

White House press briefing [via CBSN]

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3:29:56 p.m.

8 minutes and 15 seconds

KRISTEN WELKER: Secretary Mayorkas is getting a real grilling on Capitol Hill today, particularly about Title 42 and the plans that are in place to deal with it. DHS has acknowledged that a surge would put a substantial strain on resources. Now, obviously, DHS announced this six-point, 20-page plan, but given that strain that DHS is anticipating, why should the American people have confidence that you'll be able to deal with that surge of migrants if Title 42 is lifted?

JEN PSAKI: Well, first, I would say, just as a reminder: It is a health authority, not an immigration plan or an immigration authority, and it's not meant to be a replacement of. So the determination about where we stand and to lift it was made by the CDC. Just to note the six-point plan that Secretary Mayorkas put out and talked about today, or over the last 24 hours, includes six pillars: surging resources, including personnel, transportation, medical support; enhancing CBP processing efficiency and moving with deliberate speed to mitigate potential overcrowding; administering consequences for unlawful entry; bolstering the capacity of nongovernmental organizations to receive noncitizens; targeting and disrupting the transnational criminal organization and smugglers; and deterring irregular migration. So, what he talked about today is exactly what his preparedness plan — that's been in the works and in the planning for months — would do. And they have talked about the need, potentially, for more resources to make that happen.

WELKER: And just to be very clear, and some Democrats have said this: Does the plan — will the plan be in place before Title 42 is lifted?

PSAKI: That is exactly what the preparedness and implementation plan is intended to do.

WELKER: Okay.

PSAKI: Go ahead, Jacqui.

JACQUI HEINRICH: Thanks, Jen. Dr. Fauci said that he's not going to the White House Correspondents' Dinner, citing COVID concerns. Obviously, he's the President's chief medical advisor. As far as we know, the President is still planning to attend. How should people understand Dr. Fauci's decision versus the President's decision? And is there any concern that the President would be seen as not following the science in some way?

PSAKI: Well, first, I would note and respect everyone's privacy, including Dr. Fauci's, as much as he's very much a public figure. But as you all know, he can speak for himself and his decisions and every individual will make their own decisions about whether they attend this event, other events, whether they wear a mask at it or not. Obviously, the White House Correspondents' Association is requiring same-day testing. That's a — that's a decision they have made. The President outlined, as you all know, a 100-page plan in March intended to

position us to go back to our more normal routines. But in that, that requires making risk assessments and decisions about what you're going to do and what you're going to attend and be a part of, as we all do every day. Today, the President felt it was very important to be at and speak at the memorial service for a diplomatic icon — Secretary Madeleine Albright. He made the decision to do that, despite the fact that there were hundreds if not thousands of people there. He has made the decision he wants to attend, in a safe way, the White House Correspondents' Dinner to show his support — showcase his support for the free press, for the work of all of you, for the work of your colleagues around the world to not only share accurate information about COVID but also report on the war in Ukraine and all of the work that happens every single day. That does stand in stark contrast to his predecessor, who not only questioned the legitimacy of the press on a nearly dai- — daily basis, but also never attended the dinner, I don't believe. So, he felt that was important and made a risk assessment to do that in consultation with his doctors and healthcare team. I would note that we also take additional precautions and steps. I would expect that he may wear a mask when he's not speaking. I'll wear a mask when I'm at the dinner, in all likelihood and we also took steps, including the fact that he's not attending for the eating portion of the dinner and he'll be there for the program, which includes a number of speakers, the presentation of scholarships, as you know, and, of course, his speaking and his roasting, where he will be "on the menu," as he likes to say, when Trevor Noah is speaking. So, you know, just like anything, it's a risk assessment and a decision he made on a personal basis.

HEINRICH: Thank you and I want to ask a few questions on Title 42, but real quick, I want to take another stab at a question I tried yesterday. You answered the first part of it. We've heard the President say over and over again that he has never spoken to his son about his business dealings. Has he ever spoken to his son's business partners about his son's business dealings?

PSAKI: Again, nothing has changed about what I said yesterday. The President does not get involved in the business dealings of his son.

HEINRICH: Even through his son's business partners?

PSAKI: Nothing has changed since what I said yesterday.

HEINRICH: Okay. I don't believe you answered that part of my question yesterday though.

PSAKI: He's not involved in his son's business dealings.

HEINRICH: Okay. On Title 42, Mayorkas detailed this six-point plan; part of it involves sending healthcare providers from the VA. He was asked about this on the Hill today. He said that it's necessary, that this interagency effort is necessary. But is it appropriate to be taking resources away from the VA to help with the surge at the border?

