SELINA WANG: I know that these new tariffs are seen as more targeted and strategic, but the administration has chosen to keep in place those Trump era tariffs on some $300 billion worth of goods, which Biden himself had said in 2019 that Americans are paying for. So, why make that decision to keep it in place? And aren't you concerned that it's going to keep prices elevated?

KATHERINE TAI: So first of all, let me say a couple of things in terms of the price that Americans paid for in the previous era. Some of that — may be a lot of it was about the chaos and unpredictability that it created and the escalation that resulted, right? Secondly, I think what — I'm a — I'm a trade lawyer by training and at USTR, we are deep into the technical issues. This Section 301-based review that we undertook required us to look at a couple of questions. One of them was the effect of the practices on our economy and there you have our response, which is a targeted strategic response that is meant to work together with the investments that we're making. The other aspect that we had to look at was the effect of the tariffs on changing China's behavior with respect to the IPR abuses and the forced tech transfer. Their — the findings in my report, which you can find on the USTR website right here — it's a serious report — is that not only have we not seen the problematic practices subside in some areas, we have seen them get worse. And in that light, there is actually no reason for — for us — no justification to relieving the tariff burdens on the trade with Beijing.

EDWARD LAWRENCE: So, this is an election year. Why did it take three years to impose these tariffs?

TAI: So, this is where I put my lawyer hat back on. Under the 301 statute, in the fourth year of the tariffs, if there is a stakeholder that has benefiting from the tariffs, who asked us to keep them, we keep them. That is what happened in 2022 because the tariffs first went on in 2018. As a result of that, in the fall of 2022, we started a process. We opened up a portal that was open, I think, in the end of 22 to the very beginning of 23, notice and comment. We wanted to hear from all of our stakeholders, their views on the tariffs, the pros and the cons — please inform us. That — that elicited, I think, about 1,600 comments. So, that's at the beginning of 2023. And then, we started a whole of government, interagency review within the Biden administration. That process has taken us to today and the unveiling of this finalized package which the President approved.

LAWRENCE: So, it took three years to figure out the Chinese were flooding the market and stealing technology? I mean, it's pretty evident that they've been doing that all along.
TAI: No, it took — it took a year and a half for the course of the review. You will see the amount of care that we put into our investigation and our findings. Yes, there continue to be problems, but then the question is: What do you do about the tariffs? For this administration, it is extremely important that we approach a relationship like the one between the U.S. and China and these issues around the industries and the jobs of the future with discipline. That's what takes so long — is the design and the architecture of the tariff defense system that you will see.

LAWRENCE: One more quickly on Mexico, if I could. Are we looking at tariffs — I mean quotas? The Trump administration imposed quotas on steel and aluminum tariff — aluminums coming in from Canada and Mexico. Could there be the same policy related to EVs once the [inaudible] comes in?

TAI: I think I'll just rely on the answer provided before which is stay tuned.

GABE GUTIERREZ: Following up on my colleague's Selena's question. You said that the President has been consistent on this issue, but back in 2019, when he was a candidate, he said that “any freshman economics student could tell you that the American people are paying his tariffs”, referring to his opponent at the time. And he also said that he would reverse what he called ‘senseless policies’. Why’d he change his mind?

TAI: Okay, so I'm going to reject the assertion that he changed his mind. What he has been clear about is his commitment to America, America's workers, and America's manufacturing capabilities and resilience — A future for our economy that is built from the middle out and from the bottom up. These tariffs are — tariffs are tools and this is something at USTR that we feel very strongly about because there are tools. They are the tools of trade. When used strategically and smartly, they can be powerful forces for economic strength and development and that is what you were seeing in this package.

GUTIERREZ: Previously, he called them “senseless”. They're no longer senseless?

TAI: I think you have to separate out the tool itself and perhaps how it's being used, and whether or not they are articulated for a particular purpose.

