

White House Press Briefing (via ABC News Live)

08/04/21

12:57:56 p.m.

1 minute and 35 seconds

JONATHAN LEMIRE: Yesterday, the President said Governor Cuomo should resign. The governor has not done so. Has the President called the governor?

JEN PSAKI: No.

LEMIRE: Has anyone from the White House called the governor or the governor's staff?

PSAKI: Not that I'm aware of.

LEMIRE: When was the last time the President and Governor Cuomo have spoken?

PSAKI: I would have to check on that.

LEMIRE: Okay Just two more on this. If the pres — if the governor refuses to resign, does the President want to see him impeached and removed from office?

PSAKI: The President made clear yesterday that Governor Cuomo should resign — believes and — we — I believe we should start with that. There's obviously a process that's going to proceed, and leaders in New York spoke to that yesterday. We'll leave it to them to speak to that. But the President believes Governor Cuomo should do the right thing, resign and leave space for future leadership in New York.

LEMIRE: Okay. And then there's been a lot of discussion in here, including the President in recent days about the vital role that governors play in the nation's Covid reponse. In this period, while Governor Cuomo is still in office, does the president have confidence in him leading New York State's response to the pandemic?

PSAKI: Well, I think, again, the President made clear because of the abhorrent allegations that were made public yesterday that it is time for — for Governor Cuomo to resign. At the same time, we do not want the people of New York to be impacted in a negative way as they're working to fight Covid, and we're going to continue to work with the administration in New York, with leaders in New York to continue to fight Covid. Um, that will continue and obviously if leadership changes in the state, we will work with — with a different leader.

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1:02:41 p.m.

35 seconds

KELLY O'DONNELL: The earlier moratorium used the same legal justification that the new one

is using which, in layman's terms, is about preventing the spread of disease. If you evict people at a time of pandemic. So, the -- the only real difference is narrowing, location, but the rationale is the same. So, after the President was clear that it wasn't legal, Gene Sperling was clear that it wasn't legal, is this a roll the dice and see if it gets challenged position from an administration that maybe doing something it knows is not on legal standing?

(....)

1:05:24 p.m.

2 minutes and 46 seconds

PETER DOOCY: There's been a major push here recently to protect tenants from being affected — evicted right now. Why isn't more being done to help the landlords who are struggling to pay their bills because they're not being paid?

PSAKI: Well, actually, the landlords can benefit from exactly the same emergency rental assistance that renters can benefit from.

DOOCY: But right now, as we understand it, many states are not distributing that money. The Washington Post says that this measure could drive thousands of minor landlords to bankruptcy.

PSAKI: Well, that's exactly why and I'm happy to have you as a partner in this effort. Uh, we are trying to advocate for states, localities to get this money out. There is no reason it's not going out to landlords, to renters. No reason that people who were eligible are not benefiting and we've seen a number of states — red states and blue states — do this very effectively. Texas is an example I used yesterday. Virginia is one I highlighted today. This is why we're doing as much of this outreach and engagement as we're doing and simplifying forms, making it easier for people to understand.

DOOCY: Okay and then on immigration. It's been almost four months since the President told migrants, “don't come, don't leave your town,” almost two months since the Vice President went to Central America to say, “do not come.” But people are coming in record numbers. Does the President think his immigration plan is working?

PSAKI: Well, the President continues to convey to anyone, as you've said, who wants to come to the United States, now is not time to come. It is not the time to come and try to go through irregular migration. We want to have an effective process where you can apply for asylum, where you can apply for legal status. We have increased our investment in areas like the Central American Minors Program, allowing people to apply from within country so they are not making that dangerous trip. There's more that needs to be done. We've also instituted, uh, uh, uh, a number of additional steps recently, including expedited removals to move people out of the country more quickly. But it's — it's — we're still at work on an improving process and improving a system that was very broken when we took office.

DOOCY: So, the message to migrants is the same, even though they are coming at 21 year high

210,000 encounters at the border last month?

