

White House press briefing  
04/13/22  
3:58:25 p.m.  
26 seconds

NANCY CORDES: And then back to the question about genocide. Last week, Jake Sullivan was here at this podium. He said, “we have not seen a systemic deprivation of life of the Ukrainian people to rise to the level of genocide. So, is it that now the White House position that you have actually seen a level of systemic deprivation that would qualify as genocide?”

JEN PSAKI: Well, the President spoke to that twice yesterday and, of course, he’s the President and we are here to — to implement his views.

(....)

3:59:09 p.m.  
28 seconds

JACQUI HEINRICH: Following up on Nancy’s question, did anyone know that the President was going to use the word genocide in his remarks? It seemed like a passing remark or passing reference in a broader conversation about inflation?

PSAKI: Well, it’s — he’s the President of the United States and the leader of the free world and he is allowed to make his views known at any point he would like.

HEINRICH: So, it was not scripted then? Wasn’t pre-planned?

PSAKI: Again, I think we shouldn’t misunderstand who he is and where he stands at the totem pole, which is at the top.

HEINRICH: Okay.

(....)

4:00:19 p.m.  
4 minutes and 20 seconds

HEINRICH: And then, the first bus of migrants arrived in D.C. today. Texas Governor Greg Abbott making good on his promise to send migrants to the President’s doorstep. I think you previously called it a publicity stunt. Is that still the view of the White House? Can you give us any reaction to this busload of migrants arriving here in D.C.?

PSAKI: Well, these are all migrants who have been processed by CBP and are free to travel, so it’s nice the state of Texas is helping them get to their final destination as they await their outcome of their immigration and they’re all in immigration proceedings.

HEINRICH: And then, on your statement this morning, you had mentioned in that statement that the truck inspections have led — that Governor Abbott has been conducting have led to disruptions with the food and automobile supply chains and rising prices for families. So, is the White House blaming Greg Abbott for inflation?

PSAKI: Well, I think we're trying to state the facts of what his — another political stunt that we're seeing and the impact of it. And what we're seeing is, factually, there is over \$1 million in trade crossing over the U.S.-Mexico border every minute. These actions are impacting people's jobs and the livelihoods of hard-working families in Texas and across the country. That's not a political statement. That's a statement of fact. I'd also note that what we are seeing with these unnecessary inspections of trucks trans — transiting ports of entry between Texas and Mexico are significant delays, which are resulting in a drop in commercial traffic of up to 60 or 70 percent in some ports. And that is significantly impacting the local and regional supply chains to the point that trade associations, officials, and businesses are calling for the Texas governor to reverse their — this self-inflicted gridlock. I'd also note that CBP officers are very good at their jobs and Texas DPS does not need to replace CBP at the southern border. CBP has conducted a record number of drug seizures with more than 900,000 pounds of narcotics seized, just in FY 2021, so the economic impact, something that people of all political stripes are calling for a reversal of is something that we think is significant and we felt should be shouted out.

HEINRICH: And then, last one, does the White House still view inflation as transitory?

PSAKI: That is the view of the Federal Reserve and outside economists and they all continue to project it will come down this year. [TO SHANNON PETTYPIECE] Go ahead.

SHANNON PETTYPIECE: Yeah, Jen. Just to make sure we're clear, first of all, on the question of genocide cause I know sometimes in the past the President has expressed his own opinion about issues, it's not necessarily U.S. policy. So, is it the U.S. policy that genocide has been committed in Ukraine or was that the President's personal beliefs?

PSAKI: Well, there is a legal process. As the President said yesterday, that will be — will go — will be undergone and will happen and he wasn't getting ahead of that. He was speaking to what we feel — he feels, he sees on the ground. But regardless of what you call it, what our objective now is evidenced by the enormous package of military assistance that we put out today is to continue to help and assist the Ukrainians in this war and one where we see atrocities every single day.

PETTYPIECE: Is there any concern, though, that the President's views on things, differing from what the actual policy is once it's gone through all those legal channels, that that could confusing to world leaders when the President's saying one thing, but the policy isn't necessarily clear?

PSAKI: Well, how would it impact it — the outcome?

