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TELEVISION PROGRAM TO "CBS NEWS' FACE THE NATION."



## **August 16, 2009 Transcript**

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## TRANSCRIPT

HARRY SMITH: Today on FACE THE NATION, the battle over health care reform. Plus, the war in Afghanistan.

Members of Congress went home last week and came face to face with huge crowds angry about plans to overhaul health care--does the White House still have the muscle and the public support to pass reforms.

We'll ask White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs.

Then we'll turn to Afghanistan, where U.S. troops are going head to head with the Taliban as that country prepares for this week's elections. We'll get perspective from former Senator Chuck Hagel and Iraq Study Group Co-Chair Lee Hamilton.

And, finally, presidential historian Douglas Brinkley joins us to talk about Presidents and our national parks.

But first, the rage over health care reform, on FACE THE NATION.

ANNOUNCER: FACE THE NATION with CBS News chief Washington correspondent Bob Schieffer.

And now from Washington, substituting for Bob Schieffer, anchor of THE EARLY SHOW, Harry Smith.

HARRY SMITH: Welcome again to the broadcast. Bob Schieffer is off this morning.

Joining us now from Phoenix, Arizona, where he is traveling with the President, White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs.

Mister Gibbs, good morning.

ROBERT GIBBS (White House Press Secretary): Good morning, Harry. How are you?

HARRY SMITH: Very well. Eighty percent of Americans have health insurance. They may not be thrilled with the system as it works right now, but their fear is that reform is going to make things worse instead of better. Can you guarantee them that things will improve?

ROBERT GIBBS: Absolutely. If you like what you have now, you'll get a chance to keep it. But at each of the town hall meetings that the President has done over the last week, Harry, we have highlighted a specific instance where health insurance reform would help those that already have health insurance.

Yesterday, it was a-- a family that had hit the lifetime cap on their policy and were soon going to have to start paying those expenses completely out of pocket or a-- a woman in New Hampshire who was discriminated against by her health insurance company because they said she had a preexisting condition, which meant they didn't want to cover any of her medical expenses.

Those type of insurance reforms will be exactly what those that are lucky enough to have health insurance in our country, those are the reforms and the benefits that they'll see as part of this debate.

HARRY SMITH: Okay. So those are for folks who have insurance already. There are almost fifty million people in the United States who do not have health insurance. What makes the White House think it can create a new bureaucracy that will live up to the promise of actually being-- being able to provide health insurance to people who don't have it?

ROBERT GIBBS: Well, look, we'll create a health care exchange that will allow people to find the policy that works best for them, much like the Federal Employees Health Benefit. They'll get a chance to look at what serves their family or their interest or their small business in a good way. They'll get help in trying to purchase that health insurance because right now, Harry, we all pay for those that get sick and go to the emergency room but don't have health insurance through uncompensated care it affects our insurance rates just like it affects millions of others.

HARRY SMITH: Does the President have to have a government-sponsored or a government-run insurance plan in order for him to sign off the-- on this or is this a deal breaker?

ROBERT GIBBS: Well, Harry, what-- well, the President has always talked about is that we inject some choice and competition into the private insurance market. There are places in this country, unfortunately, where if you are-- if you don't get insurance through your job and you are seeking it on the private insurance market, you don't have any choice but one health insurance company.

What the President has said in order to inject choice and competition, which will drive down costs and improve quality, that people ought to be able to have some competitor in that market. There ought to be a choice that they have. The President has thus far sided with the motion that that can best be done through a public option.

HARRY SMITH: Okay. Thus far sided with--

ROBERT GIBBS (overlapping): But I think most of all--

HARRY SMITH: Is that-- is that a hedge?

ROBERT GIBBS: No, no, no. What I am saying is that the bottom line for this for the President is, what we have to have is choice and competition in the insurance market. Again, if you are in a place in this country where you only get one choice, how in the world--

HARRY SMITH (overlapping): Right.

ROBERT GIBBS: --are you going to be able to convince anybody that you are driving down costs when you don't have to compete against anything.

