

TRANSCRIPT: Republican Leader Mitch McConnell media availability (Sens. Johnson and Craig), September 5, 2007

MCCONNELL: Good afternoon, everyone.

As you probably know, we just welcomed Senator Tim Johnson back to the Senate. It was great to see him. He, as you know, spoke; did an excellent job. And there were a very large number of Republicans on both sides of the aisle there to welcome him back. And we're happy to have him here.

I want to make an observation on two issues. First, on the issue of Guantanamo and whether it would be appropriate to house -- return, if you will, or bring to the United States -- terrorists who've been captured overseas, I was pleased that the House yesterday went on record with an overwhelming bipartisan majority opposing moving terrorists onto U.S. soil.

That, coupled with the vote on an amendment of mine in late July, of 94 to 3, expressing the sense of the Senate that we, too, oppose moving terrorists onto American soil, I think guarantee that whatever the fate of Guantanamo in the future, there's an overwhelming likelihood that the Congress would disapprove of any effort to mainstream these terrorists into the U.S. -- onto U.S. soil and into the U.S. justice system.

Now, I heard from Senator Craig this morning. He called me to give me an update on where he is in order to dispel, as he put it, any confusion that might exist with regard to his intentions.

So let me relate to you his comment. He said that he is going to try to get the case in Minneapolis dismissed; that if he is unable to have that disposed of prior to September 30th, it is his intention to resign from the Senate as he expressed last Saturday.

If he is able to get the case favorably disposed of in Minneapolis, it would be his intention to come back to the Senate, to deal with the Ethics Committee case that he knows that he will have, and to try to finish his term.

So whatever confusion may have been created the last few days, as of this morning, that is his view about where he is headed.

As you know, the leadership last week, as we've already discussed, and as you've written, has already referred the matter to the Ethics Committee. Any further observations about the case that Senator Craig may have before the Ethics Committee obviously would have to come from them.

QUESTION: Will you support him in that course of action he announced to you?

MCCONNELL: My view remains what I said last Saturday. I thought he made the correct decision -- the difficult but correct decision to resign. That would still be my view today.

QUESTION: (OFF-MIKE)

MCCONNELL: I've already characterized the conversation.

QUESTION: Senator, you said what Senator Craig had said to you. What did you say to him? Did you advise him (OFF-MIKE)?

MCCONNELL: As I said, I wouldn't further characterize the conversation. I wanted to give you an update on what his intentions are, as expressed to me this morning.

QUESTION: Does that mean he has no intention of running for re-election?

MCCONNELL: He'll have to speak for himself, but that was what I thought I heard him say, that his effort would be to complete his term under that set of circumstances.

QUESTION: (OFF-MIKE)

MCCONNELL: What I've indicated to you is that this matter, if Senator Craig is still in the Senate, will be referred to the ethics committee, and any comments about him will have to come from them.

QUESTION: What do you think of Senator Specter's advocacy over the weekend?

MCCONNELL: You'll have to talk to Senator Specter about whatever his views are on the matter.

QUESTION: Has it been helpful in resolving this?

MCCONNELL: You'll have to talk to Senator Specter about his views on the matter.

QUESTION: (OFF-MIKE) if Senator Craig were to run for reelection, would he have your support?

MCCONNELL: I believe he indicated this morning that he -- his hope would be that if he got the matter disposed of in Minnesota that he would finish his term. I do not believe he intends to run for re-election.

QUESTION: Mr. Leader, could the conference embrace Senator Craig if he were able to dispose of the case and return?

MCCONNELL: I'm not going to ask any -- answer any hypotheticals about what might happen in the future. I think I've pretty well covered all I have to say about the Craig matter.

QUESTION: Do you feel as if he was disingenuous with you on Friday when he spoke to you and said he was resigning (OFF-MIKE)?

MCCONNELL: I'm giving you an update on what he told me this morning, and I believe I've covered that.

QUESTION: And were you surprised by what he told you this morning?

MCCONNELL: All I can do is relate to you what he told me this morning. I've done that. I really don't think I've...

QUESTION: Senator, can I ask about the lunch that you guys just had...

MCCONNELL: About what?

QUESTION: The lunch that you just had. Did you speak to conference members about your conversation with Senator Craig?

MCCONNELL: Well, the policy lunch is confidential. But, obviously, we did have a discussion about this matter.

QUESTION: (OFF-MIKE)

MCCONNELL: I'm having a hard time hearing you.

QUESTION: Have you had any discussion with your members about, sort of, the broader issue of ethics and making sure that folks understand the importance of maintaining sort of an ethical behavior and all that?

MCCONNELL: I discuss a lot of issues in our conference all of the time.

Anything on any other subject? I really have covered this issue.

QUESTION: General Jones has a new report out today on military (OFF-MIKE). Senator Levin, yesterday, said that the improvements to the army are reason to consider U.S. troops coming out. What do you make of that?

MCCONNELL: I hate to appear to be not very forthcoming, but I just haven't report on the Jones report yet. And, until I do, I'd rather not comment on it.

OK, thanks.

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