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'The Rachel Maddow Show' for Monday, March 21st, 2011

Read the transcript to the Monday show

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Guests: Richard Engel, Steve Clemons, Ed Lyman

RACHEL MADDOW, HOST: Good evening, Lawrence. Thank you.

And thank you at home for staying with us for the next hour. In the United States of America, we are used to thinking of ourselves as a superpower, as a world leader, as a country capable of throwing our weight around when we feel the need to. That's really only when you take a step back and take sort of a wide, historical view that you realize one of the consequences of that self-image, that self-concept is that we end up feeling that need to throw our weight around quite a lot.

We go to war all the time—big wars, little wars, medium-sized wars, weird wars, normal wars, wars. America as a country fights a lot of wars.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIPS)

RONALD REAGAN, FORMER U.S. PRESIDENT: The participation of American forces in Beirut will again be for a limited period, but I concluded there is no alternative to their returning to Lebanon if that country is to have a chance to stand on its own feet.

Grenada, we were told, was a friendly island

paradise for tourism. Well, it wasn't. It was a Soviet, Cuban colony being ready as a major military bastion to export terror and undermine democracy. We got there just in time.

At 7:00 this evening Eastern Time, air and naval forces of the United States launched a series of strikes against the headquarters, terrorist facilities and military assets that support Moammar Gadhafi's subversive activities.

GEORGE H.W. BUSH, FORMER U.S. PRESIDENT: Just two hours ago, allied air forces began an attack on military targets in Iraq and Kuwait. These attacks continue as I speak.

WILLIAM JEFFERSON CLINTON, FORMER U.S.

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PRESIDENT: Let me say at the outset, America's role will not be about fighting a war. It will be about helping the people of Bosnia to secure their own peace agreement. Our mission will be limited, focused, and under the command of an American general.

GEORGE W. BUSH, FORMER U.S. PRESIDENT: Onin a way that U.S. presidents usually do. my orders, the United States military has begun strikes against al Qaeda terrorist training camps and military installations of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

My fellow citizens, at this hour, American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people, and to defend the world from grave danger.

(END VIDEO CLIPS)

MADDOW: You know, those were just the ones they announced. We did those chronologically starting with Ronald Reagan in 1982 -- presidents making Oval Office announcements about U.S. wars, about U.S. military interventions—some of them amounting to very small wars, some of them amounting to very large wars.

Now that the United States has embarked on its latest new military intervention in Libya, I would love to be able to show you the current president's Oval Office address on the subject, but there isn't one.

President Obama did make a public statement Saturday afternoon that we had started that

military intervention in Libya, but he did so from the confines of a convention center in Brazil. Eight years to the day that George W. Bush stared unsteadily into the camera and announced the Iraq invasion, President Obama announced his own military intervention, but he pointedly declined the opportunity to do it

President Obama is taking all sorts of criticism from the right over the past few days for not canceling his trade visit to Latin America as a result of this military action in Libya. And, of course, the White House knew that criticism would come. But their decision to go ahead with the trip anyway, to forego the chest-thumping commander-in-chief theater that goes with military intervention of any kind, that in itself is a fascinating and rather blunt demonstration of just how much this presidency is not like that of George W. Bush.

Do you remember when George W. Bush

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campaigned for president by saying he wanted America to have a humble foreign policy? Candidates for president love to say stuff like that.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

GEORGE W. BUSH: I just don't think it is the role of the United States to walk into a country and say we do it this way, so should you. I think the United States must be humble and must be proud and confident of our values, but humble in how we treat nations that are figuring out how to chart their own course.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Candidates always say stuff like that when running for president because Americans like that idea. Americans like to vote for that idea, no matter who says it. We like that kind of talk and we expect it from presidential candidates—this idea of restrained foreign policy. No intervention unless you have to.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIPS)

GEORGE W. BUSH: Nobody wants to be the war president. I want to be the peace president.

GEORGE H.W. BUSH: I am not going to commit U.S. forces until I know what the mission is, until the military tell me it can be completed, until I know how they can come out.

REAGAN: I believe with all my heart that our first priority must be world peace, and that

use of force is always and only as a last resort when everything else failed.

(END VIDEO CLIPS)

MADDOW: These guys always say that. They always say they only want to use force as a last resort. They are super reluctant to use the military ever, but then they get into it, and it's big wars, and it's little wars, and it's medium-sized wars—it's all sorts of wars. It's wars all the time.

