

White House press briefing [via FNC's America Reports]

10/08/21

2:45:42 p.m.

1 minute and 6 seconds

AAMER MADHANI: And then finally, um, today, the President became the first U.S. President to recognize Indigenous People's Day. Um, why should the U.S. continue to celebrate Columbus Day? And has there been any talk or discussion of, and as many cities and a few states have shifted from Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day?

JEN PSAKI: Well, today is both Columbus Day, as of now, and this is why you're asking the question, as well as Indigenous People's Day. I'm not aware of ending that — either — ending the prior federal holiday at this point. But I know that recognizing today is Indigenous People's Day is something that the President felt strongly about personally. He's happy to be the first President to celebrate and to make it the — the — the — the history moving forward. Go ahead.

NANCY CORDES: Thanks, Jen. Want to ask about jobs numbers. One of the things that the jobs numbers showed is that there are more jobs available — a historic number of jobs available compared to how many people are actually seeking jobs.

PSAKI: Yeah.

CORDES: Why do you think there are so many people who are still reluctant to re-enter the workforce?

PSAKI: There's a range of factors in our assessment. One is people are still fearful of Covid and what it will be like in workplaces and ensuring their own safety. There are still challenges as relates to childcare, elder care, the cost of those and being able to afford it and also the availability, which is something we've seen a shortage of in many communities. And we have also seen the pandemic, while it has been challenging on many levels, it's also prompted many people to rethink what their careers might look like and what careers they may pursue. So, you're right. There are enormous amount of jobs still available out there in the work force and we believe those are range of factors that are attributed to that.

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2:47:50 p.m.

4 minutes and 44 seconds

PETER DOOCY: First, on the economy. There are a half million containers floating off the California coast with nowhere to go, major issues in the global supply chain right now. The Vice President warned that this could happen in August, so why wasn't more done to prepare?

PSAKI: For the global supply chain issues?

DOOCY: Yeah. She was talking about in August about if you want your Christmas toys for your children, now might be the time to start buying them because the delays could be many, many months.

PSAKI: I ask that because we've been talking about the issues in the global supply chain since January and the President has not only put in place a task force, but we have taken a range of steps to work to address. Now, it's not just about ensuring that we are having different companies speak to each other. We've certainly done that. We've been a forum for hosting different industry leaders to see what we can

— what we can reduce in terms of red tape in the process. One of the biggest issues in the global supply chain is also Covid and the fact that Covid continues to be a threat to supply chains that are happening globally, so we've also worked to be by far and away largest provider of vaccines, know how, manufacturing capacity to the world. So, we've not only been talking about this since January. We've been working to put in place range of steps to help address the challenges in the supply chains.

DOOCY: And as we understand it, it's not just Covid. There are also labor shortages and issues with shipping lines here — overground shipping lines in the U.S. Is the President satisfied task force that is doing a good job?

PSAKI: The — the President recognizes there are several — several layers of the challenge here that contribute to the bottleneck and on ports and transportation bottlenecks specifically, we appointed — the President appointed a White House ports envoy this summer, John Porcari, to work with Secretary Buttigieg and bring stakeholders, labor, private industry together, to help solve the global transportation supply problem. The fact he designated and appointed someone at that level with range of vast experience shows that this is part of the issue we're absolutely focused on. We're also focused, as I noted, on the work of the supply chain task force. Also, the semiconductor shortage, which has been an issue that has impacted range of industries and we're working to attack the challenges in global supply chain at every point they are in the bottleneck.

DOOCY: Thank you. The Democratic candidate for governor in Virginia, Terry McAuliffe, who President Biden stumped for over the summer, now says, “the President is unpopular today unfortunately here in Virginia, so we've got to plow through.” Why do you think the President is unpopular in Virginia?

