

White House press briefing [via *Washington Post* Live]
01/18/23
3:16:44 p.m.
30 seconds

JOSH BOAK: And then secondly, real fast, help us understand, given the frequency with which President Biden works in Delaware, what is the case against having visitor logs for his house?

KARINE: JEAN-PIERRE: So I'm — I am going to refer you to my White — the White House Counsel. They actually addressed this. They answered this question that you are asking me, I believe, on Sunday and I also believe the Secret Service put out a statement, so I would refer you to those two statements that — that came out from — from the White House.

(...)

3:27:11 p.m.
1 minute and 14 seconds

JON DECKER: I want to reference an interview that President Biden did in mid-September with *60 Minutes* and in that interview, he chided former President Trump for having in his possession classified documents. He called it “irresponsible.” First of all, do you think it was proper for President Biden to comment on an ongoing DOJ investigation?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, I'm going to say this, and going to keep it really short today: As it relates to this particular issue, as it relates to an ongoing legal matter, I'm going to refer you to the Department of Justice — Department of Justice with the — that specific. As it relates to anything that you want to ask of us about this — this legal matter, I would refer you to the White House Counsel Office. I'm going to leave it there. Not going to go into it further.

DECKER: I'm simply asking you to comment —

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I — and I just —

DECKER: — on the person that you work for —

JEAN-PIERRE: I just commented.

DECKER: — and his comments.

JEAN-PIERRE: I just commented.

DECKER: His comments. Well, it's not really a comment.

JEAN-PIERRE: We're moving on.

DECKER: It's on the [INAUDIBLE].

JEAN-PIERRE: Go ahead.

DECKER: But I also wanted to ask you —

JEAN-PIERRE [TO OTHER REPORTER]: Go ahead. Go ahead. No, go ahead. [TO DECKER] I already answered your question.

UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER: I have two —

DECKER: You really didn't.

JEAN-PIERRE: Well, I — I did.

DECKER: No, you didn't. You gave a non-answer answer.

JEAN-PIERRE: Well, it's your — it's your opinion.

DECKER: You gave a non-answer answer.

JEAN-PIERRE: It's your opinion. It's your opinion. That is your opinion.

DECKER: It's a fact.

JEAN-PIERRE [TO OTHER REPORTER]: Go ahead. Go ahead. Go ahead.

(....)

3:28:58 p.m.

1 minute and 5 seconds

UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER [in VOA seat]: Then let me ask about the document issue again. Sorry to take another stab at it, but with — we don't know what's in these documents, but can the U.S. and is the U.S. working to reassure allies and partners that you can still participate in intelligence gathering and still be trusted with secrets? Is that — are those conversations that the President is having right now or that top administration officials are having — for example, Jake Sullivan in Israel?

JEAN-PIERRE: I'm — I'm going to say this: The President takes classified information seriously. You heard that directly from him. Takes classified documents seriously. You heard that directly from him last week and I'm just going to leave it there. I'm not going to open this up for discussion. We have answered many questions when it — as it is related to — to the documents. Any specifics that's related to this — this review, this legal process, I would refer you to the Department of Justice and any questions that you may have of us, I would refer you to

my colleagues at the White House Counsel's Office, so I'll leave it there.

(....)

3:32:14 p.m.

1 minute

HARIANA VERAS: And one — one quick question on the classified documents. How the President is feeling? Is he worried about those documents that were found? Or is he — did he somehow regret to what he had done with those documents being found at his property? Is he worried about that?

JEAN-PIERRE: First, I'm going to repeat what I've just said moments ago: He takes this very seriously, when it comes to classified documents, when it comes to classified information. He was unaware that the documents were there. You heard that directly from him, from the President; twice he spoke to this just last week and his team is fully cooperating with this process, with the legal — this ongoing legal process. Anything specific dealing with this — dealing with this — with this issue, I would refer you to the Department of Justice or the Special Counsel and I'll leave it there. Okay. I'll come —

VERAS: And when did he find out about the documents?

