirm that it was suicide? Why is it necessary to confirm it was suicide? Most of the -- I bet most of the people in the United States, from what I hear, don't think it was a suicide. Why don't we all -- why don't you all go further into the proposition that it might not have been a suicide?

MS. MYERS: Every -- all indicators are, and I think most people believe that it was a suicide. But he was a high federal official and it's important to rule out --

Q Most people believe it was not a suicide.

MS. MYERS: I disagree with that premise, Sarah. Most people believe that it was.

Q Dee Dee, what's the Justice Department's mandate in this? I mean, last week the Justice Department was saying that they were going to look for -- try to establish a motive to, among other things, for public confidence, to clear the air. This week they're saying they're not. I don't understand what their mandate was when the White House approached them to get involved.

MS. MYERS: We asked them to serve as a point of contact for other federal agencies. Decisions they make -- and they've done that, by the way. Any decision that they make to pursue an investigation beyond that is their decision and you'd have to check with them.

Q What's behind the change of heart? They said one thing last week and something --

MS. MYERS: Again, that's something you'd have to check with them about.

Q They weren't contacted by the White House?

MS. MYERS: No.

Q Dee Dee, change of subject -- NAFTA coordinator this week?

MS. MYERS: Perhaps, but not necessarily. We'll have one at some point, but I don't have any concrete plans at this point.

Q To follow on NAFTA -- a bunch of members on the Hill this morning, led by David Bonior, said that while he read the letter in The Post this morning, that they're claiming that if you bring up NAFTA now it could derail health care reform.

MS. MYERS: Yes. NAFTA and health care are proceeding on separate tracks. There's been no change in our timetable on NAFTA. The President still feels we can conclude it by the end of this year. We're going to wait until after reconciliation to make final decisions on the timing of health care and NAFTA, but we expect both to move forward.

Q They contend that Congress cannot handle both at the same time.

MS. MYERS: I think that there are a lot of people who believe that those are proceeding on separate tracks and that there's no reason to link them. And, again, we'll make a final decision as to timing after reconciliation. But there's been no change in our plans at this point.

Q Can I go back to Foster, please? The way that you, the President and McLarty spoke last Wednesday about this was it was an unexplained mystery, there was no reason to go beyond the evidence that it was a suicide. And there seemed to be, given the characterization you're providing today that he was obviously troubled, you were widely aware that he was having difficulty. There seems to be a sense at the time that the President didn't say I was trying to help my friend and it failed. Instead of that, he said, I accept this as an unexplained mystery and there's no need to go into it. Why did he portray it that way when obviously he was trying and his friends were trying to bring this fellow some hope?

MS. MYERS: That is way too dramatic a reading. There was no reason to believe that it was anything other than the kinds of ups and downs that people have gone through in this White House. And I don't mean to suggest that there was any -- that any of that has changed. There was just no reason to believe -- and I think Mack has said so and the President has said so and I have certainly said so -- that this was anything other than the routine ups and downs of what can be a very demanding job in this White House.

Q But why you believe otherwise -- today's -- some of your answers indicate that you all have basically come to a conclusion that the job got him down and could have led to it.

MS. MYERS: I don't mean to say that I have any answers, or to suggest that I have any answers to it.

Q But this is the overriding theme, that he was depressed and despondent.

MS. MYERS: No, that he was suffering -- I don't even want to say "suffering" -- you guys are reading too much into it -- that he was going through the kinds of ups and downs that people in the White House often do, that people in any kind of a demanding and visible job often do.

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Q (Inaudible.)

MS. MYERS: I don't mean to suggest that there has been any further evidence to suggest that it was anything other than that. People that knew him well did not --

Q Would it be fair to say that everyone who knew him well here thought he was discouraged, but no one thought he was suicidal?

MS. MYERS: Absolutely.

Q Does the President routinely people who are going through professional --

MS. MYERS: He routinely calls people with whom he's been friends for 42 years.

Q Did he say at any point I wish I had done more or I could have done more? I missed a signal or anything like that?

MS. MYERS: I won't even -- I just don't have anything more on this, you guys.

Q I'd like to ask a tough, probing, insightful question about the jogging track.

MS. MYERS: Well, under the circumstances --

Q Seriously. Over by the Southwest Gate -- seriously, the jogging track is all ripped to hell. There are holes in it, it's buckled in places. Can you take that and find out what's the problem there and how it will be repaired?

Q Are they repairing it at their expense -- the company?

MS. MYERS: I don't know. There was a -- as you know, we raised a little more money than it cost to install, and that money is kept in a fund for maintenance. So it is entirely possible that the maintenance fund may be used for the repairs.

Q Can I return to the Middle East for just a moment? You said the main reason that Christopher was coming back -- cited that he wanted to meet with his team and have his team with him. Is his team not with him? I thought Ross and most of the --

MS. MYERS: I believe they were here. You'd have to double-check the State Department. I was under the impression that they were here. For example, Djerejian's testifying here today and Ross is also here, yes. Yes, I think he just thought there was a number of issues that he could deal with better from Washington.

Q Dee Dee, another question on that issue. Another question on the Middle East. You've described Iran's Hezbollah as enemies of the peace process. Do you mean by that to give Israel a green light in Lebanon? That's certainly how your remarks could be interpreted.

MS. MYERS: No. I think we've urged restraint from all parties and have been in touch with Israel, Syria, Lebanon on this and would like to see an end to the hostilities as soon as possible. At the same time -- but I think there's more that Syria can do, vis-a-vis Hezbollah, and the most important thing is to keep the peace process on track.

Q Going back to the NAFTA thing for a minute. You said you were going to wait until after reconciliation to make final

decisions on timing on this thing. How big is the scope or the range of options that are being considered for timing? Is it possible that because of the court ruling last month and everything else that after reconciliation the President might decide, well, we've got to put this thing off for several months, or is it just a question of which week in a fairly small window?

MS. MYERS: For health care?

Q Well, for both.

MS. MYERS: For both? No, I think that it is our expectation that we will proceed with both. That's been -- but, again, the final decisions as to timing will have to wait. The President has said repeatedly that he'd like to finish NAFTA by the end of the year. I think people have said, including the First Lady, that we expect health care to start sooner rather than later. And I don't think there's been any change in that.

Q I guess my question is when you're looking at the decision on timing, are you looking at a window that is five weeks long, and you're trying to decide which of those five weeks; or are you looking at window that's three months long, and you're trying to decide which of 15 weeks; or are you looking at window that goes to the '94 elections and --

MS. MYERS: I think we've been -- already been far more sort of specific than that. The President has said he'd like to see NAFTA completed by the end of the year. I mean, I think that necessitates that you have to make progress on it fairly quickly. And I think Mrs. Clinton has said that she expects health care -- and the specific details and timing just aren't -- they just don't exist. But she expects action to start on that relatively soon.

Q Well, in Hawaii she had said in September.

MS. MYERS: Right.

Q And I'm just wondering whether anything has changed

--

MS. MYERS: No, I mean, my point is that -- nothing has changed.

Q And you will send up legislation in September, not just speak about it or talk about a framework -- when you say both proceed at the same time, you mean legislatively you want Congress to pick up the legislation and proceed on both of them in the fall?

MS. MYERS: That's our expectation, and I just don't want to say any more about the specific timing, because the final decisions just haven't been made as to what exact dates.

Q Did the President take to heart Rostenkowskis' accusation that he's meddling?

MS. MYERS: I think the President has made it clear throughout this process that he expects to be quite involved in the conference process. I think he's done that, although he's certainly left Congress a lot of room to work the details out among themselves.

Q Is he seeing more senators today?

MS. MYERS: More House members. I don't know about Senators. I'd have to -- I don't think any are scheduled.

Q What is he prepared to do? Let's say the conference concludes this week and you're starting to move toward

floor action next week, which was the hope for a schedule -- an address to the nation? Are there other things that he can do? What should we expect next week?

MS. MYERS: I certainly wouldn't rule out an address to the nation. It's something we always said we would do in the context of this process. We don't have any specific plans for it at this time.

Q Advance text?

MS. MYERS: Advanced text will be available today and I guarantee he'll use three words of it -- the, and, and if.

Q Schedule tomorrow?

MS. MYERS: Schedule tomorrow: Tomorrow would be Wednesday. He's got a large CEO lunch at noon. It will probably be closer to 40 or 50 CEOs than the usual --

Q It's not just big CEOs --

MS. MYERS: It's big CEOs -- many big CEOs.

Q Big CEOs.

MS. MYERS: Yes. Big.

And then he's -- may meet -- I believe he's going to meet with the Democratic Study Group perhaps on the Hill. And then he has a dinner with House members tomorrow night.

Q What is he doing on the Hill?

MS. MYERS: DSG perhaps on the Hill. And a dinner with House members -- and I'm not sure where it is. I think it's off campus. I think it's at the House Gym.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

1:50 P.M. EDT

Cliff Sloan
Room 128 OEOB

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

Release

July 29, 1993

PRESS BRIEFING
BY DEE DEE MYERS

The Briefing Room

3:22 P.M. EDT

MS. MYERS: Good afternoon. I have a brief statement from the President.

While I regret the continued filibuster of national service, I'm hopeful that additional Republicans will see passed politics to support this landmark legislation. National service will lift up our country and do us all honor.

I want to thank Senators Durenberger, Jeffords, and Chafee, along with 26 House Republicans, for putting service ahead of politics. I urge other Senate Republicans to follow their example and end this filibuster. The bill pending in the Senate reflects the concerns of both Democrats and Republicans. It has a limited authorization. It cuts bureaucracy and will energize our youth and reknit our communities. This legislation isn't Democrat or Republican, it's just American. And I hope that additional Republicans will soon agree.

Any questions?

Q Dee Dee, does the government have a response to the Israeli Supreme Court's decision on Demjanjuk?

MS. MYERS: No. I believe it's being reviewed at the State Department, and I'd have to refer you to them.

Q Well, the Justice Department apparently said something about still not wanting him back in the United States. Can you clarify that or expand on it?

MS. MYERS: I'll have to take the question. I know that the Justice Department also had something on it today, but I'm not sure what it is.

Q Can you clarify who is in charge or who is the point now on the Vince Foster investigation? Last night the Justice Department was saying no questions will be answered, all questions will be answered at the White House. This related to the note.

MS. MYERS: The Justice Department is still the point of contact for any investigating agencies. The Park Service, obviously, is still the agency conducting the investigation.

Q So nothing has changed?

MS. MYERS: Nothing has changed. Questions about the investigation would have to be referred to the Justice Department, I think. With reference to the note specifically and its discovery last night, we decided to go ahead and confirm it once it leaked, and I think they are referring calls about that particular incident to us.

Q Well, about that then, is more going to be released on that? Is the contents of the note going to be released?

MS. MYERS: No. The Justice Department has said that in order -- because the investigation is ongoing, the contents ought not be released.

Q Can you characterize in any more specifics the items in this note? Did they relate to specific things at the White House? Is it nonbusiness? Is there any way --

MS. MYERS: No, it's work related, and I think it does sort of shed some light on his state of mind, assuming that this is authenticated. Beyond that, we can't really comment given that it is part of an ongoing investigation.

Q You mean the investigation -- they still are seeking the answer to whether he killed himself or not?

MS. MYERS: I think that they're in the process of an investigation that certainly looks at that question.

Q What is the investigation? What are they looking for?

MS. MYERS: Well, you have to ask them exactly where they are in the investigation and what they may be trying to find. They're doing an investigation, as they would, because Vince's body was found in a national park.

Q The President said yesterday when asked about this and about what he knew, he said, "I decided to watch a movie and Webb Hubbell was still hanging around here and I hadn't seen Vince in a while and I called him. I didn't -- unlike some other people who did know that he had been quite distressed, I was not really aware of that. But I knew I hadn't seen him in a while and I just kind of got lonesome." Now, according to the President, here he was with Webb Hubbell who had just spent the weekend with the guy, trying to lift his spirits because he was worried about him. Does the President mean to say that he spent this time with Webb Hubbell and he and Webb Hubbell are inviting this guy over for a movie and Hubbell had not advised the President that he was in distress?

MS. MYERS: Well, I certainly can't characterize Webb's weekend with Vince. I don't know enough about it. He -- and I think the President's comments in that regard speak for themselves. If other people knew about --

Q Does he mean to say that when he called him he didn't even then know that he'd been "quite distressed"?

MS. MYERS: That's what he said -- he didn't know --

Q Or he just learned that?

MS. MYERS: No, he didn't know.

Q He didn't know?

MS. MYERS: He did not know.

Q Webb Hubbell is there with him. Webb Hubbell spent the weekend with him --

MS. MYERS: You have to ask -- I can't comment on what Webb Hubbell's impressions might have been based on their weekend together.

Q Is it you won't -- is it you dispute the idea that Webb Hubbell went to the shore with him for the purpose of lifting his spirits?

MS. MYERS: No -- I don't know what the reason is. I just can't characterize what was in Webb's head. I'm not --

Q We're talking here about intimates of the President of the United States.

MS. MYERS: I understand that. But I don't know exactly what Webb thought or what he told --

Q Well, can you find out and tell us please?

MS. MYERS: I know what the President's impression was; that, I can tell you. He did not have any reason at that point to believe that Vince was distraught.

Q On what basis are you telling us that this note was work-related? Have you read it, seen a transcript of it? Has it been characterized to you? Can you explain?

MS. MYERS: I know what the contents are. I've seen not the note itself, which was turned over to the Park Service police, but I am familiar with the contents.

Q Are you telling us there was nothing in it that related to anything other than work? There was no personal side to this -- to his writing?

MS. MYERS: The only thing I'll say that I can say about it is, I think it did show him to be in a distressed state of mind, a troubled state of mind per work. And beyond that, I really can't comment.

Q And not per anything else?

MS. MYERS: No, it was really work-related.

Q And what can you tell us about the antidepressant medication?

MS. MYERS: Nothing.

Q Had he taken any of it?

MS. MYERS: I don't know.

Q Do you know what it was?

MS. MYERS: No. I don't even know -- the only thing I know about that is what I read in The New York Times. I don't have it confirmed through another source.

Q Can you take the question of whether he was taking Prozac?

MS. MYERS: I really can't, because --

Q Why not?

MS. MYERS: Because it's something -- it's with -- the family has chosen not to comment on that.

Q Did you ask the family?

MS. MYERS: I spoke to a representative of the family, and at this point they're just --

Q Is that Mack McLarty or somebody else?

MS. MYERS: No, somebody else.

Q An attorney?

MS. MYERS: Yes.

Q Dee Dee, when are the toxicology reports going to come out?

Q You're saying that it's the White House position you're not going to explain what kind of medication, whether you know that he had been taking any medication?

MS. MYERS: Right. I think what we said before is that we just weren't aware of it if he was, and again, the only information I have about that is what I read in The New York times this morning. I don't have any independent confirmation.

Q Well, was any medication found in his office?

MS. MYERS: No, nothing -- what we said before is nothing bearing on his death was found in his office.

Q But we were told that also, but the note --

MS. MYERS: That's true. But given --

Q Well, and the psychiatrist note.

MS. MYERS: But that wasn't found in his office.

Q Where was it found?

MS. MYERS: I don't know.

Q How do you know it wasn't?

Q That wasn't found in his office?

MS. MYERS: Because I know that it wasn't, but I don't know where it was found.

Q What wasn't found?

MS. MYERS: The scrap of paper or note, whatever it was, that had the names of three psychiatrists on it was not found in his office.

Q Was it found in the car?

Q Do you have any comment from Japanese --

Q Can we finish up?

MS. MYERS: No. The answer is no.

Q Dee Dee, did you see the letter yourself? And if so, could you tell us -- did he seem to be shouldering more responsibility than he should have?

MS. MYERS: I am familiar with the contents of the note, but I cannot say any more than I've already said about what was in it.

Q Why can't you?

Q Did Vince, at any time, talk to Mack or to the President about leaving the administration?

MS. MYERS: No.

Q Did he give any indication that he was not happy in his job?

MS. MYERS: I think everybody has their ups and downs. I think everybody has their good days and their bad days. I don't know that he talked to anybody about quitting. I don't know that he did.

Q Do you know that he didn't?

MS. MYERS: I can't say that there isn't anybody in the building that he ever talked to about leaving. I haven't -- I don't think we've done an inquiry that would in any way make that certain. But I do not know of any plans if he had talked to anybody in any serious way about quitting.

Q If I could just follow up on Brit's question for just a moment. Does the President -- it now appears that a lot of people who knew Vince Foster knew that he was distressed, and the President apparently did not, or says he did not. Does the President feel that people, perhaps out of a desire to shelter him or out of a fairly common thing that happens at the White House is to keep bad news away from the boss, that people did not inform him of what was going on with Vince Foster adequately? And does he have any feeling that he should have been informed and that he wasn't?

MS. MYERS: I don't know the answer to that. I think that the White House -- people who worked with Vince didn't have any reason to believe that he was distraught.

Q But they thought he was quite distressed.

MS. MYERS: I think people who work -- some people who work, particularly people who work closely --

Q Isn't that a little bit of a hair you're splitting there between quite distressed and distraught?

MS. MYERS: No, because -- well, I mean, everything looks different from this vantage point.

Q Sure, everything looks different in hindsight.

MS. MYERS: And I think what's happened in subsequent days and subsequent week or nine days since his death is that people have compared notes and tried to understand more completely for their own personal reasons the circumstances surrounding his death. But at the time, and even now I don't think anybody, looking back, can say, oh, we should have recognized that as a sign of something much greater. In hindsight, you can perhaps say that. But at the time, people go through their ups and downs here. What he was going through didn't seem to be anything outside of the normal sometimes

difficult ups and downs of working here. Had anybody had any inkling of the trouble that he was in, we all would like to think that we would have done something about it.

Q Are people saying that? Are people regretting that they didn't recognize or notice things now that they now, in hindsight, think?

MS. MYERS: Hindsight always provides a much clearer perspective. I think there isn't a person in here who doesn't wish that they had known so they could have done something.

Q How many hours did the White House have the note before they turned it over to the Park Police?

MS. MYERS: The note was discovered Monday afternoon and turned over Tuesday evening, so a little over 24 --

Q So somewhere between 24 and 30 hours before you gave that evidence to the Park Police?

MS. MYERS: Yes. It was our judgment that the best thing to do was to make sure that the family had a chance to see it. Lisa Foster was coming to Washington on Tuesday for business unrelated to this letter and was given -- was informed about it when she got here. And the President, who was out of town on Monday, was also informed on Tuesday.

Q So your position on --

Q Did the President see the note?

MS. MYERS: He didn't see the note, but he was briefed as to the contents.

Q So your position on this was rather than turn over the evidence in an investigation that it was uncovered that you would wait however many hours or days it took to show the family first?

MS. MYERS: And then we promptly called the Justice Department.

Q Who uncovered the note?

MS. MYERS: Associate Counsel Steve Neuwirth.

Q And who made the decision that it should not immediately be turned over to the investigating authorities?

MS. MYERS: I think the decision was made to inform the family, and I'm not sure who actually made the final decision.

Q Will you take that question please?

MS. MYERS: Sure.

Q So our impression, or the impression that the decision to inform the family first and to withhold it from the police until that was done, we're told was made by Mr. McLarty. Is that at odds with --

MS. MYERS: I just don't know who made the decision. I know how and when the note was discovered and some of the events thereafter, but I just don't -- I'll take the question.

Q Anything else --

Q And there were questions of phone logs that the police raised that hadn't been turned over yet. Do you know whether or not the Counsel's Office has made available to the Park Police the phone calls of his -- that he made the day that he died?

MS. MYERS: No, and I'll take that question. I don't know whether we have an answer to that, since it's part of the ongoing investigation. But I'll --

Q Do you know if the White House has given the Park Police permission to talk to Mrs. Foster yet? As I understand it, they were informed that she was too distraught to be interviewed until after the funeral.

MS. MYERS: I don't know that to be true, but I'll take that as well. I don't know that the White House would have any control over that.

Q When the investigation is complete, who will be releasing the results of that investigation report? And, also, will the family have some type of veto power over what is released?

MS. MYERS: I think that since the Park Service police is conducting the investigation, they'll release the results consistent with the normal -- whatever they normally do. You have to contact them as to that.

Q We couldn't get it through Justice?

MS. MYERS: No, not necessarily. You'd have to check with the Park Service. The Park Service is conducting the investigation. We've only asked the Justice Department to serve as a point of contact in that investigation.

Q For who?

MS. MYERS: For the Park Service.

Q Wait a minute. So the Park Service goes to the Justice Department and the Justice Department then comes to the White House to request evidence? And the White House then consults the family?

MS. MYERS: To provide -- I'm not sure exactly how -- I believe that's true, that the lawyer for the family is in touch with the Justice Department and the Park Service is in touch with the Justice Department to answer questions like, "Is it appropriate to release the contents of the note?" And the answer we got back from the Justice Department, after consulting with the Park Service police, was "No." So that's an example of how the process works.

Q So the Justice Department made the call on releasing of the evidence?

MS. MYERS: The Justice Department in consultation with the Park Service Police, advised us, in fact, directed us not to release the contents of the note.

Q Who at Justice did that?

MS. MYERS: Well, Phil Heymann is the point person. But I believe --

Q The reason was --

MS. MYERS: The reason was that it was part of an ongoing investigation and their judgment was that it --

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Q I'm talking about releasing it to the Park Service.

MS. MYERS: No, no, no. Well, we contacted the Justice Department originally, who advised us --

Q When?

MS. MYERS: Tuesday. Tuesday after --

Q So you contacted Justice the day after you found it?

MS. MYERS: Correct. That's the point we just discussed.

Q I understand that, but what I didn't know was whether you contacted anybody or whether you had a consultation with the Justice Department before that.

MS. MYERS: We contacted the Justice Department on Tuesday who said to contact the Park Service police. The Justice Department came to the White House.

Q When you say they're a point of contact what that means is they're a point of contact for investigators, but they're not the first point of contact for the White House when it's deciding what to do with evidence it uncovers.

MS. MYERS: No, they were. We contacted them.

Q The day after.

MS. MYERS: The day after.

Q Why did you wait to contact the Justice Department?

MS. MYERS: Because we wanted to make sure that the family had been informed and the President had been informed.

Q That's the point, isn't it? The Justice Department is a secondary point of contact after you consult with the family and whoever else you deem you want to talk to.

MS. MYERS: No, I think the Justice Department is still the primary point of contact. That's the person we went to to seek advice about what to do with the document. And they said it ought to be turned over to the Park Service police, and so we did that.

Q When you say an ongoing investigation, which investigation are you referring to?

MS. MYERS: The Park Service police.

Q Can you take the question of whether Vince Foster was in New York City on February 10th?

MS. MYERS: Sure.

Q What was the question?

MS. MYERS: Was Vince Foster in New York City on February 10th?

Q Where was this note found?

MS. MYERS: The note was found in the bottom of Vince's briefcase in his office as one of the Associate Counsel's was packing up some of his personal belongings to be turned over to the family.

Q And was the briefcase in that office when Park Police originally went through the office in search of any possible evidence that could shed some light on the death?

MS. MYERS: Yes, it was. And I don't think I should say a whole lot more about the circumstances since this is ongoing, but it was. It was torn into fairly small pieces of paper and at the bottom of the briefcase and I think was not immediately apparent.

Q Who put it together?

MS. MYERS: The Counsel's Office.

Q Can you just run through the chronology on the other note, the one with the list of the three psychiatrists? When was that found?

MS. MYERS: I don't know.

Q You still don't know?

MS. MYERS: No, it was -- I don't know what the Park Service is saying, if anything, about it. But it was not something that was discovered in his office and it's something that I don't know the specific details about --

Q -- that you waited a while before you told police -

MS. MYERS: We didn't have it. We never -- it was never here.

Q Has anything else turned up?

MS. MYERS: Not that I know of.

Q Let me just ask one other question on that. When was the first time that officials here knew of the existence of that?

MS. MYERS: What day was it? Today's Thursday. Tuesday night, late.

Q Dee Dee, coming back to Ann's question, if you had the note for more than 24 hours before turning it over to the authorities, is that not obstructing justice when there was an investigation going on?

MS. MYERS: I don't believe so. We took the note and informed the family and then turned it over to the proper authorities.

Q That's more than 24 hours. In an investigation 24 hours can be critical.

MS. MYERS: I don't think there's -- there's no criminal implications here.

Q Isn't that what the investigation is determining?

Q That's why there's an investigation.

MS. MYERS: I think what we did was we informed the family about it, which we thought was appropriate, and then turned it over to the proper officials.

Q Tuesday night, your first knowledge of which note?

MS. MYERS: That was the time we were first informed about a note with, or a piece of paper with the names of three psychiatrists.

Q Tuesday night late?

MS. MYERS: Yes.

Q It was on the air Tuesday.

Q Who discovered that note?

MS. MYERS: But we didn't have any independent confirmation of that. All we had was NBC's report.

Q To what extent is the White House deciding for itself what evidence is appropriate to submit to the investigating authority? If Vince Foster had worked for any other organization except the White House, his office might have been sealed and all the contents gone over by the investigating authorities. And now, when things are found, it's being discussed whether or not and under what circumstances to be submitted.

MS. MYERS: No, whether or not was never an issue. It was something that we thought had a bearing on the situation and we turned it over. There was never a discussion about whether or not to turn it over.

Q Dee Dee, would you object to a release of that note at the appropriate time, or would you tell the authorities that that shouldn't be released?

MS. MYERS: No, I don't think we would object. I think in the context of the investigation we were told not to release it, but I think that if the investigating agencies thought that it was appropriate that --

Q Is there any reason it couldn't be released now? That would end a lot of the questions you're going to get.

MS. MYERS: Yes, I understand that, but, yes, the Justice Department advised us not to in the course of this investigation. Now, at some point they may say that it's okay, but at this point they're saying not to. And we think it's important.

Q Can you clear up the differences between what you told us on I think it was your Tuesday briefing that the President was among the people that knew that Foster was, quote, "having a rough time," and what the President said yesterday?

MS. MYERS: I tried, and I guess, failed to put that comment in the context of the work, that the President knew the Counsel's Office had had its ups and downs, like a lot of departments around here, that that was not unusual. But he had no reason to think that Vince was personally despondent or distressed or deeply troubled. He was shocked when it happened, and shocked to find out subsequently that people thought that he was, in fact, distressed, which was what he said yesterday. At the time, he didn't have any reason to believe that it was anything other than sort of routine ups and downs.

Q Dee Dee, will you take the question as to whether Webb Hubbell told him that Mr. Foster was in distress?

MS. MYERS: I know that he did not.

Q You know that he didn't?

MS. MYERS: I know that he did not. The President did not know when he called Vince --

Q With Hubbell at his side, correct?

MS. MYERS: Correct. I don't know if Hubbell was in the room, but he had talked to --

Q Hubbell did not -- can you clarify then whether it was Hubbell who urged him to invite Foster over?

MS. MYERS: He didn't. Nobody urged him to. I mean, it was -- Webb was there and they were going to watch a movie.

Q These three men are old and close friends. The President -- and Hubbell is an intimate of Mrs. Clinton and a friend of Mrs. Clinton and a friend of Foster. He was there with the President of the United States. He had just spent a weekend with him, he doesn't tell the President this.

MS. MYERS: The "this" is what is, I think, perhaps in question. I don't know what Webb thought coming out of that weekend with Vince. I haven't had a chance to speak to him about it, and I don't think that anybody here -- I don't think Webb has said exactly what he thought.

Q Are you disputing that Webb Hubbell -- that part of the purpose of that weekend at the shore was to lift Foster's spirits?

MS. MYERS: I'm simply saying I don't know and I can't comment on it. I don't know why they went. I think --

Q Might you see fit, in light of the fact that all of this revolves around intimates of the President of the United States to ask?

MS. MYERS: I mean, I can tell you that the President did not know --

Q You can understand why anyone with the knowledge of the facts as they've been reported here and mostly there would wonder.

MS. MYERS: I think it is appropriate to talk about the context of what happened at the White House, and we've tried to do that. I don't think that I'm in a position to know what Vince's friends and intimates outside of this environment thought or what was in their mind.

Q Dee Dee, you just said they're officials of this administration.

MS. MYERS: I understand that, but I just think that I can tell you what the President thought when he called Vince and I talked to him about that, and what the President -- why he called him and sort of what his understanding of the situation was. Hindsight puts this in a completely different light.

Q We're not asking about hindsight, we're asking about what happened and when and who said what to whom beforehand.

MS. MYERS: Right, and what I can tell you about that is that Webb and the President were together, the President called Vince to invite him to the movies --

Q Just sort of out of the blue?

MS. MYERS: Yes, well, Webb and Vince and the President were friends, and it would not be unusual for two of them to contact the third, particularly because Hillary was out of town, I think, and he was having some people over for the movies, and as he said, he got lonesome for Vince and he called him up. But the President did not have any reason to believe that Vince was deeply troubled or depressed.

Q In light of that, and the difficulty you seem to be having in answering Brit's question, are there questions of liability here? Has Attorney Nussbaum, McLarty suggested at all, if there might be any questions of liability? We're trying to --

MS. MYERS: I don't think so.

Q It doesn't seem that there would be.

MS. MYERS: No one has suggested it in any way. It's -

Q At the same time, it stretches credibility to think that Webb and the President together would not discuss the weekend.

MS. MYERS: I think that the President and Vince discussed the weekend in some detail in their phone conversation. Hi, had a great time at the shore, how are you, it was fun, the sun was out. You know, they talked about the weekend. The President clearly knew that they had spent the weekend together. Once again, I don't know how to reconstruct events in a way that makes sense from the perspective of knowing what happened. But all I can tell you is what the President's recollections were at the time.

Q Dee Dee, what's striking about this is that it seems utterly credible to anyone that the President and everyone around him, even though they cared deeply about this man, would not have recognized that he was suicidal. That makes great sense. It's very hard to know these things. What seems less -- what's harder to believe is the idea that, under these circumstances, with Mr. Hubbell having just done what we believe him to have done, that the fact that the man was, as the President put it, in serious distress, would not have come to the President's attention. That's tough.

MS. MYERS: I think what the President -- again, all I can tell you is what the President knew at the time, that Counsel's Office was having its turn, as it were, and suffering some of the daily ups and downs of life in the White House. And I think the President was aware of that, but he wasn't aware that it went beyond that. And it's difficult to reconstruct from this vantage point. I wish there was more that I could say.

Q This White House works seven days a week. Can you clarify whether or not you've checked with any of his staff to know if, in fact, the stories that he was not coming in on Saturdays and Sundays and so forth -- does that match with what was --

MS. MYERS: Does not match with what was reported today. I think a number of people here had meetings with him or were at a Fourth of July barbecue with him, for example, on weekends throughout the month.

Q Was he working routinely on weekends, just like everybody else?

MS. MYERS: He had meetings in the White House, or was seen in the White House, I think every weekend day, was either at a party or in the White House with one exception. And I don't know what day it was, but --

Q Well, that would have been the weekend before, wouldn't it?

MS. MYERS: No, because we can account for his whereabouts every day, except one. This is for the month of July. So, in other words, he was in on both Saturday and Sunday for a meeting or in the middle of the day at some point was seen with somebody during that period.

Q Was that routine pattern prior to July?

MS. MYERS: He worked a lot of weekends. I didn't check back beyond that.

Q When this is all resolved, who will make the announcement? Will it be the Park Service, or will it be the White House, clearing through the Justice Department or with the family? I mean --

MS. MYERS: I don't know.

Q You don't know how it will be finally --

MS. MYERS: Yes. I don't know how it will be finally sort of reconciled, whether or not they'll turn something over to us with the caveat that we can do what we want with it, or whether they'll release something. I think we'll have to wait and see.

