

White House Press Briefing (via ABC News Live)

06/02/21

12:34:39 p.m.

3 minutes and 6 seconds

ALEXANDRA JAFFE: And on the President's comments yesterday, he seemed to call out Manchin and Sinema for, he said, voting more from with Republicans and Democrats, but, ProPublica actually found that they've so far but voted with Biden 100 percent of the time on major votes. And so can you explain where those comments came from, and why he felt the need to call out members of his own party?

JEN PSAKI: Well, I would say first that if Senator Manchin and Senator Sinema were standing with me here today, they're always welcome. They would call out their own independent streaks and that's something that I think they're both proud of. They both vote for and represent the people in the states that — and all the people who elected them to represent them in the Senate. If you look at what the Senate — what the President said, the big tell here is, “I hear all the folks on TV saying.” Now, as a former TV pundit myself, I can tell you that sometimes these conversations can be oversimplified. TV isn't always made for complex conversations about policy making. We all know that, right? And what the president was simply conveying is that he — his threshold, his litmus test is not to see eye to eye on every single detail of every issue and he doesn't with Senator Sinema and Senator Manchin and he doesn't with Senator Capito who's coming here later this afternoon. He believes there's an opportunity to work together to make progress, to find areas of common ground even if you have areas of disagreement, and he also believes that sometimes because they're three entities, three branches of government something he knows well, having served 36 years in the Senate that sometimes it's not a straight line to victory or success — that sometimes you know, takes more time and, you know, he's open to many paths forward, so I don't think he was intending to convey other anything other than a little bit of commentary on TV punditry.

JAFFE: Well, he did seem to suggest that he is in favor of filibuster reform and wants to see that move, so why hasn't he didn't more prominent in calling for that? And is he pressuring Manchin and Sinema to move on that issue privately?

PSAKI: I wouldn't say that — that his comments yesterday were conveying a new position on his view on the filibuster. His full comment was —

JAFFE: Well, what did he mean by saying that Manchin and Sinema are standing in the way of his agenda, essentially? What was he referencing?

PSAKI: That's not exactly what he said. I think it's important to quote him directly. What he said was: “I hear all the folks on TV saying, ‘why doesn't Biden get this done?’ Well, because Biden only has a majority of effectively four votes in the House and a tie in the Senate with two members of the Senate who vote more with my Republican friends.” He's not — he was not giving a specific commentary on a policy. He was conveying, again, that sometimes that's the summary shorthand version that he sees on — on cable news at times. Again, it's not always the

forum that's easy to provide a guidance on how a bill becomes a law. His view on the filibuster continues to be that there should be a path forward for Democrats and Republicans to make voting easier, to move forward on progress for the American people. That position hasn't changed, and he was not intending to convey something different.

(....)

12:41:34 p.m.

1 minute and 32 seconds

PETER ALEXANDER: To just put a fine point on this, very quickly, is it President Biden's view that President Putin can stop these attacks these hacks from occurring if he wanted to?

PSAKI: Well, I would say the President, President Biden certainly thinks that President Putin and the Russian government has a role to play in stopping and preventing his attacks, hence it's — it will be a topic of discussion when they meet in two weeks.

ALEXANDER: Does the President believe that Vladimir Putin is testing him right now ahead of the summit?

PSAKI: I'm not going to give any further analysis on that other than to tell you that our view is that when there are criminal entities within a country, they certainly have responsibility and it is a role that the government can play and again that will be a discussion of the summit.

ALEXANDER: Of all the threats that the White House has to juggle right now and, of course, there are a lot, how high does ransomware fall on that list right now? Has it gone dramatically higher in the course of this administration? Does it need to be higher than it is right now. Where is it?

PSAKI: You know how I love rank-ordering our — our focuses and our threats, right?

ALEXANDER: How big is it? But it's been going up dramatically, right? This is now the major issue.

PSAKI: That's true and — and Peter, I just said that I think that this is the — this attack that we've seen over the last couple of days and certainly following the attack that we saw several weeks ago is also a reminder to the private sector about the need and the importance of hardening their own cyber security protections, of investing in and putting in place protections in their own systems. We have given guidance for some time from the federal government, and it is up to a number of these private sector entities to protect themselves as well.

(....)

