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'The Rachel Maddow Show' for Thursday, March 31st, 2011

Read the transcript to the Thursday show

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Guests: Jack Jacobs, Armond Budish, Frances Coleman

RACHEL MADDOW, HOST: Lawrence, at some point, we will collectively write an MSNBC host political science textbook and I will write the side bar in that textbook about how any reference to any male politician that involves the word "hair" is probably what Ari was saying.

LAWRENCE O'DONNELL, "THE LAST WORD"
HOST: All right. You know, my gaydar just isn't—

MADDOW: It's your anti-gaydar. That's the—

O'DONNELL: My anti-gay—I've got to work on my anti-gaydar. I'm working on that.

MADDOW: Seminar at 11:00. Thank you, Lawrence. I really appreciate it.

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

This past weekend, the governor of Maine, Republican Paul LePage, the governor of Maine had state workers in Maine tear down a mural at the state's Department of Labor, a mural that offended the governor. I don't know if the workers got paid double-team for working on

the weekend. But it was over the weekend when this multi-panel piece of art showing interesting and defining moments in the history of people who work for a living in Maine, when this mural got pried off the wall and shoved into storage at the orders of the governor.

This is the part of the mural that shows child laborers in Maine. As you can see, these children look very forlorn, because it's child labor. Of course, they're forlorn.

Maine passed its first child labor laws in 1847. And back then, laws restricting child labor were almost always tied up with laws about schooling.

I mean, there used to be this totally crazy idea

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in America that tiny people, not yet full grown, should be diverted into some sort of learning to read environment rather than being shunted down into the coal mines, or whatever. You know, that could wait until after childhood.

And granted, I mean, the temptation is clear. Children have very tiny hands. They're very nimble. They eat so little.

But the commie, pinko bleeding heart liberals of, say, 1840s Maine took action to keep kids out of the mines, out of the sweatshops, and in school instead.

So, we have laws in Maine and in the rest of this country that restrict what kind of jobs kids can do, how many hours they can work, et cetera. And a lot of those laws are tied to schooling. For example, kids' work permits often say that the number of hours, and which hours kids are allowed to work for pay are different during the school year than they are during the summer or on holidays—the idea being that kids need time for school.

After Governor LePage took downtown mural depicting the bad old days of child laborers taking their iron lunch buckets into the sweatshops—

I'm guessing the one with the thimbles is work in some sort of textile environment. I don't know for sure. Post a comment at MaddowBlog@MSNBC.com if you know what's on that girl's hands. Are we talking thimbles?

Anyway, after Governor LePage took down the mural showing that those bad old days of child labor used to exist in Maine, Governor LePage and the state's Republican legislators this week made some great advances toward making Maine more like those bad old days once again.

Right now, if you are a kid working in Maine, even if you can only get a minimum wage job, you're still getting paid minimum wage. You're still getting paid \$7.50 an hour. That's the minimum wage in Maine.

If Republicans get their way, and it's starting to look this week like they're going to, if Republicans get their way, if you are a kid in Maine, you will be privileged to receive not \$7.50 an hour anymore but \$5.25 an hour.

Also, although the governor had originally supported rolling back the laws so kids in school could also work essentially full-time,

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so they could work 32 hours a week—what? Eventually that got rolled back. So the new restrictions allow kids to work 24 hours per week, on top of being in school full-time. And, of course, for that 24 hours per week, they get a reduced kid-size wage.

In one of the great Orwellian moments in all of this, the House version of this bill in Maine is called “An Act to Enhance Access to the Workplace for Minors.” Yes, how enhanced do you feel do you feel to be working more hours during the school year for less money, considerably less money?

This is like calling a rollback of nuclear regulations an act to enhance citizen access to cancer.

Whether or not you care about the urchins of Maine, even if you feel totally coldhearted about this in terms of what effect this will have on, I don’t know, reading, whether or not you care about what childhood is for, consider also what this will do to the overall labor workforce in Maine. Not just kids—to the prospect of anybody getting hired for a low-level job in Maine.

Now, you’re not only competing against everybody else who’s in Maine’s 7 percent unemployment statistics, you’re not only competing against everybody who is trying to get a low-level job, you are now competing against high school kids who are being cleared to do as many hours a week as they need to for this job but who can get paid legally \$2.25 less an hour than you can as an adult.

Teenagers in Maine would get paid the subminimum wage for six months before they ‘d be able to graduate to the regular minimum wage.

