



# THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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## Press Briefing with Ari Fleischer

The James S. Brady Briefing Room

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12:32 P.M. EDT

MR. FLEISCHER: Good afternoon. I have no opening statement for you, so I am at your disposal. Helen -- a fine place to start.

**Q Can you tell us** more of what the President means by revisionist historians? And what is the genesis of that, and on what does he base it?

MR. FLEISCHER: Yesterday, in the President's remarks, he referred to -- he referred it to revisionist historians who are seeming to make the case that Saddam Hussein likely did not have, or did not have, weapons of mass destruction prior to the war. And the President bases that on some of the statements that he has heard where people are expressing doubt about whether or not the intelligence that was provided to the administration, as well as to Congress for many years was accurate intelligence information.

The President has every reason to know that it was, indeed, accurate, just as previous administrations have said so, just as he believes so, and therefore, he said so. And so he looks at it and describes as revisionist history those who now seem to cast doubt on the accuracy of the intelligence information that stated that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction prior to the war.

Q Is he certain they have them now and that you will find them? And I have one more follow-up.

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, the President has repeatedly expressed his confidence that as a result of the actions that we have put in place with the Department of Defense undertaking the search, with the increased number of personnel DOD has now to carry out its mission, as well as the interviews that are being done and will be done with mid-level Iraqi officials, including scientists, the review of the paperwork that we're finding, as well as the expertise of David Kay who is not helping, that we will, indeed, find the weapons of mass destruction.

Q And my other question is, in view of some of the faulty intelligence -- assuming it was faulty -- is there any move now to consolidate all the intelligence agencies, or at least to have them work together under one head?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, that's the case now. The DCI, the Director of Central Intelligence, does head all the various agencies. So when you're talking about the National Security Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, they all do report to the DCI through their various channels.

Q Just to pin this down, you're saying for the record that the President believes that prior to the war Saddam Hussein did have weapons of mass destruction, in the period immediately leading up to this most recent war?

MR. FLEISCHER: Yes. I think there's nothing new here, nothing has changed. You've heard the President say it many, many times -- yes, that's what the President said then, it's what he believes now, of course.

Q Then what is the scenario? Because if there was an imminent threat to the American people that justified the war and no weapons program, as such, has been discovered, then what happened? Were weapons destroyed while U.N. inspectors were there, is that what the President believes? Were they destroyed at another point? And as Helen pointed out earlier, they couldn't have been operational if they weren't really poised to be used, thankfully, against U.S. and other coalition forces. I mean, at the end of the day, isn't it more likely that there is a history lesson here of a weapons program that may have existed, rather than actual weapons that are found?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, it's just as the President described it, based on the judgment and the information that he has received. And the reason I think you're seeing it play out in the manner it is, is exactly

because of the lengths that Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi officials went to hide the weapons of mass destruction that they had.

After all, it was the United Nations, when they left Iraq, when they were thrown out of Iraq in 1998, that concluded and told the world that Iraq had failed to account for the thousands of liters of botulin, of VX, of sarin gas. It was the United Nations who put it on the record and reported they had it.

Now, of course, we had information that also lent credence to that conclusion. To suggest that Saddam Hussein threw out the inspectors and, therefore, used the fact that the inspectors were gone to destroy his weapons, is fanciful. It's a fit of imagination.

So the fact is he did design a system that was intended to conceal it from the inspectors. After all, even in the early to mid '90s, when we did find the proof of the weapons of mass destruction, it was only after defectors told us about it. The inspectors were in the country, and they were unable to find it because of the great lengths the Saddam Hussein regime had gone to perfect their ability to hide and to conceal.

And we still are in an environment where whatever they hid, and whatever they concealed could remain hidden and concealed. In addition, as the President has said publicly --

Q But do you know what imminent means, and --

MR. FLEISCHER: In addition -- imminent is my next sentence. I was in the middle of it. (Laughter.) In addition to the fact, the President said earlier, that they may have destroyed some of it.

