

Barack Obama Press Avail (Flight from Denver, CO to Chicago, IL)

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Q: When will we have a clear idea to say we've got a nominee?

BO: After Tuesday we will. I think Saturday will be important, put the Michigan, Florida issue behind us. We've got three contests in succession. And at that point, all the information will be in. There will be no more questions answered. I suspect that you know whatever remaining superdelegates will make their decisions pretty quickly after that

Q: And if Senator Clinton decides that she is not happy with the Saturday ruling, then she doesn't put it behind her, then what happens? At what point can we say we have a winner?

BO: Well at the point when I have enough delegates to claim the nomination.

Q: And when will that be?

BO: I think that you know it obviously depends on what the DNC does but [inaudible].

Q: What do you make out of how long it has been since you went to Iraq? Is that relevant?

BO: I don't think it's relevant but I think you know their strategy seems to... [break as pilot is speaking], I don't think that John McCain or the Bush Administration have a very strong argument to make about their foreign policy so they're going to try to come up with diversions or distractions and not argue the substance. Because when you argue the substance, what you see is a failed strategy, a worsening situation in Afghanistan, enormous expenditures in blood and tragedy and a diminished reputation for America around the world. That's not a strong track record to run on.

Q: Can you just say that again for this camera here... your reaction please for McCain's comments ...

BO: I haven't seen McCain's comments but the ... I was asked about the Republicans trying to make the issue of frequency of visiting Iraq and what I said was that the Republicans don't have a strong position to argue on when it comes to substance. Their foreign policy has been a failure over the last eight years. The war in Iraq was a huge strategic blunder, our standing in the world is diminished, we've spent hundreds of billions of dollars, lost thousands of lives, Afghanistan is in worse shape since anytime since 2001, and we have Bin Laden sending out audio tapes. So not surprisingly they're not going to want to argue the substance of what's happened in their foreign policy and they're going to try to come up with diversions. But I think the American people are going to be a lot more interested on whether or not if we're focused on the problems.

Anything else?

Q: Senator, you spent today talking about education. I feel like that's been a bit of a sleeper issue on the campaign ...

BO: Surprisingly, we haven't seen that in the debates, it was an infrequent topic, but probably nothing is more important to our long term economic health than getting our education system right. When you see quality schools like the one we saw today working with kids who are similar to kids who are in schools where the dropout rate is 50 percent, it shows you, you can have a terrific school and these kids can learn if you've got creative faculty and staff. That's the kind of approach that we're going to have to spread all across the country.

Q: Senator, does the general election begin then after Tuesday?

BO: Yes

Q: And you will be the winner at that point?

BO: I believe so

Q: We'll have a nominee?

BO: I hope so

Q: Senator would you consider establishing diplomatic relations with Iran? Re-opening a US Embassy in Tehran?

BO: You know, I think it's premature for that, but what I have said is I want to initiate direct talks, starting at a low level, with Iran, exploring the possibilities of seeing a change in behavior in Iran. And hopefully over time, changing the nature of the relationship.

Q: Can you respond to McCain saying you're more willing to meet with Ahmadinejad than with General Petraeus?

BO: You know, I don't have a -- you know, that's just a, you know, a typical sarcastic comment that doesn't have anything to do with the substance, and is patently untrue since I just saw General Petraeus when he was testifying in Washington.

Q: He's saying outside of those meetings on the Hill, you would not set up your own meetings with General Petraeus, never attempted to meet with him?

BO: And I haven't - look, it's just a flippant comment, it's not designed to actually talk about substance. It's a political comment that doesn't get anywhere.

Q: Can you talk about your reaction to Scott McClellan's book?

BO: I haven't read it. I don't think the subject is particularly a surprise. I think many of us have been troubled by the lack of straightforwardness out of this Administration. The only news is that somebody within the Administration has confirmed what a lot of us had thought for some time.

Q: Senator Obama, are you surprised at how hard Senator McCain has come after to you? And are you surprised by his tone this early on in the election?

BO: Of course not. He's adopted George Bush's policies, and he's going to adopt George Bush's tactics. I don't know why anybody would be surprised by it.

Q: Also want to talk about this could be a loss of civility between these two candidates.

BO: Well, at the point where John McCain is willing to argue the substance of his Iraq policy, and his desire to continue this policy that is inherited from George Bush; he wants to talk about how we're going to deal with challenges economically from countries like China; if he wants to start talking about the bread and butter issues here in the United States, where he has no clear agenda for how he wants to move forward - then we're going to have a substantive debate. So far at least, we have not seen a desire on his part to have that kind of substantive debate.

Q: But as we've seen him in the last week, the tone is totally suggesting of how the general election is going to be. Perhaps the American public was thinking, from some of the comments that you've made, and some of the comments that McCain has made previously, that this wasn't going to be the tone in this election.

BO: Well I think you're going to have to ask John McCain what kind of campaign he intends to run. So far, it's pretty standard Republican fare.

Q: Question about foreclosure rates and whether he thinks it is an issue that has been overlooked?

BO: Yes that is why we did that event in Nevada to talk about it.

Q: [inaudible] foreclosure rate is amazing in Las Vegas-

BO: As I said it took John McCain three times to come up with a plan and it is still inadequate.

Q: Senator what happens after Tuesday because they are talking about going on beyond Tuesday? How do you handle the endgame?

BO: I am sure we will have discussions with Senator Clinton and her team. Unless we have..you know.. It is technically not over until we have the number of delegates that are needed to secure the nomination. Once we have that number then we'll focus on the general election.

Q: Even if she contests it? Even if she says I'm going to keep on arguing at the convention.

BO: I mean guess the question is what would be the source of contention.

Q: There could be a lawsuit?

A: A lawsuit challenging what?

Q: like Michigan and Florida

A: There have already been two of them and they have been thrown out of court.

Q: She is still saying she is going to go to the convention. Until she pulls out...how are you going to..

A: This is true of every convention. I mean when Dukakis won the nomination you know Jesse was still running until the convention. When Bill Clinton was running, Gerry Brown was still technically in it. As far as I can tell this is fairly standard fair.

Q: But doesn't it make it harder for your campaign to act as if the general campaign is fully underway without having to deal with another democratic candidate?

A: If we've got the number of delegates to secure the nomination then I'm the nominee. If we're short of that then we'll have more work to do. But once we achieve it then I think we'll be the nominee.

Q: [inaudible] What happens during the final few days? Question about superdelegates/endorsers getting on board?

A: We are only a few days away. We have waited this long. We can wait a while longer.