

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

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PRESS BRIEFING BY
PRESS SECRETARY ROBERT GIBBS

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

12:31 P.M. EDT

Q On another subject, The Washington Times is reporting today that the President has awarded big donors to the Democratic National Committee with various access to senior officials here at the White House. One donor got a birthday visit to the Oval Office. Obviously I know other White Houses, Democrats, Republicans, have done things like this. But the President last year promised to clean this up. What went wrong?

MR. GIBBS: Well, Ed, I think understanding what this President has done is institute the very toughest ethics and transparency rules of any administration in history. We're the first administration in history that will soon provide a list of each and every person that visits the White House, something that's never been done before.

The Democratic National Committee does not accept contributions from registered federal lobbyists or political action committees and hasn't done so since President Obama became the party's nominee last year. I think as the statement that we issued said, a contributor - - contributing doesn't guarantee a visit to the White House, nor does it preclude it.

Q It appears that people are getting special access because of these donations. If you've taken --

MR. GIBBS: Hundreds of --

Q -- those other positive steps, why not shut off access?

MR. GIBBS: Hundreds of thousands of people have visited this White House since the President came in, and I think the President has returned to a stance of transparency and ethics that hasn't been matched by any other White House.

Q The RNC is calling for the White House to release the names of donors who have gotten special access to White House advisors and perks like the bowling alley. Will you release those names?

MR. GIBBS: Every name of every person that comes to this White House will be released.

Q In the past, too?

MR. GIBBS: I think there soon will be some look-back list that will be released. But again, Chip, this -- this is something, again, that for the first time in any administration at any point in our history, we've undertaken releasing publicly those names. I would remind -- let me just also -- the Republican National Committee -- there's two political parties, two major political parties in this country. One party doesn't accept contributions from registered federal lobbyists. That same party doesn't accept contributions from political action committees. It's not the committee with which you just asked me the question on.

Q Are you saying the White House will release the names of any donors who come in, and then, say did they meet with particular White House advisors as -- in exchange for those contributions?

MR. GIBBS: Through an agreement that we announced in August, the names of people that come to the White House will be released, and any contributor's name --

Q But will we know what they did --

MR. GIBBS: -- is released as per the forms on the FEC.

Q Will it simply be a name on a list, or will we know that they came here to meet with a senior White House official in exchange for a contribution?

MR. GIBBS: Chip, as we did this briefing in August, I'll remind you that the WAVES records will denote who that person is, when they came, how long they were here, and who they met with -- again, a standard not met by any other previous White House.

Q We will know if they used the White House bowling alley, for example?

MR. GIBBS: There are only a couple of people that I know that have used the residence bowling alley.

Q -- bowling alley also.

MR. GIBBS: I can report to you that Ethan Gibbs, with the bumpers down, bowled a couple of games while eating some chicken fingers.

Q Was there a quid pro quo here?

MR. GIBBS: No, of course not.

Q Well, the DNC documents actually say those who raise \$300,000 before the 2010 midterm elections get quarterly meetings with senior members of the Obama administration.

MR. GIBBS: I'll point you to the DNC on that.

Q But they're with White House officials.

MR. GIBBS: Again, I'll point you to the DNC.

Q How can you point us to them when it's White House officials who the meetings are with? Can I have one other? Do you know if any of these donors have had a night in the Lincoln Bedroom -- reminding of an earlier controversy?

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

Q Quick cleanup. On the disclosure things, the statement that just came out said they were coming out

monthly. I think you said quarterly. Or did I get that wrong?

MR. GIBBS: I thought it was quarterly. I will double-check.

Q You decided sort of throughout the course of these last few months that you will release the visitors logs --

MR. GIBBS: This particular decision I think was finalized in August, yes.

