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



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TRANSCRIPT

BOB SCHIEFFER: Today on FACE THE NATION, the first quarter report. Three months into 2010. How's the country doing?

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: We are beginning to turn the corner.

BOB SCHIEFFER: The jobs picture did get better last week and the administration passed its massive health care bill, but what next in Afghanistan, in the war on terror, on immigration and climate control, and what about the anger out there? We'll get answers and analysis from our in-house experts Jan Crawford, Bob Orr, Nancy Cordes, and Georgetown professor Michael Eric Dyson, and the New York Times chief Washington correspondent David Sanger.

What to expect, next 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 and welcome again to FACE THE NATION.

Well, I'm going to start with you, Jan Crawford, because suddenly, according to both the New York Times and Washington Post today where interviews were given by Justice John Paul Stevens, who is approaching ninety-years-old. He is talking about when is he going to step down. I mean, there's every indication from these interviews. He doesn't say he's going to step down, but it sounds like his retirement is imminent. So, in the midst of all the other things that are going on in this election year, it appears that President Obama is going to nominate somebody to fill a-- a vacancy on the court and (LAUGHING) does the White House really need or want that fight right now?

JAN CRAWFORD (Chief Legal Correspondent): Well, I think the White House has been expecting this. We've long suspected that Justice Stevens was going to step down this year and he said he's going to retire in Obama's-- President Obama's first term. So, that means either this year or next year. Justices don't like to retire during a presidential election season. They don't want to inject the court into politics. So the White House is ready for this. I mean, remember, they went through this last year when they replaced Justice Souter. They've looked at these nominees. They've got a pretty good working short list. If they want to fight, now is the time to have it. They've got a solid majority in the Senate. They're going to lose probably four to six votes in the upcoming midterm. So, if they want a fight, that-- now's the time to have it.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): So--

JAN CRAWFORD: But the question is, do they? And I don't think they do. They don't have to have a big fight. They've got qualified nominees out there who I think would be pretty palatable to some of the-- some of the--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Who-- who would you think would be the-- the leading candidate right now?

JAN CRAWFORD: There's a pretty good working short list now of, number one, Elena Kagan, former dean of Harvard Law School. She's the current Solicitor General. She represents the

United States in the Supreme Court. She's very qualified, sparkling credentials, and some conservatives really like her. She hired a lot of conservatives at Harvard Law School. You've got Merrick Garland, a judge here on the DC circuit, considered a moderate on some criminal issues. He would be a very, I think, easy confirmation for the White House. But there's (sic) a lot of voices for another woman and that points us to Judge Diane Wood on the Chicago Federal Appeals Court. She would probably be the biggest fight because out there in the heartland, that's where you get a lot of those controversial abortion cases, and so she sat on a few of those.

BOB SCHIEFFER: There was an interesting speculation that maybe Senator Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota might be on the short list but I noticed you didn't list her.

JAN CRAWFORD: That's-- well, that's a very intriguing possibility. She's a really impressive person. She's got prosecutorial experience and people are always clamoring for someone off the judicial monastery. This, of course, got all former federal appeals court judges. Even the President has talked about how the court is out of touch with everyday Americans. We saw him take a swipe at the Supreme Court in that State of the Union address. She's an impressive person as well--Yale, Harvard Law-- Chicago Law School. But she is a Democrat from a state with a Republican governor. And so if you're thinking politically about who you're going to put on the court, and certainly Obama did last time with Sot-- Sonia Sotomayor, she's not the one you-- you put up.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Because the Republican governor could then appoint a Republican to take her place.

JAN CRAWFORD: Right. And the last thing you want is to lose another Democrat in the Senate when you know you're going to lose four to six coming in November.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, let's talk about that, Nancy Cordes. You covered every step of the President's big fight over health care. This was going to be his signature achievement. He got it done but at some cost. They-- CBS News ran a poll last week and showed that after the President got health care passed low and behold his popularity, his approval rating went down five points. So he actually lost and his approval rating is now at an all-time low and a long way from the sixty-eight percent approval rating he had before-- last year. Do you think that Republicans will now use this? Will this embolden Republicans? And will they continue to oppose him?

NANCY CORDES (Congressional Correspondent): Well, they were already emboldened, Bob. They were feeling really good about their chances in the fall, even before these new poll numbers came out. But the challenge for them now is that the next issue up is really a challenge for them. It's a fin-- it's financial regulation. And they're kind of in a bind because on one hand they have some serious issues with the Democrats' plan in the Senate working through the Senate right now. But on the other hand, they don't want to come across as the partners of the Wall Street fat cats. So they're going to be very careful with this issue because they do believe in the end financial regulation will pass and they don't want to be on the losing end.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And you think that's going to be where the-- the focus is next on passing the financial.

