

White House press briefing
12/02/21
11:15:28 a.m.
1 minute and 13 seconds

JEREMY DIAMOND: Just big picture here, President Biden has repeatedly promised to shut down this virus. He has talked about wanting to end the pandemic. Is that still possible? Does he still believe that is possible? Or are we starting to now, especially with the rise of this variant, to perhaps accepting that we need to live with covid for years to come?

JEN PSAKI: Well, first, I would say there's a lot we don't know about the variant yet that and that is challenging and frustrating. I understand for Americans, for all of you, and we want to give the space and time for the public health officials who are working 24/7 to assess and provide guidance on it. There are a range of options, as Dr. Anthony Fauci has spoken to and our medical experts have spoken to. It could be less deadly. It could be more. We don't know, so I want to say that we — we are — that is the next step in this process. The president — and you will hear him speak to this today, continues to believe that if we build on the bold steps that we've taken to date, if we continue to make the vaccines more accessible, to increase testing, increase masking, we can return to a version of normal in this country. That's what everybody wants and everybody would like to see.

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11:22:57 a.m.
3 minutes and 58 seconds

DOOCY: A handful of key aides have announced either that they are leaving the Vice President's office or are reportedly going to be leaving the Vice President's office soon. Is the Vice President not satisfied with the staffing that she has had so far or do people just not want to work for her anymore?

PSAKI: Well, Peter, I would say that, working on a presidential campaign — maybe covering one, I would say, to be fair, and working in the first year of a White House is exciting and rewarding but it's also grueling and exhausting. It's all of those things at once. And many of the team members you're referencing — and I would note there has been one — an announcement about Symone Sanders departing, but there hasn't been official announcements about others, so I would leave it to them and the Vice President's team to make additional announcements but in my experience and if you look at past precedent, it's natural for staffers who've thrown their heart and soul into a job to be ready to move on to a new challenge after a few years and that is applicable to many of these individuals. It's also an opportunity, as it is in any White House, to bring in new faces, new voices, and new perspectives, and I expect you'll hear more from the Vice President's office on that in due time.

DOOCY: So, this is not a case of bad headlines about the Vice President and a decision being made to shake up the staff to fix an image issue?

PSAKI: You know, Peter, I think I spoke to it and I would note that — and I'll just speak to Symone since I knew her before and she's been officially announced and I knew her even before she joined the Biden campaign, sitting on many panels with her on CNN — on CNN sets and knowing someone like her, she joined the campaign early on, as many of you know. She's been a part of this for two-and-a-half or three years. She's somebody — and anybody who's spent time with her knows that she is whip smart and she is — she is — has charisma coming out of her eyeballs and she's going to do plenty of interesting things in the world in the future. She'll always be a part of this Biden-Harris family and it's only natural after a couple of years to be ready for something new and that's what happens in my experiences — in my experience in the past and the White Houses often.

DOOCY: Does the Vice President think that staff are to blame for her not making any kind of meaningful progress on the big things in portfolio, like passing voting rights or addressing the root causes of migration?

PSAKI: I know the Vice President is grateful to all of the staff who have served her. She also understands the excitement and the grueling nature of working on a campaign and working in a White House and, again, as I noted earlier, it's also an opportunity to bring in new faces and perspectives, which is, overall, a very positive thing.

DOOCY: Okay. And then big cities are dealing with smash-and-grab robberies, a record number of police officers have been shot and killed this year. What is President Biden going to do about all this lawlessness?

PSAKI: Well, Peter, I would say that, one, the President proposed additional funding in his budget over the funding that had been proposed by the prior President to increase and support local — local police departments, make sure we keep cops on the beat, and we insure that local communities are working in partnership to crack down on — on crime and any dangers they see in their community. So, that's one of the steps. We've also worked with a range of communities across the country on strike forces, as you know, something we've talked about in the past. We're continuing to implement that from the Department of Justice, but the President absolutely believes that community police forces can have an important, instrumental effect in helping keep communities safe.

DOOCY: And does the President still think that crime is up because of the pandemic?

PSAKI: I think many people have conveyed that, and also one of the reasons that crime — one of root reasons crime we've — root causes of crime in communities is guns and gun violence. And we've seen that statistically around the country.

DOOCY: But to your point — so, when a huge group of criminals organizes themselves and they want to go loot a store, a CVS, a Nordstrom, a Home Depot until the shelves are clean, you think that's because of the pandemic?

PSAKI: I think a root cause in a lot of communities is the pandemic, yes.

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11:29:47 a.m.

49 seconds

TARINI PARTI: Given what you said about the first year of the White House being so grueling, are you expecting or preparing for turnover here at the White House among senior ranks?

