

White House press briefing [via CBSN]

05/17/22

Time N/A

3 minutes and 20 seconds

KARINE JEAN-PIERRE: The last thing — I promise — and then we'll go to your questions. But before I do that, I just want to say a few words about how honored I am to be here with all of you today in this role, in this room, standing behind this podium. I am obviously acutely aware that my presence at this podium represents a few firsts. I am a Black, gay, immigrant woman, the first of all three of those to hold this position. I would not be here today if it were not for generations of barriers — barrier-breaking people before me. I stand on their shoulders. If it were not for generations of barrier-breaking people before me, I would not be here. But I benefit from their sacrifices. I have learned from their ex- — excellence, and I am forever grateful to them. Representation does matter. You hear us — you hear us say this often in this administration. And no one understands this better than President Biden, which is why his administration is not only the most diverse in history, it is filled with barrier-breaking women and men, from the Vice President, to the Cabinet Secretaries, to his Supreme Court nominee, to senior staff throughout this administration. When I did my first briefing as Principal Deputy Press Secretary last year, almost a year ago, I said at this podium that this podium, this room, this building belong to the American people. We work for them. It's not about me. It's about them. It was true then, and it is very true indeed today. On Jen's first briefing, she made clear that the President's and her priority was to bring truth and transparency back to this briefing room. Jen did a great job at that. And I will work every day to continue to ensure we are meeting the President's high expectation of truth, honesty, and transparency. I also have tremendous respect for the work that you all do, which I know it's not easy. The press plays a vital role in our democracy, and we need a strong and independent press now more than ever. We might not see eye to eye here in this room all the time, which is okay. That give-and-take is so incredibly healthy and it's a part of our democracy. And I look forward to engaging with all of you on that. With that, please kick us off.

ZEKE MILLER: Thanks, Karine. And congratulations.

JEAN-PIERRE: Thank you.

MILLER: While you've been here before, it's your first as Press Secretary, so on that — in that vein, I just want to ask you: Do you view your primary role here as speaking for the President and promoting his interests? Or are you — you know, or are you committed to providing the unvarnished truth to the American people so that they know what their government is doing on their behalf?

JEAN-PIERRE: I actually think that's hand in hand. I don't think there's — that there is any separation to that. As I said at the end of my opening here, the President believes in truth and transparency. That's what he expects from us. Clearly, we are here to talk about his platform and what he is doing to deliver for the American people. But he wants to make sure we're doing this trans- — in a transparent way, in a truthful way, and an honest way.

(....)

Time N/A

1 minute and 17 seconds

MILLER: And then, on a substantive note, this weekend's attack in Buffalo — the shooter professed ideology, echoed in some ways the hate — the hateful rhetoric espoused by the Charlottesville white supremacist protesters almost five years ago that motivated the President to run for this office back then, as he's often talked about. What more does the President believe he has to do and the country has to do to combat that sort of hatred?

JEAN-PIERRE: So let me just say we still need to learn more about the motivation for the shooting as law enforcement do — does their work. But we don't — we don't need anything else to stay — to state a clear moral truth — right? — which is: A racially motivated hate crime is abhorrent to the very fabric of this nation. Hate must not have a safe harbor. This is something that the President says very often, especially in these horrific incidents that we have seen time and time again. We must do everything in our power to end hate-fueled domestic terrorism. And we must reject hatred and extremes — extremism ideologies that seek to divide Americans, whenever we find it in our society. It is antithetical to who we are as a country and fuels — and fuels violence as well.

(....)

Time N/A

1 minute and 45 seconds

CECILIA VEGA: But on this notion that immigrants and others are believed to be, by some, taking over and pushing white people out of positions of authority in this country, which is at the heart of so much of this terror that is being spewed online, does the White House believe these views are being amplified by Tucker Carlson?

JEAN-PIERRE: Look, you know, like I said, we are still figuring out the motivation of all of this. And we are very clear — look, you know, as you all know, watching what happened in Charlottesville was a major factor in the President deciding to run — right? — and back in 2017. You know, many of those dark voices still exist today, and the President is — is determined, as he was back then. And he is determined today to make sure that we fight back against those forces of hate and evil and of — and violence. So that's what we're going to keep doing. That's what we're going to continue to call out. But we reject hatred and extremism ideologies.

