

White House press briefing [via C-SPAN]

01/13/22

1:01:36 p.m.

55 seconds

ANDREA SHALAL: Can I ask you if — as you're — in your role in community outreach, whether the issue of the documents is a particular setback for the President at a moment when other things seem to be going pretty well? Inflation is coming down. Employment is solid. Like, are you finding that you're getting a lot of response from the public on that? And how do you — how do you play that issue?

KEISHA LANCE BOTTOMS: In my role as senior advisor for public engagement, we've not gotten any information on that in terms of from the public. We've not received any questions.

SHALAL: And do you anticipate that that will have any bearing or is causing the President to think at all about — as he's making his decision about whether to run again — will this series of discoveries have any bearing on his thinking and his thought process as he decides whether to run?

BOTTOMS: I'll refer those questions to the President. He can speak for himself on that.

(...)

1:17:31 p.m.

56 seconds

MARY BRUCE: And as — but, as far as you know, is it ever okay for classified documents to be mixed with personal effects?

JEAN-PIERRE: What I can say — look, what I can say is what the President has said before, what I have said multiple times. We take this very seriously. The President takes a classified information, classified documents very seriously. But, look, you know, I've said this — I've said this before: We have addressed this issue multiple times at length and we have been fully cooperating with the Department of Justice and now we will be doing the same with the special counsel's office. Out of — just to be prudent here and just to make sure that we are consistent, I would refer anything that is related to this to the — as it relates to the review — to the Department of Justice or my colleagues at the White House Counsel Office and this is — we see it as the best way to move forward. We want to respect the process and so, that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to refer you to Department of Justice.

(...)

1:22:34 p.m.

22 seconds

JEAN-PIERRE: And just to be very clear here, Ed, we have — I've been in here almost every day since we got back from Mexico City, standing here, taking your questions at length. So, we're not avoiding anything here and you've heard —

ED O'KEEFE: No, you're not. You're here.

JEAN-PIERRE: — you've heard — you've heard from the President at least twice and you — we have put forth multiple statements from the White House Counsel's Office. So, that suggestion, I just disagree with.

(...)

1:24:24 p.m.

4 minutes and 39 seconds

KRISTEN WELKER: And — and let me just ask you a big-picture question here: Does the White House, broadly speaking, have an obligation to share not just with the National Archives, but with the American people when the existence of classified information is found in a private location?

JEAN-PIERRE: Again, there is a process in this.

WELKER: But just big picture. Not necessarily in —

JEAN-PIERRE: We —

WELKER: — this instance. But is it the policy of the White House that they should share that information not just with the National Archives, but with the American people?

JEAN-PIERRE: So I'll say this, Kristen: We have been transparent in the last couple of days in — remember there's an ongoing process, and we have spoken when it is appropriate and we have shared — again, I've been here almost every day — well, not every day, but from Wednesday, yesterday, and today — taking your questions on this. The White House Counsel has put out a very extensive — multiple statements on this as well and you all — I know you all have been talking — many of you here have been talking to my colleague in the White House Counsel. So what the — the — the actions that we took were right — right actions that his team took in deal — in — in dealing with the Department of Justice and also the Archives. Look, I have —

WELKER: But just to be clear —

JEAN-PIERRE: — I have —

WELKER: — you guys have answered question when the press has broken in the news —

JEAN-PIERRE: — because it's an ongoing process.

WELKER: — [INAUDIBLE]

JEAN-PIERRE: Because, again, it is an ongoing process. There is a process here. The Department of Justice is independent. We respect that process. But, again, I have taken questions. I can take two — two questions to a hundred questions. I have answered your questions as — almost every day on this issue and, again, anything else that you may have, anything that's related to the review, I would refer you to the Department of Justice.

WELKER: One — one last question, because I know you've got to move on here. But the President campaigned on the argument that he would restore confidence. We know that he's in the process of deciding whether to officially announce he's running for reelection. Does this episode undercut that argument that he would restore confidence? Because here we have in the headlines that he is now under investigation by a special coun —

JEAN-PIERRE: He's restored independence in the Department of Justice. That's what we're doing here. When we're saying we're going to refer you to the Department of Justice, that is restoring independence as it — as it relates to issues like this. And that is important to the President and it's been consistent. What I am saying about investigations has been consistent for the last two years. You've heard me over and over — again, when it comes to a legal issue or matter like this, we have always referred to the Department of Justice. So there's nothing here — different here. We have said we wanted to restore the independence of the Department of Justice. That is what you're seeing and again, we — this has been done in a transparent way. When it relates to how this was dealt with, with the Department of Justice and the Archives, the President takes this very, very seriously. Any other questions that you may have about this particular issue, about the review, I would refer you to the Department of Justice. You guys have been in touch with my colleagues at the White House Counsel's Office, and I would suggest that you continue to reach out. [TO PORTNOY] Go ahead, Steven.