PSAKI: Well, just if you look at facts in the polling, the President is the most popular figure in Virginia of anyone currently running for President or any former, recent president. So, I'd just note that in terms of the data. But I would say that the President's agenda is incredibly popular. That's probably the reason former Governor McAuliffe is also running on that agenda, whether it is reducing cost for the American people on child care, on elder care, making sure the tax system is more fair, rebuilding our roads, rails, and bridges, those are all components of the President's agenda that he has a huge agreement with former Governor McAuliffe on.

DOOCY: One more topic. Following up on his remarks yesterday, President Biden claims that he cold-called a Pennsylvania hospital to ask the desk-receiving nurse why it was taking so long for a good friend's wife to be seen. What happened next?

PSAKI: Well, the context of why the President told this story, which I think is important and I promise I'll answer your question is that he was expressing that hospitals, frontline workers, nurses, doctors in emergency rooms are still seeing and feeling the impact of number of people who are unvaccinated who are filling beds in emergency rooms, ICUs, and it is preventing people who have other illness, who may be seeking treatment, who may be fearful of heart attack, who — other people who might be going to the emergency room from getting that care that they need. I don't have any other update for privacy of this individual.

DOOCY: But setting aside the privacy of the individual, how often does President Biden call around trying to help his friends cut the line?

PSAKI: That certainly was not his intention. He was not trying to do that. He was checking in on a friend.

DOOCY: And do you know if this particular hospital might have been having staffing problem because they have a vaccine mandate and maybe some folks have had to leave because they didn't want to get vaccinated?

PSAKI: I would love for you to account for me where that is the issue over — more so than number of unvaccinated who are filling emergency rooms, filling ICU beds. That is the problem in hospitals across the country.

(....)

2:53:42 p.m. [via ABC News Live]

1 minute and 13 seconds

PETER ALEXANDER: Jen, what does the President say to — inflation is a big issue right now for Americans from coast to coast —

PSAKI: Yeah.

ALEXANDER: — as we head into the holidays, what does the President say to Americans right now who are worried about those rising costs?

PSAKI: The President would say, we take the commitment, he takes the commitment of lowering costs for the American people very seriously. We, of course, have seen from outside experts, including the Federal Reserve, OECD, and others, that their expectation is that these inflation rises will be transitory, that they will come back down next year and that one of the best things we can do is pass his agenda. That's what outside economists, 17 Nobel Laureates have conveyed, in order to reduce the risk of inflation over the long term. He's also attacking this from everywhere he can. If you take, for example, the cost of meat in the grocery store which we know is of concern to the American people, we believe that the lack of competition is a huge issue here. That the conglomeration of big companies in some industries is a huge factor. He has also taken that on, but we would say to the American people that what we're trying to do is lower your costs, whether it's childcare, whether it's the cost of meat, or whether it's ensuring this is not an issue in years to come.

(....)

2:57:39 p.m.

50 seconds

STEVEN PORTNOY: I'd like to ask a — put a finer point on — on something Aamer asked you about —

PSAKI: Sure.

PORTNOY: about Indigenous People's Day. The President today issued two proclamations —

PSAKI: Yes.

PORTNOY: One for Indigenous People's Day.

PSAKI: Yep.

PORTNOY: Another for Columbus Day. In the Indigenous People's Day proclamation, the President spoke of it as a day to be celebrated. And in the Columbus Day proclamation, the President spoke of the need to reflection on that day and he also seemed to indicate that Congress has requested the President proclaim Columbus Day. So, my question is: Is President Biden grudgingly proclaiming Columbus Day this year?

PSAKI: He's declaring both a holiday. Obviously, Indigenous People's Day is something that he is honored to be the first President to be issuing a proclamation on and celebrating.

PORTNOY: Is it his wish that the federal law be changed that Columbus Day no longer be the designation of the second Monday in October?

PSAKI: I don't have any prediction of that at this point in time.

(....)

2:58:02 p.m. [via CBSN]  
4 minutes and 26 seconds

MARYALICE PARKS: You talked about labor shortages. You talked about supply chain issues. How long does the White House expect those issues to go on?

PSAKI: Supply — global supply chain issues?

