

AMERICAN MORNING

Obama Expected to Name Clinton as Secretary of State; Holiday Shoppers Seek Bargains Online; Legal Clause Could Prevent Clinton Appointment; \$40 Million Mission to Make "Contact"

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CHETRY: And still ahead, we're asking you these questions. What could Bill Clinton's role be? Can he even have one? We're going to talk about what the former president could do to help or hurt the Obama administration if his wife becomes secretary of state. It's 13 minutes after the hour.

Also ahead, hear aliens? Well, who are you going to call if you do? We will introduce you to the woman who's been eavesdropping on the heavens hoping for contact.

It's 13 minutes after the hour.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: What is it, Paul?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Looks like an airplane, without wings.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Get out. Get down.

UNIDENTIFIED GIRL: Is it a terrorist?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Now what do we do?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Address the nation. We've got a lot of frightened people out there.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

CHETRY: Well, a group of UFO enthusiasts want Barack Obama to open up the X-files they

wrote requesting the new administration come clean about America's contact with UFOs and hold congressional hearings, and they may actually have a guy on the inside for this one. John Podesta, the man leading Obama's transition team once said it is time to open those books. Well, what a way to get into our special series that we've been bringing you "In Search of Aliens." And, today, we're talking to a woman who has made contact, her life's mission. Space correspondent Miles O'Brien is here.

She's made contact, her life's mission, but she has not yet made contact.

MILES O'BRIEN, CNN SPACE CORRESPONDENT: Yes. The pause is important there. Is that? Yes. Welcome back, Kiran.

Here's the basic premise in all of this. If there's another intelligence civilization in the universe somewhere, it would undoubtedly be on the air, so to speak. Using various frequencies to communicate as we are here right now. So if we look in the right place in theory, we could listen in on alien transmissions and finally get some proof we're not alone. But this makes finding a needle in a haystack seem like a cinch.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

JILL TARTER, DIRECTOR, SETI INSTITUTE: So think of these as Bombay doors. They're going to swing down.

O'BRIEN (voice-over): If E.T. should ever try to phone our home in the universe, you can bet Jill Tarter will be there to take the call.

TARTER: This is a feed, all right? And it is like the one on your car.

O'BRIEN: Or a flash Gordon ray gun. Jill is director of the search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, and I am under the hood of one of her cool, new radio telescopes.

TARTER: What are we listening for? We're listening for something that we don't think can be produced by Mother Nature. Something that looks artificial, something that's obviously engineered.

O'BRIEN: Something alien and smart. Jill has spent three decades, her entire career, on this all or nothing needle in a star stack quest to tune in to WUFO, it's a signal that may or may not exist.

TARTER: If you put a transmitter up there and there is a radar transmitter in there.

O'BRIEN: When I first met her, she was still making brief annual pilgrimages to Arecibo, Puerto Rico, to the world's largest radio telescope hoping to make contact there.

(on camera): Now this is starting to ring a bell, isn't it? Jill is the inspiration for Ellie Arroway, played by Jodie Foster in the movie "Contact." But now, the real action has moved here, to Hat Creek, California, an isolated spot 300 miles north of San Francisco. The \$40 million ray is funded by private donations, \$25 million came from Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen. It will allow us to keep our ears on them 24/7, 365.

TARTER: This is an exciting time. We're doing something now we couldn't do when we started. We couldn't do five years ago. We just got the capability. This technological capability a few years ago and we're now taking advantage of it.

O'BRIEN (on camera): This is the electronic intergalactic version of cupping your ear so you can hear a little better. Right now, they have 42 of these dishes. Eventually they would like to have 350 here, which would greatly increase their sensitivity and their ability to hear the heavens.

TARTER: This is how the Silicon Intelligence concentrates.

O'BRIEN (voice-over): But listening in this case means watching. They hunt for radio signals with a galactic police scanner by pointing at stars and dialing in some likely frequencies.

But those lines are what contact will look like, probably?

TARTER: That will probably be the first key that something is out there.

O'BRIEN: Just like in the movie with the "Wang, Wang" (ph). It's not going to do that, right? It's not going to do the "Wang, Wang."

TARTER: I won't say it's going to do this or it's going to do that.

