



Special Briefing
Tom Casey, Deputy Spokesman
 Washington, DC
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Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs and Head of the U.S. Delegation to the Six-Party Talks Christopher R. Hill On Six-Party Talks Held in Beijing

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(2:15 p.m. EDT)

MR. CASEY: Afternoon, everybody. Pleasure to be here, better pleasure to have with us again everybody's favorite Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Chris Hill. He'll tell you how he's been spending his summer vacation in Beijing, working the six-party talks; wanted to give him an opportunity again to talk to all of you, explain about some of the accomplishments that they were able to reach there and what, sort of, the next steps in this process are.

So Chris, let me turn the podium over to you and your Dr. Pepper and we'll go from there.

QUESTION: Great product placement. (Laughter.)

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: It has caffeine though, I think. Anyway, well, good to see you and -- boy, surprising to see some of you because you were in Beijing so I can't believe that you're here to learn something new. Those of us who left on Friday recall our aircraft blowing an engine and having to turn around and go back to Beijing, so we all spent another night there. But anyway, we all made it here safely, I guess.

I think the past week was, I think, a very important week for the six-party process. First of all, we had, I think, the first real development in terms of implementing the September '05 agreement, which was, of course, the shutdown of the Yongbyon complex. As welcome as that development was, it's nonetheless an initial step. And as I've said many times, if it's going to be meaningful, it needs to be followed by additional steps. And so with that in mind, we had a meeting of the heads of delegation of the six-party process to kind of chart the way ahead.

As a meeting of the heads of delegation, it was not to lay out the specific time schedule ahead. It was not to determine the type and scope of disablement, for example, of the Yongbyon facility, nor was it to lay out with precision what the full declaration will mean. It was really to get an idea of what the sequencing of events will be. I had personally hoped that we could get an overall timeframe and I was looking to see if we could get this done by the end of this calendar year. I do believe that is very much feasible, but it was not something we wanted to put in any press communiqué from the head of delegation meeting. I think it's something that we're going to try to see if we can do after the working groups have met and after we can determine whether it is, in fact, feasible.

So what we agreed to do was to have all five working groups meet in the weeks ahead. We -- I think the first two that need to get going, and we would hope to do this early in August, is the denuclearization working group and the energy working group. Denuclearization is important because it's in that working group that they're going to deal with the technical task of determining what a declaration will look like and of course, a declaration needs to be all nuclear programs, which means that not only plutonium, but uranium nuclear programs would have to be declared, fully declared, in that declaration. So that's something for the working groups to be discussing, how - the technical task of putting all nuclear programs into the declaration.

The second thing that the denuclearization working group will need to do is to look at what type of disablement would be accomplished; that is, there are many different ways to disable a graphite-moderated reactor and the technical working group needs to determine what kinds of disablement; do you cut certain chains, do you drill a hole, questions like that. And that really has to be discussed by people who know what they're talking about.

And then we would have the energy and economic assistance working group. And the idea of this working group would be to look at the -- you know, we have an agreement to provide 950 tons of -- 950,000 tons of heavy fuel oil or an equivalent of that in economic assistance. So we would be -- so the working group would be looking at what could an equivalence be. If it were only done according to the -- according to heavy fuel oil with an absorptive capacity of 50,000 tons per month, 950 would stretch out to too many months. So we would be -- we want to see what kinds of equivalents are.

For example, could building storage capacity so that DPRK could have more than 50,000 tons per month -- could that be something that could be accomplished as an equivalent; could the refurbishing of some electricity plants that would take the heavy fuel oil be counted toward an equivalence in fuel oil; or could the provision of electricity across a neighboring state be counted as an equivalent. So that's something the working group is going to have to determine.

When we've had these working groups, these kind of technical working groups meet, then we would -- later in the month, we would have three other working groups. One is this issue, this working group dealing with the Northeast Asian security forum, and they would -- this is chaired by the Russians and the idea would be to look at what sorts of things could be done if there were a convening of a Northeast Asian security forum, perhaps sometime in the year -- calendar year '08.

But then we would get to, I think, what are two very key working groups. One is the DPRK-Japan working group, the second is the DPRK-U.S. working group. Now in the U.S. working group, which I can speak to, we agreed to begin a process to remove -- begin a process to remove DPRK from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. We also agreed to begin a process of removing them from provision of the Trading with the Enemy Act, and so we would be discussing those issues and how far -- how much further we can go with those issues in the current phase. And I think we would be also discussing the overall level of bilateral relations with the understanding that we're not going to be normalizing relations with a nuclear North Korea.