PSAKI: And I would also note the number of people who were — who were removed from the border, which is an important part of the context, which is almost half of that number.

DOOCY: But he's saying “don't come” and they're coming.

PSAKI: Well, there are a number of factors as you will know that are happening in these countries and we're working to address those as well and the Vice President is leading those efforts. We don't expect that to be a switch, but addressing root causes in these countries, corruption, economic downturn, people are fleeing a range of challenges, persecution. Those are issues we need to address at the same time.

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1:08:36 p.m.
20 seconds

CECILIA VEGA: And on the Governor Cuomo issue, if — if — this is potentially such a stain on the party, the President as the leader of this party, why not pick up the phone and ask him to resign at this point?

PSAKI: I think the President was pretty clear publicly. He asked him to resign yesterday.

VEGA: No plans to call him though?

PSAKI: I don't have any — no plans to call him to preview, no.

(....)

1:12:38 p.m.
1 minute and 53 seconds

PHIL MATTINGLY: The President was very sharp from his kind of perspective on Republican governors who — sort of block, I guess, specific, potential public health options. He echoed something you said yesterday — a very sharp tone of either you're with it or move out of the way. Is that an intentional shift? What's driving kind of very sharp tone in regards to these specific actions by Republican governors?

PSAKI: Well, let me be also clear that as the President said yesterday, the vast majority of leaders, and as I've said too, continue to step up and do the right thing. People like Governor Hutchison have been traveling their state, hearing from their communities, and answering questions about the vaccine. We're also in constant communication with our nation's governors. So even as we called out steps that, and he called out, steps that we felt should have been taken by the governors of Florida and Texas. We're in touch with those offices about providing

additional assistance and seeing if we can figure out what their needs are and how we can help meet them. And we had our first FEMA team on the ground in West Virginia, just days after entering government. Right now, our surge response teams are working hand in hand with the hardest hit states that are not traditionally blue and Democratic states, Arkansas, Missouri, Louisiana, focusing on everything from contact tracing, technical expertise and vaccine confidence. But at the same time that wasn't an evaluation, a partisan evaluation or assessment. That was an assessment of what isn't happening that would help protect people's lives and save people's lives. And there are leaders who are not stepping up and are getting in the way of the American people, companies, and others who are trying to save lives and stop the spread of Delta. And we are going to keep calling that out. That's not meant to be partisan. It's not meant to be political. It's just meant to convey that more action is needed in some parts of the country, even where there are many states where positive action is being taken.

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1:15:30 p.m.

1 minute and 21 seconds

JOEY GARRISON: What is the White House doing to push forward the nomination of David Chipman at the ATF? The vote could hinge on the vote of Senator Angus King in Maine, who has been pushed by both local Maine sportsmen groups, the national gun rights advocates. Has the White House reached out specifically to Senator Kaine — King on this issue, and is the White House fully committed to Chipman or might it go with a different nominee at some point?

PSAKI: Well, I'm not going to read out private conversations with members of Congress, but I will tell you that we knew this wouldn't be easy. ATF hasn't had a confirmed director in six years and only one confirmed director since the position became Senate confirmable. So we've been eyes wide open into the challenge from the beginning, but we are disappointed by the fact that many Republicans are moving in lockstep to try to hold up his nomination and handcuff the chief federal law enforcement agency tasked with fighting gun crimes. It speaks volumes to their complete refusal to tackle the spike in crime we've seen over the last 18 months. This is someone who has 25 years in distinguished service to our country as an ATF agent. He has the exact set of skills and experience we need to revitalize the Bureau's work to crack down on gun trafficking, keep guns out of the hands of criminals. So certainly yes, we stand by his strong qualifications and nomination.

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1:20:53 p.m.

1 minute and 45 seconds

STEVEN NELSON: It's been a while, so I'm hoping to ask you two questions if that's all right.

PSAKI: Okay.

