

White House press briefing [via CBSN]
11/12/21
1:40 p.m. Eastern

ZEKE MILLER: Has — when does he plan to undergo his annual physical?

JEN PSAKI: He will be doing his physical soon, as I've noted before. As soon as he does that, we will provide that information transparently to all of you.

(...)

1:45 p.m. Eastern

ANDREA SHALAL: So, there were reports that President Xi could ask the president to attend the Olympics in February. What kind of signal would it send if he were to attend to the Olympics given the concerns raised about China's actions towards Taiwan. It's, you know, increased aggression and flights there in that region, is that — is that — would it be a problematic situation for the President?

PSAKI: Well, I understand why, but we're getting a few steps of where we are. I will also note, for all of your planning purposes and don't want to ruin your Sundays, but there will be a preview call of the summit on Sunday that all of you will be invited to, so in terms of the Olympics or any invitation, I don't have anything for you on that at this point.

SHALAL: Okay, just a quick one on the economy, on inflation, so one in four Americans according to a new survey have experienced some kind of loss of income as a result of higher prices. The President has expressed concern about this. I know that you are looking into different fronts —

[White House podium screen puts up slide]

PSAKI: On cue.

SHALAL: — to — to address this, but, I mean, how urgent is it and, you know, is there any sort of specific concern that this is — is going to affect not just political outcomes, but just the overall economy?

(...)

1:50 p.m. Eastern

KAITLAN COLLINS: And does he bring up the Covid-19 origins with President Xi, given he has said that China has been blocking investigators from getting access to information that's critical to that?

PSAKI: That is a remaining concern and there will be a broad range of topics that will be discussed. And, the President's certainly not going to hold back on areas where he has concern.

(....)

1:51 p.m. Eastern

JUSTIN SINK: You just said that the real risk on inflation is inaction, but so far this week, we haven't seen any action from the administration on gas prices. The President, in Europe, said, you know, we would see action sooner rather than later. On Wednesday, that it was a top priority, so is it going to tap the SPR, ease biofuel blending requirements, ban crude exports? And if the answer is you still haven't kind of decided on any of this, is the message to Americans heading into Thanksgiving where everybody will be driving to see their family and friends, that you think the current prices are acceptable?

PSAKI: We certainly don't think that. The message Americans is that we're not just closely and directly monitoring the situation, which, of course, been doing, but looking at every tool in our arsenal. You mentioned some of them. While I don't have anything to preview today, the president is focused on this, as is the economic team. And I would note, again, that we have taken a range of actions. We've communicated with the FTC to crack down on illegal pricing, are engaging with countries and entities abroad like OPEC on increasing supply. And we're looking at a range of options we have at our disposal, but I don't have anything here to preview for you.

(...)

1:57 p.m. Eastern

PETER ALEXANDER: As it relates to the White House, has the White House determined whether is it safe to hold holiday parties and will the White House do so this year?

PSAKI: You know, it's going to look a little bit different, Peter, and I don't have anything outlined at this point in time, but certainly, we expect to celebrate the holiday season, and we'll have more details I expect in the coming weeks on that.

ALEXANDER: For clarity, when you say it's going to look different, that means there will be holiday parties and they will look different, but you're not going to detail how they look different?

PSAKI: We'll have more to convey to all of you about what it looks like, but we do not have those details at this point in time.

ALEXANDER: One last question if I can, quickly. Across the country, we've seen this new phenomenon lately chanted at sporting events and on signs, the phrase is "Let's go Brandon," a sort of code for a profane slogan attacking President Biden. What does the President make of that?

PSAKI: I don't think he spends much time focused on it or thinking about it.

ALEXANDER: The President said when he came into office on Inauguration Day — he said he was going to help get rid of the uncivil war in this country. So, I guess through that lens right now, does the President think that there are things he could do differently or how does he react to the stuff he sees when it is one of his primary promises or desires to help bring Americans together?

PSAKI: Well, it takes two to engage more of a civil engagement discourse in this country, and the President's going to continue to operate, as you said, from the promise he made early on, which is that he wants to govern for all Americans. He's going to deliver for all Americans, as evidenced by the infrastructure bill that he's going to sign on Monday that's going to help expand wideband to everyone, no matter your political party, no matter whether you voted for him or not, that's going to replace lead pipes to make sure kids have clean drinking water, whether you're a Republican or Democrat, not political at all, that's how he will govern and, certainly, we're hopeful we'll have partners move towards civil discourse in the future.