So once the results of all these working groups are in place, we would then have a meeting probably beginning of September, a meeting -- a full meeting of the six-party -- of the six parties. And that's when -- now that we know the technical answers to -- you know, various options for disabling the Yongbyon complex, that's when we would try to put this together in a sequenced agreement which I hope could be concluded by the end of the year, with the major elements being the provision of fuel oil or its equivalent on our side, some bilateral considerations on our side as well, and also on the DPRK side, full declaration and disablement plan.

And that would get us to the end of this calendar year and beyond that, we would then be looking at efforts to address the -- North Korea's possession of already separated plutonium that is fissile material, as well as the explosive devices. That would be '08 and we would look at an overall package to secure that.

So that's sort of the game plan and that's what we discussed. I must say it was a good discussion. We -- it was free of a lot of the, sort of, polemics we've been subjected to in the past. It consisted of a number of six-party -- of meetings of all delegations together and then numerous bilateral meetings, including the U.S. We had bilateral meetings with all parties, including the DPRK and the day before the six parties. And then during the six-party meetings, we had a bilateral meeting with the North

Koreans, I think an hour and 15 minutes. Japan also had a bilateral meeting with the North Koreans about a similar length of time.

So a lot of discussions and we'll see if we can get all this done and -- oh, and one other issue. Once the -- once we agree with all the -- in a six-party meeting, which is probably going to take us to one of these 11th hour deals and we would then hope to bring our ministers together in early September to bless what we've done and look ahead.

Anne.

QUESTION: You mentioned having -- having hoped for an overall timeframe. Is part of that that you would hope to have a more -- a fixed date or more clear date for that ministerial meeting, so that you have something to work against?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah, I mean, the idea of having an overall timeframe, I just call all of this phase two, whereas the first step, shutting down the reactor and solving BDA, I call that phase one. So I just think realistically speaking, if we can phase two done by the end of the year, then we can address some of the other elements that are there, for example, the Northeast Asian security forum or whatever we're going to call it. We can begin the Korean Peninsula peace process among directly related parties.

And realistically speaking, if we can't get that going by, you know, the end of '07, it's going to be tough to complete it by the end of '08, which would be our target time. So realistically speaking, I just want to see if we can get this second phase done this year.

QUESTION: Well, it -- do you see a danger of drift in this interim phase when you've got the working groups going and you're trying to get the agreement that you can have the ministers then bless if you don't have a specific time that everybody knows those ministers are going to show up to sign it?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I'm not sure I understand. I'm not worried about drift. I mean, I think we have a very specific timeline. By the way, all of these five working groups have been agreed by all six parties. So -- you know, subject to, you know, working out the dates, we also need to work out a date for the ministerial that works for all six ministers, but subject to the schedulers. I think we can get that done.

I think the real question we have is when we take all of these elements I've just mentioned, you know, disabling the complex, for example, and try to put that together in a sequencing plan, I suspect we're going to have some 11th-hour negotiations and we'll, you know, just try to make sure it gets done. I mean, we've managed to get the negotiations done at a -- you know, in more or less the timeframe. The problem has been the implementation. And I must say as, you know, I wanted to see us putting out a sort of target timeframe. But given how we missed every deadline in the spring, I didn't think it was something I really should push on. So let's see if we can get something that makes sense by early September and then try to implement it.

Yes.

QUESTION: If by September, the working groups were able to finish their activities by September --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah, late August. Yeah.

QUESTION: -- late August and the envoys meet in September --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- do you think that the plan to get everything done by the end of the year could really take place because with North Korea beginning disabling, before all these meetings or maybe in the process of disabling before these meetings?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, you're quite right. They wouldn't begin to disable until after everything's agreed. And you know, one of the issues is, you know, how much fuel oil would they want to see in the port in the country before they, you know, put the first hole in the first, you know, piece of machinery. So you're quite right to be, you know, wondering how that's all going to work and that's why people were not so interested or not so willing to put timelines on this.

My own view is yes, it could be done. If they want to get it done, it can be done. I mean, I think disabling activities are not a matter of weeks; they're a matter of -- I mean, sorry, they're not a matter of months; they're a matter of weeks. So if we have a timeframe where everything works and where we have enough of the fuel oil shipments front-loaded in the guise of fuel oil equivalence, then I think it is reasonable.

But if, for example, the energy working group determines that it would be very difficult to get anything -- you know, actually on the ground in terms of a fuel oil, you know, equivalent. For example, how long does it take to build fuel oil storage capacity? Are you into the middle of '08? Does that affect how quickly the North Koreans are prepared to disable? All of those things are a problem and that's why the working groups need to sort through this and that's why I didn't feel it was prudent to try to push for an end-of-year thing when, let's say, we later find out that's not possible and it looks like some sort of failure on our parts so --

QUESTION: Based on your discussions with North Korea, what are the --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Again, I hate to quote the North Koreans, you know, because we had private discussions with them. I say things; they say things. I just do believe it is feasible to do it by the end of the year.

