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TRANSCRIPT

BOB SCHIEFFER: Today on FACE THE NATION, it's worse than ever in the Gulf, and in politics the establishment takes a whipping.

There's even more oil in the Gulf than anyone thought. And now it's reached the Louisiana beaches. White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs took a pounding from reporters Friday, about why the administration isn't doing more to fix it. He's with us this morning to talk about that and tell us what the administration plans to do next.

Then we'll turn to politics and Campaign 2010--is the Tea Party movement helping or hurting the Republican Party. We'll bring in Tennessee Senator Lamar Alexander to get the GOP establishment take on the Tea Party. And Tea Party candidate Rand Paul's blowout win in the Kentucky Republican Senate primary.

Then we'll talk to Joe Sestak, who took on the White House and the Democratic establishment in Pennsylvania, and toppled Arlen Specter in the Democratic Senate primary there.

Finally, I'll have some thoughts on historical repeats.

But first, White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs on FACE THE NATION.

ANNOUNCER: FACE THE NATION with CBS News chief Washington correspondent Bob Schieffer. And now from Washington, Bob Schieffer.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And we begin with the White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs. And we normally call people by their last names or their title on this broadcast, but it is traditional reporters call the White House press secretary by his first name. So, Robert, if that's all right with you I'm going to you Robert.

ROBERT GIBBS (White House Press Secretary): Bob, it's nice to be here.

BOB SCHIEFFER: (LAUGHING) Breaking news, let's deal with this first. Anwar al-Alwaki-- laki, that cleric in-- in Yemen, has issued a rather ominous warning to the United States in a forty-five-minute video. He justifies civilian deaths and encourages them. He says talking about terrorist acts which he's encouraging--those who might be killed on a plane are merely a drop of water in a sea, suggesting there's going to be more of them and, actually, encouraging them. Is this to be taken seriously?

ROBERT GIBBS: Well, look, I think Mister Awlaki is-- despite telling the world he's a cleric, you see on a videotape that he supports al Qaeda's agenda of murder and violence. In fact, in recent videotapes, he's said he's a member of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, who has an agenda just like al Qaeda to strike targets in Yemen, throughout the world, including here in the United States.

Bob, the President, yesterday, to graduates at-- at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point said that members of al Qaeda are small men who will be on the wrong side of history. Those cadets, many of them will go to Afghanistan to pursue our battles there, to keep our country safe. And the President will continue to take action directly at terrorists like Awlaki, and keep our country safe from their murderous thugs.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Are we actively trying to find this guy?

ROBERT GIBBS: We are actively trying to find him and many others throughout the world that seek to do our country and to do our interests great harm.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let's shift to the situation down in the Gulf. The oil spill apparently is worse than ever, Robert. And the administration is getting a lot of criticism now, a-- a lot of it from officials along the Gulf Coast, and some of it even from Democrats here in Washington that say the government simply needs to do more. How do you respond to that?

ROBERT GIBBS: Well, Bob, the Coast Guard was on the scene moments after the rig exploded in April. It-- it certainly has been four weeks and the government is doing everything humanly and technologically possible to plug the hole five thousand feet above-- ar-- five thousand feet below the floor-- below the ocean, and to do everything we can to contain its spread and to deal with its environmental and its economic impacts.

We are, as I said, doing everything in our power--morning, noon, and night--to make sure that we contain what is happening and do everything that we humanly can to plug this hole. The President has told the team to spare nothing in trying to cap this well.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Some of the criticism is that-- and you're hearing this from Democrats as well as Republicans that the oil company is lying, that it is covering up, that it shouldn't be trusted. Do you trust BP and what they're telling you?

ROBERT GIBBS: Well, Bob, BP is the responsible party. They own the well. They're responsible for capping it. That effort is overseen by and directed by Admiral Thad Allen, and our commanders on the ground in Louisiana. As Admiral Allen has said if he's got a problem or concern with what BP is doing, he calls their CEO on his cell phone.