12:44:05 p.m.

3 minutes and 23 seconds

PETER DOOCY: Why does the White House think there is a shortage of workers right now?

PSAKI: Well, we've talked about this a bit in the past but happy to go through it. So, one — our view is that it's going to take time for workers to regain confidence in the safety of the workplace, reestablished childcare school and commuting arrangements and finish getting vaccinated. And even when individuals get their first dose, we've seen a huge increase in that, as I started the briefing talking about, it's about a five to six week cycle, so we have expected that to have an impact. At the same time, as we look at all of the data, we know that our economy is growing faster than at any time — than any time in the last 40 years. We're creating an average of 500,000 jobs a month, up from 60,000 month before the President took office, and we're continuing to put in place policies and measures to ensure that we're helping people make ends meet and we're helping the economy continue to grow.

DOOCY: But — and you mentioned thoughts about safety. You're celebrating the number of vaccinations today You say the vaccines work. COVID cases are way down.

PSAKI: You're right.

DOOCY: Is — is there any thought here that some of the workers shortage could be driven by the extra \$300 in weekly unemployment benefits through September?

PSAKI: I will say, Peter, that our economists, in our assessment, and the assessment of many economists out there is that the impact — the largest impact are on issues related to the pandemic on. And yes, you're right that the increased numbers, that's a good science of positive sign. But it's a five to six weeks cycle. So the data that was taken for the May jobs number — the jobs numbers that came out for April and early May was from early April. That's almost two months ago, right? We'll see. We'll have jobs numbers come out on Friday. People — the vaccination rates are continuing to go up and in terms of people being fully safe, fully vaccinated, it's gonna take some time. We always expected that to be a couple of months and we expect to see continuing improvement in the numbers.

DOOCY: On the JBS hack, these hackers based in Russia have disrupted American gas supplies and American meat supplies. Why do you think that these ransomware attacks have been rising since President Biden took office?

PSAKI: Well, first, I would say these are private sector entities who have a responsibility to put in place measures to protect their own cyber security. As it relates to why criminal actors are taking actions against private sector entities, I don't think I'm the right one to speak to that.

DOOCY: So it's a total coincidence.

PSAKI: I think you could certainly go track down those cyber criminals in Russia and have a good chat with them.

DOOCY: Okay. If you have any leads, we'll take that.

PSAKIS: Okay.

DOOCY: And then on immigration has the president or the vice president seen the video from last Friday of a five-year-old boy dropped off along the border, yelling to the adults who abandoned him, “No, no, don't go no!”

PSAKI: Well, I've seen the video. It is heartbreaking and the reason we continue to be very clear regularly migrating to the United States puts ourselves and others at risk. That's why we relayed — relaunched certain efforts to build a more fair and orderly immigration system, including programs like the Central American Minors Program that allows kids who are eligible to apply from within country, but I don't think anyone, whether a parent or not, would watch that video and not feel heart broken by a five year old, I think, screaming at the border.

(....)

[Nancy Cordes pestering on student loans]

(....)

12:51:16 p.m.

1 minute and 21 seconds

NANDITA BOSE: Obviously the White House's engaging directly with Russia on this, and we're wondering if Russia has offered any cooperation or — or help in tracking down these hackers.

PSAKI: I'm just not gonna be reading out Russia's view or their role here. You can certainly ask them those questions.

BOSE: And — and considering this is obviously the third Russia linked attack this year and we understand with the president will bring this up in his meeting with President Putin, but are — are — are you — is the administration really considering any actions in addition to that, just to make sure that this doesn't happen, sanctions or any other actions that are perhaps on the table.?

PSAKI: Sure, I mean, as I said, I think in response to an earlier question, we're not taking options off of the table, but it's just an opportunity. There will be an opportunity for the President to discuss this directly with President Putin to reiterate the fact that we believe that responsible states do not harbor ransomware criminals and that — and as he — as we said around Colonial and the Colonial hack — or the colonial ransomware attack, we will continue to be in direct touch with Moscow. We will continue to make the case that responsible countries need to take decisive action against ransomware networks. At the same time, as I know it for a little bit earlier, too, we're doing our own review of a range of options as well from here.

(....)

1:01:10 p.m.

