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'The Rachel Maddow Show' for Wednesday, March 23rd, 2011

Read the transcript to the Wednesday show

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Guests: Richard Engel, Sen. Sherrod Brown

LAWRENCE O'DONNELL, "THE LAST WORD"
HOST: That is all the time we have for this Wednesday edition of "THE LAST WORD."

THE RACHEL MADDOW SHOW is up next.

Good evening, Rachel.

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

And thanks to you at home for staying with us for the next hour.

We will be joined live from Libya in just a moment by NBC's Richard Engel, who's been doing some amazing reporting from the war zone there. Are we allowed to call it a war zone? War zone—let's call it a war zone.

While interviewing rebels on the frontlines in Libya earlier today, Richard and his crew found themselves on the wrong side of what I think was an artillery barrage. That is to say they were not far from it and covering from a safe distance. They were right in the middle of it. Richard and his crew are fine. We will have that amazing footage for you in just a moment and, as I say, Richard will join us live.

But, put yourself in Richard Engel's shoes for a moment. If you had the job of being NBC's chief foreign correspondent, and let's say, like him, you speak Arabic, and your special area of expertise is the Middle East, it's hard to imagine at this point when you get to come home, isn't it? I mean, the uprisings in Tunisia that began just four months ago, continued to ricochet and swell throughout North Africa and the Middle East, in countries like Bahrain and Yemen and Syria, and, of course, now, Libya.

But as our country tries to get our American heads around not only what's happening in the Middle East but also our relationship to it as Americans, the great American awkwardness at the heart of all of this is how close the United States is and how supportive

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the United States has been to all of the leaders who are now getting overthrown by their own people, or where their people are at least trying it. From Tunisian government that was the first to fall, which the U.S. marinated very good relations with; to Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, the great U.S. ally of three decades; to even the leader who's teetering on the brink in Yemen now. Because of U.S. worries about al Qaeda and extremism in his part of the world, he is supposedly our ally against terrorism.

Even, even, even, Moammar Gadhafi, most Americans if they think of him at all, think of him as a ridiculous cartoon villain. But even he has recently been considered an ostensible American ally. Gadhafi, who accepted Libyan responsibility for the Lockerbie bombing, whose planes the United States military shot down in 1986, a man whose house Ronald Reagan shot a missile at during that campaign. Even Gadhafi was brought in from the cold, as they say, and made into a supposed U.S. ally by the George W. Bush administration when they were searching for something to call a diplomatic victory after the fiasco that was the fake weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

It is hard enough to figure out how Americans can best help out popular uprisings of people who want to determine their own future instead of living under a despot. That is hard enough.

How do you figure it out when the despot in question is our despot? When his despotic regime has enjoyed American support, an American seal of approval?

That's why there was this collective national stomach-turning when we saw images of those "made in the USA" tear gas canisters that were fired at the peaceful protesters in Egypt. The Egyptian military first stayed neutral, and then sided against Mubarak. But had they not, had Mubarak kept control of the military, ultimately, it wouldn't just have been tear gas, it would have been American Abrams tanks and American F-16 fighter jets squaring off against that peaceful protest movement that America was supporting.

In Libya right now, there is some of that very same awkwardness. Justin Elliott had a piece about this at Salon.com that was really helpful and interesting. He's noting that the George W. Bush administration's embrace of Gadhafi and Gadhafi's military resulted in a big U.S. junket a year and a half ago that brought senior Libyan military officers to the headquarters of AfriCom, to the headquarters of the U.S. Pentagon Command Center that is currently

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leading the fight against that exact same Libyan military.

So, think about that a second for a second. The upper echelons of the Libyan military got to tour the headquarters and see all the behind-the-scenes action at the Pentagon division that is now fighting them in a war. And it is looking more and more like a war.

The U.N. Security Council vote that authorized the intervention that's happening, that vote was to protect civilians by enforcing a no-fly zone over the country, right? But it did also authorize member states taking, quote, "all necessary measures" to protect civilians there.

We are now into that all necessary measures part. Reports from Libya indicating there is no one other than the coalition flying over Libya at all. The no-fly zone is essentially in effect over the entire country. Only coalition aircraft are in Libyan skies.

But what those coalition aircraft are doing is attacking Gadhafi's military on the ground, attacking tanks, attacking missile launchers, attacking military ground forces.

(BEGIN AUDIO CLIP)

REAR ADM. GERARD P. HUEBER, JTF ODYSSEY DAWN: Our targeting priorities are mechanized forces, artillery, those mobile integrated—those mobile surface-to-air missile sites, interdicting their lines of communication which supply their beans and their bullets, their command and control and

any opportunities for sustainment of that activity.