So we are watching everything that they're doing. There's no doubt that we've had some problems with BP's lack of transparency. We asked that a video feed be made public and that took ten days. We are-- we have sent letters recently in order to get them to post their air, water quality data and to ensure that-- that the dispersants that they're spraying on top of the water and using at a subsea level are the least toxic available. So we are working, as I said, every minute of every day to ensure that the response is-- is everything that it-- it should be.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Do you foresee that there might be a criminal investigation opened into what happened here because the Justice Department, certainly, would have that option?

ROBERT GIBBS: Well, I think the Justice Department has been down in the Gulf to look at and to gather information on this. First and foremost, our focus with scientists throughout the government, even those not involved with departments that directly respond to this, they're-- they're down in Houston, trying to figure out ways to plug this-- this hole. But I can assure you the Department of Justice has been there as every bit of government has been activated to try to plug this hole.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Robert, you had one of the most contentious briefings of-- sessions with the White House press corps on Friday. I'm told that you even continued it after the briefing, calling reporters and questioning them about why they were so pointed in-- in their response. A--

ROBERT GIBBS: Well, my frustration, Bob, was one of the questioners said-- said in-- in-- the premise of his question was why is the government standing around doing nothing and hoping for the best?

And there's a lot of criticisms that one can have, certainly for BP and even for the government in-- in how we got to this. But I don't think anybody could credibly say--even as frustrated as they are and as frustrated as we are--that the government has stood around, done nothing, and hoped for the best.

We were activated the moment that this oil rig exploded. This has been on the President's agenda ever since that happened. And we have mobilized every aspect that we possibly can in our government. There have been calls to every sector of our government to ask for help. That's what we've done. My frustration was with the notion and the premise that we had sat by and done nothing, which I think is certainly not true.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Do you-- do you think this could be your administration's Katrina?

ROBERT GIBBS: Well, I-- I think if you look back at what happened in Katrina, the government wasn't there to respond to what was happening. That quite frankly was the problem; even tracking a hurricane for days and knowing fairly precisely where it was going to hit.

I think the difference in this case is we were there immediately. We have been there ever since.

Thad Allen has-- is directing our response as the National Incident Commander. There're people on the ground. There're thousands of people working even as we speak, Bob, to figure out a way to plug this hole and to deal with the spread of this oil.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let-- let me shift this a bit because, (LAUGHING) while you're getting hammered from one side for not doing enough. There are those out there, including Rand Paul, who won that blowout Republican primary victory in Kentucky, who say you're not doing enough. (sic) Listen to what-- what he said in response to this:

RAND PAUL: What I don't like from the President's administration is this sort of, you know, I'll put my boot heel on the throat of BP. I think that sounds really un-American and his criticism of business. I've heard nothing from BP about not paying for this spill. And I think it's part of this sort of blame-game society, in the sense that it's always got to be someone's fault. And instead of the fact that maybe sometimes accidents happen.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Sometimes accidents happen. What's your response to that?

ROBERT GIBBS: Well, we have to make sure that BP, as the responsible party, is doing everything humanly possible to cap this leak. And I will tell this to Rand Paul and anybody else that's listening: laws that were passed after the Exxon Valdez ensured that the taxpayers don't get a bill for this. BP will pay for every bit of this. But you know what, we've got to figure out and make sure that the relationship that it's had in government with oil companies is not a cozy relationship, as the President said. We have to regulate this industry. We have to make sure that there are safety standards are-- are up to the very latest and highest standards when-- whenever they do something like this, drilling in such a precious ecosystem as the Gulf of Mexico.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Sarah Palin, speaking of-- of close and cozy relationships, said this morning on FOX that one reason the administration was slow off the mark here was because of President Obama's cozy relationship with the oil companies and the support that they gave him in the election.

ROBERT GIBBS: Well, I-- Sarah Palin was involved in that election, but I don't think, apparently, was paying a whole lot of attention. I'm almost sure that the oil companies don't consider the Obama administration a huge ally. We proposed a-- a windfall profits tax when they jacked their oil prices up to charge more for gasoline. My suggestion to Sarah Palin would be to get slightly more informed as to what's going on in and around oil drilling in this country.

BOB SCHIEFFER: One final question. Joe Sestak who beat Arlen Specter and the White House, of course, was-- was backing Arlen Specter in the Pennsylvania primary up there. All these reports that the White House offered him some sort of job, some sort of post in the administration, if he wouldn't run, would you tell us what-- what post he was offered?

