

THE WHITE HOUSE **BULLETIN**

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SUBJECT: TODAY'S BRIEFING

DATE: MONDAY, AUGUST 24, 2009

OFF THE WIRES:

- **New Iraqi Shiite Alliance Forms Without Al-Maliki.** Major Iraqi Shiite parties today announced the formation of a new alliance that excludes Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's Dawa Party. The group includes the Iranian-backed Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council and Moqtada al-Sadr's followers, as well as several smaller Sunni and secular parties. The Dawa Party was left out after the sides disagreed over leadership and Dawa's desire for a broader coalition. The move is part of the shuffling of the political field in the run-up to January's parliamentary elections.
- **Pakistani Police Round Up Militants.** Pakistani authorities said today they have arrested 13 Islamist militants in a series of raids designed to break up a plot to conduct major terror attacks. One of the raids nabbed seven members of the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi movement in Karachi, who were found in possession of a large quantity of heroin and a number of suicide vests. The group is believed to have been planning attacks on Pakistani government targets in the city and was financing their activities through drug sales. Other captured include a Taliban suicide bomber recruiter.

IN THE WHITE HOUSE AND AROUND TOWN:

- **Obama Protests On Hold But Plans For September Offensive Intensify.** Republican-sponsored protests of President Obama's health care reform plan are going on hold this week as members join the President on vacation. "This week will be quiet," says a leadership official. Instead, officials say they are shifting their focus to the return of Congress after Labor Day when the Senate will resume negotiations. Some officials are already at work on alternative plans while others are working with outside groups to prepare for the early September round of public protests hitting Washington. The first is set to occur on September 9 when more than 1 million signatures on a petition will be delivered to Congress. The "Free Our Health Care Now" petition, initiated by the Salem Radio Network and drawn up by the National Center for Policy Analysis, has already been signed by over 1.1 million. GOP leaders expect to have 1.5 million on September 9 when it will be presented to the media by Reps. Mike Pence, Paul Ryan and Minority Whip Eric Cantor. Conservatives are also working to fill Washington on Saturday September 12 at the taxpayer revolt started by the groups that sponsored the spring and summer tea parties against federal spending. -- *Bulletin exclusive from U.S. News*
- **Panetta Vows To "Stand Up For" CIA Interrogators.** On the day the Washington Post reported the administration intends to bring high-value detainee interrogations into the White House via the National Security Council, CIA Director Leon Panetta invoked President Obama's name in promising to defend CIA interrogators who are the targets of congressional and other investigations. In a memo to CIA employees today, Panetta says the agency has been open and forthright in developing and delivering information for investigators on its past practices, consistent with its responsibilities in a democracy. Panetta adds, "As Director in 2009, my primary interest – when it comes to a program that no longer exists – is to stand up for those officers who did what their country asked and who followed the legal guidance they were given. That

is the President's position, too. The CIA was aggressive over the years in seeking new opinions from the Department of Justice as the legal landscape changed. The Agency sought and received multiple written assurances that its methods were lawful. The CIA has a strong record in terms of following legal guidance and informing the Department of Justice of potentially illegal conduct.

"I make no judgments on the accuracy of the 2004 IG report or the various views expressed about it. Nor am I eager to enter the debate, already politicized, over the ultimate utility of the Agency's past detention and interrogation effort. But this much is clear: The CIA obtained intelligence from high-value detainees when inside information on al-Qa'ida was in short supply. Whether this was the only way to obtain that information will remain a legitimate area of dispute, with Americans holding a range of views on the methods used. The CIA requested and received legal guidance and referred allegations of abuse to the Department of Justice. President Obama has established new policies for interrogation."