If you time line the last 30 years, it is easier to isolate periods of time when the United States was not at war than it is to block out times when we were. And regardless of all of that reluctant warrior "I want to be a peace president" talk, once they do get us into wars, presidential chest-thumping about that, trying to convert wars into political capital is an ugly but well-tested art.

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(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

GEORGE W. BUSH: Or do I take necessary to defend our country? Given that choice, I defend America every time.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: George W. Bush running for reelection in 2004. Remember all of that, because we acted, the dictator, brutal tyrant is sitting in a prison cell and he will receive the justice he denied for so long. Right. That's how George W. Bush ran in 2004 for reelection.

The George W. Bush that ran in 2000 promised the country a humble America, a humble foreign policy, a bend over backwards, biased against U.S. military intervention anywhere in the world. Lots of candidates for president promised that.

A candidate named Barack Obama promised that. The difference with Mr. Obama as president is that he appears to be walking more of that walk as well as talking that talk. Mr. Obama not making an Oval Office address to the nation, Mr. Obama repeatedly stressing the limited nature of U.S. involvement, promising there will be no ground troops in Libya, no matter what, leaving the overall question of an intervention until a U.N. Security Council resolution could be passed and then actually following the U.N. Security Council decision, the White House overtly acknowledging and making widely known that it sees France, and Britain and Arab countries as in the lead here. The U.S. waiting until there

was a clear international consensus before doing anything on our own and letting other nations make this more their war than our war.

This is what President Obama promised as a candidate he would do. It is frankly what most presidential candidates have promised as candidates they would do. But the fact that he's actually doing it as president is freaking out all corridors of the political world that really kind of liked the interventionist, chest-thumping, triumphalist stuff.

We have—I could hear this—we don't have it. OK.

The funny thing is, is that with that sound bite, I hear it whispering in my ear. But we don't have it.

Lindsey Graham saying this weekend, "I'm very worried that we are taking a backseat

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rather than a leadership role. We used to relish leading the free world. Now, it's almost like leading the free world is an inconvenience. I think the president has caved this way too much, it's almost like it's a nuisance."

Republican Senator Lindsey Graham speaking this weekend, speaking on FOX News yesterday.

Would-be Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich said that President Obama's position on Libya makes him a, quote, "spectator-in-chief instead of a commander-in-chief."

Fellow would-be Republican presidential nominee Rick Santorum saying, quote, "The French were the first ones out there. He's following the lead."

I mean, think about the big picture and about these presidential—what the presidential candidates in 2008 campaigned on and the legacy of George W. Bush. Do you want the narrative of America's role in the world to be America leads Western aggression against Arab countries or don't you want that? Do you want that continue to be the master narrative about America's role in the world, or do you want the narrative to be something different?

President Obama wants the narrative to be something different. He very clearly did not want there to be another American military action in the Arab world. He is very open about his reluctance. He wants everybody to know how reluctant he was.

The White House keeps broadcasting that. Why are they doing that? Because they want the narrative to change. And everything about the character of the intervention shows Mr. Obama's reluctance here.

The U.S. commander in the region reporting today U.S. air missions over Libya decreased dramatically today. He says the overwhelming number of missions were flown by non-U.S. pilots. U.S. officials again are going out of their way to point that out.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates saying today, quote, "I expect us very soon to receive back into a supporting role with other nations carrying a significant proportion of the burden."

President Obama himself repeatedly insisting that not only will there not be ground troops involved here from the U.S., but that the bulk of our involvement will end very quickly.

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(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

OBAMA: Let me emphasize that we anticipate this transition to take place in a matter of days and not a matter of weeks.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOWS: Days, and not weeks.

There was also news today that the direct involvement from President Obama and Vice President Biden on this has involved personal, direct communication between them and the leaders of other Arab countries in the region specifically—again, trying to change that narrative that America leads Western aggression against the Arab world, trying to force to the forefront of this war the Arab countries that on March 12th called for a U.N. no-fly zone to be enforced in the first place.

After the Arab League criticized the intervention they called for this weekend, the Obama and Biden diplomacy appears to have paid dividends today. Arab League now stating its support for the mission, calling it an Arab and nationalist duty.

Whether or not efforts to change that master narrative about U.S. aggression towards Muslim countries are successful, whether or not trying to change that long narrative can survive, what is yet another U.S. military intervention in yet another Muslim country, whether or not that narrative can change, even though this is now happening may depend on how long this intervention lasts and what its

consequences are, whether it works—what Libya looks like when this is all over.

Joining us now for some insight into that is Richard Engel, NBC News chief foreign correspondent. He's in Tobruk, which is an eastern part of Libya.

Richard, thanks very much for joining us. Appreciate having you here.