QUESTION: Chris, can I follow on something you said in an answer before? You said, "My own view is if they want to get it done they can." Is it your view they want to get it done?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah. You know, again, we had very good discussions and it was very much on -- what's the word -- on task. Bear in mind, they just did a big thing last week. They shut down a reactor, an entire complex, and sometimes when you've just done a big thing, you don't want to wake up the next day and go on and do another big thing. You want to sort of see how the dust settles. I mean, I take the view when you've done something that's a time to sort of use it as a springboard to the next activity. Other people say, wait, let us -- well, let's absorb this and then we'll keep going. So you know, I think they -- I believe we have a commitment through this second phase and if you look at the Chinese communiqué after the meeting, it said very clearly that the DPRK is committed to the full declaration and disablement of the facilities.

Going on from that, though, getting on to the question of, you know, we need to get the weapons, we need to get the fissile material -- you know, that's going to be another fight and another day. But it's a fight we have to make.

Let me take someone from the back there. Yes, ma'am.

QUESTION: Yes, India (inaudible) said that North Korea should be provided with lightwater reactor and on several occasions in the past, you said that the lightwater reactor will be the issue that you can discuss after the completion of denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula. You have not changed your position?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No, I have not. It's contained very clearly in the September '05 statement: At an appropriate time we are prepared to discuss the subject of a provision of a light water reactor. And we have explained that the appropriate time is when DPRK gets out of this dirty nuclear business that they've been in and returns to the NPT.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Chris, what is the thinking of the United States at this stage about how any declaration and any commitment to denuclearization would actually be verified? Would it -- is it our expectation that the IAEA will perform that role? Is it our belief the IAEA is capable of performing that role or would we do it, would we do it jointly with our partners, et cetera?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I think that's a very good question. I mean, there's a lot of discussion going on now about the fact that the IAEA is quite capable of monitoring what has been done today to -- the shutdown. As you go into verifying and -- verifying, for example, the issue of when they give us a declaration how much fissile material they declare; that's something we need to work out the details of and I don't think the question has yet been answered. Again, it's something for the working group to determine to what extent the IAEA can do that, when do you get P-5 countries involved. I mean, if you're going to be talking about fissile material that's going to be something for the -- and weapons -- that's something probably more for the P-5 than it is for the IAEA. But I think this can be worked out. And what's important at this stage, and I want to emphasize again -- we are at an early stage here -- is to have the IAEA connected into the six-party process, and in turn, connected into the P-5 and I think we're doing that.

So I can't your answer yet except to say that it is under active discussion.

QUESTION: Is it the case that we have a desired outcome here and it's a matter of persuading others to agree to that or you don't even have a desired --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: At this point, I don't think there is a desired outcome. I know there are a lot of discussions going on within the U.S. Government about how to do that. So I'm not prepared to even say we have a desired outcome. But we certainly -- I mean, what we need to see is verification. I mean, we cannot, you know, pretend to believe people, so we will work that out. But at this point, I can't answer your question.

QUESTION: And one more if I may on the last round of the heads of delegations that you just attended. You said that you discussed what a declaration should look like.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Can you flesh that out a bit more? Was that simply as to form that you're talking about or --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, it's got to include everything; all means all. So we have to make sure that when it's made -- and there will be format issues, but I'm not qualified really to talk about those, but when it is made, that it will be understood that it's all. And that is -- and therefore, from our point of view, uranium enrichment has to be reflected in that.

QUESTION: And so to ensure that all means all and that you're all satisfied that all meant all when it is issued, has there been -- or are the other five parties prepared to share intelligence to do that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think we're prepared to share information that we have, sure.

Yes.

QUESTION: Chris, you mentioned that you started the process of talking about removing them -- North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. Are there exact terms that you've agreed on, something they have to do, at what stage that happens?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: We have and what we agreed to do with them was to begin the discussion and we began it in New York when we had our first working group meeting. And we discussed some of the reasons they're on the list in the first place. And they discussed those issues and I would look forward to having further discussions on that.

At this point, I can't tell you how far along we will be on the question that I think they have, which is, when will they get off the list. But I think we're discussing -- we're prepared to continue that discussion.

QUESTION: Can I just follow up? Is that something you anticipate would happen as part of phase two by the end of the year or is that a long way down the road?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I can't say at this point. It's a matter of negotiation.