PSAKI: You know, I think I noted that because I've worked here before. And in my experience, especially in the first year or first two years, if you think about it, it's not just being in a White House for a year. A lot of people have also — did the campaign prior to this and that means two years, three years. I'm looking at some of the people that covered the campaign. So, again, I'm sympathetic to you all as well. I don't have anything to anticipate or preview for you. Just to note that, in my experience, is a normal course of events that people are ready to do something new. They're ready to spend time with their families. They're ready to sleep more, and that is — that is to be expected in the first year, 18 months, two years of any — of any White House.

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11:34:54 a.m.

2 minutes and 6 seconds

TAMARA KEITH: And one question on Covid and I know that you kind of get variations on this, a lot, but —

PSAKI: Yes.

KEITH: — with the testing, public health people are saying, well, why not just ship tests, ship these rapid tests to every American household.

PSAKI: Yeah.

KEITH: Or why not require vaccines or a test to fly domestically? Why not go further in the direction of — of, you know, public health and mandates given the risk and the fact that we're headed into winter?

PSAKI: Sure. Well, one, I would say that nothing is off the table. So, including domestic travel and — but we do have some protections — some strong protections in place already, including requirements of mask wearing, which was extended, doubling of fines if people are not in compliance. We think — now we look at this is — of course, we base our decisions on the advice of the health and medical experts, what's going to be most effective and what is — we can implement, what is most implementable. So, we look at a range of factors as we make decisions about what steps we can put in place. So, again, nothing is off the table, but we — the announcement we made today is building on steps we've taken to-date. Significant steps we've taken to-date to continue to protect more people, put in place additional precautions that will save

more lives.

KEITH: Can you tease out what most implementable means? Are you worried about legal challenges? Are you worried about, you know, political blowback?

PSAKI: Well, I think we've taken another steps [sic] — a number of steps that are not intended to be controversial or divisive, but still may be perceived that way, but our most important factor is what is going to be most effective and that's what we really base our decisions on. But, as you have seen the past several months, we build on — we build on our steps, right? We've continued to add and make vaccines and boosters more available and accessible. Today is a good example of that. We continue to put in place additional travel restrictions as we announced — are announcing today, as well. So, we will continue to evaluate and assess on a daily basis. If there are additional steps our health and medical team is recommending, we will consider those as well.

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11:46:06 a.m.

42 seconds

BRYAN LOWRY: I just want to follow up on the issue of domestic air travel —

PSAKI: Sure.

LOWRY: — that came up a few moments ago. You said there is nothing off the table. Does that mean there are active discussions about a vaccine requirement or some other change when it comes to domestic air travel? Can you clarify how active that conversation is, whether we can see something before — before Christmas?

PSAKI: don't have anything to predict on that front. There are active discussions about a range of things that we will never see the light of day every single day. And our Covid team is going to continue to bring ideas forward, continue to make recommendations. We'll see what they come up with and what's discussed and the President takes their advice and counsel very seriously, but I would say there's discussions about a range of options everyday.

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11:48:03 a.m.

56 seconds

KAYLA TAUSCHE: So, on these new Covid guidelines, only the new transportation mask mandate — or the extension had a date attached to it. That is extended to March 18. The rest of the measures are in place for the duration of the public health emergency. How long does the administration anticipate the public health emergency portion of this will last?

PSAKI: Well, I can't give an end date on that because we're still in the middle of fighting the pandemic. I will note that there are a couple of pieces we have dates on in terms of when they will start. I'm not suggesting that was your question, but — but — that is the determination that will be made by the CDC, by our public health experts, not a political determination. So, we will wait for their guidance on that.

TAUSCHE: But 212 restrictions, though, were in place for 20 months, nearly two years. Is it your anticipation that we could see some of these measures in place for that long, or is it more a matter of weeks in this case?

PSAKI: I can't give you an assessment of that because we're going to base it on the public health guidelines, what steps we need to take to protect the American people.

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11:52:09 p.m.

1 minute and 34 seconds

EDWARD LAWRENCE: So, the administration, in that plan, is releasing a safe school checklist and it says to give schools a clear game plan on how to get as many staff and students vaccinated as possible. So, is the President pushing for vaccine mandates for kids, or would they support — or would he support a vaccine mandate for school boards to impose that?

[PSAKI]

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11:55:49 a.m.

31 seconds

PATSY WIDAKUSWARA: One on the Beijing Olympics, if you don't mind. If you have any more updates on whether the President has made his decision on the Beijing Olympics and whether the decision-making process includes considerations on human and women's rights in light of the treatment of the Chinese tennis player Peng Shuai after she disclosed she was sexually mistreated by a Chinese official.

PSAKI: I don't have an update today. I will say, broadly speaking, as I've conveyed before, that, of course any decision takes into account a range of issues, including human rights, our concerns about them, issues we've been quite outspoken on.