

White House press briefing

09/23/21

12:34:33 p.m.

1 minute and 51 seconds

JENNIFER EPSTEIN: President Biden ran on a promise to use government to help people and that he would be able to wield the powers of government effectively. But we've seen on a range of issues, whether it's the pandemic, immigration, Afghanistan, you know, some missteps or places where the government trying to do its best hasn't necessarily been good enough, so what do you say to a voter who might be saying, "I thought Biden was going to know how to run this government, but now we're looking at a potential government shutdown in a week and a default on U. S debt?"

JEN PSAKI: I would say that, um every president is elected to weather storms and navigate crises and they come to every presidency and if you look at all of the things that you, uh, loaded into that question, all issues that are happening, of course currently, the President has been clear that he wanted to end a 20 year war in Afghanistan. He did exactly that. That's something I would say the American public broadly supports. We've certainly acknowledged that there are aspects, of course of how it was handled or how all of the events transpired, that were not what we had planned for. I would say on other issues, we are doing everything we can to prevent a government shutdown and planning to prevent the impact that we've seen in the past that has — has been quite devastating on different components of government. We're right now in the midst of trying to get a historic package that's going to address a lot of issues the American people care about across the finish line and making policy is messy, so we're right in the middle of that. So I would say to anyone who feels that way, we're — we're in the middle of navigating and weathering storms and — and dealing with crises. That's what a president should do. That's what an administration should do. We're not going to shy away from that, and that's what people were elected — elected him to get through.

(...)

12:38:00 p.m.

2 minutes and 47 second

ZOLAN KANNO-YOUNGS: Jen, in the spirit of explaining policy, can you explain how the administration is determining who gets to come in and get processed under Title VIII and get an NTA and who's getting expelled? On the ground reporting suggests that it's based on demographic — not racial demographic — but, like, if you come in as a family, single adult, what have you. How is Border Patrol determining right now who actually gets to stay in and get processed and who gets expelled under Title 42?

PSAKI: Sure, so across the border, including the Del Rio sector, we continue to and fight and forced Title 42. Families and single adults are typically expelled under this CDC directive, when possible. The determination of who can be expelled or not is determined by a number of factors, including the makeup specific family unit. Some people with kids who are younger than a certain

age are not accepted back in certain countries. We know that from our immigration policy writ large, long before the last couple of weeks and agreements with the country of origin or — and as well as agreements with the country of origin or last residence. As you know, and all as all of you have reported, this is not just a case of everyone coming directly from Haiti. People are coming from different countries, somewhere they have lived for periods of time, family units are different, and so each is made on a case-by-case basis. Another determining factors is detention capacity both within ICE and CBP. And so as we have stated those who cannot be expelled or placed into removal proceedings and issued a notice to appear or when capacity issues and processing backlogs arise, they may be processed via an alternate means, which requires them to report to an ICE office to commence the next steps in their immigration proceedings. That's how the process works.

KANNO-YOUNGS: DHS thus far has not given data on specifically in Del Rio of those who have been processed under Title VIII and those who have been processed under Title 42. Is there any breakdown that you can provide on them?

PSAKI: I think they did provide, um, yesterday and I think they're going to be providing regular updates and certainly this is something that is under their purview as you noted that the department has conducted — conducted to repatriation flights yesterday. I'm just gonna give you a little more information than you asked for it, but just so everybody has it. With a total of 318 Haitian nationals on board, these flights will continue. Since Sunday, September 19, 12 repatriation flights have left the United States, 1,401 Haitian nationals have been returned to Haiti, 3,206 Haitian nationals have been moved from the Del Rio camp to CBP custody or to other sectors of the United States border to either be expelled via title — Title 42 if possible or placed into removal proceedings. Sometimes it requires a discussion in order determine the path forward then, therefore there remain less than 5,000 migrants in the Del Rio sector.

(...)

12:43:27 p.m.

4 minutes and 23 seconds

YAMICHE ALCINDOR: Thanks, Jen. I have a couple questions on Haiti. The first is the President has often used his bully pulpit during the most important times in his administration. Why is he not using that bully pulpit to speak out forcefully himself on the treatment of Haitians?

PSAKI: I would say, Yamiche, certainly I've represented to you all his point of view. His point of view is also reflected in the actions that have been taken through the administration, including the investigation, including the change in policy. The secretary of Homeland Security, oversees these efforts, um, and has been quite outspoken and quite visible and what steps we should take moving forward, and he certainly may still speak to it. Obviously there's a lot of events happening here, including the U.N. General Assembly, Covid and others and I wouldn't rule that out.

ALCINDOR: And just to say, respectfully, I have a couple more questions. Everyone else got

questions in.

PSAKI: Sure.