So, at day 179, before you kick over into that 7 ½ bucks an hour gold standard real minimum wage, at day 179 of your kid-sized subminimum wage in Maine, presumably, you could expect to get fired, so some other child laborer could be brought along to do that job that adults used to be hired to do, but now, Governor LePage says it should be done cheaper, because it should be done by children.

I spent way too much of my day today reading the comments sections of Mainers responding to this in their local newspapers—it’s sort of an instant letters to the editor of the electronic age, right, when you comment on a news article online.

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If what Republicans are doing in the states is sort of bumming you out about the direction of the country, the future of people who have to work for a living, I will tell you: the absolute chest-pounding, horrified vitriol that is contained in the unscientific survey of people writing in to Maine newspapers about the child labor laws rollback, reading those comments will restore your faith in an angry and pretty perfect humanity.

One Democratic state legislator in Maine is so fed up she's even proposed establishing a new law in that state to create the possibility of recalling a governor. Maine currently doesn't have that possibility, but apparently, Governor Paul LePage has been inspirational.

Over in the great state of Wisconsin, the recall efforts for Republican state senators who supported the union-stripping measures there, those recall efforts are steaming right along with the Progressive Change Campaign Committee saying they have raised more than 150 grand already to run this new ad supporting the recall efforts. Democratic organizers behind the recall effort are now expressing confidence that they will be able to turn the Wisconsin state Senate Democratic by recalling enough Republicans this summer.

On an even shorter horizon, there is something that would otherwise be a very sleepy state Supreme Court election in Wisconsin that's scheduled for April 5th. In any other year, this would be a sleepy, low-turnout election. But in this year, it's a pro-union rights Democrat running to oust a

conservative judge who is an ally of union-busting Republican Governor Scott Walker. So, whatever your usual turnout is for an election for state Supreme Court justices in Wisconsin, you can probably double your expectations.

Over in New Hampshire, New Hampshire has not received much national attention for their labor struggles, but there too Republicans in the legislature have been pushing a union-stripping bill that would force people who have voted to join unions—it would force those people out of those unions and make them at-will employees. Yea, oldie big government conservatism.

Here's some footage we got today of people against that union-stripping bill rallying at the New Hampshire state capitol after the Republican-led House there voted to pass the union-stripping measure. The Republican-led Senate, interestingly, is not expected to pass the bill on that side of the legislature. Even if

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they did, New Hampshire's Democratic governor is not expected to sign it. But this issue has lit a fire under people in New Hampshire to defend their rights all the same.

Nothing could unify Democrats and centrists more than this, apparently.

In Michigan, as we reported earlier this week, Republicans in the state legislature and Republican Governor Rick Snyder have passed a bill that sticks it to the state's unemployed with the added benefit of torpedoing the state's economy as a whole. The bill would make Michigan, the state with the highest sustained unemployment rate in the country, the only state in the country that would cut off unemployment checks six weeks early.

Governor Snyder seems to have himself lit a fire under Michigan state Democrats, who've announced they will do everything they can to get that unemployment law reversed. Democrats have now gone on offense in a bigger way in Michigan with an attempt to make Governor Rick Snyder as nationally famous as he probably should be. They have put out what you're seeing here, which is a three-minute video highlighting what Rick Snyder has done in the three months he's been in office and what they say has been the devastating effect on Michigan's economy, and in particular on the middle class and on kids. The video shows all these local news stations in Michigan doing news reports about each additional thing Mr. Snyder has done in government—and then the video ends like this.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

SUBTITLE: One Governor. Three Months. One hundred fifty school districts near bankruptcy. Twenty-one state police posts to close. Months of unemployment benefits cut.

GOV. RICK SNYDER®, MICHIGAN: The reinvention of Michigan.

SUBTITLE: That's not "reinventing" Michigan. That's ruining Michigan.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Governor Snyder, they say, is ruining Michigan.

Then there's the great state of Ohio—the great state of Ohio, which has been the scene of weeks and weeks of sustained protests at the state capitol over the union-stripping bill being pushed by that state's Republicans—a

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union-stripping bill that is more draconian even than the one that was passed in Wisconsin.

After weeks of upheaval in Ohio, check out this scene yesterday as Republicans there finally passed that union-stripping bill through the Ohio statehouse. This was the scene right after that vote.

(VIDEO CLIP PLAYS)

MADDOW: People shouting “shame on you” as the gallery is cleared.

The Ohio House managed to pass that union-stripping bill by nine votes. The Senate passed it by just one vote. Tonight, Ohio’s new Republican governor, John Kasich, formerly of FOX News, formerly of Lehman Brothers, signed it into law—stripping away most collective bargaining rights for about 350,000 Ohio state employees with the stroke of a pen.