**Q I want to follow up on a different** topic, and that's fundraising tonight. The President may raise \$200 million just in this primary season when he doesn't face a challenger, and the Democrats are obviously knocking themselves out to try to emerge. What's he going to do with the money?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, the President is preparing for his reelection. And part of the preparation is, of course, to raise money from Republicans and others who support his candidacy across the country. Next year is an election year and the President is preparing for it.

Q But, specifically, what's he going to do with the money in the primary season? Does he see this as a strategic advantage to try to undercut the Democratic nominee while that nominee is cash-poor, et cetera?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, every day, there are nine Democratic candidates who are running against the President, saying negative things about the President. And part of the President's efforts next year will be to rebut the statements that will increasingly be made about the President, all from a negative point of view, and to make sure that he has the resource to be able to rebut some of these arguments, and to be able to make arguments of his own.

Q Could we see, even this summer, ads promoting his own accomplishments?

MR. FLEISCHER: It's much too early for the White House to focus on that aspect of it yet.

Q Is that a "no"?

MR. FLEISCHER: It's much too early.

Q But that's not a "no"?

MR. FLEISCHER: Tom.

Q For two days in a row --

MR. FLEISCHER: It's still too early.

**Q For two days in a row** the President has now talked about the economy and his economic package, but he hasn't mentioned extending the child credit to lower-income families. Is this still an important part of his program, and what is he going to do to move this through the conference committee?

MR. FLEISCHER: It is important. The President has urged the Congress to very quickly reconcile the differences between the House-passed version and the Senate-passed version. It's important to do so. The President is prepared to sign that into law. He wants to sign it into law. And he calls on both parties, House and Senate, to work together quickly to resolve their differences. He does believe that low-income families should get a child credit.

Q Is there a reason why he hasn't been mentioning this in the last couple speeches?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think there are any number of issues that are on the economic agenda that the President can mention at any given time. He believes in it. He didn't talk today, for example, about extending the death tax permanently, which is something that he also believes in. There are a host of economic issues that he addresses and he talks about them from time to time.

**Q In his comments in Annandale**, he seemed to be a little more pessimistic about the economy than you seemed to be this morning from this podium. He was talking about it being still kind of shaky. Is there -- is the President -- is he viewing the economic data that's come in and the stock market increase in the same way --

MR. FLEISCHER: My word was "mixed;" his word was "shaky." It seems to me that you can put the two together and have the same thing. So I think we're saying the same thing.

Q By the same token, is he still encouraged by this huge stock market rally we've had since March?

MR. FLEISCHER: It's the exact answers I gave you this morning about that topic.

**Q One on fundraising, one on Iraq.** On Iraq, the President said Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction. You're telling us he is certain the intelligence on which he based that statement is accurate. How can he say it's accurate when the search hasn't turned anything up and isn't finished?

MR. FLEISCHER: Because the President is patient, and he understands the American people are patient, as well, in the face --

Q How does he know it's accurate when the search isn't over and it hasn't found any weapons? How can he say the intelligence he got that Saddam Hussein was in possession of weapons of mass destruction, that that intelligence was accurate and reliable when the search isn't done?

MR. FLEISCHER: Because the very nature of intelligence -- if the only reason you came to conclusions was because somebody found something, then you wouldn't need any intelligence, you would just wait

for events to take place. The intelligence is exactly what allows you to make judgments about future events that are not yet known because you haven't found them. That's the nature of intelligence.

Q But isn't the discovery of actual weaponry what demonstrates the accuracy of intelligence -- that he was in possession of actual weaponry?

MR. FLEISCHER: And the President is confident in the accuracy of that intelligence.

Q How?

MR. FLEISCHER: Because based on the history of Iraq, based on Saddam Hussein's previous possession of weapons of mass destruction which were known, based on the fact that I just indicated -- the United Nations, themselves, concluded that Saddam Hussein had failed to account for the thousands of liters of biological and chemical weapons that he possessed.

The only way to lend credence to what you're saying is that when the United Nations concluded in 1998 that Saddam Hussein did, indeed, have these weapons, that he had failed to account for them, is that Saddam Hussein threw out the inspectors and destroyed his weapons of mass destruction and lost the receipt. How come Saddam Hussein didn't prove to the world that he had destroyed them if, when, indeed, he had them, yet he was not able to show the inspectors who were just in Iraq that he did, indeed, destroy them. That's a fanciful interpretation. That's what the President judges as revisionist.

