

White House press briefing [via CBSN]

04/06/22

3:33:38 p.m.

3 minutes and 12 seconds

PETER DOOCY: First, on immigration: Our team in Texas is saying that you guys are starting to give smartphones to border crossers, hoping that they'll use the phones to check in or to be tracked. I — which part of that is supposed to deter people from crossing illegally into the states?

JEN PSAKI: Well, I think you of all people — since you've asked me a range of questions on this topic over time — would recognize that we need to take steps to ensure that we know where individuals are and we can track — and we can check in with them. The alternatives to detention programs — is what we utilize — has three unique forms of technology to monitor participants enrolled in the program: Telephonic, which is one of them, which uses a participant's voice to create a biometric voice print during the enrollment process and when the participant has a check-in call, their voice is compared to the voice print. SmartLink, which is another option, enables participant monitoring via smartphone or tablet using facial-matching technology to establish identity. And Global Positioning System monitoring is of a participant's location and movement history, using satellite technology through an ankle bracelet. This is all part of our effort, as individuals come into the United States and individuals who are entering — who will proceed to immigration proceedings, to monitor and track where they are.

DOOCY: With the telephonic, though, any concern by folks around here that these migrants will take the phones and just toss them? And then —

PSAKI: Do you have a record of people throwing phones away?

DOOCY: — I'm just asking if that's a concern.

PSAKI: Our concern is ensuring that individuals who irregularly migrate to the United States proceed through our process of, you know, of course, being monitored, but also participating in — in hearings to determine whether or not they will be able to stay. I would note that nearly 80 percent of non-citizens released at the border from DHS custody under prosecut- — prosecutorial discretion have either received a notice to appear or are still within their window to report. So, actually, the vast, vast majority of people are appearing. In part, we have these monitors and monitoring systems in order to do that effectively.

DOOCY: Okay. On another topic, was it common for President Biden to do favors for Hunter Biden's international business partners like writing college recommendations for their kids?

PSAKI: I have — I've seen the report. I have no confirmation or comments on a report about whether or not the President, when he was a private citizen, wrote a college recommendation letter for an individual.

DOOCY: I — A college recommendation letter, though, from, at the time, a former Vice

President would be a big deal. So, do we know what the President might have gotten in return for doing a favor like that?

PSAKI: Again, I have no confirmation of any recommendation letter the President wrote when he was a private citizen — by the way, not serving in public office. That's even in the report.

DOOCY: But he's the President now, and you're his spokesperson.

PSAKI: Correct and he was not the President at the time of this report.

DOOCY: So, there's evidence that the President, at one point, was officemates with Hunter and his brother Jim here in D.C.

PSAKI: That's not accurate.

DOOCY: That is not accurate? So, when Hunter Biden is emailing a landlord, "Please have keys made available for new officemates — Joe Biden, Jill Biden, Jim Biden," that — you're disputing it?

PSAKI: They were not officemates, no.

DOOCY: They were not officemates. Okay.

PSAKI: Great.

(....)

3:44:19 p.m.

1 minute and 46 seconds

MARA LIASSON: On immigration: With the lifting of Section 42, there are a lot of Democrats, particularly Democratic senators, up for reelection who worry that you don't have a plan to either stop the spring surge of undocumented immigrants or handle it. Could you — what do you say to those Democrats?

PSAKI: Well, I would first say that Title 42 is not an immigration measure, it's a public health measure and one that Congress has given the CDC authority to make a decision about and we respect that and think that's — that's absolutely right. That's why the President proposed an immigration bill in his first day in office and we would certainly welcome efforts of anybody to work with us on that. But as we're implementing this over the course of the next five weeks, if I'm doing my math correctly, we've also surged resources from the Department of Homeland Security and we will continue to take additional steps to implement and make clear that this is not the time to come, that there are — there will still be significant measures put in place for anyone who tries to irregularly migrate to the United States.

LIASSON: Do you feel that you — I mean, what's your goal, and what do you expect — what impact do you expect to have on the spring surge with those kinds of measures?

PSAKI: I would really point you to the Department of Homeland Security to make any projections of that, because we have not made any projections of what it will mean in terms of the — the — the ending of Title 42 either. [TO KATIE ROGERS] Go ahead.

KATE ROGERS: Thanks. I know that you've talked about the stringent measures you've taken to keep the President safe from COVID that go beyond the CDC guidelines, but that's such a visual contrast between that and the President showing up maskless in front of people at some of these events. So how do you make sure that you keep that protection bubble around him? I'm sure you feel like you're asked to explain this ad nauseum, but —

PSAKI: No, it's okay.

ROGERS: — the bubble is looking pretty porous lately, so how do you keep that, sort of, enforced?