PETTYPIECE: Yeah, well, I mean, once there's a genocide being committed in a region, other countries would treat that in a certain way if that's —

PSAKI: In what way?

PETTYPIECE: — indeed the policy. I guess as far as how — the way leaders would try — you know, decide how they're going to respond to that. So, and I don't —

PSAKI: Well, typically, a — a consideration of genocide takes years. I mean, look at — there are many past examples. And if you look at even Uighurs — right — and what we have called out happening in China. That took many years to call out. That hasn't meant we've provided a range of military assistance. What we are doing now is we are trying to prop up and support Ukrainian leaders. There are other — and the military, of course — there are other leaders who have — in the world — who have said something similar to what the President has said recently. Because they're also seeing the atrocities on the ground. I do not know that it's changed policy or confused anyone. I think they're speaking all from what they are seeing with their own eyes as we look at the visuals of what's happening on the ground.

(...)

4:08:57 p.m.

11 seconds

MARY BRUCE: One more question on Ukraine. After President Biden said he does believe that Russia is committing genocide —

PSAKI: Yeah.

BRUCE: — the French President came out and said that he warned against an escalation of rhetoric. Do you have any response to Macron?

PSAKI: I don't.

(...)

4:10:43 p.m.

4 minutes and 30 seconds

ALEXANDRA ALPER: A quick follow-up on the issue of the genocide designation. I think you just said a legal process would be undergone but I think the State Department Spokesman Ned Price just said that it was — the U.S. government is contributing to the Ukrainian prosecutor general's office's inquiry into whether Russia's committed genocide in Ukraine but they have not initiated its own.

PSAKI: So I — appreciate your opportunity to rephrase, it would require a legal process. As the President said yesterday, he's not trying to pre-judge a legal process. He was speaking to the atrocities he saw on the ground.

ALPER: And then why not? Why wouldn't the U.S. initiate its own, you know, inquiry into that issue?

PSAKI: It's a determination, again, made by the State Department and others who are — lead these efforts and certainly, it's one we will continue to assess.

ALPER: And just a quick one on the issue with Greg Abbott, is the White House planning to do anything to alleviate the supply chain disruptions or pressure him into rescinding the order?

PSAKI: Well, obviously, our preference is that he rescinds the order. And it's not just our preference. It's the preference of a number of trade associations, officials, and business leaders who are seeing a direct impact on commerce and on the economy and on business in the community, so beyond that, I think our effort today was to highlight what the impact is and how this is not a step that is — that is an immigration policy or addressing root issues at the border. This is one that is hurting — is having a negative economic impact on people who work and live in that community and the over \$1 million in trade crossing over the border every day. [TO M.J. LEE] Go ahead.

M.J. LEE: Jen, three times now the President has made comments about the war, that the White House or he himself subsequently said did not reflect U.S. policy or a legal determination when he said Putin is a war criminal, when he said that Putin cannot remain in power, and, of course, this comment about this being genocide in Ukraine. Does this not send a signal to the world there kind of is an asterisk next to anything that the President says?

PSAKI: Well, when the President ran, he promised the American people he would shoot from the shoulder is his phrase that he often uses and tell it to them straight and his comments yesterday, not once, but twice, and on war crimes are an exact reflection of that. I don't think anybody is confused about the atrocities of what we're seeing on the ground, the horrors of what we're seeing on the ground and different leaders around the world describe it in different ways, but what we're — what is unquestionable is what we're seeing is horrific, the targeting of civilians, of hospitals, of — of even kids and the President was calling it like he sees it and that's what he does.

LEE: If I could ask it this way: Do you think that there is any danger to global leaders, including Vladimir Putin to Olaf Scholz if they can't be sure when they hear words coming out of the President's mouth whether he is stating a personal opinion versus making a statement about U.S. policy?

PSAKI: Do you have an example of someone who is confused? A leader?

LEE: Well, I mean, my colleague brought up Emmanuel Macron saying — responding and saying, you know, the use of the language genocide, he sees as rhetorical escalation.

