

White House press briefing [via ABC News Live]

09/22/21

2:11:47 p.m.

1 minute and 58 seconds

AAMER MADHANI: Media on the border have reported that many Haitians are being released into the United States. Can you clarify why they're not being placed on expulsion flights to Haiti and does the administration have any concerns that these releases undercut the public messaging that Haitians should not come to the border?

[PSAKI]

(...)

2:16:05 p.m.

3 minutes and 5 seconds

CECILIA VEGA: So, Secretary Mayorkas has now been asked twice on the Hill and he's not been able to provide an answer to this So I want to ask you: Do you have the numbers? How many Haitians have been deported? How many have been processed and how many have been allowed to say United States.

PSAKI: I certainly understand why you're asking and understand why people have been asking Secretary Mayorkas. Those are numbers that are — the secretary of — the Department of Homeland Security would have the most up to date numbers.

VEGA: But why is it so hard to keep track of a simple number like that? Why can't you give it? Why can't he give us? It's been two days now he's been asked.

PSAKI: I'm certainly he will provide it. It's an absolutely fair question to ask, and I'm certain he just wanted to have the most up to date numbers to provide.

VEGA: On the campaign trail, then-candidate, now-President Biden said.: “We're going to restore our moral standing in the world and our historic role as the safe haven for refugees and asylum seekers.” How does what's happening on the border right now with Haitians refugees square with that?

PSAKI: Well, which aspect of what's happening in the border?

VEGA: What's happening with Haitians?

PSAKI: Do you mean —

VEGA: [INAUDIBLE] —

PSAKI: — the photos we've seen —

VEGA: — the photos —

PSAKI: — or do you mean —

VEGA: — yeah. Them not —

PSAKI: — well, first, we understand and agree that this has been an incredibly heart wrenching issue. We've watched the photos of Haitians gathering under a bridge, many with families and the horrific video of the CBP officers on horse — on horses using brutal and inappropriate measures against innocent people. I think it's important to take — to address that and separately address what our immigration policies are and understand that people are combining them. But that's why I asked that question. I would also reiterate that there is an investigation that will be completed by next week, which the secretary confirmed that will determine the next steps on both policy and personnel. All important questions people are asking and in the interim, those individuals were placed on administration — administrative leave and will not be interacting with any migrants, so as it relates to those photos and that horrific video, we're not going to stand for that kind of inhumane treatment, And obviously we want this — this investigation to be completed rapidly. I will say, on the broader question you were asking, the President remains committed to putting in place a humane and orderly immigration system that includes an established an efficient process for applying for asylum that includes a range of programs for individuals to apply to stay in the United States. That requires Congress acting, and it requires also health conditions improving as we are in the middle of a pandemic, and we are continuing to expel people coming from a range of countries as we are continuing to apply Title 42 because there is a global pandemic that is ongoing. So, I would think it's important to note that our policies — our border restrictions are being applied not just to Haitians, but to people who are coming irregularly to migrate to the country from anywhere. 90,000 more than 90,000 people were expelled in August. That was even before what we've seen in the — in the troubling photos under the bridge. We are applying immigration laws. We are applying a — what are — what our border requirements and we are applying title 42, which, again, is a health — a health application, given we're in a global pandemic.

(....)

2:20:25 p.m.

5 minutes and 6 seconds

APRIL RYAN: Jen, I — just bear with me because there's a lot of moving cards on this issue.

PSAKI: Sure.

RYAN: Members of the Congressional Black Caucus were here today meeting with the national security team, Cedric Richmond, Susan Rice.

PSAKI: Yep.

RYAN: Can you give us an update because they were talking about Haiti — immigration issue at the border. Could you give us an update on that and what is expected for tomorrow's meeting with civil rights leaders, be it teleconference or what have you with White House officials?

PSAKI: Just so I — what do you mean by an update exactly? An update on what happened in the meeting?

RYAN: Can you tell us what happened in the meeting? What was given to them? What did they ask for? Because black leaders are making big asks of this crisis moment.

PSAKI: What? Tell me more about what you think they're asking for.

RYAN: Okay, what they're asking for asylum process. What does that look like? Reverend Al Sharpton is going to the border tomorrow to see what that looks like, if people are actually being able to get asylum who's here. Also, you talked about the condemnation of what the patrol agents were doing with the reins or whip whatever with the intent to lash, to hurt people, to keep them away from the border. They want to know is that practice going to be still be in place? Horses and the lashing. Those kind of issues.