Here’s the thing, though: Governor Kasich signing that bill tonight starts a clock, starts a 90-day clock. If opponents of that union-stripping bill can gather a little more than 230,000 signatures over the next 90 days, that bill does not go into effect. Instead, it gets placed on the ballot in November, where Ohio voters get to decide whether they really do want to strip union rights or whether they do not.

This is a fight that Ohio Democrats have been gearing up for weeks, gearing up for for weeks. It is a fight that Ohio Democrats seem

pretty darn confident that they will win.

Joining us now is Democratic minority leader from the Ohio House of Representatives, Armond Budish.

Representative Budish, thank you very much for being here. It’s a pleasure to have you on the show.

STATE REP. ARMOND BUDISH (D), OHIO GEN. ASSEMBLY MINORITY LEADER:

It’s my pleasure. Thanks for having me.

MADDOW: It seems from a national perspective that Democrats and the Democratic base are getting really fired up by what Republican legislators and governors are doing in the states. What can you describe to this national audience about the mood in Ohio right now?

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BUDISH: The mood is angry. The mood is somewhat fearful, but very angry because people in Ohio are understanding what's happening. Senate bill five decimates—decimates collective bargaining.

You know, and I don't really get it. I mean, collective bargaining, that's people coming together and negotiating with their employer. It levels the playing field. It's basic fairness. And that is being stripped away.

And people are getting it. And people are understanding what the impact of that's going to be—especially combined with the \$7 billion, \$8 billion of cuts that this governor is now proposing in his budget. And he's putting the cuts on local governments and on schools. Most of that money is going to come out of local governments and schools.

What does that mean? That means police, fire, teachers. Senate bill five will allow the schools to slash—excuse me—slash teachers, slash their salaries, slash their jobs. Senate bill five will allow the local governments to slash the salaries of police officers and firefighters and get rid of thousands and thousands of jobs. It is devastating for the communities in Ohio.

MADDOW: The coverage that I have seen of protests in Ohio at the state capitol but also people talking to pollsters frankly about what they think about this bill, also seems like people are tapping into this idea that it is not just hard times being made for the middle class, for people who work for a living, but there is a transfer of resources going on in

Ohio from people who work for a living, from kids, to corporate interests, and to people who already have money.

Is that—is that one of the things that's resonating here in terms of the benefits that corporate interests are getting from this governor and this legislator?

BUDISH: The answer is yes. At the same time that the governor is balancing the budget on the backs of middle-class working families, he's cutting \$800 million or \$900 million in taxes, which will benefit the wealthiest people in the state. So, there is a wealth transfer going on, and it's shameful.

MADDOW: How will Democrats and the Democratic base get those many, many signatures you guys need in the next 90 days to get a ballot referendum? I mean, 231,000 signatures is a very high bar.

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BUDISH: And that's 231,000 valid signatures. So, we're going to have to collect 450,000 signatures or more to get the right number that are valid. And what we're going to do, we're going to work like hell and fight like hell to do it. That's all we can do.

We will be out at everything. You will see people collecting signatures at baseball games, at churches, at every possible venue. And I believe that people will respond. And we'll get those signatures and we'll get them before the end of the 90 days.

MADDOW: I know that some Republicans did vote against this union-stripping measure in the Ohio legislature. I wonder if those Republicans who sided with you on this, if you expect any help from them in terms of this referendum.

BUDISH: Well, there's Republicans, and then there's Republicans. I think some of the Republicans that voted with us did so just to protect their rear ends in the next election. Others did vote with us because they believe in workers' rights. Those people will get out and help us, I believe.

MADDOW: Armond Budish, Democratic minority leader of the Ohio House of Representatives—thanks very much for your time tonight. I really appreciate it, sir.

BUDISH: Thanks for having me.

MADDOW: Along with their now dust-covered promise to spend every day working on jobs,

jobs, jobs, Republicans won big in the last election promising to repeal the horrible, unconstitutional, government-run, job-killing Obamacare. Ah!

Surprise, surprise, one state actively trying to loosen Obamacare's unholy grip is trying to switch to totally lefty, pinko care because it's cheaper and better. I've got the details for you, next.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: We did what our staff voted our least articulate political analysis ever on this show recently. When I had the brilliant idea to say on the air that President Obama, in an unexpectedly spunky rejoinder to Republican governors complaining about health reform, when President Obama took this as his official position on health reform—"Oh, yeah?" Least articulate ever, according to THE RACHEL MADDOW SHOW staff.

