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



## **May 1, 2011 Transcript**

GUESTS:                   SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN  
                                  R-Arizona

                                  GOVERNOR ROBERT BENTLEY  
                                  R-Alabama

                                  MICHAEL GERSON  
                                  Washington Post

                                  MICHAEL ERIC DYSON  
                                  Georgetown University

MODERATOR/

PANELIST:    Bob Schieffer, CBS News Political Analyst

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(202) 457-4481

## TRANSCRIPT

BOB SCHIEFFER: Today on FACE THE NATION, it is the worst disaster since Katrina. The death toll from the tornadoes that roared across the South is nearing three hundred and fifty people. We'll talk to the Alabama Governor Robert Bentley.

New reports from Libya. That NATO air strikes may have killed Moammar Qaddafi's son and three of his grandchildren. We'll bring in Senator John McCain of the Armed Services Committee for the latest on that.

And, presidential politics. Is the Donald trying to play the race card? And is the President trying to make Trump the face of the Republican Party?

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: No one is happier, no one is prouder to put this birth certificate matter to rest than the Donald. And that's because he can finally get back to focusing on the issues that matter, like did we fake the moon landing?

BOB SCHIEFFER: It's all ahead 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 good morning, again. The more we know about these tornadoes that roared across the South, the worse the story becomes. As more bodies were found overnight the death toll rose to three hundred and forty-two, two hundred and fifty of them in Alabama alone. That makes this tragedy the worst natural disaster since Katrina, one of the worst weather disasters of all time.

This morning the people of the South will be going to church to mourn their dead but in too many communities there are no places to hold services. The governor of Alabama, Robert Bentley is with us. He's in Rainsville, Alabama this morning. Governor, what is the latest down there?

GOVERNOR ROBERT BENTLEY (R-Alabama): Well, Bob, we-- we're visiting the state. We've had a-- a tragic event here in Alabama. We've had numerous long-track tornados that have crossed the state. We now have two hundred and fifty people dead, confirmed dead in Alabama. We have about a seventeen hundred people who are injured. And we have a number that are missing. And that number is inexact. But certainly the confirmed dead is two hundred and fifty.

BOB SCHIEFFER: What do you need, governor?

GOVERNOR ROBERT BENTLEY: Well, let me tell you. We have a-- we've had great response first from our first responders. And I-- I would like to say this on air that we have had some of the greatest first responders anyone could have. Those are the people that get to the ground first after something like this happens. Our first responders have done well. We declared a state of emergency before the first tornado even hit. We called out the National Guard that afternoon. We have spoken with the President, met with the President. They have now declared this a-- certainly a nat-- FEMA-disaster area, and the entire state. And they have been very cooperative

so when you see local, state and federal people cooperating like this, it really makes a difference.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And how are the people of Alabama? How-- how are they this morning, governor?

ROBERT BENTLEY: Well, let me tell you, the people of Alabama are very resilient. And we-- we work together all over the state. We have people coming from southern part of the state to the northern part of the state to help out. And everywhere you go, we have volunteers. And we-- we probably have more volunteers than we actually need. But-- but that's a great sign and what it shows is the people of Alabama care about each other. And that's why I love being the governor of this state because we love each other. And I told the President that the other day.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, all right, governor. Well, we want to wish everybody down there the very best. And as they say down there in that part of the country, roll tide. Thank you very much, governor.

ROBERT BENTLEY: Roll tide. Thank you.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And in this year when there seems to be no end to the glut of news, the reports out of Libya this morning are that NATO air strikes struck the house of one of Moammar Qaddafi's sons. The Associated Press is quoting members of Qaddafi's government as saying that "Qaddafi's son and three of Qaddafi's grandchildren were killed." Joining us to talk about that is one of the key members of the Senate Armed Services Committee John McCain, who is just back from Libya. Number one, do you have confirmation yet, senator, that indeed one of Qaddafi's sons was killed?

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN (R-Arizona): We do not. And I'm not sure exactly what the situation was or what the outcome. But it is obviously an attempt to remove Qaddafi's command and control. And we regret any loss of innocent life.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Is the-- is NATO going after Qaddafi and his family?