Q You've said a number of times that the President had no inkling when he called him on Monday night. What was said or done in that conversation that caused him to set up the meeting that was to be held on Wednesday that was never held? What made him -- he certainly wasn't still lonesome for him.

MS. MYERS: Right. No, they talked about a number of work-related issues, and I think Vince had some questions that he wanted to run by the President, some issues he wanted to discuss with him.

Q Related to the kinds of things that were on this list that were --

MS. MYERS: I don't want to speculate about that, but just issues generally regarding his work in the Counsel's Office, and the President said, why don't you come on in and see me on Wednesday, so they set up a meeting.

Q And Vince raised those issues with the President in that conversation?

MS. MYERS: Yes, they talked about a number of work-related things, as well as Vince's weekend.

Q Okay. Did the weekend contribute to the reason for the meeting on Wednesday as well --

MS. MYERS: No, no.

Q Let me just take that a little further. Now, Lisa Foster and Donna McLarty had lunch on Tuesday, approximately the same time that Vince was leaving here to go off wherever he went that afternoon. And Hubbell and Vince met over the weekend. There were a couple of other prior discussions -- people -- there were any number of people talking around here. This is, I guess, revisiting the old horse, but there's an awful lot going on here for the President to have been totally oblivious to it all at the time. If Donna knew, certainly Mack knew. But that was too late for a phone call, but wouldn't she tell him? That's funny? I'm sorry, I didn't mean to make a joke.

MS. MYERS: No, I meant since you set the timing up at the beginning of the question -- first of all, I don't know what Donna and Lisa talked about on Tuesday, but it was Tuesday and I don't think she saw Mack again in time to tell him anything.

Q Until he got the call Tuesday night?

MS. MYERS: Yeah.

Q But remember there was a great deal of questions about --

MS. MYERS: Mack was here in the White House until -- soon when we found out because of Larry King --

Q But there was a great deal of questioning about whether -- Nussbaum kept saying where he was, but nobody thought his absence was meaningful. And if the discussion that Lisa Foster had with Donna McLarty at lunch on Tuesday meant anything and if it got to anybody, certainly that would have --

MS. MYERS: I just don't think she had -- I mean, I don't know what went through her head. I certainly can't surmise, but again, it was Tuesday. And by the following day it was too late.

Q Any other notes discovered or pieces of paper that could similarly reflect on the state of his mind?

MS. MYERS: Not yet that I'm aware of.

Q Have you asked if there are any other notes? I mean, -- through the last five days, we've had a series of, "Not to my knowledge," and, "Not that I'm aware of," until you've become aware of. Have you asked if there's any other notes or --

MS. MYERS: I don't think that's quite true.

Q Well, okay, well, you were asked if he was on any medication. Gearan was asked, McLarty was asked. "Not to our knowledge." "Not that we're aware of."

MS. MYERS: But that's -- that, I mean -- you have to understand, why would we know? I don't -- I mean, the White House --

Q Because you may have asked these questions are logical questions because he was a public official.

MS. MYERS: Question was asked on Friday, and I think as the week and the weeks from here forth proceed, a lot of things are going to come to light that people weren't previously aware of.

When I say -- when I'm asked if he's taking any medication, and I say, "not that I'm aware of," that was our impression here at the White House at that point. We wouldn't necessarily be in a position to know. It's just not -- I mean,

people who work with him are not necessarily in a position to know what his personal circumstances are, whether or not he talks to his physician.

Q I think the point is that the answers are sort of a pattern of the handling of a private death of a private individual; that is you're not aware of anything you don't ask about -- and my question is, has the privacy of Vince Foster and his family made you and others who speak for this administration unwilling to ask questions such as, was he seeing a psychiatrist -- of the family and of people who would know -- was he seeing a psychiatrist, was he taking medicine, did he leave a note, was he depressed?

MS. MYERS: The answer that I gave to that was I did ask a representative of the family and the family's choice was not to confirm or deny it. Now, that may change over the course of the next few days, but at this point that's all I can tell you.

Q You asked the family what, Dee Dee?

MS. MYERS: Whether he had been taking any medication. And I didn't confirm it. And they made some point and I, you know --

Q Do you feel obliged to go beyond that, to try to find out from anyone else, to find out from anyone else here in the White House to try to construct --

MS. MYERS: Well, there's an investigation ongoing to try to put back together some of these details. I don't -- and certainly we want to try to provide as much information as we can about this, particularly things that are relevant to his work. It's difficult because this isn't necessarily within our purview. We're not conducting an independent investigation. I think it is useful to know this. And to the degree that I can provide accurate information -- and others I know feel the same way -- to the degree that we can provide accurate information, we're trying to do that. It's obviously a very difficult time for people both personally and as we try to cooperate with the scope of this investigation without having the authority or the mechanism to go beyond what is discovered in this process. It's a difficult situation.

Q You just said that you asked at least a representative of the family about the drug question and that they told you -- they had declined to confirm or deny it --

MS. MYERS: Right.

Q -- to answer the question. But don't you think that when you answered that question by saying not to the best of my knowledge --

MS. MYERS: That was last Friday.

Q Okay, but you've been using those kind of answers all along. When you get those kind of answers, don't you think it creates an impression that the answer is no probably, or at least probably no and not -- is it misleading?

MS. MYERS: I think that it's a difficult situation. These are questions that I'm not in a position necessarily to take. And so I give you the best of my knowledge with the -- that's why I've been very -- tried to be very careful to characterize what it is we would be likely to know and what it is we might not know.

Q -- the point that some of us are trying to make is that we understand some of the concerns you're talking about that

these sort of answers instead of addressing those concerns actually drag this story out and make it longer and actually hurt you all.

MS. MYERS: I'm painfully aware of that.

Q Do you think Bernie would be willing to brief us on what they know and what they are likely to know and what they will never know?

MS. MYERS: I think that's unlikely at this point.

Q Just to put this -- for all of our sakes.

MS. MYERS: But, see, the thing is Bernie -- I don't know that Bernie's in a position to know whether he was taking -- I know Bernie doesn't know whether or not he was taking drugs.

Q But you did say that nothing was -- no medication was found in his office --

MS. MYERS: Right.

Q -- or in his personal effects.

MS. MYERS: Well, I don't --

Q You can only speak for the office?

MS. MYERS: Right.

Q So it could be that things were found in the car or the briefcase that he had with him?

MS. MYERS: I don't think he had a briefcase with him. Just his wallet and his White House I.D.

Q Is the President going to make a broadcast this weekend?

Q Did he have two briefcases in the office?

MS. MYERS: I don't know. I only know of the one.

Q Is the President going to make a television broadcast?

MS. MYERS: I wouldn't rule it out. We've always said that's something we'd consider in the context of reconciliation.

Q Would that mean after you have --

MS. MYERS: The question was, is the President going to give an Oval Office address. And the answer was that I wouldn't rule it out. It's something that we've talked about in the context of this reconciliation process.

Q Has it been discussed with greater intensity in recent days and more likely? The question is Sunday --

MS. MYERS: We haven't made a final decision about it yet. It has been --

Q Would you characterize it as likely?

MS. MYERS: I would characterize it as fairly likely sometime, but not necessarily Sunday.

Q Could it be Saturday?

MS. MYERS: As soon as we know we'll let you guys know. We really will.

Q If it would be this weekend and it's not Sunday --

MS. MYERS: Well, no, I didn't say it was this weekend. I didn't say it was this weekend.

Q Oh, you didn't? I'm sorry.

Q Can you give us your best guidance at this point about the President's vacation and how it fits into the visit with the Pope and Tulsa and maybe California?

MS. MYERS: For planning purposes only, it is not completely clear. (Laughter.) He will leave here -- now, with that caveat I'll tell you what I can. The time in question, ballpark, August 12th to August 29th, that two-week period is still what we're considering.

Q And some of that is not down time.

MS. MYERS: Some of it is not down time. It's actually -- isn't that a little more than two weeks? He's going to see the Pope on the 12th of August. He will go to Oklahoma City -- or Tulsa for the Governor's Conference. He will probably spend some time in Colorado. It is unclear whether or not he'll go to California, and he may spend some time in Arkansas. And as soon as we have better details than that --

Q -- on the 12th, is it to Arkansas?

MS. MYERS: The 12th would be to Denver. That's the Pope.

Q And from Denver -- can you just give us any kind of order?

MS. MYERS: It's not reliable yet.

Q Is it definite yet which day he's going to speak to the Governor's Conference? Because it was originally going to be Monday, but there was some talk about having it on the weekend instead. Is that fixed?

MS. MYERS: It's not fixed. It's not definite.

Q Did the President meet with the French Defense Minister this afternoon? Or did Anthony Lake?

MS. MYERS: I don't know. I'll take that question.

Q What about tomorrow?

Q Wait a second. Is he meeting with him?

MS. MYERS: What's on the plan?

Q Tony Lake?

MS. MYERS: Tony is -- tomorrow? Today.

Q It has happened, hasn't it? It's over, right, or is the guy still in there?

MS. MYERS: An announcement. Tony Lake met with the French Foreign Defense Minister, as opposed to Mr. Jupe.

Q Everybody would like to know why.

MS. MYERS: Do you want to come up here and just give a little readout on that? Are you prepared to do that?

MR. STEINBERG: I'm not prepared to do that yet.

MS. MYERS: Okay. We'll post a readout.

MR. STEINBERG: The meeting may, in fact, still be taking place.

MS. MYERS: We'll post a readout on Mr. Lake's meeting with Mr. Leotard.

Q Any subject other than Bosnia on the agenda?

MR. STEINBERG: It was just a general discussion that was scheduled for a long time.

Q No. (Laughter.)

Q Tomorrow?

MS. MYERS: Tomorrow. Do you guys have the schedule for tomorrow? We have a seniors' event, right, somewhere in Maryland? I'll have to get back to you. I don't have the details.

Q In the morning?

MS. MYERS: No -- we don't have -- we have a schedule, I just don't have it in front me.

Q Dee Dee, on the budget, is Senator Feinstein trying to barter a vote on the budget with the White House for some big bucks favors for some powerful interests in California?

Q A simple yes will be fine. (Laughter.)

MS. MYERS: No, I think Senator Feinstein is interested in getting a good economic growth package that will benefit Californians.

Q Are you denying that there's been any horse-trading with her?

MS. MYERS: As you know or may not know, she met with the President on Sunday. They discussed a number of elements in the economic plan. I think that's part of the process.

Q But you're saying you're not aware of any extraneous things, concessions, that she was demanding and may have gotten?

MS. MYERS: I certainly wouldn't discuss that from this podium.

Q What are the weekend plans?

MS. MYERS: There was no -- last I checked they were both -- Saturday and Sunday were down days. Now, we may put something on Saturday and we'll let you know tomorrow.

Q Is there anything new on Bosnia?

Q -- referring this morning to some back-up plans if, for instance, the enforcement mechanisms are considered extraneous and they have -- the Byrd rule. The deficit trust fund is another one of these issues. Empowerment zones is another issue. Would he treat those through an executive order, for instance, if the Byrd rule is invoked on those issues?

MS. MYERS: I don't think we have final decisions on that yet.

Q Is it possible?

MS. MYERS: I'll have to get back to you on it. I don't want to characterize it.

Q No change in Bosnia?

MS. MYERS:

END

4:01 P.M. EDT

#101-07/29

FILE -
Foster suicide
Press

Cliff Sloan
Room 128 OEOB

000801

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

August 10, 1993

PRESS BRIEFING
BY
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS MARK GEARAN

The Briefing Room

4:27 P.M. EDT

MR. GEARAN: Let me begin by apologizing for being late, and thank you all for coming. Sincerely, though, we're sorry we're getting delayed coming in here.

Q Why?

MR. GEARAN: We apologize for that.

Let me begin --

Q And it won't happen again?

MR. GEARAN: And it will not happen again. We promise you that. (Laughter.) A late lunch on my part delayed me.

Let me begin with a few remarks about Vince Foster's writing, which I assume is most of your interest here. Vince Foster was a very highly respected and certainly well-liked and able member of this administration. At this time, particularly, the thoughts of everyone in the White House are with his wife, with his children, and with his many friends here in Washington and in Arkansas.

The sentiments in the note are the comments of someone who was obviously troubled about matters he encountered at work. Certainly those who have known him here have gone back in their minds trying to remember conversations and discussions they have had with him, searching for clues to the question, why.

To my knowledge, and certainly even with the benefit of hindsight, his tragic death is very much a shock and a surprise to his colleagues and to people here. I don't think his colleagues here at the White House ever fully realized what Vince was going through during his time here.

As all of you know, the writing was found torn up in the bottom of his briefcase. It was unsigned. It was undated. We do not even know how seriously Mr. Foster may have taken the note. We don't even know when he wrote it, since it is undated. So as we go through this, let me be clear just from the start, I will not attempt to characterize what Mr. Foster might have meant by certain phrases or sentences. It would not only be inappropriate, but it is certainly beyond anyone's capacity to interpret many of the words that he wrote here.

Let me take any of your questions.

Q Mark, would you explain what he meant -- well, you can't explain what he meant -- can you tell us what information you have about the line that says, "The Usher's Office plotted to have excessive costs incurred taking advantage of Kaki and HRC." Give us any information on that and on what the costs have been for

-- some of the residence rooms and a combination of that. I would have to --

Q Why don't you have somebody who can tell us?

MR. GEARAN: We certainly will.

Q Why are you out here if you don't know it?

MR. GEARAN: That's a fair question. I'm asking myself. (Laughter.) Among your many qualities, mind-reading is really one of them. (Laughter.)

Q What are the other ones?

MR. GEARAN: Her other qualities are too long to note. But let me go back -- I'm sorry.

Q Good lunch appetite.

MR. GEARAN: Lunch appetite, yes, late lunch. So we will have to work with you on the numbers. I am not expert enough on renovating. I'm trying to sell my house --

Q Why was he concerned about it? How did it come into his bailiwick at all?

MR. GEARAN: Well, as Deputy Counsel in the Counsel's Office, part of his responsibility and his job was the legal matters affecting the residence. And so in that context he was made aware of it. But I can tell you at this point, for your purposes, and we will work with you, but we do not believe any plot. The Public Integrity Unit that's been looking into it has indicated that they have no suspect of any criminal --

Q Did Mrs. Clinton ever say anything?

Q Was Mrs. Clinton being involved -- I mean, was she being accused of overspending or anything in that way?

MR. GEARAN: No, no. Mrs. Clinton as the First Lady is involved with the renovation, but no.

Q Well, why was the Public Integrity unit looking into it?

MR. GEARAN: That's what the Deputy Attorney General directed.

Q Could we have some more on camera here, Mark?

Q Excuse me?

MR. GEARAN: The Deputy Attorney General, as he announced today -- I think he provided this at his briefing. They wanted --

Q And it began when -- the Public Integrity Unit's investigation?

MR. GEARAN: I don't know. I'd have to direct you to Justice.

Q It began after this note was discovered?

MR. GEARAN: I would assume so. Let me read his --

MR. GEARAN: I think he said, from what I understand is, that it was reasonable. But anyway, let me get to the point of your question.

The legal counsel -- associate and the legal counsel and the Chief of Staff and I'm not -- David Gergen, the counselor. I'm not familiar with anyone else who -- you mean who physically saw the note, was your question? I believe that's right. Let me take that and let me report back to you if there's any others.

Q But related to that question is the question of this information about the Usher's Office has been available inside the White House since that note was discovered and read by people on the staff here. Has Mrs. Clinton been asked anything about the contents of that note? About her suspicions about something going on? Has the interior decorator been asked anything about it? What -- has anybody tried to come to a conclusion on what it was that persuaded Vince Foster that there was something going on that could be a problem?

MR. GEARAN: We don't know is the answer --

Q Nobody?

MR. GEARAN: -- to what he might have been thinking or speculating at this point. I can tell you, as Heymann mentioned, that the Office of Public Integrity, while it's not complete, has made a preliminary inquiry. And that was the quote that I --

Q Mrs. Clinton hasn't been asked about this note?

MR. GEARAN: Not to my knowledge, but you might want to --

Q Is it the assumption then --

MR. GEARAN: You should talk to the Justice Department. They're the ones --

Q Is it the assumption then that Vince Foster was making this up? This was out of whole cloth?

MR. GEARAN: I have no ability to answer that question. We do not believe that there is any, as he says, plot. We note that the Public Integrity Unit has looked into it. Beyond that, I'm unable to speculate what he might have meant.

Q Was anyone else in his office working on this issue with him? Any other members of the Counsel's Office working on a possible cost problem involving the renovations?

MR. GEARAN: No.

Q Have they been asked?

MR. GEARAN: Well, it has been reviewed since then and his files have been turned over, but I'm not aware of anyone else in --

Q What was found when it was reviewed since then? And did you ask the Usher's Office?

MR. GEARAN: We did not. The Justice Department did, to the best of my knowledge. I can detail more from the briefing that might have come up today at Justice who they might have talked to. I'm not aware of who specifically in the White House they spoke to. You need to check in with Justice on that.

Q So what about the prior investigations that the GOP has lied and misrepresented its knowledged role and covered up a prior investigation of the travel office?

MR. GEARAN: What I said earlier was, again, we don't really know, but prior instances of problems in the travel office predating our administration have been noted or observed. Whether or not that was the case, we don't know.

Q Since Vince Foster's suicide there have been discussions in the White House amongst people talking about why he might have done it, and from that has come out a fully portrait of people having talked to him before his death and there were some signs that he was troubled. In any time in that process of reflecting on those conversations has anyone come across recollections of conversations on the topic the Usher, the FBI, the charge about the Republicans that he talked about -- not that you don't think that there are any charges are true -- but does anyone know of any time that he talked about any of those topics?

MR. GEARAN: Well, the topics of the travel office and others have been ones that have been well discussed within the White House. No one ever thought here, that any of the references here -- I mean, it should go without saying, but by definition, was to a point -- as I said at the beginning we were not aware clearly of the depth of his feelings by definition. People would have done something here otherwise.

Q There was no discussion, no one had discussions with him about any of these more specific types of topics than just the travel office?

MR. GEARAN: I think in the list of things -- I mean, we're not aware of -- we were not aware that the kind of references that he observed were ones that would have prompted any kind of action that he eventually took.

Q May I just follow up on a question about the Usher's Office? May I take it that some other official in the Counsel's Office now has whatever portfolio or case or whatever you care to call it that he would have had that would have brought these matters to his attention? And may I take it further that someone is following up on this matter, this seeming allegation of excessive costs -- to find out what this was about and to determine what it is?

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q So the White House is on the case, so to speak?

MR. GEARAN: Yes. Let me be clear.

Q What did he say, sir?

Q Who would that be?

MR. GEARAN: I'm sorry -- keep going.

Q Can you just tell me who would that be that's following this up?

MR. GEARAN: Bernie Nussbaum is assigning the different pieces of work within the Counsel's Office that Vince had been charged with to the other counsels in the office. I don't know who specifically has his portfolio. We can get you that.

MR. GEARAN: Let me get into this. There were two estimates that differed. Let me just get into this and then we can go through.

He was concerned about the discrepancy in costs and asked the Usher's Office -- he, Vince, asked the Usher's Office to provide an explanation for the change in estimates. We can only assume that Mr. Foster was unclear about the costs because we do not believe that he had actually reviewed the receipts relating to the renovation that included labor and upholstery and the charges that were incurred, and is continuing. The renovation is not complete.

What happened here -- let me go through this -- what happened here, as we understand it, is a miscommunication between the decorator and the Usher's Office. For example, the Usher's Office was not aware of the certain time deadlines that the decorator was going to impose on the work being done. Similarly, the decorator didn't understand what the imposed deadlines would mean for overtime labor. Therefore, there was a difference in the estimates that were given from within a few month period. That might have accounted --

Q Difference in estimates or difference in estimates and costs incurred?

MR. GEARAN: Estimates at this point. The renovation is continuing. And at the end of the entire renovation, the plan, apparently, of every renovation -- what they usually do, I am told, is to provide a report on what was done, how it was completed. This --

Q How big was the --

MR. GEARAN: Okay, let me go through. The first estimate that was given in March was for \$250,000.

Q Whose was that?

MR. GEARAN: That was the arrangement between the decorator and the Usher's Office.

Q Whose estimate?

MR. GEARAN: That's what they agreed to at that time. That's what they agreed to at that time.

Q What was this for? You haven't told --

MR. GEARAN: The second was --

Q Why don't you tell us what the renovations were for?

Q Sarah.

MR. GEARAN: The second, which was approximately \$377,000, was given in early June.

Q These were both given by the decorator to the usher?

MR. GEARAN: No, these were the estimates that -- the initial one that the usher and the decorator worked out. What we had -- what resulted was apparently a miscommunication as to what that estimate involved. When the price --

Q What is his name?

Q Mark, what is -- two questions. Could you move Sarah up front so she can hear things? Second of all, what exactly does the usher do? (Laughter.)

MR. GEARAN: Which one of you wants to leave?
(Laughter.)

Q It just seems like it would make it easier for her and everybody.

MR. GEARAN: Okay. What's the second question?

Q What does the usher -- I'm not clear how the usher fits in. Explain who does what? I mean, who oversees the decorator?

MR. GEARAN: Yes. The Usher's Office manages the Executive Residence staff, whose responsibilities include the care and maintenance of the historic Executive Residence, its furnishings and preparations for official and ceremonial presidential events and the operation of the First Family's household. There's a Chief Usher and then four assistant ushers.

Q Does the decorator work for the usher by contract -- in other words, he is getting 20 percent of whatever the cost of this is?

MR. GEARAN: I need to send you to Lisa on that.

Q In other words, the decorator works for the usher?

MR. GEARAN: The decorator works for the First Family. But the Usher's Office coordinates the Executive Residence.

Q Can I just clarify one thing -- why would Vince Foster be at all interested in what the ushers and the decorators and this whole project -- how does he fit in?

MR. GEARAN: Well, as Deputy Counsel, one of his jobs was to work on any legal issues or to -- on the residence issues in the White House.

Q But isn't that a little junior for the Deputy Counsel to be getting involved in those kinds of minor matters?

MR. GEARAN: I don't think so.

Q Other than a misunderstanding, was there a real fight between them?

MR. GEARAN: No, I think it was a miscommunication, is how I can best interpret it.

Q Between who?

MR. GEARAN: Between the Usher's Office and the decorator.

Q Mark, the note seems to exhibit something more than just discouragement or depression about the way things are going. There's hints of conspiracies and cover-ups. I mean, more than hints. Has there ever been any indication from the people who've known him for years, including the Clintons, that he ever exhibited this tendency or this concern about broader plots being waged against the President? Was it right in that case to put him in a position of this kind of responsibility?

investigation beyond the seven to look at possible ethics violations by the officials involved in the firings.

MR. GEARAN: I don't know the answer.

Q You don't know whether he received a call from Justice saying we may look into that?

MR. GEARAN: I don't know. I can post an answer. Let me take a few more.

Q Given Vice Foster's involvement in this and in the FACA case, was there any way in which he -- it's fair to characterize his role in the Counsel's Office as having responsibility for those issues pertaining to the First Lady? Did that tend to be in his portfolio?

MR. GEARAN: He had a broad portfolio. As Bernie Nussbaum said, when they approached their job, that they were partners in the Counsel's Office, building a law firm. And they approached it like that -- bringing in the Associate counsels. I think we can say quite a bit about Vince's work in the Counsel's Office and that as a extremely able lawyer.

Q Just to follow up. Partners in law firms have different responsibilities. Did the First Lady's work and legal needs tend to fall on his desk rather than that of other attorneys?

MR. GEARAN: I'm not aware, aside from the renovation and the task force any other instances. But certainly those two were. He assisted in the Supreme Court nomination, as you know, directly for the President. Someone that the President sought for his own advice. I would not narrow it to that, but it included those two instances.

Let me just take a couple more questions.

Q Mark, did anybody besides Vince Foster raise any questions about these estimates into the redecoration of the White House? And is there an ongoing investigation into any of these allegations in this letter, whether it be the cost estimates, the FBI lies to the AG, the press covering up illegal benefits, or is there an ongoing investigation into any of these issues?

MR. GEARAN: I would have to refer you to Justice for the status of those investigations. Heymann, in the letter I mentioned, this morning directed Professional Responsibility and Public Integrity to do that. And the investigation --

Q And did anybody else raise any questions about the cost estimates? Anyone besides Vince Foster?

MR. GEARAN: Not that I'm aware of.

Q What was Bernie Nussbaum's response to these statements and allegations in this letter? Is he as baffled by them as you appear to be?

MR. GEARAN: I think Bernie would share in our assessment that it's, most of all, a sad commentary on Washington.

One more question.

Q Do you have any comment about the line in here about the Wall Street Journal? Is there any degree to which the Journal is being blamed?

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MR. GEARAN: I'm sorry?

Q What does Clinton have going to California that he has to leave -- what's he doing in California?

MR. GEARAN: We're doing defense conversion, Alameda Air Station.

Q Friday. Not Thursday, Friday.

MR. GEARAN: On Friday. Friday -- that's correct.

Q What is the perceived role within the Clinton administration of the papacy in the modern world in terms of the constructive role the papacy can play both on a domestic and on foreign policy scale?

MR. GEARAN: That's what I was referring to in terms of the social mission as well as a lot of the humanitarian effort that the Church has been involved in. The President, when he nominated Mayor Flynn as Ambassador to the Vatican, spoke about that and the important role that the Church has played in humanitarian efforts. His interest, of course, is to have Ambassador Flynn, who will be in Denver for the arrival of the Pope, a part of that effort.

Q Will Mrs. Clinton be joining him at the airport?

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q Chelsea?

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q Is the President taking all of the Catholic staff members with him? This is usually the case.

MR. GEARAN: I think many members of the staff that usually travel with the President are coincidentally Catholic, as it turns out. There are many members of the staff that are honored to have been invited by the President to join him for it.

Q Will there be an exchange of gifts?

MR. GEARAN: So the answer is, yes -- Marcia Hale may be joining him; Dee Dee Myers; other members of the President's staff that are Catholic.

Q The President is Southern Baptist?

MR. GEARAN: The President is Baptist, yes.

Q Will there be an exchange of gifts?

MR. GEARAN: Typically there is. I assume there is. I can post an answer to that. I believe there is. I don't know what it is. There definitely is. I don't know what the gift is.

Q I know on a state visit there is, but on something like this, is there?

MR. GEARAN: Yes, there is an exchange.

Q Do you have something going for the President today -- a staff salute?

MR. GEARAN: Yes, but that's to be determined.

Q Do you think the American people would think it was weird that the President is getting on his airplane and doesn't really even know where he's going, where he's going to end up for vacation? Do you think that my readers would think that's strange?

MR. GEARAN: No. I would like to think your readers would appreciate the complexities of planning a visit of the President to a vacation area in August.

Q But, Mark, there hasn't been any real planning in this. I mean, this has been being discussed for three or four weeks and your five days, six days away from the vacation and you have no idea where you're going.

MR. GEARAN: No, no.

Q No matter where you go, you're going to have to find a hundred or so rooms for staff and security. You're going to force those people out of their hotel rooms. For them it's going to be a concern.

MR. GEARAN: Well, what I would like to think that people would take away from this is that -- as we have advance people on the ground presently looking at a site, that we've tried to give you the best guidance for the time line that we can at this point. Complexities of a trip like this are, I think, somewhat obvious. I would suspect within the next 24 hours, as our advance people complete their work, that can be confirmed for you.

Q Mark, are you thinking about -- is the President thinking about staying at Jackie Onassis's estate there -- is that true?

MR. GEARAN: Not to my knowledge, no.

Q Mark, is the White House satisfied now that all the questions regarding Vince Foster's suicide have been answered?

MR. GEARAN: Well, the position of the White House, I think, has been, as we've said over the past few days in light of the writing that was released yesterday, is that there are many issues of which he spoke that we talked about yesterday that we don't have a clear sense just exactly what Vince may or may not have meant by that. Some of the issues in terms of the cause of death, some of the preliminary inquiries that were held by Justice have reported. There's other issues tangentially related in terms of the travel office and whatever that is an ongoing inquiry. Until that's -- that's a judgment for them to make, not certainly the White House at this point.

I think what we have tried to say from this podium and elsewhere is the culture of the White House or the reaction of the White House in the past few weeks has been that people were truly shocked and surprised both at the time and continue to be.

Q But the President -- the President said immediately after this happened that he was satisfied that based on what he knew initially that this was one of those mysteries that would never be solved. Did this note raise any more questions for him and lead him to believe that there are any unanswered questions remaining?

MR. GEARAN: No, I think the note stands for what it is, as we talked yesterday, is more than anything a sad document of a reflection of life in Washington.

Q But the President's feeling about this is a mystery?

MR. GEARAN: I think the President's feeling is, as he has stated in the past. I would say I think people here believe that a suicide is, by definition, an irrational act and that Vince was troubled over matters regarding work. The note is evidence to that. And in a certain sense, one will never completely know, as in any suicide, the full range of it.

Q Would it be fair to say that the White House regards some of the factual matters that were mentioned or raised as more a reflection of his state of mind than of any new facts that were revealed?

MR. GEARAN: What we tried to say completely and straightforwardly yesterday as best we can is we don't really know in a -- exactly what he may or may not have meant. We can make some judgments, as we've tried to do yesterday. Trying to speculate to an extreme is inappropriate and probably not appropriate guidance for any of you. I am neither trained to make some of the judgments that I think some of the questions might want us to conclude on. I just don't think it's an appropriate, nor do I feel particularly qualified to do so.

Q The day after Vince's suicide, the President came out and we asked him if he thought that the work, the pile-on and so forth was the cause, because that was the speculation, that he was fatigued -- and he said, no. After he saw the letter, or whatever it was, did he revise his view? Because the man himself says that he was overworked, inexperienced.

MR. GEARAN: Well, I think the President remarked certainly at the staff meeting that we had a couple days, I guess, after Vince's death, is the need for balance in one's life here. He said that before anyone was -- in the early days right after Vince's death, I think. As I said yesterday, the note gives one even more pause for that -- to seek and strike that balance. When he talked about overwork and those kinds of issues, I think that's just --

Q Did the White House have advance notice of Justice's release of their --

Q Mark, have you noticed any decrease in the amount of hours worked by --

MR. GEARAN: I'm sorry. I'll be right back to you. What?

Q Have you noticed any effect of that presidential suggestion -- talk about balance in life -- have you noticed people cutting back their hours -- more private? Or is everybody doing just the same six day, 14-hour days grind that they were doing before?

MR. GEARAN: I think everyone in the White House feels that it's a tremendous honor to be here and privileged to be here, and many of us feel that it's a once in a lifetime opportunity to serve the President. I think what it becomes a question of is to balance that with one's family and friends and personal life. Everyone needs to make their own judgment individually. I think a lot of people have tried to calibrate that appropriately. I can't speak for everyone in the White House, but I think at times like this -- and everyone has had a personal experience where you're reminded of the fragility of life -- I think people are mindful of that.

Q For a lot of people, I would assume, there's not a great deal that they can do about their hours and that sort of thing. Are superiors and supervisors putting themselves in the frame of making sure that people are able to get that balance?

MR. GEARAN: Yes. And I think people are working to -- certainly Mack has emphasized it at the senior staff meeting, that period that's upcoming, the balance of August, that people should try to schedule time and staff out offices, where he's coordinating a schedule to make sure that we're appropriately staffed, but that people are encouraged to take that time. So in that -- I don't know if I'm answering your question directly. But I think people are trying to allot that time. This past period we've been through, the reconciliation has been, we hope, atypical in terms of time lines.

Q Did you guys have advance notice of the Justice Department's release of their investigation and the release of this letter? If so, did you coordinate it at all? And why did you seem so surprised and, if I may say, befuddled by the turn of events yesterday? The briefing was put off several hours. There were big, high-level meetings going on in the Communications Office.