RICHARD ENGEL, NBC NEWS CHIEF FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT (via telephone):

It's always a pleasure. Sorry, I'm not in front of the camera, we are having some technical difficulties. But I wish you had included in that very long list of wars, all of the wars associated with the war on terrorism as it is often called, the drone strikes in Pakistan, the drone strikes in Yemen, the drone strikes in Somalia. The list goes on and on.

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MADDOW: Sure, when everybody started calling Afghanistan the other war, ultimately it 's Iraq as war, Afghanistan is the other war, Pakistan is the other "other war," Somalia as the other other other, and Yemen and so on. There have been so many interventions. And yet—

ENGEL: And now Libya.

MADDOW: And now Libya. And this master narrative, which Mr. Obama, President Obama seems so resistant to—this idea the U.S. is eager to intervene in Arab countries.

Do you see a strong difference between this, the character of this American intervention, and the other ones that we just talked about, Richard?

ENGEL: Well, I was sort of surprised. In the last several months, been touring around the Middle East, covering these revolts, and suddenly I woke up one morning, found myself covering an American war in Libya. And it sort of came out of no place. I didn't see it coming.

And I still am looking around and saying, how did I end up in Tobruk covering an American military action in Libya? I understand why it happened. There was this probably very real need for protection for the city of Benghazi. Gadhafi's troops were right on the edge of this city. They were going to go in, they were going to go hard, they were going to kill people.

And in Tobruk today, walking around today,

there was tremendous sense of relief. People no longer feel terrified. They no longer feel that Gadhafi's forces are going to come in and slit people's throats and make them pay for having supported this revolt. But the rebels, and I said the other way, these rebels as well are now completely dependent on foreign military intervention. Once you've given them air, once you've given them ground support, and you—they believe they have an alliance with the United States military, how do you take that back without exposing them to the same sort of fear and real danger that they were exposed to before?

MADDOW: Richard, what kind of impact is the Western intervention having on Gadhafi's forces? The strategy, at least the declared strategy is essentially to make things safe enough for the rebels that they can win on their own. Do you see anything like that happening?

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ENGEL: Well, that's going to be a tough one. These rebels are—they're divided into two groups. They are the volunteers, and these rebels have really no military experience, very little sophistication, very little education. A lot of bravado, but when the actual fighting happens, most of them run away.

We were with rebels who didn't know how to load weapons. They were dropping round of ammunition on the ground. A lot of them are fighting for weird conspiracy theories. I would say one in five of the rebels told me today that they are fighting because they think Gadhafi is Jewish.

So, they're not the same—they do not have the same ideals that a lot of Americans probably think they do have.

The other group of the rebels is people, units that have defected from Gadhafi's army. And if we're waiting for these defected units to go and suddenly storm the frontlines, I think we may have to be waiting a little bit longer.

I went looking for one of the top commanders here, actually the top commander in Tobruk, actually the top commander in Tobruk, and we went to the military base and we knocked on the door. He decided to take the day off. And I was shocked at that.

You would think if the U.S. military had just joined your revolution, after two-plus days, that this wouldn't be the apt time to go home and spend time with the family.

MADDOW: Unbelievable.

Richard, while I have you, let me ask about one other country in the Middle East where developments are fast-moving and dramatic right now. In Yemen, the most senior military official there who is sometimes seen as a rival to the president in that country, he and a number of other top generals have essentially defected to the opposition. Dozens of protesters, of course, shot dead by government forces this weekend, now this split in the military.

Is that the kind of shift in momentum that you think might be decisive against the government in Yemen?

ENGEL: Yemen is big news right now. And I mean, it's one of the places you're always looking over your shoulder. I'm here in Tobruk, but, you know, maybe we should be in Yemen. It is an amazing, fast-moving story.

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The army has now been divided and on the streets of Sana'a today, you had military units loyal to the president, in parts of the city, you have military units loyal to this general and other generals that defected on patrol protecting the protestors.

So, you have a country where there are massive protests on the streets, the military is divided. In the north of the country, there is already a kind of civil war. In the south, there is another war. There are so many divisions in Yemen right now, they are hard to keep track of.

And many people do believe that the country could be at a breaking point when there's a coup or some sort of actions to change the political leadership.

MADDOW: NBC News chief foreign correspondent, Richard Engel, reporting from Tobruk, in eastern Libya—Richard, I don't ever want to predict your travels, but wherever you are going, please stay safe. Thanks for joining us.

ENGEL: Thank you. Thank you.