Q That's not evidence, that's an argument. And you said the President is -- knows that the intelligence he got was -- not that he's confident, not that he has faith, but that he knows that that intelligence is accurate.

MR. FLEISCHER: The President has every reason to believe it's accurate.

**Q Based on that argument.** On the fundraising thing, the President I guess is expected to raise upwards of \$200 million. That's a staggering figure. What should ordinary Americans in this tough economy, mixed, shaky economy, make of that enormous figure?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, one, I caution everybody about jumping to conclusions about how much money ultimately can or will be raised. I think we've had this conversation before about how people are putting that number out there, and I think that's based on the fact that the campaign laws doubled the funding and that people are looking at what he raised in the last cycle. That's not necessarily indicative of how it will be.

Whatever the case is for the ultimate number, the President will follow the laws of the land, he will follow the campaign finance laws, and he will ask the American people of all parties to support him. The American people will be the ones who decide how much money the President raises by the amount of support they decide to give him.

Q Certainly, but I'm asking about the system and what should people make of our political system that this incumbent President is going to raise this very large amount of money?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think it's probably a good indication that the President has a strong amount of support throughout the country. I think it's also an indication that the American people are fortunate not to live in a system where they are compelled to give money from their taxes to support candidates or causes they did not believe in. That would be taxpayer financed campaigns, and I think the American people like the fact that candidates have to seek their support, ask for their support, and are not entitled to take taxpayer money to use for their own reelections when the taxpayers did not support the cause or the candidate in question. That's our American system. It's a newly-reformed system based on the campaign finance laws that President Bush signed into law.

Q What will the President base his campaign on? Why does he deserve reelection?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, again, the President is focused right now on governing. He is doing what needs to be done to prepare for the election year. The President's focus on governing is exactly as he laid out in the State of the Union message, which is on economic security and on national security.

Q Two questions, please. With all the questions being asked by the intelligence agencies of the United States, as the Senate is preparing to hold hearings this week presided by Pat Roberts, is the President in favor of there being open hearings so people can answer some of the questions that Terry was asking?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, certainly, the Congress has at its discretion as it goes through its hearing process, decisions about open and closed. Currently, if there's a discussion of classified information, that will be done in a closed session. If it's a discussion of things that are not classified, it can be done in open session. The President has welcomed these hearings. After all, this is information that has been shared with the Congress, going back now some -- one decade in both the open and closed format before.

**Q My second question, if you would** be so kind. Yesterday, the authorities announced the detainment of 14 people involved with the illegal aliens who died in Victoria, Texas last month. Fourteen people have been charged, I think 56 counts. Has the President been following this thing? I know he's been pretty busy with this international agenda. Is this a subject that he's following?

MR. FLEISCHER: This is something that's very close to the President's heart. And this is where I think you've heard the President, as a Texan, someone who has seen some of the tragedies that have taken place on our borders, reflect on, because the President looks at this, he looks at it as a matter of values, of, as he puts it, a woman, a mother, who wants to feed a child and come to America for more opportunity. And we need to find a way to welcome people, to have opportunity in the United States. And, as he puts it, when a mother wants to feed a child, she's going to come, she's going to try to come

into the United States and give her child a better life.

And that's why the President views the importance of improving relations with our allies, and our friends down in Central America and Latin America. That's such an important issue. This is why he was working so hard prior to September 11th to have a reform of our immigration laws. And it is a very sensitive and, I think, matter of compassion with the President.

Q Ari, a couple of weeks ago, you said from the podium the President really wasn't concerned about his retractors for the Oval Office. Why now are you concerned? And could you explain -- you didn't answer Steve's question as to why the President deserves people punching a chad or pulling down a lever for him this time?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, I indicated that the President right now is focused on governing. And what the President is focused on when it comes to governing is on providing economic security and national security for the American people. There will come a time, but it has not come yet, for the President to engage more in political activity. This is not an election year, but this is the period of time in which incoming Presidents have, historically, prepared for their election years.