- **Obama Trip Won't Be Working Vacation.** As President Obama and his family begin their week-long holiday at Martha's Vineyard, White House officials are abandoning the traditional argument used by past administrations that the boss will be on a "working vacation." Obama is there to relax, pure and simple, according to the President's aides. "Nobody is looking to make any news," White House spokesman Bill Burton told reporters yesterday aboard Air Force One while Obama was en route to the Vineyard, "so he's hoping that you guys can enjoy Martha's Vineyard while we're there. And the second thing I'll say is, of course, the first family would very much appreciate if you respect the privacy of the girls while they're out here on vacation." Burton added that President Obama will continue to receive his daily national security briefings and will be updated on issues that require his attention. But Burton said the goal is to get away from work pressures as much as possible: "There isn't a lot scheduled for this week. You can bet there's going to be some golf playing, maybe a little swimming, but a lot of time spent with his family." -- *Bulletin exclusive from U.S. News*
- **Concerns In Senate Grow Over Kennedy, Byrd.** Senate Democratic leaders are indicating to members that it is possible that health-sidelined Sens. Edward Kennedy and Robert Byrd may not be returning to the chamber. Leadership officials told the Bulletin that Kennedy is in grave condition as indicated by his move last week to suggest a legal change to Massachusetts law to speed up the naming of his successor. And Byrd, though he returned for the recent Supreme Court confirmation vote of Justice Sonia Sotomayor, is also said to be very ill. As a result, Democrats are considering what impact the absences mean to upcoming votes on energy and health care reform as well as the appropriations bills. "Of course nobody is wanting to talk about this, but we still have to look at how their absences will change things on the big votes," said a leadership official. -- *Bulletin exclusive from U.S. News*
- **Corker Expects US To Need More Troops For Afghanistan.** Tennessee Sen. Bob Corker (R), back from Afghanistan, said this morning on CNN that he believes that the US needs more troops there in the short term and that he would probably back their deployment if the military requested them. Corker said, "My sense is that General McChrystal will ask for more troops. And as I've said in the past, I rely upon them to make those determinations. I do believe that he will be asking for more troops. I asked him the question in person this last week and he was not ready to make that commitment, wanted to see what happened during the elections." Corker added that he believe that in "the short term," the US "will need more troops on the ground." Asked if he would support more troops, Corker said, "Yes, but I want to know what the benchmarks and what an articulation of victory is simultaneously. I think we owe that to the American people. We owe that to our troops."
- **US, South Korea Pressing Ahead With Sanctions On North.** A US envoy is in South Korea today to consult with the government there about the implementation of stiff sanctions on the North in response to the rogue nation's nuclear program. Philip Goldberg met with the South's top nuclear negotiator and said a complete, verifiable denuclearization of North Korea remains the goal of the US. While North Korea has stepped back from some of its most provocative actions in recent weeks, a spokesman for South Korea's foreign ministry said today that both his country and the US would not consider backing off from sanctions unless there is a "fundamental change" in Pyongyang's attitude about denuclearization.
- **Poll Shows Patrick In Tight Race With Likely Opponents In Massachusetts.** A new poll out this morning from Rasmussen Reports shows Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick (D) trailing one potential

opponent and narrowly leading another in his quest for a second term. The poll of 500 likely voters taken August 20 shows Patrick trailing Christy Mihos (R) 40%-35% and leading health care executive Charlie Baker 40%-39%. The heavy Democratic slant of the state's electorate is keeping Patrick competitive, as independent voters favor either candidate over Patrick by 30 points. Rasmussen says, "The fact that the numbers are similar regardless of which Republican is mentioned suggests that the race for now is a referendum on the incumbent rather than a choice between competing alternatives."

- o **Political Notes. Governors.** In his [New York Post](#) column, Fredric U. Dicker writes that Nassau County Executive **Thomas Suozzi** (D), "a close political ally of" New York Gov. **David Paterson** (D), "has told Democratic activists that he doesn't expect the embattled governor to seek election next year."

Senate. The [Las Vegas Review-Journal](#) reports a Mason-Dixon Polling & Research survey of 400 registered Nevada voters conducted Aug. 17-18 shows **Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid** (D) trailing realtor **Danny Tarkanian** (R) 49%-38% and state GOP chair **Sue Lowden** 45%-40% in his quest for reelection. ... The [Raleigh News & Observer](#) reports that North Carolina Democrats continue to struggle to recruit a first-tier challenger to **Sen. Richard Burr** (R), though **NC2 Rep. Bob Etheridge**, ex-Lt. Gov. **Dennis Wicker**, and **Secretary of State Elaine Marshall** are still possibilities.