MADDOW: More to come from around the world as the news continues to read like a world atlas. Libya, Yemen, Japan and more. But also Wisconsin and Washington and Louisiana. And Sharron Angle's kitchen in Nevada.

Lots still to come. Please stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: World financial markets came way back today, which indicates in part that the markets think Japan's nuclear crisis is under control, which indicates that world markets maybe don't pay close attention to even the crises that freak them out. We do, and we will, coming up.

Also, the field of Republican challenges to President Obama in 2012 just officially got 33 1/3 percent bigger—and less exciting by the exact same degree.

Plus, budget crisis as union-busting excuse poster boy, Scott Walker, governor of Wisconsin, has a new problem on his hands and it's not about the budget either. It's about someone's girlfriend and someone's job. And that's coming up in a moment.

Please stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

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MADDOW: The United States Congress has declared war five times. That's it. Precisely five times in U.S. history. World War I, World War II, the War of 1812, the Spanish-American War and the Mexican-American War.

Think what a different country we would be if those were the only wars we'd ever had. When presidents send U.S. military forces abroad—very, very, very, very rarely and not in the last 60 years have they first had Congress declare war. Sometimes, they have Congress vote for an authorization for the use of force. President George W. Bush did that, for example, with both Iraq and Afghanistan, which made for a lot of awkward primary debates among Democrats running against George W. Bush and his wars in the following two elections.

But sometimes, presidents order military interventions without a declaration of war and without a declaration of an authorization for use of force—and that's what President Obama has done in Libya. After announcing Friday that U.S. military force would be used in Libya, the president sent a letter to Congress today explaining the point of the operation and under what authority he ordered it.

President Obama describes the Libyan operation as being “in the national security and foreign policy interests of the United States.” In the letter, he reminds Congress of his role as commander-in-chief and chief executive and he says explicitly that he ordered the Libyan military intervention, quote, “pursuant to my constitutional

authority to conduct U.S. foreign relations.”

Foreign relations? Is that what we're calling it now?

Joining us now is Steve Clemons of the New America Foundation. He's publisher of “The Washington Note.”

Steve, it's great to have you here. Thank you for your time.

STEVE CLEMONS, THE WASHINGTON NOTE: Sure. Thanks.

MADDOW: Does President Obama's decision about Libya reflect an unusually broad view of what a president can personally authorize or is this in keeping with how presidents act on things like this now?

CLEMONS: Well, I think, as you just pointed out, the last constitutionally correct war was

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World War II. And so, the tug of war between the Congress and the president over using and deploying military force and engaging in, I guess what you call “police actions” has been going on for decades. I think President Obama has decided he is within the letter of the law.

And I think last week, when he changed course in which way he wanted to go in this and begin—he did begin actively consulting with Congress and moved that ball forward. And as you said, he filed his letter today.

MADDOW: The right—the political right in this country appears to be somewhat split on this. Some Republicans saying we shouldn’t have intervened at all, some saying we should have intervened more and earlier. Some FOX News hosts and Newt Gingrich are trying to take both positions simultaneously, which is fun.

But what about inside the administration? What was the argument for intervention that turned this around and won the day in Washington?

CLEMONS: I think that before this came up, I think President Obama was studying every option and trying to look both at those who worried about having too big an American footprint in this, and what the down side risk would be, but I also think he was looking at the humanitarian dimensions. And they wanted to behave differently than we had in Kosovo and Rwanda in the past.

And when you saw an imminent crisis, that tens of thousands of people and potential, you

know, massive massacre, I think he said that what he was doing wasn’t enough, it wasn’t deterring Gadhafi. And so, he changed course on a dime.

And I think he was in control of it. This wasn’t the boys versus girls, you know, Hillary Clinton and Susan Rice versus Tom Donilon and Joe Biden. This was Barack Obama basically deciding he needed to do something to save those people, but to do it in a minimal way so that the U.S. footprint and the Western footprint, as you’d been saying, was small.

MADDOW: What role, though, did the State Department—did Secretary Clinton play in the debate here? And how important were they—how important was she and Department of State in getting things to line up the way the president wanted to in order to do this intervention?

CLEMON: She was hugely important and I think

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Susan Rice was important, as well as other players there. But what they did, which I think was a really incredible diplomatic fete is you had five nations abstained at the U.N., all the BRIC countries, Brazil, Russia, India, China, plus Germany, they didn't vote against. And I think they would have been inclined to, despite that.

And I think the Arab League and where the Arab League came out, as you just said, they've come back and reinforced their position, is a huge diplomatic fete. But beyond that, I think they laid out the notion in the past with Kosovo, with Rwanda, getting presidential attention and getting international consensus didn't take the weeks that it has here. Now, it took months and months. It's a very long time.

