

White House press briefing [via ABC News Live]

10/22/21

2:26:14 p.m.

5 minutes and 40 seconds

PETER DOOCY: The leader of the union representing FedEx, UPS, and DHL is saying that supply chain problems are going to get worse with labor shortages right before the holidays unless the President postpones the requirement to get vaccinated by December 8. So, what is more important to this President: The vaccine mandates or fixing the supply chain as fast as possible?

JEN PSAKI: Well first, I would say that that is not actually what we've seen at companies that have implemented these vaccine requirements that are not even part of federal law yet.

DOOCY: And, I understand that, but —

PSAKI: Let me just let me just finish. I'm going to let you talk. Don't worry about it. I'm going to talk. Okay? So, American and Southwest CEOs have made clear this will — their — their work — workers will not be — there — there won't be a labor shortage. We've seen United Airlines implement this and as we've also said, as we work to implement these federal employee requirements, the first step is not firings. It's actually education and counseling, so we don't actually anticipate these disruptions. What we've seen for companies who have implemented these requirements is it increased from 20 to 90 percent. Last thing and then I'll let you ask your follow up, is that the other piece of this is that Covid is an enormous labor destructor, not only because it's the number one cause of death in some industries and some professions, including police forces across the country, but because people are out sick, people are worried about coming to work. This is one of the reasons that a lot of these companies have implemented these requirements.

DOOCY: Just so that I understand that position then. This union leader says that the looming December 8 mandate for having fully vaccinated workforces “creates a pretty significant supply chain problems.” You say? No, it does not. Is that right?

PSAKI: We — what I would point to Peter is the evidence we've seen from companies — large companies, private sector companies that have implemented these requirements across the board.

DOOCY: Okay. Following up on something else the President said last night, Why did President Biden say he has been to the border?

PSAKI: Well Peter, uh, as you may have seen, there's been reporting that he did drive through the border when he was on the campaign trail in 2008 and he is certainly familiar with the fact — and it stuck with him with the fact that in El Paso, the border goes right through the center of town, but what the most important thing everyone should know and understand is that the

President has worked on these issues throughout his entire career and as well versed in every aspect of our immigration system, including the border. That includes when he was Vice President, and he went to Mexico and Central America, 10 times to address border issues and talk about what we can do to reduce the number of migrants who were coming to the border. He worked in a bipartisan manner with senators like Ted Kennedy, Harry Reid, John McCain, and others to push for comprehensive immigration reform. He does not need a visit to the border to know what a mess was left by the last administration. That's his view.

DOOCY: Does that count as a visit? He said, "I've been there before." You're saying he drove by for a few minutes. Does that count?

PSAKI: What do you — what is the root cause? Where are people coming from who are coming to the border, Peter?

DOOCY: The President has said that he has been to the border.

PSAKI: I'm asking a question cause I think people should understand the context. DOOCY: No, you're not answering the question.

PSAKI: Where do people — where do people —

DOOCY: I'm asking you if —

PSAKI: — okay, I'll answer it for you. People come from Central America and Mexico to go to the border. The President has been to those countries 10 times to talk about border issues. There is a focus right now on a photo op. The president does not believe a photo op is the same as solutions.

DOOCY: But he said, "I —"

PSAKI: That may be a difference he has with Republicans

DOOCY: — but that's not what he said either. He said, "I guess I should go down." So, does he think that he needs a photo op? Is that what he's saying?

PSAKI: He doesn't —

DOOCY: Is that what you're saying?"

PSAKI: — and that's a fundamental disagreement he has. I would say the former President went to the border at least once, maybe more. You may know the numbers.

DOOCY: That doesn't have anything to do with —

PSAKI: How did that immigration policy result, Peter? That immigration policy resulted in separating kids from their parents, building a border wall that's feckless, and that cost billions of dollars for taxpayers. The President fundamentally disagrees on how —

DOOCY: — has —

PSAKI: — we need to approach —

DOOCY: — has —

PSAKI: — the immigration issue.

DOOCY: — anything changed at the border between 2008 when he drove by and 2021?

PSAKI: Aside from the fact migrants are still coming through the course of Democratic and Republican presidents and the — the immig — the need to reform immigration system is even further long overdue? No, but we need to work with Democrats and Republicans to get that done. I think we're going to have to keep chugging along here. [TO PETER ALEXANDER] Go ahead.

PETER ALEXANDER: Let me ask you if I can about gas prices. The President was asked about that. A lot of Americans have been concerned about the cost to go to the pump these days. He said, "I don't see anything that's going to happen, in the meantime, that's going to significantly reduce gas prices." He said, "I don't have a near term answer." For Americans who are looking for an answer, what is the answer?

PSAKI: Well what is true, and I think the President, as I said earlier, was quite candid last night as the American people should expect from him — expect from him and from any president. And there are limitations to what any president can do as it relates to gas prices. Here's what we have been doing. As we've said for some time, we are engaging broadly with OPEC on our concerns at a range of levels, and that is something we will continue to do. As you know, Jake Sullivan, our National Security Advisor, recently met with leaders in Saudi Arabia and certainly raised this issue. The President has also been concerned, as the administration has been, about what we have seen as rises in supply that had not been accompanied by drops and costs. That's one of the reasons he's asked the FTC to look into price gouging, something that is no doubt impacting or we expect might be impacting the cost of gas around the country. So, we're working and using every single lever he can, but I think what people heard from him is some candor about what impacts we can have.

ALEXANDER: He mused that he could go into the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and that could bring the cost down. He said it would still be above \$3. Will he do that?