MR. GEARAN: Well, all levels in the Communications -- all meetings in the Communications Office are by definition high level. (Laughter.)

We were notified that there was going to be a briefing in the morning, just as a --

Q You were notified yesterday?

MR. GEARAN: That there was going to be -- that a press conference was going to be held, correct. We did not receive any of the report or anything that was presented. But we were told that they were going to have the briefing at 1:30 p.m. or whenever it was. Why did I appear befuddled? I frequently -- I don't know how to answer.

Q You knew the contents of this letter for at least 10 days, yet you seemed unable to answer some of our questions when it was released to us so much after the fact.

MR. GEARAN: Yes, I regret -- I mean, I will try to be as complete as I can to answer any of your questions. It has been a very active 10 days here with reconciliation and other matters before the White House. To the extent we seem befuddled yesterday, we regret that.

Q Did you ask the Justice Department not to release this on the day you were having your bill signing and trying to have your message of the day be something far different?

MR. GEARAN: No.

Q Mark, did Vince Foster discuss the items in his note with the President when he talked to the President on Monday night?

MR. GEARAN: No, not that I'm aware of.

Q Are you positive? Is it possible to find out for sure whether there's --

MR. GEARAN: I think we have characterized that conversation from this podium, about the President's conversation with Vince. The President has talked about it. Dee Dee has talked about it here. I think we're about done.

Q None of those things that you mentioned -- was there any other time when Vince Foster discussed these items with the President?

MR. GEARAN: Let me just try to give the best guidance as we can. If the question is, did anyone realize the depth of his feelings here, the answer is no.

Q That's not the question.

Q That's not my question. My question is very direct, and that is --

MR. GEARAN: Did he review these items, line by line?

Q Or maybe -- and the other question obviously following up is do you know whether he planned to go over these items when he had a meeting scheduled with the President on Wednesday?

MR. GEARAN: No. I can review it, but every indication I have from the President, the type of conversation, it was not specific to these issues specifically or in a general conversation of that nature.

Q Can I ask one other question. Also, this I asked yesterday, maybe there's more information available today. It appears that the President and First Lady had the right without competitive bidding to pick wherever they want to, to use private funds to pay a decorator. And this is the decorator apparently referred to in this note. Why is it that someone can pick a personal friend and make sure the money's directed to them in this way? Why isn't there competitive bidding like there is on any other contract for draperies or whatever?

MR. GEARAN: I would direct you to Lisa in Hillary's office for how that was done. My understanding is, and you should really get to Lisa on this, but in the past the decorators have been chosen by the First Family, as someone that they personally have requested.

Q And it's correct that the funds that are used to pay that friend are from private donations, is that what you were saying yesterday? You were talking about private donations -- I want to make sure I understand you.

MR. GEARAN: Yes. I don't know the payment to Kaki. You need to visit with Lisa Caputo on that. Is that enough?

Q I asked her and, frankly, she didn't know the answers to some of these questions and mentioned that you were having a briefing. And there is this back and forth as other reporters might tell you as well.

MR. GEARAN: Oh, really?

Q I suggested to her, and maybe I could suggest to you that why don't you just release whatever records there are on this so there won't be questions like the ones I'm asking and others will ask? Why can't you just say, here's all the information, and then you can present it to whoever you want to?

MR. GEARAN: I'd be happy to give you as much information as we have in terms of it. I do know that what the intent is at the conclusion of the renovation that they will be issuing the report that will go through that. What I tried to suggest yesterday is in terms of the individual rooms and what exactly they're doing, I am not the best guy for it.

Q One last question on the same subject. My impression is there, in fact, is no formal contract; it's all just word of mouth and they talk it back and forth. And this apparently is part of the problem. Is that your understanding?

MR. GEARAN: Well, the numbers yesterday were estimates that were agreed to. I don't think that -- we did not mean to suggest that was a contract. The miscommunication was over the estimates of those funds.

Q New subject.

Q Are you saying there is a question as to whether or not all this was private or some might have been public funds?

MR. GEARAN: No.

Q Because there is a circular, a May '76 circular that requires for government procurement purposes that there be competitive bidding. I mean, is this all private funds?

MR. GEARAN: Yes, my understanding is that it's all private funds.

Q From who? How is that money collected?

MR. GEARAN: It's through the Historical Society.

Q How do they collect the money?

MR. GEARAN: We need to get to Lisa on how they do it. I can tell you what we know at this point in terms of the Historical Society. The Historical Society is traditionally the organization within the White House that coordinates the funds that are utilized for the renovation. I don't know how other White Houses have done it. I'm not particularly expert on how it was done.

The intent of the Society was to release it at its conclusion -- the renovation -- what rooms they are doing and all of that. I can tell you at this point that the contributions -- that they expect the entire range to be I think Lisa said \$400,000, in that range for what the total cost would be.

Q Such things as renovations -- I mean, since this is an estimate you're talking about here and hasn't been set in stone yet, it's possible that the cost would be higher or lower when it comes out, isn't that correct? So this isn't a number set in stone that you're talking about now; this is still just an estimate. And when you get done, it could cost more or less.

MR. GEARAN: I suspect that's possible. I think people feel that based on the estimates and the review of the receipts and all of that, that the June estimate is an accurate one at this point in time.

Q Is Kaki under contract?

MR. GEARAN: I don't know the answer to that.

Q I'm sorry, could you take that question and find out?

MR. GEARAN: Is she under contract?

Q Is she under contract? And how much she's being paid. And whether it's a percentage or what the business arrangement is there.

MR. GEARAN: We went through this a little bit yesterday. I think -- and I will visit with Lisa if this is not getting connected to you, because I think it's best rather than

confusing it from this podium that Lisa really go through this structure with you.

Q Mark, can you comment from your perspective on Governor Weld's tax program?

MR. GEARAN: I don't know enough about the Governor's tax program to comment on it.

Q There are reports that people at the White House are upset that he's trying to upstage you and --

MR. GEARAN: No. I think what was presented to me yesterday was the Governor's concern about -- that it was -- presented concerns about the President's economic package. And I think my comments, as you read through some of the articles that were printed, was that it was specifically answering what our program does. I do not know enough about what the Governor is suggesting in Massachusetts to make any judgment on it.

Q Have you any conclusion on whether it's harmful to U.S. economic -- federal economic policy?

MR. GEARAN: What I was commenting on yesterday was our economic plan and any suggestion that the President's economic plan that was signed was harmful to all citizens. I went through our usual comments on terms of the gas tax and --

Q But in terms of his cutting the gas tax there, does that make any difference to you?

MR. GEARAN: I don't feel comfortable enough commenting. I don't know the specifics of this.

Q Is the President satisfied with Bernie Nussbaum's handling of the 48 hours or so immediately following Mr. Foster's death?

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q Did anyone from the White House Counsel's Office, the cleaning staff or anyone else remove anything from Vince Foster's office from the time you were notified of his death until Bernie Nussbaum went into the office with the FBI and others?

MR. GEARAN: Nothing was removed, but what was retrieved was the trash that was retrieved. And then that was --

Q Retrieved from where?

MR. GEARAN: From Vince's office.

Q Retrieved?

MR. GEARAN: Well, I mean, it had been cleaned out. His office was cleaned out.

Q His office was cleaned out by whom?

MR. GEARAN: The normal janitorial service had gone into his office before anyone learned of --

Q So somebody went and got the trash back?

MR. GEARAN: Right. And that was secured. And that was gone through then in the course of the regular review of his office.

Q -- report that they removed a box -- a box of documents were removed was just false?

MR. GEARAN: I think Bernie spoke to that in the paper today.

Q Mark, has the President settled on a successor for General Powell?

MR. GEARAN: No.

Q What is his time frame for making that decision?

MR. GEARAN: I think he'd like to do it in the most timely manner that he possibly could, given the --

Q Is he close?

MR. GEARAN: I think it's something that he's given some thought about.

Q Would you expect it --

Q Was that the reason for the dinner last night?

MR. GEARAN: No.

Q Would you expect it before the end of the month?

MR. GEARAN: I don't want to get into a time line game at this point. I think --

Q Some of the gay community held a news conference today and strongly urged against General Hoar being selected. Will the President take their comments into consideration?

MR. GEARAN: I think the President is anxious to get the best person into that position. It's a critical position and his interest is to have someone there of the -- as he said before -- the caliber of General Powell. And that's his --

Q Did he give a farewell party last night for Powell?

MR. GEARAN: It was -- he had the CINC dinner last night at the White House.

Q Was it in honor of Powell, or was it --

MR. GEARAN: I don't know if it was specifically in honor of General Powell. I can get you that.

Q Was he honored in some way at the dinner? Did the President propose a toast to him?

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q Did he have 16 generals or commanders --

MR. GEARAN: I'm sorry -- what?

Q Did he have a 16 or so commanders there?

MR. GEARAN: Yes, they were all there, as well as Secretary Aspin and Sandy Berger and different --

Q If I could go back to the question of the payment, I asked Lisa Caputo how much she'd been paid and was told that information would not be made public until the renovation was

Q First, the Washington Post today says that the famous torn note mentions travelgate. Is that correct?

MS. MYERS: I am not in the position to comment on the contents. I just can't.

Q Also, in regard to your answer to Carl before, you said you don't think the President would have any comment. David Mixner has described himself and Clinton has described him as close friends for 20 years. This is someone who is so upset by his close friend's policy that he got himself arrested in front of the White House. It's a little mind-boggling --

MS. MYERS: I think that the President is well aware of Mr. Mixner's position on the military decision -- gays in the military decision. And I don't think he has anything further to say. I think it's been well documented Mr. Mixner's opposition.

Q Dee Dee, does the President favor a wider use of airpower in Bosnia? Wider than just to protect the U.N. peacekeepers?

MS. MYERS: As you know, we're talking to our allies about how best to support the negotiations in Geneva and to prevent further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Sarajevo and some of the other population centers. And beyond that, I don't have anything to say.

Q In these talks with allied officials, are we making the suggestion that airpower ought to be considered for the purposes you just stated?

MS. MYERS: I'm just not going to comment on the content of the discussions, other than to say that the general goal is to figure out how best to support the negotiations in Geneva and to protect the -- to prevent the further deterioration of the humanitarian situation on the ground.

Q Would this, again, be a multilateral thing? In other words, supposing that the allies as in May don't go along at that point. We also get off --

MS. MYERS: We're discussing the situation with our allies, and beyond that, Leo, I just don't have any comment.

Q Dee Dee, in connection with the Vince Foster case, the police are described in this morning's paper -- the Washington Post -- as saying that the White House hindered their case by slowing down the examination of the evidence, especially the note. Do you have a reaction to that? What do you say to that? And also, in the search of Foster's office, was it actually Bernie Nussbaum who physically went through all of that evidence, or did the Park Police physically do it under the supervision --

MS. MYERS: The first part is that we're doing our best to cooperate with the ongoing investigation -- Park Service investigation. And we will continue to do that. We will continue to do our best to facilitate that and cooperate. Bernie did actually do the physical going through, because many of those documents are protected by either executive privilege or attorney-client privilege. And so Bernie went through and sort of described the contents of each of his files and what was in his drawers while representatives of the Justice Department, the Secret Service, the FBI and other members of the Counsel's Office were present.

Q Was that the only time any White House official had gone through those documents?

MS. MYERS: That was the first time. And I believe then an associate counsel cataloged the contents -- cataloged the files in Vince's office.

Q Regarding -- note, is the name Nussbaum mentioned in it?

MS. MYERS: Again, I'm not going to comment on the contents of the note.

Q Dee Dee, have they checked the --

Q And what about the FBI -- the incident described that the FBI agent told to --

MS. MYERS: My understanding was that a junior member of the Counsel's Office said something to an FBI agent when he stood up and Bernie Nussbaum then contradicted that and said that he thought that the other person was wrong.

Q Is the FBI conducting its own investigation?

MS. MYERS: You'd have to check with them.

Q Does anyone know if he ever threatened to quit and whether he was taking an antidepressant?

MS. MYERS: I don't know. On the drug you'd have to check with the Park Service Police.

Q And will the Park Service report be put out publicly without going through the White House control?

MS. MYERS: You'd have to check with whatever their standard operating procedure is.

Q Well, I'm sure they don't deal with the White House every day.

MS. MYERS: That's true. I mean, I think that that's something -- or perhaps a better point of contact on that is the Justice Department. I don't know and I don't think that we know exactly what the final report is going to look like, what it's going to contain, or how it will be handled. I think we'll have to wait until it's done.

Q In the search of the office, did they check the -- with the FBI and the police present -- did they check the computer files, any dictating tapes, videotapes, or audio cassette tapes to see if an audio or electronics message was left or anything?

MS. MYERS: I will have to take that. I don't know whether there is any kind of audio equipment in his office, whether he used any of that. And as to computers, I'm not sure what the arrangement was on that. I know there was some arrangement the they tried to put in place to have those files checked.

Q And the phone logs?

MS. MYERS: The computer files and phone logs. I'm just not sure what the status of those two issues is.

Q What do you know about -- relationship between Mr. Foster and Mr. Foster?

MS. MYERS: They had a very good working relationship.

Q What was the question?

MS. MYERS: What was the relationship between Mr. Nussbaum and Mr. Foster. They had a very good working relationship. Bernie described it, I thought, fairly eloquently on Wednesday of last week when he said that they got together when they both came here and decided that they wanted to run the White House Counsel's like a little law firm and to operate as partners in a law firm would. And I think that they were well on their way to establishing what they thought was a good partnership.

Q Dee Dee, is it true that McLarty's directions that the Foster office be sealed was not carried out for 12 hours?

MS. MYERS: No, what happened in that regard was that evening, Tuesday evening, as people were here in the White House notifying family members and others about what had happened, it was suggested by Mack we need to make sure that Vince's office isn't disturbed. The Counsel's Office is -- every night is locked and alarmed. So I don't think -- there wasn't a need to lock it in any other way. So people just made sure the door was closed and that when the members of the Counsel's Office left that the door was locked and alarmed as it always is. And the next morning, they asked the Secret Service to put a guard on it just for an additional layer of protection.

Q Is the White House satisfied that there were no improper removals of documents or other possessions from that office?

MS. MYERS: Yes, we have just no reason to believe that that happened.

Q Since the outbreak of fighting in Lebanon, has the President himself been in touch with any of the Middle East leaders?

MS. MYERS: No. As you know, Secretary Christopher has been in constant contact with the Israelis, the Lebanese and the Syrians.

Q -- getting back to Bosnia, there's a report on the wires that there's been an agreement reached in Geneva between the parties -- at least an initial one. Have you received word of that? Do you have any reaction?

MS. MYERS: That's the first I've heard of it. I've not seen that report.

Q And has the President been speaking with any foreign leaders today?

MS. MYERS: Not that I know of. I don't believe so, and I'll double-check, but I don't think so.

Q I'm a little confused. Does the White House not trust the FBI or the Park Police to treat the information in Foster's office with due confidentiality? And how can they conduct a thorough investigation if they're doing it through the filter of Nussbaum who's doing it himself apparently?

MS. MYERS: Well, I think that is a -- it's not an issue of trust, of whether or not you trust. Certainly, we trust the Justice Department and the FBI. But there is an issue of privilege, which is I think always taken very seriously by attorneys, as it should be. And so, I think most of the documents that Vince was working on were protected by one sort of privilege or another.

Q Protected from whom?

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MS. MYERS: Protected from anybody outside of the attorney-client relationship.

Q Well, wait a minute, does the President not also have an attorney-client relationship with the Justice Department?

MS. MYERS: I'm not familiar with all the privileges that exist, but I know in the case of the White House Counsel's Office, one of Vince's functions was to serve as the First Family's lawyer within the White House Counsel's Office, and that was part of what he did. Plus a number of the issues that he's working on are --

Q So he's the President's private lawyer --

MS. MYERS: Well, he's the White House -- he's the guy in the White House Counsel's Office who handles issues relating to the First Family and the Residence.

Q So the White House is asserting here an issue of personal privilege with regard --

MS. MYERS: Well, both. I mean, there's an attorney-client privilege and there's also an executive privilege. And I am not an attorney, nor an expert on privileges, but I know that this is -- there's a very serious question about how -- but in answer to the other part of your question, I think that Mr. Nussbaum conducted a very thorough investigation, particularly in terms of what they were looking for. I mean, he went through the files and described what the issues were and what the contents of the files were without having them read the specific documents.

Q So the investigators had to rely on his characterization of everything?

MS. MYERS: That's correct.

Q And, Dee Dee, he missed the note. Didn't Nussbaum miss the note?

MS. MYERS: Well, it was in the bottom of Vince's briefcase torn up. So, yes, they didn't discover it until Monday.

Q Well, how can you characterize it as a thorough investigation when he didn't find the most salient piece of evidence that's been found so far?

MS. MYERS: Your characterization, not ours or anybody else's.

Q So you don't think it was --

MS. MYERS: I just don't know if it's the --

Q Was it a thorough investigation?

MS. MYERS: Yes, I think it was a --

Q Was a thorough search?

MS. MYERS: Yes, I think we feel it was a thorough investigation.

Q So you -- okay. (Laughter.)

Q Thank you, Brit. You may step down. (Laughter.) But was there any other piece of evidence that's more relevant?

MS. MYERS: I'm just not going to get into characterizing things like that.

Q Isn't there an inherent conflict of interest if you have the same person representing the family -- the client-family relationship as executive privilege? You're saying -- is there any consideration of taking or having an independent counsel look into this? If you're being protected both by the attorney-client privilege as the First Family's lawyer --

MS. MYERS: The intimation here is that -- I mean, there has been no allegations of any kind of criminal wrongdoing. There's been no suggestion that there's anything in there. We have cooperated fully with the ongoing investigation. If, at the end of the investigation, the investigators or somebody thinks that there needs to be another look at this, then we'll be happy to revisit it. At this point we've cooperated completely. I think the investigating agencies feel they have gotten what they need and continue to get what they need.

Q Then how do they know if it's been screened?

MS. MYERS: They're the investigators. Talk to them about how they know.

Q Wait a minute, Dee Dee. If you're the ones who control the evidence, it's not -- it's perfectly appropriate to ask you that question.

MS. MYERS: But I -- no.

Q And to say -- it is not an answer to the question to say talk to the people who have to get it through to you --

MS. MYERS: It is -- no, no, no, Brit.

Q -- as to why -- how we can know.

MS. MYERS: No, no.

Q That's a fair question to put to you is all I'm saying.

MS. MYERS: But here's the thing. It is not up to us to determine what they should be looking for.

Q That's how it works, though, isn't it? What they get -- you're determining what they get to see.

MS. MYERS: No, it -- in terms of -- they haven't -- I don't know exactly what they've asked for, because -- I'm not the point person on the investigation. But it is up to them to decide what it is they think they need. If they need more information they'll come back to us.

Q Did the Park Police decide --

MS. MYERS: That's a decision -- if they don't feel they have enough information --

Q Let me ask you a question. If there's an investigation of a private citizen, suicide, do you really imagine that the private citizen's lawyer gets to stand there and see -- preside over the search of the person's premises?

MS. MYERS: Of anything that would be protected by attorney-client privilege, absolutely. Of course, they would, Brit. Of course, they would. If somebody had legal papers pertaining to

some issue that they were working on that were protected by an attorney-client privilege, that would be something that the --;

Q I think you better look it up.

Q How about if the attorney was a partner of the deceased? This is not just an attorney-client relationship, this is an attorney that had a working relationship with the deceased --

MS. MYERS: The issue is not --

Q -- not a third attorney here looking at this.

MS. MYERS: The documents are protected by privilege. The Park Service police is conducting an investigation. They feel they are getting enough evidence to make a conclusion about what happened and why Vince took his life. They feel they're getting access to the information they need to make that determination with enough certainty to conclude it. They have said that they think they'll wrap the investigation up next week. Among other things, they said in the paper this morning they're waiting for the results of his autopsy. They feel they have enough information to make a conclusion. That's what -- that's their judgment.

Q Just to take it perhaps to an extreme that it shouldn't be taken, but how about --

MS. MYERS: Why not? (Laughter.)

Q -- Nussbaum flipping through this finds a note from Vince that says I can't stand working with Bernie Nussbaum anymore. And Bernie says, oh, this is executive privilege and stuffs it back in his coat pocket. I mean, there's no independent person looking at these materials and saying this is relevant, this is not.

MS. MYERS: Again, the documents that -- the documents that were not protected, such as, I think he had some personal documents -- his lease for his house, for example -- they were allowed to look at. But the documents that are protected by privilege they were not allowed to look at.

Q Dee Dee, do you deny that the White House could waive attorney-client privilege?

MS. MYERS: I don't know. I --

Q Can take the question of whoever --

MS. MYERS: Sure.

Q And ask you whoever in the White House is making the judgments about what the White House will or will not do --

MS. MYERS: As you know, that's a complicated and precedent setting kind of decision.

Q The second question is, you originally designated the Justice Department as the point of contact --

MS. MYERS: We designated them on Tuesday night after Vince's death -- or Wednesday morning.

Q What's the rationale for that. And doesn't that rationale maybe apply to who the filter becomes for evidence that goes to the investigators?

MS. MYERS: The rationale was to have a point of contact outside the White House in case there were requests for things, in
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case the investigators needed additional information, that they wanted to come back in and talk to people. It's a way to have a point of contact --

Q Then why isn't the Counsel's Office just as qualified to do that as they are the screen the evidence --

MS. MYERS: That is not protected by attorney-client privilege or by executive privilege.

Q Wait a minute, that's not the question.

MS. MYERS: Well, I mean -- yes, I think that's the answer, though.

Q Why is the Counsel not fit to be the point of contact since the Counsel is --

MS. MYERS: Well, for the reason that I just gave, but the distinction is attorney-client privilege and executive privilege. That is why Bernie was conducting the investigation. But under the circumstances, we thought it would be easier, better, to have the Justice Department to serve as the point of contact.

Q Was the President among those interviewed by investigators or has he provided them a statement or been requested to provide a statement?

MS. MYERS: He's not been requested.

Q Why was it necessary to have the Attorney General and the Deputy Attorney General weigh in on the question of whether the note should be turned over to the Park Service?

MS. MYERS: They were contacted and they came over and were asked what should be done with it, whether it should be given to the Justice Department or to the Park Service police. They said they took a copy of the contents of the note and suggested that the note itself be turned over to the Park Service Police, so that was done.

Q That seems like an -- I mean, it seems obvious that the people who are investigating whether or not this was a suicide are finding reasons for a suicide would be allowed to have a copy of the note. And I guess I'm just mystified by the summoning of the two top ranking people at the Justice Department to weigh in on this.

MS. MYERS: It -- Phil Heymann was the lead coordinator person. I mean, he -- and so I think the point of contact works both ways. Our point of contact for an ongoing investigation wisely, I think, is the Justice Department. So Phil Heymann was contacted and he asked the Attorney General to come with him. I think that that was the appropriate thing to do. I think the point -- it's important that the point -- that our contact with the investigating agency be done through the Justice Department.

Q And the discussion there was not whether to turn over the note, but who should get it?

MS. MYERS: Well, what we should do with it. I mean, I think that was a judgment we asked them to help us make, or to -- we asked for their best guidance on that and they said it should go to the Park Service Police. That's part of what we asked them to do.

Q What were the other options?

Q -- alternatives?

MS. MYERS: You know -- I think it was pretty clear we were going to give it to either the Justice Department or the Park Service Police.

Q Who made the decision not to make it public and why?

MS. MYERS: The Park Service Police -- and, again, that contact happened through the Justice Department -- that they thought that it would not be wise in the context of an ongoing investigation.

Q But would it -- how about the future?

MS. MYERS: I think we'll wait and see.

Q -- go back to a question Jill asked a while ago. The Washington Post account this morning described a scene where supposedly Nussbaum told an FBI agent to sit down and not to peek at documents. Were you saying that account is incorrect?

MS. MYERS: I don't remember -- maybe you guys can help me -- if it said who from the Counsel's Office.

Q It said an official, I think.

MS. MYERS: Yes. And my -- I think I explained that it was a junior member of the Counsel's staff who suggested that the person sit down and Bernie suggested that that was not necessary.

Q Dee Dee, I'm confused here. What -- a lawyer relationship are you talking about? That's usually a phrase used between a man on his personal business and his lawyer. Are you talking about personal business or are you talking about public business?

MS. MYERS: There is an issue of privilege in both.

Q We know what executive privilege would be, but what about the client-lawyer relationship as regards public governmental matters -- public governmental matters?

MS. MYERS: Well, executive privilege would apply -- and, again, I should probably -- at some point we probably need a better explanation about how these privileges work. But there is both personal relationships since Vince Foster handled a lot of the President and First Family's -- what personal business there exists for them. And he did previous to his arriving here at the White House. And he also handled legal issues pertaining to federal government business. So both.

Q When you turn over something to the Justice Department -- to people who are appointed by the President -- that's hardly independent. That's not independent. When they speak of an independent counsel or investigation, they're usually speaking of somebody being appointed outside the government. But Reno and Heymann would certainly be under the President's --

MS. MYERS: I think that Janet Reno has shown herself to be quite independent and we expect that she is.

Q -- we all love her and all that, but --
(Laughter.)

Q Who has taken over the Clinton's personal attorney business?

MS. MYERS: I'll have to take that question. I don't know that it's been passed -- some of the existing files were
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FILE -
Foster suicide
Press

0000801

Cliff Sloan
Room 128 OEOB

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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August 10, 1993

PRESS BRIEFING
BY
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS MARK GEARAN

The Briefing Room

4:27 P.M. EDT

MR. GEARAN: Let me begin by apologizing for being late, and thank you all for coming. Sincerely, though, we're sorry we're getting delayed coming in here.

Q Why?

MR. GEARAN: We apologize for that.

Let me begin --

Q And it won't happen again?

MR. GEARAN: And it will not happen again. We promise you that. (Laughter.) A late lunch on my part delayed me.

Let me begin with a few remarks about Vince Foster's writing, which I assume is most of your interest here. Vince Foster was a very highly respected and certainly well-liked and able member of this administration. At this time, particularly, the thoughts of everyone in the White House are with his wife, with his children, and with his many friends here in Washington and in Arkansas.

The sentiments in the note are the comments of someone who was obviously troubled about matters he encountered at work. Certainly those who have known him here have gone back in their minds trying to remember conversations and discussions they have had with him, searching for clues to the question, why.

To my knowledge, and certainly even with the benefit of hindsight, his tragic death is very much a shock and a surprise to his colleagues and to people here. I don't think his colleagues here at the White House ever fully realized what Vince was going through during his time here.

As all of you know, the writing was found torn up in the bottom of his briefcase. It was unsigned. It was undated. We do not even know how seriously Mr. Foster may have taken the note. We don't even know when he wrote it, since it is undated. So as we go through this, let me be clear just from the start, I will not attempt to characterize what Mr. Foster might have meant by certain phrases or sentences. It would not only be inappropriate, but it is certainly beyond anyone's capacity to interpret many of the words that he wrote here.

Let me take any of your questions.

Q Mark, would you explain what he meant -- well, you can't explain what he meant -- can you tell us what information you have about the line that says, "The Usher's Office plotted to have excessive costs incurred taking advantage of Kaki and HRC." Give us any information on that and on what the costs have been for

-- some of the residence rooms and a combination of that. I would have to --

Q Why don't you have somebody who can tell us?

MR. GEARAN: We certainly will.

Q Why are you out here if you don't know it?

MR. GEARAN: That's a fair question. I'm asking myself. (Laughter.) Among your many qualities, mind-reading is really one of them. (Laughter.)

Q What are the other ones?

MR. GEARAN: Her other qualities are too long to note. But let me go back -- I'm sorry.

Q Good lunch appetite.

MR. GEARAN: Lunch appetite, yes, late lunch. So we will have to work with you on the numbers. I am not expert enough on renovating. I'm trying to sell my house --

Q Why was he concerned about it? How did it come into his bailiwick at all?

MR. GEARAN: Well, as Deputy Counsel in the Counsel's Office, part of his responsibility and his job was the legal matters affecting the residence. And so in that context he was made aware of it. But I can tell you at this point, for your purposes, and we will work with you, but we do not believe any plot. The Public Integrity Unit that's been looking into it has indicated that they have no suspect of any criminal --

Q Did Mrs. Clinton ever say anything?

Q Was Mrs. Clinton being involved -- I mean, was she being accused of overspending or anything in that way?

MR. GEARAN: No, no. Mrs. Clinton as the First Lady is involved with the renovation, but no.

Q Well, why was the Public Integrity unit looking into it?

MR. GEARAN: That's what the Deputy Attorney General directed.

Q Could we have some more on camera here, Mark?

Q Excuse me?

MR. GEARAN: The Deputy Attorney General, as he announced today -- I think he provided this at his briefing. They wanted --

Q And it began when -- the Public Integrity Unit's investigation?

MR. GEARAN: I don't know. I'd have to direct you to Justice.

Q It began after this note was discovered?

MR. GEARAN: I would assume so. Let me read his --

MR. GEARAN: I think he said, from what I understand is, that it was reasonable. But anyway, let me get to the point of your question.

The legal counsel -- associate and the legal counsel and the Chief of Staff and I'm not -- David Gergen, the counselor. I'm not familiar with anyone else who -- you mean who physically saw the note, was your question? I believe that's right. Let me take that and let me report back to you if there's any others.

Q But related to that question is the question of this information about the Usher's Office has been available inside the White House since that note was discovered and read by people on the staff here. Has Mrs. Clinton been asked anything about the contents of that note? About her suspicions about something going on? Has the interior decorator been asked anything about it? What -- has anybody tried to come to a conclusion on what it was that persuaded Vince Foster that there was something going on that could be a problem?

MR. GEARAN: We don't know is the answer --

Q Nobody?

MR. GEARAN: -- to what he might have been thinking or speculating at this point. I can tell you, as Heymann mentioned, that the Office of Public Integrity, while it's not complete, has made a preliminary inquiry. And that was the quote that I --

Q Mrs. Clinton hasn't been asked about this note?

MR. GEARAN: Not to my knowledge, but you might want to --

Q Is it the assumption then --

MR. GEARAN: You should talk to the Justice Department. They're the ones --

Q Is it the assumption then that Vince Foster was making this up? This was out of whole cloth?

MR. GEARAN: I have no ability to answer that question. We do not believe that there is any, as he says, plot. We note that the Public Integrity Unit has looked into it. Beyond that, I'm unable to speculate what he might have meant.

Q Was anyone else in his office working on this issue with him? Any other members of the Counsel's Office working on a possible cost problem involving the renovations?

MR. GEARAN: No.

Q Have they been asked?

MR. GEARAN: Well, it has been reviewed since then and his files have been turned over, but I'm not aware of anyone else in --

Q What was found when it was reviewed since then? And did you ask the Usher's Office?

MR. GEARAN: We did not. The Justice Department did, to the best of my knowledge. I can detail more from the briefing that might have come up today at Justice who they might have talked to. I'm not aware of who specifically in the White House they spoke to. You need to check in with Justice on that.

Q So what about the prior investigations that the GOP has lied and misrepresented its knowledged role and covered up a prior investigation of the travel office?

MR. GEARAN: What I said earlier was, again, we don't really know, but prior instances of problems in the travel office predating our administration have been noted or observed. Whether of not that was the case, we don't know.

Q Since Vince Foster's suicide there have been discussions in the White House amongst people talking about why he might have done it, and from that has come out a fully portrait of people having talked to him before his death and there were some signs that he was troubled. In any time in that process of reflecting on those conversations has anyone come across recollections of conversations on the topic the Usher, the FBI, the charge about the Republicans that he talked about -- not that you don't think that there are any charges are true -- but does anyone know of any time that he talked about any of those topics?