Q But what's changed? I mean, just a couple of weeks ago, you were not worried at all about the Democrats and what they were saying. And now, you know, you're saying that they have all these negative words about the President, he's going to rebut it next year.

MR. FLEISCHER: It's just perfectly consistent. What I've indicated is you've asked me many times from this podium to respond to this barb or that barb that the Democrats like to throw at him, and I typically don't have to engage in that because the President is not. The President is focused on governing.

But, as I just indicated, there is an election year coming up next year and the President is going to prepare for it. So there are two tracks to it, and the President is engaged on this track.

Q I want to try once more on the approach Terry was trying to get at. Let me ask you first -- and it may have been too close to when you came out here -- but right before you came out the American Medical Association endorsed cloning for research purposes. Anything you want to say on that?

MR. FLEISCHER: I have not seen their specific report on it. And as you know, the President's positions on this are well-known. The President is opposed to human cloning in all its forms. And I have not seen any of the nuances in what the AMA has seen or even the headline on what they have said.

**Q Back on the intelligence in Iraq.** After September 11th, there was a great debate in this country about the failure of the intelligence agencies to connect certain dots, because of failures to communicate between agencies, and the like. Is there not a sliver of doubt anywhere in this administration that it is possible that the reverse took place in this case, that because of the evidence of known weapons programs in Iraq that everyone agrees to in the 1990s, anthrax and the like, that when they saw things happening later, that people connected dots that necessarily maybe should not have been connected, based on suspicions, not facts?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think based on what was known and shown and proved by Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction which they did, indeed, use, based on what was known about Saddam

Hussein's pursuit of these weapons, and based on the findings of the United Nations inspectors, based on the findings of the intelligence community throughout the '90s and into the early part of this President's administration, leading right up to the war, the conclusions were reached because they were the conclusions based on the best intelligence. And the President is confident in them. The Congress was confident in them.

I would suggest to you, go back and read any number of speeches given by members of Congress, Democrat and Republican alike, in 1998, when the Congress passed -- and wisely passed -- the regime change act for Iraq, and you'll find floor speech after floor speech that talks about Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction. Members of Congress said it with certainty then; the previous administration said it with certainty then. And unless somebody thinks, again, that Saddam Hussein threw out the weapons inspectors and after he threw out the weapons inspectors he got rid of his weapons of mass destruction and didn't tell anybody, and had no proof that he got rid of his weapons of mass destruction -- that's why the intelligence community continues to believe as strongly as it has and does that Saddam Hussein did, indeed, have weapons of mass destruction leading up to the war.

Q But you don't rule out that some of it, some of what the intelligence community says might not be exactly right? We go through this every time the threat level goes from yellow to orange, that there is stuff out there --

MR. FLEISCHER: No, but there's a fundamental conclusion that has been reached and that doesn't change.

Q Ari, a quick two-part question. You said there will come a time when the President engages in political activities. How will we know when that happens? (Laughter.)

MR. FLEISCHER: You're not trying to lead me somewhere with that type of question, are you?

Q Never, Ari.

MR. FLEISCHER: Very judicious of you.

Q Will you be landing somewhere? (Laughter.)

MR. FLEISCHER: I hope you enjoyed it. (Laughter.) Your network surely did.

You know, there will come a time when the President will, as events get closer to an election, to Election Day, the President will engage in more overt campaigning. That time is not here. I think the American people typically think campaigns go on too long, and the President tends to agree with that. Nevertheless, the President will prepare for the campaign -- after all, next year does end in an even number.

Q And also in the last, 2000 and coming up, the President will accept federal funds in the general election.

MR. FLEISCHER: Correct.

Q Is there any dash of hypocrisy in that he doesn't contribute to that fund when he files his tax returns?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, interestingly, we talked before about taxpayer-financed elections, and while for the congressional races, Senate races and House races, and for overwhelming majority of the funds that go to presidential races is voluntary, there is that check on the tax reforms. And the best I remember this from IRS data is something like only 12 percent, or down to 8 percent of the American people check that box. So I think the President is in pretty good company with a number of American people who do not check that box.

Q Why would he take the money, then?

MR. FLEISCHER: As you know, he's not taking the money for the primary campaign; he will take it for the general.

