

White House press briefing [via CBSN]

03/17/22

2:58:58 p.m.

1 minute and 34 seconds

ZEKE MILLER: First, on COVID, the President has had a couple of close calls over the last couple days — the Second Gentleman and the Irish Prime Minister last night. Has he been tested today? And did he test — is there a result of that test you can read out?

JEN PSAKI: He was not tested today. He was tested last Sunday. Neither of these individuals were considered close contacts. The doctors at the CDC determine what “close contacts” look like and that — a close contact is someone who was less than six feet away from an infective — infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period. That is how they define it and, of course, our doctors look closely at that as well and neither of these two individuals was — did he spend that amount of time with. And so, his weekly testing cadence remains as it has been; it has not changed.

MILLER: And I know there are a number of particular precautions that exist, you know, to protect the President and keep him safe and healthy. The testing cadence here is not like most people — or it has —

PSAKI: That’s true.

MILLER: — but this broader issue, though, of, you know, the President coming into — maybe not CDC “close contact,” but having close exposure to some people, even for a brief amount of time, it sort of — you know — you know, getting into that bubble around the President. You know, this is something that people around the country are dealing with on a daily basis where they don’t have the same sort of precautions that are here. So, you know, if the President hypothetically were to come down with COVID, is that something — or any — or the First Lady or anyone else in this administration — is that a failure at this point? Or is this just a new fact of life that everyone has to sort of, you know, make — you know, make peace with at this point?

(...)

3:11:43 p.m.

2 minutes and 25 seconds

JACQUI HEINRICH: The President called Putin a “war criminal” yesterday. The Secretary of State just said that that was also his view today. So, given all of that, why are we still having Putin’s Russia broker the Iran nuclear deal talks?

PSAKI: Well, I would say that it’s not in our interest for Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon and Russia is a member of the P5+1. So, that is the pursuit of a deal that would be in our national security interests.

HEINRICH: So, basically we're just stuck working with him?

PSAKI: Well, again, I think how the President and any of the P5+1 partners or Europeans or others look at this is: If we can achieve a diplomatic solution where we prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon — despite the efforts by former President Trump to pull us out of the deal, allowing Iran to move far — move closer to acquiring a nuclear weapon, that would be good for our national security and good for global security around the world.

HEINRICH: The Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act says that Congress is required to review any new agreement. This is obviously not the same agreement that Obama worked on in 2015. Does President Biden believe that this treaty needs the advice and consent of Congress? And if so, does he believe he has the votes to lawfully affirm it?

PSAKI: Well, if — if and when we have a deal — and we don't have a deal at this point; otherwise, you would all know — we would carefully consider the facts and circumstances of any U.S. return to the JCPOA to determine the legal implications, including those under the Iran Nuclear Review Act of 2015. And we're committed to ensuring the requirements are satisfied. So, certainly, we would abide by that. But we have been keeping members very updated. We've been briefing them regularly. Brett McGurk conducted a call just a couple days ago and we've been briefing them with a range of national security officials.

HEINRICH: And then, has the IGRC — or — done any — or rather, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the IRGC — has it done anything to be eligible to be removed from the terror blacklist?

PSAKI: Well, I think you're asking me this because it's been out there as a possible discussion, but there's no deal at this point. So, if and when there's a deal, we'll have a discussion about what's in the deal.

HEINRICH: Outside of the deal, though, does it take action to be removed from that terror blacklist? Do you have to do something to get off of it?

PSAKI: You have to make a decision, yes.

(...)

3:19:30 p.m.
32 seconds

TARINI PARTI: Also, just to follow up on the President being around some people who've —

PSAKI: Sure.

PARTI: — now tested positive, why not just test the President every day at this point? The administration has done a lot in terms of, you know, saying certain actions are being done out of

an abundance of caution. So, in this case, even if it doesn't quite follow CDC guidelines or goes above and beyond, why not just do that because he's the President?

PSAKI: Because we're guided by his medical doctor, and he has kept him at the same cadence and if that changes, then we will change how often he's tested.

PARTI: And is the cadence once a week? Or —

PSAKI: Yeah.

PARTI: Okay.

(...)

3:30:42 p.m.
22 seconds

KATHRYN WATSON: And then, on the COVID cases that — for example, with the Second Gentleman testing positive this week, why did the Vice President appear today — I understand she was masked — but in an event with other people around, when CDC guidance is currently that people who have been exposed should stay home and not interact with others for five days?

(...)

3:21:19 p.m.
42 seconds

JENNIFER EPSTEIN: Just to kind of follow up on that bit on COVID: Is one of the reasons why the administration is not going — being extra cautious with the President and the Vice President, even though there is a national security issue around this, in part to kind of lead by example for Americans to say, "You can get back to living your normal lives, and you shouldn't be concerned that even if you get exposed to somebody just briefly, you shouldn't freak out about that. You don't need to test a bunch of times?" Is that basically the dynamic that you're trying to say —

PSAKI: Look — oh, go ahead.

EPSTEIN: — even though if the President — 79 years old — the President of the United States were to get COVID, it might be more serious than, you know, somebody in their twenties?

PSAKI: Well, we don't know that.

EPSTEIN: Right. We don't, but [INAUDIBLE].

(...)

3:24:44 p.m.
58 seconds

SCOTT DETROW: St. Patrick's Day.

PSAKI: Yes.

DETROW: Given the fact that the President very much likes to share his pride of the Iri — his Irish heritage but also the fact that —

PSAKI: He does.

DETROW: — so many ceremonial —

PSAKI: "More Irish than Irish." Is that what he said? "Irish Americans consider themselves more Irish." I think that's true. I will confirm that. Go ahead.