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: I think that if you view the-- the Qaddafi himself as part of the command and control, I think you could argue that if he was in one of those places, then it would be part of it. But Bob, we tried many times to kill leaders. Remember when we-- we're going to kill Saddam Hussein at the beginning of the last war in Iraq. We tried to kill Osama bin Laden on several occasions. So it's not as easy as you think. And so, we should be taking out his command and control. And if he is killed or injured because of that, that's fine. But we ought to have a strategy to help the rebels succeed and overthrow Qaddafi and everybody associated with him.

BOB SCHIEFFER: You were one of the first who called for the United States getting involved in this. Are you satisfied with the-- how the administration is handling this?

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: I am not because we have taken a backseat role. The President has, quote, "withdrawn from NATO." I'd like to remind you that NATO is an organization of twenty-eight countries. Now with-- with Italy, there's now seven of them actually in the fight. They don't have the assets that the United States of America does. America-- United States is NATO, is NATO. So the British and the French, God bless them and others, they don't have the assets. They are running out of some of their munitions. And we need to get back in the fight.

We applaud the predator being added into, but the worse in-- in to the fight-- the worse outcome-- a very bad outcome here would be a stalemate which would then open the door to al Qaeda.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, what-- what do you want the President to do?

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: Say that the United States' air assets, and I am opposed and we should not use ground troops. United States' air assets and many other assets should be brought into the fight. We should recognize the Transitional National Council, thereby freeing up money so that they can start financing their operations and providing people with the things they need--humanitarian efforts, communications capability, facilitate the movement of weapons in not the United States arm but facilitate as we did during the Afghan War--communications, kick Qaddafi off television. You know, when people in-- in Benghazi see them on television they're scared because this guy has become-- so we'll take him off--

BOB SCHIEFFER (Overlapping): What-- what are you saying--

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: --of television.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --take NATO out of it, and put the United States in?

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: No. Have-- have NATO remain in, all seven of our allies who are willing to. But the United States has got to get its assets back into the air fight. And we've got to do it very strenuously and understand that right now, unless somehow Qaddafi falls with-- from within, that we may have a stalemated situation and that would be very bad. It's events on the ground that will drive Qaddafi's desire to leave or not to leave. Right now in many respects he's not doing too badly for a third-rate military power.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let's shift to Syria--

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: Sure.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --because you're just back from that part of the world. You know, over the weekend the government troops fired on protestors as more of these people, thousands upon thousands of Syrians were out in the streets. And-- and-- and the government was opening fire, I think, about something like sixty people were killed. Now you, Senator Lieberman and Senator Graham, have called on the United States to, among other things, what break relations with Syria? Where-- where do you think this is going?

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: I think it's going very badly for the people of Syria. I think it's clear that Bashar al-Assad is willing to slaughter his own people. The question is, is what can we do to affect the outcome? And, frankly, I don't see a military option. Libya, they had a-- a group of people who were at least semi-organized that we could support. The situation lent itself very much to the use of air power. Obviously, increased sanctions, whatever pressures we can bring to bear. But it's going to be a very bloody time, I'm afraid, in Syria. And any illusions we had about him be a, quote, "Reformer" let's not talk about that anymore. Could I just mention one thing back on Libya, one second?

BOB SCHIEFFER: Sure.

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: I met with the Transition National Council. The finance minister is a economics professor from the University of Washington. One is the member-- one of the members is-- was in Qaddafi's prison for thirty-one years. These are not al Qaeda. They're people who wanted to rise up against a brutal and oppressive dictator. And finally, I went to a hospital in Benghazi, a ship had come from Misrata with wounded. I saw these young men dying--wounded, dying before my eyes. We shouldn't-- we should be doing whatever we can within reason to prevent further massacres, which are taking place in Misrata, as we speak.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let me just ask you to give me your assessment of-- of American leadership at this point and President Obama.