MR. GEARAN: Well, the topics of the travel office and others have been ones that have been well discussed within the White House. No one ever thought here, that any of the references here -- I mean, it should go without saying, but by definition, was to a point -- as I said at the beginning we were not aware clearly of the depth of his feelings by definition. People would have done something here otherwise.

Q There was no discussion, no one had discussions with him about any of these more specific types of topics than just the travel office?

MR. GEARAN: I think in the list of things -- I mean, we're not aware of -- we were not aware that the kind of references that he observed were ones that would have prompted any kind of action that he eventually took.

Q May I just follow up on a question about the Usher's Office? May I take it that some other official in the Counsel's Office now has whatever portfolio or case or whatever you care to call it that he would have had that would have brought these matters to his attention? And may I take it further that someone is following up on this matter, this seeming allegation of excessive costs -- to find out what this was about and to determine what it is?

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q So the White House is on the case, so to speak?

MR. GEARAN: Yes. Let me be clear.

Q What did he say, sir?

Q Who would that be?

MR. GEARAN: I'm sorry -- keep going.

Q Can you just tell me who would that be that's following this up?

MR. GEARAN: Bernie Nussbaum is assigning the different pieces of work within the Counsel's Office that Vince had been charged with to the other counsels in the office. I don't know who specifically has his portfolio. We can get you that.

MR. GEARAN: Let me get into this. There were two estimates that differed. Let me just get into this and then we can go through.

He was concerned about the discrepancy in costs and asked the Usher's Office -- he, Vince, asked the Usher's Office to provide an explanation for the change in estimates. We can only assume that Mr. Foster was unclear about the costs because we do not believe that he had actually reviewed the receipts relating to the renovation that included labor and upholstery and the charges that were incurred, and is continuing. The renovation is not complete.

What happened here -- let me go through this -- what happened here, as we understand it, is a miscommunication between the decorator and the Usher's Office. For example, the Usher's Office was not aware of the certain time deadlines that the decorator was going to impose on the work being done. Similarly, the decorator didn't understand what the imposed deadlines would mean for overtime labor. Therefore, there was a difference in the estimates that were given from within a few month period. That might have accounted --

Q Difference in estimates or difference in estimates and costs incurred?

MR. GEARAN: Estimates at this point. The renovation is continuing. And at the end of the entire renovation, the plan, apparently, of every renovation -- what they usually do, I am told, is to provide a report on what was done, how it was completed. This --

Q How big was the --

MR. GEARAN: Okay, let me go through. The first estimate that was given in March was for \$250,000.

Q Whose was that?

MR. GEARAN: That was the arrangement between the decorator and the Usher's Office.

Q Whose estimate?

MR. GEARAN: That's what they agreed to at that time. That's what they agreed to at that time.

Q What was this for? You haven't told --

MR. GEARAN: The second was --

Q Why don't you tell us what the renovations were for?

Q Sarah.

MR. GEARAN: The second, which was approximately \$377,000, was given in early June.

Q These were both given by the decorator to the usher?

MR. GEARAN: No, these were the estimates that -- the initial one that the usher and the decorator worked out. What we had -- what resulted was apparently a miscommunication as to what that estimate involved. When the price --

Q What is his name?

Q Mark, what is -- two questions. Could you move Sarah up front so she can hear things? Second of all, what exactly does the usher do? (Laughter.)

MR. GEARAN: Which one of you wants to leave?
(Laughter.)

Q It just seems like it would make it easier for her and everybody.

MR. GEARAN: Okay. What's the second question?

Q What does the usher -- I'm not clear how the usher fits in. Explain who does what? I mean, who oversees the decorator?

MR. GEARAN: Yes. The Usher's Office manages the Executive Residence staff, whose responsibilities include the care and maintenance of the historic Executive Residence, its furnishings and preparations for official and ceremonial presidential events and the operation of the First Family's household. There's a Chief Usher and then four assistant ushers.

Q Does the decorator work for the usher by contract -- in other words, he is getting 20 percent of whatever the cost of this is?

MR. GEARAN: I need to send you to Lisa on that.

Q In other words, the decorator works for the usher?

MR. GEARAN: The decorator works for the First Family. But the Usher's Office coordinates the Executive Residence.

Q Can I just clarify one thing -- why would Vince Foster be at all interested in what the ushers and the decorators and this whole project -- how does he fit in?

MR. GEARAN: Well, as Deputy Counsel, one of his jobs was to work on any legal issues or to -- on the residence issues in the White House.

Q But isn't that a little junior for the Deputy Counsel to be getting involved in those kinds of minor matters?

MR. GEARAN: I don't think so.

Q Other than a misunderstanding, was there a real fight between them?

MR. GEARAN: No, I think it was a miscommunication, is how I can best interpret it.

Q Between who?

MR. GEARAN: Between the Usher's Office and the decorator.

Q Mark, the note seems to exhibit something more than just discouragement or depression about the way things are going. There's hints of conspiracies and cover-ups. I mean, more than hints. Has there ever been any indication from the people who've known him for years, including the Clintons, that he ever exhibited this tendency or this concern about broader plots being waged against the President? Was it right in that case to put him in a position of this kind of responsibility?

investigation beyond the seven to look at possible ethics violations by the officials involved in the firings.

MR. GEARAN: I don't know the answer.

Q You don't know whether he received a call from Justice saying we may look into that?

MR. GEARAN: I don't know. I can post an answer. Let me take a few more.

Q Given Vice Foster's involvement in this and in the FACA case, was there any way in which he -- it's fair to characterize his role in the Counsel's Office as having responsibility for those issues pertaining to the First Lady? Did that tend to be in his portfolio?

MR. GEARAN: He had a broad portfolio. As Bernie Nussbaum said, when they approached their job, that they were partners in the Counsel's Office, building a law firm. And they approached it like that -- bringing in the Associate counsels. I think we can say quite a bit about Vince's work in the Counsel's Office and that as a extremely able lawyer.

Q Just to follow up. Partners in law firms have different responsibilities. Did the First Lady's work and legal needs tend to fall on his desk rather than that of other attorneys?

MR. GEARAN: I'm not aware, aside from the renovation and the task force any other instances. But certainly those two were. He assisted in the Supreme Court nomination, as you know, directly for the President. Someone that the President sought for his own advice. I would not narrow it to that, but it included those two instances.

Let me just take a couple more questions.

Q Mark, did anybody besides Vince Foster raise any questions about these estimates into the redecoration of the White House? And is there an ongoing investigation into any of these allegations in this letter, whether it be the cost estimates, the FBI lies to the AG, the press covering up illegal benefits, or is there an ongoing investigation into any of these issues?

MR. GEARAN: I would have to refer you to Justice for the status of those investigations. Heymann, in the letter I mentioned, this morning directed Professional Responsibility and Public Integrity to do that. And the investigation --

Q And did anybody else raise any questions about the cost estimates? Anyone besides Vince Foster?

MR. GEARAN: Not that I'm aware of.

Q What was Bernie Nussbaum's response to these statements and allegations in this letter? Is he as baffled by them as you appear to be?

MR. GEARAN: I think Bernie would share in our assessment that it's, most of all, a sad commentary on Washington.

One more question.

Q Do you have any comment about the line in here about the Wall Street Journal? Is there any degree to which the Journal is being blamed?

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MR. GEARAN: I'm sorry?

Q What does Clinton have going to California that he has to leave -- what's he doing in California?

MR. GEARAN: We're doing defense conversion, Alameda Air Station.

Q Friday. Not Thursday, Friday.

MR. GEARAN: On Friday. Friday -- that's correct.

Q What is the perceived role within the Clinton administration of the papacy in the modern world in terms of the constructive role the papacy can play both on a domestic and on foreign policy scale?

MR. GEARAN: That's what I was referring to in terms of the social mission as well as a lot of the humanitarian effort that the Church has been involved in. The President, when he nominated Mayor Flynn as Ambassador to the Vatican, spoke about that and the important role that the Church has played in humanitarian efforts. His interest, of course, is to have Ambassador Flynn, who will be in Denver for the arrival of the Pope, a part of that effort.

Q Will Mrs. Clinton be joining him at the airport?

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q Chelsea?

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q Is the President taking all of the Catholic staff members with him? This is usually the case.

MR. GEARAN: I think many members of the staff that usually travel with the President are coincidentally Catholic, as it turns out. There are many members of the staff that are honored to have been invited by the President to join him for it.

Q Will there be an exchange of gifts?

MR. GEARAN: So the answer is, yes -- Marcia Hale may be joining him; Dee Dee Myers; other members of the President's staff that are Catholic.

Q The President is Southern Baptist?

MR. GEARAN: The President is Baptist, yes.

Q Will there be an exchange of gifts?

MR. GEARAN: Typically there is. I assume there is. I can post an answer to that. I believe there is. I don't know what it is. There definitely is. I don't know what the gift is.

Q I know on a state visit there is, but on something like this, is there?

MR. GEARAN: Yes, there is an exchange.

Q Do you have something going for the President today -- a staff salute?

MR. GEARAN: Yes, but that's to be determined.

Q Do you think the American people would think it was weird that the President is getting on his airplane and doesn't really even know where he's going, where he's going to end up for vacation? Do you think that my readers would think that's strange?

MR. GEARAN: No. I would like to think your readers would appreciate the complexities of planning a visit of the President to a vacation area in August.

Q But, Mark, there hasn't been any real planning in this. I mean, this has been being discussed for three or four weeks and your five days, six days away from the vacation and you have no idea where you're going.

MR. GEARAN: No, no.

Q No matter where you go, you're going to have to find a hundred or so rooms for staff and security. You're going to force those people out of their hotel rooms. For them it's going to be a concern.

MR. GEARAN: Well, what I would like to think that people would take away from this is that -- as we have advance people on the ground presently looking at a site, that we've tried to give you the best guidance for the time line that we can at this point. Complexities of a trip like this are, I think, somewhat obvious. I would suspect within the next 24 hours, as our advance people complete their work, that can be confirmed for you.

Q Mark, are you thinking about -- is the President thinking about staying at Jackie Onassis's estate there -- is that true?

MR. GEARAN: Not to my knowledge, no.

Q Mark, is the White House satisfied now that all the questions regarding Vince Foster's suicide have been answered?

MR. GEARAN: Well, the position of the White House, I think, has been, as we've said over the past few days in light of the writing that was released yesterday, is that there are many issues of which he spoke that we talked about yesterday that we don't have a clear sense just exactly what Vince may or may not have meant by that. Some of the issues in terms of the cause of death, some of the preliminary inquiries that were held by Justice have reported. There's other issues tangentially related in terms of the travel office and whatever that is an ongoing inquiry. Until that's -- that's a judgment for them to make, not certainly the White House at this point.

I think what we have tried to say from this podium and elsewhere is the culture of the White House or the reaction of the White House in the past few weeks has been that people were truly shocked and surprised both at the time and continue to be.

Q But the President -- the President said immediately after this happened that he was satisfied that based on what he knew initially that this was one of those mysteries that would never be solved. Did this note raise any more questions for him and lead him to believe that there are any unanswered questions remaining?

MR. GEARAN: No, I think the note stands for what it is, as we talked yesterday, is more than anything a sad document of a reflection of life in Washington.

Q But the President's feeling about this is a mystery?

MR. GEARAN: I think the President's feeling is, as he has stated in the past. I would say I think people here believe that a suicide is, by definition, an irrational act and that Vince was troubled over matters regarding work. The note is evidence to that. And in a certain sense, one will never completely know, as in any suicide, the full range of it.

Q Would it be fair to say that the White House regards some of the factual matters that were mentioned or raised as more a reflection of his state of mind than of any new facts that were revealed?

MR. GEARAN: What we tried to say completely and straightforwardly yesterday as best we can is we don't really know in a -- exactly what he may or may not have meant. We can make some judgments, as we've tried to do yesterday. Trying to speculate to an extreme is inappropriate and probably not appropriate guidance for any of you. I am neither trained to make some of the judgments that I think some of the questions might want us to conclude on. I just don't think it's an appropriate, nor do I feel particularly qualified to do so.

Q The day after Vince's suicide, the President came out and we asked him if he thought that the work, the pile-on and so forth was the cause, because that was the speculation, that he was fatigued -- and he said, no. After he saw the letter, or whatever it was, did he revise his view? Because the man himself says that he was overworked, inexperienced.

MR. GEARAN: Well, I think the President remarked certainly at the staff meeting that we had a couple days, I guess, after Vince's death, is the need for balance in one's life here. He said that before anyone was -- in the early days right after Vince's death, I think. As I said yesterday, the note gives one even more pause for that -- to seek and strike that balance. When he talked about overwork and those kinds of issues, I think that's just --

Q Did the White House have advance notice of Justice's release of their --

Q Mark, have you noticed any decrease in the amount of hours worked by --

MR. GEARAN: I'm sorry. I'll be right back to you. What?

Q Have you noticed any effect of that presidential suggestion -- talk about balance in life -- have you noticed people cutting back their hours -- more private? Or is everybody doing just the same six day, 14-hour days grind that they were doing before?

MR. GEARAN: I think everyone in the White House feels that it's a tremendous honor to be here and privileged to be here, and many of us feel that it's a once in a lifetime opportunity to serve the President. I think what it becomes a question of is to balance that with one's family and friends and personal life. Everyone needs to make their own judgment individually. I think a lot of people have tried to calibrate that appropriately. I can't speak for everyone in the White House, but I think at times like this -- and everyone has had a personal experience where you're reminded of the fragility of life -- I think people are mindful of that.

Q For a lot of people, I would assume, there's not a great deal that they can do about their hours and that sort of thing. Are superiors and supervisors putting themselves in the frame of making sure that people are able to get that balance?

MR. GEARAN: Yes. And I think people are working to -- certainly Mack has emphasized it at the senior staff meeting, that period that's upcoming, the balance of August, that people should try to schedule time and staff out offices, where he's coordinating a schedule to make sure that we're appropriately staffed, but that people are encouraged to take that time. So in that -- I don't know if I'm answering your question directly. But I think people are trying to allot that time. This past period we've been through, the reconciliation has been, we hope, atypical in terms of time lines.

Q Did you guys have advance notice of the Justice Department's release of their investigation and the release of this letter? If so, did you coordinate it at all? And why did you seem so surprised and, if I may say, befuddled by the turn of events yesterday? The briefing was put off several hours. There were big, high-level meetings going on in the Communications Office.

MR. GEARAN: Well, all levels in the Communications -- all meetings in the Communications Office are by definition high level. (Laughter.)

We were notified that there was going to be a briefing in the morning, just as a --

Q You were notified yesterday?

MR. GEARAN: That there was going to be -- that a press conference was going to be held, correct. We did not receive any of the report or anything that was presented. But we were told that they were going to have the briefing at 1:30 p.m. or whenever it was. Why did I appear befuddled? I frequently -- I don't know how to answer.

Q You knew the contents of this letter for at least 10 days, yet you seemed unable to answer some of our questions when it was released to us so much after the fact.

MR. GEARAN: Yes, I regret -- I mean, I will try to be as complete as I can to answer any of your questions. It has been a very active 10 days here with reconciliation and other matters before the White House. To the extent we seem befuddled yesterday, we regret that.

Q Did you ask the Justice Department not to release this on the day you were having your bill signing and trying to have your message of the day be something far different?

MR. GEARAN: No.

Q Mark, did Vince Foster discuss the items in his note with the President when he talked to the President on Monday night?

MR. GEARAN: No, not that I'm aware of.

Q Are you positive? Is it possible to find out for sure whether there's --

MR. GEARAN: I think we have characterized that conversation from this podium, about the President's conversation with Vince. The President has talked about it. Dee Dee has talked about it here. I think we're about done.

Q None of those things that you mentioned -- was there any other time when Vince Foster discussed these items with the President?

MR. GEARAN: Let me just try to give the best guidance as we can. If the question is, did anyone realize the depth of his feelings here, the answer is no.

Q That's not the question.

Q That's not my question. My question is very direct, and that is --

MR. GEARAN: Did he review these items, line by line?

Q Or maybe -- and the other question obviously following up is do you know whether he planned to go over these items when he had a meeting scheduled with the President on Wednesday?

MR. GEARAN: No. I can review it, but every indication I have from the President, the type of conversation, it was not specific to these issues specifically or in a general conversation of that nature.

Q Can I ask one other question. Also, this I asked yesterday, maybe there's more information available today. It appears that the President and First Lady had the right without competitive bidding to pick wherever they want to, to use private funds to pay a decorator. And this is the decorator apparently referred to in this note. Why is it that someone can pick a personal friend and make sure the money's directed to them in this way? Why isn't there competitive bidding like there is on any other contract for draperies or whatever?

MR. GEARAN: I would direct you to Lisa in Hillary's office for how that was done. My understanding is, and you should really get to Lisa on this, but in the past the decorators have been chosen by the First Family, as someone that they personally have requested.

Q And it's correct that the funds that are used to pay that friend are from private donations, is that what you were saying yesterday? You were talking about private donations -- I want to make sure I understand you.

MR. GEARAN: Yes. I don't know the payment to Kaki. You need to visit with Lisa Caputo on that. Is that enough?

Q I asked her and, frankly, she didn't know the answers to some of these questions and mentioned that you were having a briefing. And there is this back and forth as other reporters might tell you as well.

MR. GEARAN: Oh, really?

Q I suggested to her, and maybe I could suggest to you that why don't you just release whatever records there are on this so there won't be questions like the ones I'm asking and others will ask? Why can't you just say, here's all the information, and then you can present it to whoever you want to?

MR. GEARAN: I'd be happy to give you as much information as we have in terms of it. I do know that what the intent is at the conclusion of the renovation that they will be issuing the report that will go through that. What I tried to suggest yesterday is in terms of the individual rooms and what exactly they're doing, I am not the best guy for it.

Q One last question on the same subject. My impression is there, in fact, is no formal contract; it's all just word of mouth and they talk it back and forth. And this apparently is part of the problem. Is that your understanding?

MR. GEARAN: Well, the numbers yesterday were estimates that were agreed to. I don't think that -- we did not mean to suggest that was a contract. The miscommunication was over the estimates of those funds.

Q New subject.

Q Are you saying there is a question as to whether or not all this was private or some might have been public funds?

MR. GEARAN: No.

Q Because there is a circular, a May '76 circular that requires for government procurement purposes that there be competitive bidding. I mean, is this all private funds?

MR. GEARAN: Yes, my understanding is that it's all private funds.

Q From who? How is that money collected?

MR. GEARAN: It's through the Historical Society.

Q How do they collect the money?

MR. GEARAN: We need to get to Lisa on how they do it. I can tell you what we know at this point in terms of the Historical Society. The Historical Society is traditionally the organization within the White House that coordinates the funds that are utilized for the renovation. I don't know how other White Houses have done it. I'm not particularly expert on how it was done.

The intent of the Society was to release it at its conclusion -- the renovation -- what rooms they are doing and all of that. I can tell you at this point that the contributions -- that they expect the entire range to be I think Lisa said \$400,000, in that range for what the total cost would be.

Q Such things as renovations -- I mean, since this is an estimate you're talking about here and hasn't been set in stone yet, it's possible that the cost would be higher or lower when it comes out, isn't that correct? So this isn't a number set in stone that you're talking about now; this is still just an estimate. And when you get done, it could cost more or less.

MR. GEARAN: I suspect that's possible. I think people feel that based on the estimates and the review of the receipts and all of that, that the June estimate is an accurate one at this point in time.

Q Is Kaki under contract?

MR. GEARAN: I don't know the answer to that.

Q I'm sorry, could you take that question and find out?

MR. GEARAN: Is she under contract?

Q Is she under contract? And how much she's being paid. And whether it's a percentage or what the business arrangement is there.

MR. GEARAN: We went through this a little bit yesterday. I think -- and I will visit with Lisa if this is not getting connected to you, because I think it's best rather than

confusing it from this podium that Lisa really go through this structure with you.

Q Mark, can you comment from your perspective on Governor Weld's tax program?

MR. GEARAN: I don't know enough about the Governor's tax program to comment on it.

Q There are reports that people at the White House are upset that he's trying to upstage you and --

MR. GEARAN: No. I think what was presented to me yesterday was the Governor's concern about -- that it was -- presented concerns about the President's economic package. And I think my comments, as you read through some of the articles that were printed, was that it was specifically answering what our program does. I do not know enough about what the Governor is suggesting in Massachusetts to make any judgment on it.

Q Have you any conclusion on whether it's harmful to U.S. economic -- federal economic policy?

MR. GEARAN: What I was commenting on yesterday was our economic plan and any suggestion that the President's economic plan that was signed was harmful to all citizens. I went through our usual comments on terms of the gas tax and --

Q But in terms of his cutting the gas tax there, does that make any difference to you?

MR. GEARAN: I don't feel comfortable enough commenting. I don't know the specifics of this.

Q Is the President satisfied with Bernie Nussbaum's handling of the 48 hours or so immediately following Mr. Foster's death?

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q Did anyone from the White House Counsel's Office, the cleaning staff or anyone else remove anything from Vince Foster's office from the time you were notified of his death until Bernie Nussbaum went into the office with the FBI and others?

MR. GEARAN: Nothing was removed, but what was retrieved was the trash that was retrieved. And then that was --

Q Retrieved from where?

MR. GEARAN: From Vince's office.

Q Retrieved?

MR. GEARAN: Well, I mean, it had been cleaned out. His office was cleaned out.

Q His office was cleaned out by whom?

MR. GEARAN: The normal janitorial service had gone into his office before anyone learned of --

Q So somebody went and got the trash back?

MR. GEARAN: Right. And that was secured. And that was gone through then in the course of the regular review of his office.

Q -- report that they removed a box -- a box of documents were removed was just false?

MR. GEARAN: I think Bernie spoke to that in the paper today.

Q Mark, has the President settled on a successor for General Powell?

MR. GEARAN: No.

Q What is his time frame for making that decision?

MR. GEARAN: I think he'd like to do it in the most timely manner that he possibly could, given the --

Q Is he close?

MR. GEARAN: I think it's something that he's given some thought about.

Q Would you expect it --

Q Was that the reason for the dinner last night?

MR. GEARAN: No.

Q Would you expect it before the end of the month?

MR. GEARAN: I don't want to get into a time line game at this point. I think --

Q Some of the gay community held a news conference today and strongly urged against General Hoar being selected. Will the President take their comments into consideration?

MR. GEARAN: I think the President is anxious to get the best person into that position. It's a critical position and his interest is to have someone there of the -- as he said before -- the caliber of General Powell. And that's his --

Q Did he give a farewell party last night for Powell?

MR. GEARAN: It was -- he had the CINC dinner last night at the White House.

Q Was it in honor of Powell, or was it --

MR. GEARAN: I don't know if it was specifically in honor of General Powell. I can get you that.

Q Was he honored in some way at the dinner? Did the President propose a toast to him?

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q Did he have 16 generals or commanders --

MR. GEARAN: I'm sorry -- what?

Q Did he have a 16 or so commanders there?

MR. GEARAN: Yes, they were all there, as well as Secretary Aspin and Sandy Berger and different --

Q If I could go back to the question of the payment, I asked Lisa Caputo how much she'd been paid and was told that information would not be made public until the renovation was

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New CMS file
Vince Foster
Suicide:
press briefing

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

July 21, 1993

PRESS BRIEFING

BY

CHIEF OF STAFF MACK MCLARTY
AND COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR MARK GEARAN

The Briefing Room

3:38 P.M. EDT

MR. MCLARTY: Good afternoon. As I'm sure you can appreciate, this is one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. Like the President and myself, Vince Foster was from Hope, Arkansas, and for more than 40 years he was my friend. And because of that friendship and because of Vince's considerable accomplishments, I took understandable pride when the President asked him to join us here in Washington as Deputy White House Counsel.

For six months, he served his country with distinction in that capacity and, to be sure, the White House has lost a talented and dedicated attorney.

Many of you may not know that Vince graduated first in his law school class and scored the highest grade on the Arkansas bar exam the year he took it, and was made partner in a major law firm in just two years. He chaired the Arkansas Advisory Council to the Legal Services Corporation, and he just recently received the Arkansas Bar Foundation Award and the Arkansas Bar Association's 1993 Outstanding Lawyer Award.

But I'm here today really to talk more as Vince's friend than his White House Chief of Staff. When we received the tragic news last night the President and I joined his family and his friends at the Foster home. And as the President related to the White House staff earlier today, we all shared some warm and some wonderful memories, as well as shed some very real tears.

All of us who have the privilege and honor of calling the White House our place of employment, on either side of this podium, are used to, in large measure, dealing with issues and problems that are tangible, that are knowable, at least in large part, and most times subject to reason. And that is one aspect that makes this tragedy so difficult to deal with. For try as we might, all of our reason, all of our rationality, all of our logic can never answer the questions raised by such a death.

We really can never fully know a person's private pain and what might lead them in their thought process, even a person we have known all of our lives. But what we can do is offer our prayers and comfort to Lisa, Vince's wife of 25 years; their wonderful children; his mother Alice Mae, whom I spoke with this morning in Hope; and to his sisters, Sheila Anthony here in Washington and Sharon Bowman of Little Rock.

As a measure of our affection for them, there has been established a Vincent W. Foster Scholarship Fund with the Arkansas Bar Foundation. Funeral services will be held in Little Rock this Friday. The President and First Lady, as well as Donna and I will, of course, attend. Donna is at the Foster residence this afternoon, and I plan to join her and the Foster family later today.

It is one of life's ironies that just yesterday, when speaking of what John F. Kennedy had meant to him, the President said -- and I quote -- "The only way to ever honor any memory of someone gone is to do something today which reinforces the validity of that memory in our hearts." And so we will reinforce the validity of our friend's life, even as we mourn the circumstances of his death.

The work which he was devoted here at the White House will go on, and Vince Foster's spirit will live on in the hearts of those of us who loved him.

Thank you very much. I would now like to ask Mark Gearan to respond to any questions that you may have. Thank you.

Q Mack, did you know of any personal reason why he might have done this?

MR. GEARAN: Thank you. Let me provide you some background information, if I might, and walk through some things and then we'd be happy to take some questions.

In terms of the chronology for the White House notification, the Park Service police made the initial contact to the White House security and administrative officers about the report of a body being found. The Secret Service and the Park Service respectively notified the administrative and security officers of the White House. That set into motion calls to the Chief of Staff. We were here for the Larry King Live show in the Residence.

Soon after the show began, we were pulled from the staff room where the Chief of Staff Mack McLarty was informed of this -- that it was an unconfirmed report. In the intervening 50 or so minutes, efforts were made to both confirm the report and to make preliminary calls to individuals that needed to be contacted. Mack McLarty was with us in the Residence and coordinated the activity.

Just about five minutes before 10:00 p.m., before the Larry King Show concluded, we had the confirmation that indeed Vince had been confirmed as deceased. And the President concluded the show, went up to the Residence with Mack; at which point Mack informed the President of Vince's death. Following the indication -- following that report, then the President visited the Foster family with Mack and with several of their friends from here in Washington, senior staff members and folks from Little Rock that went to be near the Foster family at that time.

Secondly, let me tell you a bit about Vince's day-to-day responsibilities here at the White House. He's the Deputy Counsel to Bernie Nussbaum, and as such, assisted Bernie in managing all of the day-to-day activities in the White House Counsel's Office. In a staff meeting that the President had at noon today in the Old Executive Building, Bernie spoke very movingly of what they tried to do in the White House Counsel's Office, and that is to establish a law firm. They view their work as partners, senior partners in the firm in putting together the law firm there. He advised the President in the selection of judicial nominees, was a key advisor to the Health Care Task Force, and provided day-to-day management assistance to Bernie overall in the Counsel's Office.

Yesterday, Vince attended Judge Freeh's announcement ceremony, returned to his office and did some work in his office. Around noon, he stopped by and visited with Bernie in Bernie's office, which is adjacent to his, ate lunch at his desk. And soon thereafter --

Q Had lunch at Bernie's desk?

MR. GEARAN: Ate lunch at his own desk. Soon thereafter, left the office and said he would be back. Mack has gone through some of Vince's bio that I think we've provided to you as well, so we'll let it stand at that.

Let me say a bit about the investigation, where we're at at this point. At the request of the White House Counsel's Office, the investigation will be coordinated by the Department of Justice and the Office of the Attorney General and her deputy, Phil Heymann. And that's where we would refer you to any questions. We'll be providing scheduling information and details of the funeral services set for 11:00 a.m. on Friday at St. Andrews Catholic Cathedral in Little Rock. And burial will be later in Hope, Arkansas.

I'd be happy to take any questions.

Q Is there any doubt -- I mean, the Justice Department investigation -- is there any doubt as to the apparent suicide?

MR. GEARAN: I'm sorry. As to the --

Q You say an investigation is underway.

MR. GEARAN: No, it's standard operating procedure, I think, that following a death of this nature that there is an investigation, and that's being coordinated by the Attorney General.

Q Do you know anything about the weapon that was used? To whom it was registered or any of those details?

MR. GEARAN: I don't, but I think it's general procedure that there's research on that by the appropriate agency. And again, Justice can provide you the status of that to determine --

Q Did the Secret Service have a role in the investigation?

MR. GEARAN: It's being coordinated by the Department of Justice. The Park Police, because that was the -- was where Vince's body was found was -- is also involved in the --

Q Was it unusual for him to be out of the office all afternoon? What was going on yesterday that -- did he say anything to anyone before he left the White House?

MR. GEARAN: He did not. He said he would be back. A different points during the day Bernie said, is he back yet? But it was not atypical. They did have meetings or availability, but certainly there was --

Q There was no concern about his welfare?

MR. GEARAN: No.

Q Mark, had he ever given anyone any indication that he needed help or was in a difficult psychological condition?

MR. GEARAN: No. He never said anything to indicate that anything was out of the ordinary to his colleagues.

Q How did he go when he left? Did he have his personal car? Was it a White House car?

MR. GEARAN: His personal car.

Q And no one tried to page him or no attempt to reach him?

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MR. GEARAN: No.

Q What time did he leave?

MR. GEARAN: Soon after 1:00 p.m. or soon thereafter.

Q Was there any indication of the time of -- we know when you guys were contacted, but the time of death or the time that his body was found?

MR. GEARAN: The Park Service can provide that information. I think that we can --

Q Did he go home at all before --

MR. GEARAN: We don't believe so.

Q Do you have the information, Mark?

MR. GEARAN: I'm sorry?

Q Do you have anything that answers Ruth's question?

MR. GEARAN: About the time that his body was found?

Q Yes.

MR. GEARAN: -- 6:00 p.m. I think is what the Park Service report --

Q You don't know -- that period of five hours -- 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. --

MR. GEARAN: We do not.

Q No one knows where he was in those five hours?

MR. GEARAN: That's correct.

Q Mark, was he under any treatment that was -- was he seeing any kind of doctors? Was he under any kind of medication that you're aware of?

MR. GEARAN: Not that we're aware of, no.

Q Did the Park Service investigators -- I'm sorry, Terry.

Q I was just going to say -- he wasn't seeing a psychiatrist or getting any kind of counseling as far as you know?

MR. GEARAN: Not that we're aware of.

Q Did the Park Service investigators tell anybody on the White House staff what they thought the time of death might have been?

MR. GEARAN: Not that I'm aware of. The exact time of death?

Q Well, or approximate time of death. You say the body was discovered approximately 6:00 p.m. How long had he been dead?

MR. GEARAN: I don't know the answer to that. We can refer you to the Justice Department for that.

Q The Justice Department has a policy of not ever commenting on pending investigations, so in essence, Mark, by referring us to the Justice Department we're not going to get any answers.

MR. GEARAN: Well, I think if the question is what -- the question is at what time was the death recorded?

Q No, when do they think death took place. They can estimate these things and they normally do.

MR. GEARAN: I don't know the answer to that.

Q Was there a note?

MR. GEARAN: There was not.

