

White House press briefing [via FNC's *America Reports*]

01/17/23

2:04:32 p.m.

5 minutes and 7 seconds

ZEKE MILLER: Regarding the discovery and classified and official documents at the President's residence and former office, last week, you told — I think — I believe it was Phil that we all can assume, the American people could assume that the searches were complete and all the documents had been recovered. On Saturday, the White House counsel's office said that five additional classified documents had been found. Is it safe to assume now that all the documents are — have been recovered, all the official records, all the classified documents are back in the custody of the National Archives or are more searches underway to find out if there's anything else there?

KARINE JEAN-PIERRE: Look, I understand your question, We have addressed multiple questions from here, multiple questions have been answered by the president. I know that you all just spent about some of you — some of your colleagues, maybe you yourself, Zeke, was on the phone with my colleague for about 45 minutes that addressed a lot of your questions. I'm just going to continue to be prudent here. I'm going to let this ongoing review that is happening, this legal process that is happening and — and let that — let that process continue under the special counsel. We're not — I'm not going to comment from here. I'm not — one of the things that we have said for the last two years, when it comes to the Department of Justice, when it comes to legal matters, when it comes to legal issues, we have been very clear that we are not going to comment. We are not going to politically interfere and — and that continues with this also — this legal issue. And so I would refer you to the Department of Justice, refer you to the special counsel as it relates to specifics on this issue and also, my White House counsel colleagues are engaging with all of you, and will certainly continue to have a copper — conversations on this. I will say that we are consistent with what we have said on cooperating fully with Department of Justice on this issue and we will continue to cooperate fully with the special counsel. [TO VEGA] Go ahead.

CECILIA VEGA: Thanks, Karine. On Friday, you stood here though and were asked about these documents, by our count, some 18 times. At that point, the President's lawyers had found these five additional pages of classified documents. So, did you not know on Friday that those documents had been found when you were at the podium or are you being directed by someone to not be forthcoming on this issue?

JEAN-PIERRE: I — I have been forthcoming from this podium. What I said yes to was what the statement at the time that we all had, right? You all had the statement and I was repeating what the — what the counsel were sharing at that time? And —

VEGA: But we had that statement, so we knew what was in it. But you also knew —

JEAN-PIERRE: Exactly.

VEGA: — did you not know that more documents had been found?

JEAN-PIERRE: I'm telling you — I just answered the question. I just said that I was repeating what the information that we had at that time — right — that you all had. I was confirming from — what the special counsel had provided to all of you and that we knew as well from here. So, just to be very, very clear and look — I've also been very clear about being prudent from here. I was also being very clear about being consistent from here and not going beyond what is currently happening, right? And again, this is an ongoing — I also said this was an ongoing review that was happening with the Department of Justice and, as we know, with the special counsel, I've been very consistent about that as well. And that's one of the reason — look, your question to me is one of the reasons why I'm we are being very, very careful and very mindful and to not interfere here and to make sure — to make sure that the Department of Justice has their independence. Your question actually proves that and that's why we're going to continue to refer you to Department of Justice and refer to the special counsel, or my colleagues —

VEGA: Is the President —

JEAN-PIERRE: — at White House counsel.

VEGA: — does President Biden have confidence in the way his team is handling this with this trickle out of information and the documents being found day after day?

JEAN-PIERRE: I can tell you this. The President has confidence. I can tell you this that the President his team rightfully took action when they learned that the documents existed. They reached out to the Archives, They reached out to the Department of Justice. That is the steps we have been very clear about that, the steps in the process that we took here. And — and look, we're going to continue — we're going to continue to, as we have said, fully cooperate with the Department of Justice. We're going to fully cooperate — the President's team is going to fully cooperate with the special counsel. That does not stop and that will just continue. Again, we are going to respect the independence of Department of Justice, right?

VEGA: Can you just describe his mood to us and the conversations you've had with him on this issue?