House. The [Detroit Free Press](#) reports a Denno Noor Polling survey of 300 voters in the **MI13** district shows just 27% would vote to reelect **Rep. Carolyn Kilpatrick** (D), whose son Kwame, the former mayor of Detroit, resigned after pleading guilty to corruption charges. In the **MI14** district, a similar poll shows that only 40% would vote to reelect **Rep. John Conyers** (D), whose wife, a former city councilwoman, has also pleaded guilty to corruption charges. ... [Roll Call](#) says that freshman **VA5 Rep. Tom Perriello** (D) is "one of the biggest targets for national Republicans in the 2010 elections," while [The Hill](#) sees **state Sen. Robert Hurt** "as the odds-on frontrunner" for the GOP. ... The [San Gabriel Valley Tribune](#) reported over the weekend that **Lee McGroarty**, the president of a retirement planning firm and a political novice, plans a primary challenge to **CA42 Rep. Gary Miller** (R), marking Miller's first primary contest in a decade.

POLL WATCH:

46% Approve Of Obama Handling Of Health Care In ABC/WPost Poll. An ABC News/Washington Post poll of 1,001 adults taken August 13-17 shows:

- 46% said they "approve" of the way President Obama is handling "health care"; 50% said "disapprove"; 5% had no opinion. In a similar survey in mid-July, 49% said "approve" and 44% said "disapprove."
- 27% said that, given what they know about them, they "strongly support" the "proposed changes to the health care system being developed by Congress and the Obama administration"; 18% said "somewhat support"; 10% said "somewhat oppose"; 40% said "strongly oppose"; 5% had no opinion.
- 23% said they would be more likely to "support" a candidate that backed Obama and Congress' proposed changes to the health care system; 32% said more likely to "oppose"; 43% said it wouldn't make "much difference"; 2% had no opinion.
- 49% said that Obama "will be able to make significant improvements in this country's health care system"; 46% said he "will not"; 4% had no opinion.
- 33% said they "strongly support" "having the government create a new health insurance plan to compete with private health insurance plans"; 19% said "somewhat support"; 11% said "somewhat oppose"; 35% said "strongly oppose"; 2% had no opinion.
- 35% said they "strongly" believe that government reform of the nation's health care system "is necessary to control costs and expand coverage"; 16% "somewhat" believe that; 35% "strongly" believe that government reform "will do more harm than good"; 10% "somewhat" believe that; 3% had no opinion.
- 19% said that "if the health care system is changed," the quality of their health care will get "better"; 33% said "worse"; 47% said "remain about the same"; 2% had no opinion.
- 37% said that "if the health care system is changed," the quality of health care "for most people" will get "better"; 38% said "worse"; 23% said "remain about the same"; 2% had no opinion.
- 85% said they have "some form of health care insurance or health care coverage"; 14% said they do not.
- Among those that were insured, 14% said that "if the health care system is changed," their "health insurance coverage" will get "better"; 40% said "worse"; 43% said "remain about the same"; 3% had no opinion.

- Among those that were not insured, 56% said that “if the health care system is changed,” their “ability to get health insurance” will get “better”; 10% said “worse”; 30% said “remain about the same”; 4% had no opinion.

IN THIS WEEK’S WEEKLIES:

Democrats’ Stance On Tort Reform Said To Result In Campaign Contributions. [US News Weekly](#) (8/21, Garber) reports, “Healthcare town hall protesters bring it up constantly. So do many doctors. Democrats, for the most part, refuse to go near it. The issue is the cost of ‘defensive medicine’ – basically, doctors ordering extra (and arguably unnecessary) tests to protect themselves from costly lawsuits.” US News adds that “supporters say limits on big payouts would ease doctors’ worries about costly lawsuits and curb unnecessary tests,” but tort reform “is viciously partisan and heavily lobbied.” Plaintiffs’ lawyers have “generously given to Democratic campaigns, including President Obama’s.”

