

White House press briefing

09/08/21

2:56:39 p.m.

2 minutes and 48 seconds

CECILIA VEGA: A couple questions on Texas. The governor there was asked about the lack of an exception for rape or incest in the abortion law, and I don't know if you heard his comments, but he said — his answer to that question was that Texas will work tirelessly to make sure that we eliminate rapists off the streets.” I'm just wondering if the White House has a response to that?

JEN PSAKI: Well, if Governor Abbott has a means of eliminating all rapists or all rape from the United States, then there'd be bipartisan support for that. But given there has never in history of the country, in the world been any leader who has ever been able to eliminate rape, eliminate rapists from our streets, it's even more imperative — it's one of the many reasons, I should say, not the only reason, why women in Texas should have access to healthcare, so it does not change our objectives, does not our commitment. The Department of Justice, the Attorney General announced a step on Monday, our Department of Justice is continuing to look at legal options, our Department Health and Human services is also continuing looking at all options, and the president has made clear that it's a priority to do everything we can to ensure women in Texas have access to healthcare

VEGA: I want to push a little bit on that part, this looking for options. You know, for women in Texas right now who might be in need of having an abortion, who perhaps are looking at this white house for a hail Mary intervention, the clock is ticking for them, the clock is literally ticking for them today. So, in terms of their decision-making, can this administration offer any help to them now? What — what would you tell these women who are looking to this White House to help them? Is help on the way?

PSAKI: Well, we would tell them, first, that this law is a violation of your rights and we are going to do everything we can to provide assistance as quickly as we can. One of the reasons why the department of health and human services is a key component here is obviously because they oversee the nation's healthcare systems, but they are going to look for ways to make sure we are providing access to healthcare to women in Texas. I — I noted the Department of Justice announced a step that they were taking on Monday, Clearly, this law is — is — or this — this bill that was signed into law is something we strongly oppose and there's an urgency to looking for and announcing actions to help women now. And certainly, we understand that women are looking at their choices right now, today, tomorrow, last week. And we are hopeful we will have more to convey to them directly.

VEGA: But is there tangible help that's on the way? Would the White House support the FDA lifting restrictions on Mifepristone, the abortion — called the abortion pill?

PSAKI: This is a decision that the FDA has to make on their own based on science. And, certainly, we believe in the independence of the FDA to make these decisions and we know there

are a number of advocates who have called for that but we'll leave that decision to the FDA.

(...)

3:03:36 p.m.

4 minutes and 24 seconds

PHIL MATTINGLY: And then one on the flights that have been stuck in Afghanistan, I understand the state is leading on this but you guys have made it clear you're paying very close attention to the American citizens still in the country. I'm trying to square where things actually stand. The Secretary of State said a couple of times it was a documentation issue. A U.S. senator, Richard Blumenthal, pushed back vociferously on that. Today, the secretary of states said the Taliban are not permitting the charter flights to leave, putting it precisely on them. What is your understanding of the hold up and if the Taliban is preventing them, what levers do you have right now?

PSAKI: Well, there — a couple of pieces are true here. So, one is, we are continuing to press the Taliban, the secretary of state is, to do more to abide by allowing American citizens, individuals with — who are legal permanent residents and individuals with proper documentation to depart the country. It is also true that we don't have a role in preventing flights from taking off. We are not on the ground, so that is not something the U.S. government is doing. But at the same time, some of the planes and some of the issue is where are they going to land? A number of these planes, they may have a handful of American citizens but they may have several hundred individuals where we don't have manifests for them. We don't know what the security protocols are for them. We don't know what their documentation is and there is a fundamental question and this is one of the hard choices you face in government, are we going to allow a plane with hundreds of people where we don't know who they are, we don't know what security protocols are in place to land on a military base. And there are reasonable questions, justifiable questions, I think, as to why we wouldn't do that. And so, right now, there are some charter planes that are taking off. We do have to make evaluations about the safety and security, and protocols in place as planes are landing on military bases. And there are some challenges as it relates to documentation where a number of people may not have documentation. Some for good reason because they are trying to depart Afghanistan but that is something we're working through. These individ — these handful of American citizens, we are also in touch with. They are not the majority of the flights, far from it. It is a small number of American citizens who are — we're talking about on these charter flights.

PATSY WIDAKUSWARA: Can I follow-up on that, please, Jen?

PSAKI: Sure.

WIDAKUSWARA: So, are you essentially saying that — is the administration saying, I'm from picking from what Secretary Blinken has said today about documentation, is the administration essentially saying that the Taliban is the only one who has access and who's able to check passenger documentation against these flight manifests? And if so, what is stopping the U.S., for

example, from sending personnel over there to do this job and to allow these passengers to leave on the flights? I understand they're not all Americans but many are Afghan allies.