PSAKI: President Putin is brutally targeting civilians and brutallizing a country right now, so the President, this President was speaking to what those atrocities are and what he is seeing on the

ground. A number of other leaders have done exactly that. It does not change policy in the sense that we have seen these atrocities, unfortunately, for weeks now and we're going to see more as Russia pulls back from parts of the country, so what our focus will continue to be and the focus of leaders around the world is to continue to escalate our military assistance, our security assistance as we did today in providing a range of — of weapons that we have not even provided to them in the past and that, I think, is what the Ukrainians are most focused on and I think the global community is most focused on: how we're responding and how we're helping them.

LEE: Could you explain — so, if the U.S. were to legally determine that what is happening in Ukraine is genocide, what would the sort of legal obligations from the United States be at that point?

PSAKI: It doesn't change a policy. There would be an international effort to explore that and an investigation at an international level. Those often take many years.

LEE: And nothing has changed in terms of the President not wanting to send in U.S. troops to Ukraine?

PSAKI: Correct, nothing has changed.

(....)

4:16:27 p.m.

1 minute and 23 seconds

ANNIE LINSKEY: And then I just had follow-up to M.J.'s question.

PSAKI: Sure.

LINSKEY: When you're talk about the President — sort of — you know, and I should preface this by saying, you know, the world and we are all still getting to know this President. He has been around for — for awhile but we have not seen him in the role as President for awhile. And so can you tell us when should we interpret his words as his reaction versus U.S. policy?

PSAKI: He's the President of United States. He speaks for the United States. There's also a legal review in process that is important to take place in the case of genocide or war crimes, so we're trying to provide as much information on that as possible.

LINSKEY: Are there any tips that you can provide? Or any sort of — [LAUGHS] — you know, any — any giveaways that this is the President talking about what he's seeing and his reaction as a human versus, you know, the United States government is now going to do X, Y, Z because I have determined what this is.

PSAKI: Well, I think what's important to understand determination or whatever you label it doesn't change policy. It change — what we're doing in terms of the amount of security

assistance we're providing, including the new package today goes far beyond what we have done in many cases where we have called it genocide, so there is not a direct trigger in that way and if that's helpful clarity for anybody, happy to provide it, but he is the President. He speaks for what our policy is and I would take his words for exactly what they are.

(....)

4:18:46 p.m.

36 seconds

JORDAN FABIAN: Just one on Texas. Right before you came out, Governor Abbott announced that they're halting some inspections on that side of the border and said there'll be some inspections conducted in Nuevo Laredo, the Mexican state that borders Texas. I don't know if you had seen that or wanted to respond to it.

PSAKI: Not yet and I don't have an assessment on the impact but I think the overarching view from not just us but, again, trade associations, officials, and businesses is that these are unnecessary inspections and that they are impacting the economy. I don't — I don't know how to — I can't gauge from here what the economic impact will be but I'm happy to take a look at that or have our economic team take a look at that.

(....)

4:22:38 p.m.

3 minutes and 23 seconds

UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER #1: You know, European officials — diplomats we're talking to are saying this escalation of words has an impact because — because it makes the prospect of future peace talks with Vladimir Putin very difficult or impossible. So, is the President, by using such words, conveying the idea that there will never be any possible talks with Putin and that the only way the war can end is — is, you know, military capitulation.

PSAKI: No and I would just dispute that argument or that notion. Peace talks is something we're always going to support. The President, secretary of state, our national security adviser will always going to support and we support the Ukrainians in that effort. I think it's unlikely that — that President Putin is moved — is going to decide not to participate in peace talks because of words that came out of the mouth of the President of the United States. He's going to decide to participate in them if it's in his interests. [TO EDWARD LAWRENCE] Go ahead.

EDWARD LAWRENCE: The Producer Price Index on inflation came out at the highest level in the history of recording these — these events. This is the price that companies are paying for the materials that they need to make the stuff —

PSAKI: Yeah.

LAWRENCE: — that they sell, right? So, with the last two days the inflation reports, does the White House believe that inflation is now peaked and we're coming back down or because of these reports, do you think we're going to see worse numbers in the future?

