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



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TRANSCRIPT

BOB SCHIEFFER: BOB SCHIEFFER: Today on FACE THE NATION, one of the candidates in the Afghanistan run-off election has quit--will that delay President Obama's troop decision.

Abdullah Abdullah withdrew because he feared the coming election would produce the same kind of fraud as the last one--where does that put U.S. strategy now. Can the current government claim any legitimacy.

We'll ask the top advisor to President Obama David Axelrod. We'll have that same question for Senator Joe Lieberman who wants more troops for Afghanistan now.

We'll have plenty of questions, too, on health care. Then I'll have a Final Word on nation-building at home and abroad.

But first, deciding on troops and a strategy on FACE THE NATION.

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

BOB SCHIEFFER: And good morning again. Joining us from Chicago this morning, the White House Senior Advisor, David Axelrod.

Mister Axelrod, the President insisted that the Afghan people have a run-off election. He convinced the Afghan President Karzai to do that after charges that the general election was a fraud. He agreed but he refused to replace the officials who were in-charge of the last one and now the other candidate Abdullah Abdullah has quit. I guess I would ask you first, is this going to have any impact on the timing of the President's decision on when to send those troops to Afghanistan?

DAVID AXELROD (White House Senior Advisor): Well, let me correct one thing that you said, Bob, what the President said was he wanted there to be a-- an election that proceeded in the constitutional way. It-- it did, in fact, many ballots were thrown out, a run-off was called. Now Mister Abdullah has exercised his rights as a candidate to withdraw. He's made a political decision to withdraw from this contest and-- and that does not markedly change the situation.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, why doesn't it? I mean, the thing was a fraud. The man who was opposing him said, you know, you've got to replace these officials who allowed this to happen. They didn't allow it to happen. United States, I guess, went along with that. Why doesn't it change the situation?

DAVID AXELROD: Well, I think, first of-- first-- first of all, as I said he made a political judgment and I thought that his remarks today were rather moderate. He left open as to whether his supporters should participate in the process and he's establishing himself as a-- as a leader of the opposition.

But every poll that'd been taken there suggested that he was likely to be defeated anyway. So we're going to deal with the government that is. Then obviously, there're issues we need to discuss, such as reducing the high level of corruption there. These are issues we'll take up with-- with President Karzai.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Is there any word, Mister Axelrod, on when we can expect the President to make this decision on whether or not he's going to put more troops in there?

DAVID AXELROD: Well, Bob, I expect the President will make a-- a decision within weeks. As you know he's gone through a very rigorous process because the goal here's not just to make a-- an arithmetic judgment about the number of troops but to make sure we have the right strategy to reach our goal. And our goal is to protect the American people from al Qaeda, that's why we're in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda launched on us from Afghanistan. They've been driven to the mountains of Pakistan. We don't want them to re-return to Afghanistan and make Afghanistan a-- a base again and that's what this is about. And the

question is what is the most effective strategy moving forward in the context of Pakistan, our troop strength around the world? These are the decisions that commander-in-chief has to make and he is going through a methodical process met with the Joint Chiefs on-- on Friday—

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Okay.

DAVID AXELROD: --a good discussion with them.

BOB SCHIEFFER: But on timing, you're saying in a matter of weeks? Let me ask you this--

DAVID AXELROD: Yes, I expect that.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --Mister Axelrod, last week when casualties in Afghanistan hit a new high, President Obama went to Dover Air Force Base to take part in a ceremony honoring the return of some of those who had been killed there. Well, this morning on Fox News, Rush Limbaugh had this to say about that.

RUSH LIMBAUGH (Fox News Sunday): It was a photo op. I was a photo op precisely because he's having big-time trouble on this whole Afghanistan dithering situation. He found one family that would allow photos to be taken. None of the others did.

And, of course, when you have a sycophantic media following you around, able to promote and amplify whatever you want then he can create the impression that he has all this great concern.

BOB SCHIEFFER: So what's your reaction to that?

DAVID AXELROD: My reaction is that I think that the President of United States went to Dover to represent the American people and pay his respect to the families who had made so much of a sacrifice to those brave service people who made the ultimate sacrifice. It was the appropriate thing to do, and I think most Americans appreciate that.