STEVEN PORTNOY: Thanks. I just want to press you on that point about the idea of disclosures when it's appropriate. You describe a process, but it sort of feels like a strategy — a communication strategy to protect the President from political damage. Was it the hope and expectation here that this would have remained a private matter and not have been subject to public disclosure?

JEAN-PIERRE: Look, Steven, that's your version of the case. I've been very clear here, and I've answered that question multiple times in different versions — right — in the last couple of days. Look, I want to be very clear: There is a process here; we are going to respect the process. This is all part of the Department Jus — the Department of Justice process and we are cooperating fully. We are cooperating fully in this process and, again, the President believes that the Justice Department and its independence needs — needed to be restored. That's what you have seen under this administration the last two year — two years and I want to be consistent in what I'm saying. I want to be prudent in what I'm saying when I say that we are going to defer any questions related to this to the Department of Justice and any other items that you have, if you don't want to talk to the Department of Justice, you're free to talk to the White House Counsel Office; I know you guys have been in touch with my colleagues there.

PORTNOY: We have done both. But let me just ask you, because oftentimes in the careers of White House Press Secretaries, there becomes — there comes a time where they are asked, you know, what they knew and when they knew it. Were you or any member of your staff involved in the crafting of the strategy as to when this disclosure should be made in advance of CBS News breaking the story on Monday evening?

JEAN-PIERRE: No.

(...)

1:36:33 p.m.  
53 seconds

PATSY WIDAKUSWARA: But just briefly on the documents: We have seen online propaganda from adversaries seeking to take advantage from this revolt — revelation.

JEAN-PIERRE: I'm sorry, can you say — can you go back a little bit?

WIDAKUSWARA: Sure.

JEAN-PIERRE: Who's see- — who's seeking to take advantage?

WIDAKUSWARA: We have seen online propaganda from adversaries seeking to take advantage of the revelation of the classified documents. I wonder if you can share with us whether the administration is anticipating any kind of national security implications from this fallout? Are you hearing any kind of intelligence? And are you doing anything to deter those threats?

JEAN-PIERRE: Again, I'm just not going to talk about any intelligence from here. I would certainly — anything that's related to this, I would refer you to the Department of Justice and to — and also refer you to my colleagues at the White House Counsel. I'm just not going to go into anything — any fur — especially national security iss — ah — affairs and so, I would refer you to them.

(...)

1:45:38 p.m.  
2 minutes and 27 seconds

KAREN TRAVERS: You've several times today referred people to the White House Counsel for questions about the process and the review. Would you bring Richard Sauber here or someone from his team to answer these questions in the briefing room in a formal capacity?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, look, the White House Counsel's Office has provided information on this, this week, as appropriate. Again, I think I just said this. I've said this multiple times during this briefing — that I know, in the last 24 hours, my colleagues at the White House Counsel has been

— at the White House Counsel’s Office has been in touch with many of you and has answered a lot of your questions and so, that will continue. You reach out to them, and they will — they will certainly engage and so, I’m going to leave it there. But again, I will — anything that is related to this review, I would — I would send you to Department of Justice. Again, if there is something specific to — to this that you want from us, I would refer you to the White House Counsel’s Office.

TRAVERS: And is the White House concerned that this investigation is going to overshadow what you are trying to do right now, what your message is right now?

JEAN-PIERRE: Look, our message is very clear and it will continue to — to be just that and you’ve seen it. That’s why when I started the briefing, I laid out all of the — all of the kind of progress that we have made just this week alone — when you think about the Inflation Reduction Act, when you think about how it’s going to lower costs for American families, when you think about the bipartisan infrastructure legislation. Just recently, as you all — some of you were there in Kentucky where you saw bipartisanship, talking about a bridge that has — for decades — for decades, presidents have talked about fixing that bridge and this President, because of the bipartisanship that he was able to bring together, got that done and so, we’re not going to stop talking about how we’re going to deliver for the American people. I actually think, and we actually believe, there are — there are people who are watching — the American people who are watching want to hear that. They want to hear what I just laid out at the beginning of the briefing. They want to know how this President, how this administration, how the federal government is delivering for them. So, we’re — again, we’re going to continue to have those conversations. You’re going to continue to hear from me speaking about that. You heard from the President yesterday talking about the CPI data and how important it was to see inflation go down in six — six months, and how we’re seeing record low unemployment in 50 years. That is conversation, and that work is going to continue.