ALEXANDER: Thank you.

PSAKI: Go ahead, Jacqui.

JACQUI HEINRICH: Thanks, Jen. Welcome back

PSAKI: Thank you.

HEINRICH: Democrats are calling for the President to release barrels from the strategic petroleum reserve to bring down costs and that would be sort of an immediate action to mitigate these high-priced gases as opposed to waiting for the BIF money to be implemented to address a lot of the supply chain issues or the Build Back Better to be passed. Why has the president not yet done that? Does he plan to do that soon?

(...)

2:00 p.m. Eastern

HEINRICH: Can I get your response to this report from the Tax Policy Center that, under the Build Back Better plan, most millionaires would get a tax cut — at two-thirds of people making a million dollars would get a cut on average of \$16,800, mostly because of SALT. Separately, it finds that 20-30% of middle-class households would pay more in taxes — granted it's a small amount — between \$100 and \$230, depending on income level, but how does the White House frame this reconciliation plan as a tax cut to the middle class paid for by the rich when this analysis is showing the opposite?

(...)

2:02 p.m. Eastern

HEINRICH: But doesn't that not take effect — that cut you're referencing until 2023, so I guess what I'm getting at is next year, 2022, expectation is that middle-class families will be paying — granted, a little bit more, but still a little bit more if this passes. And then, also, you're still dealing with issues like gas prices being high. You guys have talked about the actions you're going to take or are looking at, but these are long-term solutions, mostly that you're talking about, so what will be done in the immediate future to address the next year?

(...)

2:05 p.m. Eastern

BRIAN BENNETT: I had a question about the meeting between Xi Jinping and President Biden on Monday. The U.S. Holocaust Museum this week came out with a report that China's actions towards the minority population of Uighurs in the country may amount to genocide, its use of forced slave labor, and forced sterilizations and other actions. Is that something the President is going to bring up with Xi Jinping and is that something that the President will hold up as something that Xi Jinping needs to take action on to reverse before the U.S. gets closer in its relationship with China?

PSAKI: Well, I would say one of the purposes of the leader to leader engagement is to also discuss areas where you have strong concern and disagreement. And, you know, it's not just the President's words. We've also acted. We are engaged, first of all, with members of Congress on technical — advising — providing technical assistance on legislation that's currently working its way through Congress. But, in addition to that, we've also taken concrete measures on our own including visa restrictions, global Magnitsky and financial sanctions, export controls, import restrictions, the release of a business advisory, and rallying the G-7 to commit to take action to ensure all global supply chains are free from the use of support labor. So, this is an area where we have been — the President has been vocal. He has taken action. Again, in terms of topics that will be discussed, there will be areas we are together and he will not hold back, as he never has, on areas of concern but I will leave it to the call on Sunday to give you more details on that.

BENNETT: Does the President believe that his personal relationship with Xi Jinping, going back to having a meal together in a noodle shop in Beijing in 2011 and their — the time they spent together, will that have an impact on his ability to engage with Xi Jinping and get China to take actions that it's been reluctant to take so far?

PSAKI: I would say that — he — you heard him talk about this before, Brian and he feels a history of the relationship, having spent time with him allows him to be quite candid as he has been in the past and we will continue to be as we look ahead to next week.

(...)

2:10 p.m. Eastern

WEIJIA JIANG: So, that report that my colleague was just citing —

PSAKI: Yeah.

JIANG: — was not directly just about people quitting because of Covid mandate.

PSAKI: Oh, okay.

JIANG: Yeah.

PSAKI: That's helpful.

JIANG: But the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that, in September alone, 4.4 million people —

PSAKI: Yeah.

JIANG: — quit their jobs after 4.3 million in August. So, how are those figures accounted for when the President talks about the record 5.6 million jobs created in the first nine months when he talks about job growth, economic growth, etc?

(...)

2:11 p.m. Eastern

JIANG: In two months alone, some nine million people quit their jobs and I don't know that they're all going to new jobs. So, is there any concern about this trend of the great resignation? Is there anything to do to reverse it?

PSAKI: Well, we know we've seen labor shortages in some industries. In some industries, that's because they need to have a more competitive package to offer to workers. It's a workers market right now. We know that. People are looking for more dependable benefits, they're looking for wages that are higher, and that's something that's incumbent on a lot of industries to meet the moment on. But I can certainly dig more into this data and see if there's more to provide to you.