(...)

3:47:02 p.m.
19 seconds

ROGERS: Was everyone tested before the East Room event tomorrow — everyone who was there?

PSAKI: It's not at public events. I'm talking about at meetings. But again, I can check on the protocols for public events. Sure.

ROGERS: Have you changed any protocol surrounding him in recent days as more people are — in the administration contract this virus?

(...)

3:48:20 p.m.
22 seconds

ROGERS: So what's the clearest version of the message that you're trying to send to Americans about living with this virus, even as infection rates rise — I mean, that it's not the end of the world if you get it if you're boosted? I mean, is that the message you send through the President, who's maskless in front of hundreds of people that this — this isn't the end, that we have to live this way? Is that the clear version of the message?

(...)

3:50:07 p.m.
37 seconds

KAREN TRAVERS: Jen, just to follow up on something you said to Mara on the Title 42 question. You said that the administration will be taking additional steps to make clear this is not the time to come. That was, of course, a pretty explicit message from the President and others last year: “Do not come.” Is that still the message on May 24th?

PSAKI: Yes.

TRAVERS: Okay and then, a follow-up to that: As the U.S. moves to end Title 42 in May, are there discussions now or is there any update you can give us on ending the testing requirement for reentry into the U.S. for people traveling here?

PSAKI: I don’t have any update on that at this point in time. That’s something we will continue to evaluate.

(....)

3:52:12 p.m.
45 seconds

ANDREW FEINBERG: You talked about the increasing picture of Russia’s economy. Over the years, public reporting has shown that white supremacists and other domestic extremists have developed an affinity for Russia. Is there any concern that as the Russian economy continues to degrade, that Russia might try and inspire domestic extremists, domestic terrorists to commit acts of violence on American soil in retaliation?

PSAKI: It’s an interesting and scary question. I don’t have any prediction or assessment of that, nor have I heard a prediction or assessment of that from our national security experts or the Department of Homeland Security. I’m happy to check with them and see if there’s anything on that front.

(....)

3:59:29 p.m.
3 minutes and 5 seconds

PHILIP WEGMANN: A couple of follow ups. When the President said that the U.S. was training Ukrainians, was he talking about training that had occurred during his administration?

PSAKI: I don’t have any other additional details. What he was really making a point about is what Secretary Austin said yesterday, which is that without the extensive and robust military assistance we have provided, the Ukrainians would not have been able to as effectively fight and push back on the Russian invasion.

WEGMANN: And then he said, “Amazon, here we come.” You said that he was generally expressing his support for the right to unionize. Moments later, though, news broke that the SEC was beginning an investigation of Amazon. Was that a coincidence?

PSAKI: No relation. SEC is an independent agency.

WEGMANN: Gotcha. Was he aware that there was an investigation?

PSAKI: Not that I’m aware of.

WEGMANN: And then, one final one. This administration has sent everything from medical supplies to laser-guided rockets to the Ukrainians right now. While this administration is making them more lethal, is the thought that we are bolstering their defensive capabilities? Or is the administration confident that we are bolstering their offensive capability to, in fact, you know, expel Russia from their borders?

PSAKI: Well, their country is being invaded, so it’s all defensive. They’re defending their sovereign country and the territorial integrity of Ukraine using these weapons systems that the Department of Defense has long categorized as defensive systems. You wouldn’t go invade another country with a lot of these systems — the vast majority of these systems. That’s not how you would go about it and obviously, that is not what they’re doing. They’re trying to protect their own people, their own cities, their own innocent civilians who are being invaded by a foreign power.

WEGMANN: Thank you, Jen.

PSAKI: Okay. Let me do one more in the back because I never get to the Huffington Post, and I — today is the day. [LAUGHTER]

S.V. DÁTE: Thanks, Jen. There was a recent report that the President had expressed some frustration that the former President had not been charged. Without getting into the details of that, there are lots of people being charged with obstructing an official proceeding, meaning the January 6th certification. Well, the former President was doing that openly and his administration was doing it. Why wouldn’t you charge him? And why hasn’t the President come out and said that if that’s the case?

PSAKI: Well, I — first, I’ve never heard the President say those words — or say that phrase that was reported. And I know Ron Klain said something similarly, so I don’t know — we each spend a lot of time with him. But I would say that the President, from the beginning, has felt strongly that the Justice Department and the Attorney General must operate independently, and any decisions about prosecution need to be made independently and that is the strength of our system, even as the former guy ignored that and former-President Nixon ignored it as well. The President does not want to be in that category of how you approach the separation of the White House and the Department of Justice and — and he thinks that will even strengthen our systems as they’ve been weakened over the last few years.