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: Well. Look, I-- I respect the President and sometimes it's very inappropriate for me to second guess. Obviously, I lost to him in the presidential election. But American leadership is vital in the world. There's no country like America. We should be leading. We should not be following. We should not be behind. We should be saying, look, we're going to help the Egyptians set up a-- a government and a democracy. We're going to help Tunisia. And we are going to help the Libyan people in ways that are viable and reasonable to do. Americans are war weary. They don't want to get us into another ground war and we shouldn't. But we have to, for example, again in NATO, we are NATO. And we should be leading. And that's what I would like to see the United States of America do. Only the United States is capable of helping these people in the most seismic and most incredible period in the world's history. This Arab Spring is not confined to the Arab countries but how we handle it will determine the entire 21st Century.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let's shift to matters closer to home.

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: Mm-Hm.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Gas prices are-- are going out of sight. The deficit is totally out of control. Congress comes back this week and we're told one of the first things that the democratic leadership in the Senate will do will be to introduce legislation to take away the-- the subsidies to the energy companies.

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: Mm-Hm.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Good thing? Bad thing? Would you vote for that?

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: I'm-- I'm very-- I have very mixed emotions about that because we are going to have to ask a lot of organizations and groups in America to make sacrifices in order to get our budget balanced. But I would not want to do anything that would be a disincentive for further oil explora-- exploration and exploitation. We need a lot of oil, and we need nuclear power. We need solar. We need all those things. But right now oil exploration in the Gulf and off both coasts in my view should be open, should be ideas and--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): So you have an open mine about that, let me just ask you--

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN (overlapping): I do. I do. I do. Because obviously we're going to have to ask everybody to make sacrifices in order to get the spending under control.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you about the thing that all of Washington is buzzing about, especially since last night. And, that is, do you somehow sense that the President maybe trying

to make Donald Trump the face of your party, the Republican Party? And what would be the result of that?

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: I think he may try to but I don't think that's going to happen. I think Mister Trump is having a lot of fun and-- it's pretty clear he enjoys the limelight. We have very serious candidates. And I think that Mister Trump wants to run, he's welcome to run but I think--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Do you think he's trying to play a race card here suggesting we ought to check Barack Obama's college grades that maybe he had-- he got in to Harvard because he was black?

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: I wouldn't accuse him of that. But all of this is so unnecessary. With unemployment where it is, with the challenges we face let's not have a nice-- national conversation about that. Let's have the national conversation about the up tier-- upcoming debt limit, which is going to be the subject of many of your shows in the next--

BOB SCHIEFFER: Yeah.

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: --in the next few weeks. That's what we ought to be focusing our attention on.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right.

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: Thanks, Bob.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Thank you very much, Senator McCain. When we come back we'll talk a little about presidential politics, show you what President Obama said last night about Donald Trump.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: Back now with Michael Eric Dyson of Georgetown University who is writing a book about Barack Obama and Michael Gerson the former member of the Bush White House now a columnist for the Washington Post.

Well, gentlemen, we saw it last night at the White House Correspondents' dinner. Barack Obama took on this whole Birther issue that Donald Trump has brought up. And-- and you heard him at the top of this broadcast as saying that-- that nobody wants to put this behind us more than Trump because it will give Trump time to focus on the really serious issues--did we fake the moon landing? And he just went on and on like that. And then he really stuck in a needle about Trump's experience and he brought up Trump's reality show and the hard decisions the President said that Donald Trump has had to take when he fires one of the contestants on the show. Listen to this.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: You, Mister Trump, recognize that the real problem was a lack of leadership and so ultimately you didn't blame Lil Jon or Meat Loaf. You fired Gary Busey. And these are the kinds of decisions that would keep me up at night.

BOB SCHIEFFER: So-- so there you have it. I'm going to ask you, Michael Gerson, as a former member of the Bush White House--

MICHAEL GERSON (Washington Post): Sure.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --a Republican in good standing, now a columnist--

MICHAEL GERSON: Mm-Hm.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --that you write from-- from the right side of things, what do you think the President is? Is there more going on here than we might suspect? Was he doing--

MICHAEL GERSON (overlapping): I think--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): --more than just sticking the needle in?

MICHAEL GERSON: I-- I think it could be. I mean it was a good comedy act but also I think is a good strategy. You know, anything done to humiliate Donald Trump may make it more likely for him to run. Any increase in the likelihood that Trump is going to run is good for the President because every minute that Trump spends on the national stage is a minute that a serious Republican is not on that stage.