O'BRIEN: Jill, always keeps a bottle of chilled bubbly handy in case her cosmic crap shoot pays off. Over the years, she's had a few spine tingling moments, when she heard a signal but from a spacecraft launched here on earth. But the stars may be in alignment, if you will, for this to happen for real before too long. NASA is working on a space telescope designed specifically to look for other earth-like planets in our galaxy.

WILLIAM BORUCKI, NASA'S KEPLER MISSION: Basically, at the end of the mission, we will know. Are there lots of earth or are there very few? If there are lots of earth, there probably is a lot of life in our galaxy waiting for us to contact them.

O'BRIEN: So, Jill Tarter may soon have some better clues on where to aim her dishes and maybe this will be the place where we finally get an answer.

TARTER: I am extremely excited about the potential of living in this first generation of human beings that can try and answer this question by doing an experiment, rather than asking the priest and the philosophers what they believed.

(END VIDEOTAPE) O'BRIEN: Now you would think a project like this would be supported by NASA. It's a goal which, after all, they spent a lot of time and effort on trying to unlock the riddle of life outside our planet. But in '93, the project drew the ire of some members of Congress, the space agency was forced to abruptly cancel its support for SETI. So these days, SETI relies on private donations to conduct its radio scans. The cost is about \$6 million a year to tune in and listen.

CHETRY: Yes. And she says it's a cosmic crap shooter. You called it that. But where do they know even where to tune these signals, where to point them in the skies?

O'BRIEN: That's just it. The sky is pretty big. And then, we're talking billions and billions, to use the Sagan expression here. What they look for are stars like our sun, sort of averaged, middle- aged kind of mediocre stars. You know, the bright stars you see at night are not good places to live nearby. Ours is kind of a slow cooker. And if you find the slow cookers, then you start thinking, well, there might be some solar systems around it.

CHETRY: Fascinating. Fascinating. As you said, Paul Allen threw in \$25 million, right?

O'BRIEN: Yes. That's what I'm saying for example. I'm glad he did.

CHETRY: Sure is. Well, thanks, Miles. And Miles, this series is creating a lot of buzz, by the way, on our Web site, cnn.com/ireport, and we want to share a few of them with you. We got -- we got some people who --

O'BRIEN: And there are some interesting ones. This one came from Juan Ramirez in Fort Lauderdale, who said he saw several UFOs off the beach in Fort Lauderdale. He described them as changing from a powerful bright spot of light to a clearly defined aircraft. One of them switched shapes and transformed into a translucent orange light before shooting up into the sky and disappearing.

CHETRY: Hey, that sounds like the one you described.

O'BRIEN: Yes, kind of similar. Isn't it?

CHETRY: You were on the beach.

O'BRIEN: And then this, you can see the UFO's yellow lights on top and a single white light on the bottom of I guess a spacecraft.

And take a look at this video. You got to check this one out. This comes from Brad Drenning (ph). He filmed four red dots hovering above Arizona, kind of reminds me of the Phoenix light story, which we talked about a few days ago. This is over the course of seven minutes. This thing was really weird. And I watched the whole thing and it just kind of hovers there. The lights kind of flicker and then eventually they disappear. This went on for about 30 seconds and finally the last light was gone. I have no explanation for that one. So, who knows?

CHETRY: There's no way that could have been an aircraft.

O'BRIEN: Could have been. You can't say no way, but you know, you also can't say no way it's not an alien, right? Right?

CHETRY: Joe was over there laughing. Yes, you're right.

O'BRIEN: We've founded the parameters there, aircraft or alien? Maybe it's somewhere in between. Who knows?

CHETRY: All right. Well, if you have something that you've seen in the sky that's funny or your convinced that aliens exist, please, send us an iReport, because we love looking at them. Very cool. And we want to know about them. Send us your pictures or video, cnn.com/am

and click on the iReport link.

Miles, thanks.

Coming up, by the way, tomorrow, the Mars Worm. We're going to meet a NASA contractor who says there is life on Mars and proof. A fossil from the red planet, perhaps?

O'BRIEN: Perhaps.

CHETRY: All right. Miles, thanks -- Joe.

JOHNS: Send us those alien pictures.