

White House Press Briefing  
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1:17:43 p.m.  
1 minute and 58 seconds

JACQUI HEINRICH: And then going to the emails with Dr. Fauci. There was an exchange between Dr. Collins and Dr. Fauci referencing a Fox News reports, discussing it — basically the lab week as a — a — conspiracy. Collins denied jumping to conclusions and he asserted that his mention of conspiracies was referring to the thought — the rumor that the virus was engineered, bio-engineered as a weapon. Is that the position of the administration and their health experts that this was not engineered, or is that still an open question and part of this review?

JEN PSAKI: Well, I think we've spoken to this pretty extensively from here. Let me just say on Dr Fauci and his e-mails. He's also spoken to this many, many times over the last — over the course of the last few days, and we'll let him speak for himself, and he's been an undeniable asset in our country's pandemic response, but it's obviously not that advantageous for me to relitigate the substance of e-mails from 17 months ago. We've launched, based on the President's direction, an entire internal review process to use all of the resources across government to get to the bottom of the origins. And that's a 100 day process, and we'll look forward to providing more when — or 90 days, sorry when it's concluded.

HEINRICH: Can you speak it all to the *Vanity Fair* report about this State Department fact sheet that came out five days before inauguration, you know —

PSAKI: Five days before this President's inauguration?

HEINRICH: — correct. Do — do you know if there was any crossover of that, how that was seen by this administration, the conclusions that they were trying to put out in the final days of the Trump administration?

PSAKI: I think I'm just going to focus on our — our own internal review that's going to use every resource in the federal government, whether that is our health experts, our medical experts, our national security team to see what more we can unearth about the origins, which certainly we all want to get to the bottom of.

(....)

1:36:11 p.m.  
4 minutes and 20 seconds

PHILIP WEGMANN: I know that you don't want to really relitigate what happened when Biden wasn't in office and when those emails were sent.

PSAKI: Uh-oh. That's a setup.

WEGMANN: Probably not.

PSAKI: Okay.

WEGMANN: But has anyone from your team briefed the President on what was in those FOIA-ed Fauci e-mails?

PSAKI: I'm not aware of him being briefed on the publicly reported emails.

WEGMANN: Gotcha. And then given that there were some things that Fauci said privately that contrasted — contrasted with what he said publicly, whether it was masks or whether or not someone who had the virus, you know, could — had immunity where, you know, other questions as well. I mean, does he still have confidence in his NIH director? Does this change anything at all with these?

PSAKI: Nope. The president and the administration feel that Dr Fauci has played an incredible role in getting the pandemic under control, being a — a voice to the public throughout the course of this pandemic, and again, I would reiterate a lot of these e-mails are from 17 months ago or more, certainly predating this administration, but some time ago as we look to history.

WEGMANN: I have just one more. This morning on *Morning Joe*, Fauci said that one of the ways to get transparency from the Chinese on the origins of COVID-19 was to “don’t be accusatory. Does the president feel that the initial investigation of the origin of the virus — including that WHO survey that your team had deep concerns over — was a problem with that, that it was too accusatory? I mean, is that a problem that this administration is accusatory, or I mean, is this a situation where, you know, just following the evidence where it leads?

PSAKI: I think the — our primary objective here has been working with the international community, rejoining the WHO, working with the international community to unite in pressing the Chinese to be transparent to provide the underlying data so other scientists can take a look at that data and to participate in a constructive way in the second round of — the next round, or the next phase, I should say, of the WHO investigation. As we noted at the time when we announced our own internal next step here, or 90-day review, one of the things that was happening in the timeline was the Chinese conveying that that was not their inclination, so I can't assess what the impacts are. I can tell you what our position is and what we've been pressing for on the international stage. Go ahead.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER: Yes, just about the 90-day review. One thing that's not clear is how is it that the U.S. intelligence officials knew about the workers in Wuhan that they knew about was getting sick back in 2019? And then in February, the intelligence officials were saying that they still haven't ruled out the possibility that it — that the virus came from the lab. But the inquiry didn't happen until late May and this month, and I'm wondering what took us so long before it launched this —

PSAKI: That's not actually an accurate depiction of the timeline.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER: But is —

PSAKI: The President actually asked his intelligence community to do an internal assessment, which then was presented to him, an internal meeting, back in March.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER: Yes, but the official, the 90-day inquiry, the one that you're describing, like, the full look at this hypothesis, that was not announced publicly and we were not aware of it until May 26<sup>th</sup>, so [INAUDIBLE] —

PSAKI: He didn't decide to launch it. The timeline here was he asked the intelligence team to do an internal review and internal assessment, one that was done several weeks ago. He asked it to be made public, to declassify that information that, goes through a process. Sometimes it takes a couple of weeks to do. When that assessment was done, we were presented with an option for a public statement, and the President decided we wanted to do a more extensive review and tap into our lab scientists and experts, our — more of our national security team, to see what more we can uncover over the course of 90 days. That's the timeline.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER: Yeah, maybe I wasn't saying it or maybe I was saying it too specific with the dates, but the question — bigger question is what took the U.S. so long to take it seriously when there were reports about the possibility of this virus coming from there — you know, way, way —

PSAKI: We completely refute that argument or notion. Obviously, the President asked his intelligence team to do an internal assessment, which happens all the time. We rarely talk about that publicly. We obviously took the step to declassify that, and that's something that he did early on in his administration.