QUESTION: And in terms of their terrorism, the Japanese kidnappings and so forth, what are they engaged in that -- recently that keeps them on the list?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think there are a number of things, but the most recent was the bombing of the Korean air flight in 1987.

QUESTION: The KAL?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: KAL flight, yeah.

QUESTION: It was 1983.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No, '83 was the bombing of the -- in Rangoon of the South Korean Cabinet. The KAL flight was '87.

QUESTION: So are you asking them to do specific things?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: We're having discussions about those issues and -- Robin, I can't tell you everything here. (Laughter.) We're having discussions about those issues and what they -- what they mean. And therefore, how far one can see to getting them off the terrorism list.

QUESTION: Do you think that's important to them? I mean, really important to them?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: It's -- the terrorism list?

QUESTION: Yeah.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think it's important to them and therefore, they -- I mean, they wanted us to initiate this and we have done so. So yes, it is important to them. I think the idea of being listed as a state sponsor of terrorism is an important issue for them.

Mike.

QUESTION: Just to follow up on that, I'm trying to get a hold of what you were saying. If the North Koreans go ahead and finish the second phase in a timely manner, will they have gone a long way in earning the right to come off of the State Sponsor of Terrorism list?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: It depends. (Laughter.) Yes.

QUESTION: A question regarding the alleged misuse of UNDP funds in the DPRK. What's your position on the UNDP's assertion that the U.S. should back up these funds -- should further these claims? Sorry -- to substantiate them.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I would refer you to the spokesman for the U.S. Mission in New York where these --

QUESTION: But are you working on substantiating these claims?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Me personally?

QUESTION: I guess not.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: It's not come to us. It's something -- these are -- as I understand, this is a UN -- an issue of UN oversight, an issue of UN programs and I think some allegations have been made from the U.S. Mission in the UN. And I personally have not been involved with it. But I understand UNDP and the U.S. Mission have had discussions and I don't know the disposition of it right now, but I consider this a UN issue, rather than a DPRK issue.

QUESTION: But it does consider the smuggling of dual-use goods to the DPRK. Do you think that this damages the UNDP in any way and its leadership?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: It's a little off of my -- out of my lane. Tom, you want to say something about this issue? I'd be very curious myself.

MR. CASEY: I think you had it right the first time, Chris. I'm sure Rick Grenell would be happy to talk to you about it.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah. He's the spokesman --

MR. CASEY: Spokesman at the U.S. Mission.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah, speak to him. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Thanks.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah.

QUESTION: Can I ask you about the relationship between the U.S. and North Korea? You've obviously met with them now bilaterally several times. Would you describe it as warming? Do you trust the North Koreans? (Laughter.) What level of trust do you have in them?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Warming, trust -- I wonder what we're talking about here.

QUESTION: Well, I mean, you know, has your -- have your conversations, do you think, built upon each other and establish a little bit more good faith than perhaps was there?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Let me put it this way. Certainly, I think we're beyond the rhetoric and we're trying to deal with solving a problem, I mean, and that's what I'm in this for, to try to solve a nasty problem and get on to the next nasty problem. You know, I told the North Koreans -- I said, any effort to normalize our relationship really hits a brick wall, over denuclearization, that is, we cannot, will not have a normal relationship with a nuclear North Korea. But if they fulfill their promise to give up these programs, that a lot of things indeed become very possible.

This doesn't mean that we end our problems with the DPRK. We will continue to have issues. We have human rights concerns in DPRK. I mean, there are certain standards, international standards. We don't think DPRK is quite up to those. And that's going to be a continuing issue. There'll be other continuing issues. But unless we can solve this nuclear issue, I don't think we can even get to those. So you know, this nuclear issue is an enormous impediment right now and we're trying to resolve it.

QUESTION: Do you have any better insight as to whether the leadership has decided to give up their nukes?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You have to ask them. I mean, I -- the only insight I can give you is that as we're sitting down, we're discussing very much the issues at hand. And I think that's a good sign that we can make progress on denuclearization. But I'm not prepared to be clairvoyant about, you know, where we'll end up here. There is -- this problem has been around a long time and it's not easy to resolve. But I just feel it's very important to see it as a problem that -- and like most Americans, I like to think of problems as ones you can solve, otherwise, I don't think I'd be in this game.

Okay. Even though you were in Beijing, you heard me speak every day for -- why I called on you, I don't even know, but go ahead. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Can I just clarify the appropriate timing of discussing the lightwater reactor?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah.