So, those people who have criticized the president for slow action aren't familiar with the history of our past involvement in humanitarian causes. I still worry about the sense that the Western footprint in this is too large, and that ultimately, this needs to be the Libyan people who take control of their own destiny. But I think President Obama is trying to provide a constructive and effective tilt.

But I think—I think Hillary Clinton did play a very important partnership role here.

MADDOW: To hear that—to hear you articulate that crucial issue that, that it's also so crucial that president about the size of the Western footprint and then to hear Richard Engel in eastern Libya essentially saying that he's not sure that the Libyan people, the Libyan rebels

have it in them to get this fight done is potentially a recipe for stasis, is it not? That the Western powers are essentially keep trying to make room for people who may not be capable of filling that space.

CLEMONS: There's no doubt this is a real gamble for the president. And people are going to be looking at whether Gadhafi stays or goes as a measure of President Obama's strength in the world and what he's able to achieve. I think that Richard's right. And sometimes, you got to be careful of joining oppositions that aren't really in a position to win.

In fact, you can create a moral hazard problem of getting other people elsewhere who begin campaigns against their government, they are not quite organized. They're not quite ready as we saw those very inspiring protesters in Egypt were on their game. They knew how to move their people and how to resuscitate themselves.

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When people thought the air was coming out of the protest in Egypt, they shocked everyone by showing up again. That may not always be the case. And what I recently said at forum in Doha is, you know, one of the uncomfortable truths in this is sometimes revolutions aren't won by the protesters. And it's going to be a mixed bag in the Middle East. And, hopefully, we'll do OK in Libya, but I have some doubts.

MADDOW: Steve Clemons of the New America Foundation, publisher of "The Washington Note," which is required reading—Steve, thanks for helping us out tonight. I really appreciate it.

CLEMONS: Thank you, Rachel.

MADDOW: Yes, the international events continue to overtake most domestic news. But there is still good reason tonight to talk about a pathetic Ku Klux Klansman and his connection to 2012 presidential politics, seriously. Plus, there's a weird scandal breaking in Wisconsin that's related to the Scott Walker union-stripping debacle and someone else's alleged girlfriend. Some nights, the news is both world-changing and super tawdry, some of each. Still ahead.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: Do you remember Sharron Angle, the Second Amendment remedies Republican who everybody thought was going to beat Harry Reid for Senate but she didn't? On this show on Thursday, we reported that Sharron Angle had released an odd taped

announcement that she's running for Congress now. That was on Thursday.

Today, I came back to work after the weekend to find that producer, Trisha McKinney on our the staff had found on eBay the exact same kitchen canisters that Sharron Angle used to make her running for Congress announcement seem more homey. You can apparently buy these little guys at Sears in the 1970s. They were from the merry mushroom series. And now, we got them ourselves, which I think forms a spectacular backdrop for our kickoff of our decision 2012 coverage.

The Republican Party's race to find someone, anyone, to run against Barack Obama for the presidency.

Before today, there were precisely three candidates declared for that Republican presidential nomination. One of them is named Herman Cain. He owns a pizza company.

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There's also a man named Fred Karger. He's running on the platform that Republicans need to get over their gay rights hang-up.

And then there's Buddy Roemer, the man who as governor of Louisiana, as the incumbent, lost the primary to run for his own job again to David Duke. Yes, that David Duke. He lost to the Ku Klux Klan guy.

So, as of this morning, the entire field of Republican presidential contenders for 2012 consisted of the pizza guy, the "Republicans shouldn't be so anti-gay" guy, and the "I lost to David Duke" guy.

But now, today, we have a fourth contender. He has announced his presidential exploratory committee, so it's official and everything. We have a fourth man running. It's Herman Cain, it's Fred Karger, it's Buddy Roemer, and it's Tim Paw -- (SNORING). Tim Paw.

Sorry. "One More Thing" that has been somewhat confusing about the field of Republican candidates for 2012. You may remember that Newt Gingrich sort of kind of tried to announce that he was running, too. In the end, all he did announce was that to make up his mind about whether or not to run, he needed more money—I mean, time. In order to collect of that time—I mean, money—Mr. Gingrich set up the awkwardly named Web site NewtExplore2012.

Since NewtExplore is kind of a creepy and unfamiliar concept, someone, we don't know who, did the obvious and snapped up the

similar but more memorable URL ExploreNewt2012.com.