PSAKI: We'll let the Federal Reserve make projections about that. They have the purview over those projections. What I will say is that while — when we talk about this over the last couple of days as it relates to the CPI data, Consumer Price Index as opposed to Producer Price Index for others and what we saw while energy accounted for 70 percent of the monthly inflation in March on CPI data, it accounted for a substantial portion of PPI inflation as well and PPI measures things like the cost of wood, metal, plastics, kind of materials like that, so it's not necessarily — it's not a surprise to us that energy is having an impact, is a driver of these numbers. Obviously, what we're trying to do is mitigate the energy impact and take steps to do exactly that, release from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and other actions working to get more supply out into the marketplace but, you know, again, projections of a — when we're hitting a height and where it will look, we will leave that to the Federal Reserve.

LAWRENCE: And one last one, so then does the President acknowledge any responsibility for the inflation that we're seeing now based on the decisions that he's made when he came into office?

PSAKI: Well, I would say, as the President talked about quite a bit, there are a range of factors including the pandemic, the impact on the supply chains, and our effort — and what we've tried to do from the beginning is take steps to address that, address the supply chains and we've had a lot of success moving more equipment and goods through — through — through ports, et cetera. We've also seen — given energy is such a significant driver of this data and increase of energy prices over the last month plus since the invasion of Ukraine — that's factual, that's based on data that we have seen out there. So, our effort and our focus has been to try to address it and take mitigation measures when we can.

LAWRENCE: But to take responsibility for his decisions, like some say the American Rescue Plan boosted demand when it didn't need to. Larry Summers was one of those.

PSAKI: Well, the alternative would have been that we would have gone into a massive economic downward spiral and many Americans would have not had enough food on the table, so we chose the other path.

(....)

4:27:41 p.m.

1 minute and 7 seconds

*DAILY MAIL* REPORTER: There was a new poll out today that showed the President's approval rating is still in the low 40s and that voters are still concerned about the economy. Does the White House see it as a sign that their message on the increased job numbers and all the infrastructure funding isn't getting through. I mean, the President has said he wants to see his

accomplishments being solid. Is he satisfied that's being done or is there talk of a pivot in messaging?

PSAKI: Well, I would say we understand some realities happening right now, including the fact there is a war happening in Europe and that is dominating the airwaves which we understand and fully expect and so, the President has actually done a number of events on the economy in recent days and weeks and will continue to. But our view is, while the world needs to understand and see how he is leading on the war, we also — the world also needs to — or the country needs to see, I guess I should say, how he is continuing to lead on the economy and I don't know that that's a shift or requiring a shift. It's just a recognition that being able to continue to speak to domestic — or a domestic audience about that is a huge priority and his schedule tells the story of how much of a priority it is.

(....)

4:28:50 p.m.

1 minute and 31 seconds

UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER #2: I wanted to ask about the migrants that arrived today from Texas. These are Venezuelan and Nicaraguan migrants who have applied for asylum in the U.S. Has the administration been in touch with these migrants or with the organizations that are assisting them such as Catholic Charities?

PSAKI: The migrants who have traveled on the bus —

UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER #2: Yes.

PSAKI: — from Texas? Well, they're all in immigration proceedings, those who traveled on the bus and so certainly that would mean they're in touch with the appropriate entities and the federal government about that process, but beyond that I don't have any other updates.

UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER #2: There's nothing to — that you have not been in touch with them to make sure that their rights are respected?

PSAKI: Well, that, of course — certainly is of vital importance to us and as we've stated many times from here, nobody can forcibly be put on a bus. They would have to be voluntarily be put on the bus. And if there are concerns about that, we would expect them to contact appropriate authorities.

UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER #2: And even if these migrants wanted to get out of Texas, do you find it troubling that the Texas governor used them as props to make a political point to the White House? Do you worry that this might bring forth the narrative that profiles of undocumented people as criminals who are bad people?

PSAKI: Well, I called it the other day a publicity stunt by Governor Abbott and made clear that



immigration policy and law is overseen by the federal government, not state governments, so I think I spoke to that the other day pretty clearly.

(....)

4:33:52 p.m.  
23 seconds

SIMON ATEBA: I would like to ask you about the — first of all, I know we've had reports that you may be leaving soon. How would you like to be remembered as White House press secretary?

PSAKI: Well, one day I will not be here. Either to spend time with my kids or because the President fires me, hopefully not the latter. At that point I'm sure I can reflect on that.