

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki, October 22, 2021

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October 22, 2021

Briefing Room

• Press Briefings

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

2:06 P.M. EDT

MS. PSAKI: Hi, everyone. Happy Friday. Okay. Just an overview of the week ahead for all of you: Throughout the week, President Biden will continue to meet and call members of Congress about his transformative Build Back Better Agenda and Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal.

On Monday, he will travel to New Jersey, where he will visit a school and one of the busiest railroad bridges in the country to continue rallying support for both his Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal and Build Back Better Agenda.

Back in Washington, President Biden will meet with His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and welcome the official delegation of the Orthodox Christian Church to the United States. I was about to use — lose my “Greek-American card” there for a second, but I think I sailed through.

On Tuesday, the President will campaign with former Governor Terry McAuliffe in Arlington, Virginia.

On Thursday, the President and First Lady will travel to Rome, Italy.

On Friday, the President will visit Vatican City and have an audience with His Holiness Pope Francis. They will discuss working together on efforts grounded in respect for fundamental human dignity, including ending the COVID-19 pandemic, tackling the climate crisis, and caring for the poor.

On Saturday and Sunday, the President will participate in the G20 Leaders’ Summit. We will have more on individual bilateral engagements in the run-up to the summit.

And from Rome, the President will travel to Glasgow, United Kingdom, from November 1st through 2nd, to participate in the World Leader Summit at the start of the COP26, the 26th Conference of the Parties to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change.

I will note — a programming note for all of you: We will have Jake Sullivan in here next week — we’re working on finalizing the details — to preview the trip in advance of the President’s departure.

But, Zeke, why don't you kick us off.

Q Thanks, Jen.

MS. PSAKI: Oh, sorry, can I note one more thing? I apologize.

Today, the Vice President visited northeast — the Northeast Bronx YMCA in New York with HHS — HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra, Governor Kathy Hochul, and Congressman Jamaal Bowman. The Vice President will hear about the YMCA facility's impact on the community and deliver remarks about how the Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal and the Build Back Better Agenda will benefit working families.

She'll also highlight the importance of extending the Child Tax Credit, which is one of the largest-ever single tax cuts for families with children.

Okay. Zeke, go ahead.

Q Thanks. What's the status of the negotiations over the President's social spending bill? House Speaker Nancy Pelosi suggested a deal could be today. Does the President expect that? And who is he speaking with right now?

MS. PSAKI: Well, he will continue to have calls throughout the course of the day and the weekend as he has over the last several days. We will provide you details on those as we can. We have a goal, as Speaker Pelosi conveyed. We have milestones. And we're working on finalizing an agreement. That's the status.

Our focus is on making significant progress on that. We've seen that happen over the last several days. We're encouraged by the shared commitment to get this done and deliver for the American people. But I don't have any new deadlines or timelines from here, nor have we set them from here over the last several days or weeks.

Q As that package that the President proposed initially at roughly \$3.5 trillion has been — now looks to be cutting — being cut roughly in half, we've heard the President say he wants he come back and get things later — things like community college and some of the other — or extending the life of some of these programs that have been shortened.

Progressives have been saying that now is the moment to do — go big; there might not be another moment. Why does the President think, given how difficult things have been up to this point, that he'll have another bite at the apple to sort of make these programs more enduring, or to include even things that couldn't make it into this package somewhere down the line?

MS. PSAKI: Well, let me say, first, Zeke, that this is — this package is on track to be — to represent or to direct the most fundamental shift in supporting hardworking families over wealthy in modern American history.

So — and the President’s belief, as you heard him say last night, is that compromise is not a dirty word and that we will get nothing if we do not have 50 votes. The alternative is not a larger package. The alternative is nothing.

So his objective is to continue to press forward to bring the parties together to get a historic package done. And I will note that there’s a lot of history for this — and he talked about this a little bit last night — but there’s history in setting — putting in place a framework that puts in place positive, fundamental change.

Look at Social Security, look at the Affordable Care Act: These are all historic programs that have then been built on domestically.

And whatever the topline number is — which we’re still, obviously, working through and negotiating — this is on track to change millions of middle-class families who have been falling behind.