When ExploreNewt2012 was first launched, it automatically redirected visitors to the Web site for Buddy Roemer's presidential campaign. Yes, he is the guy who lost to David Duke. But, then, about a week ago, ExploreNewt2012 started redirecting to a whole new thing. Now, it redirects to this—a YouTube video showing marbled newts eating stuff. I think it's like little larva and stuff. ExploreNewt2012.com. ExploreNewt2012, and every hungry day between now and then as well.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: There are two things you need to know about the ongoing crisis in Japan. One is bad weather. First, take a look at this. Keep in mind that because of the time difference, even though it's Monday night here, it's Tuesday

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there. As of just after 10:30 a.m. Tuesday, it's been raining in parts of Japan for a while, it will be raining through tomorrow. Forecast also calls for the winds there to shift to blowing inland instead of out to sea.

Plus, it's getting really cold there. Subfreezing temperatures at night, combinations of rain and snow in the day. The reason that's important in light of the disaster in Japan is because it highlights the need for warm shelter among people whose homes have been destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of people in temporary shelter facilities already.

Also, in the event of radiation that may be diffuse up there in the atmosphere, rain and snow can be a means of delivering that radiation in a more concentrated form to the ground. So, one is the weather.

Other thing to know about what's going on in Japan is that the effort to stabilize the reactors and the radioactive spent fuel at the Daiichi nuclear plant there is facing new setbacks—plural, setbacks. This morning, a light gray smoke was seen emanating from reactor number three, and then later, white smoke was seen coming from reactor two. TEPCO said that from reactor two was steam.

Neither case, that calls a temporary evacuation of workers from the Daiichi plant. “The Washington Post” reported that radiation level readings near the plant more than tripled shortly after the smoke was seen at reactor three.

As workers continue to try to restore electrical power to the facility, to get cooling systems up and running in the reactors and the spent fuel pools, the “Associated Press” is reporting that cooling systems that electrical power is supposed to be running at the reactors have themselves been damaged. Reactor two is the first reactor to have had its power restored, but its key cooling system pumps are apparently not working, even though power is being supplied to them. It's unclear how long it will take for new pumps to arrive there.

Developments are still happening, sort of fast and furious in Japan.

This crisis is not over.

Joining us to help us understand this better is Ed Lyman. He's a senior scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists and he joins us here in studio.

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Dr. Lyman, thanks for being here.

DR. ED LYMAN, UNION OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS: Thanks for having me.

MADDOW: First, I have to ask you, as I do regularly, did I get anything wrong in that description?

LYMAN: No, it sounded pretty good to me.

MADDOW: And it's always bad news whenever I ask you that. So, that's a drag.

In terms of the rain and snow issue, obviously, people in need of shelter is the immediate concern there. But in terms of radiation risk, if rain and snow is a means of delivering more concentrated doses essentially of diffused radiation in the atmosphere, is there an increased health hazard from bad weather essentially in Japan?

LYMAN: Well, it depends where the rain falls and where the plume is. If there's still radiation being emitted from the site and this rain close to the site or snow, it could cause more concentrated fallout closer to the site.

Now, it is a rural area, so that might actually be good news for a city like Tokyo. However, if let's say weather conditions allow that plume to travel as far as Tokyo, then the rain and snow hits, it could be bad news for Tokyo. So, it's really hard to predict who might get the extent of that fallout.

MADDOW: OK. Statements from American

officials last week were notably more dire, more pessimistic than statements from TEPCO and from Japanese officials. But today, U.S. officials started to sound more optimistic. One NRC official is saying that the plant might be on the verge of stability.

From what you know, are you optimistic that this threat is going to be resolved anytime soon?

LYMAN: Well, I'm staying hopeful. But I don't think see—I look at the same information as all of the authorities, it still looks like there's a rough road ahead. Even if they restore full cooling to the reactors, I think there's still a lot of uncertainty what will happen if those vessels get flooded with water again because the fuel has been exposed partially for several days. And that could cause degradation to the core in ways that aren't well understood.

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again, it could cause some damage that may not be predictable and make it harder to ultimately cool.

MADDOW: I know that this is not over, and so, it's not time to step back from this, but we are having a review, a 90-day sort of immediate review of U.S. nuclear facilities, and then a larger comprehensive review. And so, some stepping back and looking at the big picture is already happening.

Do you feel like this disaster has uncovered a fundamental flaw, fundamental understatement of risk in reactor design and in disaster planning?

LYMAN: Yes. I would say that is our sense. I think in that era of complacency after Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, regulators in the industry may have just become too comfortable with the idea we're never going to see that type of accident again, and I think that's influenced their decision-making and their practices.

