

White House press briefing

11/23/21

3:25:20 p.m.

1 minute and 5 seconds

APRIL RYAN: You've said your effort is primarily targeting working and low-income families, what do you say to those families feeling the pinch right now at the pump? Prices are very high.

ENERGY SECRETARY JENNIFER GRANHOLM: Yeah. No – no doubt. This is why the President has been really thoughtful about this. I mean, this is – you know, we have looked at every angle of what the tools are to him. He feels so strongly that all Americans are feeling the pinch as a result of gasoline at the pumps and short-term, we have to do everything in our power and that's why we have the strategic petroleum reserve. But he also feels strongly that, long-term, the strategy really is to go clean. I mean, right now, the price, for example, of solar and wind is cheaper than in most places of the country because it's free fuel than – than more traditional sources of energy. So, he wants to bridge that time and – and double down on investing in clean while creating jobs, but do what we can within our power to lower the cost today.

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3:29:21 p.m.

1 minute and 35 seconds

RACHEL SCOTT: So, bottom line, how soon will Americans see prices at the pump drop and how long do you expect that to last?

GRANHOLM: Yeah, I'm not going to make a prediction about how much or how long. I'm -- what I'm saying is this is the largest amount that we have ever done and it won't happen tomorrow, but it'll happen over the next few weeks that people will hopefully start to see the difference.

SCOTT: Before the end of the year? Before the Christmas holiday?

GRANHOLM: I think that people will start to see some tick down over the next bit. But, again, we want to make sure that the gas prices at the pump are not being held artificially high for some reason. So, as I mentioned, it is unusual that the price of gas at the pump doesn't drop at the same rate as the price of unfinished gas. And they -- people will be paying \$.30 less per gallon if that had done that, so this is why the President sending the letter to the FTC is important.

SCOTT: Some [INAUDIBLE] have called it a short-term fix? Simply putting a Band-Aid on top of a larger issue. Should Americans be bracing for prices to go down just for a couple days or couple weeks and then go right back up again?

GRANHOLM: Yeah, it's hard to predict what gasoline is going to do because it is a global market. But we are doing what we can because this is a bridge to a longer-term issue. It's a short-term pinch. We want to make sure we do what we can to sort of even out the market while – while these prices come down. And, in the long term, of course, the long-term solution is to build clean and that's what we're doing.

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3:37:44 p.m.

1 minute and 27 seconds

JEFF ZELENY: The Reserve was created for emergency purposes. Does the President believe that this is an emergency of an energy sake or more of a political crisis?

PSAKI: Well, we're emerging from a once in a century pandemic and the supply of oil has not kept up with demand as the global economy has emerged from the pandemic, so it is certainly something that we're not just expressing in the United States in terms of the supply issues, but many countries around the world – globally -- are experiencing it and the price of gas is also up around the world. I would note that this is not technically an emergency release but tailored to market circumstances. As you know, the Department of Energy has bought authority to do exchanges, which, as you know, 18 million barrels of the sale is, in fact, congressionally mandated and the other set of barrels is through an exchange. So, we don't even classify it as an emergency. It's under the authority of the department of energy.

ZELENY: But is this being done primary to try and stave off a political crisis?

PSAKI: This is being done in order to take – use every tool at the President's disposal to lower the price of gas for the American people. And it follows a step he took last week where he sent a letter to the FTC asking them to look into what we see as a concerning trend where oil – there's an increase in supply of oil and not a decrease in the price of gas, something that he's asked the FTC to look into because that's not aligned with what our expectation or the American people's expectation should be.

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3:42:36 p.m.

3 minutes and 12 seconds

PETER DOOCY: A couple days ago, President Biden was in Michigan and he was thanking Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib for the passport into her district. Now she is supporting legislation that would release all federal prisoners within two years. Would the President ever support that?

PSAKI: Well, the President did enjoy visiting Michigan and visiting Congresswoman Tlaib's district, but let me be absolutely clear: The President does not support abolishing prisons. He does not support defunding the police. He thinks measures like that will make us less safe and he would not support legislation that includes it. What he does support is effective and accountable community policing and a fairer justice system and he supports investment in public health, education, the environment, housing, committee-based programs. He believes there are steps that we know are going to reduce crimes and make our neighborhoods safer, but that is not one of them, in his view.