NANCY CORDES: Absolutely. That's what Democrats are saying. It's already passed the House. It's going to come to the floor of the Senate in the next couple of weeks. The President

has said-- nobody likes timetables anymore after what happened with health care. But he has said he's hoping to sign something by Memorial Day. And Democrats are feeling pretty good about that because they do think unlike with health care that they will get some Republican votes, particularly in the House. They think they could pick up several dozen votes in the House and Republicans tell us that that's probably right on target.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Michael Dyson, you are writing a book about Barack Obama. You sort of chronicled him since the campaign. Ruth Marcus wrote a very interesting article yesterday in the Washington Post. And she said, "The irony of the presidency so far," and I'll quote a little above it. She said, "Conservatives have attacked Obama as a socialist, but many on the left are frustrated by his more or less backtracking on a lot of campaign promises." And she quoted a man named Jim Kessler, who heads a group called the Third Way, who says, "If there is an interest group in this country that is completely happy with Barack Obama, they're doing a very good job of keeping it to themselves.

(LAUGHTER)

BOB SCHIEFFER: Why do you think his popularity went down and it will-- we send-- see that trend continue? Is he as powerful as he was? Is he going to be able to get anything done?

MICHAEL ERIC DYSON (Georgetown University): Well, he's in a pickle. The reality is-- with the exception, however, of interest group of African-Americans, where Obama continues to poll at an extraordinary rate, one could only hope that there would be some reciprocity, recognition of those high numbers and maybe throwing out some meat, if it-- if-- as it were, to African-American people who suffer a 16.5 jobless rate versus the rest of America, which is at 9.7. But I think he's in a tough situation, Bob. On the one hand, he's got to recognize that he's governing all of America. And as a result of that he has to, you know, give in to, so to speak, and con-- make concessions to conservative basis, not right wing, but conservative basis. And at the same time tact toward the middle as he's done after winning a perceived left victory, although the left is laughing and guffawing, saying it's not a left victory. But in-- in realistic terms and realpolitik, the fact is that he got the health care through. Now he's got to go back and let's talk about, you know-- you know drilling on shores from the tip of Delaware down, you know, past a hundred and sixty-seven miles. So the reality is he's trying to balance it out. He doesn't want to give to the tea parties on the one hand, although, he can see some legitimate points and anger. At the same time he has to govern according to a vision for which he was called in to office. That is to say reform health care, deal with the student loan, to deal with nonproliferation among Russia. I mean he had a heck of a week when you look at it in real terms. The guy had a great week and now he's suffering polls that are declining. I think what it suggests is that is that it's an up and down, it's give and take. And I think Obama understands that. Though some of us who are progressives, some of us who are leaning toward the left wish that he might make more grand overtures in that fashion. The reality is he's trying to govern through the middle. He's taking a page out of the Clinton playbooks, so to speak.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let's cut to foreign policy. David Sanger, the President made a surprise trip to Afghanistan. He was seen with President Karzai there. And then last week, Karzai basically kicks him in the teeth and blames all the problems that are happening in his country on what he called foreigners and the-- the Western media, including the New York Times--

DAVID SANGER (New York Times): Mm-Hm.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --and-- and the Obama administration basically.

DAVID SANGER: He did, Bob. And you know what was remarkable about it is that Karzai sort of demonstrated in public what everybody had-- in the administration has said about him in private, which is he's the ally who's really isn't sure he wants to be in an alliance. And this is big problem for President Obama because when you look at the strategy for Afghanistan, it's to put those troops in for just eighteen months, reach a peaking point and then turn everything back to the Karzai government and to the Afghan National Army. And there's very little evidence, at this point, that President Karzai is ready to do any of the things that the Obama administration laid out would be necessary. That could put the President in a position a year from now of having to begin to withdraw without achieving his major objective of being able to transfer.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, is what you're saying is that-- that this whole Afghanistan project is in big trouble?