ROBERT GIBBS: Well, Bob, I-- I'm not a lawyer. But lawyers in the White House and others have looked into conversations that were had with Congressman Sestak. And noting-- nothing inappropriate happened. I-- I think Republicans are continuing to dredge this up because if you look just a couple of days after this primary, the polling shows that Republicans are already behind in a very important Senate race.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Improper or not, did you offer him a job in the administration?

ROBERT GIBBS: I-- I-- I'm not going to get--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Okay.

ROBERT GIBBS: --further into what the conversations were. People that have looked into them assure me that they weren't inappropriate in any way.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Robert Gibbs, thank you very much for being with us.

And we turn now to get the other side of the story to a member of the Republican leadership in the Senate: Senator Lamar Alexander. He joins us from Maryville, Tennessee.

Well, let me just start where Robert Gibbs was talking about that the administration has done everything possible--morning, noon, and daylight, nighttime, too--to get this thing fixed down in the Gulf, Senator. Do you think they've done everything they could do?

SENATOR LAMAR ALEXANDER (R-Tennessee/Republican Conference Chairman): Bob, I'm not-- I'm not going to start pointing fingers at the administration. There's one thing they could do under the law. They can fire BP and take it over. But the truth is the federal government probably doesn't have the capacity to do that. I think we ought to allow the administration working with the governments and others to do its best to clean it up and make our verdict about the blame later.

BOB SCHIEFFER: But would you favor taking over BP if that became necessary?

SENATOR LAMAR ALEXANDER: Sure. That's up to the President to decide. Under the law we know who pays. That's BP. They are the responsible party. And we know who is managing the

federal effort. That's the Coast Guard. But under the law, the federal government can take it over if they choose. And I understand why they might not choose but that option exists.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. Let's talk a little bit about what happened last week. These elections, especially down in-- in-- in Kentucky, where you had the handpicked candidate of Mitch McConnell, your leader, in the Senate. The whole Republican establishment down there was for a one par-- one guy and along comes Rand Paul, this Tea Party favorite. And he doesn't just beat him. He wins it in a blowout. But since then, he has had some rather controversial things to say like the '64 Civil Rights Bill may have been too broad. He's questioned the Disabilities Act. He's talking about abolishing the Federal Reserve and the Department of Education. Can you see yourself supporting a candidate who takes those kinds of positions, Senator?

SENATOR LAMAR ALEXANDER: Yes, I can.

BOB SCHIEFFER: You can.

SENATOR LAMAR ALEXANDER: And I'm glad he cleared up at least one of them. But here's-- here's what happened. You know, even a very good baseball player sometimes has a hard time going from AAA to the Major Leagues, and that's what happened to him last week. If he'll stick to the jobs, debt, and terror and providing a check and balance on a run-away government in Washington, he'll be the next Republican Senator. We'll be glad to have him.

BOB SCHIEFFER: But that's not what he campaigned on. He campaigned on all these other things, doing away with the Department of Education, getting rid of the Federal Reserve, and then talking about that the Civil Rights Act went too far.

SENATOR LAMAR ALEXANDER: Well, he clarified that. He made a mistake there. At least, I thought he did. At least, it's different than my opinion. We already have senators who want to get rid of the Fed. And you know, we've-- we've-- we've got a Democratic Caucus with nearly sixty votes that includes a very nice Senator from Vermont who proudly describes himself as a socialist. So a little check and balance in the Senate wouldn't be a bad thing.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, I think the Republican Party, as I understand it, is trying to broaden its appeal to-- to African-Americans, to minorities. Why would any member of any minority group want to vote or want to be for-- for someone who says that, well, you know, maybe that Civil Rights Act went a little too far? I know you say--

SENATOR LAMAR ALEXANDER (overlapping): Well--

BOB SCHIEFFER: --he's clarified it. Now he says he wouldn't vote to repeal it. But just saying you wouldn't repeal it after saying, maybe, it went too far, I mean, can you be for that?

SENATOR LAMAR ALEXANDER: Oh, I cannot be for that. I was for the Civil Rights Act of '64, '68, '75. I helped put in the Martin Luther King Holiday in Tennessee, when I ran for re-election in 2008. I got twenty-five percent of the African-American vote with President Obama on the ticket.

