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## Press Gaggle by Scott Stanzel

Crawford Middle School  
Crawford, Texas

11:37 A.M. CST

 [Press Briefings](#)

MR. STANZEL: Good afternoon, everyone. Happy to take your questions.

Q Scott, do you have any update on the President calling President Musharraf at all? And any plans for the President to attend a funeral?

MR. STANZEL: The President does plan to talk with President Musharraf today. We had reached out to them earlier, to make those arrangements, but that has not happened yet. You should also know that Secretary Rice has spoken with Benazir Bhutto's husband to offer our condolences, but don't have anything for you beyond that.

Q Any chance of going to a funeral, or would you send Secretary Rice or somebody else?

MR. STANZEL: It's too early to tell. We'll see what those arrangements are, and we can provide information as it comes in.

Q Scott, does the White House support the possible postponing of elections in Pakistan, given what's happened today?

MR. STANZEL: Well, I think that is up to the Pakistanis. Free and fair elections are an integral part of a democratic society, and we're in the opening hours of this tragedy, this assassination. But that is up to the people of Pakistan.

Q And more broadly, can you comment a bit about the implications for U.S. policy in Pakistan because of what's happened today? I mean, as the White House sees it, given the declaration of emergency rule and then what's happened with this assassination, is democracy failing?

MR. STANZEL: I think it's important to take a step back and consider what we're facing here. This is the nature of the enemy we face. We face terrorists who will stop at nothing. They will take innocent life to stop the march of democracy. And we have seen that in other places around the world -- suicide

bombers who kill wantonly. And the President decided to take the fight to the enemy in 2001 to confront this type of danger, because terrorist thugs want to stop the march of democracy, they want to stop the advancement of liberty, and they will stop at nothing to do so. So it is a reminder of the threats that we face.

Q Who do you believe was responsible for this attack?

MR. STANZEL: That would be up to the Pakistani officials to investigate. Let's be clear: Whoever perpetuated this violence was someone who was an enemy of democracy. But it's too early, at this point, to say that from our perspective. Understand there are various -- there may be claims of responsibility out there, but I'm sure the Pakistani authorities will be looking into the matter.

Steven.

Q Scott, how confident are you that there will be a thorough investigation, given that there -- the same calls were made after the bombing, when she first returned, and there's been no progress that we know of in finding out who carried out that event.

MR. STANZEL: I think it's -- from our perspective, it's important to have a review of this and to look into the matter, and I think it's important to the long-term prospects of democracy in Pakistan that there be an open review of this matter. And I think that that is something that is necessary.

Q Is that something the United States is prepared to assist with?

MR. STANZEL: Well, you know, again, we're in the opening hours of this tragedy, and the President looks forward to his conversation with President Musharraf today. Obviously we're in contact with Pakistani officials. Pakistan has been an ally in the war on terror. President Musharraf, himself, has faced numerous assassination attempts, numerous attempts on his life, so he is familiar with the threat from extremists. We're in the early hours of this matter, but certainly Pakistan has been a close ally in the war on terror, and we look forward to those further conversations.

Yes, Savannah.

Q Does the administration trust the Pakistani government to investigate properly whether the government, itself, or any elements within it were involved in this attack?

MR. STANZEL: Well, that's sort of the answer that I provided to Steven. I think it's important to have a thorough investigation of that. We expect that that will happen and, like I said I said to Steven, I think we're willing to work with our allies in Pakistan to make sure that does happen.

Yes.

Q Does President Bush plan to offer any guidance to President Musharraf regarding whether to hold the elections next month? And, also, does he plan to discourage any imposition of, for example, martial

law in Pakistan?

MR. STANZEL: Well, the conversation hasn't happened yet, so the President does look forward to his conversation with President Musharraf. But we would urge calm -- and there is a risk of -- after an assassination like this of a political leader, there is a risk of people turning to violence to express their anger. And we would urge calm and hope that all the Pakistanis would mourn her death, celebrate her life, and unite together in opposition to the types of extremists that are trying to stop the march of democracy.

Q When you were saying before that Musharraf is an ally in the war on terror, are you concerned, though, when The New York Times, for example, reported just a few days ago that a lot of the U.S. aid for Pakistan has been wasted and has not gone to fighting extremists, any concern at all that he is not fully onboard and you need push him a little bit?

MR. STANZEL: Well, I think it's important to remember that Pakistan -- the Pakistan military has lost hundreds of soldiers in the fight against extremism. They have lost life in their fight against these types of terrorists. Certainly when it comes to aid that is provided, we always want to make sure it's used for the purposes for which it was provided, and those are ongoing reviews that we always have with all countries around the world.

But I think that there is -- what is clear is there are extremist elements in Pakistan and other places around the world who do want to stop democracy and will take measures -- like killing innocent people at a democratic rally -- to try to stop that advancement.

Laurent.

Q Does the President think that President Musharraf did his utmost to protect Benazir Bhutto? And what level of confidence can President Bush have in President Musharraf now, after this act?