AAMER MADHANI: Was it appropriate for Speaker Johnson to show up at the trial of the former President today?
KARINE JEAN-PIERRE: So, look, I can't speak to — uh — I don't want to comment. Obviously, as this is related to 2024 elections, and I can't speak to the speaker’s schedule. That is something for him to decide on and let's not forget, this is also connected to a independent judicial process. So, going to be really mindful and he makes his choices on what he does, Um — um — you know, with his business that is his choice to be made. What I can speak to is, obviously, what the President is — is speaking to today as it relates to 301 tariffs, making sure that he's protecting American workers, protecting American businesses, making sure that when we — that, you know, when we're allowed to compete in a fair way, we can thrive and that's what you heard from this President. And what we've learned and we've seen from what the speaker is — obviously leading — in with congressional Republicans is that they want to talk — they want to cut — they want to cut medical — Medicare. They want to cut — um, you know, they want to cut Social Security. They want to get thing — rid of things that the American people truly, truly care about. And so, our focus is going to continue to build an economy from the bottom up, the middle out and, you know, this is — this is something that we can speak to. I think the contrast between what we do here and what Republicans — more broadly, Republicans in Congress do is, I think, couldn't be more stark.

(....)

1:55:18 p.m.
4 minutes 24 seconds

PETER DOOCY: Why do you think Americans are so down on President Biden right now?

JEAN-PIERRE: What do you mean?

DOOCY: I know you don't like to talk about polls, like, the five of six swing states that he is losing right now to somebody who is a criminal offender. But, more broadly, it doesn't seem like anything you guys are doing, is making him more popular. Why do you think that is?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, you — uh — you mentioned a criminal defendant your words, not mine. So I want to be super mindful about how I answer this question, because obviously, that criminal defendant is also a — in the race for 2024 elections, so going to be super mindful there. I will speak more broadly to what the American people are going through. Like, we understand. We are sensitive enough and open-minded enough to understand that this is — that — not just this country, but globally, people have had to deal with a pandemic and coming out of that pandemic. We understand that even you know, you think about gas prices and because of Putin's war what that has occurred that led to gas prices increasing and the President had a lot to deal with when he walked in. A lot. A lot of crises, and this is a President that took that very, very seriously and took action. The American Rescue Plan? No Republicans voted for that. But we ended up trying to work to get an economy that's fair for all and make sure that we don't leave people behind and creating 15 million jobs, an unemployment rate that's under four percent. We understand that people are still feeling this. We get that and we're not — we're not blind to that. That's why you hear the President pretty regularly announcing how he is going to lower costs for the American people, whether it's Big Pharma, trying to lower healthcare costs is expanding ACA for those
who truly need it, or it is making sure that we get rid of junk fees that cost Americans a lot of money — every year. So, look, we know it's going to take a little bit of time. We get that and we are going to continue to — it's not going to stop us from talking about it and it also not going to stop us for [sic] talking about the contrast that we see from GOP — Republican congressional members who want to do the opposite of what the President is trying to get done — Cutting Social Security, Medicare [sic] — Medicare, Medicaid. That is what they're talking about — slashing taxes for billionaires and corporations. That's not what this President wants to do. He wants to make sure that we're building an economy from the bottom up, middle out and again, we get it. We get that prices are too high for Americans, and that was — that's what [sic] we're going to continue to do the work.

DOOCY: I get that you understand that people are hurting right now. Why is it that nothing you're doing to address their concerns is working?

JEAN-PIERRE: What I'm saying is, we're going to continue to do the work. I can't speak to the polls, right? Those are for folks who are experts who can do a deep dive and look into that and speak to them. What I can speak to is we understand what the American people is [sic] feeling. We understand what they're going through. That's why we're going to continue to do the work. 301 tariff — that's part of it — right — making sure that we're protecting American workers, making sure that we're protecting American businesses. That's the work that the President's going to focus on and we're going to continue to move in that way.

DOOCY: So, more broadly then —

JEAN-PIERRE: Yeah.

DOOCY: — have you considered in the White House that some of President Biden's recent policy positions could be a turn off to the people that used to like him?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, here, I would — this is — I would disagree with you there because a lot of the policies that the President is pushing forward are incredibly popular. They are. Student debt — even though you have Republicans who stopped the President on moving with his plan on student debt, that's actually very popular with Americans. Fighting Big Pharma? That's popular with Americans, right? Making sure that we lower costs on health care? That's popular with Americans. So, what the President is actually doing is popular with what majority of Americans want to do. Even in protecting reproductive rights, something that Republicans are not on the right side of history, you think about what extreme — extreme elected officials want to do. The President wants to protect and make sure that we actually are giving a woman a right to make really difficult decisions on their health care. So, that part I certainly disagree with you on.