

White House press briefing
08/11/21
12:40:30 p.m.
2 minutes and 15 seconds

PETER DOOCY: The President is saying now, “God willing, the FDA is going to be coming out in a reasonable timeframe to say this vaccine is totally safe.” What is the holdup in nominating someone to run the FDA after more than 200 days in office?

JEN PSAKI: I know, it’s like 204 at this point in time.

DOOCY: 204 days.

PSAKI: Certainly, I will say, and the President was asked this question yesterday, that he wants to name someone who’s qualified, who’s ready to lead the FDA. It is a priority for him. He’s also not going to take a step to put forward a nominee before he’s found exactly the right person. I will note that it is a place that is filled with talented, experienced scientists, data experts, career staff, who are certainly running the FDA effectively.

DOOCY: Okay, and as the President tries to reach unvaccinated Americans, has there been any thought given, looking back, to the possibility that he may have created some vaccine hesitancy when last year around this time the previous administration was rushing to get a vaccine authorized, and the now President said, “I trust vaccines, I trust scientists, but I don’t trust Donald Trump and at this moment, the American people can’t either.”

PSAKI: Well, I think it’s safe to say he still doesn’t trust Donald Trump, so that hasn’t changed. But he does trust scientists. He does trust data experts and he does trust the people leading the CDC, the FDA, which is the gold standard of approval for vaccines. I’d also note, because this question often comes up, that the President has repeatedly given credit to scientists and experts from the prior administration, even as recently as just a few weeks ago, for their role in moving the vaccines forward.

DOOCY: Yes, but at the time when Donald Trump is out there saying, “We’re going to have a vaccine in the next couple of weeks, the next couple of months.” And Joe Biden is out on the campaign trail saying, “Don’t trust Donald Trump.” Did that create any kind of vaccine hesitancy?

PSAKI: Not that we’ve seen in the data. I would note that at the time, just for context, the former President was also suggesting people inject versions of poison into their veins to cure COVID, so I think that’s a relevant point.

DOOCY: And Joe Biden, then-Vice President was saying, “We got to wait until something is fully authorized.” And it’s still not.

PSAKI: Well, the FDA works on the timeline of science. At the same time, we’ve also seen tens

of millions of people's lives saved who have gotten the vaccine, that data is clear across the country.

(...)

12:45:49 p.m.

1 minute and 20 seconds

PETER ALEXANDER: We'll follow up on this when we talked to the COVID-19 response team in the next opportunity, but what is the assessment that the White House has received in terms of the projection for when this Delta variant would reach its peak? When should we anticipate that that would happen? What, if any, preparations are being made in anticipation of that time?

PSAKI: Well, I certainly do encourage you to ask our scientists, as I know that you will. Part of it is dependent on the actions and steps that the American people take across the country to get vaccinated, to wear masks, to protect themselves, to reduce the spread of the virus. We have seen in states where there was a rise in COVID cases even a week or two ago, obviously an increase in vaccination rates, but — and also a start to see a leveling off in some of those states, that's a positive sign. I'd also remind everyone, as you all know, that when — if somebody gets their shot tomorrow, they're not protected the next day. They need to get their second shot, and then it's a couple of weeks after that. So it is going to take a little bit of time, even as we've seen an increase in vaccination rates in a number of states across the country.

ALEXANDER: But you receive assessments obviously from them, what is the assessment? When should Americans on this trajectory, or even if there is a best case scenario trajectory, when should we anticipate this surge to peak?

PSAKI: Well, again, I encourage you to ask our scientists and our experts who are tracking exactly that, an important question. But it is also dependent on the steps that we are taking and people across the country are taking to get vaccinated and protect themselves.

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12:52:06 p.m.

1 minute and 46 seconds

FRANCO ORDOÑEZ: Now a few of the recent nominations last week were donors. What — the President during the campaign promised to put diplomacy back in the hands of professionals. What is the makeup that the White House is kind of shooting for in regards to percentage of political versus career diversity? How are you balancing that — those political appointments of donors, especially after some diplomats feel after four years of Trump and the withdrawal from the world, need — there should be more career people?