PSAKI: So — so, I just wanted to have clarity on exactly what you were asking about. April. That's it. On the second piece, there is next — there is an investigation that is ongoing that the secretary of Homeland Security has made clear he wants to have. He wants the outcome to be done by next week. Once that process is concluded, that will be a deterrent — that will help you determinant in any policy decisions and personnel decisions, both. All important questions. I'm sure that was what was conveyed as well. On the first part, I think what in the answer I gave just a few minutes ago here, uh, I think what — what we are conveying to anyone who are partners, whether they are civil rights leaders, members of the CBC, and others who have important questions here is how outraged we also are by these photos and this video, our commitment to this investigation, but also how our immigration processing system works. And in response to Aamer's question before, what I tried to lay out is — is what happens, right? No matter where you are coming from, If you are a irregularly migrating, we are still applying Title 42 because we're in the middle of a public health crisis. This is what is conveyed to anyone who has questions. Those individuals who are eligible to stay in the United States through — through a range of our programs, that — they would be allowed to stay in the United States through a range of our programs. If they are, uh, there are some who are placed into removal processes, where they also can make the case, whether it's fear or fear of returning back to countries, etcetera. They will go through the process as well. So I'm sure what they are doing is explaining exactly what our immigration processes are and reiterating as well our outrage at the photos and the video.

RYAN: No, but bear with me because this is moving pieces, but with the asylum — there are people, advocates — immigrant immigration advocates, especially for that, uh, advocating for the Haitian migrants right now that they're saying that this administration is breaking U.N. policies and its own policies by moving people out before allowing them to ask for asylum. Is that the

case?

PSAKI: First of all, April, what we are doing — one, Haiti has Temporary Protected Status for people who arrived here before July 29th. That is not a status that most other people who are migrate irregularly migrating from other countries have. As individuals — as we go through this process, as I outlined just a few minutes ago, individuals who cannot be expelled under Title 42 — a range of reasons why they not — may not be able to be those individuals are placed into removal proceedings. That is where the process would take place where they would apply for variety of programs. While they're in that process, they are required to also provide biometric and biographic information and data, so that's how the process works. What is important for people to know and understand is that this is how our immigration and border requirements apply to everyone, whether they're coming from Haiti or any country in South or Central America.

RYAN: You have Africans as well. That you said that people from other places, but you have Africans. Cameroonians, Ugandans, and Senegalese who are coming to the border as well. What happens with them as they are looking for asylum? Do you lump them into the same category with Haitians that are at border, be it Del — Del Rio or wherever it be on the border?

PSAKI: I think the point I'm making April and then we just have to move on to get to —

RYAN: [INAUDIBLE]

PSAKI: — some more people, is that anyone who's coming from anywhere, if there's temporary protected status for their country, as there are for Haitians who arrived before July, that — they can apply through that program. If they're coming from other countries where we don't have that status, then they are expelled, according to Title 42. If they are not — if there can't be expelled, according to Title 42, they're placed in expedited removal, or in alternatives to detention, no matter what country they're coming from.

(...)

2:29:53 p.m.

6 minutes and 22 seconds

ED O'KEEFE: And on the situation on the southern border, the meeting today with members of the CBC, the Vice President talked to the Homeland Security secretary to express concern, how often does this get to the president? Does he get briefed on these situations? Or is he just getting it in the news reports?

PSAKI: Of course, he gets briefed on them, absolutely by his team.

O'KEEFE: Okay. Well, to the point that we were trying to ask him about yesterday, what is his impression of the situation down there? What does he make of how those Border Patrol agents were — seemed to be interacting with these migrants and, you know, where — where is he on dealing with these wide range of immigration issues that continue to challenge this government?

PSAKI: Well, Ed, on the subject of the video footage and the photos, the President was horrified by that, just as we all were. He was, of course received a briefing — an update from his national security team on the efforts by the secretary of Homeland Security to launch an investigation and one that he would like to see concluded rapidly. As it relates to our efforts to implement our immigration laws and border — border requirements, the President is quite hopeful, as he conveyed on his first day in office when he introduced an immigration bill that we can take steps to put in place a more humane, more orderly system, especially after a very broken one over the last several years that has better asylum processing, that has a more — a better system and a range of programs individuals can apply to. The President also believes and knows, as we all do, we're in the middle of a global pandemic and we need to continue to administer Title 42, which expels individuals who come to the border. So, he is horrified by the photos and the footage. He is also committed to implementing and abiding by our laws.

O'KEEFE: And what is your understanding of what transpired in the Oval Office yesterday when we were all in there trying to hear from the President and the prime minister?

PSAKI: Which aspect?

O'KEEFE: Well, the British prime minister in the American Oval Office called on British reporters and then when American reporters tried to call in the American President, we were escorted out. We'll put it that way.

PSAKI: Well, I think, in that circumstance, and I think our relationship with the United Kingdom and with Prime Minister Johnson is so strong and abiding, we will be able to move forward beyond this, but he called on individuals from his press corps without alerting us to that intention in advance. Go ahead.

