

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

02/06/23

2:41:07 p.m.

2 minutes and 12 seconds

ZEKE MILLER: You mentioned — excuse me — a few minutes ago, in your — in your response to Jeff, you said the American people should feel optimistic about the direction of the country. Survey after survey shows they don't. An AP survey over the weekend showed three quarters of Americans view the direction the economy is heading — the economy is heading in the wrong direction. Is that the objective for the President tomorrow night, to sort of convince the American public that their views of the economy are not the way — you know, that they should be seeing things the way you are and not the way they are currently feeling right now?

BRIAN DEESE: I think the objective, as is always the case for the President, is to, number one, meet the American people where they are, with the recognition, as I mentioned, that — that the anxiety and the ongoing challenges that families feel in their lives are the reality of a very challenging period, with a pandemic and a — a war in Europe that has driven — that drove gas prices up and food prices up and created lots — a lot of uncertainty. And so, first and foremost, to meet the American people where they are, but also to help explain why he is optimistic that if we continue to make the kind of progress that we have — historic progress, even with all of the distance that we have yet to travel — then more and more families, more and more communities are going to see economic opportunity and more durable economic opportunity as a result of the policies that we have put in place, as a result of the economic progress that we're making, so that's the way that the President has always approached these things, but will approach it tomorrow is to — is to acknowledge and meet American people where they are, but also to try to tell a story about where we are going, where we can go together and it — you know, it is the case that if you go around the world, if you talk to heads of state, see heads of state, CEOs, other leaders — they will tell you, you know, that the United States really is better positioned than almost any other country, that the opportunity to invest in the United States is something that people are enthusiastic about and that bodes very well for the economy, not only in the very short term but over the medium term as well.

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2:52:20 p.m.

2 minutes and 24 seconds

KAREN TRAVERS: You mentioned how the President said Friday that the state of the economy is strong. We had a poll out over the weekend — ABC News — that found that 41 percent of Americans say they're worse off financially now than before this President took office. How do you explain the disconnect there of why this administration's message about the strong economy is not getting through?

DEESE: Right. So — so, I think — I think the poll that you just cited is actually consistent. So, about two thirds of Americans say that their — their circumstances are better than — than before

— you know, say it either way and I think that — that it is the case that if you look at the, kind of, key measures of basic economic security — do I have health insurance; do I have \$400 in the bank in case my car breaks down or I have another emergency expense; am I late or delinquent on a credit card bill; am I facing foreclosure — if you look at all of those measures, they — on average, American households are in a better position than they were before the pandemic hit and that's true for the lower-income quartiles as well and so, I think that that is, in part, reflected in the data that you're saying — is that more Americans believe they're in a better economic position in terms of their own balance sheet — their own family balance sheet. And at the same time, in the way that we were talking about before, this has been a very challenging period with — with the pandemic and all of the ways in which — the second- and third-order ways in which that's affected our lives and the way that we operate in the economy, with the war in Ukraine and the — and the cascading impacts on supply chains and on the ways it affects things that — you know, the basic price of things that people pay in the grocery store. And so, for all those reasons, it's — it's understandable that even as personal household circumstances for the majority of people have improved, the anxiety — the economic anxiety is real. So, I just go back to the answer I gave before, which is why the President will both speak directly to the fact that we have more work to do, but also underscore how the progress we have made to date can paint the picture to move forward and why we should, then, commit to the proposition of seeing these policies and this policy vision through.

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3:09:05 p.m.

2 minutes and 35 seconds

KELLY O'DONNELL: First of all, thank you for taking so many questions. We all appreciate that and we hope your successor will, too and we do really appreciate it. A number of them dealt with this perception issue of how Americans are feeling differently than a lot of the positive data you have. Is there a perception issue in the other direction on inflation? Because when the President says he's not responsible for inflation, that it's a global issue and things like that, is there a problem or — or maybe a gap somewhere in how the White House views inflation when so many Americans feel it on a daily and weekly basis when they're having to meet their obligations? Is there a perception gap on inflation here?

