

White House press briefing

08/03/22

1:29:09 p.m. [via Washington Post Live]

3 minutes and 14 seconds

CECILIA VEGA: On the EO that the President is going to sign — so we're now some six weeks out from the Supreme Court ruling on abortion. And this EO seems to be directing the Health and Human Services Department to consider a number of actions. So, where's the urgency right now for women who need help? And when will the help actually kick in? What is the timeline?

KARINE JEAN-PIERRE: So, the exact — when the President normally does an executive order, it's always "to consider." That's always the wording and the language that's — that's in an EO. So, that is nothing new; you'll see that in any executive order that he signs. So, it is in line with that. Look, I mean, just to, you know — it's really important what this is going to do. It's going to help, in particular, low-income women, right? If you think about it, it paves the way for Medicaid to pay for abortions for women having to travel out of state. Secretary Becerra will invite states to apply for Medicaid waivers to allow them to provide reproductive healthcare to women who live in states where abortions are banned — those he judged to be the strongest and most effective on both legal and policy grounds. That's what the President is doing. He's reviewing the options that he has and — and so — and also the thing to note here — and we have said this: This is in consultation with groups, this is in consultation with legal experts, when we make these announcements and the President has been very clear he is going to continue to do whatever he can to make sure that a woman's right to choose continues to be protected the way — the best way that he can from the federal government. But again, the way we do this, the way to make sure that it is federal law is Congress needs to act, and Americans need to make sure that their voices are heard.

VEGA: But what is the timeline — specific timeline — on this EO? For women who need, want to have an abortion soon, will this help them get one? Are we talking about days? Are we talking about weeks? Are we talking about six months?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, that's a great question. We don't have the details to share today, but HHS will soon have more on what a waiver could look like in the timeline as you're asking me and — which would generally target, again, low-income women served by Medicaid and help cover certain costs, so HHS — as you know, the President is going to sign the executive order. It says "to consider." Secretary Becerra will then work with his team to figure out the details and the timeline.

VEGA: And one more question on this. How will you be able to pay to help women pay to cross a state line to get somewhere else where they need to go, given the restrictions of the Hyde Amendment?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, that is something that HHS will come up with the details on that and —

VEGA: Have they — but you're about to sign an EO. Have they not figured that out?

JEAN-PIERRE: Well, we're going to leave it to HHS to come up with the details on the specifics on how they're going to work with states — if a state asks for a waiver — and what that's going to look like. So, this is going to be in their purview. They're going to come up with the specifics — again, with the details on how this is going to work. But again, this is what the President is doing to — he's looking at everything that's available to him on the table — whatever is legally possible, what he can use, his executive authority — to move forward on, and that's what he's doing.

(...)

1:37:17 p.m.

2 minutes and 12 seconds

MJ LEE: And just in terms of the timing of this executive order: Obviously, the idea of helping patients who need to travel out of state — states — out of whatever state they're living in now to get abortion services, other healthcare services — I think that's an idea that you all have been, obviously, talking about since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. I guess, why is this executive order coming out now and directing HHS to consider more actions? Presumably, they would have thinking about this already, right?

JEAN-PIERRE: Well, you know, as you know, the last executive order that we signed — the President signed was to create a task force. And that task force — one of the reasons it was created is so that it could be — streamline our efforts here and our efforts across the agencies to come up with ideas of how to move forward and how to move — the best way to really deal with — deal with this crisis that's in front of us. And so — and also, the — I think — so, that's one part, right? The task force came together, they're — they are putting forth ideas and ways to move forward. I think the other thing to think about is: You know, the President has executive authority, but he also has to make sure he talks to the legal experts, right? He has to make sure that the ideas that we have or come up with can be done. And so that's also a big part of it, too. This is still — you know, this is a government and so there are ways — there — there's steps and processes that we have to take in order to take actions as big as — as big as these. And so that's something, as well, to take note. But look, there has been an urgency from this President from day one when — when the Supreme Court made this extreme decision to take away a constitutional right. It was an unconstitu — unconstitutional action by them — a right that was around for almost 50 years, a right that women had to make a decision on their bodies and how they want to start their families and so, the President has been very clear that he's going to do everything that he can. It doesn't stop with this. But we also understand that, you know, it's — he can't only be the only person working on this, right? That's why we continue to ask Congress to take action.

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1:47:37 p.m.

3 minutes and 8 seconds

PETER DOOCY: How come Republicans seem more jazzed about Speaker Pelosi's trip than the President?

JEAN-PIERRE: You're going to have to ask Republicans. "Jazzed"?

DOOCY: Well, yeah. I mean —

JEAN-PIERRE: Do they have jazz hands, Peter?

DOOCY: Do I have jazz hands?

JEAN-PIERRE: [LAUGHTER] Do they have jazz hands?

DOOCY: Do they?