VEGA: But just in the interest of — I apologize. In the interest of time — I know you've got to go —

JEAN-PIERRE: Yeah.

VEGA: — but are there elected officials that this administration views as threatening in this

way?

JEAN-PIERRE: Yeah, it's the — what we're going to continue to do — anyone — any one person — right? — doesn't matter who they are, who spews this type of hate — hatred, we are going to — we're going to call out. We're going to condemn that. I'm not going to speak or call out any individual names. I'm saying that this is something that we need to call out. And so this is what the President has been doing and will continue to do that. You saw him say that in his statement over the weekend. And that's — you know, now he's going to go to Buffalo and visit with the victims that were affected by this violence that we saw on Saturday.

(....)

3:40:59 p.m. [via NBC News Live Event]
15 seconds

SEUNG-MIN KIM: We understand that the shooter did purchase his guns legally, but he did have a history of mental health issues and was held for an evaluation last year. So does the White House believe he should have been prevented from owning a gun because of that history? And how does the administration propose doing so in the future?

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3:46:33 p.m.
3 minutes and 19 seconds

PETER DOOCY: The President's Twitter account posted the other day, "You want to bring down inflation? Let's make sure the wealthiest corporations pay their fair share." How does raising taxes on corporations reduce inflation?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, are you talking about a specific tweet?

DOOCY: He tweeted, "You want to bring down inflation? Let's make sure the wealthiest corporations pay their fair share?"

JEAN-PIERRE: Look, you know, we have talked about — we have talked about this this past year, about making sure that the wealthiest among us are paying their fair share. And that is important to do. And that is something that, you know, the President has been, you know, working on every day when we talk about inflation and lowering costs. And so it's very important that, you know, as we're seeing costs rise, as we're talking about how to, you know — you know, build an America that is safe, that's equal for everyone, and doesn't leave anyone behind, that is an important part of that as well.

DOOCY: But how does raising taxes on corporations lower the cost of gas, the cost of a used car, the cost of food for everyday Americans?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, look, I think we encourage those who have done very well — right? — especially those who care about climate change, to support a fairer tax — tax code that doesn't change — that doesn't charge manufacturers' workers, cops, builders a higher percentage of their earnings; that the most fortunate people in our nation — and not let the — that stand in the way of reducing energy costs and fighting this existential problem, if you think about that as an example, and to support basic collective bargaining rights as well, right? That's also important. But look, it is — you know, by not — if — without having a fairer tax code, which is what I'm talking about, then all — every — like manufacturing workers, cops — you know, it's not fair for them to have to pay higher taxes than the folks that — who are — who are — who are not paying taxes at all or barely have.

DOOCY: But what does that have to do with inflation? The President said, "You want to bring down inflation? Let's make sure the wealthiest corporations pay their fair share." Jeff Bezos came out and tweeted about that. He said, "The newly created disinformation board should review this tweet." Would you be okay with that?

JEAN-PIERRE: Look, it's not a huge mystery why one of the wealthiest individuals on Earth — right? — opposes an economic agenda that is for the middle class, that cuts some of the biggest costs families face, fights inflation for the long haul — right? — and that's what we're talking about; that's why we're — we're talking about lowering inflation here — and adds to the historic deficit reduction the President is achieving by asking the richest taxpayers and corporations to pay their fair share. That is what we're talking about.

DOOCY: Okay. And then just one on the trip tomorrow: How come the President is visiting Buffalo after a senseless tragedy there, but he couldn't visit Waukesha after 6 were killed and 61 injured in an attack on a Christmas parade there?

JEAN-PIERRE: I mean, he's visited many communities. Buffalo — he was — we — you know, he was — he's able to go tomorrow to Buffalo before the trip. That is something that was important for him to do. But he has visited many — many other communities. This is not — Buffalo is not the first community, sadly, that he has to go up to because of a violent attack. So, you know, that's not — that's not the first one. So he's been to many others, sadly.

(....)

3:51:19 p.m.

2 minutes and 11 seconds

SEBASTIAN SMITH: Does the President see any link to the white supremacist theories that — like the replacement theory — and what he started calling "ultra-MAGA" or sometimes he just refers to as "extreme Republican" politics? Does he see that as part of it?