DEESE: No, not at all. I mean, you have a President who has gone out and said that his top economic priority is to bring down inflation. You have a President that prioritized working with Congress to pass a bill called the Inflation Reduction Act, which, as we talked about before, was designed specifically to lower the cost of people's prescription drugs, lower healthcare costs, lower clean energy costs and you have a President that has been tireless about working on those issues that connect most directly to the lived experience of people across the country: the efforts — which I won't, you know — we've talked about at this podium around trying to help bring gas prices down in the wake of Putin's invasion. From things very visible in public, like the historic release strate- — Strategic Petroleum Reserve, to the — to things the President is doing every day behind the scenes diplomatically with our allies and partners on those sets of issues and as a result, in no small part because of those efforts, we're now seeing progress. That progress is not

sufficient. We need to keep making more progress, but the President is actually focused today on those — the — those issues. And that's what you're going to hear. "How can we keep making progress to reduce — lower costs for people?" And I would say this, I think, also is an area of contrast that the President will highlight, which is that what — you know, he wants this economic conversation to focus on how we can keep reducing costs for the American people and doing things like cutting taxes for the very wealthiest people in the country and increasing the deficit as a result of that not only are bad economic policy, but they don't speak in any way to that core issue. So, I think — I think the President is very much focused on that issue. He's shown that he can actually work to deliver results and is going to keep arguing why we need to make more progress on that front.

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3:28:09 p.m.

7 minutes and 12 seconds

MICHAEL SHEAR: I think you made the assertion that the reason that there wasn't a red wave or the reason that the elections and the midterms were more successful than many people thought they would be for Democrats was because of the President. Is that — that's a fair —

JEAN-PIERRE: Yeah. And we've said that before. It's noth- — it's nothing new. We think —

SHEAR: So, like —

JEAN-PIERRE: — we think the President played a very big role in laying out the message for Democrats.

SHEAR: So I wonder how, in light of the following poll, you can make that assertion. This is a recent NBC poll: Is Biden honest and trustworthy? 34 percent, yes; 48 percent, no. Ability to handle a crisis: 30 percent — 32 percent, yes; 49 percent, no. Competent and effective: 31 percent, yes; 49 percent, no. Has the necessary mental and physical health to be President: 28 percent, yes; 54 percent, no. Uniting the country: 23 percent, yes; 50 percent, no. I mean, given that poll, which, you know, is not just a single poll, it's been — you know, versions of that had been repeated in poll after poll, survey after survey since the midterm elections and before. And I think one of my colleagues referenced a recent poll that said 60-something percent — more Democrats don't want President Biden to be their nominee than Republicans don't want President Trump to be their nominee. So, given all of that, why are you so convinced that it was President Biden that caused the Democratic success in the midterms and not that the Democrats had success in spite of the President?

JEAN-PIERRE: Well, I'll say this: Because if you look at what candidates — senators and congressional members — ran on, it was the successes that the President had. It was on the bipartisan infrastructure legislation. It was on the CHIPS and Science — and Science Act, which was bipartisan because of — the President was able to make that happen. It was because of the Inflation Reduction Act. If you hear the message that was coming out of Democrats during the

midterms, it was what we were able to deliver. So, yes — so that's what they used, right? They used exactly what the President was able to do in order to get that success. And so —

SHEAR: So that —

JEAN-PIERRE: — it is — right — if you think about all of the pieces of — of historic legislation that became law, clearly, that — that we did last year, again, the President led that and the President went out there and spoke on these very important pieces of historical legislation. When you think about what it's done for the economy, what it's done for the American people, how it's provided some relief: Yeah, I think the President did play a big role.

SHEAR: So, then, just one quick follow-up. I mean — I mean, I guess does it suggest then that maybe the Democrats who were talking about the President's agenda have been more successful at talking about the President's agenda than the President —

JEAN-PIERRE: Well —

SHEAR: — himself has been? And does that make it all the more important tomorrow and — and whatever — whenever the President rolls out his election — re-election campaign, if he does — but does it make it that much more important for the President to somehow find a way to communicate as effectively as, I guess, some of these other Democrats were? Because, obviously, however — however he's communicating now isn't translating —

JEAN-PIERRE: So I'll say — I mean, look —

SHEAR: — into his own successes.

JEAN-PIERRE: I'll say this, Michael — and Brian — and Brian spoke to this — right — I think he got this question every which way from — from your colleagues, and a very important question to ask. But I'll say this: We understand and it is true that the American people are feeling — are feeling inflation. They're feeling what the pandemic and COVID has — has done — right? — the last two, three years. And so we understand that they're going to have some feelings about the economy right now. And so that is something that the President has always acknowledged and has said, "There's always more work to do." But also, the reality is, if you look at the data, if you look at how the economy has bounced back because of this work that the President has done — and Brian spoke to this; I have spoken to this — when you think about record 12 million jobs, when you think about unemployment at the lowest that it's been in 54 years, when you think about the 800,000 manufacturing jobs and how important the CHIPS and Science Act is going to continue to be as we see manufacturers coming back to the U.S — those are real data points, right? Those are real things that has occurred these past two years, and it's because of the President and so, look, we get where the American people are. But what we are going to focus on is — are the numbers that I just laid out and that is also important. Will we continue to need to talk directly to the American people? Absolutely. That's why the State of the Union — we see it as an important moment to lay out — for the President to lay out how he sees the country moving forward and also to remind folks and lay out what he has done the last two