(END AUDIO CLIP)

MADDOW: To be clear, what is happening in Libya includes enforcing that no-fly zone, but it also is a lot more than that. It also includes essentially a U.S.-led international war on Gadhafi's military. And the U.S. leadership part of it, the American government keeps saying, the leadership part will end very soon.

That's what President Obama, for example, told Univision last night when he was asked about his exit strategy in Libya.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: The exit strategy will be executed this week in the sense that we will be pulling back from our much more active efforts to shape

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the environment.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: This week says President Obama.

Mr. Obama's secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, reading from the same page.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

DIANE SAWYER, ABC NEWS: It will be one week on Saturday? Will it happen by Saturday?

HILLARY CLINTON, SECRETARY OF STATE: Well, it will be days. Whether it's by Saturday or not depends upon the evaluation made by our military commanders, along with our allies and partners.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: This repeated insistence that the U.S. is not going to lead this thing, it doesn't just have an international audience, it is not just about telling the Muslim world, for example, that America isn't leading this charge, it is not just about telling American allies in this intervention that they better step up, that U.S. forces are not going to lead it forever.

This repeated assertion that the U.S. is going to pull back also has a domestic audience, and frankly a legal one. The idea that Libya is a limited intervention—an intervention that's only going to take a matter of days, that isn't going to be a sustained American-led effort, that is key to Obama administration's

justification for not getting authorization from Congress for doing what they're doing.

As Charlie Savage noted in "The New York Times" this week, the Obama administration appears to be operating on the theory that Libyan intervention falls short of what would prompt any necessary congressional authority.

Walter Dellinger, former head of the Office of Legal Counsel and acting solicitor general making the same case, that under the War Powers Resolution, the president can take military action without first getting authorization from Congress if the U.S. involvement is expected to be limited in its expected nature, scope, and duration.

So, think about this. This is where we are: we have a president who does not want the U.S. to be seen as stomping into another Muslim country. We have the repeated promises that

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the U.S. is not going to be running this thing for much longer, the way that we have been for the past few days. We have a president who has proceeded to this action by a procedural means that essentially requires the mission to be limited in its duration and its scope. And we have no clear indication of who takes over from the U.S. if the U.S. does really get out of the lead.

The U.S. and Britain clearly want NATO to take over. France, on the other hand, keeps saying they don't want that, and they are going to invent some sort of committee or something to run it instead.

At this point, who knows? It could be NATO, could not.

The very first NATO combat mission ever took place in 1994. It came after the U.N. authorized a no-fly zone over Bosnia. In February 1994, in support of that U.N. resolution, NATO shot down four Serbian jets that have violated the no-fly zone. That was the first combat action that NATO took as an alliance in its history.

After shooting down those jets, there was a targeted NATO bombing campaign that U.S. Air Forces were involved in. An American fighter pilot named Scott O'Grady was shot down over Bosnia during that mission. He survived for six days on the ground alone before he was rescued by U.S. forces.

But then what had been a limited engagement in Bosnia, a "no ground troops" engagement

there broke open in the summer of 1995, when in Srebrenica, 8,000 men and boys were massacred by Bosnian Serb forces. Just their wives and their daughters left behind.

What NATO had been doing up to that point was judged after Srebrenica to be not enough. The bombing campaign was then stepped up massively. It was a NATO effort, but one in which the U.S. took the lead role.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Though it is officially a NATO operation, American air power dominates the raids. More than 200 allied sorties so far. The war planes flew this corridor across Bosnia into the heart of Sarajevo, knocking out Serb air defenses first, then bombing Serb targets near the city.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

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MADDOW: That sustained bombing campaign went on for weeks and weeks. It ultimately forced the Dayton Peace Accords in November of that same year.

Then afterwards, to enforce those peace accords, even though President Clinton had said, had promised there would be no U.S. ground troops involved there, in the end, there were.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

WILLIAM J. CLINTON, FORMER U.S. PRESIDENT: things in Libya next.

They asked for America's help as they implement this peace agreement. America has a responsibility to answer that request, to help turn this moment of hope into enduring reality. To do that, troops from our country and around the world would go into Bosnia to give them the confidence and support they need to implement their peace plan. I refuse to send American troops to fight a war in Bosnia, but I believe we must help to secure the Bosnian peace.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: What started as the first NATO combat mission ended up with 20,000 U.S. troops on the ground there.

