

White House press briefing [via NBC News Live Event]

05/10/22

2:47:23 p.m.

2 minutes and 16 seconds

MARY BRUCE: I just have a question on messaging. Who came up with this phrase “Ultra-MAGA?” Why the need to kick it up a notch? MAGA wasn’t enough? I mean, why now use this phrase?

JEN PSAKI: I will tell you, it is — it is the President’s phrase, and the President made those comments himself just last week, as you know. And I think what has struck him is how extreme some of the policies and proposals are that a certain wing of the Republican Party — that is taking up too much of the Republican Party — are for and are advocating for. And you — you’ve heard the President talk about this. It’s — but it’s not just obviously putting at risk a woman’s right to make choices about her own healthcare. It is also, as you heard him talk about this morning, Rick Scott’s extreme plan that will raise taxes on 75 million Americans making less than \$100,000 a year. It is Rick Scott’s plan to get rid of, eliminate — that’s what “sunset” means: “get rid of” — Medicare and Social Security, something people over 70 in this country rely on. And it’s also the obsession with culture wars and wars against Mickey Mouse and banning books. The President thinks that’s extreme. That is not what the American people care about or what they want. And so, to him, adding a little “ultra” to it, give it a little extra pop. [TO O’KEEFE] Go ahead.

ED O’KEEFE: So then who is an “Ultra-MAGA” Republican?

PSAKI: I would say people who support that portion of the Republican agenda.

O’KEEFE: So, Rob Portman, Susan Collins, Mitt Romney, would they be “Ultra-MAGA” Republicans?

PSAKI: They can all make their own choices, Ed. And I can — we can let others evaluate that. But I would say that the President’s view is: Those who support a plan by Rick Scott — by Chairman Scott, that would raise taxes on 75 million Americans and get rid of, “sunset,” eliminate — whatever you want to call it — Medicare and Social Security, that’s a MAGA position. And that includes the Chairman of the Republican National Committee. That’s a MAGA position. That is the chairman of the party. So that’s what the President considers. But also, obviously, given two thirds of the American people, according to a Fox News poll, believe that women’s — that *Roe v. Wade* should be protected, if you’re on the other side of that, you’re supporting an “Ultra-MAGA” position, in the President’s view. So we’ll let — we don’t need to name-call individuals unless they have positions that are aligned with what he feels is the “Ultra-MAGA” wing of the party.

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2:51:56 p.m.

3 minutes and 24 seconds

ALEXANDRIA HOFF: So, today, the President said that a “majority” of Republicans have signed on to Senator Scott’s tax plan. That does not seem to be the case. Senator Scott said that today. Mitch McConnell had said that the party is not behind this. Are there any Republicans that you can think of or the President might be referencing that is currently behind this?

PSAKI: Do you count the chairman of the Republican Committee as an important Republican?

HOFF: He is the chairman of a committee. But if no other Repub- —

PSAKI: She. It’s actually a “she.” The chairman of the Republican Party —

HOFF: I thought you were referring to Scott there. I —

PSAKI: So, Chairman Ronna McD- — Ronna McDaniel praised Senator Scott’s proposal as a, “clear plan” for Republicans that offers, quote, “real solutions.” She’s the chairwoman of the party. Rick Scott is not a random senator. He is literally in charge of winning back the Senate for Republicans and what the plan is. So he is the person who’s put forward this plan. Senator Ron Johnson has called the Congressional GOP plan a, quote, “positive thing.” Senator Mike Braun has said he was, “glad Rick did it.” Senator Tommy Tuberville said he was, “on board” with the Congressional GOP plan. Congressman Matt Gaetz said he was, “proud of Senator Rick Scott for providing [producing] this bold agenda.” So not only that, which seems to be quite a range of Republicans, but there isn’t an alternative plan they’ve put forward. So it’s either this, put together by the person who is leading the effort to win back the Senate, or nothing and the President this morning talked about what his plan is. If they have an alternative plan, we would welcome them putting it forward.

HOFF: And he did say one was coming in this summer. And as far as Senator Scott goes, he acknowledged today that a majority is not behind him. He says this is his individual plan for this. I do want to ask, as well — I mean, the Department of Justice was very swift in responding to school board members who felt like they were being harassed and intimidated a couple months back. Does the President feel that the demonstrations outside of, say, Justice Alito’s home — are those attempts to interfere or intimidate?

