

White House press briefing (via CBSN)

08/02/21

3:29:00 p.m.

4 minutes and 13 seconds

YAMICHE ALCINDOR: I guess my question is it's — part one, why not force the supreme court to make this decision, and two, is that decision not to actually go to the Supreme Court and force them to strike it down — does it have anything to do with fears that the Supreme Court might strike down the administration's broad use of public health laws for other policies?

GENE SPERLING: You know, I — I don't necessarily — I believe that people have been examining whether there is legal authority to go forward, period — whether there is legally available options. For me, personally, yeah. I — you always have to worry about whether you do something that could create harm. That's a factor to think about. Is it an overwhelming factor? I can't tell you. But, you know, I think, when you are governing, you have to look at all these issues and — and — and see. I think the President is still kicking every corner because I think if there is any chance you could get this extension, he wants to know every available authority, but it is a consideration that I think, you know, may have affected some of us, but I can't say, you know, that I think within our legal counsel and the CDC, I think they have spoken mostly about simply whether there is — there is that legal authority to go forward. [INAUDIBLE ALCINDOR] I want to make clear, you have seen that this President is continuing to double, triple, quadruple check on those issues, and — and — and to ask all of us to look in every corner and kick every tire and double, triple, quadruple check if there is any possible way that we can move forward.

ALCINDOR: But can you give me an example of what might — might be the thing you worry about the supreme court striking down? But what — what unnecessary — what intended consequence might come from that?

SPERLING: Are you trying to get me in trouble with Dan Remus? [REPORTERS LAUGH] Are you like trying to make me persona non-gratis with — with our general White House counsel? I will pass.

CECILIA VEGA: Is it 2 million people though? Is that the number that this white house believes could lose their home as a result of this?

SPERLING: I am saying that those who are — no. Those are people — those are the estimates for, you know, 1.4 to 1.9, are the people who fear that they could be at — at a deeper level, a large — a significant percentage of them are in states where there's eviction — the moratorium has increased. We have lots of indications that the kind of diversionary policies that we are doing is helping, and also, remember, we're at almost 300,000. If we get up to 4, 500,000, you could be talking about helping well over a million people in a two or three month period.

VEGA: But how many people —

SPERLING: What I'm trying to say — what I was trying to say is that we are pushing hard because we do believe that if state and local governments were to accelerate, if all of them were to do as well as the best performers are, what I'm trying to say is that, it could make a sizable impact on mitigation because — you know — because you're — because those types of numbers, over a few month period, you could have a substantial impact. That said, not everyone.

VEGA: But what's the number America should brace for? How many people does this White House believe could lose their home because of this?

SPERLING: I — I do not — I — I — I do not have an estimate. What I was trying to discourage against was the use of just the largest — I mean, sometimes are just using — what is the percentage of 45 billion or what is the percentage of everyone who says they didn't backpay? And it could make it seem like things — it could understate the degree of progress if you feel like being able to help 700,000 a month over a few months, you know, could — couldn't matter a lot, and if we could get all the states and local governments, I'm saying that you could make a sizable impact. What's that?

VEGA: Millions?

SPERLING: What's that?

VEGA: Have you ever seen millions of people losing their homes?

SPERLING: No.

(....)

3:37:04 p.m.
17 seconds

JONATHAN LEMIRE: Quickly, on this, from the briefing we received, it seems like the white house does not want to challenge this in court. But lawmakers — Democratic lawmakers were unhappy with the response so far, are basically saying — and I'm paraphrasing — don't let Brett Kavanaugh stand in the way of this. Why not take executive action now to direct the CDC and deal with the court later on?

(....)

3:38:11 p.m.
3 seconds

LEMIRE: And how much more time is he going to kick the tires?

(....)

3:40:14 p.m.
59 seconds

VEGA: Quick, on Friday, the President was asked whether should Americans expect more guidelines coming out because of Covid — because of the delta variant and he said, “in all probability.” So, what’s on the table right now?

PSAKI: Obviously, the president is keeping the option open of making sure that he is — that the CDC and our public health officials can make recommendations on what’s needed to keep the American people safe. I’m not in a position to preview that or to get ahead of any decisions they may make. What I can reiterate though is — and you heard Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins reiterate this this weekend. We’ve been clearly we are not going back to the shutdowns of March of 2020. We would go back to the economy shutting down. We’ve made too much progress. Too many people are vaccinated. There’s been progress on the economic front. But again, he has said everything from the beginning that we are guided by the science, guided by our health experts, and we’re not going to take options off the table of what they may recommend.

(....)

3:43:00 p.m.
32 seconds

MATT VISER: And just to be clear, can vaccinated people be indoors with other vaccinated people? I mean, is that the — is it okay for people to be doing this?

PSAKI: I — I know Dr. Collins spoke to this during one of his interview this weekend. The good news is, there is a Covid briefing coming up this afternoon where you can ask questions of public health experts. But they have not changed that guidance in their — in their — the guidance from last week. They updated guidance on masks, but I certainly would encourage you to ask them that during the briefing.

(....)

3:45:08 p.m.
2 minutes and 42 seconds

PETER DOOCY: About public health at the border, is the President concerned that migrants who are coming in in great numbers are not being tested for Covid at their first point of contact with Border Patrol?

PSAKI: Well, let me give you a little bit of an understanding of what actually happens when people come across the border. First, as — to Katie’s earlier question, there’s been no change in Title 42 so families and single adults are expelled, if possible, when apprehended at the southern border. That’s step one. Those who can’t be expelled are often placed — and this, I think, goes to your question — in alternative programs while their cases are being reviewed. CBP provides

migrants with PPE from the moment they are taken into custody and migrants are required to keep masks on at all times, including when they are transferred or in the process of being released. Our other protocol is if anyone exhibits signs of illness, in CBP custody, they are referred to local health systems for appropriate testing, diagnosis, isolation, and treatment. That is our process.