BOB SCHIEFFER: On this broadcast back in March, the White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel said this about Rush Limbaugh. He said, "He is the voice, the intellectual force, and the energy behind the Republican Party." Do you believe that what he said today and he-- we'll have some more quotes from him here represents what the Republican Party believes?

DAVID AXELROD: I don't know. That's for the Republican Party to decide. I think we've seen an interesting development over this weekend in a special election up in Upstate New York in a congressional district, the Republican candidate withdrew because of the strong third party movement behind a very right-wing conservative and certainly Mister Limbaugh and others were behind that.

And I think it sends a clear message to moderates within that party that there's no room at the in-- for them and that's why you see Republican identification in polls at a-- at a historic low. So, that may be where the energy is in the Republican Party but it's certainly not a-- a view on which you can build a majority-- a majority party.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, one of the things he said today was that the President is narcissistic, immature, inexperienced, and in over his head. Reaction?

DAVID AXELROD: Yeah. Well, I-- I think it's a surreal day when you're getting lectures on humility from Rush Limbaugh, and I'm not going to respond to that. The fact is that he is an entertainer. The President has to run the country. He is the commander-in-chief. He has huge responsibilities. I think he does them thoughtfully. He does them well and there're difficult problems. We walked into a difficult situation. I think he's handling it very, very well and most people believe that.

So, you know, we'll let Mister Limbaugh fulminate but I think the American people are well served and believe they're well served.

BOB SCHIEFFER: I want to go to other things, but let me just ask you one final question. Last week your man Robert Gibbs met with the folks at Fox News, declared a truce in this war you've been having with them. Was the truce broken this morning?

DAVID AXELROD: Look, I'm not-- first of all, let me dispel something. We're not at war with anyone. We're at war only with people who represent mistruths as truth and that's true of any network whether it's Fox, CBS, or any other network when-- when errors of fact are stated or when opinion is offered as fact, we will-- we will challenge that. So, you know, and that is-- that will be our policy going forward and the American people deserve that and we-- and we have to do that for the sake of-- of the administration but-- but we're not at war with anyone. And certainly Rush-- nobody-- it is no surprise that Rush Limbaugh espouses the views that he espouses. He does it every day on radio. He-- he is marketing the-- the outrageous and-- and he does very well with it but, as I said, he's an entertainer, we've got bigger responsibilities and we're going to discharge those responsibility (sic).

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you a little bit about the whole swine flu thing. Has the government done enough to prepare this country for a swine flu epidemic? Is there a vaccine shortage?

DAVID AXELROD: Well, let me say when the first intimations of this-- of this epidemic came to the fore in the spring, the President alerted the country and mobilized the government and the secretary of Health and Human Services and the secretary of Homeland Security. They've both done, I think, an excellent job along with the CDC.

We were told by the manufactures of the vaccine and we started that process very quickly. We were told by the manufactures that they would have forty thousand doses ready by last week. We have twenty-eight, I'm sorry, forty million doses. We had twenty-eight million as of last week. It's growing every day. We expect to get ten million this week and we're catching up quickly. But we did represent to the public what we were told by the manufacturers and that turned out not to be the case. I think on the whole, however, we've done an-- a very good job, an unprecedented job, and working with local authorities to deal with what is a very serious situation.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, what do you-- what do you do to correct this kind of thing. You're told one thing, you'd have so much and you didn't. These are the kinds of things we heard after Katrina--

DAVID AXELROD (overlapping): Well--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): --during a pervious administration.

DAVID AXELROD (overlapping): Well, Bob, let's-- let's be--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Are you taking steps to correct that?

DAVID AXELROD: --let's be clear, we're going to be caught up within a week and I think we've been very, very aggressive on this situation. For the first time ever people can go on a website and find out where to get the vaccine they need. They can diagnose their symptoms on the website. This has taken some pressure off of public health authorities. We've gotten Tamiflu all over the country to deal with those who-- who contract this, particularly, the young. This is a serious, serious epidemic. One of the most serious we faced in a long time. And I think if you measure our performance against the performance of past administrations in dealing with the situation like this, we come up very well. But the important thing isn't how we measure up, the important thing is how we deal with this problem moving forward. And we will have all the vaccine we need in very order and people should have some confidence about that.