DETROW: — but like that, and also the fact that so many of the ceremonial parts of the job —

PSAKI: Yeah.

DETROW: — have been canceled over the past year, I'm wondering: Did he express particular frustration or sadness that the Oval meeting had to become yet another Zoom meeting today?

PSAKI: He was disappointed. He was looking forward to having the meeting today and having meetings over Zoom, I think as we've all experienced, are not the same. Having spent a lot of time with the President, he is an extrovert, extrovert, extrovert and loves that engagement with people in person and he was really looking forward to the meeting today. There will be more in the future. We certainly understand we are still facing the pandemic. And there are more events that he has been able to participate in today to celebrate St. Patrick's Day. So, fortunately, many of them still moved forward.

(...)

3:26:49 p.m.
35 seconds

MATT VISER: I also wanted to try one more time on —

PSAKI: Go ahead.

VISER: — on the President and COVID.

PSAKI: Okay.

VISER: A lot of the questions are focused on testing, which you're pretty clear that the testing cadence is not changing. As he looks particularly to a trip next week that is quite important — to Brussels and maybe elsewhere in Europe — is there anything else that he's doing, I mean, as he's having these — what the CDC does not consider a close contact but are certainly people that he's around and aware of — is anything about his behavior changing? Are there any other precautions that you guys are taking that are not testing-related?

(...)

3:33:59 p.m.
34 seconds

BRYAN LOWRY: A follow-up on your point about Senator Hawley. Obviously, he's consistently voted against the President's nominees. I don't think he was a swing vote you guys were counting on. However, will his criticism, will the explosiveness of this line of attack — do you worry that it will affect your ability to win over other Republican votes? Is there any concern about this campaign upping the pressure on, say, Senators Collins and Murkowski, who may be more amenable to voting for Jackson?

PSAKI: Well, I'm not sure that someone who refused to tell people whether or not he would vote for Roy Moore is an effective and credible messenger on this.

(...)

3:35:08 p.m.
31 seconds

PATSY WIDAKUSWARA: As the administration continues to condemn and take action against Russia's invasion on Ukraine, are there any plans to revisit, review, revoke the Trump administration's recognition of Israel's annexation on the Golan Heights and Morocco's annexation of Western Sahara?

PSAKI: I don't have any updates on that front. I'd point to the State Department.

WIDAKUSWARA: But at this point, can you — can you describe just the administration's position on the difference between Russia's invasion on Ukraine and Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights?

PSAKI: I'd point you to the State Department.

(...)

3:36:22 p.m.
34 seconds

JONATHAN LEMIRE: The White House Chief of Staff Ron Klain, in a tweet today, celebrated the idea that —

PSAKI: Uh-oh. [LAUGHTER]

LEMIRE: — you know who he is — said — and that he tweets. You said — he said — celebrated the idea that there is a low number of Americans in ICUs today because of COVID. But he also wrote, there's a "great risk of a new wave." And there are — certainly, we're seeing cases surge right now in China and in Europe and one of the truisms of this pandemic: If it's in Europe, it ends up here a few weeks later.

PSAKI: Sure.

LEMIRE: What precautions and preparations is the administration taking federally and encouraging states to take ahead of a possible new COVID wave?

(....)

3:38:29 p.m.
16 seconds

LEMIRE: Just a very short, quick follow-up. Is there concern, though, that this variant, which is more — it seems very transmissible — is coming at a moment when a lot of Americans are seeing waning protection from their boosters just cause the timing of the shots, as well as the fact that mask guidelines and other restrict — regulations have been lifted across the country?

(...)

3:43:40 p.m.
23 seconds

EDWARD LAWRENCE: [D]omestically, on another subject, the Congressional Progressive Caucus Recommendations for Executive Action are out, and they're asking for a decision to declare a climate emergency and ban all U.S. exports of oil. Is that something that President is thinking about doing [INAUDIBLE]?

PSAKI: There are a range of really good ideas out there. The President is looking at all of them. But I don't have anything to predict for you at this point in time.

(....)

3:44:30 p.m.
1 minute and 15 seconds

PHILIP WEGMANN: If the U.S. plans to still engage with Russia on the Iran nuclear deal and

perhaps some of these other climate initiatives, what does President Biden expect Russia to bring to the table? I know what the goal is — that we don't want Iran to have a nuclear weapon — but how does the President think that Putin will be helpful after the President rightfully turns him into a pariah on the global stage?

PSAKI: As it relates to the Iran nuclear deal? I think that our view on this is that it's not, obviously, in our interest and it's not in Russia's interests either for Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon and so, while these negotiations — I mean, the people are back in their capitals at this point in time, as you know, but they're, for all intensive purposes, ongoing. There have been roles and implementation that Russia has had in the past, but I think what we recognize is that it's not in their interest either and we will consider — continue pursuing the diplomatic path forward.

WEGMANN: And then one more. *The New York Times* has authenticated e-mails that appear to have come from a laptop abandoned by Hunter Biden in Delaware. The President previously said that the *New York Post* story about this was “a bunch of garbage” and that it was “a Russian plant.” Does he stand by that assessment?

PSAKI: I'd point you to the Department of Justice and also to Hunter Biden's representatives. He doesn't work in the government.

(...)

3:48:31 p.m.
16 seconds

ROB CRILLY: And if I may, you were asked about Hunter Biden's laptop. You also, in October 2020, dismissed it as “Russian disinformation.” Do you stand by that assessment?

PSAKI: Again, I'd point to the Department of Justice and Hunter Biden's representatives. I'm a spokesperson for the United States. He doesn't work for the United States.