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With so many other Republicans and other statewide officials who have an eye on higher office channel their ambitions into complaining really loudly about health reform, the president decided to call their bluff last month. The president said at a meeting with the nation’s governors if those governors have a better idea for how to deal with health care in their states, they could go right ahead and do it—instead of states creating their own health care systems and opting out of federal health reform by 2017, which was initially in the health reform law, the president said he’d support letting states do their own thing three years earlier. In the way these policy things work, that means they’ll pretty much be able to work on their own plans right away.

Now, this mystified the Beltway press. The Beltway response to the president’s move was basically: what now? Was he yielding to the governors? Was he offering them a concession on health reform? How big was this concession? Why would the president, instead of defending his health reform law, give his critics in the states the opportunity to leave, to leave it?

It’s because by doing so, he is requiring them to put their money where their mouth is. It was an “Oh, yeah” response. The deal he offered them was sure, you could do your own thing at the state level, but compared with what the federal government is offering, your deal has to cover at least as many people, it cannot be more expensive for people, and it cannot increase the federal deficit.

So, you think you got a better idea that can do all those things? You go for it. No, seriously, you go for it. Oh, yeah?

Go for it. Go right ahead. Be my guest.

So far in Republican-led states, all the sound and fury is still focused on how awful and terrible and horrible the tyranny of Obamacare is. But we have not seen any movement in terms of Republicans coming up with their own ideas for some other way they’d prefer to deal with health care. It’s been sort of radio silence there.

There are two states in the country that seem to be actually moving ahead with an actual idea, moving ahead in concrete ways on their own ideas for how to deal with health care. One of them is Oregon, which has some complicated ideas about negotiating health care costs that would hopefully lower them, a long-standing goal of Oregon. The other state,

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which is steaming full speed ahead on its project with no one really paying any substantial attention to them while they do it, it's the great state of Vermont.

And what is Vermont doing? Vermont with its Democratic governor and its Democratic controlled-House and its Democratic-controlled Senate. Do you want to know what Vermont is doing? Single-payer. Do not tell any conservatives you know about this. They are going to freak out.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIPS)

BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: I happen to be a proponent of single payer universal health care.

(APPLAUSE)

OBAMA: That's what I'd like to see. But, as all of you know, we may not get there immediately because first we've got to take back the White House and we've got to take back the Senate and we've got to take back the House.

(APPLAUSE)

OBAMA: If we're designing a system from scratch, then I'd probably set up a single-payer system.

There are some people who proposed in the past Medicare for All. That essentially is what's called a single-payer plan. And a lot of countries have single-payer plans. I have to

tell you that politically it would have been difficult and it would have been very disruptive.

(END VIDEO CLIPS)

MADDOW: Whatever the politics that ultimately made it too difficult and disruptive at the national level in the president's estimation, Vermont thinks that at the state level they are perfectly happy to do it. It's essentially Medicare for All.

One of the architects of the modern Medicare program designed a plan for Vermont that he says will save the state at least \$580 million a year. In a state like Vermont, that is a lot of money. And by alleviating the burden of rising health care costs and taking that burden in particular off of businesses, they think it will probably create 4,000 Vermont jobs.

The bill passed by the Vermont House by a

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nearly two-to-one margin last week. It's now being debated in the Senate, which held its first public hearing on the measure tonight. Vermont's Democratic Governor Peter Shumlin campaigned on health care, so if it does get through the Senate he is expected to sign it.

The mayor of the second largest city in Vermont, the mayor of Rutland, Vermont, even though he is a Republican, he is one of the big supporters of what Vermont is trying to do, telling "The Valley Advocate" newspaper that more than a third of the city of Rutland's annual payroll is consumed by health care costs and that it is frankly unsustainable, saying, quote, "The only way to fix the problem is to blow it up and start over."

So, big picture here—even though Republicans are talking this huge game about the evils of tyrannical Obamacare and how they would totally do it differently and way better and it should be left to the states, the only people who are actually trying to do it better instead of just crowing about it are building a single-payer health care system in the great state of Vermont. The phrase "neener, neener" comes to mind.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIPS)

SEN. BERNIE SANDERS (I), VERMONT: What is unique and important about your presence here today is that you are saying I want to be the best doctor and the best healer that I can be, but I can't be that unless we change the system.

(CHEERS AND APPLAUSE)

GOV. PETER SHUMLIN (D), VERMONT: If they move (ph) into Vermont, when our single-payer health care system comes up, are you going to come practice here, make Vermonters healthy?

(CHEERS AND APPLAUSE)

(END VIDEO CLIP)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: The British government—seriously, we're over here? How about if I just do the whole thing in profile? No, here? OK.