NELSON: First about the coronavirus pandemic and then about a follow-up to Governor Cuomo, the report on him. On COVID-19, former President Trump has called for China to pay the United States more than \$10 trillion in reparations, as a result of letting the coronavirus escape Wuhan and infect other countries, causing, of course, 600,000 American deaths and economic devastation. President Biden hasn't called for reparations from China. Does he support them? Does he think that China should pay us financially for what it has allowed to spread?

PSAKI: Our policy hasn't changed.

NELSON: So is he open to —

PSAKI: Did you have another question?

NELSON: — yes. In a follow-up to the report on Governor Cuomo's sexual harassment, a lot of men in politics have been accused of sexual harassment. President Biden was accused by female Secret Service agents of skinny dipping in front of them, offending them, according to former *Washington Post* reporter Ronald Kessler, who's an author as well. His former Senate aide Tara Reade accused him of sexual assault. [JOHN GIZZI's PHONE GOES OFF] *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* published multiple accounts of women who objected to the way President Biden touched them. Should there be an independent investigation of allegations into the president as there was into Governor Cuomo?

PSAKI: Well, first I would say the president has been clear and outspoken about the importance of women being respected and having their voices heard and being allowed to tell their stories and people treating them with respect. That has long been his policy, continues to be his policy. That — those — that was heavily litigated during the campaign. I understand you're eager to come back to it, but I don't have anything further, other than to repeat that he has called for the governor to resign.

(...)

1:23:02 p.m.

1 minutes and 3 seconds

ALEX THOMPSON: And you guys have said you guys are not going to return to lockdowns. Now, is that based just on current COVID conditions? Or Dr. Fauci today in an interview, warned that he is worried about a potentially worse variant that could more effect vaccinated people. So is the guidance on lockdowns just based on current conditions or is that just a — and could change or is it forever more are there not going to be lockdowns?

PSAKI: Well, I think Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins have both spoken to this in recent days, and what they have conveyed and what it's based on, is the fact that we have made a significant amount of progress in the past six months, even as we are fighting the Delta variant, the most transmissible variant we have seen. And that includes 70 percent of the American people getting their first shot, 160 — more than 162 million Americans at this point. That's progress, that ensures that a

lot of communities are going to have a great deal of protection and we're in a different place than we were when there was the period of lockdown, so it's a reflection of that.

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1:27:05 p.m.

34 seconds

NANCY COOK: President — we know President Biden has called on Cuomo to resign — Governor Cuomo, but in the meantime, does the White House intend to strip him of his leadership position on those biweekly governor COVID calls?

PSAKI: I'm not sure when the next one is scheduled, but again, I would convey that our — our — objective is not to hurt the people of New York in the fight against COVID. If he is no longer the Governor of New York, which is certainly what the President made clear of his preference, then we will engage with other people, but we are not going to take steps to hurt the people of New York in the fight against COVID.

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1:27:51 p.m.

4 minutes and 6 seconds

STEVEN PORTNOY: One more question on the eviction moratorium, I'll approach it this way. The President may support the legal justification, but he also publicly gave voice to doubts about the constitutionality. What's the White House's message then to Americans who heard what happened yesterday, heard what was said at this podium on Monday, can't square the two, and are now disappointed that the President is signaling that he doesn't respect the rule of law?

PSAKI: I'm not sure there are Americans evaluating it to that degree. Maybe there are some you have talked to, I don't know. What the President has — his message to the American people, especially those who are concerned about losing their homes, being kicked out of their homes, is that he's going to do everything in his power to make sure they can stay in their homes as long as possible. That is not just an extension of the eviction moratorium, which obviously a step was taken yesterday. It is also about using every tool at our disposal to get this money out. Again, states have the funding to extend the eviction moratorium in their own states. That's because there was funding in the American Rescue Plan to get that done. So that includes asking his team, members of his cabinet, whether it's the — whether it's Secretary Fudge, who obviously made an announcement today, or the Department of Treasury, who made an announcement about the simplification of forms, that this is a priority, that they are to use all resources at their disposal to make sure they're communicating with Americans, that we are making it easy to get this funding out, because that's the overall objective. The overall objective is not about one tool. It is about keeping people in their homes. That's the goal.