Q Does he prefer a privately-financed system altogether?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think he signed into law the system that he supports.

Q The amount of money the President is trying to raise, as everyone has noted, is an enormous amount of money. You seem to be suggesting that the President views this as an arsenal that he can dip into in order to fight back against Democratic claims that he's doing one thing or another. Is that sort of the way you see it?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think there is a certain obviousness in our political system, in our democracy, that when candidates run for office they raise money. And the President will begin raising money tonight to help him prepare for a year that ends in an even number.

Q But he's going to extraordinary lengths. I mean --

MR. FLEISCHER: Not really. He's holding fundraisers.

Q Right. But he's going to raise more money than anyone has ever raised, twice what he raised last time, which itself was a record. I mean, doesn't --

MR. FLEISCHER: I don't think that's an indication of the lengths to which the President is going. I think it's an indication about the lengths of -- the breadth of support that he has from the American people. After all, an incumbent, or even a challenger cannot raise money if the person does not have the support from the public. And the President has broad support from the public; otherwise he would not be successful in this endeavor.

Q Right. But we were talking more about the amount of money he's going to raise. And even when he was a challenger he raised a huge amount of money. I mean, I'm just trying to get a sense from you of why the President thinks it's necessary to raise as much as he hopes to raise.

MR. FLEISCHER: Again, there are nine Democrats who spend all of their time saying negative things about the President. And that means there is a large resonation, a large reinforcement of a negative message that's coming at the President. The President is a competitor and he will prepare for what he needs to do in a reelection.

**Q Okay. One other thing**, if I may, on a different topic. David Kay has been appointed special advisor

to Tenet, as you've noted here. There was one story that suggested that the White House had sort of dumped the whole responsibility for finding weapons of mass destruction on to the CIA and put it in charge of the effort to find weapons in Iraq.

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, it's the CIA and the DOD doing it together. If you can imagine a country as large as Iraq -- which, as you know, is the size of California -- it requires a tremendous number of people to help move with the logistics, to get people into place, to carry out their work. Iraq remains a place with great danger in many places, and so there has to be security provided for some of the experts to travel around. So it's a combination, it's a combined effort of the CIA and the DOD.

Q And who is in charge of that effort?

MR. FLEISCHER: It's a combined effort. So it's the two of them. I think when it comes to intelligence information, the CIA is the keeper of the intelligence information. When it comes to much of the logistics and to the assistance and to the moving around, DOD, of course, can help provide that.

Q Ari, when you said earlier that Saddam must have had weapons of mass destruction because he had them and we don't have receipts for their destruction, and so forth, are you indicating that we went to war basically on an inference that he had to have them, or was there specific, credible evidence --

MR. FLEISCHER: This was asked before. It is based on intelligence information that led to the conclusion of this administration, the previous administration and many on the Hill that Saddam Hussein did indeed have weapons of mass destruction, of course.

Q So there was enough specific, credible information of the existence of weapons, not any inference, but of the actual existence of weapons, there was enough of that to lead us to go to war?

MR. FLEISCHER: Let me give you an example --

Q Can you answer that question before you --

MR. FLEISCHER: -- Saddam having weapons of mass destruction, Saddam Hussein's militaristic history in which he had used weapons of mass destruction against others --

Q I'm not asking about history. I'm specifically not asking about history. I'm asking about what we saw on the ground just before the war, did we know that those weapons were there.

MR. FLEISCHER: You cannot separate the two. You cannot separate history --

Q So you're saying that we did not have enough of that.

MR. FLEISCHER: I'm saying it's a combination; that the decision to go to war was based on the knowledge that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, and Saddam Hussein had a history of using weapons of mass destruction, that he had a militaristic history; and that we successfully carried out a war, and did so in a way that Saddam Hussein was not able to use his weapons of mass destruction, that he may have had some of it destroyed, that he had it hidden, as part of a whole apparatus of concealment that he mastered over the years as he dealt with United Nations inspectors.

Q On the credible evidence that we did know about, whatever amount of that there was, I assume that our intelligence capabilities before the war are the same as they were -- as they are now. So how it is

possible that we were able to discern those weapons before the war, but we can't when we have 200,000 troops on the ground?