MR. STANZEL: The President looks forward to his conversation with President Musharraf. Certainly security is an important matter. But as the President said earlier today, Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan knowing the risk that she faced, knowing that there would be people who would try to stop her calls for democracy. So the -- it was a dangerous situation, but she returned to it because she believed in democracy. But in terms of providing security and the arrangements that were made, that's not something that I can comment further on.

Q Who is here at the ranch -- who is physically here at the ranch to help advise the President on this? And is there any thought of somebody -- of the Secretary of State or national security coming here to help him in this crisis?

MR. STANZEL: Well, the President is always, wherever he goes, he travels with staff. He's here with national security staff and various other members of the senior White House staff --

Q And who is the top member that is here?

MR. STANZEL: I'm sorry?

Q Who is the top member of national security --

MR. STANZEL: Well, there are numerous people that essentially have the same rank, so there isn't one top person. But Stephen Hadley, the President's National Security Advisor, is in Washington, D.C., and they participate regularly in secure video teleconferences. So the President is never without the advice of his advisors. This morning, as you know, he participated in his regular intelligence briefing, where they did discuss this matter. So the President is always with staff wherever he goes.

Q And any thoughts any of any of them coming out here?

MR. STANZEL: Not at this time, but there will be various staff members here throughout the time here.

Q There are reports that the White House is reaching out to General Kayani in Pakistan. Can you explain what that means?

MR. STANZEL: We have an open dialogue with General Kayani, we have strong lines of communication with him. You may recall that Deputy Secretary Negroponte was recently in Pakistan and did have discussions with him. I believe that might be better described as the administration is reaching out to him, because I'm not aware that the White House is reaching out to him directly. But certainly the State Department, Defense Department and other officials throughout the government do have a relationship with General Kayani.

Q So the reaching out, I mean, why him, and --

MR. STANZEL: Well, obviously security and stability is important. And in the wake of this tragedy, we want to talk with officials in Pakistan to make sure that we are providing our advice as they need it or want it. Certainly General Kayani has a responsibility for stability in the country, as the leader of the army. And those are conversations that would be natural, I think.

Q Why is it taking so long to set up a phone call between President Bush and President Musharraf? Isn't he just able to --

MR. STANZEL: Actually the first time we reached out to him, President Musharraf I understand was talking with reporters. So serving your needs, and that's why the conversation didn't happen at that point. So when was that was occurring, we just decided that we would have it later today. That will happen shortly.

Q And what was President Bush's initial reaction when he heard the news that Bhutto was assassinated?

MR. STANZEL: Well, you got his reaction earlier today. And he did want to make a statement about it, because he thought it was very important to call attention to the matter, and to make sure that --

Q I mean, was he in shock, was he --

MR. STANZEL: I wasn't in the briefing, so I couldn't describe it -- I couldn't describe his immediate reaction, but you saw his statement earlier today. But certainly it is a tragedy, and it's a life that we mourn the loss of.

Jim.

Q Scott, how soon after the assassination was the President informed? And also, you've been saying "extremists" and "terrorists" -- can you be more specific? Is the government hearing anything that is more specific than that, that takes it to al Qaeda?

MR. STANZEL: I don't -- I've seen and I'm aware that al Qaeda may have claimed responsibility. I'm aware of news reports of that, but I don't have any specifics for you on that. But certainly whoever perpetrated this attack is an enemy of democracy, and has used a tactic which al Qaeda is very familiar with, and that is suicide bombing and the taking of innocent life to try to disrupt a democratic process.

You had asked about when the President heard -- his regular intelligence briefing began this morning at 7:30 a.m. and he was informed at that time.

Q Scott, will you give us a readout after the phone call with Musharraf?

MR. STANZEL: I'm not sure that I will, but I'll see what I can do for you.

Q At least let us know it happened?

MR. STANZEL: Yes, certainly.

Q You were asked about this, but does the President have a position on whether elections should go forward on January 8th?

MR. STANZEL: And I would refer you to that answer, and that is that that is matter for the people of Pakistan, and what they believe is right in terms of advancing democracy is what we would support. So it is important that the democratic process move forward. We believe that is the right thing to do. Obviously we're just in the early hours of the wake of this tragedy, so those are discussions that the various political parties in Pakistan are probably having right now.

Yes.

Q I have an airline question.

MR. STANZEL: Yes.

Q Today you announced that you would extend reinsurance on airlines. Why that decision -- you know, what led to that decision? Why are you only giving it another year? What's the process?

MR. STANZEL: Why am I -- why are we what? I'm sorry.

Q Why are we giving it just another year?

MR. STANZEL: Well, that is a continuation of a policy. I can work to get you more information on that. But I understand that that's a continuation -- that was a determination that was made to continue that policy for another year, and that was on -- certainly on the advise of transportation officials and what we thought was right in terms of continuing a strong and healthy airline industry.

Other questions? All right, thank you all very much.

Q Any bill signings today?

MR. STANZEL: Not today. There could be, certainly.

Q S-CHIP?

MR. STANZEL: The S-CHIP extension has passed, obviously. As of yesterday, that had not arrived at the White House. So it was not ready for action.

END 11:51 A.M. CST

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