PSAKI: Again, these dec- — these decisions and discussions about what resources are possible are made through the interagency process, and clearly, having support and resources for our nation's veterans is a top priority to the President. But we also want to take steps we can at the border, even as we anticipate an increase in migrants coming to the border, to keep the American

people safe and this is part of that effort.

HEINRICH: Another piece of this plan talked about the law enforcement help. CBP has 23,000 agents working on the southern border right now. We're already seeing 7,000 illegal crossings a day; that is expected to surge to 18,000 when Title 42 is lifted. So, how does adding 600 law enforcement officers make a dent in that?

PSAKI: Well, I would say, Jacqui, that one of the reasons that Secretary Mayorkas is participating in the important, you know, democratic process of testifying on the Hill is to answer the questions of exactly how the resources he's requesting, and they have identified as needing, to address this potential increase will help address that. So I would point you to his many hours of testimony today and tomorrow.

HEINRICH: And then there's been reporting that Speaker Pelosi is unhappy with the way that the White House has handled Title 42 and worried that if it comes up for a vote as part of the Ukraine package, that Democrats wouldn't have the votes to defeat that. Does the White House share that concern? And what do you make of Pelosi seeming to be kind of shaky on just how close she is with the White House on this decision?

PSAKI: Well, I would say we're incredibly close with Speaker Pelosi, and the President has known her for many, many decades. I don't — I don't have more to spell out or explain what her meaning was or what "defeat it" means or doesn't mean. There are many strong feelings and points of view on Capitol Hill in the House and in the Senate about Title 42. It wasn't a decision made by the White House. It's a decision made to lift it by the CDC. The authority given to — was given to them by Congress. And our effort and our focus is on implementation. And the Department — the Secretary of Homeland Security is obviously testifying on that. So, I don't have any more to explain about the particular comments. But we obviously work very closely with Speaker Pelosi on a range of issues, including immigration.

HEINRICH: But a number of Democrats are, you know, speaking up about their problems with Title 42. I mean, Mark Kelly was briefed by Mayorkas yesterday. He said that he still has remaining questions about how and when resources are going to hit the ground. These are Democrats saying these things. They're not wanting, you know, Title 42 to replace an immigration effort, but they're saying that there just is not a plan in place to support what's going to happen when Title 42 goes away.

PSAKI: Well, what I was trying to note earlier, perhaps not articulately, is that there are a range of members who have strong concerns about it being lifted. Again, not a decision we make — a decision made by health and science experts and there are many members who feel very strongly about it actually being — it lifted and that moving forward. This is why Secretary Mayorkas is on the Hill doing, I believe, four hearings, answering extensive questions from a range of members, Democratic and Republican. He put out a six-pillar plan on exactly how he's going to implement it and that has been a plan that's been in the works for six months. So, this is part of the democratic process happening, and he's happy to be on the Hill answering their questions.

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3:39:38 p.m.

1 minute and 34 seconds

PHILIP WEGMANN: Two questions. A follow-up on the student loan forgiveness.

PSAKI: Yeah.

WEGMANN: You said that the President is looking at a range of options with regards to canceling some student debt. But is the President looking at any options for those students and parents who saved and sacrificed so that they wouldn't have to take out such massive loans? Is he looking at including them in relief retroactively? How would they be made whole if there was some sort of canceling of debt?

PSAKI: You mean for people who have paid off all of their student loans?

WEGMANN: Yeah — who made sacrifices so that they wouldn't have to take out some of those loans.

PSAKI: It's a good question. What I can tell you at this point is that there's legislation he'd be happy to sign for individuals who have \$10,000 in existing student debt. If Congress wanted to send that to him, he'd be happy to sign it, and he's looking at executive actions and authorities. But I don't have anything to preview on that front.

WEGMANN: Okay. Then, you know, if the President does move on canceling some of the student debt, isn't that just one half of the equation though? I mean, what is he looking at in order to keep some of these public universities from jacking up tuition prices, despite some of the federal subsidies that they've been getting? I mean, what is it to stop some of these schools from just increasing tuition for the next generation of students? Isn't that half of the equation?

PSAKI: I don't know if people would consider it half of the equation. I don't know. We'll let Americans define it. I would point you the Department of Education to talk about their efforts on that front.

WEGMANN: And one last quick follow-up. Is the President's weekly lunch with the Vice President still a priority for him?

PSAKI: Absolutely. Obviously, they're not going to be dining in person while she is quarantining at home, but they did speak yesterday and I expect they will speak regularly while she is quarantining and she is participating in a number of policy meetings here, too.

WEGMANN: Thank you, Jen.