MR. FLEISCHER: Let me give you a good example. These are the biological trucks that Secretary Powell spoke of at the United Nations. When Secretary Powell spoke about those, he couldn't tell anybody exactly where they were, but we had intelligence information that he had them. Now, the inability to say exactly where they are does not disprove the fact that he has them. And of course, as time went along, Secretary Powell was proven exactly right and the intelligence community was proven exactly right about what they said on these trucks.

The President has said before that he is patient, the American people are patient and he is confident that in time we will find this.

**Q Several questions on fundraising.** First of all, why is it that the President checks the "no" box? Does he have a philosophical rejection, or what's his reason for doing that?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, I think the President views campaign funding as a voluntary matter, as the American people do, where people want to support the candidate of their choice. We have on the presidential level a somewhat mixed system where there is some level of taxpayer support. And the President, as you know, in the primary is not going to accept any taxpayer support, he will raise funds privately -- which means he will get support as the American people see fit to give it.

Q But why does he -- why does he check the "no" box?

MR. FLEISCHER: Because I think the President's approach is that from him, personally, that he believes in personally financing the causes in which he believes.

Q But he does accept public funding for the general election.

MR. FLEISCHER: That's correct.

Q Yet he is not contributing to it by checking that box. Isn't there a disconnect?

MR. FLEISCHER: That's the way our system works. If he contributed to it, he'd have three more dollars.

Q But you won't answer the question why --

MR. FLEISCHER: I think I just did.

Q The President has a fairly brisk fundraising schedule over the next few weeks. Does he want to get all of this, or most of this done before the first of the year? Is that the timetable that he set forth on fundraising?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, I think just as always in our system, the President will follow the law and raise funds over a period of time, as the campaign determines, and that will continue throughout this year and into next year.

Q And into next year?

MR. FLEISCHER: Certainly.

Q One last question. David was asking you about when he might start TV advertising, your answer was to the effect that he intends next year to rebuff the Democratic arguments against him. Does that imply that he won't start advertising --

MR. FLEISCHER: My answer was that it's too soon to say, it's too soon to indicate. David very cleverly tried to pin me down to a more specific timetable, and I just indicated it's too soon to say.

Q Well, your words were, though, he intends next year to rebut those arguments. Does that indicate that you won't begin to put up TV spots this year?

MR. FLEISCHER: I'm saying it's too soon for us to even begin any discussion about when any type of paid media campaign may or may not begin.

**Q Ari, one of the great** personal and political strengths that the President's polls show is that he's trusted by the American people. Is he concerned that the longer this weapons of mass destruction issue goes on that it's going to erode that trust?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, I think the American people have faith and confidence in the statements that the President made. And the American people, after all, have heard these very same statements for some 10 years now from elected officials, from members of Congress, from the previous administration. So I think, again, this is not new to the American people and the American people understand that Saddam Hussein had a very, very detailed program of concealment that he mastered in order to hide his weapons of mass destruction from the inspectors.

And again I remind you that in the early to mid-'90s, were it not for the defectors, the United Nations inspectors never would have even known about the weapons of mass destruction that Saddam Hussein did, indeed, possess and was proved to have possessed at that time. It's the nature of concealment, and Saddam Hussein was a master of it.

Q Isn't there a point, though, where the longer this goes on, the more erosion there might be?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, again, you'll be able to make those judgments over time.

Q If I could follow up on Jim's question. I think the article that he was citing also suggested that Director Tenet is a potential fall guy if it turns out that there -- you know, if WMD doesn't pop up. Can you tell us about that? Is that, in fact, the case? Is the Director of the CIA --

MR. FLEISCHER: Again, the President has every confidence that the intelligence that he received was accurate intelligence and that weapons of mass destruction will, indeed, be found. The President has full faith in Director Tenet. And the President is focused on pursuing the reconstruction of Iraq. We have the team that's on the ground now that is working on the finding of the weapons of mass destruction.

Q Is there one person that is responsible for rounding up the WMD? This article did suggest that the onus has put on at least CIA at this point.

MR. FLEISCHER: It's a joint effort, just as I said.