years. There's no easy answer there. I get where you're getting to, but this is an incredibly complicated time. What the President is going to focus on is how he's going to continue to deliver for the American people. Okay. [TO JIANG] Go ahead.

WEIJIA JIANG: Thank you, Karine. Is this the first Chinese balloon that the U.S. identified flying over U.S. airspace under this administration?

JEAN-PIERRE: So what I can say is that we have talked about the China's — China's balloon program. We have — generally on this, the Chinese surveillance balloons program has been around for some time. We even — we even briefed Congress this past August, so I don't have any specific on any other balloon during this — during — during this President's administration. But there has been a program that has been in effect. We have kept Congress abreast on that. So — but I don't have anything more to say or to share.

JIANG: How is it possible that this administration discovered at least three previous balloons that flew over the U.S. under the previous administration, but Trump officials didn't know it was happening?

JEAN-PIERRE: Yeah, so, look, I think that — and we have talked about this before, about how the — when it — when the PRC government surveillance balloons trans- — trans- — trans- — transited the continental U.S. briefly at least three times, as you just mentioned, during the President's — the prior administration and once that we know of the beginning of this administration's. But never for this duration of time, as we know. This information was discovered prior to the admin- — administration left, but the intelligence community, as I said, is prepared to give — give briefings to key officials, but this is something —

JIANG: Prior or post?

JEAN-PIERRE: — this is something — sorry, post. So this is something that we — they did not — they were not aware of, as we've just laid out. But again, we are ready to brief key officials to let them know what — you know, what the intelligence community was able to figure out.

JIANG: But is there anything you can share about how you became aware of it? Like, did you —

JEAN-PIERRE: I'm —

JIANG: Is there — I just don't — did you go back and look at some —

JEAN-PIERRE: So, I'm not going to get into the intelligence community — intelligence community information from here. That's not something that we do from the — certainly from the briefing room. What I can say is that we learned of this, the three prior, during the past administration and — and so we're — we are willing to share that information. But again, I'm just not going to get into intelligence from here.

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3:37:48 p.m.

2 minutes and 9 seconds

BLAKE BURMAN: So, Karine, we know of these few balloons that had flown in the past — the one, of course, from last week. You say the relationship is up to China going forward. Should the expectation be for the American public that — that this is it with balloons then? Or is it that this could potentially happen again in the future? And if that's the case, that the standard procedure going forward is wait for it to get over water and then it'll be shot down?

JEAN-PIERRE: I — I'm not going to get into going to get into, you know, specifics of what might happen next or hypotheticals from here. I'm just not going to do that. What I can say is, as you've heard me say, there is a — there was a China surveillance program — right? — balloon program that we have — that has been going on for some time, that Congress certainly was briefed on back in late — in last August. But just — just not going to get into hypotheticals from here.

BURMAN: And then, one more. There are — there's bipartisan calls up on Capitol Hill as it relates to TikTok and the national security implications of it. You have Congressman Ken Buck saying: If you think a — “If a CCP surveillance balloon scares you...wait until you hear about TikTok...” Senator Michael Bennet had recently called on the CEOs of Apple and Google to remove TikTok from their — their devices — from their Google Play stores and Apple play store. Does the administration believe that TikTok is a national security threat? And does it believe that those apps should be removed from phones?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, look, the President — the Biden administration more sp- — more broadly, has never allowed TikTok on White House devices. Other fa- — federal agencies have similar restriction. We have been clea- — clear about our concerns on apps like TikTok and so, look, we are focused on the challenges of certain countries, including China, seeking to leverage digital technologies and Americans' data in ways that present unaccountable, unacceptable national security risk. I'm just not going to get ahead of it. As we know, there's a review currently happening, but we take this very seriously and as I said, the Biden administration has never allowed TikTok on the White House — on the White House devices.

BURMAN: Is it a national security risk?

JEAN-PIERRE: Again, I'm just not going to — there's a review happening by CFIUS. I'm just not going to get ahead of that.