Hi. Thanks for joining us.

The British government says it is a sign that Gadhafi's regime is, quote, "crumbling." His foreign minister, whose name rhymes, Moussa

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Koussa, a man suspected to have been involved with the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988 -- Moussa Koussa unexpectedly defected to the U.K. yesterday. Mr. Koussa now being debriefed by Britain's spy agency MI-6.

Then, Ali Abdul Salem Treki, who was recently named Libya's new ambassador to the U.N., he announced from Cairo today that he too has left the regime.

And tonight, there are signs that others are following suit. Here's what John Ray from our British affiliate ITV News is hearing in Tripoli.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JOHN RAY, ITV NEWS REPORTER: There are rumors swirling that four more named ministers, including the Europe minister and the head of intelligence, are also on the point of departure. Now, the government spokesman here says any of those figures who are overseas, and he can't tell us which, are away on official business. But the problem with that denial is it's exactly what they told us about Mr. Koussa last night long after he'd got on that plane to Britain.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: "The Independent" newspaper also reporting that up to 10 members of the Gadhafi regime are currently in touch with the British government and looking to defect.

It's "The Guardian" newspaper that's reporting

that one of Britain's most trusted aides was recently in Britain for confidential talks. It's a move that the paper describes as a sign that Gadhafi's regime is, quote, "may be looking for an exit strategy."

Now, again, all of this reporting essentially from the British press, nothing is really confirmed until we hear it from the sources themselves. But what exactly the United States might be doing to hasten what is starting to look like the crumbling of Gadhafi's political regime, what the U.S. might be doing to hasten that exit is coming up here next.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: Before the Libya invasion—is that what we call it? Before the Libya intervention at least, the last occasion for us to talk about our nation's defense secretary on this show was when he once again won the bluntest person in the news award for making these

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comments.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ROBERT GATES, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE: In my opinion, any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should have his head examined.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Of course, 20 days after he said that, the United States did get involved in a war in North Africa, in the nation of Libya. Today, Secretary Blunty Pants stayed just about as blunt about that conflict.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

REP. COLLEEN HANABUSA (D), HAWAII: Is there any attempt, or do you know if there's any time in the future that there are going to be boots on the ground in Libya?

GATES: Not as long as I'm in this job.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: I told you he's blunt.

But, of course, nobody is really arguing that the U.S. should be sending in ground troops to Libya right now. And that is what he said the thing about having your head examined about—a ground army, a large land army into Asia or the Middle East or Africa.

People are not arguing about putting U.S. ground troops into Libya, at least not yet. The big argument that's happening right now is over the question of whether or not the civilians that are fighting this war in Libya but who still really look like civilians while doing it, whether these ragtag Libyan rebels should get weapons shipments from us or from some other country.

Secretary Gates was asked today to what extent the U.S. should help the rebels. His response I think was important. Listen.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

GATES: I think that what the—what the opposition needs as much as anything right now is some training, some command and control, and some organization. It's pretty much a pickup ball game at this point. In terms of providing that training, in terms of providing assistance to them, frankly, there

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are many countries that can do that. That's not a unique capability for the United States. And as far as I'm concerned, somebody else should do that.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Somebody else should do that. Again, he earns that award I just made up two minutes ago, bluntest man in the news this week. Secretary of Defense Bob Gates saying, yes, maybe they need weapons but mostly what they need is to be made into an army since what they're fighting is an army. And making a group of civilians who want to fight into an army is not a unique capability of the United States. Somebody else can make them into that.

In the national debate about whether or not this Libyan war is a good idea or a bad idea, these are the details that really matter. It's one thing to say the U.S. should minimally participate to the extent that we can do things that no one else can, but really this is an international effort and we're not leading—saying that is one thing. But this is the devil of the detail of how that gets done.

What the administration meant by that "we'll participate minimally" thing is apparently if somebody else needs to be done in Libya to support those rebels, if anybody other than the U.S. can do it, the U.S. will not do it and we will therefore expect others to do it.

It is not just the defense secretary explaining these details. It's also the less blunt but also

on the same page chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ADM. MIKE MULLEN, CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF: We're not the only ones that are familiar with this. There are plenty of countries who have the ability, the arms, the skill set to be able to do this.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: We raise the question, though: if the administration and the Pentagon are going to be very strict about this idea, that the U.S. will only do things that only the U.S. can do, what then is the list of American responsibilities? What are the things that only we can do?