JEAN-PIERRE: I'll come down. I'll come down. [TO PARKS] Go ahead, Mary.

(....)

3:35:29 p.m.

42 seconds

MARYALICE PARKS: And can I ask just a follow-up to what you said earlier about the President being surprised the documents were even there — that he said multiple times, you've said again he was unaware that these classified documents were even in his garage, in his residence? Given that — given that you could actually just be surprised that documents were there, does that suggest to you, to this White House that reform is needed, there needs to be changes for how classified documents are tracked through the U.S. government?

JEAN-PIERRE: I'm not — I'm not in a position to talk about reform or how this process should go forward. What I will say is: This is something that's being reviewed by the Department of Justice. I would refer you to them. I would refer you to the Special Counsel. I'm just not going to go any further than that.

(....)

3:47:22 p.m.

52 seconds

KAREN TRAVERS: And if I can also ask you — I asked you last Friday, and I know that there was a formal request from the WHCA to have Richard Sauber come to the briefing and take questions. To follow up on that, would you commit to having the White House Counsel come here and take questions from reporters?

JEAN-PIERRE: That is something that I would refer you to the White House Counsel's Office. This is — they have been engaged with all of you. I know, again, they did a 45-minute call with many of — if not you, many of your colleagues. Somebody here had said 30 minutes, but it was not. It was actually 45 minutes. They miscounted and so, that was important. They will continue to engage with all of you and so, again, I would refer you to the White House Counsel's Office on this and any specifics to the ongoing legal matter, I would refer to Department of Justice.

JAMES ROSEN: Could you pass along the request? Could you pass it along for us?

JEAN-PIERRE: I'm happy — I'm happy to pass it along.

(....)

3:50:49 p.m.

8 minutes and 2 seconds

WEIJIA JIANG: Just to be clear, my question is about procedures here at the White House and not about anything specific related to the DOJ investigation, so I'm just wondering how this episode has prompted a review of the process in which staffers handle classified information and how they are turned over to National Archives during a transition.

JEAN-PIERRE: And to be clear, I'm going to refer you to the my colleagues at the White House Counsel's Office. They will be able to address that particular questions. I'm just not going to address something that is even related to an ongoing legal process.

JIANG: But why not? I mean, I'm having a hard time understanding why —

JEAN-PIERRE: I just said —

JIANG: — questions about —

JEAN-PIERRE: Weijia —

JIANG: — procedure would impact the investigation.

JEAN-PIERRE: And I just said — and I just said to you: The White House Counsel's Office will be able to address that question.

JIANG: Okay. Is President Biden satisfied with the current SOP of handling classified materials here and turning them over to National Archives?

JEAN-PIERRE: Again, I will refer you to the White House Counsel's Office. They are the — they're the people who would be able to answer that question about classified information.

JIANG: So, just to be clear: From this point on, are you not going to be taking questions about the classified documents?

JEAN-PIERRE: I have been very clear over and over again we are going to be prudent here. We're going to be consistent. This particular matter is being — is being looked at. There's a legal process currently happening at the Department of Justice, and I'm going to refer you to the Department of Justice on any specifics to this particular case and anything that has to deal with our — what we're doing here, I would refer you to the White House Counsel's Office and let me remind you this is — this is — this is not a new process here. We've been doing this for the past two years. Anything that is related to a legal process, a legal matter, we refer it to the Department of Justice. There's nothing new in our process here. [TO HEINRICH] Go ahead.

JACQUI HEINRICH: Thank you, Karine. Since so many of our questions have been referred to the DOJ and to the White House Counsel's Office, I'm sure you can understand that we're in sort of an information blackout where DOJ refers us to the Special Counsel. They're not holding any briefings. White House Counsel refers us to DOJ, so if you are not able to talk about this from the podium, would you invite a DOJ official to take our questions here — to the briefing room?