DAVID SANGER: I-- it is certainly in significant jeopardy. You know, we have in-- in the Times a really fascinating story on page one this morning about what's happening in Marjah. You may remember that that's where the big U.S. initiative and-- and NATO initiative began two months ago. What's happening is the Taliban are coming back in and quietly either intimidating or executing people who have taken money from the Marines or who have helped them out in some way. You know, we're a long way from that month-and-a-half-ago declaration by the American commanders that they had a government in a box ready to come into Afghanistan. You know, and there's a similar problem next door in Pakistan, where, you know, for years President Bush and now President Obama have been trying to get a Pakistani government to have the same enthusiasm about pursuing the Taliban and al-Qaeda as the U.S. did. Pakistan it's improved some; in Afghanistan, it's gotten worst.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Bob Orr, that brings us to terrorism here at home. Because if I understood it, the reason we went to Afghanistan is because it posed a threat to this country, the safety of this country, because it was a haven for al-Qaeda. This week we saw something that didn't seem to have any connection with al Qaeda in this country. These militias suddenly come up. They're in the news. We see another group that's calling on governors to get out of this-- out of office in three days or they'll be removed. What-- what is this all about?

BOB ORR (Justice and Homeland Security Correspondent): Well--

BOB SCHIEFFER: I mean who are these people?

BOB ORR: Well, there's a lot of anger out there. And there's no doubt in the last couple of years, we've seen an-- an uptick in the so-called Patriot groups and the military arm of the Patriot groups tend to be these militias. The thing you're talking about this week a reference to the group called the Hutaree. It's a self-named group. They say it means Christian warrior. No one else has ever heard of that name before. But they had an audacious plot where they wanted to instigate a rebellion, an insurrection, a standoff with the government, like killing police officers and then luring other officers to the funeral and then bombing the funeral procession. Now they were under surveillance, it never came close to happening and they're now all in custody being held without bail. But it does illustrate that there is an element out there that's very, very angry with the government-- with the government. And the FBI says they're looking for other people like that.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And-- and, let's go back and talk a little bit about al Qaeda, which were supposed to be the big threat to this country. How do we see them now at this juncture?

BOB ORR: Well, al Qaeda has-- has kind of fragmented. There's core al Qaeda still in the mountains with Pakistan and Afghanistan. That's bin Laden's, Zawahiri, and the core commanders. And they're a still a threat, but primarily through propaganda. The biggest threat from al Qaeda now has been franchised out to branches in North Africa--al Qaeda in the Maghreb, and also al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. That was the group that sponsored the attempted Christmas day bombing by Abdulmutallab. These are very dangerous elements that are now going beyond regional conflicts, trying to reach out to what they see is the far enemy. And I think we have to be on guard because that threat is still building.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And these are the people we're trying to defense against when we change the procedures for checking terrorists when they're coming-- or checking people when they come into this country.

BOB ORR: Well, exactly, you have to stop the bomb plot before it gets on the airplane. And just this week, the administration came out with a brand-new set of protocols, which basically are intelligence based, very smartly targeted towards the most likely problem. We've done away with this kind of profiling by nationality. After the Abdulmutallab attempt, the administration rushed into place, a-- a declaration that people from fourteen countries that had touched terrorism of some sort--Somalia, Yemen, Iran, other places--that they would all be pulled aside for screening. Now they're saying, let's not do that. Instead, let's look at the threat analyses and let's look at personal-profile characteristics and see which people should be pulled out of line.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, there's certainly plenty out there to be talking about. So we're going to take a little break here and come back and-- and talk about it.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: We're back now with our round table. I want to go back to what we talked about in the beginning, Michael and-- and David, both. And that was the little bit of good news that the administration got. The job situation does appear to be a little better, but it looks like to me we're a long way from getting back to where this economy ought to be, Michael.

MICHAEL ERIC DYSON: Well, there's no question. I think that the President understands that you got to, in-- in-- in-- in a very serious way, target those most vulnerable populations with an uptick, as one has talked about, in terms of creating jobs. But that's not any kind of jobs. You don't want, you know, you got a-- a dearth of low-skilled, high-wage jobs, that is going a way of the dodo, with the (INDISTINCT) manufacturing and the service industries. And the service industries are now, in one sense, bloated with people who have jobs in name only but none of the benefits have come along. That's why health care reform was so important, not simply in terms of providing health care to those who formally were not in-- were not benefitted by that. But also in terms of the employment track that was connected to that health care. And I think that a lot of these populations, what I mentioned earlier, African-American people, if you've got a 16.5 percent unemployment rate there, or at least a thirteen-something employment rate among Latinos then you got populations which are especially vulnerable. Then, when you take into account Appalachian and Middle America, it's pretty tough. So, I think the President is trying to push forward and his council of economic advisors are (sic) trying to talk about what can be done to spread the wealth, so to speak. But I don't think we can avoid a kind of redistribution wealth of upward in terms of the big corporations that are getting the benefits of the stimulus package versus those states that are more diverse, that deserve more that payoff.