I think they're going to have to take a fresh look how they made decisions over the last decade and where the safety margin to the extent we may be at risk at home.

MADDOW: Dr. Ed Lyman, senior scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists, at some point, we will talk about happier things. So far it has been a bummer every time I talked to you. But you have really helped us—helped me understand it personally—and I think helped us make the stuff clearer to our audience and I

'm really grateful for that. Thank you.

LYMAN: Thank you.

MADDOW: Congressman Dennis Kucinich is going to be a guest on "THE ED SHOW" right after this show tonight. Congressman Kucinich made news today by saying that President Obama authorizing military intervention in Libya without Congress should be an impeachable offense. You don't want to miss him and Ed going a few rounds on that tonight, right after the show.

Plus, the political news in Wisconsin got weird today. That's coming up.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: The big soul of America politics fight that's been going in Wisconsin is not over, not by a long shot. This weekend, there was another crowd at the state capitol in

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Wisconsin protesting against the Republican union-stripping adventure there. The crowd was led this weekend by veterans groups. And this makes five straight weeks of protests of thousands of people at the Wisconsin state capitol. They are protesting now even after Republicans passed that union-stripping bill.

One of the directions all of the anti-Republican energy in Wisconsin is channeled is into a recall effort against Republican state senators who voted for the union-stripping. One of the Republican senators being targeted for recall only won his seat by 163 votes in the first place.

And now, he's got a whole new political development to worry about—allegations that he doesn't in fact live in the district that he represents. Where is it that he allegedly lives instead? It's a really awkward question. It turns out it's a really, really, really super awkward question.

The strange, awkward details of that and how it ties into this fight in the states still being the most important domestic story in American politics, coming up next.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: This is Scott Fitzgerald. He's a Republican. He's the leader of the state Senate in Wisconsin.

This is Scott's brother, Jeff. Jeff is leader of the state assembly in Wisconsin.

And this is Jeff and Scott's dad, Stephen. Stephen used to be the U.S. marshal for the western district of Wisconsin but when his term expired last year, he ran for a local sheriff gig and lost, which was particularly embarrassing because it was his old job. He had previously been that sheriff but he lost the election to get that job back by a lot, two to one. Ow!

So, Stephen is rather embarrassed and he's jobless after that, but he's also the dad of the guy who runs the state assembly and the dad of the guy who runs the state Senate. So, with friends in high places and the Republican Governor Scott Walker, Mr. Walker found a spot for him—appointing him to lead the Wisconsin state patrol. You may have seen a piece on this in "Talking Points Memo" last week.

"The Fond du Lac Reporter," a newspaper in Wisconsin, pointed out that

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Papa Fitzgerald got that sweet job from Governor Walker even though he was

the only finalist for the gig who came from outside the ranks of the

Wisconsin state patrol, itself. But you know that's how it is in Wisconsin

Scott Fitzgerald leading the Senate, Jeff Fitzgerald leading the assembly, and Stephen Fitzgerald leading the Wisconsin state patrol, which I'm sure came in handy when the governor and the Fitzgerald brothers wanted to threaten to use the state patrol for political purposes to go arrest and round up Wisconsin's Democrats who fled the state to stop the Republicans' union-stripping.

That Republican union-stripping measure in Wisconsin is still a nationally galvanizing force for Democrats. Support and enthusiasm among the Democratic base still continues to build for pinning this union-stripping thing on the Republican Party nationally and for recalling Republicans in Wisconsin who pushed it through.

And it is in the midst of that effort into which another patronage hiring scandal appears to be blossoming today. It started actually a little bit more than a week ago when protesters showed up at the home of one of the Republican state senators who is facing a recall. His name is Randy Hopper, State Senator Randy Hopper. And there was this strange detail in the local coverage of that protest at his house.

People who were mad about the union-stripping thing and wanted to protest it showed up at Randy Hopper's house and his wife came out of the house to address the protesters and told them that Senator Hopper no longer lived there. In fact, she said, he no longer lived in his district at all. He no longer lived in Fond du Lac. She told the protesters that Senator Hopper had left his senate district and now lives primarily in Madison with his 20-something mistress.

Today, Wisconsin papers are all aflutter with news that despite Wisconsin's alleged terrible budget crisis, Republican Senator Randy Hopper's alleged girlfriend was able to land a sweet job in the Walker administration, getting what will amount to a \$12,000 annualized pay raise over the person who had the job before her.