PETER DOOCY: Thank you, Jen. Just following up on this very basic, but very important question. You're telling us that the DHS chief has the most recent numbers about how many of these Haitians under the bridge have been sent back and how many have been released into the U.S. The DHS chief is telling us that he doesn't know. So who else can we ask?

PSAKI: You can certainly ask the Department of Homeland Security. I am confident —

DOOCY: But he doesn't know.

PSAKI: — Peter. I am confident he wanted to have the most up to date numbers and we will venture to get you those — I promise to you — this afternoon.

DOOCY: Is this an issue of not knowing or is this an issue of a lot more people are being released into the U.S. than are being sent out? That is certainly not the issue.

PSAKI: First, I think it's important to reiterate what I conveyed earlier about what the actual processes is. Individuals are expelled under Title 42. If they can't be expelled under title 42, they are put into a removal process. If they're put into removal process, they're either transported to an

ICE facility or released with a legal document. That legal document includes fingerprints, photos, phone numbers and addresses in the United States and a background check. That's the process that transpires. That's a part of our immigration process, regardless of where you're coming from.

DOOCY: And just because you keep using Title 42 to defend this administration's immigration policies, that is a Trump era regulation. You guys came in saying that the Trump-era immigration policy was very inhumane.

PSAKI: Title 42 is not an immigration policy. It is a —

DOOCY: But —

PSAKI: — it is a health authority because we're in the middle of a pandemic. The Trump administration approach to immigration was inhumane and was immoral. That's why we need to put a new policy in place, and we need Congress to pass that policy.

DOOCY: Unified control — Democratic control of Congress. Many months in office. You have not even tried.

PSAKI: That's not actually true —

DOOCY: Well —

PSAKI: — there's been a — Peter — just to — just factual here.

DOOCY: — okay.

PSAKI: There's been there's been a bill proposed first day in office. Currently, it was proposed as a part of — steps were proposed as part of the reconciliation process, right? The parliamentarian rejected that proposal. They're going back and proposing new options. The President supports that. He would like to see immigration reform passed into law — more humane processes.

DOOCY: Just one more. Has President Biden ever been to the southern border?

PSAKI: In his life?

DOOCY: Yes.

PSAKI: I will have to get — look back in my history books and check the times —

DOOCY: We —

PSAKI: — he's been to the Southern border.

DOOCY: — we have been looking all morning and we cannot find any record of him visiting the

border as President, Vice President, senator, or even as a concerned citizen. Why would that be?

PSAKI: I can check and see when the last time or when he may have been.

DOOCY: Did — did —

PSAKI: But —

DOOCY: — did —

PSAKI: — tell me more about why you're asking.

DOOCY: Because this is a president who makes the point when there are disasters in this country like a wildfire or a hurricane to go and see for himself firsthand what the needs are of the local communities so that he can have an informed POV to make policy. Why doesn't he do that? Why doesn't he go down at Del Rio, Texas and see what's going on?

PSAKI: Well, first of all, Peter, I think the situation at the border is the result of a broken system, and the President certainly relies on his experience. So, whether it was the work he did to address root causes as Vice President, His efforts when he was in the Senate to support comprehensive immigration reform, steps that at a time or being done and work toward in a bipartisan way, something that certainly we think should be the case today, he uses all of his experiences to inform how he governs, how he approaches challenges, and certainly, he looks, again, at the last four years and the separation of children who were ripped from the arms of their parents as the way he does not want to proceed. So all of his experiences and his time in office, whether Vice President or Senate, inform his approach to issues.

(....)

2:37:44 p.m.

4 minutes and 15 seconds

PETER ALEXANDER: So, let me ask you if I can, Jen.

PSAKI: Yeah

ALEXANDER: So, the President — he campaigned and, in his first months in office, he campaigned on this message of unity and competence that he could make Washington work, that he would rebuild, revitalize these alliances. Now Americans are seeing headlines about Democrats divided about what they're gonna do on this agenda. France is furious at the U.S. There's frustration among allies about Afghanistan. What should Americans make of that, given what they've seen in recent weeks?

PSAKI: Well, let me take each of those issues. The President just had a friendly phone call with the president of France, where they agreed to meet in October and continue close consultations

and work together on a range of issues.

ALEXANDER: And where he acknowledged the failure, right, that he should have communicated better and advance them?

PSAKI: Well again, I think in terms of the level of American concerns, acknowledging there can be closer coordination and consultation, I don't think is going to be the height of concern for most of the American people, but anyone who's concerned about our relationship with France can rest assured that with — they had friendly phone call, and we have a path forward.