PSAKI: I don't have anything to preview on that front at this point.

(...)

2:43:08 p.m.

1 minute 1 second

ZOLAN KANNO-YOUNGS: I have a follow-up on Afghanistan, too.

PSAKI: Sure.

KANNO-YOUNGS: Just — if — given that the embassy is currently closed right now.

PSAKI: Yeah

KANNO-YOUNGS: — in Kabul as well. If — if you're an Afghan and you still are hoping to find relief and come to the U.S., is there any way to actually get parole or refugee status without going to a third country?

PSAKI: Well we have a presence in Doha, one that engages with counterpart — with officials on the ground, but we've also had recent meetings with leaders of the Taliban, as you all know, and has been reported publicly and our State Department is leading this effort. So, yes, absolutely, there is. We have worked to help individuals who have stood by our side and fought by your side over the course of the last two months since we left — we ended our military presence there., We've put out — I know the State Department put out numbers on U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents who have departed from Kabul. We wouldn't be able to do that unless we had the diplomatic presence in Doha and were able to engage with and work with authorities on the ground.

(...)

2:45:58 p.m.

59 seconds

STEVEN NELSON: I'd like to ask first about press access and then coronavirus origins. We, as a press corps, are fairly unanimous in our opposition to the mysterious pre-screening process that's been going on for presidential events in the East Room. And so, I'm hoping that you can demystify for us how White House staff are selecting which journalists get into these events. Is it first come first serve or something else? Also, how long will this pre-screening remain in place?

PSAKI: Well, we have — we are still in the middle of a pandemic. As you know, people are wearing masks in this room. As a reflection of that, we have certain requirements here as well among staff, and I think we don't have this size of numbers that we would all like to have in the East Room, and we hope that we make changes to that soon.

NELSON: But how are the decision made about —

PSAKI: Is that not important that we're going to expand access and make sure more people can get into the East Room.

NELSON: That's almost everyone here, but how are the decisions made about who gets to go in?

PSAKI: There's a limited number that we have based on how many — how many people are attending as guests. I don't have any more information on that. [TO KAREN TRAVERS] Go ahead, Karen.

NELSON: My second question was about —

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

(....)

2:52:37 p.m.

3 minutes and 37 seconds

HILLARY VAUGHN: Quick question. Follow-up from yesterday. Your colleague Karine said, last year, under Trump, during the holidays, families were facing down a dark winter with less economic security than ever before. But this year, families are facing highest gas prices in seven years, 30 percent higher costs to heat their homes, inflation that is almost five higher than it was in December, groceries are more expensive, so I'm wondering what Americans are facing this Thanksgiving and Christmas under President Biden when looking at economic security.

PSAKI: Well, I would say we have cut in half the unemployment rate, created five million jobs, ensure that 180 million Americans have vaccine have been vaccinated since last year. So, yes, are there still — as the economy is turning back on, are there still fundamental issues we're working through? Absolutely. That's why the President's pushing to get his agenda done. But I think there's no question that, a year ago, when we were locked in our homes, when one only one percent of people were vaccinated, when 10 percent of people in this country were unemployed, that was an incredibly dark time and dark period in our country.

VAUGHN: [INAUDIBLE]

PSAKI [TO JON DECKER]: Go ahead.

JON DECKER: Thanks a lot, Jen. I want to ask you about public opinion polls, which I'm sure you recognize. The President's public opinion polls have declined sharply over the last few months, and I want to get a sense from you in speaking to your White House colleagues why you think that is. I know you mentioned Covid before.

PSAKI: Mmhmm.

DECKER: But is it also because of the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan? Is it the stalled agenda for President Biden? What do you suppose is the reason that we've seen this slide in the President's approval ratings?

PSAKI: Well, a lot of people in this room work for organizations that have done polls and there's a lot of underlying data in them, and sometimes, it differs, so I would just go back to what our view is — is that, um we're still going through a hard time in this country, and people are tired of fighting a pandemic. They're tired of the impact on their lives. Some of them are sick and tired of people who won't get vaccinated who they feel are impacting their ability to live life in a normal way. Some people are still fearful for loved ones, and we all thought that it would be over at this point in time. Obviously, the delta variant and other factors have led to this to be extended. So there's no question that the fatigue with Covid is impacting people around the country. The President understands that. He's empathetic to that, and he knows that the best thing he can do is help get Covid under control, continue to work to address some fundamental issues in our economy, put people back to work, and that's what he's focused on every day.

DECKER: But how do you turn things around, Jen? What — what's the ways? Is it just getting victories? Is it — is it passing the bipartisan infrastructure bill. What's the way that you think President Biden can turn around these sliding approval ratings?

PSAKI: He can keep his — keep his head focused on doing the job — doing the job as president, leading the American people, make — putting in place fundamental changes that will make people's lives better. [TO SHELBY TALCOTT] Go ahead, Shelby.

SHELBY TALCOTT: Thanks. The DHS secretary said, I think it's just about a month ago now, that the investigation into the horseback Border Patrol agents would be completed in days, not weeks. Has the White House received any update on this investigation? Was there any conclusion on whether these Border Patrol agents were whipping migrants?

PSAKI: It's really under the Homeland Security Department. I can check with them

— TALCOTT: Can —

PSAKI: — and see what the status is. I know what he said at the time and I will see if there's any particular update on that.

TALCOTT: — and so, is the White House in active communication with the DHS on this? Like, do we know why this hasn't been —

PSAKI: Yes, but they're overseeing the investigation so well, I would point to them on any update on the status.