Q One more unrelated follow-up to Tom -- thank you very much. (Laughter.)

MR. FLEISCHER: Wait a minute, I didn't answer you yet.

Q The President said he's behind the tax credit, there's no -- for low-income folks, there's no question about that. However, it's been a few weeks since that position was first announced from this podium. Is it getting closer to a time where the President may have to suggest to members of his own party that this is a good thing --

MR. FLEISCHER: The House of Representatives just took its action last week, and now the conference between the House and the Senate will begin. This is the pace the Congress follows. But the President's message to the Congress is unequivocal. The President wants to sign the child credit into law. He thinks it's the appropriate thing to do for low-income families. He wants the House and the Senate to quickly reconcile their differences so that it can, indeed, be signed into law.

Q Ari, two questions. First, can you comment on reports that Condi Rice will be going to the Middle East?

MR. FLEISCHER: I'm not going to engage a speculation about any potential travel. If we have travel from the National Security Advisor, we'll keep you posted, but I'm not going to speculate.

**Q Secondly, on fundraising.** Governor Dean has said that it's a threat to democracy for any one presidential candidate to have two or three times more money to get his or her message out than any other candidate. Regardless of how much money the President plans to raise, does he see any merit whatsoever in that argument?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well again, I think the amount of money that candidates raise in our democracy is a reflection of the amount of support they have around the country. So the President is proud to have the support of the American people, and the American people will ultimately be the ones who decide how much funding goes to any Democrat or any Republican.

Q How can that really be reflective of his support, though, considering he's getting money from people who can afford to go to dinner for \$2,000? I mean, most Americans cannot afford that. So how can that really be reflective of his support from middle America?

MR. FLEISCHER: The rules are equal. The rules are the same for both parties, for the Democrats and the Republicans. Both parties compete knowing that. They, of course, raise money from all groups of Americans, including many low-dollar donors. And, again, the American people decide how much support to give either candidate in either party.

Q It's also known, Ari, that the labor union members overwhelmingly support Democrats, or have in previous elections. So how can that really, you know -- that doesn't really support your argument.

MR. FLEISCHER: I'm not sure of your point, Heidi.

Q I mean, Gore was endorsed by most of the labor -- you know, major labor unions.

MR. FLEISCHER: Right. So the American people have spoken because one segment of our society has spoken? I stand by what I've said about the American people, broadly.

**Q Ari, the federal appeals** court ruling on detainees, allowing the administration to continue not to publicly identify these detainees -- why was it necessary not to identify these folks who were rounded up after September 11th?

MR. FLEISCHER: This is a matter the Department of Justice works on in a way that makes certain that we -- they are protective of the national security needs of our country, while making certain that it's all done within the Constitution. And that's what the courts have found today.

Q I understand the argument, but why is just publishing their names such a threat to national security?

MR. FLEISCHER: When it comes to the legal matters of how cases are prosecuted in a court or the procedures by which detainments are followed, the Department of Justice is your source on that. The Department of Justice may have more to indicate on that.

I'd note today the Department of Justice is also announcing today the follow-up to the President's announcement in the State of the Union from two years ago about policies dealing with banning racial profiling. The Department of Justice has an important announcement that they are making today about the follow-up to that, where they are taking action now to make certain that racial profiling is not allowed by our federal law enforcement agencies. And the President is very pleased to hear the Department of Justice taking that action today.

Q Ari, you said several times today, the President is still confident that weapons of mass destruction will be found in Iraq. But last week the President made a distinction, and said that he was confident evidence of a weapons of mass destruction program --

MR. FLEISCHER: Right. And I was asked about that when the President said that, and I indicated to the press that very day that the President uses the two interchangeably. When he says, weapons program, he means also, weapons of mass destruction.

**Q And can you give us** an update on Ambassador Wolf's activities in the Mideast?

MR. FLEISCHER: Ambassador Wolf is on the ground in the Middle East. He's already had a series of meetings with officials there. And there are a series of talks that are underway in the Middle East. There are talks between Palestinians and the Palestinians -- different entities within the Palestinian community -- including the terrorist organization Hamas.