DOOCY: Okay, and then just about Covid safety, is President Obama setting the wrong example of how dangerous Covid is by hosting a big birthday party with hundreds of people this week?

PSAKI: Well, I would certainly refer you to the team who is working for my former boss to give more specifics of what the protocols are in place. But I would note first that former President Obama has been a huge advocate of individuals getting vaccinated. When CDC provided — has provided — what CDC has provided guidance on is for indoor settings in high or substantial high zones of Covid cases. This event, according to all the public reporting, is outdoors and in a moderate zone. But in addition, there is testing requirements and other steps they are taking which I'm sure they can outline for you in more detail.

DOOCY: But is there any concern, just because as you said here, and you've had people saying over the past couple days, vaccinated people can still spread this Delta variant around. So is there a concern that this President Obama birthday party might become a superspreader event?

PSAKI: I think, Peter, the guidance is about what steps people can take when they are in public settings, indoor settings specifically was the new guidance to keep themselves and others safe. In terms of what protocols they are taking, I would refer to them and I'm sure they could give you more details.

DOOCY: And just last one, so, people who are watching this at home and they see, well, Obama can have a party with several hundred people, should they think that it is okay for them to have a party with several hundred now?

PSAKI: Well, we advise everyone to follow public health guidelines, which I know the former President, who is a huge advocate of getting vaccinated, of following the guidance of public health experts would advocate for himself as well.

(...)

3:50:12 p.m.

1 minute and 9 seconds

KELLY O'DONNELL: In places like Florida where hospitalizations are at a record level —

PSAKI: Yeah.

O'DONNELL: — is there any concern about the number of resources available, rationing of care, additional equipment that needs to be sent in, or personnel to assist?

PSAKI: Well, one, we are — we stand ready and available to provide any assistance that is needed, whether that is Florida or any other part of the country. We've done these strike forces. We are at a different point in the pandemic than we were a couple months ago. We have ample vaccine. We have ample experts. We have ample resources to provide them. You know, I will note as you touched there, 20 percent of the cases we are seeing are in Florida. There are steps and precautions that can be taken, including encouraging people to get vaccinated, encouraging people to wear masks, including allowing — allowing schools to mandate masks, and allow — allowing kids to wear masks, which is not the current state of play in Florida. So, you know, at a certain point, leaders are going to have to choose whether they're going to follow public health guidelines, or they're going to politics? And we certainly encourage all governors to follow the public health guidelines.

(...)

3:53:30 p.m.

2 minutes and 16 seconds

NANDITA BOSE: One on vaccine misinformation. Since President Biden and the Surgeon General, you know, have spoken about the issue. You have spoken about it as well. Has the White House seen the companies, specifically Facebook and the other social media companies, take any steps to address vaccine misinformation, any notable changes that you have seen?

PSAKI: It's a really great question. I will talk to our team and see if there are specific — specific notes of improvement that we can call out. I'm happy to do that or connect you with them directly.

BOSE: And just so, the reason I ask is, you know, we are seeing this increase in vaccinations again and that seems to be tied to the number of cases going up. But we're just sort of wondering if there is anything we can tie that to, maybe some of the misinformation campaigns being contained?

PSAKI: Well, look, I think that it is hard to draw one step in any local community. But there's no question — you see this anecdotally through a lot of your reporting, which is where people see their neighbor got a vaccine. Their friends got a vaccine and they are okay. And on the flip side of it, they had a friend or neighbor who was hospitalized and it made them go and get a vaccine. So, certainly, it's an ongoing battle against misinformation. It is not just on Facebook, though that is a mechanism for traveling, no question, it is through a range of mediums. We all have responsibility. But we certainly are seeing in the states where there are higher case rates, we have seen record rates of — I should say very encouraging rates of vaccination, and that could be because a number of factors — go ahead.

BOSE: I have one more on voting rights, quickly.

PSAKI: Sure.

BOSE: There are hundreds of state legislatures who are converging in D.C. today from over 20 states. They're going to be meeting with Texas Democrats. We did see the Vice President meet with Texas Democrats earlier. I was curious if the President and Vice President plan to meet with these lawmakers and if they have any message for them.

PSAKI: First, I would say the President and Vice President, the message to them is we stand with you and believe that voting rights are a fundamental right for the American people across the country and the President would love to assign voting rights legislation into law. He will continue to — this will continue to be a fight of his presidency and that's why he asked the Vice President to lead this effort.

(....)

3:56:54 p.m.

1 minute and 21 seconds

MONA AUSTIN: I was asking the President on Friday before his departure why hasn't he — I have an inkling — but for the American people — why hasn't he signed the executive order on the VRA? That's the one thing, and then to follow up on the eviction moratorium for context, of course, you probably know there was landlord, state, renter state situations.

PSAKI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So in the state of Florida, it is a landlord state, meaning the law favors landlords. Some of my research has indicated that renters are having a difficult time in a general sense. And now that they have these tools they can take advantage of from the government, they are facing more stress and lack — a lack of cooperation from these landlords. I got a lot of that over the past week. I have been following this since a month or so ago reporting on this weekly and what I'm hearing more and more is people are afraid that they're just not going to get the support because of that lack of cooperation and I know it's been address, what do you think we can do — or the government can do even further to make sure that these states and local municipalities are cooperating?

(....)

3:59:19 p.m.

19 seconds

AUSTIN: The VRA. Just principally, people want to know if the President can sign an executive order for transgender rights, for example. Why can't he find the same power — does he have the same power to sign an executive for the VRA?