

White House press briefing [via CBSN]

03/30/22

3:17:38 p.m.

1 minute and 38 seconds

MIKE MEMOLI: And, Kate, on the subject of the President's remarks in Poland about President Putin: Obviously, yesterday, he tried to suggest that there was a distinction between his personal views of what he thought was a moral outrage versus an official policy position on the part of the United States. But you know full well something that candidate Joe Biden said virtually every day on the campaign trail, which is that the words of a president matter; that they can, as he often put it, lead a country into war. Is he not living up to the standard that he set himself during the campaign?

KATE BEDINGFIELD: Absolutely not. I think the words of the President here were incredibly powerful. He spoke personally about the moral outrage that he felt, which is shared by people all across the world. It does not mean he's articulating a change in policy. It does not mean he's laying out a change in U.S. policy. He met with refugees as — again, many of you were on that trip and saw — and saw firsthand some of the pain that Vladimir Putin has inflicted on — on people who are fleeing their homes and who are seeing their country war-torn. So, this was an incredibly personal, powerful statement of moral outrage. It was not an articulation of a new U.S. policy and I think both of those things can be and are true.

MEMOLI: And you've spent some time with the President — last question, Kate — is he frustrated or does he regret that those words at the very end of the speech overshadowed a larger message, which obviously he put a lot of thought into in the days leading up to it?

BEDINGFIELD: Absolutely not. He spoke from the heart. He, as he always does — as you know very well from having covered him for a long time, as many of you do, and as the American people know — he speaks from the heart. He says what he feels and, no, he absolutely does not regret that in any way

(...)

3:32:10 p.m.

5 minutes and 16 seconds

JACQUI HEINRICH: There are reports that the administration is going to require COVID vaccines for undocumented migrants at the southwest border just as Title 42 is expected to end and right after the fourth shot got FDA approval. You just highlighted the impacts of not having enough COVID funding when it comes to paying for shots for the uninsured and sending shipments of treatments to states. So, why would the administration give out free vaccines to undocumented migrants but not to, for instance, uninsured Americans?

BEDINGFIELD: Well, to be clear, we have the supply that we need in this moment to vaccinate Americans here in this country. I don't want to conflate those two things because I think that's

not a — that's not an accurate representation of what I said. We have — we have the supply that we need to vaccinate Americans. What we are asking for is funding to prepare for future eventualities and to ensure that we have what we need as we move forward. Now, on your question about the border, this is nothing new. The effort to vaccinate migrants in our care and custody has been ongoing for months. ICE has been providing vaccines to migrants since the summer of 2021 and we're always assessing the situation and addressing protocols based on changing CDC guidance. You know, but in order to ensure the safety of border communities and the workforce and the migrants themselves, DHS is now requiring age-appropriate vaccinations for non-citizens who are taken into Border Patrol custody. But again, this is consistent with overall CDC guidance for those entering the country, be it by air or land and we know that vaccinating people is the best way to protect from the virus and to protect against the spread of the virus.

HEINRICH: Can you clarify, though: *The New York Times* story framed it as something that was about to get underway in certain sectors of the southwest border. Is this some — this requirement for a vaccine. Is — is that accurate? Is that something that is going to take place? Because — and the reason I ask is you're talking about future supply and this is a future effort. How are those two things not sort of in conflict?

BEDINGFIELD: Well, as I said, it's — it is actually nothing new. I mean, we have been vaccinating migrants in our care and custody for many, many months. So ICE, as I said, has been providing vaccines to migrants since the summer of 2021. So this is not anything new. As we know, that this is — again, the best way to protect people from the virus and to prevent the spread of the virus is to ensure that they're vaccinated.

HEINRICH: Can you confirm Title 42 is about to end then?

BEDINGFIELD: I have no announcement that I can make on Title — Title 42.

HEINRICH: And then, on Ukraine: Yesterday, did the President accidentally reveal a previously unknown effort for the U.S. to be training Ukrainian forces in Poland during his answer in the press conference?

BEDINGFIELD: No. The troops that he met with in Poland routinely interact with Ukrainians. That is something that's known. Many of you were, again, on the trip with us. That is something that's known. That is in no way revealing compromised information. That being said, there's nothing further that I have to say on that beyond what the President said yesterday.

ED O'KEEFE: Just to follow up, I know you said just now you don't have any news on Title 42, which expires on Friday — or at least the current use of it. When you were — when we were in Europe, the President announced that he's admitting 100,000 Ukrainian asylum seekers. They are exempt from Title 42. Why?

BEDINGFIELD: So, obviously, we are looking at an extreme crisis in Ukraine. I think it's — it is — it is easy to look at the incredible volume of displacement and the duress that people are

under in Ukraine and understand that we need to make — we need to make efforts to ensure that we are moving to get them to places that are safe. What I can say more broadly about our efforts to — to bring 100,000 Ukrainian refugees into the country is that, you know, we anticipate that most of these refugees will want to stay closer to home, will want to stay in Europe. But we are making every — we are putting forward this effort to ensure that we're able to — to accommodate 100,000. Obviously, on the specifics of that, I would have to refer you to the State Department on the specific workings. But it is important — as you heard the President say when we were overseas, it's important for the United States to do its part and for those countries bordering Ukraine to not be the only ones to shoulder the burden. You heard him talk about that while we were on the ground in Warsaw.