It's not to debate the merits of what the United States did in Bosnia, it's not even to debate the merits right now of what the U.S. is doing in Libya, but this is the open question in front of the country right now: the question of tactically whether it is possible for the U.S. to

be involved in an international mission like this in a way that is limited, that is short term, one in which the U.S. is a participant and not a prime mover.

That is what President Obama says he wants. That is the grounds on which he has proceeded to this without authorization from Congress. That is what he says he wants.

Is it possible?

Richard Engel joins us live from the thick of things in Libya next.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: If you are a regular viewer of the show, you have probably benefited the way we all have from the work of NBC's Richard Engel. If this is your first time watching or if you haven't seen Richard's reporting, then you will want to see what we are going to air next.

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Richard is in Libya where he was on the frontlines with the Libyan rebels today. He and those rebels and his crew got caught up in a rather traumatic mess while his rather incredible camera crew caught the whole thing on tape. Everyone is fine after a harrowing experience. We have the footage next and we have Richard Engel joining us live and alive to show us just what happened and to explain what it means about this war and how it may end.

Please stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: When the international bombing campaign began in Libya, it stalled but does not appear to have stopped Gadhafi's march on the rebel-held city of Benghazi. Today, Gadhafi's forces were still bombarding civilians 100 miles outside Benghazi in the town of Ajdabiya. That's where NBC chief foreign correspondent Richard Engel traveled to today for what ended up being a harrowing look at the frontlines in the battle for Libya.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

RICHARD ENGEL, NBC NEWS CHIEF FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): The road outside Benghazi today is a graveyard of Gadhafi's armored vehicles destroyed by Western air strikes. After an hour and a half driving south flanked by desert, we reached the rebels' front line. There are no trenches or sandbags, just men poorly armed who want to fight. The front line is about five miles outside

the town of Ajdabiya. Smoke can be seen rising from Ajdabiya in the distance.

Gadhafi still has tanks and artillery in the town. The rebels watch with binoculars, but can't advance.

Outgunned, the rebels say they are killed whenever they approach Gadhafi's forces.

"We have light weapons, he has tanks," complained one man.

Another rebel showed me he isn't actually armed at all.

(on camera): It's a toy gun. This is amazing. He just handed me his gun. I didn't realize until he put it in my hand, it's actually just made of plastic. It's a toy.

(EXPLOSIONS)

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ENGEL (voice-over): Three explosions, 50 yards away.

(on camera): So, we were doing interviews, incoming rounds just landed in this area. I assume the rebels are now starting to flee.

(voice-over): Rebels cheer that they survive this assault by Gadhafi's army.

(on camera): There have been several artilleries that have landed right in this area. We're using this piece of concrete to take a little cover and to see if the artillery round stops long enough for us to get out of the interview.

(voice-over): Shockingly, the rebel we interviewed leaves cover to retrieve his plastic gun, but abandons it as we hear another explosion.

We leave a few minutes later and find rebels regrouping at a safer distance. But without leadership or the close air support they desperately want from the West, the rebels are struggling.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: Richard Engel is now back in Benghazi and he joins us from there tonight.

Richard, thank you for joining us and staying up so late to do so. We are all very glad you guys are safe.

ENGEL: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be with you as always.

And I was listening to the intro, so I'm not allowed to ever go back to New York again? I guess I have to keep revolution-surfing across the Middle East. I'm never going to enjoy your good drinks anymore. Come on!

MADDOW: I will have to meet you in some country where liquor is illegal and fly you with liquor illegally there because I don't think you're going to be allowed to come home, man. This stuff is not ending.

ENGEL: I know. Next, you're going to say that we went to college together but weren't friends. But we'll go on from there.

MADDOW: All right.

ENGEL: I'll move on.

MADDOW: Richard, are the international forces that are fighting in Gadhafi—fighting in Libya right now, are they—are they fighting Gadhafi's

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military directly right now or are they counting on what can be done by those rebels like the ones you were with today?

ENGEL: They're giving a very sort of mixed message. They're joining this fight halfway. And it's very difficult to fight a war when you're tying your own hands behind your back, and when you're on the frontlines, you realize completely that this incredible Western support is so appreciated and so crucial.

I'm in Benghazi right now. And this city probably would have been overrun and there would have been massacres here if you speak to almost anyone if Gadhafi's forces had gotten in. The people are very happy about that.