BOB SCHIEFFER: That-- that's very, very interesting. And-- and I want to talk to the-- to the more serious side of this because after this whole Birther thing, the President put out his birth certificate this week. Then Donald Trump held this news conference up in New Hampshire and brings up the question of-- of President Obama's grades when he was going to college. Listen-- listen to this.

DONALD TRUMP: The word is, you know, I-- you think you would want to release it actually, because the word is he wasn't a good student and he ended up getting into Columbia and Harvard. And I'd like to know-- I'd like to know-- well, this is what I read written by some of the people in this room. I'd like to know how does he get into Harvard how does he get into Columbia if he isn't a good student. It's an interesting thing.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Michael Eric Dyson, what-- what-- what was Donald Trump saying there?

MICHAEL ERIC DYSON (Georgetown University): Well, this is racism by inference. The implication is that Obama is not up to snuff. You know, skepticism about black intelligence and suspicious about black humanity have gone hand in hand, Bob throughout the history of this country in feeding the perception that black people don't quite measure up. Thomas Jefferson's Notes on Virginia was skeptical about the rational capacity of black people. I'm not equating Thomas Jefferson and Donald Trump. We don't have to fear that Donald Trump is the face of the Republican Party. Maybe another part of the anatomy might be more correct. The problem is that--

(Bob Schieffer laughing)

MICHAEL ERIC DYSON:--this-- this invidious bigotry, he's part of a bigotcracy. This bigotocrat out there promoting conspiracy theories, half-hearted truths, factual errors, Barack Obama is a magna cum laude graduate of the Harvard Law School. Here he is the editor of the Law Review. Unimpeachable intellectual credentials, now we have a retroactive bigotry that tries to question his very bona fide. I think this is just sane- shameful and it's sad. And unfortunately, Donald Trump has commandeered the bully pulpit if he is indeed the voice of Republicans they ought to say so. But if not they ought to distance themselves from him and suggest that this obsession

with the birth of Barack Obama has to be put aside to deal with more serious and sustained issues. But make no mistake this is part of a racist trajectory.

BOB SCHIEFFER: You know, you say others ought to distance themselves. And I think everybody from-- from Mitt Romney to Michelle Bachman has now said they know all they need to know about the President's--

MICHAEL ERIC DYSON (overlapping): But-- but how can it be--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): --whether he's a citizen of the United States. And they were saying that before the President put out his birth certificate.

MICHAEL GERSON: I-- I do-- I do think Donald Trump is using this for a political purpose as well.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Hm

MICHAEL GERSON: He's trying to cover the fact that he is neither a Republican nor a conservative. I mean he supported single payer health care reform to the left of Barack Obama.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Mm.

MICHAEL GERSON: He's essentially using these issues genuinely to appealing to the worst parts of the Republican coalition in order to pretend he's something that he's not. That is a transparent fraud. He's committing a fraud in this circumstance, cynically using these issues to try to say I'm tough on Obama, when in fact his background is very questionable from the Republican's perspective.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, let me ask you this.

MICHAEL GERSON: Mm-Hm.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Do you think that Barack Obama did the right thing, Michael, in-- in-- in putting out his long form birth certificate as it were.

MICHAEL ERIC DYSON: You know, Bob, I must tell you as a black man in America, and I've been a-- a professor at Ivy League schools got a Ph.D. from Princeton. You know, Bob, I must tell you as a black man in America, and I've been a-- a professor at Ivy League schools got a Ph.D. from Princeton. You know, what is-- what is enough? It's almost as if Barack Obama is brought before the school council because he stuck some gum underneath his desk or it's as if Barack Obama has to show his papers during Apartheid to prove he's legitimate or a runaway slave. I mean, I know these are extreme metaphors. But the reality is, is that Barack Obama has been called to account by a man who has nothing near the intellectual credibility or the social standing--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): But I mean--

MICHAEL ERICA DYSON (overlapping): --that he possesses.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): --do you think Barack Obama should have gone and--

MICHAEL ERICA DYSON (overlapping): Well, he had no--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): --and taken this last step?