Q Are you sure there was no note, computer note --

MR. GEARAN: Not that we're aware of.

Q Do you know of any personal problem that could have driven him to this?

MR. GEARAN: No. As I said, he never said anything to his colleagues here in the White House or his friends here in Washington that would indicate that anything was out of the ordinary.

Q And when things were going wrong at the White House in terms of appointments and the travel office, this did not upset him? I mean, he didn't have any undue stress?

MR. GEARAN: No. I think I've kind of summarized as best, Helen, in terms of talking to other colleagues or friends, and obviously, we spent the preceding -- whatever it is -- 12 hours all visiting with each other on this topic to search our own minds, and there's nothing to indicate that.

Q People have said, though, that there was a change in his demeanor and attitude over the last week or so. Are you aware of that either personally or by report from Bernie or others?

MR. GEARAN: I think people have observed in the White House there are good days and bad days here in the White House. I don't think anyone had an indication that it was out of the ordinary.

Q Had he been, in fact, depressed, down in the dumps in the last few days or weeks?

MR. GEARAN: Some people might have observed it, but again, nothing to indicate anything out of the ordinary, obviously.

Q Had he left the White House for afternoons before? Have you any evidence that he'd taken such long departures?

MR. GEARAN: I'm not aware of it, but I would not be, frankly.

Q Are you providing any counseling to any members of his staff about his death? And is there any attempt to counsel people on perhaps the pressures of the job and --

MR. GEARAN: Not at this point, although the President and Mack McLarty, the Chief of Staff, convened a staff meeting today that Bernie spoke at and that Mack spoke at, and the President spoke at. And I think it was a good session for us all certainly to be together and an opportunity to share some thoughts.

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Q The whole staff, Mark?

MR. GEARAN: The entire White House staff was invited.

Q Mark, what time --

Q In 450?

MR. GEARAN: In Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building.

Q Mark, what time did you say again that the White House was first notified -- 9:15 p.m.?

MR. GEARAN: Nine fifteen p.m., soon after 9:00 p.m. --

Q Well, what accounts --

MR. GEARAN: -- is when we Mack was notified, because we were at the Residence.

Q What accounts for the lapse in time then between 6:00 p.m. and 9:15 p.m. before you or the White House was notified, and who made the positive identification?

MR. GEARAN: The White House, our security administrative officers were notified at 8:30 p.m. or so and 9:00 p.m. respectively.

Q That's still two and a half hours, presumably. Did he have his identification on him?

MR. GEARAN: It was --

Q It seems like -- I don't know, it just seems like an inordinate amount of time, two and a half hours --

MR. GEARAN: I don't know if that's inordinate or not.

Q Okay, but did he have identification on him, do you know?

MR. GEARAN: Yes, he did.

Q Okay -- no --

MR. GEARAN: I do not know. And I don't know if that's inordinate.

Q Who made the positive identification?

MR. GEARAN: Craig Livingstone went to the Fairfax Hospital, accompanied by Bill Kennedy.

Q Who is Craig Livingstone?

MR. GEARAN: He's our security officer.

Q And when you say the administrative and security officers were --

MR. GEARAN: Craig is the security officer, and David Watkins is the administrative officer -- the official point of contacts on all matters of this.

Q The President has spoken of this as a suicide, and so did Mack. What is the evidence that it was a suicide?

MR. GEARAN: The Park Service report indicated that.

Q Is there any doubt at all?

MR. GEARAN: That's what the Park Service report concluded. We have no reason to dispute it.

Q Did his wife know he owned a gun, or did this come as a complete surprise to her that he even had a gun in his possession, or that he might have secured it only yesterday?

MR. GEARAN: I don't know. I don't know his gun ownership or the nature of this gun. This is, again, part of the standing procedure, and an investigation of this type is that they do look at the number and determine the ownership of it.

Q When he didn't return to the White House in the afternoon, did his secretary or anyone in his office become alarmed, or try to contact the family?

MR. GEARAN: From visiting with Bernie, he did say from time to time and then by the end of the day, they thought he might have then returned home. It was not necessarily atypical.

Q What do you mean by that? Can you explain that?

Q What do you mean it was not atypical?

Q A minute ago you said you didn't know if he had done this before.

MR. GEARAN: That's their observation. I do not know from personal --

Q What had he gone in to talk to Bernie about? You said he visited with him.

MR. GEARAN: They were watching -- he came in to talk about Judge Freeh's announcement and the opening proceeding of the Ginsburg hearings.

Q Mark, Bernie said --

Q Nothing out of the ordinary?

MR. GEARAN: No.

Q Bernie said this was not atypical for him not to have returned by the end of the day?

MR. GEARAN: It was not viewed as any way unusual in that sense. They weren't sure of his exact schedule.

Q In what sense, Mark?

Q Had this happened before then?

MR. GEARAN: I don't know the answer to that.

Q Can you check that for us?

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q Mark, what was his -- how did Bernie describe his demeanor at that lunch before he left?

MR. GEARAN: He had -- Vince had lunch by himself at his desk. He went into --

Q But Bernie was the last one to meet with him at the White House?

MR. GEARAN: Yes. Dee Dee has got the statement we're releasing that from the staff meeting when Mack and Bernie and the President spoke. He did speak about that visit that we can provide you some of the excerpts from.

Q Mark, it's not unusual in a case that seems so unexplainable as this for the person's friends to take on some sense of the guilt that, gee, maybe I did something or maybe I should have -- does President Clinton feel any sense that the pressure or the work load or being part of this administration contributed to his decision?

MR. GEARAN: Well, I think we're all saddened beyond words at Vince's death. Obviously, he was enormously well-respected here. We all feel like we lost a very valued colleague. It's also the case that when we met today we talked -- the President spoke as he had before of the need to balance all of our lives and this provides --

Q The President said that work isn't everything, that you have to pay more attention to friends and family. Does President Clinton feel that he has, perhaps in some way, neglected friends and family?

MR. GEARAN: No, I think we're just speaking to, as he has since we got here, that at moments like this you're reminded of the importance of friends and family.

Q How and by whom was Mrs. Clinton notified? And can you characterize her reaction?

MR. GEARAN: She was -- Mack McLarty, the Chief of Staff, called her from the Residence at 9:40 p.m. -- somewhere -- 9:45 p.m. --

Q Told her before he told the President?

MR. GEARAN: The President was on Larry King Show -- that there was this report. She was in Little Rock.

Q And was this report the reason for the last half hour of the program being cut off?

MR. GEARAN: The original agreement with the show was that it would be an hour, and then it was extended midway during it. But, obviously, as events and our knowledge of the circumstance became more clear, then we agreed to terminate --

Q This was the reason? The stated reason was that there was an appointment. That's the way -- but the appointment was a cover --

MR. GEARAN: The President did not know until he left the set.

Q The appointment was a cover for this event.

MR. GEARAN: The President did not know until he left the set.

Q Was Foster related in any way to the President or anybody else on the staff here?

MR. GEARAN: I'm not aware of any familial relation. They grew up in Hope, Arkansas, and their backyards joined each other

growing up. The President's grandparents that he lived with growing up and in the foster home --

Q Was he related distantly, if at all, to anyone else on the White House staff?

MR. GEARAN: On the White House staff? I'm not aware of it. His sister, Sheila Foster Anthony, serves in the Justice Department.

Q Mark, I have two questions. One, can you tell us who else besides Mack and the President sat in on that conversation among friends last night at the Foster home?

MR. GEARAN: Webb Hubbell, the Fosters --

Q Including Sheila?

MR. GEARAN: I believe so.

Q Anybody else? Was Lindsey there?

MR. GEARAN: Bruce was not -- David Watkins was there.

Q David Watkins and Pat --

MR. GEARAN: I don't believe so.

Q David called Chief Langston and Major Hines here today, I understand, from the Park Service to brief on this investigation so far. Who did they brief and what did they tell you, please?

MR. GEARAN: Well, the agreement today was, as I said, at the request of the Counsel. The Justice Department is going to coordinate the investigation.

Q And you were told that? Is that what they were brought here to be told?

MR. GEARAN: They discussed that and the Chief agreed to that. Thought that was a good idea.

Q Did they brief you on anything they had gotten? Did they bring you up to speed? Who did they talk to?

MR. GEARAN: No, no, they did not brief me.

Q Mark, just a -- let me follow Ruth's question. Is there anyone of all the people who you've talked to in your discussions, either Bernie or others, who really were in a position to see him over a period of time and measure, who felt or believed there had been a change in his behavior -- a discernible and obvious change in his behavior in the last week or two?

MR. GEARAN: I can only repeat what I've said in that there was nothing people felt that he said anything in the extraordinary, that was out of the ordinary to his colleagues or to his friends. Something we've all thought about.

Q How long did the President stay at the Fosters last night?

MR. GEARAN: He stayed 45 minutes.

Q Mark, back on the investigation. What is the specific goal of this investigation that you're undertaking?

MR. GEARAN: This is a standard operating procedure.

Q It can't be standard for the Deputy Attorney General to investigate a suicide.

Q Mark, can I follow that, please?

MR. GEARAN: No, to coordinate it with the Park Service and the Secret Service.

Q What do you want to find out?

Q -- the factors that might have contributed to this?

MR. GEARAN: I'm sorry.

Q Are you looking for collateral factors that might have contributed to this, whether it be financial problems or blackmail or something that's unseen at this point?

MR. GEARAN: No, we're looking just to ensure that the standard procedure is followed in the sense of the Counsel's Office here because some of it may require the broadened focus of the Justice Department only in the sense of the Counsel's Office.

Let me just -- I don't want to confuse anyone here. The Department of Justice has been asked by the Counsel's Office, Bernie, to coordinate this from the Park Service to any of the other procedural investigatory authorities on behalf of the White House. That's all that's --

Q Mark, I'm sorry, isn't the nature of this -- in the case of this kind, if I'm not mistaken, at its first impression for the authorities, an investigation to see if, indeed, it was a suicide, and, if not, if it were some other kind of crime? That being the case, I wonder is it standard procedure for the White House, despite the fact that the victim worked here, to be involved in directing how the investigation is coordinated or having the federal authorities do that? Is that standard procedure to your knowledge?

MR. GEARAN: I can provide additional details on the specific legalities as to why that was suggested. I think the instance of both from the scene of Vince's death, it's the Park Service, to any -- another part of the investigation would be any information that would provide background that would also involve his place of work or whatever.

Q You're talking about the White House as supervising cooperation with the investigation, or are you talking about the White House actually having the Justice Department supervise the investigation and run it itself?

MR. GEARAN: What we -- and I will be more precise when -- I didn't come in here prepared fully on this, and we want to make it very clear. My understanding is that the Department of Justice has been asked to coordinate this because of the various investigating authorities. Let me come back to you on it completely so as not to confuse anyone.

Q Who made the request?

MR. GEARAN: The Counsel's Office.

Q Are you going to get back to us on that --

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q So you're going to take a question, in effect, and get back to us?

MR. GEARAN: Absolutely.

Q Are you going to try and get back before our deadlines this evening?

MR. GEARAN: Yes, we don't want to have any confusion on this.

Q Mark, will you explain to us also what this is that they're investigating if the Park Police is convinced it's a suicide?

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q Is there any doubt as to whether it's a suicide?

MR. GEARAN: No, as I said, there's no reason to doubt that.

Q -- tell both agencies or --

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q Mark, did the President personally request that the Justice Department --

MR. GEARAN: No, the White House Counsel's Office.

Q Can you say what the wife felt? Was there any indication -- did she get any kind of an insight? You weren't there last night in the house, but has there been any word from her, any expression that she might have known he was not feeling --

MR. GEARAN: Not that I'm aware of, no.

Q Do you have any word on a medical exam?

MR. GEARAN: I do not know that.

Q The autopsy has been concluded, has it not?

MR. GEARAN: It was to be conducted today.

Q Are White House employees routinely asked whether they own firearms upon being employed?

MR. GEARAN: I don't recall.

Q What was the question?

MR. GEARAN: Whether White House employees are asked whether they own firearms. I don't recall from the questionnaires that we were provided. I do not know.

Q Did he park on campus here? Did he park his car routinely on campus here on the White House grounds?

MR. GEARAN: I believe so, yes.

Q What's your understanding of how Mr. Foster reacted to The Wall Street Journal editorials about him?

MR. GEARAN: I think people, again, just to state the broader point here because I know where a lot of the concerns are here from folks, is that, generally, in conversations with colleagues that Vince had and as we've all been following up on, no one ever

felt there was anything extraordinary. In the White House there's good days and days of more stress than others. No one ever felt that he was unduly burdened by it.

Q He seemed to take it in stride, is that what you're saying?

MR. GEARAN: Yes.

Q Mark, how about this travel office report? That concluded that the White House Counsel, among others, could have done more to avert the damage that was caused. Do you have any indication that Vince took that to heart and that had a particular impact on his state of mind over the last couple of weeks?

MR. GEARAN: No, we don't. As you know, Mack and Leon have spoken from this podium about the travel office, and, as you know, there was no instance of conduct that was noted there to necessitate any reprimand of Vince.

Q Mark, do you have anything more on the travel? Is he going to stay overnight?

MR. GEARAN: We don't.

Q Mark, you've left the impression with a comment earlier about his unexplained absence during the afternoon was not atypical -- it left the impression it kind of was not unusual for him to kind of go AWOL in the afternoon.

MR. GEARAN: I don't want to leave that impression.

Q Can you go back to the atypical line and say what you meant?

MR. GEARAN: Yes, thank you. I think what I was trying to suggest is that while he was out of the office, whether this was at a meeting or whatever, people did not feel, based on any comments that he might have given anyone or any behavior that would necessitate further inquiries, that other than the fact that his schedule was not known that he might have left earlier in the afternoon for home after an appointment. It was within that kind of context that there was --

Q Mark, can you give us a rundown on what the President's day and night was like after he left the Foster home last night?

MR. GEARAN: He came back to the Residence.

Q We were told that he didn't get much sleep.

MR. GEARAN: He visited in the Residence with Mack for some time. And this morning he conducted his meeting with the Congressional Black Caucus and then had the staff meeting. The public schedule today out in Maryland was conducted by the Vice President. He's been in the office. This evening's schedule I don't know.

Q Can you go back on Mrs. Clinton's contact with Foster's family and tell us a little bit about her friendship with --

MR. GEARAN: She was Vince's partner at the Rose Law Firm and was friendly with Vince and his wife and their family, as was President Clinton and many of the folks around the White House.

Q Did she call her last night? Did she have any contact with the people who were at the --

MR. GEARAN: I need to confirm that for you, the timing of the call.

Q Was anyone else on the White House staff or in the President's family or inner circle -- did anyone hear from him yesterday other than the context you've mentioned before this happened?

MR. GEARAN: Not that we're aware of.

Q Or in the 24 or 48 hours before?

MR. GEARAN: Wait a minute, Brit. One more time.

Q I gather that yesterday, apart from the contacts in the office, no one is aware of any discussions he may have had that would shed any light on how he felt or what might have led to this.

MR. GEARAN: No.

Q In the two days -- did anyone else in the White House hear from him yesterday who did not work in the immediate office that might have given some sense on this?

MR. GEARAN: People saw him at the Judge Freeh ceremony.

Q He seemed fine.

MR. GEARAN: He was doing legal work after that at his desk and with a colleague.

Q His secretary had no sense of anything wrong?

Q How involved in the review process for Dr. Elders was Mr. Foster? Was he very involved in the review of her nomination and the questions about Social Security taxes from last weekend?

MR. GEARAN: I don't believe so. I don't believe so. I can clarify that for you, but I do not believe that was part of this.

Q Mark, what did the --

Q He didn't go home during the afternoon, did he?

MR. GEARAN: Not that we're aware of, no.

Q And did the authorities call his family, or did the White House contact Mrs. Foster?

MR. GEARAN: The authorities went to the Foster residence.

Q Has his office been searched at all for clues? And is it now being sealed as part of the investigation?

MR. GEARAN: It's secured, yes. It's secured.

Q And was it searched for notes or clues or anything?

MR. GEARAN: There was nothing remaining, no.

Q What are the ages of the children?

MR. GEARAN: We can provide the exact ages. Two are in college and one is about to enter his senior year.

Q Of college?

MR. GEARAN: I'm sorry -- in high school.

Q I'm sorry. You said there was nothing remaining in his office?

MR. GEARAN: The question was a note, I believe, wasn't it?

Q Was it searched for a note.

MR. GEARAN: Is the question --

Q For any clues or nothing remained?

Q Why has it been sealed?

MR. GEARAN: That's part of the standard procedure as --

Q Was there any indication, Mark, that he had tried to put his affairs in order in some way --

MR. GEARAN: Not that I'm aware of.

Q -- like tidy up legal matters?

MR. GEARAN: Not that I'm aware of, but I don't know the answer.

Q And the police informed Mrs. Foster?

MR. GEARAN: Yes, yes.

Q They came to the house?

MR. GEARAN: They go to the house.

Q Do you know did they --

MR. GEARAN: The question was did the police inform Mrs. Foster.

Q Did they inform Mrs. Foster before they informed the White House? That might account for the lapse in time. Do you know what time they informed her?

MR. GEARAN: They informed -- they went to the house right before 10:00 p.m., I think. They wait for confirmation -- somebody to identify the body.

Q What particular official made the ruling that the death was by suicide, and what particular official was conducting the autopsy?

MR. GEARAN: The Fairfax County Coroner's Office in the instance of the latter question, and the Park Service police report indicated that.

Q What kind of hours has he been working and when is the last time he had a vacation?

MR. GEARAN: Vince was very hard-working. I don't know his exact hours. I think --

Q Is it 18 hours, is it 14 hours, is it seven days a week?

MR. GEARAN: It's at least 12 hours, I would suspect, or more.

Q When was the last time he had a vacation?

Q Do you have any details on how he was found, who found him?

MR. GEARAN: I don't know the answer to that.

Q Do you have any details about how he was found or who found him?

MR. GEARAN: No, I don't.

Q What is the President's schedule? Do you have any details over the weekend?

MR. GEARAN: No, we'll have to provide that for you.

Q Will he go to the burial?

MR. GEARAN: He's going at least to the funeral at this point.

Q Mark, can you tell if that's the only business relationship that Vince and Hillary had was in the law partnership? Do you know if they had any other business relationship?

MR. GEARAN: I'm not aware of any other business relationship, no.

Q Mark, did the President phone the First Lady last night?

MR. GEARAN: Yes, he did.

Q Do you know how long they spoke?

MR. GEARAN: I don't know that. Mack was -- it was from the Residence and Mack was there.

Q Can I ask you a question on another issue?

MR. GEARAN: I want to get back to you on this Justice thing --

Q Mark, has she returned to Washington?

MR. GEARAN: No, she's in Little Rock.

Q Will you release the Park Service police report? Is that a public document you can release?

MR. GEARAN: I can check. I think they have released it, yes.

Q What was Foster like to deal with in the office on a day-to-day basis?

MR. GEARAN: Vince Foster was a delightful guy. He was solid. He was someone that you'd want as your lawyer. He was earnest and exhibited a tremendous sense of honesty and integrity, and also enjoyed the good humor and respect of -- people who worked with him liked working with him and for him.

Q You're giving an impression that he didn't wear his emotions on his sleeve. Is that accurate?

MR. GEARAN: I think we'll leave it as where I left it.
I think it's --

Q Mark, was he driving home? Was this the route to his home?

MR. GEARAN: He lives in Georgetown or Northwest.

Q Mark, can I ask you a question on another subject? The Congressional Black Caucus said today that the President indicated he was considering adding a black and a woman to his inner circle. Where do things stand on that? Is that an accurate portrayal of where things are?

MR. GEARAN: I wasn't at the Black Caucus meeting, so I'm not prepared to take the question.

Let me leave it there because I don't want to leave any misunderstanding on the status of the coordinated effort with Justice.

Q When did Mrs. Foster last see her husband? Did she have any indication? Did you say yesterday morning before he left for work?

MR. GEARAN: I can't confirm that. I don't know the answer to that.

Q Thank you, Mark.

END

4:15 P.M. EDT

Cliff Sloan
Room 128 OEOB

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

Immediate Release

July 22, 1993

PRESS BRIEFING
BY DEE DEE MYERS

The Briefing Room

1:32 P.M. EDT

MS. MYERS: I have a brief statement. President Clinton held a cordial and constructive meeting this morning with President Jean Bertrand Aristide of Haiti. The meeting lasted about 30 minutes. This was their first meeting since the signing of the so-called Governor's Island Accord on July 3rd, although they spoke by phone on July 4th.

The President commended President Aristide on his signing of the agreement, which establishes a sound timetable for the restoration of democracy and for President Aristide to return to Haiti on October 30th, just 100 days from now.

The President described the agreement as an historic step forward for democracy, economic prosperity and freedom for all Haiti. He reaffirmed that the United States will continue to play a leadership with the international community and help fostering a better life for the Haitian people.

The President and President Aristide discussed the steps that need to be taken to fulfill the terms of the agreement, including naming a new prime minister by President Aristide in consultation with members of the Haitian parliament.

Q How do you distinguish a sound timetable from an unsound one? What does that mean?

MS. MYERS: One that is specific and will be implemented.

Q Realistic, you mean?

MS. MYERS: Realistic, solid.

Q And he agreed to all this?

MS. MYERS: Yes -- as he did when he signed the Governor's Island Accord on July 3rd.

Q Can you tell us if a search has been conducted in Vince's office and if anything was found, and whether the President got some rest last night? How is he feeling today?

MS. MYERS: I'll take the second part of that first. He seems to be feeling fine. I think, of course, these things take a while. However, he started his schedule early this morning and will conduct it in full. And I think he's going about business sort of professionally as possible. I think he's doing fine.

As for the second part, the Park Service Police were in this morning. They've interviewed a number of staff members about Vince's last day, and will be sort of, I think, finishing up with

their look at it today here in terms of Vince's office. They're simply trying to confirm their preliminary notion that it was, in fact, a suicide.

Q Did they find any, or take any paper with them or find any note?

MS. MYERS: I don't know. When I last checked they weren't done.

Q Has a note been found to the best of your knowledge?

MS. MYERS: To the best of my knowledge no note has been found. That's sort of what they're looking for just to determine -- just to confirm their observation that this was, in fact, a suicide.

Q Is the President getting any routine briefing on this from them? One would think that he would be, you know, wanting to monitor this very closely in terms of whether there was anything here that happened that could have in any way contributed.

MS. MYERS: Well, just to be clear, what they're really looking for is just anything that would confirm that it was a suicide, such as a note. I think the President is certainly being kept abreast of what's happening, although there hasn't been a whole lot of movement today. The Park Service has talked to a number of people, but simply to determine his schedule on Tuesday.

Q Any new developments today? And can you give his itinerary for tomorrow?

MS. MYERS: No, new developments today. His schedule is as released. And I actually do have the details of tomorrow's schedule. He'll leave here at 8:15 a.m. It's a family pool. At 11:00 a.m. he'll attend the funeral service at St. Andrew's Catholic Cathedral. Then he'll go to Hope for the burial; I believe a reception at the Foster's house. And this is all fairly open-ended. I think they'll do these things when they get there. He will return to Washington tomorrow night and proceed with his Saturday schedule as previously announced.

Q Tomorrow night?

MS. MYERS: Yes. Spend the night in Washington. So, Saturday morning, he'll do the radio address live at 10:06 a.m. and then have the reception with Boy's Nation in the Rose Garden after that. I think it's after.

Q Does he feel that there's any progress being made at all on the budget. Can you tell us of his meetings this morning?

MS. MYERS: Yes. I think that the general attitude is that I think people are fairly optimistic. They think that the members of Congress are fairly upbeat about this; that there's a real willingness to get it done and that progress is being made.

Q Is it a five or six cent a gallon --

MS. MYERS: They haven't -- obviously, the conferees are working out the specific details of the energy tax, but I think that there's -- by all accounts, there's a real willingness and a desire to get this done, to move forward, to make progress. And I think members are pretty upbeat.

Q But you never answered the question.

MS. MYERS: As far as I know, it's not resolved.

Q No, I mean, do you know what he wants, what he'll go for?

MS. MYERS: He's made it clear what his priorities are. The conferees will have to work out the specific details about how many cents.

Q Just a couple more questions on the Vince Foster thing. Have they gotten an ID on the gun ownership yet? And you spoke about the President's mood. Could you give us a feeling for the mood in the White House in general?

MS. MYERS: As far as I know, ATF has not communicated to us if they've made a positive ID on who owned the gun. According to their folks, it is a little more difficult since it was an old weapon and didn't have a serial number.

The mood in the White House -- I think people have gotten back to business today. I think there's always a lingering sadness when you lose a friend, particularly in such a tragic way. But I think people are pretty much back to business and focused on the tasks at hand. I think it will take a while for people to fully get over the circumstances of Vince Foster's death, but we're doing pretty well.

Q How many members of the staff will be going out to Little Rock?

MS. MYERS: I don't know. I haven't seen the manifest. I think there will be a fair number who will travel down there. As you know, a number of people here have known Vince for a long time and will certainly go to pay their last respects.

Q Two questions. Can you tell us who the Park Police interviewed and was the President among those that were interviewed?

MS. MYERS: No, the President was not among those. I don't have a list, but it was primarily people -- or perhaps completely people on the staff on the Counsel's Office staff, people who had contact with him on Tuesday.

Q The other question is, the President yesterday in the Rose Garden said he was urging his staff to perhaps slow down and pay more attention to family and friends. He made that comment yesterday. Are people following up on that? Is there any recognition of a need to concerning recognition of a need to -- not to work so hard, not to put in long hours?

MS. MYERS: I think the President has always urged balance between -- in work, and particularly here in Washington. I think people will certainly take it to heart. I don't know what people's specific plans are for the weekend, but I think something like this always gives you a little pause, and I think it's good if people spend -- you know, take a little time just to make sure that they think this through. But I don't know if it's made any specific change in people's plans.

Q Dee Dee, back on the Vince Foster story. Lawyers for the seven employees fired in the Travel Office suggested to the FBI and to the public integrity section of the Justice Department that the investigation be expanded to include officials who were involved in the dismissal of those seven employees. Had Vince Foster, anybody in the White House Counsel's Office, or anybody else in the White House staff received a call from the Justice Department

public integrity section or the FBI asking for cooperation in an expanded inquiry?

MS. MYERS: Not that I know of. I'll take it, but --

Q Would you know?

MS. MYERS: I think so, but I'd be happy to take it.

Q Are you sure you're confident you can answer it if you do take it?

MS. MYERS: No. I just --

Q What I'm saying is are you willing to go to Justice and ask any contact or -- is that what you're prepared to do?

MS. MYERS: What I think I can do is find out the status of the Justice Department's review, which I think is complete. If there were another inquiry, I'm not sure that I -- that's a good question; I don't know if I would be in a position to know, given my relationship with previous investigations, I think.

Q Complete on the travel -- you mean, the FBI investigation is over?

MS. MYERS: No, no. Justice Department --

Q Oh, of the death.

MS. MYERS: I just don't know.

Q We asked Janet Reno that yesterday.

MS. MYERS: And what did she say?

Q It's not complete. Today it's gotten complete?

MS. MYERS: Well, it was in its final phases a few days ago, I was told, and I certainly --

Q We asked her Monday.

MS. MYERS: You asked her Monday -- this is now Thursday.

Q It just feels like yesterday.

MS. MYERS: Yes. So, anyway, I will take that question and provide what information I can.

Q Two questions on loose ends. Have any of his friends or family confirmed that he actually owned a revolver? And have any friends or family filled in any of those five hours? Did anybody hear from him?

MS. MYERS: Not that I know of. And I don't know about whether he owned -- what his gun -- again, we'll wait for the results of the ATF investigation as to the ownership of the gun.

Q So negative on both questions?

MS. MYERS: Yes.

Q Do you know who in the White House staff is going back with the body today?

MS. MYERS: No, I don't.

Q Do you know if anybody is?

Q Can you repeat the question?

MS. MYERS: Who on the White House staff is going back with the body today. And the answer is, I don't know that anybody is. I'm happy to take that. I think, certainly, the family.

Q The family is traveling today?

MS. MYERS: I believe that was the original plan. As of yesterday, but I haven't confirmed to see if that was -

Q How will members of the White House who go to the funeral go?

MS. MYERS: Some will travel with the President, and others may go on their own. I don't know.

Q Do you know whether he was undergoing any sort of psychiatric care, or was any --

MS. MYERS: Not that we know of.

Q Is the President providing transportation for the family?

MS. MYERS: That's a good question. I don't know.

Q What was the question?

MS. MYERS: Is the President providing transportation for members of the Foster family back to Arkansas.

Q Dee Dee, is there a policy concerning firearms that would apply to Vince or you, or any other member of the White House staff on bringing them in in your automobiles, or bringing them into your office, or anything else within the White House compound?

MS. MYERS: I don't believe that that's allowable, but I would refer you to the Secret Service on that, since they're the ones that enforce those rules.

Q You haven't been told or that wasn't part of when you came on board whether you weren't supposed to have firearms in your car?

MS. MYERS: It is my belief that you're not allowed to bring firearms on campus. But, again, I would refer you to the Secret Service.

Q Did he park on West Executive?

MS. MYERS: Yes, he usually does. That's where his spot is.

Q What specifically did the Park police do besides interviewing people who talked to Vince on Tuesday?

MS. MYERS: That's all they had done as of half an hour ago.

Q Did they check through his office at all?

MS. MYERS: As of a little while ago, I don't believe that they had, but I think they expected to go in and look for signs of a note or some other evidence that he might have taken his own life.

Q How does the President's attorney-client relationship protected when they do that phase of the investigation?

MS. MYERS: Again, the Park police are simply trying to establish that this was, in fact, a suicide. It is a fairly limited investigation.

Q I mean, do they go through computer files or does someone else --

MS. MYERS: I think they may go through -- they may take a look to see if there's a note, something that is specifically a suicide note. I don't think they have any intention of evaluating the contents of the other documents.

Q Did they interview his secretary?

Q Is the Justice Department doing some broader investigation?

MS. MYERS: No, the Justice Department is simply serving as a point of contact at this point for the Park Service and others. The reason being is that normally the White House Counsel's Office would serve as a point of contact for investigating agencies and we didn't think under the circumstances that that would work.

Q So, what you're essentially saying is that the only thing being looked into is whether or not there was like a suicide note, something that would confirm this. Not whether or not there was some other reason unknown by anybody at the White House now that might be evident in papers or computers or any other --

MS. MYERS: Yes. At this point the Park Service is just looking into -- again to establish -- to confirm what they believe was a suicide.

Q Dee Dee, is anybody doing --

Q Is it correct, though, that there were supposed to be members of the Counsel's Office involved in the investigation physically when the Park Police go into his office in order to take care of what Gene is talking about -- the client relationship with the President?

MS. MYERS: Yes, I would imagine that there will be somebody from the -- I don't know exactly how that's -- and I can certainly get back to you on exactly physically how that works. But I think that there will be somebody from the Counsel's Office there just to help to assist with that. Actually, I should take that question, because I'm not sure how it's going to work.

Q We were told yesterday that it would be somebody from the Justice Department monitoring to preserve the executive privilege?

MS. MYERS: Yes, and let me take that question and see how that's going to work in practice.

Q Is there any inquiry beyond the Park Police to try to determine why he died, as opposed to just whether it was a suicide or not?

MS. MYERS: No, not at this time. And I'm not sure any investigation could ever determine why. These things are mysteries.

Q Dee Dee, you mentioned that he had lunch alone and just had a sandwich at his desk. Is there any way of checking the phone log during that period of time when he was alone to see who might have called him and perhaps might have called him away?

MS. MYERS: At this point, I don't know that there's any move afoot to do that. Again, the Park Service Police's role in this is the cause of death.