DOOCY: Another topic. Would the President ever apologize to the acquitted Kenosha shooter Kyle Rittenhouse for suggesting online and on TV that he is a white supremacist?

PSAKI: Well, let's be clear what we're talking about here. This is about a campaign video release last year that used President Trump's own words during a debate as he refused to condemn white supremacists and militia groups. And President Trump, as we know from history and as a many of you covered – didn't just refuse to condemn militia groups on the debate stage. He actively encouraged them throughout his presidency. So, you know, what we've seen all the tragic consequences of that, when people think it is okay to take the law into their own hands instead of allowing law enforcement to do its

job. And the President believes in condemning hatred, division, and violence. That's exactly what was done in that video.

DOOCY: But if – you're saying that it was just a campaign video. It wasn't. The President also gave an interview where he said this – Rittenhouse was part of a militia coming out of Illinois. Have you ever heard this President – referring to Trump -- say one negative thing about white supremacists? These are all things -- none of this was proven in the trial and Kyle Rittenhouse is saying that the President had actual malice in defaming his character. Is that what happened here?

PSAKI: The – the President spoke to the verdict last week. He has, obviously, condemned the hatred and division and violence we've seen around the country by groups like the Proud Boys and groups that individual has posed in photos with. But, beyond that, I'll leave it to his comments around the verdict.

DOOCY: And then just one more topic. What message does it send to the middle-class Americans President Biden says that he's trying to help who are struggling this week to cover the cost of the most expensive Thanksgiving ever that the President is going to take a few days off at a billionaire's compound in Nantucket?

PSAKI: Well, first I would say – I don't know if you've cooked a turkey before, but a 20-pound turkey is a pretty big turkey. I think we can all agree. They're about one dollar more. So, not to minimize that, any increase in prices is something the President is concerned about, as is evidenced by his announcement today and as his efforts to push forward on additional relief for the American people. But I just want to be clear that there are an abundance of turkeys available. They're about one dollar more for a 20-pound bird, which is a huge bird if you're feeding a very big family. And that's something that, again, we've been working to make sure people have more money in their pockets to address it as the economy is turning back on.

DOOCY: But the President said today that he was sent here to look out for these working and middle-class families who are strained right now. What should they read into him leaving now at this time of great personal financial hardship for so many to go to Nantucket for the week?

PSAKI: Well, first, I would say, Peter, that I hope you're spending time with your family, I'm spending time with my family. And I hope everyone is spending time with their families. This is a time to put politics aside, spend time with your loved ones, and talk about what you're grateful for. I will also tell you from spending time working for this President and a past President that you are a President the matter where you are. He will conduct his work from wherever he is on any vacation, on any time he is in Delaware, at Camp David, or wherever he may be spending time with his loved ones. He has secure phone capabilities. He has staff traveling with him and I think the American people can be assured that he will continue to press to lower their costs and ensure they have more breathing room.

(...)

3:58:55 p.m.

1 minute and 39 seconds

FRANCESCA CHAMBERS: President Biden, you, other members of the administration have repeatedly told Americans that wages are up, unemployment is down, the shelves are being stocked, and that the

administration is working to address rising prices, including, in a speech -- said -- the President gave today. So, why does the White House think that its messaging isn't convincing many Americans that the economy is getting better?

PSAKI: Well, I've spoken about this a little bit in the past, but, one, we're still in the middle of fighting a global pandemic and people are sick and tired of that. We are too and it impacts how people are living their lives, their fear about sending their kids out the door, about going to work. It's impacting -- the economy is just turning back on again and we're seeing the impacts of that, whether it relates to the ability -- the unsticking the bottle necks in the supply chain or it relates to the rise in gas prices. The important thing for the American people to know and understand is the President has a plan to address these issues, whether it's the action he took today to take one of the steps, in his view, we can take to lower the price of gas or the steps he's take -- anti-competition -- the steps he's taken to address meat conglomerates who are making record profits and rising [sic] the price of meat out there or whether it's the build back better agenda that will help lower costs for working people. And I think what you're going to see us do more and more is draw the contrast. We have a plan to address these issues, lower prices for American people and we're not seeing a lot of ideas on the other side so that's what you'll preview for when we come back from Thanksgiving.