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

GATES: Going forward, the U.S. military will

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provide the capabilities that others cannot provide either in kind or in scale, such as electronic attack, aerial refueling, lift, search and rescue, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance support.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: So, that's what we got on the international chore wheel. Electronic attack, aerial refueling, lift, search and rescue, intel, surveillance, and supporting reconnaissance—which I'm guessing means spying. That's what they say our war is now.

Joining us now to help us understand our place on the international chore wheel, what the U.S. military does that other countries do not, is Medal of Honor recipient and MSNBC military analyst, Colonel Jack Jacobs.

Colonel Jacobs, thank you for being here.

COL. JACK JACOBS, MSNBC MILITARY ANALYST: Good evening. Thanks for having me here.

MADDOW: Did I say anything stupidly wrong in that introduction?

JACOBS: Absolutely not.

MADDOW: Glad to hear it.

On that list of things that the U.S. is doing, what does electronic attack mean?

JACOBS: Well, it can mean two things. It may

mean more, but a minimum of two things.

The first is the ability to jam communications that take place between units or among units of Gadhafi's army. That makes it very difficult for them to control their armies, to coordinate their attacks in their attempt to thwart the rebels. And the second thing is the ability to jam electronic transmissions that occur when Gadhafi's army, ground forces try to fire at allied planes. The instant that a radar system is turned on on the ground, we can detect it and in very short order, send a precision-guided munition that follows the radar beam all the way down to its source.

MADDOW: Wow.

JACOBS: That and other stuff.

MADDOW: One of the things that people have questioned is if the U.S. has this high level of electronic capability, why is Libyan state TV

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still on the air? Is that not one of the things they would want to shut down?

JACOBS: You would think so. But I think we're letting it carry on. I mean, we know where it's coming from. But we—I think—have decided not to do anything about it. I don't know why, but I think we've decided not to do anything about it.

MADDOW: What about what the secretary described as surveillance and reconnaissance support? Am I right to think that reconnaissance is spying, so this is essentially about our spying technology?

JACOBS: Yes. I mean, when people think of spying, they always think of guys in long overcoats skulking around behind the corner.

MADDOW: Yes.

JACOBS: But we've got such a capability to look at absolutely everything from an enormous altitude, given all of our aircraft and all of our satellites, to incredible resolution down to almost like a high-definition photograph that we can look at everything. And we can process this information and share it with other people.

So, yes, it's spying. It's spying down to the lowest possible level.

MADDOW: Last night's big news was about CIA personnel on the ground in Libya. The administration is still saying we're not talking about ground troops in Libya. But what do you

expect that CIA personnel are doing on the ground, and would you expect that military special ops guys are with them?

JACOBS: I would hope so. I mean, before we conduct any operation, we will have special operations, people on the ground, in order to do two principal things. There are more than two, but two principal things.

The first is to ensure when we send precision-guided munitions, particularly to fixed installations like ammunition dumps and all the rest, that our targets are precise and that if we can't get a good fix on those targets that, in fact, we get a fix on them from the ground, that we can, in fact, paint targets on the ground with people on the ground, special operations people.

And second, especially in this situation, we're talking about rebels.

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What kind of rebels? Who are they? We don't know.

Well, the only way we're going to know—the only way we're going to be able to do anything positive is to get on the ground and actually talk to these people so we can get them to coordinate their activities with what we're doing to protect the Libyans.

Without people on the ground, that stuff is not going to happen. The interesting thing is what happens after Gadhafi's army is made to retreat back to some area that we're satisfied with? Well, we're going to have to have people on the ground for that, too.

And if we're talking about arming people, an giving them clothes and food and shelter and all the rest of that stuff, that requires people on the ground. It's—I can't believe anybody would believe that we would have nobody on the ground.

MADDOW: And if we're in a situation where people need to be on the ground for something you're describing, do they have to be American people in order for the U.S. to have the kind of role that it wants to have?

JACOBS: No, they do not have to be. As a matter of fact week, we're

trying very hard to get them to be someone other than Americans. The thing

the distinction and this is not necessarily supporting the whole action in Libya, but the

distinction to make is between boots on the ground on the one hand and conventional boots on the ground—Americans on the ground, allied forces on the ground, probably, almost undoubtedly. Conventional troops on the ground. Only in one circumstance, I could say, and maybe the president when he signed—when he signed the special order, that was included in it.

In a circumstance in which the Libyans get really close to Benghazi and they threaten Americans and other allies who are trying to assist Libyans and who are getting ready—the Americans and others who are getting ready to evacuate to send conventional troops on the ground to protect them in their evacuation. And that's the only circumstance I can think under which the president would be anxious to send conventional troops, 72nd Airborne Division, the 73rd Airborne Brigade, Marines, to Libya to put them on the ground.