Obama Faces Criticism From Liberals Over Public Option. [US News Weekly](#)’s Kenneth T. Walsh (8/21) reports, “Deepening Obama’s problem are increasing anger and frustration among his party’s liberals over signals from the administration that it may not be as solidly committed to a public insurance option as the left had thought. ... Some liberals are threatening to withhold support for any health insurance bill that doesn’t include that option.”

Klein: GOP Has Been “Overrun By Nihilists.” Joe Klein, in his column for [Time](#) (8/31, 3.36M), asks, “How can you sustain a democracy if one of the two major political parties has been overrun by nihilists?” According to Klein, “This year, the liberal insistence on a marginally relevant public option has been a tactical mistake that has enabled the right’s ‘government takeover’ disinformation jihad. ... The same people who rail against a government takeover of health care tried to enforce a government takeover of Terri Schiavo’s end-of-life decisions. And when Palin floated the ‘death panel’ canard, the number of prominent Republicans who rose up to call her out could be counted on one hand.”

Gay Donors Cool On Obama Over Perceived Failure To Back Marriage Rights. John Cloud, in a piece for [Time](#) (8/31, 3.36M), writes that at a brunch last year “to raise money for Lambda Legal, the gay movement’s litigation arm...cheers went up virtually every time Barack Obama’s name was uttered.” But, this year, “when Lambda executive director Kevin Cathcart began to review the President’s record on gay issues, he was greeted with steely silence. That silence -- because it came from some of the most generous gay political donors in the country -- is key to understanding the confusing position the Obama Administration took this week on whether gays and lesbians should enjoy equal marriage rights.” According to Cloud, “Once Obama was elected, and once a gay couple in California had sued to overturn DOMA, his Administration not only defended the law, but defended it in a legal argument so reactionary that it would embarrass Dick Cheney (who, incidentally, is to the left of Obama on marriage).”

Cabinet Officials Urge Employers To Plan For H1N1 Outbreak. [US News Weekly](#) (8/21, Kotz) reports, “Federal officials are calling for help regarding the imminent one-two punch of swine and seasonal flu. ‘We need the business community to do its part,’ Commerce Secretary Gary Locke stressed this week at a press conference announcing flu guidelines for employers.” HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius “added: ‘We hope that employers do some outreach to target populations,’ encouraging pregnant women, healthcare workers, and adults under 25 to get the H1N1 (aka swine flu) vaccine when it becomes available in October. ... ‘Let’s not just play wait-and-see,’ Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano said. ‘Businesses need to prepare for absenteeism, particularly since we’re in this season before the vaccine becomes available.’”

Kerry Said To Have Taken On New Role As Dealmaker. [Time](#) (8/31, Newton-Small, 3.36M) reports, “On a hot August afternoon in 2008, Ted Kennedy took John Kerry sailing. ... What concerned Kennedy, who three months earlier had learned he had a malignant brain tumor, was legacy - Kerry’s legacy.” According to Time, “Kerry appears to have taken that advice to heart. Over the past year, the junior Senator from Massachusetts has become the man to see. Health-care talks are stalling? Kerry’s got a way to fix the financing. The climate-change bill faces an uphill battle in the Senate? Kerry’s leading the negotiations. And as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, he has stepped out overseas - and across the aisle in the Senate - to get things done.”

CNBC's Squawk Box Gets Bipartisan Praise. [US News Weekly's](#) Washington Whispers (8/21, Bedard) reported, "There may be only one thing that House Republican Whip Eric Cantor and former Democratic Party Chairman Howard Dean agree on: CNBC's Squawk Box, the early-morning business show that puts the spotlight on the intersection of Wall Street and Washington. 'I love that show,' says Dean. 'It's a very smart audience. And very smart people who run the show.' Adds Cantor: 'There is a lot less gotcha, and it's much more insightful.'" Host Joe Kernen "sneers at 'Government Motors' and the 'activist administration,'" but "likes President Obama. 'I think he's an incredibly likable and charismatic guy. For a while, I wish I'd voted for him. But then when I see some of the stuff, I'm glad I didn't.'"