PSAKI: Well, the President has made clear that he supports, advocates for, and will continue to press for the confirmation of career ambassadors, of course. But also that individuals who are in

the private sector. That does not mean that they're unqualified. These are qualified nominees who can be excellent representatives of the United States overseas and we are also going to simultaneously continue to push for and press for and elevate career staff foreign service officers who've proudly served our country through Democrats and Republicans to serve in these posts as well. And those are all on the slate of nominees we're pushing to move forward.

ORDOÑEZ: Obama and — and — and — Obama and Bush had about 30 percent political. Is that a range that the Biden administration is seeking for?

PSAKI: I don't have a percentage for you. I can tell you that, and I'm happy to check with our personnel department to see if there's anything they want to provide, I will note that diversity has been a front and center priority for the President, for this administration, and for our personnel department as they look to fill key posts. Not just ambassador roles, but roles to serve in high level positions in agencies.

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12:59:22 p.m.
22 seconds

ZOLAN KANNO-YOUNGS: Also, the gallerist who's managing — who has been tasked with ensuring the buyers of Hunter Biden's artwork remain anonymous — he said that Hunter will be attending his — his opening as well next month and has said friends and families will be attending as well. Does the President or First Lady plan on attending that — that opening?

PSAKI: I'm not aware of plans for them to attend.

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1:06:44 p.m.
14 seconds

OWEN JENSEN: Jen, what is the White House reaction to the Hyde Amendment being included in the \$3.5 trillion budget resolution?

PSAKI: I don't think I'm going to negotiate from here. The President's position on Hyde is well-known and we've stated many times publicly.

JENSEN: And let me follow up on that, please.

PSAKI: I think we're going to move on.

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1:09:44 p.m.

1 minute and 18 seconds

PHILIP WEGMANN: Given the up — given the uptick in inflation, is anyone at the White House taking a closer look at the previous administration's tariffs to see which ones actually serve geopolitical interests, and then which ones just increased costs for consumer [sic]?

PSAKI: Well we've talked about how there's ongoing reviews of tariffs and a range of steps that were put in place by the prior administration, and of course we're going to continue to use every economic tool in our toolbox. I would note, and I noted this previously, but as we look at averages the rate of inflation has actually come down and we continue to be at a projection where it is going to come back to normal rates next year. And we also know that there are specific industries that are impacting inflation. We also saw a — a — encouraging data as it relates to the used-car industry. Last month, it went up by 10 percent. Now it went up, the cost I should say, by less than one percent. So we're seeing some encouraging data and we want to, of course, see that trend continue.

WEGMANN: And then, even though he's now out of office, would this President support the New York legislature if they decided to impeach Governor Cuomo?

PSAKI: That's a decision for them to make. The President made clear his views. Obviously, the former — the governor announced his steps yesterday. We'll leave it at that.

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1:15:40 p.m.

1 minute and 43 seconds

ALEXANDER NAZARYAN: A headline from the New York Post, from I believe two days ago, "Team Biden's War on DeSantis Is All About Kneecapping a Successful Governor — a GOP Governor." Could you address that concern please?

PSAKI: Our war is not on DeSantis, it's on the virus, which we're trying to kneecap and he does not seem to want to participate in that effort to kneecap the virus, hence our concern. Go ahead.

STEVEN NELSON: Thank you, Jen. I have a rapid-fire three questions on transparency. As Ed noted earlier, the President's been to Delaware 17 times, soon going to be 18 and 19 times over the past six months. I want to know how visits from visitors and from family members with potential conflicts of interest are being treated for the purposes of White House visitor log disclosure. Also, I was hoping that you could respond to Walter Shaub's criticism of the First Son's art sales. He says he wants the — shame on the President if he doesn't ask his son to stop. What exactly has the President said to his son? And the third question is, what space and constraints are there in the White House East Room that are preventing us all from attending the event later today, especially considering there are no space and constraints in this room?

PSAKI: Well, one, I think we wanted to make it as transparent as possible and make the entire

meeting available to everyone who isn't just in this room. So we are actually not discriminating against people who are covering the White House from outside of the White House Briefing Room. Second, I would say, we have spoken extensively to the arrangements that are not White House arrangements. There are arrangements between Hunter Biden's representatives and ones that we certainly were made aware of. I don't think I have anything to add in that regard. And no, I can confirm we are not going to be providing information about the comings and goings of the President's grandchildren or people visiting him in Delaware.