So we have plenty of Republican candidates who'll get plenty of African-American votes. I-- I think Rand Paul had a tough week, last week. If he'll focus on providing a check and balance on a runaway Washington government he'll be fine.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): And--

SENATOR LAMAR ALEXANDER: And he'll be elected.

BOB SCHIEFFER: What about this whole business of the Tea Party? Is it going to prove to be a good thing for Republicans or is this something that you need to be worried about here?

SENATOR LAMAR ALEXANDER: Well, I think, anytime Americans want to get out of their chairs and focus on jobs, debt, and terror and checking a run-away government in Washington, we want them in our primaries, we want them as our nominees and we want them in the United States Senate. I think it provides diversity in-- in-- in our party, makes us a bigger tent, gives us a lot more energy. But I think the American people are-- are-- are really upset right now. And this election is going to have a lot of fresh faces, a lot of surprises. But the mood is, let's throw the rascals out in Washington. And the Democrats are the rascals by a big majority. And I think we're going to have a lot more Republicans in November for that reason.

BOB SCHIEFFER: But there are no Democrats running in some of those Republican primaries out there. There are Tea Party candidates taking on mainstream members of-- of your party. And I guess that's what I'm getting at. If--

SENATOR LAMAR ALEXANDER: Well, that but-- but when you have a lot of energy, Bob, out there in the country, one party or the other is going to attract it. And we have people who've looked at Washington and looked at, you know, a bailout every other day, too much taxes, too much debt. I mean, this new financial regulation bill is just a big, wet blanket on our entrepreneurial system in the country, our system for creating jobs. And they want to slow that down or stop it. So we want that energy in our party. I think we're getting it. And it's going to produce some surprises and several new faces.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. Lamar Alexander, thank you very much for being with us, Senator.

We're going to be back in a minute with Joe Sestak, the man they're calling the giant killer now up in Pennsylvania.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: Back now with one of Tuesday's big primary winners, Pennsylvania Congressman Joe Sestak, who took on the establishment, the Democratic establishment in Pennsylvania, and took on the White House and beat Arlen Specter, who had switched from the Republican Party.

Let me just ask you first about what I was asking Robert Gibbs about this idea: did the White House offer you a position in the administration if you would not run?

REPRESENTATIVE JOE SESTAK (D-Pennsylvania/PA Democratic Senate Candidate): Yeah. I-- I was asked that question months after it happened. And I felt an obligation to answer it honestly. I said, yes. But, Bob--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Can you tell us what job--

REPRESENTATIVE JOE SESTAK: No, no, Bob, I-- and I said at the time, anything beyond that just gets into politics. And actually, that's what I think is failing Washington, DC. Principle doesn't seem to triumph over politics--would people come here, and be willing to lose their job over doing what they said they would do. And so, I just stay focused on what I had issued out there, which was a plan for Pennsylvania working families from retirement security to educational opportunities for their children and small business opportunities. That's what I just keep on talking about.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, let's-- let's talk about the race that you had with Arnold-- with Arlen Specter. The White House was for Specter, they obviously wanted you not in the race. But you took them on. Now will you ask for Barack Obama's help?

REPRESENTATIVE JOE SESTAK: Well, I-- I have to tell you, President was the very first one who called me, and I welcome his support. And I have to also tell you Arlen Specter, when he called me, set a standard for graciousness. Telling me, "Joe, congratulations, I'm going to support you."

Well, I watched a wonderful primary between Mrs. Clinton and Mister Obama, and they steered those candidates much like this primary did. And we're going to come together because we believe in Democratic principles. But I'm going to come to Washington and serve. And I really do want to fight for working families.

And, yes, I'll stand up to the party if they're wrong, and they aren't going the right way for people in Pennsylvania. But I do believe in Democratic principles.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Do you think the President would help you or hurt you if he came to Pennsylvania and-- and will you ask him to come?

REPRESENTATIVE JOE SESTAK: I'd be honored to stand with the President of the United States. Honored.

BOB SCHIEFFER: You would be honored if he came, did-- have you asked him, yet?