HARRY SMITH: There is a-- a lot of skepticism, though, about whether this is going to work or not. And yesterday the President said, well, okay, so if there is a federal insurance program, we'll just look at the post office. Well, and it has competitors in the-- in the private sector. Maybe that's not the best example to look at. It loses billions every year and it's about to stop delivering mail on Saturdays.

ROBERT GIBBS: Well, look, I don't think he was saying that what we were going to do is create the postal service for health care. What he was doing is addressing those that are concerned that if a government entity is involved in any way that it kills anything in the private market. The President has talked about health insurance reform will build on the way that millions and millions of Americans receive their health insurance. That's through their employer-sponsored system. We want to build on it and improve that. We want to cut costs for families and for small businesses.

You know, but, Harry, what I think is most important in this debate is what happens if we do nothing? That's the riskiest option of all, because we know that fourteen thousand people each day will lose their health insurance if we continue to do the same thing. We know that premiums will skyrocket.

For a family listening out there your premium will double in-- in less than nine years if we do nothing. For a small business that's listening out there, who wants to continue to provide health insurance but understands their premiums are skyrocketing, there will be no relief for any of those individuals or families or small businesses, and that's what--

HARRY SMITH: Hm.

ROBERT GIBBS: --and that's why we can't afford to let this great opportunity pass us by and do nothing.

HARRY SMITH: At the President's health care forums, thus far, he has not had to encounter very much rancor, but at especially in certain congressional and Senate districts, some of these folks have seen a lot of noise, a lot of passion. When you see these people's faces and you hear what they have to say, what do you think?

ROBERT GIBBS: Well, when I see the people on TV, you mean?

HARRY SMITH: When you-- when you see these health care forums, not the one the Presidents do--

ROBERT GIBBS: Mm-Hm.

HARRY SMITH: --but some of these-- ones from these various congressional and-- and senatorial districts--

ROBERT GIBBS (overlapping): Oh, I see.

HARRY SMITH: --and you see the anger what do you think?

ROBERT GIBBS: Well, look, I understand, as the President does, that people have questions and concerns about health insurance reform. I think one of the reasons the President is out there-- has been out there three times in the past week is to try to address the misinformation that's out there about health insurance reform.

He also understands this isn't going to be easy. But I-- I will tell you, Harry, we went to a place last night-- Grand Junction, Colorado--where the President received about thirty-five percent of the vote in 2008. We had a very courteous discussion. There were a couple of tough questions, but a very courteous discussion about the issues there involved. I have got to tell you, Harry, I think most of what you are seeing on TV, no offense, is a-- is good TV and that's about it. I think the vast majority of people are having discussions--

HARRY SMITH: Mm-Hm.

ROBERT GIBBS: --whether it is around their kitchen table or with their congressmen in their district or their senator, and they're doing this the way every American discusses issues--

HARRY SMITH: Right.

ROBERT GIBBS: --and that's trying to get some information and some facts to make a good decision.

HARRY SMITH: At some of these health care forums, you hear people like Chuck Grassley say, you know, if there's a-- a national health insurance policy involved in this, I'm not-- I'm not going to participate. You even have some Democrats who are very much on the fence about this. I want to just try and plow this one more time. Does the-- is this a deal breaker for the President? Does he have to have national health insurance in order to have a health care reform plan done?

ROBERT GIBBS: Well, again, the President believes that this option, the option of a government plan is the best way to provide choice and competition. But you mentioned Senator Grassley who is working with Democratic and Republican colleagues to fashion a bill in the Senate Finance Committee and we certainly look forward to their ideas.

HARRY SMITH: All right.

ROBERT GIBBS: Harry, and the-- the bottom line again is, do individuals looking for health insurance in the private market have choice and competition?

HARRY SMITH: Mm-Hm.

ROBERT GIBBS: If we have that, the President will be satisfied.

HARRY SMITH: All right, last but not the least. You're seeing increasing evidence, at least from economists anyway, that the recession is over or may have, in fact, bottomed out. Is the White House look at it that way?

ROBERT GIBBS: Well, look, we've certainly seen some data recently that shows that our economy is-- has stabilized a bit. I definitely think we've pulled back from the edge of going into a depression, which many people predicted when the President took over in January. We still see hundreds of thousands of people losing their jobs every month, millions of people looking for work. And, Harry, this President won't be satisfied that our economy is back on track again until the people that want to work in this economy can find a-- a good-paying job that lets them provide for their family.

