

White House press briefing [via ABC News Live]

03/03/22

1:21:55 p.m.

2 minutes and 32 seconds

COLLEEN LONG: So, I wanted to ask about oil prices.

JEN PSAKI: Sure.

LONG: They're at about 111 or so dollars a barrel. Pelosi has come out also in support of banning Russian oil, so why carve out, you know, especially when oil — with the argument that Putin is going to benefit — not benefit from oil, you know what I'm trying to say.

PSAKI: Yes. I think I do know what you're trying to say. Well, our objective and the President's objective has been to maximize impact on President Putin and Russia while minimizing impact to us and our allies and partners. I know you've heard me say this before but we don't have a strategic interest in reducing the global supply of energy and that would raise prices at the gas pump for the American people — around the world because it would reduce the supply available. And it's simple as less supply raises prices and that is certainly a big factor for the President in this — at this moment. It could also — also has the potential to pad the pockets of President Putin, which is exactly what we are not trying to do. So, as the President has said, we carved out payments for energy, trade, and transport from our financial sector — sanctions with that in mind. I would also note that we are also taking — we have been taking steps to degrade Russia's status as a leading energy supplier over time. That includes, of course, shutting down Nord Stream 2 or preventing Nord Stream 2 from operating. That's why we're surging LNG to Europe to help accelerate its diversification from Russian gas and I think you've also seen European leaders talk about the need to reduce their reliance and to diversify and we are continuing to look at other options we could take right now to cut U.S. consumption of Russian energy. I mean, for us, if you look at publicly available data, it's only about ten percent of our imports, but again, reducing the supply out there would have an impact on prices and on prices at the gas pump.

LONG: I guess my question is, if oil is already so expensive, isn't he already benefiting from a very — from the — from — an already costly, you know, price of oil? How does he stand to benefit if we continue to allow that?

PSAKI: If it reduces further, it makes it more expensive, so I think we look at it through that prism.

(....)

1:25:41 p.m.

40 seconds

MARY BRUCE: And President Zelenskyy has called on Russia to be stripped of its ability to vote in the U.N. Security Council, does the U.S. want Russia to be removed as a permanent

member?

PSAKI: We don't see that happening. We certainly understand — you know, they have a permanent seat on the Security Council, of course. That is why it is so particularly concerning that Russia, given its particular responsibility for upholding the U.N. charter, is actively subverting the charter and abusing its position. The fact is, they have a permanent — we don't — we're really focused on isolating them really and isolating Russia and holding them accountable and as you know, that's what we and our allies are focused on doing.

(...)

1:29:21 p.m.

27 seconds

KAITLAN COLLINS: Is the administration moving closer to banning Russian oil imports?

PSAKI: I don't have any assessment of that for you. I just wanted to note the difference between them or that there are several different components of options.

COLLINS: I guess the question is, what's the calculus in waiting if it's ultimately the step the United States is going to take?

PSAKI: Well, there's a policy process that is undergone for any decision that's made. Sometimes, those move rapidly and, often, there are a range of factors that are discussed as those decisions are made.

(...)

1:33:42 p.m.

2 minutes and 12 seconds

JACQUI HEINRICH: On gas, you just said that, you know, less supply raises prices. It's not in our strategic interest to reduce the supply.

PSAKI; Yeah.

HEIRNICH: We also, you know, the President as recently as yesterday talked about increasing domestic manufacturing to bring down prices on inflated items like goods, so why not apply the same logic to energy and increase domestic production here?

PSAKI: Well, there are 9,000 approved oil leases that the oil companies are not tapping into currently, so I would ask them that question.

HEIRNICH: Is there nothing that the administration could do to get those providers back to pre-pandemic levels?

PSAKI: You think the oil companies don't have enough money to drill on the places that have been pre-approved?

HEINRICH: Just asking.

PSAKI: I would — I would point that question to them and we can talk about it more tomorrow when you learn more.

HEIRNICH: Do you think that opening the Keystone pipeline and having more energy-friendly policies might do that?

PSAKI: The Keystone pipeline has never been operational. It would take years for that to even have any impact. I know a number of members of congress have suggested that, but that is a proposed solution that has no relationship or would have no impact on what the problem is we all agree is an issue.

HEINRICH: So, during that — those years where it would, you know, take to bring down prices, you're saying, just continue to buy Russian oil?

PSAKI: Well, again, Jacqui, I think you're familiar with a number of steps taken, a historic release from strategic petroleum reserve —

HEINRICH: But that didn't bring down prices —

PSAKI: — well, we can —

HEINRICH: — last time or this time.

PSAKI: — well, let me finish. What we can do over time and what this is all a reminder of in the President's view is our need to reduce our reliance on oil. The Europeans need to do that. We need to do that. If we do more to invest in clean energy, more to invest in other sources of energy, that's exactly what we can do to prevent this from happening in the future. We welcome any Republicans from joining us in that effort.

HEINRICH: As long as —

PSAKI [TO JORDAN FABIAN]: Go ahead.

HEINRICH: — as long as we're buying Russian oil, though, aren't we financing the war?

PSAKI: Well, Jacqui, again, it's only about ten percent of what we're importing. I've not made any announcement about any decision on that front but our objective here and our focus is to making sure any step we take maximizes impact on President Putin and minimizes it on the American people and anyone who's calling for an end to the carveout should be clear that that would rise — raise prices.

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1:39:08 p.m.

1 minute and 29 seconds

KRISTEN WELKER: Let me try one more on the potential oil ban.

PSAKI: Yeah.

WELKER: It feels like because you now have Republicans and Democrats calling on the administration to ban oil from Russia. As you've laid out, there are a range of different options under consideration. What would the administration need to see in order to make a final decision?

PSAKI: Need to see how? Tell me more.

WELKER: Happening on the ground. What — what would need to happen in order to prompt a final decision on an oil ban?

PSAKI: I don't know that we look at it exactly through that prism. Obviously, we have not held back in taking significant, historic steps that are crippling the Russian economy right now. I think there's no question about that and the President has led the world in doing exactly that, but what factors we're looking at here is the impact on the gas pump for Americans, and reduction of supply in the marketplace, reduction of global supply would have an impact on raising prices, so that's the prism we look at it through.

WELKER: There is — there are some interim steps that could be taken instead of a full outright ban that would potentially mitigate the costs on gas prices. Is — is there a sense that this is at a tipping point and that some of those interim options —

PSAKI: We are continuing to look at other options we could take right now to cut U.S. consumption of Russian energy, but in the context of maintaining a steady global supply of energy, so that's what we're trying to balance.

(...)

1:45:36 p.m.

38 seconds

AYESHA RASCOE: I know people have asked you a lot about, you know, the price of oil, but I want to come at in a little bit of a different way. The fact is the price of oil is high, is very unlikely to go down anytime soon and more than likely, will go up. What is the — that White House looking at? I know that there was the strategic release of oil, but are there other things that the white house is looking at to help consumers at the pump? Maybe to, you know, direct subsidies, maybe more biofuels, maybe easing the Jones Act. Like, what is the plan for

Americans who are going to have to be living with these high oil prices?

(....)

1:47:07 p.m.

24 seconds

RASCOE: What does the White House say to American consumers? Like, should American consumers right now be thinking, “okay, I’m going to have to pay a lot more at the pump going forward?” Should they be taking that into consideration when they’re buying cars or, you know, should they try to buy more fuel-efficient cars or saving their money? Like, what should they be doing practically at this moment considering the price of gas is going to affect them?