JEAN-PIERRE: Well, look, I think what the President believes and has done is call it out, right? I think, you know, this is — this is not about politics. This is about people's lives. What we saw on Saturday and many times — you think about El Paso in Texas, you think about the Tree of

Life in Pittsburgh, you think about the Pulse nightclub in Florida, the Mother Emanuel in South Carolina. These are events that are very — that have been led by some dark forces that still exist today. And so, it is important to call that out. We understand that there is still a lot of work to do. And so that is — when you talk about people's lives in this way, it's not about politics. It's about making sure that we're doing everything that we can, you know, to uproot this evil that we're seeing, this hatred that we're seeing. And so that's what the President is going to continue to do to make sure that we're working — we're working towards that.

SMITH: Okay, but when he talks about “ultra-MAGA,” as he has started to a lot, is he — would he include that in the bundle of what he considers “ultra-MAGA?”

JEAN-PIERRE: I mean, look, again, this is about the lives of people who were taken in a violent way, in an abhorrent way. And so, the focus for the President is to make sure that, you know, we call this out — we call out white supremacy, we call out hatred. As I've said before, this is still being investigated. This is still being looked at. But the moralness — right? — the moral center of this should be called out and that's going to be the focus. That's what you're going to see the President do tomorrow. He's going to meet with the victims. He's going to have conversations. He's going to offer them comfort. He's going to listen to them and hear what is it that they want to share with him and he's going to continue to work with Congress and call on Congress to call for — to work on gun reform, which is really important here as well.

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4:00:53 p.m.

3 minutes and 30 seconds

JONATHAN LEMIRE: I was hoping you could offer a little more of an explanation about something you said earlier, where you said that they were — did not want to call out by name individuals who had been espousing racist theories that could be fueling violence. I guess my question is: Why not, particularly if they're individuals who have very large platforms and theoretically carry a lot of influence? This would be — people accused of doing so include the number three Republican in the House and the host of the number one cable news show on television. Why not call them out by name?

JEAN-PIERRE: I mean, look, what we saw on Saturday was devastating and horrific. You know, it is — what we want to do is making sure that we send a very clear message that hate must have no safe harbor and we must do everything in our power to end hate-fueled domestic terrorism and we must reject hatred and extreme — extreme ideologies that seek to divide Americans, wherever we find it in society; it is antithetical to who we are as a country and that is what we want to make sure that we're doing. It doesn't matter who it is. This — this is something, like, morally — like, morally — the moral truth of this is that, you know, it is a racial-motivated hate crime, and it's a — abhorrent. And so, that's what we need to call out. It doesn't — it doesn't matter who that is and that's what we're trying to make clear here. We're not — we're not going to get into politics here about this. We want to make sure that we're calling out what we're seeing. These are people's lives. At the top of this — of the briefing — I talked about 10 people

— 10 people who are doing what many of us might be doing on a Saturday — is going shopping. You know, I know I go to the supermarket with my — with my seven-year-old very often. If it's not on a Saturday, it's on a Sunday, before the week starts, to get the needs — to get what we need for the week. I mean, this is what happened to everyday people, from 20 years old to 86 years old. That's what we saw on Saturday and so, we need to call that out and do everything that we can to really deal with this issue and we know we have a lot of work to do.

BRIAN KAREM: But you know it matters to some, right? It does matter to some people who it is that's calling it out and when you don't call the — when you don't call out the individual, they feel as if you're backing away from the issue.

JEAN-PIERRE: No, but we're not.

KAREM: And that gets to the point —

JEAN-PIERRE: No, we're not backing. How are we backing away from the issue?

KAREM: — well, because you won't name who it is.

JEAN-PIERRE: But here's the thing: We're calling out what is happening. We're going to the heart of the issue, the hatred of the issue. Why — but I guess my point is, you know, we are — this is a President — right? — who decided to run because of what he saw in Charlottesville — right? — and he talked about the soul of the nation. And it was something that propelled him to jump into the 2020 primary — because of what this showed, because it was, again, against who we are as a country, as he believed it to be. And so, you know, it is something that is important to remember and this is a President that calls it out every time we see this horrific violence and it's not about — once you get into calling out people's names, then you move away from that issue, right? You move away from that issue. So, that's why I'm not going to do that from here. I'm going to focus on — as I did when I started — the 10 lives that were murdered. Everyday people doing everyday things and that is why the President is going to Buffalo tomorrow.