Then, you go to Ajdabiya where the rebels probably wouldn't have gotten that far had the intervention not taken place. So, already that's some progress. But then when you get to the actual front lines, you see the rebels and they can't get further because Gadhafi's troops and tanks and artillery are still in a part of Ajdabiya, and the rebels are begging for close air support. They want Apaches, A-10s.

And it really wouldn't take that much. A few Apaches flying over and taking out these tanks would allow the rebels to go forward and sort of finish the job. But that kind of intimate relationship with A-10s or Apaches, the kind of thing you need ground troops to do or military advisors or at least someone who can communicate with the aircraft above, doesn't seem that the international community is

willing to go that far.

So, they threw them a life preserver but they're not quite reeling them into the boat yet.

MADDOW: In terms of ground troops, and you talk—I think it's an important point you just made about the need for ground troops if you are going to do something like close air support, if you are going to have helicopter gunships and supporting people who are fighting on the ground. Do the rebels want foreign ground troops there to help them? Do they—do they know that that's what it would mean to have close air support?

ENGEL: They do know that. And it's an emotional thing. They don't want to see Gadhafi thrown out by the 82nd American Airborne Division, or the 101st or anything like that.

But if there were groups of 12 Team Alphas,

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the Special Forces here, hidden away someplace, giving them advice and communicating with aircraft, I know they would accept that. I spoke with some rebel leaders who definitely want that.

They're even considering hiring security experts on their own—and there are a lot of I guess you could call them mercenaries that are available on the open market, British, SAS, people who retired and are now working more or less freelance. They're looking actively to hire people like that, and it would certainly be more effective and cheaper and less chaotic than having all of the wannabe Rambos flowing in if they had some sort of direct communication with the people who are giving them military cover.

MADDOW: Richard, the U.S. government is really insistent that the U.S. does not want to be in the lead of this international effort, even if this stretches on for a long time, they're saying the U.S. will be a participant and not running things. From what you are experiencing of the international effort there, so far, from what you know about American war making—does a transition like that seem feasible to the U.S. just participating and not leading?

ENGEL: No, it doesn't. I mean, I've seen a lot of international war efforts over the years.

In Lebanon, that one was an international effort, and it was almost completely useless because you had troops from many different nations, no one was really in charge. They didn't

speak the same sort of languages. They didn't have the same objectives.

You saw in Afghanistan when it was purely a NATO mission in early years. The Italians had one set of rules. They had their own caveats. They wouldn't fly into war zones, active war zones. They wouldn't fly at night.

The Germans were on a peacekeeping mission. The Americans were on aggressive counterterrorism mission. And it didn't really work, and look what happened in Afghanistan. We're still basically 10 years on fighting that war.

So, it sounds like America wants everything. They want it to be internationally run, fine. They want it to be quick, but they don't want to get really that involved. Well, unless you get really involved, it's not going to be quick, and that seems to be the biggest drawback, it's the timing.

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If you keep doing this, flying over the sky, and if you see a tank, taking it out, that helps certainly, and it saved Benghazi. But what Gadhafi did and Gadhafi's troops did, which I think anybody who would be with the tank command would do rationally, is you would pull troops back into populated areas.

If you are commanding the Rachel Maddow division of tanks and you are out in the open desert and the Americans start attacking, you're going to pull back into the town and use it effectively as a human shield. And that's exactly what's going on in Ajdabiya.

So, we were on the rebel side. And they were firing on the rebels out, that we were it, about five miles out, and firing over this no man's land. They were also firing into Ajdabiya, and killing people in the city itself, because there's a rebel movement in Ajdabiya.

So, there are still many casualties that are being caused inside Ajdabiya, but the—because of the nature of the support that's going on right now, the airplanes in the sky won't attack inside Ajdabiya because it's in a populated area. You need close air support, you need coordination, you need much more precise targeting for that, and that usually means at least somebody on the ground.

MADDOW: Richard, what kind of pressure do you think it would take to get Gadhafi himself to either give up or leave? They're not talking explicitly about regime change as the goal of this military operation. In fact, they say it is not, that's one way to end this. Can you

imagine the pressure it would take to cause that outcome?

ENGEL: Yes, I think it would be about the amount of pressure released by one 500-pound JDAM, a big bomb. I think that's the kind of pressure you would need. I can't imagine he would leave under any other kind of circumstances, unless he felt directly threatened, or and this is the hope here at least, that the tribes turn on him.

This is a tribal society, and the country is roughly divided into two now. You have the tribes and the people out here in the east that are clearly with this rebellion. The army units that defected, they're nowhere to be seen. I don't know what happened to them.