Q Did he have an assistant, a secretary anywhere?

MS. MYERS: Yes.

Q Who?

MS. MYERS: I'm not sure what her name is.

Q Could you get it?

MS. MYERS: Sure.

Q Again, about the President's words about work not being everything. That's a very desirable goal, but is it a realistic goal? Take yourself and your people, for example. Is there any way you can lighten the work load on people or do you have plans to do that, or on yourself?

MS. MYERS: I think we try. I think all White Houses work very hard. It's part of the nature of the beast. It's something that you do once in your life and it's something that I think people are fairly dedicated to and care a great deal about.

At the same time, I think most people in the White House -- and I know my shop, the press office -- we try to rotate and make sure that people have days off and that people don't certainly work all weekend and that they get out of here in good -- and I think that's important. It's something that the President has emphasized. The President, himself, has said he tries never to work more than 12 hours which, by his standards, is sort of a half day.

Q Since when?

MS. MYERS: It's true.

Q Considering Mr. Foster's position and his status, isn't it reasonable to assume that law enforcement agencies are at least going to make some attempt to determine a motive here? For example, if you don't do that, you'll leave open wild possibilities, such as that he may have been being blackmailed or anything like that -- just to rule those things out? Don't you think it's reasonable that a law enforcement agency will attempt to establish a motive?

MS. MYERS: My only point is that at this point, the Park Service Police is the only agency that's investigating, and that the objective of their search is simply to determine that it was a suicide. There's no other federal agencies that are investigating at this point, but --

Q But that means there will be no attempt -- are you saying that the Park Service was making no attempt --

MS. MYERS: I don't think that that's within their purview. I mean, this is --

Q They're clearly the investigating agency, aren't they?

MS. MYERS: I don't think that they haven't been here, but they would again contact the Justice Department if they wanted to come here for some reason. I don't believe that they are involved.

Q Let's assume that the Park Service Police determine to its satisfaction that, in fact, this was, as everyone thinks, a suicide. From the White House perspective, does this simply end there in terms of further examining what the circumstances might have been, or whether this was related to work or whatever? Does that --

MS. MYERS: I think it's been our position that it's impossible to know what --

Q -- the President -- this is one of his closest friends from boyhood --

MS. MYERS: It is a mystery, and I think the President made that very clear yesterday. It is a mystery. It is one of the things -- you can take -- you can create a whole set of objective reasons why it may have happened. But no one will ever know. And I --

Q I don't mean mushy little reasons --

MS. MYERS: But how can you know? How can you know? Even if you come up with --

Q All I was trying to ask was whether or not, beyond establishing whether it was a suicide, whether an effort would be made to go further than that to see if there was any evidence to indicate why -- not trying to get back into somebody's mind to know how they were feeling, but --

MS. MYERS: That's what you have to do.

Q Yes, but, Dee Dee, suicide is always to some extent kind of in inexplicable act.

MS. MYERS: Right.

Q Nonetheless, in many, many cases, one can understand at least the chain of events that could have driven someone to that level of despair. In this particular instance, no one can offer any reason why this man, at the prime of his life, the seeming pinnacle of his career, would do this. This is, I think everyone would agree, a particularly mysterious set of circumstances that raises potentially troubling questions, or maybe it doesn't. But all the questions here are focused on is trying to find out if anybody in the government, at this level or anywhere else, is trying to see if there were any circumstances that could at least explain how he became at least deeply troubled. Obviously, it's inexplicable that anyone would go that far.

MS. MYERS: Right.

Q But it does leave that question open, and all I can say to you is, this is a question that is going to be asked, and is going to be asked again and again. And from what you are saying, I take it, no one is trying to answer it.

MS. MYERS: All I've said and what I'll say again is, at this point, there are no other investigations.

Q How about his phone logs?

MS. MYERS: At this point, there are no other investigations.

Q Have his phone calls been checked?

MS. MYERS: At this point, there are no other investigations.

Q But that would be included in the Park Service's look at the office, et cetera, wouldn't it?

MS. MYERS: I don't know what the details of their investigation are. They don't necessarily have to tell us what --

Q When you say the Justice Department is coordinating the investigation, is there anyone who would make a decision to go further than this Park Service? The Park Police have to wrap up their case.

MS. MYERS: Not at the Park Service.

Q Yes, but, say, once they're done, whose responsibility is that to --

MS. MYERS: There are a whole slew of federal agencies that can make a decision to investigate or not to investigate.

Q What about within the White House?

MS. MYERS: There is not an investigative agency within the White House.

Q But is there any desire to learn? I guess that's the bottom line here.

MS. MYERS: At this point, all I can tell you is there are no other -- the Park Service is doing its thing. There are no other investigations.

Q Nobody has any question that this might have been foul play?

MS. MYERS: I don't think there's any evidence to suggest foul play. Obviously, the Park Service is going to finish up its investigation to determine exactly that. I think they will give a final -- their final cause of death when they finish this investigation. I don't think there's any evidence -- at this point there's no evidence to suggest anything other than suicide.

Q You're convinced there was a reason, aren't you? A reason you don't know?

MS. MYERS: Oh, of course. There's always a reason I would think.

Q There is a tendency, though, for the various agencies which could take an interest in this not to want to upset anybody at the White House. And they may in fact stay out -- if they are in anyway encouraged. So all I'm asking in a mild way is wouldn't it be worth the effort to have someone with a practiced eye to go over phone logs, correspondence and recent contacts, looking for anything that might have contributed?

MS. MYERS: All I can is what I've already said. I don't know where this is going to go.

Q Has the family asked that this kind of investigation not be undertaken?

MS. MYERS: No, no.

Q Dee Dee, it seemed from yours and other peoples comments yesterday in terms of this is a mystery, it's ultimately unknowable that you've already decided that further investigations are not necessary?

MS. MYERS: No, I think yesterday's comments were dedicated to the larger spiritual questions: people ask you, do you know why, and I think everybody -- there's nobody in the White House that pretends to know why or would presume to know why.

Q What I'm asking is --

MS. MYERS: You're asking the same question that's been asked 20 times. I don't have any more to say about it.

Q On Somalia, there is this growing disagreement between Italy and the United Nations, especially on the use of force. The Italians think that the use of force has been a total failure. They think that puts a risk on the peacekeepers. Have you a comment? What is your position?

MS. MYERS: We continue to support the U.N. effort in Somalia. We think it's been, overall, rather successful and continue to support the objectives of that, which are to continue to provide humanitarian aid and the ultimate restoration of civil order. We've made dramatic progress, both the U.S. and the U.N. operation, and we're going to continue in our effort there.

Q But the failure of the use of force.

MS. MYERS: Again, I don't believe that there has been a failure of the use of force. It's part of an overall activity dedicated to reducing the threat of people who would disrupt civil order, including some of the warlords, or one in particular. And we'll continue to pursue that operation.

Q Can you tell us when the deputies might be meeting on Bosnia? Did they meet yesterday, are they meeting today? When will these options be discussed?

MS. MYERS: I assume you're referring to the President's comments. We've had a number of discussions with Europeans about things that are ongoing.

Q But aren't there some NSC generated meetings about to take place?

MS. MYERS: Well, the NSC meets on -- I mean, discusses Bosnia on a regular basis, but what we've discussed with the Europeans are ways to improve the delivery of humanitarian aid, how to protect UNPROFOR forces in the safe havens, continuing to enforce the no-fly zone, and to monitor sanctions.

Q Are you suggesting that there's not some internal review that's taking place as we speak?

MS. MYERS: I think there's an ongoing -- I just got a couple of questions about the President's comment earlier which I was sort of reading into your question. But there's an ongoing discussion about Bosnia. I think the Secretary of State spoke to

that yesterday. There's certainly been no change in our position as to the use of force.

Q Is there a deputies meeting today?

MS. MYERS: Not -- I don't know.

Q But the Secretary basically wrote off Bosnia yesterday.

MS. MYERS: No, he didn't.

Q If you read the stories, basically -- this was the interpretation. And the President did contradict that.

MS. MYERS: No -- and I think the people who spoke after the Secretary made clear that we have not written off Bosnia. We're continuing on a number of fronts, including delivery of additional humanitarian aid and ways to protect the UNPROFOR forces in the safe havens. We have not -- and the President made that very clear today -- we have not written off Bosnia. It is a thorny, complicated problem, but --

Q Do you think that he was misinterpreted?
Christopher I mean.

MS. MYERS: Yes, and the President said so. He thought there were a couple of sentences in there that were misinterpreted.

Q -- the other day went through a whole laundry list of things the United States is not doing, including no participation in the peace talks, Bartholomew has not been in the region or talked to anybody about it in months --

MS. MYERS: We continue to encourage the parties to participate in the peace talks and have said repeatedly that if the parties reach a good-faith agreement, we will help to implement and enforce it.

Q Other than delivering humanitarian aid, which you've been doing all along --

MS. MYERS: Correct.

Q -- what, if anything, is the administration doing to help bring this process -- bring peace to the region or bring this process to an end?

MS. MYERS: I'm happy to go through the litany with you. I mean, we've --

Q So far you've done nothing but talk about PR stuff that you're doing.

MS. MYERS: It's not PR stuff. We've delivered literally hundreds of millions of dollars in humanitarian assistance. We've enforced stricter sanctions against Serbia, which have had some effect. We continue to enforce the no-fly zone. There have been no fixed aircraft wing bombings in Bosnia.

Q There weren't any before.

MS. MYERS: I think we've done a number of things that move this policy forward. And as the President made very clear today, the President --

Q How have you moved the policy forward?

MS. MYERS: Well, from where we started six months ago, enforcing the no-fly zone, stricter sanctions, safe havens, which we've presented a plan to the U.N. which they're going to start to enforce. We have moved forward on this and the progress has been made because of U.S. leadership.

Q What progress? The country is falling apart.

Q Will he save Sarajevo from falling?

MS. MYERS: It is a very difficult problem. No one is suggesting that it's easy. But to suggest that we haven't done -- I mean, the President made it very clear and continues to make clear what his preferred option would be. The allies rejected that. He believes that we should have lifted the arms embargo.

Q You're talking about what you would have done, which helps no one.

MS. MYERS: Well, we've talked both about what we would have done because it is relevant when you say that we've done nothing, and we talk about what we have done, which is also relevant because it has not been meaningless. Now, it is a difficult situation and we have said that all along. It is the most difficult foreign policy problem we face. It does not have an easy solution. But the President has made clear we are not talking about injecting ground troops into that theatre.

Q How close does the U.S. believe that Sarajevo is to falling? And apparently, there's a State Department reports saying that -- suggesting that the U.S. secure some of the utilities for the city. Does the White House think that that would be a good idea?

MS. MYERS: I'm not going to characterize how close Sarajevo is to falling. Again, the only thing I would say is that we're not going to send ground forces in there.

Q Jay Stephens said the other night that the administration had sought to delay -- impose upon him to delay the indictment of Postmaster Rota. Do you have any response to that?

MS. MYERS: I think the facts in this case speak for themselves.

Q Well, wait a minute, Dee Dee. What facts? There are a lot of facts --

Q He said he was prepared to proceed for indictment prior to his removal in April and was told not to. That's a statement that he made on Nightline the other night.

Q He didn't say that.

MS. MYERS: The Postmaster has been indicted, and I think the process moved forward under the new or the acting U.S. Attorney in Washington.

Q Can you represent to us today that the administration in no way will make any effort to discourage that inquiry or anything that might come out?

MS. MYERS: Absolutely not. That is proceeding exactly as it was.

Q You mean absolutely yes, don't you?

Q -- pending the budget or anything like that --

MS. MYERS: Absolutely that we will not do anything to delay the -- be clear.

Q Can you tell me where the Elders hearings are and what the White House expects to happen?

MS. MYERS: As you know, they will take place tomorrow. Senator Kennedy spoke about that a little bit today. The hearing will be held publicly and it will be one hearing. And we expect that the hearing will go forward and that Dr. Elders will be confirmed.

Q To sew up one more loose end on the Foster thing, did the President have any contact with him on Tuesday, and did he speak to the Park Police today?

MS. MYERS: The answer to both questions is no.

Q Back on Bosnia. You seemed to suggest that there was something constructive or positive going on with regard to safe havens. The Secretary said yesterday that with regard to some of the safe havens, the policy has not been effective.

MS. MYERS: My comments were in reference to the U.N. resolution to protect UNPROFOR forces in the safe haven which are now with the Secretary General of the U.N. and we expect to have his approval of that some time soon, in the next day or so.

Q Let me just ask you a broader question. With regard to Christopher's press conference yesterday, is the White House taking issue with anything the Secretary said, or are you simply taking issue with media reports about what he said?

MS. MYERS: Yes, I think the President took issue this morning with the way some of the reports characterized the Secretary's comments and made it clear that the administration has not in any way written off Bosnia.

Q But was there anything in what he said that the White House would like to clarify?

MS. MYERS: I think only in the interpretation which is that, again, the administration has not written off Bosnia.

Q Do you have a week ahead, since I assume there will be no briefing tomorrow?

MS. MYERS: No.

Q Do you have any sense of what is after Monday?

MS. MYERS: I don't have it with me. Maybe we can try to post some of the details at least for Monday later today.

Q A NAFTA czar?

MS. MYERS: Monday's Chicago. We do have Monday, actually, which is Chicago.

Q NAFTA?

MS. MYERS: I don't have a time line on it. Sometime soon.

Q Might it happen in Chicago?

MS. MYERS: I don't know.

Q On NAFTA if I could, Congressman Matsui from California told a trade group earlier this week that the administration's on the verge of losing NAFTA, as he put it. He gave a head count. Is that the administration's assessment?

MS. MYERS: No. Our assessment continues to be it's difficult, it won't be easy, but that we would like to see it wrapped up this year, and we think we can get it passed.

Q Dee Dee, if I could follow on that. Legislative initiatives, once the budget is done, will NAFTA be the next initiative or will it be health care or something else?

MS. MYERS: How to proceed after the budget is something that's being discussed now. I think it is not inconceivable that you can do more than one thing at one time.

Q Is the U.S. prepared to do anything to prevent the fall of Sarajevo?

MS. MYERS: I think we're continuing to do things and one of the things we're going to do is to implement the U.N. resolution protecting the safe havens.

Q When?

MS. MYERS: The Secretary General, again, has the NATO plan and we expect that it will be approved soon -- in the next day or so.

Q Dee Dee, the House killed the rule on flood aid and a lot of people are objecting to the fact that it's deemed emergency spending. And I'm wondering if there's any fallback plan to include it in the budget if they can't get it passed as emergency spending.

MS. MYERS: The President proposed the emergency relief outside of the budget caps, as was made possible by the 1990 Budget Act and continues to believe that that is the best approach. The deficit is somewhat lower this year than anticipated for reasons that we talked about earlier. He continues to believe that's the best approach. We'll see what Congress can work out.

Q What happens now? If the rule went down --

MS. MYERS: I think they're reviewing what their options are at this point. I'm not sure what the next step is.

Q Will the President speak at the funeral service tomorrow? Is he offering a eulogy either at this funeral or at the burial service?

MS. MYERS: I believe he will speak tomorrow. And in terms of how we're going to handle that from a press perspective, we're discussing that later today.

Q Which event will he speak at?

MS. MYERS: He's speaking at the funeral. I don't know about the burial.

Q Will you post that today so we'll know before he leaves tomorrow?

MS. MYERS: Sure -- what the arrangements --

Q Yes.

Q On Friday, will the President oppose the idea of coming up with cuts to correspond to the aid if this is --

MS. MYERS: Again, he's favored a different approach, and we'll see what gets worked out. But at this point, he continues to believe that the approach that he proposed is the best approach.

Q Dee Dee, on the energy tax, Director Panetta yesterday said that you would need about \$30 billion to \$32 billion in a final package in order to meet your \$500-billion deficit reduction goal. Is it accurate to say, then, that if you have that amount, that that would translate into upwards of five cents a gallon and no more?

MS. MYERS: The specific numbers are being worked out, but we've said consistently this week that we're moving closer to the Senate number. We believe it'll be less than half of what was originally proposed somewhere in that ballpark. But in terms of the exact numbers, the House and Senate conferees are still working that out.

Q The President also, a few days ago, said he wanted to hold this energy component to no more than a dollar a week. And my understanding from Director Panetta is, that would translate into about a \$28-billion, perhaps a little more, package. So are you working with at most \$32 billion --

MS. MYERS: Again, we've I think said all we're going to say about the size of the energy tax. It's going to be significantly less than it was in the House version, and we're moving toward working that out now.

Q What's the coverage of the New York-New Jersey --

Q -- flood bill that somehow ends up loaded with nongermane items? Is he prepared to veto that?

MS. MYERS: That's a hypothetical. There is no flood bill loaded up with nongermane items at this point.

Q Does the White House have any ethical qualms about the President attending a \$5,000-per-person fundraiser in Chicago hosted by Mr. Daley, who they're also negotiating with to be the NAFTA czar?

MS. MYERS: It's a DNC event, I believe organized and coordinated by the DNC, if I'm not mistaken.

Q Actually, the cocktail party ahead of time for \$5,000 for corporate contributors is organized by Mr. Daley. The letter inviting -- But have you looked at that at all? I mean --

MS. MYERS: No.

Q -- some of the corporations that he sent the letter to are heavily affected by NAFTA and its outcome.

MS. MYERS: No. I think that this is a fundraiser organized according to existing laws, and the President is going to attend. I think it's fine.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

2:18 P.M. EDT

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Cliff Sloan
Room 128 OEOB

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

July 27, 1993

PRESS BRIEFING
BY DEE DEE MYERS

The Briefing Room

1:20 P.M. EDT

MS. MYERS: I have no announcements, so if you all have -- on the unlikely chance you have questions.

Q David Boren today on the floor of the Senate called for a budget summit. He called for the President to invite Republicans to sit down for a budget summit. Has there been any consideration of that? Would the White House consider a summit?

MS. MYERS: I think summits have been tried in the past six times; and five out of those six times, the deficit went up, not down. We're in the midst of a process, I think making good progress, working out the final details of the budget package, and we expect to continue with that process.

Q Making progress without Republicans?

MS. MYERS: Making progress without Republicans. I think the President would welcome support from any Republicans. I don't know that that's likely at this time, but we'd certainly welcome the support.

I mean, I think that the idea of a budget summit in some ways ignores the partisan nature of some of the Republican opposition to this budget bill. This, again, is similar to some of the packages that they've supported in the past. In 1990 there were certain similarities, although this package definitely goes farther, and the Republicans found a way to support that. So I think a lot of their arguments are partisan in this instance, and I'm not sure that a budget summit would resolve them. I think the President's been open to input from Republicans throughout this process. I think he'd still like to see Republicans support this; that may not happen.

Q What is the reason for Christopher's returning? Can you explain what can be accomplished in a meeting in Washington that couldn't be accomplished by communicating by phone?

MS. MYERS: As you know, the President and Secretary Christopher spoke yesterday evening, and I think decided that it would be best if Christopher came back here in order to be closer to his team, in order to monitor some of the developments in the Middle East and to discuss a number of issues around the world. But I think he felt that he could monitor the situation more effectively, prepare for his trip there if he was here with his team, and the President supported him in that.

Q How serious is the concern, the level of concern about the current outbreak and the possibility of escalation -- further escalation?

MS. MYERS: Obviously it's something that we're concerned about, and we're urging all the parties to show restraint. So far, they seem to have done that. We will be -- I think Secretary Christopher and others will be in contact with the governments of Syria, Lebanon and Israel over the course of the next couple of days, and I think we're hopeful that the violence will stop.

Q Is there any contact with the government of Iran since Secretary Djerejian testified today that he holds Iran responsible for the Hezbollah --

MS. MYERS: No, but Iran and Hezbollah are responsible. I think they clearly instigated this. Hezbollah has the backing of the Iranian government, and they are enemies of the peace process. I think this administration; the President, Secretary Christopher, and others are committed to not letting enemies of the peace process disrupt or interrupt or dismantle it in any way. So we're going to continue to push forward.

Q Is there any feeling though that they could operate as freely as they have operated in Southern Lebanon without this sanction and protection of Syria? Is Syria opposed to the peace process?

MS. MYERS: Syria has been a party to the peace process and has not signaled any intention to change their participation. Obviously, we have urged the Syrians to take more aggressive action against Hezbollah and hope that they will do that. But at this point, we're committed to making sure the peace process goes forward.

Q Is that Secretary Christopher's mission, to make sure that the peace process doesn't collapse? Or will he also be trying to end the hostilities?

MS. MYERS: Well, I think the fundamental mission of the peace process is to address the underlying problems that lead to these hostilities. The best solution to the problems that we're currently seeing would be a negotiated settlement in the Middle East. That's what we're going to continue to push for.

Q But the acute situation right now between Israel and --

MS. MYERS: I think that obviously you want to do both. You'd like to stop the violence in the short term. We've called for an end to the violence, but continue to press forward on the peace process and make sure it stays on track. And all of our expectations at this point is that it will.

Q How concerned is the White House that the group of members that Congressman Stenholm speaks for may not vote for this package in the end if the kinds of changes he was talking about here today are not made?

MS. MYERS: Well, I think obviously we are going to do everything we can to make sure that this package gets passed. We'll work with Congressman Stenholm and others. We're obviously concerned about all the elements of the package and maintaining the support we need to ultimately get it passed. That's what the negotiations are about.

Q Well, they talked about the difficulty of trying to get done the things they want to get done when they're going to get no Republican support, which I take it has something to do with what Mr. Boren is trying to achieve as well. Is the White House still determined to put a package through that will be supported only by Democrats?

MS. MYERS: I think we'd like -- clearly, the President has said time and time again that he would welcome support from Republicans of this package, and there are certainly enough elements in it that the Republicans ought to be able to support it.

Q But you're not -- the question is whether you were going to change it in such a way that you will be able to count on public support; that's what I'm asking.

MS. MYERS: I think if there was a way we could change it to count on Republican support we'd be interested in doing that. But I'm not sure that that's possible. I think that a lot of their -- the questions that they raised about it are fairly straightforwardly partisan. I think the President made that point yesterday. He'd like to see the package passed with as much support from as many elements of Congress as possible.

But I think the most important thing to do is to get this package passed, to get it done, to keep it on track. And I think we're in good shape to do that. It won't be easy over the course of the next week or two, but I think our expectation is that we can get it done.

Q How serious, Dee Dee --

Q On the Perot idea of completely starting from scratch and instead going with a --

MS. MYERS: That's just not our position.

Q So are you at all taking it seriously or --

MS. MYERS: No, we've been taking the process seriously for the last six months, which is why we've --

Q No, his proposal. Are you taking his proposal seriously?

MS. MYERS: No. My answer is that we have taken this process seriously for the last six months, which is why we've carefully put together a package that does all the wonderful things that you all know about. And to do it at the 11th hour, to try to say that there's some easy answer and some way to start from scratch to build a better package I think is just not consistent with reality.

Q Dee Dee, how serious is the National Service legislation? Is it in deep trouble right now because of the threatened filibuster?

MS. MYERS: Well, we'll see. We're still hopeful. We believe that that legislation has the support of a majority of members, that should it be allowed to come to a vote that it would pass. Hopefully the Republicans will end their filibuster. The American people support this program. It was something that the President ran and is very committed to, something that engendered tremendous bipartisan support around the country and has bipartisan support of Congress. So we'll see, but we're hopeful that with a few perhaps minor changes, nothing that would sort of affect the major thrust of the bill, that we can get it done.

Q -- support of consumer confidence numbers today are again way down. How do you read that?

MS. MYERS: I think that the economy isn't working for everybody, that I think people are concerned about the lack of job growth and the lack of income growth, problems that have plagued this economy for the last several years. There are some indications that

things are getting better, but it is not working for everybody and I think that that's one of the reasons the President would like to see this package passed. I think, should a serious deficit reduction effort get through Congress, that will help keep interest rates low, it will help get the economy back on track, stimulate job and income growth.

Obviously, it's always discouraging -- somewhat discouraging when you see numbers like that, but it reflects, I think, people's uncertainty about the economy, and that's something that this package is designed to address.

Q Could you comment on the Newsweek report that President Clinton spoke to Vince Foster on Sunday? A, is it true? B, do you know whether what he said to him -- why the President didn't mention it when he was asked about it --

MS. MYERS: I think it is something that we've said before.

Q No. Trust me.

MS. MYERS: No? I don't think there was any -- he did speak to him on Sunday. He called him, as he often did. Vince Foster was somebody that the President spoke to frequently.

Q Did he call him to "buck him up," as Newsweek suggested?

MS. MYERS: He called to talk to him, I think -- a number of things. I think that he knew, as a number of people did, that Vince was having a rough time.

Q Wait a minute. That's the first time you've said that from this platform.

MS. MYERS: No, it's not. I think what we have said in the past was that people have their ups and downs and that --

Q Well, you've acted like this was just --

MS. MYERS: No, that's not true, Brit.

Q Yes, it is true, Dee Dee.

MS. MYERS: No, it's not.

Q It is true, Dee Dee.

Q Your tone has completely changed.

MS. MYERS: Okay, I apologize. I'm sorry. It is not. Okay. Let me just try to say what I think -- what I said certainly on Thursday, which was that people -- there was absolutely no reason to believe that Vince was despondent, that he was in any way considering doing what happened. Nobody believed that. At the same time, I think that the Counsel's Office had had its trials and tribulations. And I think a number of people in this White House have gone through -- have had good weeks and bad weeks. The communication department certainly hasn't been immune from that, and people have had troubles and had bad weeks.

I think that was the sense of what we thought was happening. There was absolutely no reason to think that Vince was despondent. Nobody believed that.

Q Questions were asked, though, to you, I believe, about whether he was depressed, whether there was indications of that --

Q We can't hear what he's saying.

MS. MYERS: He's saying we were asked whether Vince was depressed.

Q And the answers all were, well, he had his ups and downs, everybody has their ups and downs. There was no indication that there was a widespread awareness at the high levels of the White House that this man was going through a particularly rough patch.

MS. MYERS: And I don't mean to change that impression.

Q What prompted the call?

MS. MYERS: He talked to him regularly about things.

Q Dee Dee, you said he was having his ups and downs. What were his downs?

Q He called trying to cheer him up, because he was aware of his --

MS. MYERS: I think that would be an oversimplification of his -- I think that would perhaps be evaluating his motive in hindsight. I think --

Q -- a rough time. The President knew he was having a rough time?

MS. MYERS: In the broad context that the Counsel's Office was -- had gone through the trials and tribulations, as had a number of departments in this administration. And --

Q But it was Vince Foster-specific as opposed to -- how did that --

MS. MYERS: I don't think it was anything outside of the broader context of ups and downs that have certainly been part of the first six months in this White House.

Q Did he call Nussbaum?

MS. MYERS: Pardon?

Q Why on Sunday? What had --

MS. MYERS: Because the President -- Vince Foster was somebody that he had known 25 years. As you all know, the President tends to pick up the phone and call --

Q This is in the context of a weekend in which it is said, at least, that friends -- or after friends had taken him or his family had taken him to the beach and that there had been some concerted effort among those close to him who cared about him to try to give him a lift to try to get his mind off the things that might have been troubling him and so on -- so what's evident in all this scheme of events as described is signs of a man who was worried and troubled. No indication that what happened was going to happen, but a widespread recognition among those close to him that he was going through a particularly bad patch, and perhaps an effort on the part of the President to give him a lift. And you seem unwilling to acknowledge that.

MS. MYERS: No. What I'm trying to steer away from here is somehow to change the evaluation of this in hindsight. That's what --

Q Does it have to be in hindsight? Could you ask the President why he called?

MS. MYERS: I've talked to him about this and he --

Q And he said?

MS. MYERS: He called him for a number of reasons, and -- because he called him frequently and he wanted to see how he was, among other things, because, as was well known and documented, they had -- they, the Counsel's Office, had had a rough go of it.

Q A rough go in what respect?

Q What specific -- I mean --

MS. MYERS: There have been a number of editorials and other things quite recently, Andrea, and I don't -- the President obviously was close to Vince. It was somebody that he talked to regularly, somebody that he cared a lot about, and somebody who -- he checks in on people regularly. That's not to say that the President was oblivious to what might have been going on, but nobody, including the President, expected that to happen.

Q We understand that. No one is saying that.

MS. MYERS: So all I'm trying to do is stay away from this notion that somehow --

Q You knew.

MS. MYERS: -- that things were different than what we've thought they were last week.

Q Did Foster's wife --

MS. MYERS: No.

Q -- somebody such as Mack went to the President and said, you know, Vince really seems down -- or Bernie -- and give him a call?

Q Did Foster's wife call the President?

MS. MYERS: No. There was -- and to my knowledge -- and I will double-check this -- nobody asked the President to call him. There was no specific precipitating factor. And I -- we've discussed this --

Q Was he aware of the weekend and the effort to give him a lift about that?

MS. MYERS: I don't know if he knew that Vince -- I think he knew that he had gone to the shore. I don't know if there were any other circumstances that were -- the President was aware of if there were, in fact, any.

Q Did he know why or what was the hoped-for outcome of that?

MS. MYERS: No. I think that he -- the President believed that they were -- Webb Hubbell and his wife and the Fosters had gone because they needed -- it was a much-needed break. And I

think that that didn't seem unusual to anybody who's been working here.

Q What did he tell him?

MS. MYERS: They had a conversation. I don't know the contents. It was a personal conversation.

Q Was there any outstanding appointment? In other words, did he call at least with a pretext of, let's talk about this latest screw-up in the -- I don't mean to sound pejorative.

MS. MYERS: I don't know what the top order of business was. As you know, again, the President frequently calls people with whom he deals regularly -- people like Vince, people who have both personal and professional contacts -- do business with. And he did call him on Sunday.

Q Dee Dee, you said that the President went -- I've been trying to get this in for a long time, but get interrupted. You've been saying that he was up and down. Would you please tell us what were the downs?

MS. MYERS: I think they've been well documented, Sarah. I think that the --

Q No, they have not.

MS. MYERS: Yeah, I believe --

Q They have not.

MS. MYERS: Sarah, they have been well documented.

Q Would you run them down now, as you know them?

MS. MYERS: I'm not going to go -- no, I won't.

Q This is the first time that you have told us that he had ups and downs.

MS. MYERS: The Counsel's Office had ups and downs, Sarah. And I think they have been well documented. I don't think we need to go through them here.

Q Well, he wouldn't kill himself over this travel business. He wouldn't kill himself over The Wall Street Journal trying to get his picture.

MS. MYERS: I would certainly never intimate that he would. There's no way we'll ever know why.

Q Are you aware of his rough patch being related to anything other than work?

MS. MYERS: No. I mean, I think what we were aware of was that the Counsel's Office, like a lot of other offices in this administration have had good weeks and bad weeks, and the Counsel had had their share of tough times.

Q Are you saying that Vince Foster did not appear to the President or anyone in the high command here to be in any worse shape in terms of his mood and spirits than anybody else in the Counsel's Office?

MS. MYERS: Did not appear to be in any worse shape in terms of his mood and spirit than other people have been as they've

gone through difficult times in their jobs. Yes, that's what I'm saying.

Q Was there any one of these issues that has affected the Counsel's Office that hit him particularly hard?

MS. MYERS: Not that I know of, and I'm certainly not in the position to speculate about that.

Q Dee Dee, when he left at 1:00 p.m. and didn't return, there seemed to be a question of, did he periodically do this, and at the time we were told it was not atypical for him to sometimes leave without an explanation. And several people here are wondering, did he have a pattern of leaving for period of time for unexplainable reasons?

MS. MYERS: No, but he had a lot of meetings in the OEOB, and the executive residence and other offices around the West Wing, and it was not at all unusual for him to go to a meeting which would lead to another meeting, which might take a couple of hours. He always carried a beeper with him, which he had with him on Tuesday, and his secretary and support staff and colleagues always knew that if they needed him, they could reach him by beeper. And so his being gone for a few hours on Tuesday afternoon didn't strike anybody as particularly strange.