JEAN-PIERRE: His mood has been very clear. I saw him this morning. He's very focused. I was — I traveled with him this weekend. He wants to make sure that he's continuing and we are continuing to deliver for the American people and we've been, you know, we've been competing consistent of — on that. If you think about last week, you heard from him about the — has — how his economic plan is working, how we have seen inflation go down for six months straight, how we have seen unemploy — unemployment numbers at its lowest level in 50 years. That matters. That is also the things that this country, the people in the country are also very, very concerned about and want to hear what this President is doing every day. That's his focus and that's what he's going to continue to talk about.

(....)

2:12:17 p.m.
10 seconds

PHIL MATTINGLY: The President and his team had a pretty clear strategy, a list of goals heading into this year. Is there any concern that may be kind of overtaken by what's been happening over the course of the last week with the investigation?

(...)

2:14:37 p.m.
10 seconds

MATTINGLY: The President weighed in on the issue a couple times last week, but given the limitations, given what you talked about from the podium that we should not expect the President to give his thoughts or opinions on the ongoing investigation going forth.

(...)

2:15:21 p.m.
2 minutes and 4 seconds

PETER ALEXANDER: Just to follow up, if I can, very quickly on this, the White House says Republicans are faking outrage on this issue. Why shouldn't Americans be outraged about classified documents being found in a garage?

JEAN-PIERRE: Look And I think I've been very clear about this. We have answered questions on this at this podium. You've heard as Phil was saying, twice from the President talk about this. He said that he didn't know, right? He said that he was surprised and he said that he takes classified information and documents very seriously. We heard directly from the president on this issue. Now anything else, anything beyond that, we're just not going to talk about. There's an investigation going on. There's a legal process here as we've been very, very clear about. I will let the White House counsel talk about any specific details about that. But we're going to be prudent here, and make sure that we are not interfering in this process.

ALEXANDER: I guess that's why I'm asking though because you've said you don't want to interfere here and be prudent about the process. But the White House did post a statement saying that Republicans are faking outrage. So, to that point, why shouldn't Americans be upset about documents found in a garage?

JEAN-PIERRE: That's for — that's for the American people to decide. That is for you all, or I'm sure going to talk to many folks out there and have this conversation. But what we do know — right — what we do know from polling that we have seen over and over again, from your coverage, from what we hear, what the President goes out and talk to the — talks to the American people, they also care about the economy, right? They also care about what is the President doing to lower costs, which is why he took hysteric — historic action in making sure

that gas prices went down at the gas pump. And we saw that happen by more than a buck seventy cents. And that's the work that the President is going to focus on. You think about the Inflation Reduction Act. That's going to lower — lower prescription drug cost, lower medical costs, right? When you think about that, lower energy costs so that's going to be our focus here. We know that's what the American people truly care about, as well, and it is very important for them, that we do that work.

(...)

2:19:41 p.m.

1 minute and 2 seconds

SEBASTIAN SMITH: Very quickly on documents, if you don't mind.

JEAN-PIERRE: Sure.

SMITH: Given these documents that have shown up in very personal spaces, we all know that the President loves his Delaware home. It's an extremely personal space for him. Is he — is he physically joining in the search of the things, rummaging around the boxes in the garage or whatever else, I mean, literally?

JEAN-PIERRE: Are you — are you — are you listening to the question you're asking me?

SMITH: [INAUDIBLE] It's a serious matter.

JEAN-PIERRE: Look, I — I mean —

SMITH: Where are these documents?

JEAN-PIERRE: — okay, look —

SMITH: Is he taking part —

JEAN-PIERRE: — look —

SMITH: — in searching for his own documents?

JEAN-PIERRE: — look, I'm going to be very consistent here. I am going to be very clear here as I have been for the past couple of days, almost a week now dealing with this. You know, we are going to — any specific questions that you have about this issue, I would refer you to my colleagues at the White House, counsel's office who have spent almost an hour taking these questions from all of you, many of your colleagues. I'm a let you ask that question to the White House, counsel's office. And anything else specific to this, I refer you to the Department of Justice. I refer you to special counsel.