Remember, a few days ago, we were talking—we were looking for the army commander. He had taken the day off. The tribes closer to Tripoli are still more or less with Gadhafi, and

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if they will switch, that would—that would undercut a tremendous amount of his support and maybe, maybe convince him to leave, but probably it is more likely that the pressure from high explosive would end this quickly.

MADDOW: Richard Engel, NBC News chief foreign correspondent in Benghazi, Libya, tonight—not allowed to come home, not allowed to sleep, but doing an amazing job despite those restrictions.

Richard, thank you again.

ENGEL: My pleasure.

MADDOW: OK. So, Newton's law for motion is that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Same goes for state politics as it turns out. Republican governors in places like Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania have taken some pretty radical and political action, and there has indeed been an equal and opposite reaction in terms of support for those governors in those states. Do not test your luck against physics, governors.

Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown will join us here in just a moment.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: The trouble with trying to do really unpopular things in politics is that they have a tendency to make the doer of those things really unpopular. You'd think politicians would understand this since their careers are made

or broken on the popular vote.

That said, ladies and gentlemen, behold Tennessee where Republicans in the state legislature have been pushing a bill to strip union rights from teachers, where union supporters have been turning out by the thousands, and law enforcement has been bodily hauling protesters out of committee meetings. Lawmakers in Tennessee introduced this bill before Wisconsin became a synonym for Republican regret in 2011.

And now, despite the demonstrations in Nashville and the objections of the Republican governor that the union-stripping bill is maybe not so smart a move there, Republican lawmakers in the Tennessee state legislature are just going for it. They moved a version of this bill through a key House vote yesterday. The Senate in Tennessee is insisting on an even more draconian version of the bill. If they go through with it, anyone praying for a bluer

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Tennessee after the next election will probably be able to send the Democratic Party “thank you” card to the Republican legislature come next election.

Look at the polling on this. The Republicans great 2011 overreach against people who work for a living is not working out well politically for the Republicans.

In Ohio, the freshman Republican governor there is John Kasich. Mr. Kasich says Ohio is broke. His proposed fixes include giving away \$229 million the state now gets from regulating booze, taking that money out of the budget and giving it instead to businesses. Governor Kasich also has his own union-stripping bill, complete with union protests, his own mini-Wisconsin right there in beautiful downtown Columbus.

Break the unions, let them march in the streets, give the state’s money to businesses. We’re broke. That’s the plan from the governor of Ohio.

Here’s the response from the people of Ohio. From a Quinnipiac Poll released today, quote, “Ohio voters disapprove 46 percent to 30 percent of the way Governor Kasich is handling his job.” In other words, Governor Kasich’s approval rating is 30 percent right now -- 30 percent of Ohioans approve of the job he is doing as governor.

On union-stripping, specifically, more than half said they oppose his bill to limit collective bargaining rights, 55 percent say he should

balance the budget some other way from the one he is proposing, 53 percent call his budget flat-out unfair to people like them.

And in Ohio, as in the rest of the country, 53 percent is what’s known as a majority.

In Pennsylvania, Republican Governor Tom Corbett sweeps into office, announces there’s a budget crisis and says he’s going to solve it by slashing spending and giving away as much as \$833 million in tax breaks for businesses. Governor Corbett, that agenda translates into 31 percent of Pennsylvania voters saying you are doing an excellent or even good job. Among voters who say they’re in your Republican Party, 41 percent say you’re doing fair or poor, 14 percent say they have no idea.

Gov, remember the base? You had one once.

Michigan Governor Rick Snyder comes into office, also says the state’s broke, Michigan is

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broke. So, we've got no choice but to spend \$1.8 billion on a big business tax giveaway. He also wants to raise taxes on seniors and working class people.

The results of those unpopular proposals for Governor Snyder's popularity, rock carefully balanced on a hill, meet gravity. A survey yesterday from Public Policy Polling finds Governor Snyder has got an approval rating of 33 percent, also known as a third. A previous poll found that more people object to raising taxes on Michigan seniors and the poor and giving that money to business than like the idea.

These are not the returns a new governor wants to see in the first months of the first term for top priorities. But, hey, the pollsters note at least these guys are not Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker.

After Governor Walker proposed stripping state employees of their union rights, he now finds himself bracing for a recall campaign. This is the same Scott Walker who won by six points, not that long ago.

The most recent polling on him from the end of February shows him losing a hypothetical do-over election by seven points. That's if you're counting at home, a 13-point swing against him. That's the definition of buyer's remorse.