Q What have you learned about whether he brought the gun into the White House?

MS. MYERS: I don't know anything about that. You'd have to check with the investigating agency -- I guess the Park Service.

Q To follow up, if an individual like that wanted to bring a gun into the White House, would he be stopped, or would he, by virtue of his pin or pass, be waved on through the security?

MS. MYERS: You'd have to check with the Secret Service about exactly what precautions they take. I don't drive in.

Q It doesn't go through security, correct?

MS. MYERS: No.

Q Dee Dee, has it been determined that the gun actually belonged to him?

MS. MYERS: I don't know. I haven't gotten any more word on that. You can check with the Park Police, but I don't know that they've made a conclusion.

Q I was gone last week, but this notion that there was a newspaper that was looking into some aspect of this --

MS. MYERS: The Washington Times completely and thoroughly shot that down.

Q Dee Dee, did the President call any other members of the Counsel's Office on Sunday or over the weekend?

MS. MYERS: I don't know.

Q If there --

MS. MYERS: He didn't know --

Q If it was the Counsel's Office that was having the rough patch --

MS. MYERS: That's an oversimplification. He talked to a number of -- he didn't talk to everybody, every day, every time he thought that things were -- Vince Foster was somebody he'd known for 42 years.

Q -- was this call one in a sequence of calls perhaps to buck up or find information, or --

MS. MYERS: He calls people regularly. The President calls people on his staff, particularly people with whom he is personally close regularly.

Q Other people in the Counsel's Office?

MS. MYERS: He doesn't have the same relationship with other people in the Counsel's Office. It's apples and oranges. But, yes, he calls Bernie Nussbaum regularly -- at home, in the office, when he has questions, he calls people --

Q But not over the weekend, as far as you know?

MS. MYERS: I don't know who else he called that weekend; I didn't ask.

Q Do you know when he made this call? Was he still in Arkansas, or was it in the evening after he had come back?

MS. MYERS: I don't know what time it was.

Q Dee Dee, one of the things we've read is that he was here all day long, like a lot of people, like yourself, and that these very long hours and weekends helped add up to the stress. Has there been any change in the policy about how much time you guys put in and whether -- has Clinton as the administrator of this building, said in some way you should cool it down, change your habits?

MS. MYERS: I think he said that -- I think we provided the transcript that he said last Wednesday and again to you all on Wednesday afternoon that people need to take a little more time for their families and their friends and themselves, and that work shouldn't be everything in one's life.

Q I was on vacation last week, but are you guys -- is that, in fact, happening? Is there a change?

MS. MYERS: I haven't gone around, office to office, but I think this kind of event always gives people pause and makes them reevaluate a few things about their own lives.

Q (Inaudible.) (Laughter.)

MS. MYERS: A little before you guys did, I think.

Q Yes, but you have the Dodgers.

MS. MYERS: That's true. And they won 15-1 yesterday, I might point out. (Laughter.)'

Q Has the President been questioned by the Park Police?

MS. MYERS: No.

Q Dee Dee, has the Park Police determined --

MS. MYERS: I don't believe they've asked. I think, in fact, I read a comment from one of their spokesmen in the paper said

that they didn't think that would be necessary, but you might check with them.

Q If the Park Service finds that in fact it was -- there was no foul play other than it was a suicide, does the White House believe that should be the end of it, or should there be some further analysis or inquiry or investigation to seek to determine what caused this close aide and friend of the President to commit suicide?

MS. MYERS: Well, obviously there are a number of independent agencies who can make their own determinations as to whether or not to investigate.

Q Would the White House support that?

MS. MYERS: I think we'll cooperate to the best of our ability, given certain privileges and things that exist with any investigations that other federal agencies choose to conduct. I think it is important to confirm, obviously, that this was a suicide and there are a number of things that would certainly -- had there been a suicide note or were one to be turned up, something like that that would confirm that. But I don't think that it is particularly useful to try to piece together the broader aspects of his life to try to ascribe some motive to something that we can never know.

Q But you will not actively for some sort of further investigation than the Park Service?

MS. MYERS: No. The Park Service police is the lead agency. They're doing the investigation. If other federal agencies choose to investigate, we will do what we can to cooperate.

Q Dee Dee, it's been determined by -- why is it -- what you just said that's necessary to confirm that it was suicide? Why is it necessary to confirm it was suicide? Most of the -- I bet most of the people in the United States, from what I hear, don't think it was a suicide. Why don't we all -- why don't you all go further into the proposition that it might not have been a suicide?

MS. MYERS: Every -- all indicators are, and I think most people believe that it was a suicide. But he was a high federal official and it's important to rule out --

Q Most people believe it was not a suicide.

MS. MYERS: I disagree with that premise, Sarah. Most people believe that it was.

Q Dee Dee, what's the Justice Department's mandate in this? I mean, last week the Justice Department was saying that they were going to look for -- try to establish a motive to, among other things, for public confidence, to clear the air. This week they're saying they're not. I don't understand what their mandate was when the White House approached them to get involved.

MS. MYERS: We asked them to serve as a point of contact for other federal agencies. Decisions they make -- and they've done that, by the way. Any decision that they make to pursue an investigation beyond that is their decision and you'd have to check with them.

Q What's behind the change of heart? They said one thing last week and something --

MS. MYERS: Again, that's something you'd have to check with them about.

Q They weren't contacted by the White House?

MS. MYERS: No.

Q Dee Dee, change of subject -- NAFTA coordinator this week?

MS. MYERS: Perhaps, but not necessarily. We'll have one at some point, but I don't have any concrete plans at this point.

Q To follow on NAFTA -- a bunch of members on the Hill this morning, led by David Bonior, said that while he read the letter in The Post this morning, that they're claiming that if you bring up NAFTA now it could derail health care reform.

MS. MYERS: Yes. NAFTA and health care are proceeding on separate tracks. There's been no change in our timetable on NAFTA. The President still feels we can conclude it by the end of this year. We're going to wait until after reconciliation to make final decisions on the timing of health care and NAFTA, but we expect both to move forward.

Q They contend that Congress cannot handle both at the same time.

MS. MYERS: I think that there are a lot of people who believe that those are proceeding on separate tracks and that there's no reason to link them. And, again, we'll make a final decision as to timing after reconciliation. But there's been no change in our plans at this point.

Q Can I go back to Foster, please? The way that you, the President and McLarty spoke last Wednesday about this was it was an unexplained mystery, there was no reason to go beyond the evidence that it was a suicide. And there seemed to be, given the characterization you're providing today that he was obviously troubled, you were widely aware that he was having difficulty. There seems to be a sense at the time that the President didn't say I was trying to help my friend and it failed. Instead of that, he said, I accept this as an unexplained mystery and there's no need to go into it. Why did he portray it that way when obviously he was trying and his friends were trying to bring this fellow some hope?

MS. MYERS: That is way too dramatic a reading. There was no reason to believe that it was anything other than the kinds of ups and downs that people have gone through in this White House. And I don't mean to suggest that there was any -- that any of that has changed. There was just no reason to believe -- and I think Mack has said so and the President has said so and I have certainly said so -- that this was anything other than the routine ups and downs of what can be a very demanding job in this White House.

Q But why you believe otherwise -- today's -- some of your answers indicate that you all have basically come to a conclusion that the job got him down and could have led to it.

MS. MYERS: I don't mean to say that I have any answers, or to suggest that I have any answers to it.

Q But this is the overriding theme, that he was depressed and despondent.

MS. MYERS: No, that he was suffering -- I don't even want to say "suffering" -- you guys are reading too much into it -- that he was going through the kinds of ups and downs that people in the White House often do, that people in any kind of a demanding and visible job often do.

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Q (Inaudible.)

MS. MYERS: I don't mean to suggest that there has been any further evidence to suggest that it was anything other than that. People that knew him well did not --

Q Would it be fair to say that everyone who knew him well here thought he was discouraged, but no one thought he was suicidal?

MS. MYERS: Absolutely.

Q Does the President routinely people who are going through professional --

MS. MYERS: He routinely calls people with whom he's been friends for 42 years.

Q Did he say at any point I wish I had done more or I could have done more? I missed a signal or anything like that?

MS. MYERS: I won't even -- I just don't have anything more on this, you guys.

Q I'd like to ask a tough, probing, insightful question about the jogging track.

MS. MYERS: Well, under the circumstances --

Q Seriously. Over by the Southwest Gate -- seriously, the jogging track is all ripped to hell. There are holes in it, it's buckled in places. Can you take that and find out what's the problem there and how it will be repaired?

Q Are they repairing it at their expense -- the company?

MS. MYERS: I don't know. There was a -- as you know, we raised a little more money than it cost to install, and that money is kept in a fund for maintenance. So it is entirely possible that the maintenance fund may be used for the repairs.

Q Can I return to the Middle East for just a moment? You said the main reason that Christopher was coming back -- cited that he wanted to meet with his team and have his team with him. Is his team not with him? I thought Ross and most of the --

MS. MYERS: I believe they were here. You'd have to double-check the State Department. I was under the impression that they were here. For example, Djerejian's testifying here today and Ross is also here, yes. Yes, I think he just thought there was a number of issues that he could deal with better from Washington.

Q Dee Dee, another question on that issue. Another question on the Middle East. You've described Iran's Hezbollah as enemies of the peace process. Do you mean by that to give Israel a green light in Lebanon? That's certainly how your remarks could be interpreted.

MS. MYERS: No. I think we've urged restraint from all parties and have been in touch with Israel, Syria, Lebanon on this and would like to see an end to the hostilities as soon as possible. At the same time -- but I think there's more that Syria can do, vis-a-vis Hezbollah, and the most important thing is to keep the peace process on track.

Q Going back to the NAFTA thing for a minute. You said you were going to wait until after reconciliation to make final

decisions on timing on this thing. How big is the scope or the range of options that are being considered for timing? Is it possible that because of the court ruling last month and everything else that after reconciliation the President might decide, well, we've got to put this thing off for several months, or is it just a question of which week in a fairly small window?

MS. MYERS: For health care?

Q Well, for both.

MS. MYERS: For both? No, I think that it is our expectation that we will proceed with both. That's been -- but, again, the final decisions as to timing will have to wait. The President has said repeatedly that he'd like to finish NAFTA by the end of the year. I think people have said, including the First Lady, that we expect health care to start sooner rather than later. And I don't think there's been any change in that.

Q I guess my question is when you're looking at the decision on timing, are you looking at a window that is five weeks long, and you're trying to decide which of those five weeks; or are you looking at window that's three months long, and you're trying to decide which of 15 weeks; or are you looking at window that goes to the '94 elections and --

MS. MYERS: I think we've been -- already been far more sort of specific than that. The President has said he'd like to see NAFTA completed by the end of the year. I mean, I think that necessitates that you have to make progress on it fairly quickly. And I think Mrs. Clinton has said that she expects health care -- and the specific details and timing just aren't -- they just don't exist. But she expects action to start on that relatively soon.

Q Well, in Hawaii she had said in September.

MS. MYERS: Right.

Q And I'm just wondering whether anything has changed

--

MS. MYERS: No, I mean, my point is that -- nothing has changed.

Q And you will send up legislation in September, not just speak about it or talk about a framework -- when you say both proceed at the same time, you mean legislatively you want Congress to pick up the legislation and proceed on both of them in the fall?

MS. MYERS: That's our expectation, and I just don't want to say any more about the specific timing, because the final decisions just haven't been made as to what exact dates.

Q Did the President take to heart Rostenkowskis' accusation that he's meddling?

MS. MYERS: I think the President has made it clear throughout this process that he expects to be quite involved in the conference process. I think he's done that, although he's certainly left Congress a lot of room to work the details out among themselves.

Q Is he seeing more senators today?

MS. MYERS: More House members. I don't know about Senators. I'd have to -- I don't think any are scheduled.

Q What is he prepared to do? Let's say the conference concludes this week and you're starting to move toward

floor action next week, which was the hope for a schedule -- an address to the nation? Are there other things that he can do? What should we expect next week?

MS. MYERS: I certainly wouldn't rule out an address to the nation. It's something we always said we would do in the context of this process. We don't have any specific plans for it at this time.

Q Advance text?

MS. MYERS: Advanced text will be available today and I guarantee he'll use three words of it -- the, and, and if.

Q Schedule tomorrow?

MS. MYERS: Schedule tomorrow: Tomorrow would be Wednesday. He's got a large CEO lunch at noon. It will probably be closer to 40 or 50 CEOs than the usual --

Q It's not just big CEOs --

MS. MYERS: It's big CEOs -- many big CEOs.

Q Big CEOs.

MS. MYERS: Yes. Big.

And then he's -- may meet -- I believe he's going to meet with the Democratic Study Group perhaps on the Hill. And then he has a dinner with House members tomorrow night.

Q What is he doing on the Hill?

MS. MYERS: DSG perhaps on the Hill. And a dinner with House members -- and I'm not sure where it is. I think it's off campus. I think it's at the House Gym.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

1:50 P.M. EDT

Cliff Sloan
Room 128 OEOB

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

Release

July 29, 1993

PRESS BRIEFING
BY DEE DEE MYERS

The Briefing Room

3:22 P.M. EDT

MS. MYERS: Good afternoon. I have a brief statement from the President.

While I regret the continued filibuster of national service, I'm hopeful that additional Republicans will see passed politics to support this landmark legislation. National service will lift up our country and do us all honor.

I want to thank Senators Durenberger, Jeffords, and Chafee, along with 26 House Republicans, for putting service ahead of politics. I urge other Senate Republicans to follow their example and end this filibuster. The bill pending in the Senate reflects the concerns of both Democrats and Republicans. It has a limited authorization. It cuts bureaucracy and will energize our youth and reknit our communities. This legislation isn't Democrat or Republican, it's just American. And I hope that additional Republicans will soon agree.

Any questions?

Q Dee Dee, does the government have a response to the Israeli Supreme Court's decision on Demjanjuk?

MS. MYERS: No. I believe it's being reviewed at the State Department, and I'd have to refer you to them.

Q Well, the Justice Department apparently said something about still not wanting him back in the United States. Can you clarify that or expand on it?

MS. MYERS: I'll have to take the question. I know that the Justice Department also had something on it today, but I'm not sure what it is.

Q Can you clarify who is in charge or who is the point now on the Vince Foster investigation? Last night the Justice Department was saying no questions will be answered, all questions will be answered at the White House. This related to the note.

MS. MYERS: The Justice Department is still the point of contact for any investigating agencies. The Park Service, obviously, is still the agency conducting the investigation.

Q So nothing has changed?

MS. MYERS: Nothing has changed. Questions about the investigation would have to be referred to the Justice Department, I think. With reference to the note specifically and its discovery last night, we decided to go ahead and confirm it once it leaked, and I think they are referring calls about that particular incident to us.

Q Well, about that then, is more going to be released on that? Is the contents of the note going to be released?

MS. MYERS: No. The Justice Department has said that in order -- because the investigation is ongoing, the contents ought not be released.

Q Can you characterize in any more specifics the items in this note? Did they relate to specific things at the White House? Is it nonbusiness? Is there any way --

MS. MYERS: No, it's work related, and I think it does sort of shed some light on his state of mind, assuming that this is authenticated. Beyond that, we can't really comment given that it is part of an ongoing investigation.

Q You mean the investigation -- they still are seeking the answer to whether he killed himself or not?

MS. MYERS: I think that they're in the process of an investigation that certainly looks at that question.

Q What is the investigation? What are they looking for?

MS. MYERS: Well, you have to ask them exactly where they are in the investigation and what they may be trying to find. They're doing an investigation, as they would, because Vince's body was found in a national park.

Q The President said yesterday when asked about this and about what he knew, he said, "I decided to watch a movie and Webb Hubbell was still hanging around here and I hadn't seen Vince in a while and I called him. I didn't -- unlike some other people who did know that he had been quite distressed, I was not really aware of that. But I knew I hadn't seen him in a while and I just kind of got lonesome." Now, according to the President, here he was with Webb Hubbell who had just spent the weekend with the guy, trying to lift his spirits because he was worried about him. Does the President mean to say that he spent this time with Webb Hubbell and he and Webb Hubbell are inviting this guy over for a movie and Hubbell had not advised the President that he was in distress?

MS. MYERS: Well, I certainly can't characterize Webb's weekend with Vince. I don't know enough about it. He -- and I think the President's comments in that regard speak for themselves. If other people knew about --

Q Does he mean to say that when he called him he didn't even then know that he'd been "quite distressed"?

MS. MYERS: That's what he said -- he didn't know --

Q Or he just learned that?

MS. MYERS: No, he didn't know.

Q He didn't know?

MS. MYERS: He did not know.

Q Webb Hubbell is there with him. Webb Hubbell spent the weekend with him --

MS. MYERS: You have to ask -- I can't comment on what Webb Hubbell's impressions might have been based on their weekend together.

Q Is it you won't -- is it you dispute the idea that Webb Hubbell went to the shore with him for the purpose of lifting his spirits?

MS. MYERS: No -- I don't know what the reason is. I just can't characterize what was in Webb's head. I'm not --

Q We're talking here about intimates of the President of the United States.

MS. MYERS: I understand that. But I don't know exactly what Webb thought or what he told --

Q Well, can you find out and tell us please?

MS. MYERS: I know what the President's impression was; that, I can tell you. He did not have any reason at that point to believe that Vince was distraught.

Q On what basis are you telling us that this note was work-related? Have you read it, seen a transcript of it? Has it been characterized to you? Can you explain?

MS. MYERS: I know what the contents are. I've seen not the note itself, which was turned over to the Park Service police, but I am familiar with the contents.

Q Are you telling us there was nothing in it that related to anything other than work? There was no personal side to this -- to his writing?

MS. MYERS: The only thing I'll say that I can say about it is, I think it did show him to be in a distressed state of mind, a troubled state of mind per work. And beyond that, I really can't comment.

Q And not per anything else?

MS. MYERS: No, it was really work-related.

Q And what can you tell us about the antidepressant medication?

MS. MYERS: Nothing.

Q Had he taken any of it?

MS. MYERS: I don't know.

Q Do you know what it was?

MS. MYERS: No. I don't even know -- the only thing I know about that is what I read in The New York Times. I don't have it confirmed through another source.

Q Can you take the question of whether he was taking Prozac?

MS. MYERS: I really can't, because --

Q Why not?

MS. MYERS: Because it's something -- it's with -- the family has chosen not to comment on that.

Q Did you ask the family?

MS. MYERS: I spoke to a representative of the family, and at this point they're just --

Q Is that Mack McLarty or somebody else?

MS. MYERS: No, somebody else.

Q An attorney?

MS. MYERS: Yes.

Q Dee Dee, when are the toxicology reports going to come out?

Q You're saying that it's the White House position you're not going to explain what kind of medication, whether you know that he had been taking any medication?

MS. MYERS: Right. I think what we said before is that we just weren't aware of it if he was, and again, the only information I have about that is what I read in The New York times this morning. I don't have any independent confirmation.

Q Well, was any medication found in his office?

MS. MYERS: No, nothing -- what we said before is nothing bearing on his death was found in his office.

Q But we were told that also, but the note --

MS. MYERS: That's true. But given --

Q Well, and the psychiatrist note.

MS. MYERS: But that wasn't found in his office.

Q Where was it found?

MS. MYERS: I don't know.

Q How do you know it wasn't?

Q That wasn't found in his office?

MS. MYERS: Because I know that it wasn't, but I don't know where it was found.

Q What wasn't found?

MS. MYERS: The scrap of paper or note, whatever it was, that had the names of three psychiatrists on it was not found in his office.

Q Was it found in the car?

Q Do you have any comment from Japanese --

Q Can we finish up?

MS. MYERS: No. The answer is no.

Q Dee Dee, did you see the letter yourself? And if so, could you tell us -- did he seem to be shouldering more responsibility than he should have?

MS. MYERS: I am familiar with the contents of the note, but I cannot say any more than I've already said about what was in it.

Q Why can't you?

Q Did Vince, at any time, talk to Mack or to the President about leaving the administration?

MS. MYERS: No.

Q Did he give any indication that he was not happy in his job?

MS. MYERS: I think everybody has their ups and downs. I think everybody has their good days and their bad days. I don't know that he talked to anybody about quitting. I don't know that he did.

Q Do you know that he didn't?

MS. MYERS: I can't say that there isn't anybody in the building that he ever talked to about leaving. I haven't -- I don't think we've done an inquiry that would in any way make that certain. But I do not know of any plans if he had talked to anybody in any serious way about quitting.

Q If I could just follow up on Brit's question for just a moment. Does the President -- it now appears that a lot of people who knew Vince Foster knew that he was distressed, and the President apparently did not, or says he did not. Does the President feel that people, perhaps out of a desire to shelter him or out of fairly common thing that happens at the White House is to keep bad news away from the boss, that people did not inform him of what was going on with Vince Foster adequately? And does he have any feeling that he should have been informed and that he wasn't?

MS. MYERS: I don't know the answer to that. I think that the White House -- people who worked with Vince didn't have any reason to believe that he was distraught.

Q But they thought he was quite distressed.

MS. MYERS: I think people who work -- some people who work, particularly people who work closely --

Q Isn't that a little bit of a hair you're splitting there between quite distressed and distraught?

MS. MYERS: No, because -- well, I mean, everything looks different from this vantage point.

Q Sure, everything looks different in hindsight.

MS. MYERS: And I think what's happened in subsequent days and subsequent week or nine days since his death is that people have compared notes and tried to understand more completely for their own personal reasons the circumstances surrounding his death. But at the time, and even now I don't think anybody, looking back, can say, oh, we should have recognized that as a sign of something much greater. In hindsight, you can perhaps say that. But at the time, people go through their ups and downs here. What he was going through didn't seem to be anything outside of the normal sometimes

difficult ups and downs of working here. Had anybody had any inkling of the trouble that he was in, we all would like to think that we would have done something about it.

Q Are people saying that? Are people regretting that they didn't recognize or notice things now that they now, in hindsight, think?

MS. MYERS: Hindsight always provides a much clearer perspective. I think there isn't a person in here who doesn't wish that they had known so they could have done something.

Q How many hours did the White House have the note before they turned it over to the Park Police?

MS. MYERS: The note was discovered Monday afternoon and turned over Tuesday evening, so a little over 24 --

Q So somewhere between 24 and 30 hours before you gave that evidence to the Park Police?

MS. MYERS: Yes. It was our judgment that the best thing to do was to make sure that the family had a chance to see it. Lisa Foster was coming to Washington on Tuesday for business unrelated to this letter and was given -- was informed about it when she got here. And the President, who was out of town on Monday, was also informed on Tuesday.

Q So your position on --

Q Did the President see the note?

MS. MYERS: He didn't see the note, but he was briefed as to the contents.

Q So your position on this was rather than turn over the evidence in an investigation that it was uncovered that you would wait however many hours or days it took to show the family first?

MS. MYERS: And then we promptly called the Justice Department.

Q Who uncovered the note?

MS. MYERS: Associate Counsel Steve Neuwirth.

Q And who made the decision that it should not immediately be turned over to the investigating authorities?

MS. MYERS: I think the decision was made to inform the family, and I'm not sure who actually made the final decision.

Q Will you take that question please?

MS. MYERS: Sure.

Q So our impression, or the impression that the decision to inform the family first and to withhold it from the police until that was done, we're told was made by Mr. McLarty. Is that at odds with --

MS. MYERS: I just don't know who made the decision. I know how and when the note was discovered and some of the events thereafter, but I just don't -- I'll take the question.

Q Anything else --

Q And there were questions of phone logs that the police raised that hadn't been turned over yet. Do you know whether or not the Counsel's Office has made available to the Park Police the phone calls of his -- that he made the day that he died?

MS. MYERS: No, and I'll take that question. I don't know whether we have an answer to that, since it's part of the ongoing investigation. But I'll --

Q Do you know if the White House has given the Park Police permission to talk to Mrs. Foster yet? As I understand it, they were informed that she was too distraught to be interviewed until after the funeral.

MS. MYERS: I don't know that to be true, but I'll take that as well. I don't know that the White House would have any control over that.

Q When the investigation is complete, who will be releasing the results of that investigation report? And, also, will the family have some type of veto power over what is released?

MS. MYERS: I think that since the Park Service police is conducting the investigation, they'll release the results consistent with the normal -- whatever they normally do. You have to contact them as to that.

Q We couldn't get it through Justice?

MS. MYERS: No, not necessarily. You'd have to check with the Park Service. The Park Service is conducting the investigation. We've only asked the Justice Department to serve as a point of contact in that investigation.

Q For who?

MS. MYERS: For the Park Service.

Q Wait a minute. So the Park Service goes to the Justice Department and the Justice Department then comes to the White House to request evidence? And the White House then consults the family?

MS. MYERS: To provide -- I'm not sure exactly how -- I believe that's true, that the lawyer for the family is in touch with the Justice Department and the Park Service is in touch with the Justice Department to answer questions like, "Is it appropriate to release the contents of the note?" And the answer we got back from the Justice Department, after consulting with the Park Service police, was "No." So that's an example of how the process works.

Q So the Justice Department made the call on releasing of the evidence?

MS. MYERS: The Justice Department in consultation with the Park Service Police, advised us, in fact, directed us not to release the contents of the note.

Q Who at Justice did that?

MS. MYERS: Well, Phil Heymann is the point person. But I believe --

Q The reason was --

MS. MYERS: The reason was that it was part of an ongoing investigation and their judgment was that it --

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Q I'm talking about releasing it to the Park Service.

MS. MYERS: No, no, no. Well, we contacted the Justice Department originally, who advised us --

Q When?

MS. MYERS: Tuesday. Tuesday after --

Q So you contacted Justice the day after you found it?

MS. MYERS: Correct. That's the point we just discussed.

Q I understand that, but what I didn't know was whether you contacted anybody or whether you had a consultation with the Justice Department before that.

MS. MYERS: We contacted the Justice Department on Tuesday who said to contact the Park Service police. The Justice Department came to the White House.

Q When you say they're a point of contact what that means is they're a point of contact for investigators, but they're not the first point of contact for the White House when it's deciding what to do with evidence it uncovers.

MS. MYERS: No, they were. We contacted them.

Q The day after.

MS. MYERS: The day after.

Q Why did you wait to contact the Justice Department?

MS. MYERS: Because we wanted to make sure that the family had been informed and the President had been informed.

Q That's the point, isn't it? The Justice Department is a secondary point of contact after you consult with the family and whoever else you deem you want to talk to.

MS. MYERS: No, I think the Justice Department is still the primary point of contact. That's the person we went to to seek advice about what to do with the document. And they said it ought to be turned over to the Park Service police, and so we did that.

Q When you say an ongoing investigation, which investigation are you referring to?

MS. MYERS: The Park Service police.

Q Can you take the question of whether Vince Foster was in New York City on February 10th?

MS. MYERS: Sure.

Q What was the question?

MS. MYERS: Was Vince Foster in New York City on February 10th?

Q Where was this note found?

MS. MYERS: The note was found in the bottom of Vince's briefcase in his office as one of the Associate Counsel's was packing up some of his personal belongings to be turned over to the family.

Q And was the briefcase in that office when Park Police originally went through the office in search of any possible evidence that could shed some light on the death?

MS. MYERS: Yes, it was. And I don't think I should say a whole lot more about the circumstances since this is ongoing, but it was. It was torn into fairly small pieces of paper and at the bottom of the briefcase and I think was not immediately apparent.

Q Who put it together?

MS. MYERS: The Counsel's Office.

Q Can you just run through the chronology on the other note, the one with the list of the three psychiatrists? When was that found?

MS. MYERS: I don't know.

Q You still don't know?

MS. MYERS: No, it was -- I don't know what the Park Service is saying, if anything, about it. But it was not something that was discovered in his office and it's something that I don't know the specific details about --

Q -- that you waited a while before you told police -

MS. MYERS: We didn't have it. We never -- it was never here.

Q Has anything else turned up?

MS. MYERS: Not that I know of.

Q Let me just ask one other question on that. When was the first time that officials here knew of the existence of that?

MS. MYERS: What day was it? Today's Thursday. Tuesday night, late.

Q Dee Dee, coming back to Ann's question, if you had the note for more than 24 hours before turning it over to the authorities, is that not obstructing justice when there was an investigation going on?

MS. MYERS: I don't believe so. We took the note and informed the family and then turned it over to the proper authorities.

Q That's more than 24 hours. In an investigation 24 hours can be critical.

MS. MYERS: I don't think there's -- there's no criminal implications here.

Q Isn't that what the investigation is determining?

Q That's why there's an investigation.

MS. MYERS: I think what we did was we informed the family about it, which we thought was appropriate, and then turned it over to the proper officials.

Q Tuesday night, your first knowledge of which note?

MS. MYERS: That was the time we were first informed about a note with, or a piece of paper with the names of three psychiatrists.

Q Tuesday night late?

MS. MYERS: Yes.

Q It was on the air Tuesday.

Q Who discovered that note?

MS. MYERS: But we didn't have any independent confirmation of that. All we had was NBC's report.

Q To what extent is the White House deciding for itself what evidence is appropriate to submit to the investigating authority? If Vince Foster had worked for any other organization except the White House, his office might have been sealed and all the contents gone over by the investigating authorities. And now, when things are found, it's being discussed whether or not and under what circumstances to be submitted.

MS. MYERS: No, whether or not was never an issue. It was something that we thought had a bearing on the situation and we turned it over. There was never a discussion about whether or not to turn it over.

Q Dee Dee, would you object to a release of that note at the appropriate time, or would you tell the authorities that that shouldn't be released?

MS. MYERS: No, I don't think we would object. I think in the context of the investigation we were told not to release it, but I think that if the investigating agencies thought that it was appropriate that --

Q Is there any reason it couldn't be released now? That would end a lot of the questions you're going to get.

MS. MYERS: Yes, I understand that, but, yes, the Justice Department advised us not to in the course of this investigation. Now, at some point they may say that it's okay, but at this point they're saying not to. And we think it's important.

Q Can you clear up the differences between what you told us on I think it was your Tuesday briefing that the President was among the people that knew that Foster was, quote, "having a rough time," and what the President said yesterday?

MS. MYERS: I tried, and I guess, failed to put that comment in the context of the work, that the President knew the Counsel's Office had had its ups and downs, like a lot of departments around here, that that was not unusual. But he had no reason to think that Vince was personally despondent or distressed or deeply troubled. He was shocked when it happened, and shocked to find out subsequently that people thought that he was, in fact, distressed, which was what he said yesterday. At the time, he didn't have any reason to believe that it was anything other than sort of routine ups and downs.

Q Dee Dee, will you take the question as to whether Webb Hubbell told him that Mr. Foster was in distress?

MS. MYERS: I know that he did not.

Q You know that he didn't?

MS. MYERS: I know that he did not. The President did not know when he called Vince --

Q With Hubbell at his side, correct?

MS. MYERS: Correct. I don't know if Hubbell was in the room, but he had talked to --

Q Hubbell did not -- can you clarify then whether it was Hubbell who urged him to invite Foster over?

MS. MYERS: He didn't. Nobody urged him to. I mean, it was -- Webb was there and they were going to watch a movie.

Q These three men are old and close friends. The President -- and Hubbell is an intimate of Mrs. Clinton and a friend of Mrs. Clinton and a friend of Foster. He was there with the President of the United States. He had just spent a weekend with him, he doesn't tell the President this.

MS. MYERS: The "this" is what is, I think, perhaps in question. I don't know what Webb thought coming out of that weekend with Vince. I haven't had a chance to speak to him about it, and I don't think that anybody here -- I don't think Webb has said exactly what he thought.