REPRESENTATIVE JOE SESTAK: Sir, I-- yeah, we had a nice discussion and he said he look forward to you. He said I'll support you and I hope so. (LAUGHING)

BOB SCHIEFFER: So what do you think did it? Was this part of the anti-incumbent mood that's going on in the country right now, because, obviously, there-- there's a great deal of anger with Washington itself? What do you think your victory meant and-- and how do you think you did it?

REPRESENTATIVE JOE SESTAK: When I had to go through the sixty-seven counties last July and decide whether to get in or not after the establishment said sit down, I'll never forget a farmer that said to me, when I asked him how the recession was, and he said, "Not too bad. I was hurting so much already." What I listened to was people had literally lost trust. They'd lost faith in Washington, DC. They saw people actually more willing to try to take positions that might help them in electoral prospects rather than standing up with the courage and the conviction fighting for what was needed for them. They knew that Washington had lost focus.

So I tell everyone, it was a matter of trust. And I hope to earn that trust from them. I didn't run simultaneously, Bob, for my congressional job because I thought I had to begin to demonstrate. It wasn't about Joe Sestak and his job. It was about yours. That, more than anything, is what I

said about the establishment it's try-- trying to regain their trust like in the navy. A captain of a ship would always walk around have captains calls and sit down and listen. And at the end of the day, they cut of your jib, and then they'll follow you if they trust you to do anything. And that's what Washington has to regain.

BOB SCHIEFFER: You know it's a very interesting point. And I-- and I absolutely take your point. But some people say that the reason that Washington doesn't work now is because in order to get to Washington, you have to have to raise so much money. You have to sign off with so many interest groups back home before you get there. Then once you get to Washington, you can't compromise that your positions are set in stone. How do you get around that?

REPRESENTATIVE JOE SESTAK: Well, it wasn't an issue for me in this primary, (LAUGHING) and it isn't going to be. Look, if you took money out of politics, you'd solve eighty percent of all the problems. So I'm co-sponsoring a bill to move us towards public financing of campaigns. But at the end of the day I can look someone in the eye and say I appreciate your support but I'm going to still do what's right. Well, I did everything I wanted to do by 1986. I commanded a ship at sea. This is payback to this nation, as far as I'm concerned, because they took care of me and my family with TRICARE, wonderful health care. They took care of my daughter when she had a health issue. I wanted everyone to be like in the military--health opportunities because the dividends that accrue to our nation are immense.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, Congressman, thank you so much--

REPRESENTATIVE JOE SESTAK (overlapping): Thanks for having me.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --we hope we will see you again as we go through this political year.

We'll be back in a moment with some final thoughts.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: Finally today there are various reasons being given for the rise of the Tea Party, and you heard several more today. But here's what I'm wondering. Are we just seeing history repeat itself?

In modern history--to me, that means during my lifetime--political upheavals have generally been followed by the out party going too far--Republicans, too far to the right; Democrats, too far to the left. Here's what I mean.

In 1960, after John Kennedy's election and subsequent death, Lyndon Johnson came to power and caused a sea change in American politics. He launched the Great Society programs and passed the '64 Civil Rights Bill. Republicans responded by throwing out the leaders of their own party, who had controlled that party for years and nominated Barry Goldwater, a good man but who was far to the right of the Republican establishment. He lost in a landslide.

After Nixon's sea change election, Democrats purged their party of their long-time leaders, even barred them from the '72 Convention, and nominated George McGovern, another good man but one who was far to the left of his party. Another disaster.

Once Nixon resigned and caused another sea change, Democrats pushed aside mainstream leaders and chose outsider Jimmy Carter. He lasted one term. Which brings us to Barack

Obama--the sea change he brought to American politics and in its wake, the rise of the Tea Party, and its demand to purge the Republican Party of its old-line leaders.

It's not my business to advise political parties, and I'm sure they know more about politics than I do, but if I were a Republican strategist, I might think about recent history and what lessons it might offer.

Back in a minute.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: And thanks for joining us. We'll be right here next week on FACE THE NATION.

ANNOUNCER: This broadcast was produced by CBS News, which is solely responsible for the selection of today's guests and topics. It originated in Washington, DC.