Q Right, which indicates that as the administration goes along you're willing to sort of create new policies or change rules based on the optics of things. Does the President believe that anything should be changed going forward from here about the Democratic contributors coming to the White House? Does he believe that anything should change going forward --

MR. GIBBS: I haven't had a chance to talk to him about that today. But understand that what the President campaigned on -- toughening our ethics rules, making more transparent our transparency policy -- was something that he was passionate about and is proud of the progress that we've made in ensuring that. We had 4 million contributors to a presidential campaign. Ninety percent of those contributions were in the form of small donations. The President was clear with all of us that as it related to those that came to the White House, that those names could -- or that those names should and would be public. And the President will continue to work on this.

Q Besides the aspects of the transparency, does the President believe that allowing donors to visit the White House, if their names are released or not, is in the spirit of what he was talking about during the campaign?

MR. GIBBS: Well, again, as I said, giving a contribution to the DNC doesn't guarantee you a visit here, nor should it or would it prohibit that.

Q But does it help, obviously?

MR. GIBBS: I'm sorry?

Q But it obviously helps get the potential of a visit here.

MR. GIBBS: Four hundred thousand people have visited this White House since the President was inaugurated.

Q Back on the visitor logs. Those logs, as I understand it, will be released on the 31st of December?

MR. GIBBS: I've got to check on the exact dates of -- I think they will come out on a frequent basis on a certain day.

Q But they only go -- but they only start with the visitors that came after September 15th. Why is that? And will the White House consider releasing records of visitors prior to that?

MR. GIBBS: Well, there is -- I think there are going to be requests that have been made for records that will be done -- that have been made and it will be released shortly on earlier visits, understanding that one of the things -- that this was a question fairly early in the administration, that I said the administration was working on a process for how to do this -- understanding that the computer system that you have to go through, that hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people have to go through in order to get into here, was not equipped to do what our administration asked of it to do. That process we put together in order to ensure going forward those names would be released. And if people have requests, they should be sent to the White House.

Q The 400,000, those are mostly, I'm assuming, East Wing and Residence visitors --

MR. GIBBS: Some of them are tours, sure.

Q We're not talking about West Wing meetings. The West Wing meetings --

MR. GIBBS: Some of those are -- you'd be surprised the number of people that come in and out of this building each day.

Q So you're saying, though, that the West Wing meetings, the records for those meetings prior to September 15 are not being released because there wasn't adequate records --

MR. GIBBS: I'm saying that all those names -- there's a process -- again, I appreciate -- everybody seems much more interested in this policy today than they were when we actually rolled out a policy that changed several hundred years of history. We should maybe --

Q -- had a reason to wait; now we have reason to ask questions. There's a big difference. (Laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: I appreciate that you all have perked up.

Q Well, contributors coming into the White House going to the bowling alley and places like that will make you perk up.

MR. GIBBS: Well, you know what, Chip, I'm glad that it took only about three months for the perking to happen.

Q Well, if you told us about it then, we would have perked up then.

MR. GIBBS: From now on I'll start lacing in the news that changes several hundred years of precedent going forward in the White House with a shiny, dazzling object for which to hopefully perk up --

Q And you'll tell us when big contributors come to the White House and in exchange for their contributions have meetings with White House officials?

Q Can you just clarify real quickly, what is the reason for --

MR. GIBBS: Again, the process of accumulating those records.

Q So they will be released in mass?

MR. GIBBS: No. I've answered this now twice, Jon. If people have -- and I think your paper does -- have requests that look back, those requests are being entertained and fulfilled.

Q Robert, keeping with the administration's ethical tone, why not set a policy that says campaign bundlers and donors will have no more access to the White House campus or senior administration officials than the ordinary American?

MR. GIBBS: Peter, the President believes strongly in transparency, that people can determine whether -- who's here, why they're here, and for what course of business; that transparency in that way in the best policy. There are people that gave money that the President has been personal friends with since they went to school. I don't think it makes a lot of sense to preclude somebody like that from coming here simply because they gave money. David Axelrod couldn't work here if that were the case -- he's a donor.

END

1:15 P.M. EDT

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