

White House press briefing [via *Washington Post* Live]

01/25/23

2:09:31 p.m.

1 minute and 54 seconds

MARYALICE PARKS: There's also been — if I can really fast — there's also been bipartisan outrage and frustration over the last few days that there are just more and more disclosures of classified documents showing up in places where they were not supposed to be. From a national security perspective, you work in national security, how concerned are you and does the system need reform?

JOHN KIRBY: I'm going to defer most of the document questions to Karine. The only thing I say here is that — you're welcome.

KARINE JEAN-PIERRE: Thank you. [ROOM LAUGHS]

KIRBY: The — obviously the President — you've heard Karine say — takes the treatment of classified materials seriously, I can assure you everybody here does too and the National Security Council staff, we deal with classified material every single day. You have to do that. We know what the rules are, we follow the rules, and the procedures exist for a reason and they've been developed over many, many years as the nature of classified material has changed down to now including electronic capability, and so, we're — we're working at that very, very hard. I don't have any changes to speak to. The — the process of classified material handling, you know, not process, but guidelines change as technology changes and we're always reviewing those — that procedures to make sure they're fully appropriate.

NANDITA BOSE: Is there a problem with overclassification of documents?

KIRBY: Is there a problem with?

BOSE: Over classification of documents.

KIRBY: You know, I think — you know, it's always a balance and you are always trying to meet that balance about whether things are classified appropriately. And — and the intelligence community works at this, obviously we work at this. I wouldn't go so far as to slap a band aid on it and say yeah, everything is overclassified, but it's — it's a balance that we try to strike to make sure that everything is appropriately marked and appropriately handled, but you know, it varies from document to document and from issue to issue.

(.....)

2:13:48 p.m.

1 minute and 7 seconds

PETER DOOCY: John, how hard is it to walk out of a SCIF with classified material?

KIRBY: Everybody who goes into a SCIF knows what the requirements are. To go in, and knows what the requirements are to go out. You know, there's — you can't bring personal devices in, certainly can't leave with material unless that material is appropriately secured.

DOOCY: And usually what happens to someone in the chain of command if they do leave with a piece of classified material that they are not supposed to have, or that is not secured?

KIRBY: I think — if — if you do it inadvertently or you do it and realize — you know, you don't have it secured in a locked bag or, you know, you — you self-report, which is exactly what the President did, self-reported. But you self-report and you — you make sure that you get the material back secured where it belongs and that you're transparent about it.

(...)

2:20:43 p.m.
28 seconds

AAMER MADHANI: Does the administration think it's time for all former presidents to do scrub of their homes and offices to make certain they don't have any classified documents in their possession?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, I think I was asked a version of that question yesterday and I — it remains the same as what we're going to do from here — is, again, be prudent, be consistent. I would refer you to the White House counsel office. I'm just not going to comment on any change of procedure, how things should move forward. I would refer you to the White House. Counsel's Office.

(...)

2:25:14 p.m.
1 minute and 27 seconds

PARKS: Can you assure the American people, though, when President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris leave office no classified documents will walk away with them to places they should be?

JEAN-PIERRE: So I'm going to be very careful here, as you can imagine. What I can say is repeat what the President has said multiple times. He takes classified information — he takes classified documents very seriously. His team currently is fully cooperating with the legal procedure that is happening under the Department of Justice and also the special counsel. I'm just not going to go beyond that. I'm not going to predict or — or lay out anything that might happen in the future. What I can say is this is something that the President — this is a matter, an issue that the president takes very seriously.

PARKS: On another topic, any reaction from you, the White House, about Speaker McCarthy's

decision to keep Representative Schiff and Swalwell from the Intelligence Committee?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, I'll say this. Representative Schiff and Representative Swalwell, and also, Represent — Representative Omar are, you know — are expertise [sic] and bring a lot to the table when it comes to foreign policy and national security. And we'll say this, you know — we'll say this. We'll say that, you know, when it comes to that committee. it should not be politicized. It should be independent and — and again, those congressional members bring a lot of expertise to that committee and I'll leave it there.