PORTNOY: But the President's a lawyer, spent 36 years in the Senate, was Chairman of the

Senate Judiciary Committee, eight years a Vice President, half a year as President, he speaks often about democracy versus autocracy, he's issuing or overseeing this order from the CDC, in the face of doubts about its constitutionality, which he seemed to echo yesterday. There's no inconsistency here? The President is — I mean, there are many people out there who say that the President is — is essentially not giving voice to the ethic that he campaigned on. He didn't call Congress back. He asked Congress to act. It didn't. How do you square all that?

PSAKI: You know I'm going to ask you who's saying that.

PORTNOY: Well, there are plenty of people who are saying it. They are not just Republicans.

PSAKI: Okay, I'll — I'll leave that to others to figure out. But I think what's important to note here, is that the President would not have moved forward with a step where he didn't feel comfortable and confident in the legal justification. It is also a reality that there are legal steps that have been taken by the Supreme Court in the last few months, and we have spoken to that publicly. We're not going to hide from that. But he asked the CDC and his legal experts to look at what is possible. This is a narrow, targeted moratorium that is different from the national moratorium. It's not an extension of that. It's a different moratorium from a policy and legal standpoint, so he felt comfortable in the justification and the legal approach to this effort.

PHILIP WEGMANN: Quick follow up on that, Jen.

PSAKI: Uh-huh. Go ahead.

WEGMANN: Thank you. You mentioned that the President is old school and Steve noted that the President spent significant amount of time in the Senate and is also a lawyer. When — what was the moment that the President became certain that he was on solid, legal standing to move forward with this extension? And what was the argument — specific legal argument that won out and changed his mind? Because yesterday, he seemed to be weighing the two — the two options.

PSAKI: Well, again, as I've been discussing, the justification from the legal team is that this a different moratorium. It's narrow. It's targeted at the areas highest impacted. It is not an extension of the national moratorium that was struck down just six weeks ago.

WEGMANN: So, is the — is the sense here that this is temporary, it's still an open question about the constitutionality, but —

PSAKI: It is temporary. It was extended until October 3rd.

WEGMANN: — so, it's still a question of whether or not this is constitutional, but it's worth it?

PSAKI: I didn't say that.

WEGMANN: I know, but is that the sentiment?

PSAKI: He would not have advocated for and supported moving forward with something, if he was not comfortable with the legal justification.

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1:36:57 p.m.

1 minute and 49 seconds

SHELBY TALCOTT: I wanted to ask about a Harris poll released this week that indicates the majority of Americans believe the worst of the pandemic is still ahead and this is a big change from a few weeks ago. And so, this is despite, as you said, 70 percent of Americans being vaccinated and CDC data showing that the vaccine is protecting vaccinated Americans from serious illness. So, why is the American public so panicked and is a White House concerned at all that it's fueled this dramatic shift in public sentiment?

PSAKI: That we have fueled it?

TALCOTT: Yeah. Through, you know, like, returning the mask recommendations for vaccinated Americans. Is there — is — is it concerned at all? What can it point to as a reason for Americans —

PSAKI: I haven't taken a close look at this poll, but what I will tell you is that a poll before this, I believe a CBS poll, showed that more vaccinated Americans were concerned about the rise of Delta than unvaccinated. So, that was even prior to the mask guidance being put in place and certainly, as people see, you know, the rise in cases in certain communities, unvaccinated communities, of course that's concerning. We understand that, but we also believe that it is our responsibility to provide accurate public health information and also make clear to people the impact of being vaccinated and the fact that the vaccines are doing exactly what they should do, which is protect the vast majority of people from serious illness and hospitalization. But, yes, we are — we know that it is a — it is challenge and fighting a pandemic and communicating about it is a challenge. But — but certainly that's why we do as many briefings as we do, why we — why we come out here every day as we do and why we'll continue to allow our public health guidance to be — to be in the lead.