PARKS: What's your best guess for how long we'll have to be dealing w/that?

PSAKI: Well look, I think as I noted earlier, in response to Peter's question, there are a couple of issues at play here.

PARKS: I was following up on his question about the length of inflation.

PSAKI: He — he also asked me about the global supply.

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: Two Peters.

[PSAKI]

NANDITA BOSE: Thank you, Jen. Just a quick follow up on inflation. So, of course, looking at Labor Department data, it shows that there is, like, a 0.9 percent decline in how much Americans have earned per hour on average this August versus last year, so year-over-year data when you adjust it for inflation. And so, inflation is clearly eating into people's paychecks and, you know, I understand that you're saying that, you know, you've said this in the past that impact from inflation is transitory, that the President will, you know, when asked how he plans to address this will talk about competition issues, will talk about meat prices, but are there any sort of near-term steps that the White House is now thinking of taking as you look at this data that is starting to flow in? And is he starting to get — is the President starting to get increased concerned, perhaps, that this is now starting to actually eat into people's paychecks?

PSAKI: Well, as you picked that wages piece of data though, I think what's important to note is that the progress that the president talked about this morning is on a range of fronts, which is also important. We're at a faster projection of economic growth than we were at a year ago, far and away. The 4.8%

unemployment rate is down from 6.3% in January. Unemployment claims are down 60% since the president took office. We have seen close to five million jobs created since President Biden took office, and wages actually went up month-to-month from last month to the prior month. That's all important data. I understand we can cherry pick different data pieces from a year ago or two years ago, but what we're seeing in the trend is encouraging and is progress being made. As you well know, inflation is the purview of the Federal Reserve. They make projections, we rely on those projections. Those continue to say that it's transitory and will come down next year. It is also important that we address this over the long term and we address the costs, that is really what we're talking about in terms of the impact on the American people. People may not know, you hear inflation, it's like, "What does that mean?" That means rising costs, right? How do you address those costs? What the president's trying to do with his economic agenda is do exactly that, cut the cost for the American people, childcare, elder care, cut in half the child poverty, make sure that people have some breathing room. That's really what he's focused on doing in terms of how it's impacting people who are sitting at home worried about their economic future.

(....)

3:04:35 p.m. [via C-SPAN]

1 minute and 33 seconds

BOSE: One quick question on gas prices. Reuters has some reporting shows a lot of American consumers we're talking to have started to link the rise in gas prices to the administration's policies that ban fossil fuels. For example, a pause on federal leasing on land and water. And is, my question is: Why keep a lid on production at home with American companies and instead ask OPEC for more production where that production is perhaps not as environmentally regulated. Is there any consideration, perhaps, being given to — to this, you know, keeping in mind the rise in gas prices?

PSAKI: Well, we are in touch. We are not a member of OPEC, as you all know. We are in regular touch with OPEC and we have also raised issues of supply in meetings that members of our national security team and others have had in recent weeks, as I have confirmed from here. We of course want to address the short-term supply issues. One of those issues, as we know, was related to Hurricane Ida and the impacts in the region, which we took steps to address certainly at the time. But our view, to go back to your original question, is also that while we need to take steps to address short-term supply issues, we need to also keep our eye on the long term and the impact of the climate, the crisis that we are in the middle of, and ensure that we are continuing to encourage the production and rise of renewables and the clean energy industry, which is exactly what the president's proposals would do.

(....)

3:06:33 p.m.

1 minute and 25 seconds

JEREMY DIAMOND: And then just kind of going big picture here, today, we saw another jobs that fell well below expectations, the smallest jobs gains in nearly a year, gas prices are at a seven-year high, inflation is up, the President is struggling to get the rest of his Build Back Better agenda passed through Congress. How do you assess where things stand right now with regards to his presidency and do you see a need, at this point, to course correct, perhaps?