HARRY SMITH: Yeah.

ROBERT GIBBS: That's what he is focused on each and every day.

HARRY SMITH: Robert Gibbs, we thank you very much for your time this morning.

ROBERT GIBBS: Harry, thanks for having me.

HARRY SMITH: All right.

We'll be back to talk about the war in Afghanistan in one minute.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

HARRY SMITH: The growing violence in Afghanistan is a reminder that the fighting that started there in 2001 is far from over. We go now to CBS News chief of foreign affairs correspondent Lara Logan, who is with U.S. troops in Helmand Province.

Lara, you have made many trips to Afghanistan. What is it like there now on the eve of the elections?

LARA LOGAN (Chief Foreign Affairs Correspondent): Well, there is an atmosphere of fear hanging over this election. Now Afghans are ready to vote in the next few days. This is their second presidential election.

But just yesterday, there was a massive car bomb outside NATO headquarters in the capital of Kabul, and-- and-- and this for Afghans is a demonstration that Taliban trying to show they can strike any time they want to, anywhere they want to.

And they have threatened to disrupt the election at all costs. They won't be able to stop everybody from going to the polls. But there is concern that particularly here where I am in the south of the country, they will through fear and intimidation be able to prevent people from voting. And if they can do that in significant numbers, then that is a problem for the credibility of the election.

And what people were-- were telling us here is they were telling the Marines when we were out on patrol yesterday is that we can't go and vote because your finger is stained with indelible ink and if the Taliban see that they say they're going to chop of our heads, they're going to kill us. And they know there are only a few polling stations that are open in the south, and in some areas they couldn't even open polling

station. It is so dangerous. So, this is one of the major problems that Afghans face and there is some concern about what exactly the Taliban have in store over the next few days and on voting day itself.

The U.S. will be securing the roads, the Afghans will be securing the polling stations, and-- and there will not be a visible U.S. presence. They want this to look like an Afghan election. They want people to believe that it is an Afghan election. Although many Afghans believe it is the U.S. that will decide the outcome and that their vote doesn't really count. Harry.

HARRY SMITH: And joining us now to talk about U.S. strategy there, former Senator Chuck Hagel and former Congressman Lee Hamilton joining. Thank you very much for taking the time to be with us today.

July was the deadliest month so far for U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan. The Taliban effectively control almost half of the country, as the United States continues to aggressively engage the Taliban. What are your greatest concerns? Mister Hamilton, let me start with you.

LEE HAMILTON (Co-Chair, Iraq Study Group): Afghanistan is fiendishly complex, a very, very difficult policy challenge for us. I think we're at a pivotal point. We're going to have to decide how hard, how big to go in or to come back a little bit.

My major concern at the moment is that we put aside our assumptions and examine, kind of, from the beginning, are we doing the right thing there. What are our objectives? How much are we willing to pay to reach those objectives? Are there alternatives other than a massive increase in troops and money into the region? Can we protect the American national interest? Can we protect Americans with something less than maybe on the horizon here?

Those are the questions on my mind.

HARRY SMITH: Senator Hagel, General McChrystal is due to report soon back on-- as the transition that's taking place under his leadership. We're hearing rumors he's been told not to ask for more troops, but may-- the wish list is said to include as many as ten thousand. Anthony Cordesman this week said there ought to be forty-five thousand more.

This is a very expensive proposition in terms of both blood and treasure. Do we know we're making the right investment?

CHUCK HAGEL (Former U.S. Senator): Well, I go back to what Lee laid out and answer your question, which I think he has captured it exactly right. In addition to what Lee has said, I would add this: What are the achievable objectives? And, that ties to your question--how do we know we're making the right decisions?

First, we have an election Thursday. I would expect that General McChrystal's analysis will come in shortly thereafter. My understanding is there will be a part two to that. Then, he'll have recommendations following that, which will obviously address additional troops if he's going to ask for more.