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MADDOW: Colonel Jack Jacobs, recipient of the Medal of Honor, MSNBC military analyst—I know you had a lot of other engagements tonight and you went out of your way to be with us.

JACOBS: I would rather be here.

MADDOW: Thank you, sir. Appreciate it.

JACOBS: Thanks for having me.

MADDOW: It turns out when you are trying to save the world, sometimes, that involves incredibly large pieces of equipment. Sometimes, it involves driving those incredibly large pieces of equipment through parts of Atlanta. Yes, very soon. I'll explain in just a moment.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: We have been talking a lot on this show recently about the government's decision to start green-lighting oil wells again in the Gulf of Mexico after the BP disaster last year. That is news that matters to everyone in America, of course. But if you live in a town where people depend on oil rigs for jobs, then you've got a very particular interest in those decisions.

I mean, if you're a roughneck in Bamonette (ph) or Pearlinton or Eunice or Corpus Christi, government decisions about new drilling can mean the difference between shipping out for real work on a real rig or counting on an oil spill relief check from BP.

You want to get back to doing what you do, which is complicated, difficult, dangerous work.

When the U.S. Interior Department announced recently that it had granted the first new permit for deepwater drilling in the Gulf since the BP oil disaster last year, hometown papers in oil country rejoiced.

From "The New Orleans Times-Picayune": "Permit is an important step on drilling." Quote, "Independent scientists detailed months ago how most drilling could safely resume." From the "Biloxi Sun-Herald": "America needs energy and workers need jobs." From the "Mobile Press Register":

"Deepwater drilling is important to coast and nation." They noted that the government gave out the permit because, quote, "Noble Energy had proven it could drill safely in a post-BP spill environment"—which would be awesome,

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if we all believed it.

That said, a report given to the Interior Department last week reveals that what America thought was the big backup plan in case an oil well goes apocalyptic is not really a backup plan at all.

This is a blowout preventer, a piece of safety equipment that sits at the top of an oil well. If pressure from under the seafloor rises into the well, if the well starts to blow out, then the blowout preventer is supposed to seal the well off to keep the pressure and the oil in. These blowout preventers are required on every deepwater rig in the Gulf of Mexico.

And that is scary because it turns out that these blowout preventers are flawed. They are flawed in a way that—such a way that the very accidents they’re supposed to stop from becoming disasters, those very same accidents can render them inoperable, can just take them out so they can’t do their jobs.

We knew that things could go wrong with blowout preventers. What we did not know is that if things didn’t go wrong with them, they still might not work. That by design, some blowouts will just still happen, will just render the blowout preventers pointless.

In other words, there is no fail-safe. If this thing here is the backup plan, it means there is no backup plan. We did not know that before last week’s report. But we know it now.

The Interior Department posted that report on

its Web site Wednesday of last week. The next day they issued the investing new deepwater drilling permit since the BP oil disaster. There’s the press release. And the day after that, the sixth new permit for a well 2,000 feet deeper than the BP Deepwater Horizon.

By this time people like, you know, us, are asking all about these permits for wells where the backup plan if something goes wrong is something we know we can’t count on.

After the first five permits were announced using essentially the same language, in the press release for the sixth permit, the oil agency director, Michael Bromwich, quote, “Some say we are now proceeding too quickly; some say we are still proceeding too slowly. The truth is we are proceeding as quickly as our resources allow to approve permit applications that satisfy our rigorous safety and environmental standards. We will continue to do so.”

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Mr. Bromwich apparently meant what he said about keeping on because, yesterday, the government handed out another new deep water drilling permit with an assurance from Mr. Bromwich that they are, quote, “proceeding as quickly as our resources allow to properly regulate offshore oil and gas operations in the most safe and environmentally responsible manner.”

We do hope to have Mr. Bromwich as a guest on this show soon to talk to him more about what those assurances mean to him.

But lately, even the fairly rah-rah hometown papers of oil country seem to be realizing this thing with the blowout preventers could be a real problem. “The Times-Picayune” today saying the industry and government should, quote, “learn from the problems inside BP’s blowout preventer and make adjustments if necessary.” And “The Mobile Press Register’s” editorial page this week saying, quote, “Clearly, further study is needed to make sure that the nation doesn’t experience another catastrophe like the BP spill.”

Don’t take it from me. Take it from them.

Joining us now is Frances Coleman, editorial page for “The Mobile Press Register” in Alabama.

Ms. Coleman, thank you very much for being with us today. I really appreciate your time.