(...)

2:32:41 p.m.

13 seconds

SEBASTIAN SMITH: The House Oversight Committee is looking into Hunter Biden's art sales or the sales of his own art. Is the White House concerned about that? Does it have any response to it?

JEAN-PIERRE: I will refer you to Hunter Biden's representatives on this.

(...)

2:37:43 p.m.

3 minutes and 17 seconds

KRISTEN WELKER: The President said last week that he has no regrets in his handling of classified documents. When he saw how forthcoming former Vice President Mike Pence was, his team was about the fact that they did find classified documents in his Indiana home, did the President regret not telling the public about this immediately and instead letting it leak in the press?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, I'll say this and again, I'm going to be very prudent. I'm going to be very consistent here. We have seen statements from the President's personal lawyers. We have seen statements from the White House counsel's office that laid out — believe there was a timeline that laid out how this process went on, from — from our point of view. I'm just not going to go beyond that. I will refer you, again, to those documents. And I will just reiterate what the President has said. He takes this — he takes classified documents, classified information very seriously and I'm just not going to go beyond what he has said. I'm not going to go beyond what has been shared in statements by his lawyers.

WELKER: Karine, a number of lawmakers reacted yesterday to the revelations by former Vice President Mike Pence with some disbelief, saying that, writ large, the system is broken when it comes to top officials handling classified documents. Does the President — does the administration agree with that assessment. And does the President, as the commander-in-chief, feel it's his responsibility to do something about it?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, look, I know my colleague was just asked this question and I do want to be very careful. This is an ongoing legal matter here.

WELKER: We're not — I'm not asking —

JEAN-PIERRE: But it is — it is —

WELKER: — about the President's action —

JEAN-PIERRE: — actually —

WELKER: — but — but broadly speaking —

JEAN-PIERRE: — I hear your —

WELKER: — here we have a number of current and formers who have now acknowledged —

JEAN-PIERRE: — I —

WELKER: — yes, they found classified documents in their possessions in places that are not secure, the nation's deepest secrets.

JEAN-PIERRE: — no, I hear the question —

WELKER: Does the President feel like he's needs to address this?

JEAN-PIERRE: — I — no, I hear the question, and we're talking about system. You're asking about how do we move forward. You're asking, like, what does the President think. And I am telling you that because there is a really — I have to be really careful because there is — there is — this is a legal matter that is happening currently. And any — and for me to comment on anything that's related to an ongoing investigation, I — that is not something that I can do from here.

WELKER: Very quickly, the President himself said he was going to talk to us about this soon. He did make brief comments last week, but does he have any plans to answer the questions that we've been posing to him, to perhaps hold a press conference —

JEAN-PIERRE: No, understand —

WELKER: — so that we can ask a range of questions he can answer.

JEAN-PIERRE: — totally understand the question. I don't have anything to preview at this time on — on any — any opportunities for the President to address for, but, as you all know, and I know questions were shouted earlier, there's many opportunities that you all have with him where he takes your — takes all of your questions. And he has over the past —

WELKER: But he hasn't answered —

JEAN-PIERRE: — two weeks —

WELKER: — answered questions, though.

JEAN-PIERRE: No, I understand.

WELKER: We've been shouting them.

JEAN-PIERRE: No, he's answered — actually, when he was in California, he took a question.

WELKER: Yeah, in California — in California.

JEAN-PIERRE: When he was in Mexico City, he was asking — he took a question a day after that.

WELKER: Twice.

JEAN-PIERRE: No, but the day after that, he took a question. So I'm just saying that it's not that he hasn't addressed this at all. He has — I just don't have anything to preview on a, you know, potential press — press conference or anything like that or an opportunity that you all will have to hear from him directly. But again, he has been asked the question a couple of times and he's answered it and you all have heard from him on that.