O'KEEFE: Understood. So, the policy decision has been made that the war in Ukraine and the displacement of those people is more urgent to the United States than the displacement of millions of people due to earthquakes, hurricanes, and political strife in this hemisphere?

BEDINGFIELD: I think that's a little bit putting words in my mouth. My point was only that we're —

O'KEEFE: That's how it would be interpreted though —

BEDINGFIELD: — that that's —

O'KEEFE: — by immigration advocates and others on this side of the world.

BEDINGFIELD: That's a little bit putting words in my mouth. All I'm saying is that we have put forward a process to allow a hundred thou — to bring 100,000 Ukrainian refugees into the country, given the incredible duress and the crisis that they're facing in their homeland.

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3:41:32 p.m.

4 minutes and 36 seconds

SIMON ATEBA: Can I ask you — can I ask you a follow-up question on refugees?

BEDINGFIELD: Sure.

ATEBA: So, many people have been advocating that what you are doing for Ukrainians right now is what you should also do for Ethiopia. As you know, tens of thousands of Ethiopians have been killed, millions have been displaced. Why not do the same thing that you do to Europeans to Africans — to Ethiopians and then to Cameroonians? And then one second question. I want to talk about Will Smith and Chris Rock. You know, it's the biggest story right now. You saw the level of violence that was un — was unleashed on Chris Rock. Is that something that the White House condones, the type — that type of violence? Do you condemn it? And do you do anything to support comedians who have been attacked by other artists? Thank you.

BEDINGFIELD: So I don't have any official comment from the White House on the altercation. I know the President was not able to watch the Oscars — didn't see it. So I don't have anything — I don't have any official comment from him or from the White House on this. Yeah.

PHILIP WEGMANN: Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER: Kate, are you going to answer the Ethiopian question?

BEDINGFIELD: Yeah. Yeah.

ATEBA: The question on Ethiopia — the Ethiopia question —

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER: Exactly.

BEDINGFIELD: I don't have — I'm sorry, I don't have any — you're right. I don't have any additional detail on any plans there. Obviously, you know, as we are focused on working to bring — to welcome 100,000 Ukrainian refugees here, that does not — you know, that does not eliminate work that's being done in other areas. I don't have any specifics to announce from this podium at this time on any plans there.

ATEBA: But do you condemn the violence at the Oscars? Is it — is that something that you condemn, or you can't —

BEDINGFIELD: I don't — I don't have a White House comment on that. Philip, yes.

WEGMANN: Thank you. *The Washington Post* reports that Anita Dunn was here at the White House on a special one-week assignment last month. I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit more about, you know, what was so important for her to be brought in on a one-week assignment like that? And then do any other staffers or former staffers in Biden world enjoy that sort of drop-in opportunity? And finally, is it true that Dunn avoided any ethics rules that would restrict former White House officials from lobbying one year after leaving their post?

BEDINGFIELD: So what I would say to that is Anita is an incredibly trusted advisor who has known the President for a long time and she did recently come back to the White House temporarily to bring her expertise and add capacity at a key time for the White House. She came to fill in for a staffer who needed to be out for personal reasons. She did this as an SGE, as you know — a Special Government Employee — which is a temporary, short-term assignment and classification for employees who come to work for the White House in a temporary — in a temporary manner. It's a designation that past administrations have used for the same purpose and Anita is not the only person to have served in this administration as an SGE. Anita and other SGEs receive rigorous counseling on their ethics obligations as an SGE, including avoiding any potential conflicts of interest and Anita, of course, has always held herself to the highest standards, consistent with this administration's commitment to ethics, abiding by all federal ethics laws and policies applicable to SGEs.

WEGMANN: And then one more. Forty-five minutes after the President's remarks wrapped in Warsaw on Saturday, that was when a statement landed in everyone's inboxes from an unnamed White House official saying that, no, the administration did not, in fact, change its policy with regards to Russia. I'm wondering if you can tell us anything about what happened in the interim — in that 45 minutes. Did the President himself conclude that perhaps there needed to be some further clarification? Or did White House advisors come to him and say, "Perhaps you should revisit your recent remarks?" Why was that statement issued?

BEDINGFIELD: Well, I can tell you from working for President Biden for seven years that only President Biden decides what President Biden is going to say. So, the statement was simply a confirmation of what the President — of what you then heard from the President himself yesterday — that that statement did not represent a policy change — official policy change on behalf the United States.

BRIAN KAREM: But who prompted it? Who prompted it, Kate? I mean, did that come from the President? That particular statement that he's referencing, did that come from him to you all? Or did you all go to him and say, "we have to put this out?"

BEDINGFIELD: I'm not going to get into any further back-and-forth, except to say that I have worked for him for a long time and only he determines what he's going to say.