PSAKI: We certainly don't see things as darkly as you do. Look, the President's focus is on leading through a challenging time, and that has been his focus from the first day he took office. If you look at the data month over month, as I noted a few minutes ago, he has also created five million jobs under his presidency, we've created an average of 500,000 jobs a month. We are at a faster rate of economic growth, a lower rate of unemployment, than in quite some time. That's progress. That's moving exactly in the right direction. And as it relates to the President's agenda, we're continuing to press forward with members of Congress who have a broad range of views about the path forward, but we're making progress. The President remains confident we're going to get it done. And this is what governing looks like.

DIAMOND: Do you not see today's jobs report as a warning sign in any way that perhaps the economy is not headed in the right direction, that perhaps recovery is not going at the pace that it should be?

PSAKI: I don't believe that is what economists are projecting at this point in time.

(....)

3:15:30 p.m.

1 minute and 19 seconds

TARINI PARTI: Even as vaccination rates are going up and, as the President said, Covid cases are starting to come down, one of the main reasons why people are avoiding the workforce — workforce according to recent data is fear of catching the coronavirus, so what more can the White House do here in order to fix the labor shortage because this seems to be the big issue? Is there more the White House can do?

PSAKI: Well, one of the big steps we took is to announce a mandate for businesses with a hundred or more employees, which obviously the next step would be OSHA regulations on how that would be implemented. A number of companies, as you know, have already put their own mandates or requirements in place. And we've seen a great deal of success across the board on this front, where companies had been able to, United Airlines for example, ensure there was greater certainty. Employees knew they were working with people who were vaccinated. There are fewer people who are, of course, out sick with COVID, fewer people who have even worse impacts than that. So one of the big steps we've taken and announced is to put in place these requirements for businesses. Hopefully that will create more certainty. And there's no question to your point, that fear of COVID, fear of work environments, that people are not sure if they're safe or not is a contributor, as we look at the number of open jobs out there.

(....)

3:17:23 p.m.

1 minute 31 seconds

SEBASTIAN SMITH: Yeah, the President's very tough approval rating these days and I know you don't like to talk about polls and you might say that they don't mean anything, but it's also fair to say that the White House, when there are good polls, you — you publicize them. So, what do you make of these really terrible polls? Are they that he's doing something wrong? Is it just the communication? Or is that he's doing unpopular things that have to be done? Or something else? Thank you.

PSAKI: Sure. Well, look, I would say that this is a really tough time in our country. We are still battling Covid and a lot of people thought we would be through it, including us. And we — because of the rise of the Delta variant, because of the fact that even though it was a vaccine that was approved under Republican administration, even though we have full FDA approval, and even though it's widely available across the country, we still have a quarter of the country who have — less than that, 20 percent of the country, who have decided not to get vaccinated. No question that's having an impact. And, of course, as the President has said, the buck stops with him. That's far and away the biggest issue on the minds of the American people and it is impacting a lot of issues. We've talked a little bit about the supply chain. We talked about people's safety and feeling in the workforce. And so, our focus is yes, not — not exactly on the day-to-day up and down's of the polls. Our focus is on getting the pandemic under control, returning to — to a version of normal so people can have security in going to work and dropping their kids off and knowing people will be safe and that's where we think we should spend our time and energy.

(....)

3:29:48 p.m.

28 seconds

LALIT JHA: And one more on Afghanistan attack. 100 people died today. Do you have something on that?

PSAKI: We — obviously, any loss is a — is a — is an enormous tragedy and our heart goes out to the families who lost loved ones. We, of course, will continue to work in partnership with leaders in the region to work to get partners who stood by our side out of Afghanistan who want to depart. That's something that there's work on as we speak.

(....)

3:30:57 p.m.

14 seconds

BRIAN KAREM: Jen, we saw him cough and then snuffle earlier. Is his health okay? There's wild speculation. Is he alright?

PSAKI: He is doing great.

KAREM: Thank you.

PSAKI: He's got some allergies.

KAREM: Allergies.

UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER: What were you asking about?

KAREM: About his health.

UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER: Did I really have to [AUDIO ENDS]