BOB SCHIEFFER: I have to ask you a little bit about health care leader Reid and the Senate said this week that he's going to bring a bill to the floor that does include the public option. At this point it does not appear that he has the votes to get a public option passed. If he can't, will the President be willing to sign a health care reform bill that does not include the public option?

DAVID AXELROD: Bob, I'm not going to deal with that. I think both the House and the Senate are going to move forward bills that-- that likely will have a public option. The President believes the public option is valuable to create competition with the insurance-- within the insurance industry in this-- among this group of people who doesn't have insurance today. We'll reduce cost and it will be-- and it will be a positive thing. So, he is eager for that to be in the bill. I think that some version of it will be in the bill.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. David Axelrod, we thank you for coming to see us this morning. Hope to see you again.

DAVID AXELROD: Good to be with you, Bob. Thanks.

BOB SCHIEFFER: We'll be back in one minute with Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman. He is a Democrat or an independent Democrat and we may some-- have some different ideas about all of this.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: With us now, Senator Joe Lieberman of Connecticut. You just heard the White House top adviser on such thing saying that it is likely that both the House and Senate will finally come up with some kind of health care bill that has some sort of public option in it. What's your take?

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN (I-Connecticut/Armed Services Committee): I hope not. In other words I'm all for health care reform. It-- it-- we-- we have a system that needs fixing but we've got some more urgent problems than that, and the first most urgent is to fix our economy, to get at creating jobs again, and I think that a public option will actually hurt the economic recovery and our long-term fiscal situation because it will end up causing the government to raise taxes, will probably raise premiums, or it will put us further into debt. You know the public option came out of nowhere. If you look at last year's presidential campaign, Bob, no mention of it.

The goal has always been two goals. One is make health insurance more affordable and to extend it to people who don't have it now. The public option I think was raised in the last year by people who really want to have a government-controlled health insurance system. That's their right. I think they're wrong but it's not necessary, as President Obama has said over and over again, to achieve the goals that he has. So I-- I hope it's not in there at the end.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, you caught the attention of a lot of people last week when you said that, yes, you might vote to allow the bill to come to the Senate floor with the public option in it, but that you might join the Republicans and filibustering it if-- if it came to that to keep it from including a public option in the final version.

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Yeah.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Is-- is that accurate?

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Yeah. I'm not going to filibuster to stop the debate on health care reform from beginning because I want to have that debate. I want to have health care reform. I want to be able to say yes. There're so many good things we can do to make health insurance more affordable and to extend it to people who don't have it now, but I feel so strongly about the creation of another government health insurance entitlement up-- up-- the government going into the health insurance business, I think it's such a mistake that I would use the power I have as-- as a single Senator to stop a final vote, because--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): But wouldn't that mean that-- that you might wind up with nothing instead of something?

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Yeah, but I'd say to the people who are all of a sudden making the public option a government health insurance company, the litmus test here, they're stopping us from getting something done. There is a-- this is classic--

BOB SCHIEFFER: Mm-Hm.

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: --Washington today, Bob. There is broad bipartisan support for health care delivery reforms, for pushing the insurance companies. For instance, to-- to give insurance to people who've preexisting illness, no cap on lifetime benefits. We're extending health insurance to people who don't have it. All of a sudden, if you're not for this government health insurance company, you're-- you're-- you're against health care reform, I'd say to them, don't stop us from getting something important and good done for the Americans.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): But is what you're also saying is that nothing is better than a government health insurance or a gov-- health insurance reform that includes a public option. Nothing is better than that?

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Well, the truth is that nothing is better than that because I-- I think we ought to follow, if I may, the-- the doctors' oath here. In Congress says we deal with health care reform, do no harm. And I am afraid, listen, amazingly nobody has talked about it. The Congressional Budget Office said on Thursday when the House Democrats put out their health care reform plan with a public option in it that the public plan would end up charging higher premiums than the average premiums charged by the commercial health insurance companies. Now, why would we want to do that? Why would we-- the Congressional Budget Off-- Office has also said if the government creates a public plan, the public is going to be on the line. When it runs a deficit, as it surely will, the public--the taxpayers--will have to pay for it.

BOB SCHIEFFER: I'm going to ask you this question because I want to give you a chance to respond to it.

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN (overlapping): Okay.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Some of your critics say that the reason that you were so dead set against the public option is because there're so many insurance companies headquartered in your home state in Connecticut and they've been some of your biggest supporters. What have they given you this year, four hundred thousand dollars or something like that? Does that have anything to do with your position on the public option?