Scott Walker, the people of Wisconsin are sorry they voted for you. They wish they had not picked you. A year from now, they may try to undo it by recalling you.

"The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel" that endorsed Walker mused on its editorial page yesterday about rescinding their endorsement of him. They ultimately decided after listing what they see as Governor Walker's many, many faults that it is too soon to decide yet.

What these new Republican governors are learning the hard way is that doing unpopular things really does make you unpopular—taking money and resources away from working class and middle class voters and giving to corporations to folks at the skinny part of the economic pyramid—it's not working for you guys. I'm just saying.

Joining us now is Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown of the great state of Ohio.

Senator Brown, it is great to have you here.

SEN. SHERROD BROWN (D), OHIO: Good to be here. Thank you, Rachel.

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MADDOW: Let me ask you about those polling numbers. Will public opinion change the course that Republicans are taking in the states?

BROWN: Not clear. I think—you start with the 2010 campaign, at

least in Ohio, and I assume in all the states with troubled economies, was

the campaigns were all about we've got to create jobs. Well, once these governors took office, again talking more about Ohio because I know more about Ohio, their emphasis is on the legislature, governor's emphasis has been on restricting—many more restrictions on abortion rights, have been going after collective bargaining rights.

I mean, they're really taking rights. They declared this on the middle class, taking rights from people and lost their focus on jobs. And I think the negative polling, by and large, has been that they are taking rights and they really aren't paying attention to jobs.

That in a nutshell is I think why they are so grossly unpopular unbelievably quickly, which normally doesn't happen for a new executive.

But I think in Ohio, what happens is there's going to be a referendum on this. We don't have a recall process under the law in Ohio, but voters can decide whether they want to accept this law. There will be 200,000 plus signatures, on petitions that will be gathered after Governor Kasich signs the bill that

probably, if he will get a chance to sign, signs it into law, and this recall will likely take—this referendum will likely take place in November, and that's when I think you're going to really see a different direction in the country.

They've governed by ideology. They've not governed practically discussing jobs and they're going to pay for it.

MADDOW: Well, I wonder about that—I guess that direct political utility of something like a referendum that you're describing. Every time you look at anything economically populist making its way onto the ballot, particularly something like raising the minimum wage or something about the rights of people who work for a living, it tends to not only pass but pass by a lot, and drive Democratic voter turnout.

I wonder with that opportunity in Ohio to get some—the rescinding of some of these things

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on the ballot, if it is an opportunity for Democrats to actually claw back a lot of their losses from the last election, if it's really going to drive likely Democratic voters to the polls.

BROWN: Yes, six Republican state senators, I believe it was six, voted against this repeal of collective bargaining rights. I think they already have begun to fear what this is going to mean politically for their careers personally and what it's going to mean for their party because we go—we go to the ballot in November. We have this referendum. We repeal this collective bargaining—taking away of collective bargaining rights.

You see a whole new group of people voting for Democrats now, police and fire, who have not been so Democratic, and you see teachers and nurses and others instead of voting 60 percent, maybe they vote 85 percent Democratic, and that changes the whole equation, plus the kind of momentum.

One of the things that we are doing is we're already starting to organize. I encourage people to go on my Web site, SherrodBrown.com/Ohio to help—to sign up and help us begin this referendum process. That doesn't sign the petition but it helps us with the organizing. And I think you're going to see organizing in my state and other places in whatever avenue they have, whether referendum recall or just organizing because they're unhappy.

I think you're going to see that—that we haven't seen in this country in a long time. And

people are driven by feelings of anger if they're being targeted like teachers, but you're seeing a lot of religious people and you're seeing a lot of advocates for all kinds of rights and people who are just unhappy with what they are doing to the middle class and what they're doing to people who work for a living.

And I think that's a wave that the Republicans were not expecting a couple months ago that they're now becoming fearful of.

MADDOW: In terms of national importance of this and whether or not it's fully appreciated, also I guess whether or not this is going to translate into different politics on Capitol Hill as opposed to just in the streets of the state capitols around the country. There was supposedly a big national Tea Party convention this weekend in Florida. They had like 25 speakers, all of this entertainment, and all these A-list Tea Party folks. I think the turnout was something on the order of 300

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people. Big, empty conference rooms full of no Tea Partiers.

Meanwhile, every day if you Google search on the term “Tea Party,” especially about how it’s affecting national politics, the coverage is just as intense as it ever was, as if this is still a movement that is driving American politics. You got 100,000 people in the streets of Madison, you got five straight weeks of tens of thousands out in the streets of all these state capitols, the Beltway media in Washington, in particular, doesn’t really seem to be catching onto the fact that this might a be a real grassroots—

BROWN: Washington, whether it’s the media or whether it’s the Senate and the House, they are usually the last to know.