JEAN-PIERRE: No, you would have to go to the Department of Justice. That is not — this is a legal matter that is currently happening at the Department of Justice and the President has been very, very clear: When it comes to these types of legal matters, when it comes to investigations, he is not going to interfere. He wants to make sure that we give back the independence that the Department of Justice should have when it comes to these types of investigations. So, certainly, we would not be bringing them here, so I —

HEINRICH: Could you invite anybody else?

JEAN-PIERRE: — would refer you to the Department of Justice.

HEINRICH: The White House Counsel or the President's personal lawyers? Anyone?

JEAN-PIERRE: I — I just — I was just very clear. If you have any questions, I would refer you to the White House Counsel's Office. They did a call for 45 minutes yesterday, speaking to many of you. I believe there were more than 200 people on that call and so I would refer you to my colleagues at the White House Counsel's Office.

HEINRICH: We're just not getting a lot of questions —

[REPORTERS SHOUTING]

JEAN-PIERRE: Go ahead.

[REPORTERS SHOUTING]

JEAN-PIERRE: Go ahead. Go ahead.

HEINRICH: I'm just — one more, Karine. I'm sorry. But on questions that you should be able to answer here that shouldn't have to go to any other agency or entity: Can you tell us if there's any sort of assessment that has been planned or launched to determine if national security has been jeopardized at all?

JEAN-PIERRE: Again, that's for the Department of Justice.

HEINRICH: Why is it a DOJ question?

JEAN-PIERRE: And it's — and let's be clear, it's not your decision to make on what I can and can't answer from here. What I am telling you is that we are respecting the process. .We are being prudent from here. There is an investigation currently happening and when there is — when there are investigations that are happening, that the DOJ is currently reviewing or looking at, we have been very consistent to say that you need to go to the Department of Justice.

HEINRICH: Are they working with NSC or with any other intelligence agencies? I —

JEAN-PIERRE: Again, I would refer you —

HEINRICH: — I don't understand why we're —

JEAN-PIERRE: It's very —

HEINRICH: — being referred.

JEAN-PIERRE: It's very clear. I just laid out, there is no — there should be no confusion here. There — there is a legal process happening, and I would refer to the Department of Justice. [TO ALEXANDER] Okay, good ahead, Peter.

PETER ALEXANDER: Can I just follow up on that? We've all reached out to the Department of Justice. A law enforcement official tells NBC News the Justice Department has not told the White House that it cannot talk about the facts underlying the Special Counsel investigation into declassified documents, so trusting you've received that same information, understanding the desire to be prudent, then why — why can't you speak about the underlying facts?

JEAN-PIERRE: We've been very clear when it comes to even underlying facts, when it comes to specifics, when it comes to something that is under the purview that is — that the Department of Justice is looking at, especially legal matters, investigations — we do not comment from here, Peter.

ALEXANDER: Got it.

JEAN-PIERRE: And that has been consistent.

ALEXANDER: So, understanding that, Bob Bauer, who —

JEAN-PIERRE: We have been very consistent.

ALEXANDER: — Bob Bauer, who represents the President, his personal attorney, over the weekend said that one of the reasons why — and Ian Sams, your colleague, who represent — who speaks on behalf of the Special Counsel at the White House spoke to this in some form yesterday, but he said one of the reasons why they shouldn't reveal further details right now was "regular ongoing public disclosures also pose the risk that, as further information develops, answers provided on this periodic basis may be incomplete." When the White House did release a statement, the President spoke out on January 9 — the risk of incompleteness was a function of the White House's decision not to share all the information it knew, in fact, because we knew on November 2 that the first discovery was made. We knew the second discovery was made on December 20, so there's a risk of incompleteness, but will you concede that it's the White House that has been incomplete in its provision of information when it did choose to speak out publicly on January 9?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, my colleague actually dealt with this question on the call yesterday — from the White House Counsel's Office.