BOB SCHIEFFER: When can we expect to be out of this? Everybody seems to think we've hit bottom but this is going to be a long road, isn't it?

DAVID SANGER: It-- it is going to be a long road and it's all question of how you define the-- the "this" part. If it's joblessness, the guess work is that the rate will go down in a small way through the end of the year and maybe end up at eight percent at the end of the year. But governments aren't very good at-- at creating jobs. And, the pressure is certainly going to build on President Obama to focus on deficits and debt and that is also going to be a big element of-- of his own re-election campaign. So keeping up these kinds of spending levels, where the United States government is spending about eleven percent of GDP is not a sustainable path. And, yet, what we have not yet heard from the Obama administration is what the debt plan is, and I suspect you'll probably have to hear from the President on that by midsummer.

NANCY CORDES: And Democrats know that this is an issue that they're very vulnerable on. I mean, Republicans are hammering away at them, and at the President every single day saying where are the jobs, where are the jobs. So they're really hoping that in the next few months, in addition to financial regulation they can also pass a few more small jobs bills like the one that they passed a couple of months ago. But, it's-- it's very questionable how much these jobs bills actually do? And then, of course, if there's a Supreme Court-- a confirmation process that comes up midsummer, we all know that that really brings everything to a halt. That takes weeks to get through even if it's not a controversial Supreme--

JAN CRAWFORD (overlapping): Right.

NANCY CORDES: --Court nomination. And--

JAN CRAWFORD: That's why I think they're not going to see a big-- they don't want a big fight.

NANCY CORDES: Yeah.

JAN CRAWFORD: They had a big fight on health care and look what happened in his approval ratings. But when you talk about where Republicans really have some traction. A big, big area where they have traction and this is a huge problem for this administration is what you're going to do about Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and the top four su-- 9/11 suspects and also what you're going to do in the future--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): So what are they going to do?

JAN CRAWFORD: --of Guantanamo?

BOB SCHIEFFER: Is this on the backburner now or--

JAN CRAWFORD: No, no, no, no. I mean they are actively working within the White House, in the Justice Department, in the State Department, in the Defense Department for how they're going to prosecute Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind of 9/11 and those four top plotters. Remember, the Attorney General with great fanfare said they're going to be tried here in New York City. You know, just a-- just a few yo-- hundreds yards away from Ground Zero, and now they backtracked on that because of the huge opposition to that.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, you know.

JAN CRAWFORD (overlapping): So what do they do? That's— that's and-- then voters, the polls show this is an area where they don't want Khalid Sheik Mohammed to come here. I mean the— the-- voters--

BOB SCHIEFFER: Yeah.

JAN CRAWFORD: --the polls are hardening on that.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, you know, someone in the White House said to me-- I-- I said are you-- do you think in the end you wind up trying him in a— in a military tribunal and this person said yes in about 2016. But they're not going to bring him to trial right away, are they, Jan?

JAN CRAWFORD: No. I mean they're still trying to decide what they're going to do with him and where they're going to hold this trial. You can only have it in the three places where the-- the crimes occurred--New York, Pennsylvania or Virginia. Obviously, New York City, the-- the plane that went down in Pennsylvania and then, of course, at the Pentagon.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Do you think it will be a civilian trial or tribunal?

JAN CRAWFORD: It could be a civilian trial. There's— that's still on the table. There's a possibility they could do, say, for example, at the naval base in North Fork, Virginia. Have a criminal trial on a military base. You've got-- security concerns would be less in there. But that raises a host of other concerns, so why not just leave it in a military commission maybe off the coast of Florida.

(LAUGHTER)

BOB ORR: Well, I still think it's possible they'll be tried at Guantanamo.

JAN CRAWFORD (overlapping): Ah-Ha. That's--

BOB ORR: I think that's now appearing to be may be the most likely scenario. But one thing you have to remember, these trials are largely for show whether they're in the civilian court or military court, because the administration has already made it clear. There is no way--no matter what the verdict is--that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Ramzi Binalshibh, and some of these other top al Qaeda co-conspirators are going to walk free. And, in the end, it could be that the administration ends up with the same kind of enemy combatant, ill-defined policy that the Bush administration had.

MICHAEL ERIC DYSON: Well, that was part of the problem then because they wanted to distinguish themselves from the Bush administration by not trying to terrorize the domestic population by saying if you disagree with our policies all of sudden you're un-patriotic or anti-American. But at the same time, the difficulty is, of course, trying to convince the rest of the American population that having this kind of domestic trial is best suited for people who are terrorists. But I think the Jihad Jane throws into bold relief, too, this kind of targeted. You just don't know where the terrorists show up, and I think the return to American homegrown terror is the real news here. It's not all of sudden that militia in Michigan are sprouting wings and flying. These are the people who pave the path for al Qaeda.