Larijani Brothers Control Iran's Judiciary And Parliament. Robin Wright, in an article for [Time](#) (8/31, 3.36M) titled, "Will Iran's 'Kennedys' Challenge Ahmadinejad?" reports, "The brothers Larijani -- often referred to as the Kennedys of Iran -- are emerging as a powerful counterweight to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad from within the conservative camp. And unlike other Ahmadinejad rivals, the Larijanis are fully endorsed by Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatullah Ali Khamenei." Time notes that Sadeqh Larijani's appointment as head of Iran's judiciary "puts Larijanis in control of two out of the three branches of Iran's government. Older brother Ali Larijani is speaker of parliament."

Conservative Activists Trained To Take Advantage Of New Internet Technologies. [US News Weekly](#) (8/21, Schwab) reports from Pittsburgh: "The goals of the RightOnline conference were simple: train more conservatives to 'take control of the Internet' and steal some media coverage from the Netroots Nation progressive bloggers convention being held across the Monongahela River here. ... 'The reason why our side wasn't doing well online was we didn't prioritize it,' says Tim Phillips, head of Americans for Prosperity, a conservative advocacy group, which created RightOnline. Conservatives are now learning the basics, including how blogs, Facebook, and Twitter could turn those on the right who are interested in politics into a potent force."

Comedians Struggle To Craft Jokes About Obama. Richard Zoglin, in a piece for [Time](#) (8/31, 3.36M), writes, "Making jokes about Barack Obama is the big test for political comedians these days. ... The burning question for the Obama age: What the heck were political comedians going to do? For eight years they had enjoyed a comedic gift from the gods in George W. Bush," but Obama, "with his obvious smarts, low-key style and (most important) ability to catch the prevailing tone of irony and laugh at himself, has left the comics with little to hang their punch lines on."

Clintons' First Home Could Become An Historical Site. [US News Weekly's](#) Washington Whispers (8/21, Bedard) reported, "There's a new cause among Clintonites -- preserving the Fayetteville, Ark., 'dream house' where Bill and Hillary married and first lived. FOB Skip Rutherford wants the state to take over the house, already a city museum and tour stop, as a historical site."

LAST LAUGHS:

Late Night Political Humor.

David Letterman: "You know who Squeaky Fromme is? Weird deal. One of the original Manson Family members, Squeaky Fromme, and she took a shot at President Gerald Ford. This was back in the 70s. They locked her up and she's been in prison the entire time. Well, now she's being let out of prison. ... And guess what, guys? She's single."

David Letterman: "Congress has been agonizing over healthcare for months now. Squabbling, fighting, the town hall meetings going crazy. Meanwhile, while they're arguing about healthcare, we're stuck in two wars that were rubber stamped in about 10 minutes. What? How does that make any sense when you think about it?"

David Letterman: "But have you seen these town hall meetings about the healthcare? People are screaming. And I'll tell you if it's one thing Americans hate, it's comprehensive health coverage."

David Letterman: "I'm very glad you people are here, and I kind of mentioned this earlier, but last night, we had a terrible audience. ... Honestly, they were so bad I didn't know if they were an audience or a death panel."

David Letterman: "I'll tell you something, ladies and gentlemen, if I want to see a death panel, I'll tune into a George Stephanopoulos roundtable."

David Letterman: "Speaking of death panels. Dick Cheney said, 'Death panel? Count me in!'"

David Letterman: "Remember when the Obama kids first went to the White House and the Bush twins were showing the Obama kids around the White House. And remember what happened? They heard this horrible scream coming from the cellar where Dick Cheney had his dungeon. Remember that? Anyway, Dick Cheney has a brand new book. It's a memoir about his life and times, and I believe the title of it is called 'Too Fat to Waterboard.'"

David Letterman: "I didn't know this, but according to the book, there was a time when President Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney weren't speaking. They got into a fight and they weren't speaking. It really got so bad that earlier today, President Obama invited them both to the White House for a beer."

David Letterman: "And Cheney said that President Bush, there was a point during the second term, that he stopped listening to the Vice President. George Bush stopped listening to his Vice President. And I said to myself, 'Whoa. Well, maybe this guy wasn't as dumb as we thought.'"

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