MICHAEL ERICA DYSON (overlapping): --well, had no choice. I mean, in-- in the-- in the sense that and I think brother Gerson is right. He uses it to his strategic advantage but he had no choice but to give in to the vicious bigotry out there to say let's put an end to this. Finally, I want to step forward and prove that I am a legitimate American. But he is standing in for the rest of us as African-Americans. We are constantly questioned as to our legitimacy of whether we belong or not and Barack Obama is our big brother in that case and an assault on him is an assault on everybody.

MICHAEL GERSON: I-- I do think that's the sub context here because race is the sub context of American history but I would only add to that that the last three presidents have these kinds of conspiracy theories used against them. Bill Clinton was accused of complicity in murder.

MICHAEL ERICA DYSON: Right.

MICHAEL GERSON: You know, up to fifty percent of the Democratic Party, you know, members believed that George Bush was complicit in 9/11.

MICHAEL ERICA DYSON: Right.

MICHAEL GERSON: Okay. There is a percentage of the population out there that is so highly polarized that they will believe anything about a President they disagree with. That's deeply dangerous. It's a questioning legitimacy, not policies.

MICHAEL ERICA DYSON: Right.

MICHAEL GERSON: And we've seen more and more of this in the last few decades not just in this circumstance.

MICHAEL ERICA DYSON: Well, the problem with that. I-- I-- I agree with you wholeheartedly there. But the problem is when the conspiracy theories die, the racism remains. The skepticism and suspicion about black humanity and intelligence are a predicate not only of lunatic fringe but of central figures--David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Thomas Jefferson, and a whole host of other American founders and European intellectuals who have believed certain vicious things about black people. What we see about Barack Obama in the lunatic fringe is a spillover from what is an undercurrent in American society. This man can't win for losing. And how shameful is it to be called into question by what he termed a carnival barker to hold him to account when he is the most powerful man in the world but still being treated like a little boy before the court of American reason.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let me just-- a final question to Michael. Do you think this is the end of it as far as reasonable people in this country are concerned or will it-- will this hang on in some way?

MICHAEL GERSON: I think this was ended among reasonable people a long time ago. But I think there's some people who have an interest even a financial interest in selling books and doing a lot of things on this issue. And conspiracy theorists nothing ever ends the conspiracy. You can have eyewitnesses. You can have documents and-- and you know, they don't abandon their views.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right.

MICHAEL ERICA DYSON: But not conspiracy theories in the Republican Party let this go on for far too long. They have to be indicted as well.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right--

MICHAEL GERSON: Mm-Hm.

MICHAEL ERICA DYSON: Right.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --we have to end it there. Thank you all so much.

Back in a minute with some closing thoughts.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: Finally today, for the last twenty years, you've been seeing me sitting at this desk on Sunday. I'm the part of FACE THE NATION that you see. What you don't see is the other half of our broadcast, back there in the control room and back there running things for twenty years of Sundays every single Sunday has been Carin Pratt, the executive producer of FACE THE NATION. Carin was just a kid when I came to FACE THE NATION. At my urging, our bosses put her in charge. It's the best idea I ever had and she's been there ever since. Through wars and political campaigns, when guests canceled at the last minute or when satellites went down, or when we had to junk an entire show just hours before the broadcast, most recently, the case in point being the uprising in Egypt and the earthquake in Japan. Through four administrations, Carin got us on and off the air. It's not a job for the timid or the nervous, but it's what we do and we love it. Yet, we could not have done the job we did without Carin. Today, marks her last broadcast. She's leaving Washington to join her husband who has taken a professorship at Vermont Law School. I asked her to come out here with me today but she was having none of it. "I've always been the person in the control room," she told me in no uncertain terms. "That's where I want to be for this broadcast." Well, that's Carin. And because she is back there, it is always been easier for me out here. Thank you, Carin. I'm-- I'm really going to miss you.

Back in a minute.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: And that's it for us today, thank you for watching and being with us on FACE THE NATION. We're going to be right here next week, covering who knows what on FACE THE NATION.