(.....)

2:22:59 p.m.

4 minutes and 35 seconds

WEIJIA JIANG: I want to follow up on Cecilia's question. And, sorry if I missed it, but on Friday, did you or did you not know about the additional five —

JEAN-PIERRE: I already —

JIANG: — pages?

JEAN-PIERRE: — I literally just answered that question.

JIANG: You — but I missed it —

JEAN-PIERRE: I just —

JIANG: — so is it yes or no?

JEAN-PIERRE: Well, I — I mean, you're — you're not too far sitting next to her, so I was very clear. I provided — I provided the information that you all had at the time.

JIANG: But I'm asking: Did you know?

JEAN-PIERRE: No, I did not know. I'm saying I had the information. I actually said this to Cecilia. I had the information that you all had at the time, right. And so, this is why — I also said to Cecilia this is why we are trying to be very prudent here and we're trying to be very consistent and say this is an ongoing legal process and this is why I say we're just not going to comment from here. That is a perfect example in Cecilia's question and I was very clear about that.

JIANG: When did you learn about the documents found at the Penn Center in November, and in Wilmington in December?

JEAN-PIERRE: When your team was a — was a doing a story on it.

JIANG: Got it.

JEAN-PIERRE: Because I was also asked a similar question about if our team has been engaged on this and I've been very clear. This is something that the White House counsel is handling. This is something that is being handled by the President's lawyers and been very clear — that's why we are — this is why we are being prudent here. This is why we are being consistent with what we have done the last two years, when it comes to DOJ — Department of Justice investigation, we are just not going to interfere.

DIANA GLEBOVA: [INAUDIBLE]

JIANG: Well, on that note, you've repeatedly emphasized the need just as you did today for independence, for integrity of the Department of Justice investigation, one reason why you continue to point us to the DOJ, so I wonder why then did the White House counsel go to Wilmington to facilitate the handing over of documents to the DOJ?

JEAN-PIERRE: That is a —

JIANG: How is that separate?

JEAN-PIERRE: — that is a —

JIANG: How is that separating the White House from the DOJ?

JEAN-PIERRE: — and, Weijia, I appreciate the questions. I know there's going to continue to be dozens of more questions, probably today and I will say reach out to the White House counsel's office. That's one of the reasons my colleague was on the phone with many of you taking questions today. And I'm just going to leave it there. That is something for them to answer.

JIANG: Okay, but it's related to something that you keep telling us, which is how much it is important to this White House to separate the White House from the DOJ's investigation. But the White House counsel was the one to go and facilitate the documents, to look for the documents?

JEAN-PIERRE: Again, they have been working very closely with the Department of Justice. I would refer you to them if you want to know specifically about their actions, specifically about what they're doing. I would point you to the White House counsel's office. Look guys, you guys can ask me this 100 times, 200 times if you wish. I'm going to keep saying the same thing. I hear your question. It's been asked. It's been answered, it's been noted and we're just going to try to move on here and we're going to move on.

JIANG: One more.

JAMES ROSEN: Do you feel badly —

JIANG: One more.

ROSEN: — that you gave out false information?

JEAN-PIERRE: We're going to move on.

JIANG: One more because Ian did have that call today and he said that the White House would “fully cooperate with the investigation.”

JEAN-PIERRE: Mmhmm.

JIANG: Does that mean that President Biden is willing to be interviewed if called?

JEAN-PIERRE: I'm just not going to — you're asking a question that should go to the White House counsel's office. As you just said, Ian — you spoke to — to my colleague just moments ago. That is something that the White House counsel's office should be answering. Any specific — anything specific to the DOJ or special counsel — what they're doing. You need to reach out to them. [TO KEITH] Go ahead, Tam.

TAMARA KEITH: Yeah. Um, are you upset that you came out to this podium on Friday with incomplete and inaccurate information? And are you concerned that it affects your credibility out here?