ALCINDOR: Respectfully, I understand that you are the spokesperson for the President. These are images that are traumatizing Haitian Americans that he promised to treat respectfully and with humanity. Why isn't the President telling people himself these images that people say look like slavery are wrong? Me, as president — I, as President, condemn them. How is he not doing that. Why is he not doing that? And — and — what are people supposed to take away from the fact that he's not at the bully pulpit himself talking about these images?

PSAKI: Yamiche, I think people should take away that his actions make clear how horrible and horrific he thinks these images are, including an investigation, including a change of policy, including conveying clearly that this is not acceptable and this is he's not going to stand for this in the Biden-Harris administration. Our actions make that absolutely crystal clear, as have our engagements with a range of voices, a range of concerns, advocates, members of Congress and others who we want to communicate with, not just about our horror but also about what our immigration policy is moving forward.

ALCINDOR: Daniel Foote also said in his letter — he called the U.S. policy inhumane, deeply flawed. Does the President believe anything in this letter that Daniel Foote is saying rings true, has some sort of point that he that he believes it's true?

PSAKI: Which aspect?

ALCINDOR: He called the — the — he called the — the policy toward Haiti inhumane. He said that —

PSAKI: He wasn't specific in his letter. What I noted earlier before —

ALCINDOR: — he was quite specific.

PSAKI: — what I noted early — let me finish, Yamiche. What I noted earlier before is that we have taken very specific actions as it relates to the horrific photos that we would that are not. We're not going to stand for in this administration. I don't know if he was referring to that or something else. That's why I asked, raised the point. His purview —

ALCINDOR: [INAUDIBLE]

PSAKI: — let me finish, Yamiche. His purview was not about migration. He didn't raise his concerns about migration privately. We respect his point of view, respect his ability to bring forward concerns, to raise ideas, to raise proposals. That's certainly something the President welcomes from everybody on his team and something that he had the opportunity to do in a range of meetings. We also have to make decisions here, based on what we feel are going to help promote democracy in Haiti, including, uh, Haitian-led, uh, reforms, Haitian-led steps on the

ground to make changes in the country.

ALCINDOR: I've talked to a number of people who say that he did raise concerns over the deportation of Haitians and the treatment of Haitians. Are you saying then that Daniel Foote is not telling the truth in this letter?

PSAKI: I would point you to the State Department who have conveyed clearly in their statement, what I just said.

ALCINDOR: And one last question, I promise.

PSAKI: Yep.

ALCINDOR: The last question is Daniel Foote, the former special envoy to Haiti, he's raising this idea that the U. S. Should be listening to Haitian civil society, not backing the current prime minister, who was not elected by the people. What's the President's response to that because those civil society members have been telling me and other reporters for months even before the assassination of the president that President Biden was not listening to the people of Haiti about how to move forward their government?

PSAKI: You mean we support a Haitian-led process charting the country's course through the current political situation. We don't back any one political group and we continue to — continue to encourage all political stakeholders to engage in dialogue and find solutions together, and that has been our objective through all of our policy process-making throughout the course of this, in addition to providing a range of assistance, training to, uh to people on the ground.

(...)

12:52:06 p.m.

4 minutes and 9 seconds

PETER DOOCY: I have a question about the numbers that you gave and the math. So, there are 15,000 migrants under the Del Rio bridge Saturday. If you add up the ones that you say were expelled or released it's less than 5,000. Say there's 5,000 that are still left. Where's everybody else?

PSAKI: I'm happy to get you a more fruitful rundown for you, if you — if helpful from the Department of Homeland Security.

DOOCY: Okay and when you talk about how some of these people are being placed in removal proceedings, that does not mean removed, correct?

PSAKI: That means they're in the process of going through removal proceedings so that we can — it can go through the process, our immigration process that's long been in place.

DOOCY: We understand that — basically, most of these people that are going into removal proceedings are being put on either buses from Del Rio to El Paso and Laredo or being flown to Tucson, with no Covid tested — testing unless they show symptoms. How is that helping anybody stop the spread?

PSAKI: Again, we have a protocol and process in place as it relates to Covid in terms of testing and quarantining and also vaccines are provided for a range of migrants by our partner organizations in the region. What is happening now is that, as — as I outlined yesterday is that if individuals cannot be expelled under Title 42, they are placed in removal proceedings, as you referred to. That may, uh — that may require them being placed in ICE detention facilities, or it may require being — them being given a notice to appear where biometric data and other data is taken. In terms of their transportation methods, I'd certainly point to the Department of Homeland Security.

DOOCY: But why should somebody, say, in Laredo, Texas, or El Paso or Tucson, Arizona have to have their chance of catching Covid go up because hundreds of miles away, there's an open border?