But I think that’s right what you said. In Columbus, where they had these demonstrations and in places like Medina and Mansfield, my hometown, we had demonstrations in a county of 100,000, you have 500 or 1,000 people show up. There might be—I mean, I heard people say at the rallies 15 people across the street holding Tea Party signs. I mean, it really is—they are really overmatched.

The influence of the Tea Party is still felt among House Republicans in Columbus and in Washington, the freshmen that subscribe to the Tea Party on philosophy and agenda—they’re still there, still speaking out, they’re still voting with their legislative cards unfortunately. So, their impact is there, but

our impact is longer term because, in the end, people in this country care about fairness. That’s why religious folks, that’s why nonpublic employees, labor unions and non-unions alike, people in the workplace who care about being treated decently in this society are coming to our side on it. I think it’s really clear.

MADDOW: Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio—it’s always really nice to have you here. Thanks for coming in.

BROWN: Thanks, Rachel. Always a pleasure.

MADDOW: Happy birthday, health reform. Our birthday gift to health reform this year is return of Debunktion Junction. That’s coming up.

But, first, “One More Thing” about Republican governors making themselves famous. Maine’s Republican Governor Paul LePage supports

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union-stripping in his state, ala Scott Walker in Wisconsin. When Wisconsin erupted in huge protests against Walker’s union-stripping bill, Governor LePage up in Maine got publicly excited about the prospect that the protests would come to Maine next as he tried to pull off the same thing.

Governor LePage also proposes raising the retirement age for in-state workers and he supports a huge 19th century-style rollback of child labor laws. But in case the whole hostility to working people thing was not coming through loud enough and clear enough, Governor LePage has decided to throw down. He’s now going so far as to censor art in Maine that is about people who work for a living. He is tearing down art on the basis of its content because he thinks it’s too working class.

The Department of Labor in Maine moves into consolidated headquarters in 2007. For the new H.Q., the state commissioned a mural showing the history of working people in Maine. It shows loggers and people on strike. It shows the aforementioned child laborers that Governor LePage doesn’t have a problem with.

Governor LePage’s administration has decided to dismantle the mural and take it down. And, you know, frankly, you can see how it might be distracting for a Paul LePage-led agency. Honestly, you try to plot the demise of the working class with all those socialist eyes staring at you, judging, how would you like it?

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: As you might expect, a man named Newt Gingrich has a strong opinion about President Obama’s handling of the airstrikes on Libya. In fact, depending which day you ask him, Mr. Gingrich has several strong opinions about Libya which are mutually exclusive of one another. Such a scenario cries out for Debunktion Junction. We will hear that cry just ahead.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: Today, Speaker of the House John Boehner tweeted gleefully about how awful health reform is. Quote, “One year later, job-crushing ObamaCare remains as unpopular as ever.” He even invented a health reform sucks hashtag for the extra tweet literate among his many followers.

But what Mr. Boehner links to is a CNN poll on

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their Web site. They have titled it “Time doesn’t change views on health care law.”

Remember, Mr. Boehner is telling people to go read this poll because it proves how unpopular health reform is.

But what this thing he links to actually says is that 43 percent of Americans are, in fact, opposed to health reform—in CNN’s words, because it was, quote, too liberal. But 37 percent of Americans like it. And an additional 13 percent of Americans wanted even more liberal version of health reform. So, 43 percent don’t like it, a total of 50 percent like it or say they want more.

So, when John Boehner said CNN proved Obamacare is as unpopular as ever, what he really means is a majority of the people like it, or want even more, and that is a significantly higher proportion of the population than that which sides with him, against health care reform.

So, to be clear: when John Boehner says health reform is unpopular, what he means is health reform is popular. Hashtag OMG, LOL.

On this first anniversary of the signing of the health reform act—happy birthday to health reform—your opponents tried to kill you about making up things about death panels and Muslims being exempt from health reform and all the rest. Today, those same opponents are celebrating your birthday by making up all sorts of stuff about you all over again. And that is a great occasion to bring back our

beloved, controversial, poorly-animated segment that we call Debunktion Junction.

That is next.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIPS)

BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: This year, insurance companies will never be able to drop people’s coverage when they get sick.

(CHEERS)

OBAMA: They won’t be able to place lifetime limits or restrictive annual limits on the amount of care they can receive.