But, I-- I-- I think also we have to keep in mind that this fall we will have been in Afghanistan nine years. And we've got to identify very clearly what is this objective. Is it nation building? Now, if it's nation building and general-- ambassador Eikenberry, as we know, has sent a recent memo to secretary Clinton saying, I need two and a half billion more--

HARRY SMITH (overlapping): Two million more-- billion more.

CHUCK HAGEL: --in nonmilitary plus military.

HARRY SMITH (overlapping): Yeah. Mm-Hm.

CHUCK HAGEL: Then we are getting very deep into something here that we don't do very well, we don't understand. This area of the world is at the crossroads of the most dangerous, complicated, combustible region on earth. You've got three nuclear powers all bordering each other and-- and aspiring nuclear power in Iran. Pakistan is connected to the future of Afghanistan. Regional strategic concepts have to be laid out in this and it-- and it isn't just the military.

I-- I fear that we could find ourselves bogged down drifting dangerously deeper and deeper into a situation where it-- it becomes very difficult to get out and we become isolated. You know, the Dutch are coming out next year.

HARRY SMITH: Mm-hm.

CHUCK HAGEL: The Canadians are looking to coming out in 2011. The British is--

HARRY SMITH (overlapping): They're up against the wall. There's--

CHUCK HAGEL: With this election. So--

HARRY SMITH (overlapping): Right.

CHUCK HAGEL: --I'm willing to wait to see what McChrystal says. But I-- I think Gates' points-- secretary Gates has been very important, points that he's made, because one of the points he continues to make is--the more we load in American forces, are we being perceived more and more wider and wider as an occupation force? If the-- if the people turn and we can't get the people back, it won't make any difference we-- whether we put two hundred thousand troops in.

HARRY SMITH: Right.

CHUCK HAGEL: I mean, that was a difficult lesson in Vietnam.

HARRY SMITH: Point well-taken. And the question then becomes, if, in fact, too much time has transpired for the United States to let its interests seep in there? If too much time is-- if the time has been forfeited if-- let me go back to what Senator Hagel said--can we afford not to be there, though? Whe-- if it's a-- if the stakes are as high as they are, can we afford not to be there?

LEE HAMILTON: If you keep your focus on what I think is the core national interest--protecting Americans, dismantling al Qaeda--we have to achieve that objective. We do not want to threaten the security and lives of the American people. Can we achieve that without what Chuck is-- Chuck is talking about--nation building. I do not personally think we can modernize Afghanistan. There are historical, political, cultural, economic forces that are massive in that country, and we can't turn them around.

One of the great questions of American foreign policy is always-- is sustainability. We get excited about a place. We're willing to put billions of dollars into it in the short-term. But you cannot solve Afghanistan's problems in the short-term. All of the experts are telling us decades. So the question, Chuck, is, are your former colleagues and mine willing to put billions and billions and billions of dollars over not a year or two or three, but decades into Afghanistan?

HARRY SMITH (overlapping): Do you--

LEE HAMILTON: Let's protect the core interests.

HARRY SMITH (overlapping): Do-- do you feel like the White House has clear objectives here? Richard Holbrooke was in a forum this week. Somebody asked him what success is, and then when he said well we'll know it when we see it.

CHUCK HAGEL: I don't think that's a particularly reassuring answer, but I think that is indicative, though, to this foggy, vaporous idea that's still floating around out there as to what is-- to Lee's point, and he's exactly right, what is not only the achievable core objective interest but what protects our interests?

You know, I mentioned Pakistan. That area has never been governable. Now, that doesn't mean it can't get better, but I-- I am not so sure it's wise to get our army bogged down in a situation where by the end of this year, right now, on the board, including NATO and other countries like Australia have troops in there, we're going to have at least a hundred thousand troops in there. We're probably tripling the USAID and economic development going in there.

You drift and drift and you go deeper and wider and all of a sudden a year or two years goes by and you're in a lot of trouble. Now, how do you unwind this?

HARRY SMITH: Mm-Hm.

CHUCK HAGEL: Because there are ramifications to that for our standing in the world.

HARRY SMITH: Congressman Hamilton, final question. Election happens this week. Does it matter if Karzai ends up back in office? It was-- it will likely be a runoff, but it seems if-- if-- if it were to happen, he'll-- he'll end up be back in office, does it matter?