50 seconds

KAITLAN COLLINS: And just to follow up on your comments on what President Biden said about Senator Manchin and Senator Sinema, are you saying that that was not a criticism of the two of them?

PSAKI: It was not — no — that he considers them both friends. He considers them both good working partners, and he also believes that in democracy, we don't have to see eye to eye on every detail of every single issue in order to work together, and he certainly thinks that reflects their relationship.

COLLINS: But you've been saying to Democrats vote with Republicans more than they do with your party.

PSAKI: With my Republican friends. I would say that — the fact that the president is having Senator Capito here today and has been having ongoing discussions with Republicans in the Senate, and then he's eager to find a path forward on bipartisan work certainly tells you, I think, what you need to know about what he thinks about working with people even when there's disagreement.

(...)

[Tyler Pager from the left on student loans]

(...)

1:04:03 p.m.

2 minutes and 18 seconds

ELI STOKOLS: I wanted to just — given what you said that his position hasn't changed on the filibuster.

PSAKI: Mmmhmm.

STOKOLS: I just want to go back to the vote last week in the Senate on the January 6 commission, the fact that there were 54 yes votes. 35 no votes. The bill failed. This is an insurrection that the President's called an unprecedented assault. I'm just curious if that math makes sense to this president and — and if that outcome would be acceptable, should it repeat later this month when the Senate takes up voting rights?

PSAKI: When you say the math makes sense, what do you mean by that?

STOKOLS: I mean the fact that 54 of lawmakers in the Senate voted yes. 35 voted no and the bill did not pass.

PSAKI: Well, I would say first that the president doesn't see a reason for anyone to have voted against that bill, so he doesn't understand that version of the math as a starting point. He continues to believe that, given that was a dark on our democracy, a day that I think we will all remember, he will remember, certainly as President, as a day that does not stand out as a model of — of what is possible in this country. In terms of his view of the filibuster, you know, again, his position has not changed on that. He does want to see accountability as it relates to, and he does want to see an assessment of what happened to prevent it from ever happening again, and he is happy to talk with members of Congress about how to approach that moving forward. As you all know, no President can wave a wand and pass a piece of legislation with 50 votes with — when it requires 60 that requires Congress to move forward with that action.

STOKOLS: But it seems like it requires only one more Democratic vote than currently exists for that and that vote happens to be a person who the president did seem to single out yesterday, so you're saying that he didn't change his position on the filibuster? And yet, you know, he's saying things you mean his passion for voting rights was evident yesterday when he spoke saying, “we must find the courage” — and I’m quoting him — “to change the things we know we can change.” So, I just want to be very sure that you're saying that should that outcome repeat itself later this month, if the Senate takes up voting rights more than 50 lawmakers vote for a bill, but if the bill does not advance to his desk, is that's something he's going to be okay — okay living with?

PSAKI: Again, I don't think the president is okay with a January 6 commission not being in place. He's not okay with voting rights not passing, and he will continue to advocate for both moving forward.

(....)

1:09:06 p.m.

1 minute and 30 seconds

JANET RODRIGUEZ: On the vaccination efforts, as of May 7th, only less seven percent of ICE detainee population — about 22,000 detainees — have been vaccinated. Where is that process going? The ACLU has demanded this White house via a letter to speed up that process, so if you have an update and also, how do you plan to vaccinate illegible, unaccompanied minors, who are in detention?

PSAKI: Well on the first question, Immigration and Customs Enforcement — ICE — is firmly committed to the health and well being and welfare of all those in custody. COVID vaccines for ice detainees are being allocated by local and state health departments. That's how they are distributed based on availability and the state's vaccine implementation plan, so that's where they directly come not from — not directly from the federal government. Additionally, DHS's chief medical officer is rapidly working on scaling our own internal capability to vaccinate detainees in our care across the country, so that would be an additional step in addition to the state and local allocations. But it is a focus and a priority. In terms of unaccompanied minors, some eligible unaccompanied children have already received a COVID-19 vaccine. We're working with our

state partners to implement broader vaccine distribution and keeping the CDC guidance. It hasn't been an extensive period of time where children under the age of 18 have been eligible, Obviously, these allocations are distributed across states. But of course, they've been broadly available for some time in the country so they should provide a greater access to the vaccine to unaccompanied children.