The Ambassador is in contact with Israeli officials; he's in contact with Palestinian officials. And the reason he is there and the reasons that Secretary Powell and Dr. Rice met yesterday with the Israeli chief of staff -- the chief of staff to the Israeli Prime Minister -- was because of the President's strong message, which he continues to repeat, about the need for the parties to adhere to the road map to follow the vision toward peace. There's a lot of work underway behind the scenes in these meetings that I just described, trying to help achieve the return of the peace process laid out in the road map.

Q Thank you. Two questions, Iran and Saudi Arabia. First on Iran. How much support is the U.S. willing to give the students -- the dissenting students who are actually putting their lives at risk in their protests?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, we're alarmed about the reports of the arrests and the provocations that the

Iranian regime has taken against the protesters. The protesters are expressing their peaceful voices. They're expressing their yearning to have a government that is representative and a government that is tolerant. And as the President said in his July 12th statement, which is his definitive statement of policy of United States' approach to Iran, we believe in the voices of these Iranians and we hope the day will come when the Iranians have a government that allows reform to take place.

Q Will the U.S. intervene to protect them in any way?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, our message is the voice of support that you have heard for the Iranian students.

**Q Also, on Saudi Arabia.** There's been quite a bit of publicity today on the Saudis' alleged support of terrorist groups, and also on the issue of divided families, American families hold up in the embassy, and so forth, trying to get their half-Saudi children out of the country. Any comments on those two issues?

MR. FLEISCHER: No. On the second one, that's a State Department matter that is a specific matter. Family by family, they review these cases. It's not only in Saudi Arabia where you have heartrending cases about family disputes that involve the laws of another country and the laws of the United States. That happens around the world. And that's why the State Department has consular offices and diplomats stationed around the world, to help each family deal with the specifics of their individual case with each foreign country.

Q Saudi support of terrorists?

MR. FLEISCHER: Saudi Arabia, as the President has said, is a good ally of the United States in the war against terror. And certainly Saudi Arabia, even before, but especially since the bombing in Riyadh, has stepped up its activities to fight terror.

Q Senator Patrick Leahy sent the President a list of names of candidates that he finds acceptable to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court. What is the President's response to the Senator, who is stepping outside the Senate's traditional advise and consent role?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, number one, there are no vacancies on the Supreme Court. Number two, in the event a vacancy were to occur at some point in the future, the President will follow the Constitution. And the Constitution says that the President shall nominate, and the Senate shall participate through advice and consent.

Q Ari, on page one of this morning's Washington Times, you are quoted as disagreeing with the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in saying, "The President's message is that the best security comes from the Israelis and Palestinians working together to fight terror." And my question is, can you name even one Palestinian organization or individual who has ever expressed realistic willingness to join Israel in fighting Hamas or any of the many other Palestinian terrorist organizations?

MR. FLEISCHER: This is why what took place in Jordan was so important, because previously, with Yasser Arafat in charge of the Palestinian Authority, the answer was hard to find. Now there is a new moment of opportunity both for the Israelis and for the Palestinian people, with Prime Minister Abbas and with his Security Minister Dahlan in charge -- Mohammed Dahlan, in charge of fighting terror.

And the President does believe in the statements that he received from Prime Minister Abbas about his dedication to finding a peaceful solution, and to fighting terror. And, very importantly, the Arab nations are also participating in helping Prime Minister Abbas and Minister Dahlan to be successful on their fight against the terrorist elements.

Q Former Vermont Governor Howard Dean, who won the Wisconsin state Democratic convention poll decisively, over Senator Kerry and the others, has said, regarding the location of Saddam's WMDs, "How much did the President know, and when did he know it?" And my question is, in view of the statements last year in which Senators Kerry, Liebermann, and Graham, as well as Congressman Gephardt, all affirmed that Saddam had WMDs, doesn't the President believe this Dean smear is more directed at Dean's rival Democrats than at the President?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think -- the fact of the matter is there is a terrible split in the Democratic Party and among its presidential candidates about whether or not Saddam had weapons of mass destruction.

Q So he's going after the Democrats rather than the President, isn't he?

MR. FLEISCHER: Many who have the most experience have said that Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction, indeed.

Thank you.

END 1:11 P.M. EDT