ALEXANDER: And he made — he made the same point about —

JEAN-PIERRE: As you —

ALEXANDER: — the risk of incompleteness.

JEAN-PIERRE: As you — and I would refer you to the White House Counsel's Office.

ALEXANDER: Then may I make — then is the White House having any conversations internally about finding someone, much the same way that John Kirby has spoken on behalf of national security issues at this podium, as your colleague, as their representative? Is there someone — is the White House in talks right now to find someone either outside the White House or internally who can speak on behalf of the White House representing the Special Counsel Office within the White House from this podium? Are any of —

JEAN-PIERRE: I would —

ALEXANDER: — those talks in —

JEAN-PIERRE: — I would refer you to the White House Counsel's Office.

ALEXANDER: Well, but you're the communications —

JEAN-PIERRE: I — I would —

ALEXANDER: — you run the communications —

JEAN-PIERRE: — I — I —

ALEXANDER: — so I'm asking, are you, as a communications matter, having —

JEAN-PIERRE: We —

ALEXANDER: — playing any part?

JEAN-PIERRE: There is — you —

ALEXANDER: Are those conversations existing?

JEAN-PIERRE: Peter, you have spoken to my colleague who did —

ALEXANDER: Yeah.

JEAN-PIERRE: — again, a 45-minute call with all of you, answering questions about —

ALEXANDER: But on ba- — as you would acknowledge, it's on background though, Karine, not on the record until the call ends. That means the American people can't see it in public, so we're asking —

JEAN-PIERRE: But many —

ALEXANDER: — will there be a representative who would speak on camera and see it in public?

JEAN-PIERRE: But — but his — the call was indeed — he was quoted. It was in papers. It was on networks.

ALEXANDER: Correct, but because they can't witness it happening live, Americans don't get the same transparency into this back-and-forth. I'm asking —

JEAN-PIERRE: I think —

ALEXANDER: — would someone —

JEAN-PIERRE: — I think —

ALEXANDER: — is the White House having a conversation —

JEAN-PIERRE: — Peter —

ALEXANDER: — with regard —

JEAN-PIERRE: — Peter —

ALEXANDER: — this is just — with respect, you guys brought John Kirby in. I'm asking if that conversation exists.

JEAN-PIERRE: — Peter, the fact that he spoke to all of you reporters who report on this, and then you all reported on it back to the American people, I believe that is transparency. I believe that he shared information. He answered your questions that you believe that the American people wanted to hear and he answered those questions.

ALEXANDER: I understand that, so my question is, are you —

JEAN-PIERRE: And he took — he took 45 minutes to do that.

ALEXANDER: — for which we're grateful.

JEAN-PIERRE: Anything — anything else that you have on this, Peter, I would refer you to the White House Counsel's Office. Peter, I'm not —

ALEXANDER: I just want to be clear —

JEAN-PIERRE: — we just went back —

ALEXANDER: — are you having —

JEAN-PIERRE: — Peter —

ALEXANDER: — so just — the question is: Are you having a conversation about adding a member —

JEAN-PIERRE: — I — Peter —

ALEXANDER: — to the staff to speak publicly on this?

JEAN-PIERRE: — Peter — Peter, I just —

ALEXANDER: That's — it's a yes or no. You can just say "no."

JEAN-PIERRE: — I actually just answered that question. I said we have someone currently — right?

ALEXANDER: So that means “no.”

JEAN-PIERRE: We have someone currently who answered your questions for 45 minutes on a call —

ALEXANDER: He did.

JEAN-PIERRE: — and took your questions —

ALEXANDER: Yes.

JEAN-PIERRE: — took your questions about this particular issue.

ALEXANDER: Correct.

JEAN-PIERRE: He will continue to do that. He will continue to engage with all of you — right — on this issue, on this legal process that’s currently happening from the White House Counsel’s Office. After that, Peter, I don’t have anything else to share.