PSAKI: Well, there certainly is not an open border. We are continuing to employ our immigration proceedings and process and restrictions at the border, and that includes the implementation of enforcing Title 42, which is an authority — a public health authority. It includes moving people into either a process for expedited removal or removal proceedings. That is our immigration process that we are proceeding underneath.

DOOCY: And just a final follow-up, you say the border is not open, but we're told by our teams on the ground you guys are releasing pretty much all family units, couples where the woman says that she is pregnant or single women who say that they are pregnant and that nobody actually has to take a pregnancy test unless they want to. So, how —

PSAKI: Are you suggesting you don't believe when women say they're pregnant. Is that a big issue, we think, at the border?

DOOCY: I am not in charge of keeping the border secured. You guys are.

PSAKI: You think pregnant women are posing a big threat to the border?

DOOCY: You tell me.

PSAKI; To the border communities?

DOOCY: You tell me.

PSAKI: That's a big issue?

DOOCY: You tell me.

PSAKI: I'm not aware of pregnant women being a big issue of concern to people at the border. What I will note for you, Peter, is that as I said earlier, there is a process if people cannot be expelled under Title 42 for a range of reasons. Some of that is because countries they came from or other countries, including Mexico, may not be accepting families with children under the age of seven. They are placed in removal proceedings. Those removal proceedings require them to either go to a detention facility or require them to go get a notice to appear and — including providing their biometric data and otherwise so that they can be — we can ensure we know where they are, and we can ensure we know when they're going to come back. So, that's what the process is. If there's a big outrage about pregnant women —

DOOCY: No, the issue is not about —

PSAKI: — I'm not tracking it.

DOOCY: The issue is not about pregnant women. The issue is: Is the border open or is the border closed because my understanding is that a lot of this is happening on this side of the border?

PSAKI: I think you know the answer to that question and I just conveyed clearly that we are implementing our border restrictions, including Title 42, including making clear that people who are coming through irregular migration that this is not the time to come and they will be placed in removal proceedings.

(...)

12:58:37 p.m.

2 minutes and 31 seconds

BRYAN LOWRY: And the just a quick question on the border. You mentioned yesterday that the agents involved in videos they've been placed on administrative leave. You've — you've laid out the policy changes. What report — what repercussions, though, once an investigation —

PSAKI: Yeah.

LOWRY: — is completed, could those agents face if it's determined that they have committed wrongdoing? Would they be fired? Would they be transferred? Can you — can you just talk about some of the repercussions that after we get past the leave and the investigation?

PSAKI: Sure. Well, the secretary of Homeland Security made clear he wants that investigation to be completed by next week, and part of that process will be determining what happens on a personal level, also on a policy level, even though he conveyed today one of the policy steps that will be taken, so I'm not going to get ahead of that process. That's why the processes in place and I'm sure once it's completed, we'll have more to say. Go ahead.

RICHARD LATENDRESSE: Thank you, Jen. Help us figure out something about the travel restrictions.

PSAKI: Okay.

LATENDRESSE: Starting — beginning — beginning of November —

PSAKI: Yep

LATENDRESSE: — people from 33 countries, um, for instance, Iran where 15 percent of the population is fully vaccinated or Brazil, 39 percent, India, 15 percent. And then we look at Canada, 71 percent of people are fully vaccinated. And still, the border will remain closed. So obviously, hasn't — it's not a —

PSAKI: People can fly from Canada, right?

LATENDRESSE: Yes, but they can't drive through the border. I mean, it's — it's not easy to drive from Iran or from — from Europe.

PSAKI: That's true. Fair point.

LATENDRESSE: But it's much easier from airplanes

PSAKI: Fair point.

LATENDRESSE: 71 percent of people are fully vaccinated, so it's not a health decision. Because if it was, we would — I mean Canada is within the first 15 countries most — fully vaccinated in the world, so it's not a health decision.

PSAKI: Well, land restrictions, which, as you know, have been renewed through — through I think about October 21st, but we're continuing to evaluate and make policy decisions. I would say that it is a health decision by requiring vaccinations and we wanted to do it in a way that was equitable, so people who are vaccinated no matter which country they're coming from, obviously they need visas and the proper documentation, etcetera, um, they would be able to come to the United States through that. Land restrictions, I don't have an update for you on where that stands beyond it's been extended. We're continuing to consider additional steps. [CLOSES BINDER]

LATENDRESSE: And what kind of an impact —

[REPORTERS SHOUTING]

PSAKI: Alright, thanks, everyone.

EMERALD ROBINSON: Jen, one question on Hunter Biden. In 2019, you tweeted it was Russian disinformation. [REPORTERS HECKLING HER] Now, Politico is confirming they corroborated it. Do you — have you changed your mind?