ALEXANDER: Poll numbers are 43 percent —

PSAKI: On the second —

ALEXANDER: — which is why I ask because —

PSAKI: — on the second —

ALEXANDER: — Americans are expressing dis — concern.

PSAKI: — on the second — on the second piece, I would say, this is a messy sausage-making process. The president today — what Americans should be encouraged by is the President's bringing people of a range of viewpoints on big, important packages that are going to make their lives better, here to the White House to have a discussion about it. He's rolling up his sleeves. He's walking them to the Oval Office. He'll have some Covid-safe snacks. Whatever may happen, people should be encouraged by that, and that's the kind of President he is. He's going to be deeply engaged with getting bills and legislation across the finish line to make their lives better.

ALEXNADER: I guess then just to punctuate that — why do you think, in the most recent poll from Gallup, that 43 percent of Americans now approve his handling of the job, which had been well above 50 percent only a matter of weeks ago? What do you think, in the eyes of Americans, has changed that you guys have not done well enough?

PSAKI: Well, I think the country is going through a lot right now, um, and people are still under the threat of Covid. That is concerning to a lot of people. We see that and polls as well, even as they approve of the President's handling of Covid, uh, that's still something impacting people people's lives. There's a great deal of anxiety about that. We understand that. But our objective is to keep pushing his agenda forward and keep making their lives better. And you know, look at that over the long term. Go ahead.

STEVEN PORTNOY: Jen, I was struck by what you said in response to Ed's question about what happened —

PSAKI: Oh.

PORTNOY: — yesterday in the Oval Office —

PSAKI: Okay.

PORTNOY: — can shed a little bit more light on — on — on this. Did the President feel he was upstaged by the British prime minister yesterday?

PSAKI: I think the President has not spent a moment worrying about it.

PORTNOY: Can I ask you because there are so many issues that we have —

PSAKI: Sure.

PORTNOY: — discussed here that are of interest to the public, everything from the collapse of the police reform negotiations on Capitol Hill today to the pivotal period we're in, nine — eight days before the end of the fiscal year and no deal yet to avoid a government shutdown a week from tomorrow.

PSAKI: Mmhmm.

PORNOY: When can we expect to hear — or when can we expect to have the opportunity to ask the President substantive, pointed questions about these matters in a way that he will elaborate on his views?

PSAKI: Well first, the President knows that he was elected not just to get the pandemic under control and put people back to work, but protect our democracy and stand up for what's right, and be transparent and certainly part of that is engaging with all of you. I would note that he answered questions 135 times leading up to September, three times last week. And he'll keep looking for forums to answer questions from all of you, something that he sees is vitally important to our democracy.

PORTNOY: But in this month of September, most of the occasions we've had have been fleeting. In fact, there are some occasions where he's only taken one question and walked away and most of those occasions referred outside of this building. So when can we expect to have an opportunity to actually ask the President questions in a formal setting?

PSAKI: Again, Steve, I'm not trying to diminish or ask for a formal press conference, which certainly I'm sure we will have another one. But I will convey to you that as it relates to providing information to the public, elevating the importance of the freedom of press to our democracy, that I don't know that the — the format whether it is multiple, shorter Q and A's or a formal press conference is at the top of the list of the American public's concern.

PORTNOY: We — we intend to raise the matters of concern to the public at those press conferences.

PSAKI: As — as you have during 140 times, you've asked the President questions.

(....)

2:56:02 p.m.

1 minute and 49 seconds

EBONY MCMORRIS: I spoke with several organizations that have been helping Haitian migrants and they're saying that — even though you have been saying that the U.S. is going to continue the immigration policy that we have, that is not a fair process and so, a country that talks about racial justice in this country that the policies aren't applied accurately. And so I asked them, what are some things that they were talking about? Specifically, on — on metering. Is the administration going to put less, sometimes concentration on guns, ammunition and border patrols and also put people in place that can help push the process along? Some of them say that their numbers, um, they get their numbers and their bypassed or that they're just skipped over or not chosen at all. That was one of the issues, um, that they had. That was — that's the first question that I had.

PSAKI: Sure. Well, first, I would say, um, one as a part of our effort, we have surged resources and we will continue to surge resources to help address the latter part of your question. On the first part, the reason I went through what I did before about how our process works is to convey that this is how our application of our immigrant laws, border requirements work, no matter where you're coming from. And we had not — we expelled more than 90,000 people in August that was prior to the gathering of Haitians under the bridge and all of the photos and the visuals that are so, heartbreaking. And as it relates to policies, also very good question. As we go through this investigative — investigation to these two border — to these border patrol officials who, obviously, were in this horrific video, that will impact — it could impact policies. It could impact, certainly, personnel. We'll let that process expeditiously conclude and then I'll defer to the Department of Homeland Security on what that impact will be.