Today, I’m signing this reform bill into law on behalf of my mother, who argued with insurance companies, even as she battled cancer in her final days.

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It's going to mean that millions of people can get health care that don't have it currently.

I heard one of the Republican leaders say this was going to be Armageddon. Well, you know, two months from now, six months from now, you can check it out. We'll look around. And we'll see.

(APPLAUSE)

OBAMA: You don't have to take my word for it.

(END VIDEO CLIPS)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: Debunktion Junction, what's my function.

On the first anniversary of health reform being signed, Senator Ron Johnson of Wisconsin wrote an op-ed for "The Wall Street Journal" today. In it, Senator Johnson implies that health reform would have killed his daughter. Mr. Johnson describes a heart condition his daughter was born with, over 27 years ago. He describes the medical procedures used to save her life.

And then he says this: quote, "I don't even want to think what might have happened if she had been born at a time and place where government defined the limits for most insurance policies, and set precedence on what would be covered."

This is strong stuff. This senator's claim, his

threat here is essentially that if his daughter had been born with a heart condition now, she would have been death panned. She would have been left to die, rather than having been treated, because health reform would have blocked the kind of treatment she received. Strong stuff.

But he is a United States senator and that is what he's threatening. So, is it true or false—health reform would prevented Wisconsin Senator Ron Johnson's daughter from getting the medical treatment she needed to save her life? Is that true or false?

It's false. I just realize it's "The Wall Street Journal" editorial page, but I still find it kind of amazing that somebody allowed this to be published in a major newspaper.

Senator Ron Johnson uses no factual claims to support his argument here. When he cites, government defined limits on insurance

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policies setting precedence on what would be covered, that sure sounds awful, but that's not what health reform is. One of the very first provisions of health reform to go into effect, in fact, is a ban on insurance companies using pre-existing conditions to deny health coverage to kids. So, really, the effect of health reform in a case like this is that because of health reform, more kids might actually be covered by insurance. More kids will have health insurance.

So, like Ron Johnson's daughter, they will have a chance of getting life-saving treatment like Mr. Johnson's daughter did. She got the health insurance with his private health insurance. She would still get that treatment under private health if it happened today. Health reform will not affect that.

The difference is, now, more other kids can get insurance, too. Everybody is delighted for the Johnson family's happy health care outcome that he used as the basis for his op-ed today. But using your family's personal history to make a political point is not enough to make that political point true.

Next up, true or false? Former House speaker and perpetual fundraiser offered the idea he might run for president, Newt Gingrich—Newt Gingrich is for U.S. military intervention in Libya. Is that true or false?

True. On March 7th, Mr. Gingrich appeared on Greta Van Susteren's program on FOX News, and it was set you phasers to kick butt with impunity.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

GRETA VAN SUSTEREN, FOX NEWS: What would you do about Libya?

NEWT GINGRICH®, FORMER HOUSE SPEAKER: Exercise a no-fly zone this evening, communicate to the Libyan military that Gadhafi was gone, and that the sooner they switched sides, the more likely they would survive, provide help to the rebels to replace him. This is a moment to get rid of him. Do it. Get over with it. The United States doesn't need anybody's permission.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: OK. So, we do not need anybody's permission, per Mr.

Gingrich. Libya, here we come.

Next up, true or false? Former House speaker

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and still thinking about running for president as long as you've give him money in the meantime, Newt Gingrich, is not for U.S. military intervention at all. He is against it. Mr. Gingrich says no intervention in Libya. Is that true or false?

Also true. It is true that he is for intervention in Libya. It is also true that he is against intervention in Libya. Let's review. Less than two weeks ago, Mr. Gingrich said this.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

GINGRICH: Exercise no-fly zone this evening. Do it. Get it over with.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Now that Mr. Obama has done just that, Mr. Gingrich thinks that is a horrible idea.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

GINGRICH: I would not have intervened. I think there were a lot of other ways to affect Gadhafi.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Tada! Same guy, same Libya. Luckily, there's Facebook where this afternoon Mr. Gingrich sought to clarify his positions on Libya. After being super in favor of it, until Obama did it, then super against it once he did, Mr. Gingrich clarified today on his Facebook page that he was against intervening. But when president Obama said

Gadhafi has got to go, we have to intervene, but he still thinks we shouldn't have intervened, but since we did intervene, he totally supports the mission or something.

Stay tuned. There's always tomorrow. Also, please send cash. Newt always needs cash.

That does it for us tonight. We'll see you again tomorrow night.

Now, it is time for "THE ED SHOW." Have a good one.

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