BOB SCHIEFFER: I've got to ask one thing here because I want to shift to-- to the Republicans. They didn't have much of a week last week with Michael Steele, the head of the Republican National Committee getting stuck with the tab and-- and the bondage bar or whatever it was.

(LAUGHTER)

MICHAEL ERIC DYSON: (INDISTINCT).

BOB SCHIEFFER: Republicans seem to have their strategy down, and that is opposition-- to oppose-- but so far they have not coalesced around. And I guess it's a little early for this. Any one leader-- Nancy, who do you think is going to emerge as the leader of the Republican Party?

NANCY CORDES: Well, that's a great question. I think that that's something that the Republicans are grappling with them. That's why you don't hear a lot of them clamoring for Michael Steele to step down or to be replaced because it's just not clear to them who they would replace him with. One Democratic spokesperson said to me this week, any day that I can mention lesbian bondage club and Republicans in the same sentence, is a great week for me and the challenge for Republicans is that they are trying to create an image right now as a rehabilitated party that is the party of financial responsibility and then when you've have got the RNC spending money hand over fists for things like this, it's really complicating the message.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): But, let's talk about candidates. I mean, Mitt Romney, is he a leading candidate, David? Is it kind of wind up Sarah Palin? I do not believe it will be, but some do I think.

DAVID SANGER: I-- I think it would be hard to-- to-- for it to wind up being Sarah Palin, just given the fact that so far she has not come out with much of an agenda of her own. Mitt Romney--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Making lot of money.

DAVID SANGER: He is making a lot of money.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Raising a lot I should say.

MICHAEL ERIC DYSON: He's got a reality show (INDISTINCT).

DAVID SANGER: Right. But Mitt Romney comes from a-- a core Republican constituency that may well have worked in the last presidential campaign had it gone on for a bit longer. Obviously, it didn't work out for him. The question is, is he too middle of the road for where the party feels it's got to be in the next election.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, what do you think, Jan?

JAN CRAWFORD: Well, I think that as Nancy says, they have--- there's no one. I mean, that's kind of the problem. When you're looking at who's going to be or who is the next Republican presidential nominee going to be? It's a wide open field. Then, when you look back at Romney and the Pawlentsys, you know, that feels like we've been there and done that--people looking for something new. Maybe it would be-- not that a-- a newly-elected senator who'd only been in the Senate for a couple of years could ever be elected President.

(LAUGHTER)

JAN CRAWFORD: You know, we do have one in Massachusetts. (LAUGHING)

BOB SCHIEFFER: I'll tell you one thing, I think it is not out of the question that he might well be on the technical force we're talking about--

MICHAEL ERIC DYSON: Well, I think their best bet is at the midterm elections. I think when it comes to trying to trump Obama in the next election. It's looking pretty good for the Democrats right now because if he put Sarah Palin, they're praying for Palin to come forward and the-- the Republicans as a default candidate what have her. I think, Scott Brown might be more surprising than people who might anticipate.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. We have to leave-- leave it here. I want to thank all of you for a fun discussion this morning.

I'll have some final thoughts in just a minute.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: Finally today, I'm not a Catholic; I am a Protestant. But I have long admired the Catholic Church as the repository of knowledge through so much of history, and with the Jewish faith, for shaping the values on which Western civilization is built. We are all the product of those values, so we can only feel remorse as we watch the spectacle in which the church finds itself embroiled at, of all times, the holiest week of both great religions.

Eight years ago, and, yes, it has been that long, I wrote that the cover-up of child molester priest had no place in theology but everything to do with bureaucracies that grow so old and large and out-of-touch that they lose all sense of accountability. I said then that aging leaders had put their own survival ahead of the church's reason for being, and in the process had forgotten the church's own history. It was resistance to reform, after all, that led to Protestantism.

How the church organizes itself, whether priests should marry and so on, is the church's business, not mine. But child abuse is everyone's business. The church's problem is not public relations, as some of its leaders want to believe, but the cover-up of vile criminal acts. Until the church bureaucracy truly comes to terms with that, at whatever cost, and again places its reason for being ahead of the survival of its leaders, the church as an institution remains at risk.

People will seek God in many ways, but never in ways that endanger their children.

Back in a minute.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: That's everything from us this week. We'll see you next week right here 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.