FRANCES COLEMAN, MOBILE PRESS-REGISTER ED. PAGE EDITOR: You’re welcome.

MADDOW: Your paper, in the past, has taken a real—an encouraging stance toward offshore drilling. I mean, particularly given the impact economically it has in coastal Alabama. And I don’t think we need to debate the big picture of drilling here, but I do want to hear from you how important you have felt this new report is about the blowout preventers.

COLEMAN: It is important, Rachel. It shows that there are a lot of concerns that we have a lot to learn still about drilling safety and the offshore drilling industry as a whole. It is not something we don’t believe that should stop offshore drilling and, in fact, as you well know, the country demands the oil that we produce from the Gulf of Mexico. So, that’s not going to happen.

But it shows that some investigation and some study are needed so that these blowout preventers do work as they’re supposed to.

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MADDOW: How much do you think the idea of the blowout preventer—

for people who live in the region where drilling is happening, how much do

you think the blowout preventer idea has been key to people's sense of

safety about those rigs? How much has it really reassured people as that -

in terms of it specifically as one safety device? Obviously, there are a lot of safety measures but the industry really brags on the capacity of those preventers.

COLEMAN: I think a lot of people were genuinely surprised when the Deepwater Horizon blew up that oh, my God, the blowout preventer didn't work. That was supposed to be the last thing that stood between us and a disaster of the magnitude that did happen. So, that was disturbing, even appalling.

But you have to keep in mind—anyone should keep in mind that's the very last thing that is supposed to stand between the kind of disaster that happened. A lot of other things should not have happened as well, and all of it has to be fixed so that we can have a safe drilling environment.

MADDOW: Absolutely. And well put, I would say.

In terms of the BP disaster specifically, Transocean and BP are among the companies

that are getting the first new permits for new deep water drilling. Do you feel like there is local concern that those companies in particular should get extra scrutiny because of what happened on their watch, with their equipment at Deepwater Horizon?

COLEMAN: Well, BP does not have a lot of best friends in this area right now. But on the other hand, I don't think that anyone thinks that all of the executives of BP sat around a board table last year and said, "I know what we'll do. We'll have a big explosion and a big disaster."

So, it's not in their interests either to have such a terrible thing happen because it's expensive for them. And, of course, it's a dreadful thing for us on the coast. So, like them or hate him, they are what they are.

MADDOW: When there is a drilling moratorium, the drilling industry and its workers take the first economic hit obviously. But when there is

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a big spill, everybody who lives in the coastal region around drilling sites and the region itself physically is in danger.

How do you think that balances out politically in a place like Mobile with people wanting where they live to be safe but also wanting those jobs there? What's that balance like?

COLEMAN: We have lived with offshore drilling for so long, for however long they've been drilling offshore, that it's not really an "us or them," I have friends who work offshore. If you lived here, you would, too. You might have family members.

So, it's not an "us or them," an "us versus them." It is all of us in this region, knowing that's a large part of our economy and also knowing that it's a very dangerous operation, a very dangerous industry. And when things go wrong, there are terrible consequences.

MADDOW: Frances Coleman, editorial page editor for "The Mobile Press Register" in Alabama—I can't tell you how much I appreciate you coming on the show to talk with us about it. Thank you so much.

COLEMAN: Thank you.

MADDOW: You know who is not for busting unions the way the Republican Congress is considering? How about Captain Chesley Sullenberger. You know the hero's hero landed a plane on the Hudson River? Captain Sullenberger joins Ed Schultz when we are done here to explain his take on the country's

outbreak of Republican union-busting.

It is a great get for "THE ED SHOW" and for Ed himself. It should be a great interview. Please stay tuned for that right after this show. But we will be right back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: Tomorrow night on this show, we are going to do something that I teased earlier but we're going to save it turns out for our Friday show instead. It is a story sort of about Japan, but it is mostly about our executive producer Bill Wolff's child whose name is Ike who is quite possibly the most adorable child on earth. The story is about Japan and it is about Ike and it is about Ike's super human toddler capacity for naming and understanding even very obscure and complicated heavy equipment. Tonka trucks on steroids, tomorrow night's show, I promise. Moment of geek.

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In the meantime, the hero of the Hudson, Captain Sullenberger, is going to be a guest on Ed Schultz's show tonight talking about union-busting politics in America right now. This is an interview I have been looking forward to for a very long time. I am so happy Ed is the guy who got this interview and I hope you keep it right here and watch.

That does it for us tonight. Now, it is time for the aforementioned

“ED SHOW.”

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END

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