PSAKI: Well, none of that is what I said or what the secretary of state said so let me try again. So, the — the flights — we obviously don't have personnel on the ground, that's correct. We don't. What our objective is and we have a presence in Qatar — right — as you know, our secretary of state has been on the ground in Qatar, is negotiating and having discussions as we speak with international partners and also members of our State Department are in discussions with the Taliban because we do want to work through and ensure that we can allow additional flights to land at military bases. But it is also true that we are not going to allow flights to land, where we don't know what security protocols have been taken, whether people have been vetted, who is — who are on the planes. And I don't think the vast majority of citizens want us to do that either. So, right now, we are working through the process and we are also in touch with the American citizens who are on these flights or who are in the vicinity which are a very small number to work through getting them out of Afghanistan. We are committed to that. We absolutely want to do that. We have already evacuated a handful of people and we're continuing to work through. Now, things that will make it much easier for certain are if Qatari airlines — we're working with them to see if they can get flights up and operational, more efforts to get individuals evacuated over land. We're working through the components and it's the reason why the secretary of state is on the ground in the region, discussing and negotiating as we speak.

WIDAKUSWARA: [INAUDIBLE] personnel on the ground —

PSAKI: Okay, we're going to keep going. Weijia. Go ahead, Weijia. Go ahead, Weijia.

WIDAKUSWARA: — to do this, Jen?

PSAKI: Go ahead, Weijia. I —

WIDAKUSWARA: I mean, is that the plan?

PSAKI: — I think I answered your question.

(...)

3:09:50 p.m.

3 minutes and 6 seconds

PETER DOOCY: Following up on these charter flights that the Taliban is holding up in Afghanistan. The secretary of state said there are limits to what we can do without personnel on the ground?

PSAKI: Yeah.

DOOCY: You just said we are not on the ground.

PSAKI: You're right.

DOOCY: Whose fault is that?

PSAKI: I don't think this is about fault here.

DOOCY: Well, Jen, there are hundreds of Americans —

PSAKI; I think what people want to understand is what we are doing to address it. There's a handful of Americans. And I'm sure you're not suggesting we should have flights with hundreds of people who we don't know who they are —

DOOCY: Okay.

PSAKI: — where there's no security measures.

DOOCY: How many Americans is too few to go in?

PSAKI: Too few? I am just —

DOOCY: [INAUDIBLE] are American people.

PSAKI: — conveying to you there are a handful of Americans who we are in touch with and we are working to help get evacuated from Afghanistan. But decisions you have to make in the federal government are not yes and no decisions or as simple as what you're laying out here. What we're evaluating is how to keep people on our military bases safe while also getting these U.S. citizens, dual citizens, people who are prepared to leave Afghanistan able to leave. At the same time, we don't think — or — where — we're not going to allow flights that have hundreds of people who we don't know who they are, who have not been through security protocols, where we haven't seen the manifests, to land on U.S. military bases.

DOOCY: Okay. There are now more terrorists wanted by the FBI in the new Afghan government than there are women. Does the President think that is a foreign policy success?

PSAKI: Well, first of all, no one in the administration, not the President nor anyone on the national security team would suggest that the Taliban are respected and valued members of the global community. They have not earned that in any way and we're not — we have never assessed that. This is a caretaker cabinet that does include four former imprisoned Taliban fighters. We have not validated that. We have not conveyed we're going to recognize it. What we are working to do — and nor are we rushing to recognition, there's a lot they have to do before that — what we are working to do is to engage with them because they oversee and control Afghanistan right now to get American citizens, legal permanent residents, SIV applicants out of Afghanistan.

DOOCY: But you —

PSAKI: We have to engage with them.

DOOCY: — but to engage with them? Their new acting interior minister is a Haqqani terrorist. He's wanted for a bombing that killed six people including an American. He's believed to have participated in cross-border attacks against U.S. troops. There is a \$10 million bounty on his head. Why are we engaging with the government —

PSAKI: Should we not — should we not talk to the people who are overseeing Afghanistan and just leave it and not get rest of the American citizens out?

DOOCY: What are you waiting for them to do? They just formed their government. Are you waiting for something — some —

PSAKI; Waiting for what?

PSAKI: — some specif — you're saying that we're not going to rush to recognition. That means there could be recognition.

PSAKI: As we've said many times, the international community is watching, the United States is watching. It's whether they let people depart the country who want to depart, whether they treat women across the country as they have committed to treat them —

DOOCY: And we've seen they're not doing that.

PSAKI: — and how they behave and operate. And therefore, we're not moving toward recognition. At the same time, we're dealing with a reality world here where we have to engage in order to get citizens out of the country.

(...)

3:19:45 p.m.

18 seconds

EMERALD ROBINSON: Jen, a follow up on the story about Dr. Fauci yesterday in The Intercept? The documents released that shows he was untruthful.