QUESTION: You mentioned that after denuclearization, they don't see the light-water reactor. But how about starting the discussion if they show the goodwill and show the action of disablement --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- then are you ready to discuss that with them?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I know that some countries probably look at it in those terms, but certainly, my country and a number of the others take the view that when -- that the appropriate time will be when they give up these weapons of mass destruction -- there's no other word for them -- and return to the Nonproliferation Treaty and sort of show an interest in playing by the rules that everyone else plays by, that that's the appropriate time to take this up. That's certainly our view.

Yes, sir. Go ahead.

QUESTION: I'm curious. In your talks, are you getting any sense on how quickly the North Koreans hope to move forward on economic reforms? Because on the energy issue in particular, there's pretty much a relationship, whether it's -- you know, rebuilding a grid or getting in more energy or getting in the World Bank or any of these groups. Are you picking up anything on that front?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah, that's a very good question. I have not, frankly speaking. I mean, I've had some discussions about the -- you know, their economic situation which -- you know, I think, alas, no matter how much you help them, they're going to have to help themselves and they're going to have to deal with some of their problems in a systemic way and not just by receiving assistance. I mean, they should be asking themselves, how did they get into the situation where they don't have any heavy fuel oil or don't have the funds to buy heavy fuel oil on their own. And so those are systemic questions which I would look forward to us, within the six-party process, engaging them in this broader dialogue to -- frankly, to try to help their economy.

We hope that in having this energy and economic working group, that they might have some people on their delegation who can speak to some of these broader issues of economic reform and if that could happen, that would be very useful for the future, because if we get through denuclearization, you know, we want to see what we can do to help that country get on its feet. But denuclearization is the key.

Yes.

QUESTION: This sort of falls on that. The United States just signed the Free Trade Act with Korea -- South Korea.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah, South Korea, yeah.

QUESTION: And does that mean that goods from Kaesong will be coming into the United States and has that had any impact -- has that figured in at all to any of these economic --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: That has not figured at all in our North Korean -- in this denuclearization issue. The North Koreans have never raised it. We've never raised it with them. It certainly has been an issue in the context of the FTA negotiations and there was a settlement on that issue that was mutually acceptable, but it has not come up in the denuclearization issues.

QUESTION: Could you do one more, Chris?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah.

QUESTION: I don't know if you had a chance to -- any possibility that North Korea is late to account for all the nuclear program and fissile materials and the uranium enrichment program. Do you sense if there is -- they are ready to account for them -- all of them?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, you know, we're not going to talk about what they're prepared to do. I mean, let me just talk about what we're prepared to do and when we look at a declaration, it has to -- and all means all and we're not prepared to look the other way and pretend that a partial declaration is all, so -- I mean, we, I think, owe it to ourselves, owe it to our citizens to be very vigilant and to insist on all meaning all. And I think that's very, very well understood by everybody.

Yes.

QUESTION: Will this be the last one?

QUESTION: Was there any discussion going on or any decision made about resuming humanitarian aid to North Korea?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Oh, I think there is a -- certainly a willingness to -- you mean on our part?

QUESTION: Yeah.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Oh, I think we are prepared to consider humanitarian aid in the context of the way we consider humanitarian aid everywhere, which is we look at the need for it, we look at the competing need. I mean, even though there's a need in country A, there may be a bigger need in country B, so we have to look at competing need and then we have to look at our ability to monitor our assistance to make sure it's getting to the target group so where we can't have a situation where the recipient country says, "Trust us, we'll take care of it."

So with the understanding that we have to observe that for -- you know, our own people to know that our -- we're taking good care of this kind of assistance, I mean, we are certainly prepared to look at requests and -- you know, assess the need in DPRK.

One more, yeah.

QUESTION: One more, thank you. The -- about the over -- timeframe for the denuclearization is at the end of 2008 as a kind of target of the denuclearization?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I hate to say the end. I mean, it would be in 2008 we would really want to wrap this up; the sooner, the better, I mean, from my humble perspective. But in 2008, we would hope to wrap this up. I hope it wouldn't take 12 months.

All right. James, fast. You have one more -- if I let you have one more and then you'll drive me nuts with some -- all right, watch this. Watch this. Go ahead, James.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: No follow-ups.

QUESTION: I wonder if you are any -- knowing you, I think you'll just say no, but I wonder if you are willing to extrapolate from how the -- from the six-party process, as certain editorial writers have done recently, and draw any lessons from your own dealings with the North Koreans through this construct as to the value of engagement in general?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You know, this is what I do and -- you know, you look at a problem, you try to solve it. You try to solve it with the best way you can and often, it's -- you know, you talk to the guy about the problem and see if you can resolve it. And unfortunately, it doesn't work every time. I'm not willing to say it doesn't work in this case yet. I mean, I'm willing to work on this kind of engagement here, but I'm not willing to tell you that it works everywhere.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 2:58 p.m.)

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