JEAN-PIERRE: Well, what I'm — what I'm concerned about is making sure that we do not politically interfere in the Department of Justice, that we continue to be consistent. Over the last two years. And — and that is continue to refer you all, when it comes to an ongoing process, and — and I'll just leave it there. And let's not forget. There was actually a statement from the counsel's office that you all had at the same time as well. I'm just not going to go down any rabbit hole here. I'm going to be very consistent. I'm going to be very prudent and again, I've been asked — just asked that question. I've answered it. It's been noted — the question and we're just going to move on.

(...)

2:34:37 p.m.

2 minutes and 8 seconds

APRIL RYAN: You just, from the podium, in an answer to one of the reporters, you said something about you don't want to politically interfere when it comes to this investigation on the documents. I asked you when we first heard about the documents, there is a political component and a legal component. But can you expound upon what you don't want to interfere on politically because many pundits, many lawyers, many politicians are saying that this is also an issue that could prohibit a lot of work in this one — with the 118th congress, a lot of work for the American people in this moment. Could you expound on what you were talking about?

JEAN-PIERRE: Well, look. I'm not going to get into politics from here and I've been very clear about that. I've answered that question multiple times already. What I can say is that the President is going to stay laser-focused on delivering for the American people and that's going to continue to be the work that he sees at hand. When it comes to the economy, when it comes to the bipartisan infrastructure legislation, when it comes to implementing the Inflation Reduction Act, which we announced a couple of items last week on how important it's going to be for Medicare to negotiate — that is something that is going to be critical, for the American families, for American people across the country, being able to negotiate the price of drugs and cap it — cap it at, you know, at — you know, at 2 — \$2,000 a year. That's going to make a difference in people's lives, right. Continuing to do the work that he has been doing to lower costs and we've seen that. We've seen that the President's economic plan is indeed working and so, look. That is not going

to stop us. That is something we're going to continue to talk about and you're seeing — you're seeing how the work that he's put in the last two years. His administration, the work that he's done with Congress in a bipartisan way, in historic fashions is actually working and so, that's going to be our focus.

(....)

2:38:38 p.m.

1 minute and 47 seconds

STEVEN PORTNOY: I just want to ask you about something you said last week. Last week, you were pretty insistent that you believed the President's attorneys did the right thing. You still believe that?

JEAN-PIERRE: Yes, they did the right thing when it comes to making sure that when the documents were found, they handed it over to the archivist and it was handed over to Department of Justice. But again, Steve, I'm going to be very prudent here. I am going to be very consistent. It is an ongoing legal process. Not going to say more.

PORTNOY: But I — the reason I ask is — is that what we now know and the President's counsel's statement — the President's personal lawyer's statement shed a bit more light on this, but they raised more questions, namely the first call that the President personal attorneys made on November 2 was not to the FBI that they had found what we now know were top secret documents out in the open. The first call was to officials at this White House in the West Wing. How is that the right thing? Is that the right thing when you see some — if you're a lawyer and you don't have a secret clearance and you see a classified document, shouldn't you call the Justice Department's national security office right away?

JEAN-PIERRE: Again, I'm going to refer you to the White House counsel's office. That is something for them to answer. That is a very specific question that they should answer that they will engage you with — engage with on you on this. Just like my colleague did for almost an hour and —

PORTNOY: It was —

JEAN-PIERRE: — had this conversation with all of you.

PORTNOY: — it was about a half an hour. But let me — let me widen down. Why is it the matter of this White House counsel to deal with documents from two administration's ago? These are — we're not talking about presidential records from this White House. Why is this White House counsel involved in this matter at all?

JEAN-PIERRE: Again, this is something for the White House counsel to address. I'm not going to address that from here. I will refer you to them, and I will refer you to the special counsel and anything that's — that is specific to this particular issue.

(....)

2:40:32 p.m.

8 seconds

JAMES ROSEN: You told us something six times that turned out to be false. Are you sorry about that?

JEAN-PIERRE: I'll see you tomorrow. Come talk to me. I'll see you tomorrow.