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: No. You know I wish people would come out and debate me on the public option, instead of, questioning my motives. If they looked at the record, I have never hesitated to get tough on insurance companies when I thought they were wrong. I-- when I was attorney general of Connecticut, I filed an antitrust action against the Connecticut insurance companies.

A few years ago when there was a patient bill of rights in-- in the Senate, which insurance companies opposed, I supported it. Right now I have said that I will support the removal of the antitrust exemption that insurance companies have. That's not the reason but I-- but I'll say this: This recommendation of a public option, a government health insurance company takes our government down a road that we've never gone down before. In other words, the-- we believe in a market economy. It-- it's-- it's what's created the great American middle class but it doesn't have a conscience when it behaves badly. We regulated companies. We sue them. We-- I've been angry at oil companies. I never ha-- had the idea that government should go into the oil business to make oil companies behave better. I think this would be a terrible mistake.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you quickly about Afghanistan.

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Sure.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And you are one of those who say we need to send forty thousand troops now because that's what General McChrystal has told the President that we need. And, yet, we see this mess that's developed now where now they-- they're not going to have the runoff election-- well, they'll have the runoff election but even the person who is in the runoff says it's so fraudulent and it's so corrupt, there's no use to even have it. What have we gotten ourselves hooked up to here with the-- with this Karzai government?

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Yeah. We-- we've really got to keep our eye on the ball here. And-- and David Axelrod said it well in the previous interview. We-- we're in Afghanistan to stop the Taliban and al Qaeda from coming back into control there because if they do, it will be a base for much they can attack us again as they did on 9/11. It will destabilize Pakistan and the whole region.

The-- everyone knows the Karzai government can be improved but, look, Hamid Karzai is going to be the next president of Afghanistan. He's played this according to the constitutional and rules of law in Afghanistan. He's-- he got forty-eight percent of the vote even after the-- the fraudulent votes were eliminated. I think it's time for us to stop beating up on President Karzai and start building up President Karzai and his government to be the government we need because they're not the enemy. The enemy is the Taliban. Our troops need reinforcements. General McChrystal has said that. We lost more American soldiers in the last month than in any month previously in the year. It's-- it's time to send help.

BOB SCHIEFFER: I need to ask you about Rush Limbaugh--

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN (overlapping): Yeah.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --because after all as an independent Democrat you supported John McCain last time out. What about these remarks that Rush Limbaugh made this morning?

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Well, I just totally disagree with him. I mean the-- on the question of President Obama going to Dover to-- to be there to honor the American heroes whose bodies were returning, I think he was there as commander in chief for all Americans and I-- I don't fault him or question his motives at all. I was-- I was proud that my President was there.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. Joe Lieberman, always a pleasure to have you.

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Thanks, Bob.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And, we'll be back in a moment with some closing thoughts.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: Finally today, as the President tries to develop a new strategy in Afghanistan, I wonder if this is the real lesson that we've learned in Afghanistan so far that nation building like charity probably begins at home at least the way we seem to be going about it in Afghanistan. Now, don't get me wrong. Terrorism poses a threat to America's national security. But is trying to build a western style nation in Afghanistan by funneling money to its leaders really the best way to combat terrorism? I guess what set me off was that story about how we've secretly put the president of Afghanistan's brother on the CIA payroll. He's the one who's supposed to be mixed up in the drug trade. The idea was that by doing that, he'll help us pave the way to building a democracy there. Now, that's good work if you can get it but I don't see how that is making us safer.

Whatever the size of the military force the President decides on for Afghanistan, I think he needs to be paying more attention to where the money is going for the non-military spending there. Incredibly, no one really seems to know. To judge by what we've gotten from it so far we'd be much better off with some nation-building back home. Our infrastructure is already a mess. We could start at the Oakland Bay

Bridge where a five-thousand pound part of the top fell off into the traffic below. That would certainly make us safer for sure.

In Afghanistan we're having to relearn what we should've already known that we can help others but we can't do it for them and when we have to pay others to help themselves I don't see how that helps anyone but the guy getting paid.

Back in a minute.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: That's our broadcast for today. Thanks for watching. We'll be back here, right here, next week.

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