JIANG: And then just a question on the infrastructure bill because, in Baltimore, the President talked about how it will ease congestion at ports.

PSAKI: Yeah.

JIANG: But those projects are going to take time. So, when do you think that funding will actually have a direct impact on the bottlenecks we're seeing now and, in the meantime, is there anything more the administration can do ahead of the holiday season?

(...)

2:14 p.m. Eastern

MARYALICE PARKS: Following up on Weijia's first question about workforce imbalances, you said that it's a worker's market and some industries need to create more competitive packages, that it's a good thing people have more choices. Is that your way of saying that the White House doesn't view this as a problem at all?

(...)

2:16 p.m. Eastern

PARKS: And then following up on the questions about gas prices, again. Just kind of taking a step back, there are some Republicans who have taken this moment where they've seen gas prices to criticize sort of the administration big picture, canceling the Keystone Pipeline, halting leases for — new drilling leases on federal land, saying that, sort of the administration's policies writ large have contributed to the rise in gas prices. What's your response to that?

PSAKI: Our response is that, one, we have not canceled existing — there are existing leases that are continuing. A, just to be clear I know you know that.

PARKS: Not new leases.

PSAKI: Not new leases.

PARKS: You're right.

PSAKI: But, just to be clear, and I know there has been a criticism. So, that's why I said that, not an inaccurate one. Look, our view is that the rise in gas prices over the long term makes an even stronger case for doubling down our investment and our focus on clean energy options so that we are not relying on the fluctuations and OPEC and their willingness to put more supply and meet the demands in the market. That's our view. That's our view. We feel that — but we also feel there's a number of actors here including price gouging that we have concerns and we've seen out there. We feel we've seen — we've asked the FTC to look into, the need for OPEC to lease more that are the larger issues here and that's why we have been focused on those options.

[REPORTERS SHOUTING] Let me just keep going around. Go ahead, go ahead.

AYESHA RASCOE: Thanks. Following up on this and I kind of want to go at this inflation question a little bit —

PSAKI: Sure.

RASCOE: — differently. I mean, it seems like the White House is making a lot of promises on inflation but there are some concerns that the White House ora resident does not have a lot of power over inflation and even when we talk about energy prices, in particular, like a gasoline, you're talking about the FTC doing investigations, that's a common tactic. It usually doesn't turn

up very much. Tapping the SPR? That's a short-term thing. It's not a long-term thing. So, I guess my question is for the White House, you're making these promises, how do you deliver, especially on things like gasoline, food prices — yes, you know, you can, you know, deal with childcare costs, but these kinds of bread and butter issues. How do you actually deliver on that?

(...)

2:22 p.m. Eastern

SIMON ATEBA: The President's birthday on Saturday, is there anything he be [sic] doing? He is 79-yrs-old. How does he keep fit? Does he exercise? We see him cycling. Does he do anything else?

PSAKI: He certainly does enjoy a good ride on his bike and does keep fit, eats healthy, except for the occasional ice cream. Who among us doesn't love ice cream? And again, as someone asked earlier, you know, the President will be receiving a physical at some point soon. And we will release those details to you. Yes and we will release those details to you as soon as that happens.

(...)

2:23 p.m. Eastern

PHILIP WEGMANN: I wanted to ask you a quick follow-up. You mentioned a second ago that the White House was offering technical assistance to members of Congress when it comes to human rights legislation. What provisions are you talking about specifically?

PSAKI: Well, I was — I was answering a question — I don't remember who asked it — that — oh, it was Brian — right — who asked about our concern about human rights in Xinjiang, something we have taken a lot of steps on. As you know and I think you have asked about, there's legislation. It's pretty common for the white house to work with Congress on either technical assistance or other assistance. We want to make sure any bill is implementable.

WEGMANN: A provision that would have banned science funding for entities that were implicated in the Uighur genocide was stripped out of the reconciliation package last week. Is that something that the President was disappointed to see that?

PSAKI: I — I don't have any other reaction. Obviously, we're working closely with Congress. We share the concern about the human rights abuses. We are going to continue to take action as the President's record shows. Okay, thanks everyone.

BRIAN KAREM: On the vaccine, do you have anything to say to celebrities who have promoted — like Aaron Rodgers — who have promoted alternatives — dubious alternatives — to vaccines?

PSAKI: You know how we feel about misinformation. We're against it.