JEAN-PIERRE: You said "jazzed" — that they're feeling "jazzed."

DOOCY: We can have our Hill team check. [LAUGHTER] But Mitch McConnell said, "I think it's important for the Speaker to go to Taiwan." Lindsey Graham said the idea of her going "is a good thing." Chuck Grassley, "I'm sure glad that she went." Is President Biden just worried about hurting Xi's feelings?

JEAN-PIERRE: I — so you're saying, because they said that, then we're not "jazzed"?

DOOCY: Yeah. Absolutely.

JEAN-PIERRE: [LAUGHTER] We've been very clear — we've been very clear for, gosh, the past week or so, that the Speaker has the right to go to Taiwan. We have said that.

DOOCY: She has a right. Yes, you've been clear that she has a right to go, but why is it so hard for the President just to say, "She's a brave trailblazer, and I think it's great that she went," like so many others on —

JEAN-PIERRE: I think the President thinks that Speaker Pelosi is a great trailblazer. Look, I —

DOOCY: Does he think that it was good that she went?

JEAN-PIERRE: Here's the thing: What we are saying is that we cannot dictate and we will not dictate where members of Congress go. Members of Congress — wait, let me —

DOOCY: Totally get that, but when —

JEAN-PIERRE: Let me — let me finish.

DOOCY: — when they go, he doesn't dictate if they go. Now he can say if he thinks it was good or not.

JEAN-PIERRE: I mean, that's not how it works. That is not how it works here. It really isn't. Members of Congress have —

DOOCY: Can you at least say —

JEAN-PIERRE: — have the right to travel wherever they chose. Our part of this is to make sure we give them a thorough and complete briefing when it comes to the geopolitics of the region or the state, or when it comes to national security. That is our part in this.

DOOCY: Now that Taiwan is effectively encircled by the Chinese military doing these drills, does the President think that the trip was worth the trouble?

JEAN-PIERRE: I'll — look, I already said this, and I'll just repeat it to you: There's no reason for Beijing to turn this visit, which is consistent with longstanding U.S. policy, into some sort of crisis. There is no reason to do that. We have been very clear there's no change in our One China policy, which is guided by the Tai- — the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979. That has not changed and so, look, the United States will not seek and does not want a crisis here. But we are prepared to manage what Beijing chooses to do.

DOOCY: And last one about that. There's a Chinese official who says the U.S. must “pay the price” for its own mistake, and “We mean what we say.” When the Chinese threaten the U.S., does the President take them seriously?

JEAN-PIERRE: Again, the United States will not seek and does not want a crisis. We are prepared to manage what Beijing chooses to do. Nothing has changed when it comes to our policies. This was a precedent — this was precedent for the Speaker to travel to Taiwan. That is nothing new and it changes absolutely nothing when it comes to our One China policy.

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1:58:58 p.m.

2 minutes and 29 seconds

OWEN JENSEN: I have two questions. Back to the executive order first, from a much different perspective here. Pro-life Americans don't want their tax dollars paying for abortions. They believe life begins at conception. The Catholic Church teaches life must be protected from conception forward. But this executive order would have Medicaid pay for travel expenses for women to get an abortion. So my question, respectfully, please: Why does the President want to force pro-life Americans, including Catholics of which he is one, to subsidize abortion?

JEAN-PIERRE: So I'll say this: So federal law makes clear doctors must provide women emergency medical care, including abortion services, to stabilize women facing — and life-threatening conditions. We are working to ensure that pregnant women whose life and lives are in serious jeopardy receive the care that they need. This is what it is. This is what we're trying to do. This is what the President has promised that he would — he would do, but under that same federal law, there are exceptions for moral — to your point, Owen — or religious objections to

provide particular medical services. So, nothing in today's EO impacts those exceptions. So there are exceptions there.

JENSEN: And then a quick follow-up. Catholic bishops say the administration is trying to force doctors and nurses to perform procedures that go against their religious beliefs, including gender transition surgery and abortion. Does the President believe in conscience rights and religious freedom for healthcare professionals?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, I thought that's what you were asking me in your first question. It's basically the same as I just laid out, which is, like, federal law makes clear — right — that doctors must provide women emergency medical care, including abortion services, to stabilize facing health and life-threatening conditions. I — as I just stated, under the same law, there are exceptions for moral or religious objections — to the question that you're asking me — to provide particular medical services and nothing in the EO impacts those exceptions, so there are exceptions there and I thought that was the first question that you were asking.

JENSEN: Okay. So let me just clear up — just one final time again. So, on the Medi — going back of the first question: On the Medicaid — on the proposal to have Medicaid fund travel expenses for women seeking abortion, how would that not violate Hyde if it's using taxpayer dollars to pay for abortions?

JEAN-PIERRE: This EO does not — will not — will not violate the Hyde Amendment. It is law, and we follow the law here.