Q Are you disputing that Webb Hubbell -- that part of the purpose of that weekend at the shore was to lift Foster's spirits?

MS. MYERS: I'm simply saying I don't know and I can't comment on it. I don't know why they went. I think --

Q Might you see fit, in light of the fact that all of this revolves around intimates of the President of the United States to ask?

MS. MYERS: I mean, I can tell you that the President did not know --

Q You can understand why anyone with the knowledge of the facts as they've been reported here and mostly there would wonder.

MS. MYERS: I think it is appropriate to talk about the context of what happened at the White House, and we've tried to do that. I don't think that I'm in a position to know what Vince's friends and intimates outside of this environment thought or what was in their mind.

Q Dee Dee, you just said they're officials of this administration.

MS. MYERS: I understand that, but I just think that I can tell you what the President thought when he called Vince and I talked to him about that, and what the President -- why he called him and sort of what his understanding of the situation was. Hindsight puts this in a completely different light.

Q We're not asking about hindsight, we're asking about what happened and when and who said what to whom beforehand.

MS. MYERS: Right, and what I can tell you about that is that Webb and the President were together, the President called Vince to invite him to the movies --

Q Just sort of out of the blue?

MS. MYERS: Yes, well, Webb and Vince and the President were friends, and it would not be unusual for two of them to contact the third, particularly because Hillary was out of town, I think, and he was having some people over for the movies, and as he said, he got lonesome for Vince and he called him up. But the President did not have any reason to believe that Vince was deeply troubled or depressed.

Q In light of that, and the difficulty you seem to be having in answering Brit's question, are there questions of liability here? Has Attorney Nussbaum, McLarty suggested at all, if there might be any questions of liability? We're trying to --

MS. MYERS: I don't think so.

Q It doesn't seem that there would be.

MS. MYERS: No one has suggested it in any way. It's -

Q At the same time, it stretches credibility to think that Webb and the President together would not discuss the weekend.

MS. MYERS: I think that the President and Vince discussed the weekend in some detail in their phone conversation. Hi, had a great time at the shore, how are you, it was fun, the sun was out. You know, they talked about the weekend. The President clearly knew that they had spent the weekend together. Once again, I don't know how to reconstruct events in a way that makes sense from the perspective of knowing what happened. But all I can tell you is what the President's recollections were at the time.

Q Dee Dee, what's striking about this is that it seems utterly credible to anyone that the President and everyone around him, even though they cared deeply about this man, would not have recognized that he was suicidal. That makes great sense. It's very hard to know these things. What seems less -- what's harder to believe is the idea that, under these circumstances, with Mr. Hubbell having just done what we believe him to have done, that the fact that the man was, as the President put it, in serious distress, would not have come to the President's attention. That's tough.

MS. MYERS: I think what the President -- again, all I can tell you is what the President knew at the time, that Counsel's Office was having its turn, as it were, and suffering some of the daily ups and downs of life in the White House. And I think the President was aware of that, but he wasn't aware that it went beyond that. And it's difficult to reconstruct from this vantage point. I wish there was more that I could say.

Q This White House works seven days a week. Can you clarify whether or not you've checked with any of his staff to know if, in fact, the stories that he was not coming in on Saturdays and Sundays and so forth -- does that match with what was --

MS. MYERS: Does not match with what was reported today. I think a number of people here had meetings with him or were at a Fourth of July barbecue with him, for example, on weekends throughout the month.

Q Was he working routinely on weekends, just like everybody else?

MS. MYERS: He had meetings in the White House, or was seen in the White House, I think every weekend day, was either at a party or in the White House with one exception. And I don't know what day it was, but --

Q Well, that would have been the weekend before, wouldn't it?

MS. MYERS: No, because we can account for his whereabouts every day, except one. This is for the month of July. So, in other words, he was in on both Saturday and Sunday for a meeting or in the middle of the day at some point was seen with somebody during that period.

Q Was that routine pattern prior to July?

MS. MYERS: He worked a lot of weekends. I didn't check back beyond that.

Q When this is all resolved, who will make the announcement? Will it be the Park Service, or will it be the White House, clearing through the Justice Department or with the family? I mean --

MS. MYERS: I don't know.

Q You don't know how it will be finally --

MS. MYERS: Yes. I don't know how it will be finally sort of reconciled, whether or not they'll turn something over to us with the caveat that we can do what we want with it, or whether they'll release something. I think we'll have to wait and see.

Q You've said a number of times that the President had no inkling when he called him on Monday night. What was said or done in that conversation that caused him to set up the meeting that was to be held on Wednesday that was never held? What made him -- he certainly wasn't still lonesome for him.

MS. MYERS: Right. No, they talked about a number of work-related issues, and I think Vince had some questions that he wanted to run by the President, some issues he wanted to discuss with him.

Q Related to the kinds of things that were on this list that were --

MS. MYERS: I don't want to speculate about that, but just issues generally regarding his work in the Counsel's Office, and the President said, why don't you come on in and see me on Wednesday, so they set up a meeting.

Q And Vince raised those issues with the President in that conversation?

MS. MYERS: Yes, they talked about a number of work-related things, as well as Vince's weekend.

Q Okay. Did the weekend contribute to the reason for the meeting on Wednesday as well --

MS. MYERS: No, no.

Q Let me just take that a little further. Now, Lisa Foster and Donna McLarty had lunch on Tuesday, approximately the same time that Vince was leaving here to go off wherever he went that afternoon. And Hubbell and Vince met over the weekend. There were a couple of other prior discussions -- people -- there were any number of people talking around here. This is, I guess, revisiting the old horse, but there's an awful lot going on here for the President to have been totally oblivious to it all at the time. If Donna knew, certainly Mack knew. But that was too late for a phone call, but wouldn't she tell him? That's funny? I'm sorry, I didn't mean to make a joke.

MS. MYERS: No, I meant since you set the timing up at the beginning of the question -- first of all, I don't know what Donna and Lisa talked about on Tuesday, but it was Tuesday and I don't think she saw Mack again in time to tell him anything.

Q Until he got the call Tuesday night?

MS. MYERS: Yeah.

Q But remember there was a great deal of questions about --

MS. MYERS: Mack was here in the White House until -- soon when we found out because of Larry King --

Q But there was a great deal of questioning about whether -- Nussbaum kept saying where he was, but nobody thought his absence was meaningful. And if the discussion that Lisa Foster had with Donna McLarty at lunch on Tuesday meant anything and if it got to anybody, certainly that would have --

MS. MYERS: I just don't think she had -- I mean, I don't know what went through her head. I certainly can't surmise, but again, it was Tuesday. And by the following day it was too late.

Q Any other notes discovered or pieces of paper that could similarly reflect on the state of his mind?

MS. MYERS: Not yet that I'm aware of.

Q Have you asked if there are any other notes? I mean, -- through the last five days, we've had a series of, "Not to my knowledge," and, "Not that I'm aware of," until you've become aware of. Have you asked if there's any other notes or --

MS. MYERS: I don't think that's quite true.

Q Well, okay, well, you were asked if he was on any medication. Gearan was asked, McLarty was asked. "Not to our knowledge." "Not that we're aware of."

MS. MYERS: But that's -- that, I mean -- you have to understand, why would we know? I don't -- I mean, the White House --

Q Because you may have asked these questions are logical questions because he was a public official.

MS. MYERS: Question was asked on Friday, and I think as the week and the weeks from here forth proceed, a lot of things are going to come to light that people weren't previously aware of.

When I say -- when I'm asked if he's taking any medication, and I say, "not that I'm aware of," that was our impression here at the White House at that point. We wouldn't necessarily be in a position to know. It's just not -- I mean,

people who work with him are not necessarily in a position to know what his personal circumstances are, whether or not he talks to his physician.

Q I think the point is that the answers are sort of a pattern of the handling of a private death of a private individual; that is you're not aware of anything you don't ask about -- and my question is, has the privacy of Vince Foster and his family made you and others who speak for this administration unwilling to ask questions such as, was he seeing a psychiatrist -- of the family and of people who would know -- was he seeing a psychiatrist, was he taking medicine, did he leave a note, was he depressed?

MS. MYERS: The answer that I gave to that was I did ask a representative of the family and the family's choice was not to confirm or deny it. Now, that may change over the course of the next few days, but at this point that's all I can tell you.

Q You asked the family what, Dee Dee?

MS. MYERS: Whether he had been taking any medication. And I didn't confirm it. And they made some point and I, you know --

Q Do you feel obliged to go beyond that, to try to find out from anyone else, to find out from anyone else here in the White House to try to construct --

MS. MYERS: Well, there's an investigation ongoing to try to put back together some of these details. I don't -- and certainly we want to try to provide as much information as we can about this, particularly things that are relevant to his work. It's difficult because this isn't necessarily within our purview. We're not conducting an independent investigation. I think it is useful to know this. And to the degree that I can provide accurate information -- and others I know feel the same way -- to the degree that we can provide accurate information, we're trying to do that. It's obviously a very difficult time for people both personally and as we try to cooperate with the scope of this investigation without having the authority or the mechanism to go beyond what is discovered in this process. It's a difficult situation.

Q You just said that you asked at least a representative of the family about the drug question and that they told you -- they had declined to confirm or deny it --

MS. MYERS: Right.

Q -- to answer the question. But don't you think that when you answered that question by saying not to the best of my knowledge --

MS. MYERS: That was last Friday.

Q Okay, but you've been using those kind of answers all along. When you get those kind of answers, don't you think it creates an impression that the answer is no probably, or at least probably no and not -- is it misleading?

MS. MYERS: I think that it's a difficult situation. These are questions that I'm not in a position necessarily to take. And so I give you the best of my knowledge with the -- that's why I've been very -- tried to be very careful to characterize what it is we would be likely to know and what it is we might not know.

Q -- the point that some of us are trying to make is that we understand some of the concerns you're talking about that

these sort of answers instead of addressing those concerns actually drag this story out and make it longer and actually hurt you all.

MS. MYERS: I'm painfully aware of that.

Q Do you think Bernie would be willing to brief us on what they know and what they are likely to know and what they will never know?

MS. MYERS: I think that's unlikely at this point.

Q Just to put this -- for all of our sakes.

MS. MYERS: But, see, the thing is Bernie -- I don't know that Bernie's in a position to know whether he was taking -- I know Bernie doesn't know whether or not he was taking drugs.

Q But you did say that nothing was -- no medication was found in his office --

MS. MYERS: Right.

Q -- or in his personal effects.

MS. MYERS: Well, I don't --

Q You can only speak for the office?

MS. MYERS: Right.

Q So it could be that things were found in the car or the briefcase that he had with him?

MS. MYERS: I don't think he had a briefcase with him. Just his wallet and his White House I.D.

Q Is the President going to make a broadcast this weekend?

Q Did he have two briefcases in the office?

MS. MYERS: I don't know. I only know of the one.

Q Is the President going to make a television broadcast?

MS. MYERS: I wouldn't rule it out. We've always said that's something we'd consider in the context of reconciliation.

Q Would that mean after you have --

MS. MYERS: The question was, is the President going to give an Oval Office address. And the answer was that I wouldn't rule it out. It's something that we've talked about in the context of this reconciliation process.

Q Has it been discussed with greater intensity in recent days and more likely? The question is Sunday --

MS. MYERS: We haven't made a final decision about it yet. It has been --

Q Would you characterize it as likely?

MS. MYERS: I would characterize it as fairly likely sometime, but not necessarily Sunday.

Q Could it be Saturday?

MS. MYERS: As soon as we know we'll let you guys know. We really will.

Q If it would be this weekend and it's not Sunday --

MS. MYERS: Well, no, I didn't say it was this weekend. I didn't say it was this weekend.

Q Oh, you didn't? I'm sorry.

Q Can you give us your best guidance at this point about the President's vacation and how it fits into the visit with the Pope and Tulsa and maybe California?

MS. MYERS: For planning purposes only, it is not completely clear. (Laughter.) He will leave here -- now, with that caveat I'll tell you what I can. The time in question, ballpark, August 12th to August 29th, that two-week period is still what we're considering.

Q And some of that is not down time.

MS. MYERS: Some of it is not down time. It's actually -- isn't that a little more than two weeks? He's going to see the Pope on the 12th of August. He will go to Oklahoma City -- or Tulsa for the Governor's Conference. He will probably spend some time in Colorado. It is unclear whether or not he'll go to California, and he may spend some time in Arkansas. And as soon as we have better details than that --

Q -- on the 12th, is it to Arkansas?

MS. MYERS: The 12th would be to Denver. That's the Pope.

Q And from Denver -- can you just give us any kind of order?

MS. MYERS: It's not reliable yet.

Q Is it definite yet which day he's going to speak to the Governor's Conference? Because it was originally going to be Monday, but there was some talk about having it on the weekend instead. Is that fixed?

MS. MYERS: It's not fixed. It's not definite.

Q Did the President meet with the French Defense Minister this afternoon? Or did Anthony Lake?

MS. MYERS: I don't know. I'll take that question.

Q What about tomorrow?

Q Wait a second. Is he meeting with him?

MS. MYERS: What's on the plan?

Q Tony Lake?

MS. MYERS: Tony is -- tomorrow? Today.

Q It has happened, hasn't it? It's over, right, or is the guy still in there?

MS. MYERS: An announcement. Tony Lake met with the French Foreign Defense Minister, as opposed to Mr. Jupe.

MS. MYERS: Do you want to come up here and just give a little readout on that? Are you prepared to do that?

MR. STEINBERG: I'm not prepared to do that yet.

MS. MYERS: Okay. We'll post a readout.

MR. STEINBERG: The meeting may, in fact, still be taking place.

MS. MYERS: We'll post a readout on Mr. Lake's meeting with Mr. Leotard.

Q Any subject other than Bosnia on the agenda?

MR. STEINBERG: It was just a general discussion that was scheduled for a long time.

Q No. (Laughter.)

Q Tomorrow?

MS. MYERS: Tomorrow. Do you guys have the schedule for tomorrow? We have a seniors' event, right, somewhere in Maryland? I'll have to get back to you. I don't have the details.

Q In the morning?

MS. MYERS: No -- we don't have -- we have a schedule, I just don't have it in front me.

Q Dee Dee, on the budget, is Senator Feinstein trying to barter a vote on the budget with the White House for some big bucks favors for some powerful interests in California?

Q A simple yes will be fine. (Laughter.)

MS. MYERS: No, I think Senator Feinstein is interested in getting a good economic growth package that will benefit Californians.

Q Are you denying that there's been any horse-trading with her?

MS. MYERS: As you know or may not know, she met with the President on Sunday. They discussed a number of elements in the economic plan. I think that's part of the process.

Q But you're saying you're not aware of any extraneous things, concessions, that she was demanding and may have gotten?

MS. MYERS: I certainly wouldn't discuss that from this podium.

Q What are the weekend plans?

MS. MYERS: There was no -- last I checked they were both -- Saturday and Sunday were down days. Now, we may put something on Saturday and we'll let you know tomorrow.

Q Is there anything new on Bosnia?

Q -- referring this morning to some back-up plans if, for instance, the enforcement mechanisms are considered extraneous and they have -- the Byrd rule. The deficit trust fund is another one of these issues. Empowerment zones is another issue. Would he treat those through an executive order, for instance, if the Byrd rule is invoked on those issues?

MS. MYERS: I don't think we have final decisions on that yet.

Q Is it possible?

MS. MYERS: I'll have to get back to you on it. I don't want to characterize it.

Q No change in Bosnia?

MS. MYERS:

END

4:01 P.M. EDT

#101-07/29

Q First, the Washington Post today says that the famous torn note mentions travelgate. Is that correct?

MS. MYERS: I am not in the position to comment on the contents. I just can't.

Q Also, in regard to your answer to Carl before, you said you don't think the President would have any comment. David Mixner has described himself and Clinton has described him as close friends for 20 years. This is someone who is so upset by his close friend's policy that he got himself arrested in front of the White House. It's a little mind-boggling --

MS. MYERS: I think that the President is well aware of Mr. Mixner's position on the military decision -- gays in the military decision. And I don't think he has anything further to say. I think it's been well documented Mr. Mixner's opposition.

Q Dee Dee, does the President favor a wider use of airpower in Bosnia? Wider than just to protect the U.N. peacekeepers?

MS. MYERS: As you know, we're talking to our allies about how best to support the negotiations in Geneva and to prevent further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Sarajevo and some of the other population centers. And beyond that, I don't have anything to say.

Q In these talks with allied officials, are we making the suggestion that airpower ought to be considered for the purposes you just stated?

MS. MYERS: I'm just not going to comment on the content of the discussions, other than to say that the general goal is to figure out how best to support the negotiations in Geneva and to protect the -- to prevent the further deterioration of the humanitarian situation on the ground.

Q Would this, again, be a multilateral thing? In other words, supposing that the allies as in May don't go along at that point. We also get off --

MS. MYERS: We're discussing the situation with our allies, and beyond that, Leo, I just don't have any comment.

Q Dee Dee, in connection with the Vince Foster case, the police are described in this morning's paper -- the Washington Post -- as saying that the White House hindered their case by slowing down the examination of the evidence, especially the note. Do you have a reaction to that? What do you say to that? And also, in the search of Foster's office, was it actually Bernie Nussbaum who physically went through all of that evidence, or did the Park Police physically do it under the supervision --

MS. MYERS: The first part is that we're doing our best to cooperate with the ongoing investigation -- Park Service investigation. And we will continue to do that. We will continue to do our best to facilitate that and cooperate. Bernie did actually do the physical going through, because many of those documents are protected by either executive privilege or attorney-client privilege. And so Bernie went through and sort of described the contents of each of his files and what was in his drawers while representatives of the Justice Department, the Secret Service, the FBI and other members of the Counsel's Office were present.

Q Was that the only time any White House official had gone through those documents?

MS. MYERS: That was the first time. And I believe then an associate counsel cataloged the contents -- cataloged the files in Vince's office.

Q Regarding -- note, is the name Nussbaum mentioned in it?

MS. MYERS: Again, I'm not going to comment on the contents of the note.

Q Dee Dee, have they checked the --

Q And what about the FBI -- the incident described that the FBI agent told to --

MS. MYERS: My understanding was that a junior member of the Counsel's Office said something to an FBI agent when he stood up and Bernie Nussbaum then contradicted that and said that he thought that the other person was wrong.

Q Is the FBI conducting its own investigation?

MS. MYERS: You'd have to check with them.

Q Does anyone know if he ever threatened to quit and whether he was taking an antidepressant?

MS. MYERS: I don't know. On the drug you'd have to check with the Park Service Police.

Q And will the Park Service report be put out publicly without going through the White House control?

MS. MYERS: You'd have to check with whatever their standard operating procedure is.

Q Well, I'm sure they don't deal with the White House every day.

MS. MYERS: That's true. I mean, I think that that's something -- or perhaps a better point of contact on that is the Justice Department. I don't know and I don't think that we know exactly what the final report is going to look like, what it's going to contain, or how it will be handled. I think we'll have to wait until it's done.

Q In the search of the office, did they check the -- with the FBI and the police present -- did they check the computer files, any dictating tapes, videotapes, or audio cassette tapes to see if an audio or electronics message was left or anything?

MS. MYERS: I will have to take that. I don't know whether there is any kind of audio equipment in his office, whether he used any of that. And as to computers, I'm not sure what the arrangement was on that. I know there was some arrangement the they tried to put in place to have those files checked.

Q And the phone logs?

MS. MYERS: The computer files and phone logs. I'm just not sure what the status of those two issues is.

Q What do you know about -- relationship between Mr. Foster and Mr. Foster?

MS. MYERS: They had a very good working relationship.

Q What was the question?

MS. MYERS: What was the relationship between Mr. Nussbaum and Mr. Foster. They had a very good working relationship. Bernie described it, I thought, fairly eloquently on Wednesday of last week when he said that they got together when they both came here and decided that they wanted to run the White House Counsel's like a little law firm and to operate as partners in a law firm would. And I think that they were well on their way to establishing what they thought was a good partnership.

Q Dee Dee, is it true that McLarty's directions that the Foster office be sealed was not carried out for 12 hours?

MS. MYERS: No, what happened in that regard was that evening, Tuesday evening, as people were here in the White House notifying family members and others about what had happened, it was suggested by Mack we need to make sure that Vince's office isn't disturbed. The Counsel's Office is -- every night is locked and alarmed. So I don't think -- there wasn't a need to lock it in any other way. So people just made sure the door was closed and that when the members of the Counsel's Office left that the door was locked and alarmed as it always is. And the next morning, they asked the Secret Service to put a guard on it just for an additional layer of protection.

Q Is the White House satisfied that there were no improper removals of documents or other possessions from that office?

MS. MYERS: Yes, we have just no reason to believe that that happened.

Q Since the outbreak of fighting in Lebanon, has the President himself been in touch with any of the Middle East leaders?

MS. MYERS: No. As you know, Secretary Christopher has been in constant contact with the Israelis, the Lebanese and the Syrians.

Q -- getting back to Bosnia, there's a report on the wires that there's been an agreement reached in Geneva between the parties -- at least an initial one. Have you received word of that? Do you have any reaction?

MS. MYERS: That's the first I've heard of it. I've not seen that report.

Q And has the President been speaking with any foreign leaders today?

MS. MYERS: Not that I know of. I don't believe so, and I'll double-check, but I don't think so.

Q I'm a little confused. Does the White House not trust the FBI or the Park Police to treat the information in Foster's office with due confidentiality? And how can they conduct a thorough investigation if they're doing it through the filter of Nussbaum who's doing it himself apparently?

MS. MYERS: Well, I think that is a -- it's not an issue of trust, of whether or not you trust. Certainly, we trust the Justice Department and the FBI. But there is an issue of privilege, which is I think always taken very seriously by attorneys, as it should be. And so, I think most of the documents that Vince was working on were protected by one sort of privilege or another.

Q Protected from whom?

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MS. MYERS: Protected from anybody outside of the attorney-client relationship.

Q Well, wait a minute, does the President not also have an attorney-client relationship with the Justice Department?

MS. MYERS: I'm not familiar with all the privileges that exist, but I know in the case of the White House Counsel's Office, one of Vince's functions was to serve as the First Family's lawyer within the White House Counsel's Office, and that was part of what he did. Plus a number of the issues that he's working on are --

Q So he's the President's private lawyer --

MS. MYERS: Well, he's the White House -- he's the guy in the White House Counsel's Office who handles issues relating to the First Family and the Residence.

Q So the White House is asserting here an issue of personal privilege with regard --

MS. MYERS: Well, both. I mean, there's an attorney-client privilege and there's also an executive privilege. And I am not an attorney, nor an expert on privileges, but I know that this is -- there's a very serious question about how -- but in answer to the other part of your question, I think that Mr. Nussbaum conducted a very thorough investigation, particularly in terms of what they were looking for. I mean, he went through the files and described what the issues were and what the contents of the files were without having them read the specific documents.

Q So the investigators had to rely on his characterization of everything?

MS. MYERS: That's correct.

Q And, Dee Dee, he missed the note. Didn't Nussbaum miss the note?

MS. MYERS: Well, it was in the bottom of Vince's briefcase torn up. So, yes, they didn't discover it until Monday.

Q Well, how can you characterize it as a thorough investigation when he didn't find the most salient piece of evidence that's been found so far?

MS. MYERS: Your characterization, not ours or anybody else's.

Q So you don't think it was --

MS. MYERS: I just don't know if it's the --

Q Was it a thorough investigation?

MS. MYERS: Yes, I think it was a --

Q Was a thorough search?

MS. MYERS: Yes, I think we feel it was a thorough investigation.

Q So you -- okay. (Laughter.)

Q Thank you, Brit. You may step down. (Laughter.) But was there any other piece of evidence that's more relevant?

MS. MYERS: I'm just not going to get into characterizing things like that.

Q Isn't there an inherent conflict of interest if you have the same person representing the family -- the client-family relationship as executive privilege? You're saying -- is there any consideration of taking or having an independent counsel look into this? If you're being protected both by the attorney-client privilege as the First Family's lawyer --

MS. MYERS: The intimation here is that -- I mean, there has been no allegations of any kind of criminal wrongdoing. There's been no suggestion that there's anything in there. We have cooperated fully with the ongoing investigation. If, at the end of the investigation, the investigators or somebody thinks that there needs to be another look at this, then we'll be happy to revisit it. At this point we've cooperated completely. I think the investigating agencies feel they have gotten what they need and continue to get what they need.

Q Then how do they know if it's been screened?

MS. MYERS: They're the investigators. Talk to them about how they know.

Q Wait a minute, Dee Dee. If you're the ones who control the evidence, it's not -- it's perfectly appropriate to ask you that question.

MS. MYERS: But I -- no.

Q And to say -- it is not an answer to the question to say talk to the people who have to get it through to you --

MS. MYERS: It is -- no, no, no, Brit.

Q -- as to why -- how we can know.

MS. MYERS: No, no.

Q That's a fair question to put to you is all I'm saying.

MS. MYERS: But here's the thing. It is not up to us to determine what they should be looking for.

Q That's how it works, though, isn't it? What they get -- you're determining what they get to see.

MS. MYERS: No, it -- in terms of -- they haven't -- I don't know exactly what they've asked for, because -- I'm not the point person on the investigation. But it is up to them to decide what it is they think they need. If they need more information they'll come back to us.

Q Did the Park Police decide --

MS. MYERS: That's a decision -- if they don't feel they have enough information --

Q Let me ask you a question. If there's an investigation of a private citizen, suicide, do you really imagine that the private citizen's lawyer gets to stand there and see -- preside over the search of the person's premises?

MS. MYERS: Of anything that would be protected by attorney-client privilege, absolutely. Of course, they would, Brit. Of course, they would. If somebody had legal papers pertaining to

some issue that they were working on that were protected by an attorney-client privilege, that would be something that the --;

Q I think you better look it up.

Q How about if the attorney was a partner of the deceased? This is not just an attorney-client relationship, this is an attorney that had a working relationship with the deceased --

MS. MYERS: The issue is not --

Q -- not a third attorney here looking at this.

MS. MYERS: The documents are protected by privilege. The Park Service police is conducting an investigation. They feel they are getting enough evidence to make a conclusion about what happened and why Vince took his life. They feel they're getting access to the information they need to make that determination with enough certainty to conclude it. They have said that they think they'll wrap the investigation up next week. Among other things, they said in the paper this morning they're waiting for the results of his autopsy. They feel they have enough information to make a conclusion. That's what -- that's their judgment.

Q Just to take it perhaps to an extreme that it shouldn't be taken, but how about --

MS. MYERS: Why not? (Laughter.)

Q -- Nussbaum flipping through this finds a note from Vince that says I can't stand working with Bernie Nussbaum anymore. And Bernie says, oh, this is executive privilege and stuffs it back in his coat pocket. I mean, there's no independent person looking at these materials and saying this is relevant, this is not.

MS. MYERS: Again, the documents that -- the documents that were not protected, such as, I think he had some personal documents -- his lease for his house, for example -- they were allowed to look at. But the documents that are protected by privilege they were not allowed to look at.

Q Dee Dee, do you deny that the White House could waive attorney-client privilege?

MS. MYERS: I don't know. I --

Q Can take the question of whoever --

MS. MYERS: Sure.

Q And ask you whoever in the White House is making the judgments about what the White House will or will not do --

MS. MYERS: As you know, that's a complicated and precedent setting kind of decision.

Q The second question is, you originally designated the Justice Department as the point of contact --

MS. MYERS: We designated them on Tuesday night after Vince's death -- or Wednesday morning.

Q What's the rationale for that. And doesn't that rationale maybe apply to who the filter becomes for evidence that goes to the investigators?

MS. MYERS: The rationale was to have a point of contact outside the White House in case there were requests for things, in

case the investigators needed additional information, that they wanted to come back in and talk to people. It's a way to have a point of contact --

Q Then why isn't the Counsel's Office just as qualified to do that as they are the screen the evidence --

MS. MYERS: That is not protected by attorney-client privilege or by executive privilege.

Q Wait a minute, that's not the question.

MS. MYERS: Well, I mean -- yes, I think that's the answer, though.

Q Why is the Counsel not fit to be the point of contact since the Counsel is --

MS. MYERS: Well, for the reason that I just gave, but the distinction is attorney-client privilege and executive privilege. That is why Bernie was conducting the investigation. But under the circumstances, we thought it would be easier, better, to have the Justice Department to serve as the point of contact.

Q Was the President among those interviewed by investigators or has he provided them a statement or been requested to provide a statement?

MS. MYERS: He's not been requested.

Q Why was it necessary to have the Attorney General and the Deputy Attorney General weigh in on the question of whether the note should be turned over to the Park Service?

MS. MYERS: They were contacted and they came over and were asked what should be done with it, whether it should be given to the Justice Department or to the Park Service police. They said they took a copy of the contents of the note and suggested that the note itself be turned over to the Park Service Police, so that was done.

Q That seems like an -- I mean, it seems obvious that the people who are investigating whether or not this was a suicide are finding reasons for a suicide would be allowed to have a copy of the note. And I guess I'm just mystified by the summoning of the two top ranking people at the Justice Department to weigh in on this.

MS. MYERS: It -- Phil Heymann was the lead coordinator person. I mean, he -- and so I think the point of contact works both ways. Our point of contact for an ongoing investigation wisely, I think, is the Justice Department. So Phil Heymann was contacted and he asked the Attorney General to come with him. I think that that was the appropriate thing to do. I think the point -- it's important that the point -- that our contact with the investigating agency be done through the Justice Department.

Q And the discussion there was not whether to turn over the note, but who should get it?

MS. MYERS: Well, what we should do with it. I mean, I think that was a judgment we asked them to help us make, or to -- we asked for their best guidance on that and they said it should go to the Park Service Police. That's part of what we asked them to do.

Q What were the other options?

Q -- alternatives?

MS. MYERS: You know -- I think it was pretty clear we were going to give it to either the Justice Department or the Park Service Police.

Q Who made the decision not to make it public and why?

MS. MYERS: The Park Service Police -- and, again, that contact happened through the Justice Department -- that they thought that it would not be wise in the context of an ongoing investigation.

Q But would it -- how about the future?

MS. MYERS: I think we'll wait and see.

Q -- go back to a question Jill asked a while ago. The Washington Post account this morning described a scene where supposedly Nussbaum told an FBI agent to sit down and not to peek at documents. Were you saying that account is incorrect?

MS. MYERS: I don't remember -- maybe you guys can help me -- if it said who from the Counsel's Office.

Q It said an official, I think.

MS. MYERS: Yes. And my -- I think I explained that it was a junior member of the Counsel's staff who suggested that the person sit down and Bernie suggested that that was not necessary.

Q Dee Dee, I'm confused here. What -- a lawyer relationship are you talking about? That's usually a phrase used between a man on his personal business and his lawyer. Are you talking about personal business or are you talking about public business?

MS. MYERS: There is an issue of privilege in both.

Q We know what executive privilege would be, but what about the client-lawyer relationship as regards public governmental matters -- public governmental matters?

MS. MYERS: Well, executive privilege would apply -- and, again, I should probably -- at some point we probably need a better explanation about how these privileges work. But there is both personal relationships since Vince Foster handled a lot of the President and First Family's -- what personal business there exists for them. And he did previous to his arriving here at the White House. And he also handled legal issues pertaining to federal government business. So both.

Q When you turn over something to the Justice Department -- to people who are appointed by the President -- that's hardly independent. That's not independent. When they speak of an independent counsel or investigation, they're usually speaking of somebody being appointed outside the government. But Reno and Heymann would certainly be under the President's --

MS. MYERS: I think that Janet Reno has shown herself to be quite independent and we expect that she is.

Q -- we all love her and all that, but --
(Laughter.)

Q Who has taken over the Clinton's personal attorney business?

MS. MYERS: I'll have to take that question. I don't know that it's been passed -- some of the existing files were