LEE HAMILTON: I don't know much about the alternatives to Karzai. I've been disappointed in Karzai's leadership. But if our goal is to create a legitimate, reasonable, accountable, capable Afghan government, we're going to be there a long, long time, I believe.

Does it matter? I suppose it does in who wins an election. My view is that the election is kind of delayed us to try to achieve our objectives, maybe it's a necessary delay. But we're going to have to work with that Afghan government even with limited objectives that Chuck and I have talked about. We're going to have to work with them.

HARRY SMITH: Hm.

LEE HAMILTON: And so in a sense, we'll work with who-- whoever wins.

CHUCK HAGEL: As always, Harry, just like Iraq, it will be the people themselves of that region that will determine the fate and outcome of their country.

HARRY SMITH: Very sobering stuff, Senator Hagel, Congressmen, thank you so much for being here. We'll be right back.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

HARRY SMITH: President Obama and his family took in a tour of Yellowstone National Park yesterday. Historian Doug Brinkley joins us now to talk about Presidents in America's national parks. He's the author of the new book, *Teddy Roosevelt: Wilderness Warrior*.

Doug Brinkley, good morning.

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY (Author, *The Wilderness Warrior*): Good morning to you, Harry.

HARRY SMITH: Why was Roosevelt so determined to preserve some of America's great-- last great places?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: Well, as a kid he had asthma and he grew up in New York City and he found the nature as a cure tip. He would go to Catskills and Adirondacks. Later, his mother and wife died on the same day, Valentine's Day, in New York. He grew very dark and despondent, took the train out to the

Badlands of North Dakota and ended up writing a trilogy of books about the ecosystem there; and started believing that the wilderness, wild places, scenic wonders is what distinguish the United States from Europe.

It's true, Britain had Westminster Abbey, but we had Yellowstone. France might have the Louvre, we had the Grand Canyon.

HARRY SMITH: All right. You spoke with President Obama before he embarked on this trip out West. What did you talk about?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: Well, they're just a group of historians he had at the White House and I got to talk a little bit about my book on TR, *The Wilderness Warrior*. And then I went to the Interior Department and got to speak with Secretary Salazar who's accompanying the President to these national parks. And they're just very keen for, I think, the American people to know that some of their tax dollars are going to keep these great parks up and running.

HARRY SMITH: If Roosevelt were alive today, what would he think of the state of the parks?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: I-- I think he would be sadly dismayed, in fact, not just our national parks, incidentally here, we need to-- it's a great American triumphal success story--the national park system, our forest, and monuments. But we have places that still need to be designated parks like Big Sur, ANWR in Alaska, the North Woods of Maine.

I'm sitting here in California, and the state parks of California. Arnold Schwarzenegger is about to try to close fifty to a hundred of them because he says he doesn't have money. He's going to padlock the state parks of California.

So I think hopefully the President's trip and Ken Burns' upcoming documentary is going to remind people that-- that these are our great wonders that these parks, both national and state, are what makes America really special and great. And that children, in particular, can find all this-- these sort of wonders by just going to the sea or the mountains or our great rivers.

HARRY SMITH: Interestingly enough, attendance at national parks had been going down for several years. It actually spiked back up against this-- again because of the recession this year. Do you have any sense whatsoever that there is a national will to pour in the billions of dollars that is so desperately needed to restore the infrastructure in the national parks? And I have only got about thirty seconds left, Doug.

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: I think we need to have that debate, Harry. Clearly, health care is going to dominate things now, but the answer is yes. For example, we have over five hundred wildlife refuges, saving these great species and their habitat, yet industrialization is encroaching on them all the time. I think we just got to preserve what we have. We have got to realize that it is America's best idea--the parks, monuments, and wildlife refuges. And think about what Roosevelt called the generation's unborn, these-- these land areas are great heirlooms to future generations.

HARRY SMITH: Doug Brinkley, thanks so much for your thoughts this morning. Do appreciate it.

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: Thanks, Harry.

HARRY SMITH: We'll be right back.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

HARRY SMITH: That's our broadcast. Bob Schieffer will be back next Sunday. Thanks for watching FACE THE NATION.

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