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4:04:40 p.m..

5 minutes and 29 seconds

APRIL RYAN: The President ran on the issue of the soul of this nation.

JEAN-PIERRE: Yeah.

RYAN: Charlottesville. He speaks now of equity and inclusion. He has strengthened civil rights in DOJ. He's strengthened civil rights in other departments in this White House. But where are the teeth when it comes to changing this hate that has been plaguing this nation since the inception of this nation? Where's the teeth for the President people are expecting when it comes to these issues? And on the summit issue, is the White House looking at what Bill Clinton did —

the precedent of having the Race Initiative, which brought people from all walks of life together to discuss issues of race — the browning of America? Is the President looking at that as well? And then I have another question.

JEAN-PIERRE: Oh, okay. You stopped there. Okay. You know, now, this is a President that has been very clear about race in this country, right? When he walked in, he talked about the multiple crises that were facing us as a country. He talked about COVID, the economy, climate, and where we are with — with race and he's called it a crisis. And he made it a point in his administration — what he can do on the federal level — to really deal with that in a way that we've not seen before. You know, one of the first things that he signed when he walked into the — this presidency is an executive order to make sure that there's fairness, equality, and representation in — in the federal government and federal agencies and that is something that Susan Rice and her team, the Domestic Policy Council, has taken on, and they've made that a priority. Look, I know, April — and we all know — there's still so much work to be done. This President is committed to that work, and he has not shied away from it. He has called out the hatred that we have seen, the violence that we have seen when it comes to racially motivated attacks. He has been very, very clear on that. Is there more work to be done? Absolutely. It is our — is the team here looking to see what else we can do? Absolutely and so, we're just going to continue to do that work. But I do want to say, you know, tomorrow — again, tomorrow, you know, the President wants to go to a community, he wants to grieve with them, and he wants to send a message to the entire country that we stand behind them and with them. And that is so important, as well as the President. He will try to bring some comfort to the community, particularly to those who lost loved ones. And, you know — you know, we hear him discuss some of things he said Saturday about "hate must have no safe harbor." You heard me say that. It's probably the third time I've said this in this briefing. And it really does — it doesn't in this country and so any — any racially motivated hate crime is abhorrent to the very fabric of this nation. And so that's what you're going to see him do. And that is going to be the focus tomorrow.

RYAN: And the second other opposite of the question. You're making history —

JEAN-PIERRE: Yeah.

RYAN: — on so many levels. So many communities are so proud of you, and we're hearing it on social media everywhere. You're the first. What does that mean for the broader community, particularly Washington — white male-dominated still, even though we had the first Black president — and the broader society that is — majority does not look like you?

JEAN-PIERRE: I know.

RYAN: What does this say? Because it's not window dressing; it's more than that.

JEAN-PIERRE: It's a very good question, April. I'm going to answer it in a — in a kind of a personal way, if that's okay, since you asked it in a personal way. So, I have not read a lot of the things that have been written about me because I wanted to focus on the work at hand. And I do believe it's not about me, it's about this place. It's about what — the work that I have to do every

day, that we all have to do as a team to make sure that we communicate with you and communicate with the broader — the broader public. But there was something that moved me, and I think this speaks to — to what you're asking, which is: There was a story about my elementary school. I went to Franklin Middle School — Elementary School in Hampstead, New York and they did a story, and they went to the class — I think I was in sixth grade when I went there; I went for one year — and they talked to the students about me and this moment — and this administration too, which is very important, because I don't think I would be here — yes, I stand — I stood on so many shoulders, but it does matter who sits in the Oval Office as well. That is very, very real and these kids wrote me a letter and in the letter, they talked about how they can dream bigger because of me standing behind this podium and that matters. You know, as I started out at the beginning: Representation matters and not just for girls, but also for boys and so, what I hope is that young people get to dream big and dream bigger than they have before by seeing me stand here and answer all of your questions, you know, and have a healthy dialogue, as I discussed and so I think it is important, and so I appreciate the question. Thank you.