PSAKI: Well, I think I said yesterday, but I’m happy to repeat because I think it’s important for everybody to hear, that the President’s longstanding view has been that violence, threats, and imitat- — intimidation of any kind have no place in political discourse and we believe, of course, in peaceful protest. What I do find is interesting, and I think most — many people have noted, is that there are voices on the right who have called out this — protests that are happening — while remaining silent for years on protests that have happened outside of the homes of school board members, the Michigan Secretary of State, or including threats made to women seeking repro- — reproductive healthcare, or even an insurrection against our Capitol. So I know that there’s an outrage right now, I guess, about protests that have been peaceful to date — and we certainly continue to encourage that — outside of judges’ homes. And that’s the President’s position. But

the silence is pretty deafening about all of the other intimidation that we've seen to a number of people.

HOFF: This is a pending court case though. That's where the federal law comes into place. This is a pending court case.

PSAKI: Well, but I think that intimidation and protests — and intimidation outside of the homes of school board members, the Michigan Secretary of State — you know, intimidation and threats against people seeking legal reproductive healthcare — and against our Capitol and American democracy also warrant some outrage and we haven't really seen that.

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3:05:20 p.m.

4 minutes and 35 seconds

ASHLEY PARKER: On Monday, you tweeted out that the President strongly believes in the right to protest, that such protests should never include violence, threats, or vandalism. And you specifically mentioned the ability of judges to be able to do their jobs. Is the administration worried that abortion rights protests may turn violent? And was there any specific group of protesters that that tweet was geared towards?

PSAKI: Well, I think, to be very clear, the protests outside of judges' homes have not turned violent. And I don't think we need to make a prediction of that from here. Just because people are passionate, it does not mean they're violent. And I think that's probably why you're asking the question, Ashley. But I think it is important to — the President felt it was important for us to be clear that as people's passions are high, as people are fearful about their own healthcare, that should never resort to violence, it should never resort to vandalism. And we have seen some elements of that — vandalism. And he wanted to be clear that his position was to call for peaceful protests.

PARKER: And on a similar theme, Senator Collins called the police over the weekend after someone wrote a non-threatening abortion rights message in sidewalk chalk in front of her house in Maine. I was just curious, sort of, what you made of that — of her response.

PSAKI: I don't have any specific comment on her response, other than to say that: Even as passions are high, even as people are fearful, even as people are scared and frustrated, which is understandable, we should not — no one should resort to violence, of course, nor threats, nor intimidation, nor vandalism, and that those are not effective means.

PARKER: Do you consider sidewalk chalk vandalism?

PSAKI: I'll let others define that. But there are lots of ways to peaceful protest. What's also important to note here is what I would call the hypocrisy of the silence on the other side when there have been intimidation, protests outside of the homes of school board members, the

Michigan Secretary of State. There have been countless women who have dealt with and navigated through threats made as they're seeking repro- — reproductive healthcare, which, by the way, has been legal for 50 years and there has been no outcry about that. There has been outcry about — about protests that have been peaceful outside of judges' homes, which, again, you know, have been peaceful and have not been violent and the President has been clear about his view on them. Yeah.

ANDREW FEINBERG: Thank you. I wanted to ask you about another aspect of what the President might call the "Ultra-MAGA Agenda," which is election denial. More than 140 House and Senate Republicans voted against certifying his victory in January 2021. There are many more candidates running for seats in this election that have pledged that they would have done that and may do the same in the future. The President's ramping up his rhetoric and going after Republicans on economic policies, tax policies. Is he planning to go to voters and tell them that their vote this November could impact their ability to have their vote counted two Novembers hence? Or is he not concerned that a Republican House would refuse to certify a Democratic victory in 2024?

PSAKI: Well, I think the way you can expect — without getting into the politics of it, which I have to be careful of from here — the President to talk about voting and voting rights is about his view and belief that we should have people elected across the country stand up for protecting and expanding access, and not questioning and making it more difficult or oppressing people's right to exercise their right to vote.

FEINBERG: Just a follow-up. It seems more and more that a tenet of the Republican agenda is to denigrate him as illegitimate or — or worse. Is — is it hard for him to hear these things? What's his reaction every day to hearing that there are people referring to his administration as "the regime" and talking about him as if he's a dictator? Is — is he bothered by that, or does he just see it as politics as usual these days?

PSAKI: I haven't heard that one as much. But I would say that you heard the President — Ed asked him earlier today about Senator Scott's comments about him. And, you know, the President's response was, "[He] has a problem." And his view of a lot of these comments is that people are freaking out in some capacity. Because if you look at Senator Scott, his — his plan that is going to raise taxes on 75 million Americans, even peo- — some people in his own party — not enough, but some people in his own party are backing away from. So, you know, I don't think he spends a lot of time worried about people's angry tweets or — or angry verbal, you know, missives. He spends time on laying out the contrast of what he's going to present with what their plans are.