Senator Hopper says he had nothing to do with her getting that job. He also says he's not

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living with her no matter what his wife says. But apart from the awkwardness for the state senator in question here, there's also the big policy awkwardness of whether or not Wisconsin state government is so broke because of all those greedy state employees, right?

I mean, for the senator already facing the likely prospect of recall, this is not a positive development. But it is also really handy as a reminder about the whole nature of this fight in Wisconsin and why it is resonating nationally.

The Republican justification for the union-stripping business in Wisconsin was that it was all about the budget, right? But then something like this comes along and we were all reminded that if it were about the budget, people hired by the state would not be getting \$12,000 raises, whether or not they were state senators' girlfriends.

And you see this writ large in the policy the Republicans are pursuing. Not everybody is taking a hit financially in these states that are pleading poverty. And this is important.

These Republican governors and Republican legislators all over the country keep saying that they're broke. They keep saying it's about the budget, it's about the budget, it's about the budget—but they are being incredibly generous to some with their budgets, whether it's state senators' girlfriends or the forces in our society to whom they would like to redirect what are now public assets.

There are some people who are making out like bandits toward whom states pleading poverty are being incredibly, generously profligate.

In Maine, for example, the Republican governor there wants to spend \$30 million giving a tax cut to about 550 individuals, 500 of the state's millionaires.

In Ohio, House Republicans say they want to spend \$10 million to give the petroleum industry in their state a tax break.

Pennsylvania's Republican governor wants to spend big on business as well. His tax proposals have been estimated to cost the state between \$200 million and \$833 million. Remember, he is pleading poverty.

New Jersey's Republican Governor Chris Christy wants to spend \$200 million on tax cuts to business. Remember, we're broke.

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Not to be outdone, Florida's Republican governor wants to spend \$1.5 billion on tax cuts for corporations.

Michigan's Republican governor wants to spend \$1.8 billion on business tax cuts.

And, of course, in Wisconsin, Republican Governor Scott Walker, his giveaways to business, his first actions as governor, are projected to cost the great state of Wisconsin nearly \$140 million. And remember, we're broke.

This is some spectacular generosity toward some very specific parts of society among these governments that are pleading poverty, complaining about giant state budget deficits. And states do have budget deficits. But all of these giveaways I just described are things that will make those deficits worse.

All the beltway media reporting on the fight in the states is about how governors are making hard choices and taking controversial steps to close their budget deficits. But all of these things they are doing open budget deficits wider. They make the budget problems in all these states worse and they bend over backwards to do it.

The people who are not benefiting from the Republican generosity in the states—they're the ones facing the cuts.

In Georgia, the legislature is looking at cutting funding to the state university system by about \$75 million.

Pennsylvania's Republican governor proposing a more than 50 percent cut to that state's higher education system.

In New Jersey and South Carolina, Republican governors want to drastically cut Medicaid benefits.

In Arizona, the Republican governor's budget would get rid of health care for 100,000 poor people.

Just in case anybody even tries to make a case this is all ideological, this is just about Republican opposition to taxes and opposition to spending, consider that in most of these states is not only are Republican governors or legislatures trying to cut things like education and social services, they are also overtly raising taxes on poor people. We've got tax hikes on the elderly and on low income residents in Michigan.

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Also, Republicans in Kansas and in Wisconsin are talking about effectively raising taxes on the working poor.

In Georgia, House Republicans are talking about raising taxes on groceries. Also, they're talking about ending a tax break for blind people. That's up for grabs in Georgia right now, raising taxes on the blind.

And just to spread the pain around in Maine, the Republican governor's proposed budget would raise property taxes for the middle class.

This is not some sort of policy double speak, right? This is Republicans proposing tax increases. I keep hearing that what Republicans are doing in the states is about closing the budget gaps.

When you give away hundreds of millions of dollars to businesses, when you give those away as state revenues—that makes your budget problem worse, not better.

And every time the national media reports these states that are giving these huge tax giveaways to businesses as closing the budget gap, they are wrong. Every time we hear this is an ideological opposition to taxes among these Republican governors and legislatures, you got to ask what you believe about tax cuts, tax increases for poor people.

Are tax increases for poor people also tax hikes? Huge tax cuts for the people in this country who are already wealthy and tax

increases on the poor and the unemployed and elderly people. The next time somebody tells you Republicans are anti-tax, ask them to be specific.

We've been covering this story for a while now. I have a feeling we will continue to cover it for a long time, but whether it is the state senator's girlfriend and her giant raise, or its multi-million dollar giveaways to the people who already have the most money in these states—again, let it be known, it is not about the budget.

Now, it's time for "THE ED SHOW." Have a good night.

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