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3:21:57 p.m.

3 minutes and 5 seconds

KAREN TRAVERS: Also on abortion, Jen, we've seen the President speak out against states

that had passed laws that he disagreed with.

PSAKI: Yeah.

TRAVERS: Voting rights especially. But last year, he supported calls for Major League Baseball to move the All-Star Game out of Georgia because of their voting laws. Would the President support private businesses pulling out of states that are passing or will pass restrictive abortion laws?

PSAKI: I haven't had that discussion with the President, so I don't have anything to comment on at this point. [TO LAWRENCE] Yeah, go ahead.

EDWARD LAWRENCE: Yeah. So — thanks, Jen. So the President said today that inflation is his top domestic priority.

PSAKI: Yeah.

LAWRENCE: Has that replaced climate change, then, for this administration as the top priority?

PSAKI: Well, I would say first that inflation and the rise in cost for people across the country has long been the top issue for peo- — for — in every poll we've seen and certainly has been the number one issue for the President for some time. When he came into office, he said that his agenda was going to focus on four major priorities. That includes addressing the climate crisis, of course, and he will continue to do that. But we are certainly aware that right now, in this moment, that inflation and reducing costs is what is most on the minds of Americans.

LAWRENCE: So the President was also asked if he took responsibility for any of his policies related to inflation — not just gas prices, but inflation. When he took office, inflation was 2.5 percent year over year. It's now 8.5 percent. The invasion didn't happen until about one year into his term. So why doesn't the President take any responsibility?

PSAKI: I think the President said today that he's President and that we control all three — obviously Congress, the House and Senate as well. What is also true is that the pandemic was going on before he took office; that fighting this historic pandemic — which has been front and center for his agenda, we know, and every economist will tell you this — has been the major driver of inflation over the past year-plus and we've continued to fight the pandemic since then. We've also heard Chairman Powell, Secretary Yellen, and others convey — and we've seen this in nearly every element of data we've seen on inflation since Pu- — President Putin invaded Ukraine — that energy prices account for the majority of inflationary increases over the past several weeks since the war began. So, you don't have to take my word for it; that's what economists and data have told us. What our focus is on — and you heard the President say this today — is not whether inflation is or isn't an issue. We all agree it's an issue. What our plan is and what the President's plan is to address costs and bring down costs is what he outlined this morning. It's a multi-step plan. What are we seeing on the other side? We're seeing the plan proposed by Chairman Scott, which would instead raise costs on the American people and sunset

or end — whatever you want to call it — Medicare and Social Security.

LAWRENCE: But last week, Chairman Powell did say that partly what the Fed did, as well as spending from Congress, is the reason that we're in this high inflation environment.

PSAKI: He also talked about energy pri- — the invasion and the impact on energy prices, did he not?

LAWRENCE: He did.

PSAKI: Well, that seems like an important part of context, doesn't it?

LAWRENCE: But it wasn't until one year into the presidency that the invasion happened.

PSAKI: And you're asking me about recent inflationary data, which we know 60 to 70 percent of is because of energy prices, which even Chairman Powell quoted and said was because of the invasion of Ukraine, right? Okay.

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3:27:27 p.m.

1 minute and 29 seconds

APRIL RYAN: Wait a minute. I'm not finished. Please!

PSAKI: Go ahead, April.

RYAN: All right, so the next question on inflation. The President has drilled down and administration officials have drilled down on issues of price gouging — going back to Kaitlan's question, but this is more on a broader scale. The Agriculture Secretary came here a few months ago —

PSAKI: Yeah.

RYAN: — talking about price gouging.

PSAKI: Yeah.

RYAN: He called out Tyson Foods —

PSAKI: Yeah.

RYAN: — people who are profiting.

PSAKI: Record profits yesterday.

RYAN: Right. What's hap- — across the board, you have gas companies that are profiting. You have food companies that are profiting. Consumers are having a hard time dealing with what's at the grocery store and at the pump. Is the President going to start putting more of a focus on this profiteering or price-gouging issue? Because you're seeing these numbers from Tyson, you're hearing about what's happening at the pump. And he even talked about — he asked local gas stations to look at the prices and see if they could make a cut themselves. Is there going to be an extra focus or a more concerted focus on this issue of price gouging?

PSAKI: Yeah — you heard the President talk about it this morning. And tomorrow, he's going to be traveling to Illinois where he's going to be talking about how we need to continue to help small farmers on agriculture. So, we have talked about this, we have elevated it, and we want to make sure people across the country understand that some of these conglomerates — you mentioned the meat industry, but also oil and gas industry — should not be raising prices on consumers while they are making record profits.