Let me give you just a couple of examples — and he talked about this last night — but where the package stands as of now:

- the largest investment in childcare and early education ch- — childhood education in history, with the first national universal preschool program ever in history.
- the largest investment in climate and clean energy in history, around six times the size of the climate and clean energy investment in the Recovery Act — the second largest climate bill in history.
- the first national paid leave — paid family and medical leave program ever.
- the largest expansion in healthcare coverage since the Affordable Care Act, leading 7 million people to gain new coverage.
- perpetuating the largest one-year drop in child poverty in history by extending the Child Tax Credit.
- and a new investment in housing that is greater than the entire current annual budget of the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

That is what we were talking about here. As we — even as we are talking about a package that’s being negotiated that is smaller than what he originally proposed.

Q But why does he think that a future Congress, or sometime later in this administration, he’ll have more luck going beyond where he’s at right now in getting more spending for some of those programs at the levels that he initially wanted and now he’s had to pare back?

MS. PSAKI: Well, two reasons, Zeke. One is what I referenced, related to the Social Security program in history or the Affordable Care Act, where these are programs that put in place the fundamental mechanisms in society to deliver on change and relief to people for decades to come.

And what we’re talking about here is instituting some programs that have never existed before: universal pre-K; we’re talking about paid family and medical leave; we’re building on, as an example, the Affordable Care Act by continuing to expand healthcare coverage,

which is another example of building.

So the President's belief is these changes are long overdue. These changes are changes the American people are — have been asking for, have been demanding, want to see government act on to make their lives better, and that this package — these packages will be the basis for building on in the future, during his administration as well.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. The President was pretty clear last night that Senator Sinema does not support raising taxes on big corporations or the corporate tax hike. The White House says that you guys are looking for other ways to pay for this package. What exactly are those proposals? And can this package be paid for without a corporate tax increase?

MS. PSAKI: Yes, absolutely. But there are different corporate tax increases in here. So let me go through what a couple of the tax pieces are that are under consideration.

I would note that, as it relates to the President's comments last night, he was answering a question. These town halls are conversations; that's what's so endearing and engaging about them. But he was referring to the challenge of having the votes to move forward on raising the corporate rate, not the ability to raise revenue through a range of other tax fairness proposals.

So let me give you a sense of a couple of those. So, some of the biggest corporations in America pay literally nothing in income taxes, as we know — as we've talked about in the past. A lot in here. Fifty-five of the biggest companies, they pay lower rates than wage-earning families. We can stop that by imposing a 15 percent minimum tax — a minimum corporate tax — to make sure large corporations pay their fair share.

We also believe, the President believes, a number of other members of Congress believe that we need to stop rewarding companies that offshore profits and American jobs. We'll do that by creating a global minimum tax, something the United States has been the global leader in bringing together countries around the world. And that will help to make the United States more competitive and end the race to the bottom.

We can also close loopholes for high-income Americans, including a loophole that allows some taxpayers — like hedge fund managers — to escape a Medicare tax imposed on all high-end income — on all high income. That's another proposal that's out there still.

And we can crack down on wealthy tax cheats, who are taking advantage of every honest taxpayer, and invest in enforcement to stop 1 percent from evading \$160 billion in taxes per year, something that Treasury Secretaries — Republican and Democrats — have expressed support for and feel this is a strong part of the proposal.

So, I list all of those because those are all ideas out there — all ideas that would move us forward toward a greater system of tax fairness and also can help pay for the full package.

Q One more follow-up on the Child Tax Credit. Speaker Pelosi told me yesterday that the President was looking at a one-year extension. According to the Census Bureau, 47 percent of families use that money to buy food. Will those children be left behind if there's only a one-year extension on the Child Tax Credit?

MS. PSAKI: Well, to be clear, the President proposed a longer extension. What the President is though looking to do is to extend the Child Tax Credit — something that he proposed himself earlier this year and, again, proposed extending it — because he thinks it does have such an important and dramatic impact on people across the country.

Many economists have credited it with cutting the childhood poverty rate in half. He absolutely thinks it should be a part of what American families can benefit from.

But it's smaller because compromise is not a dirty word, and it is something that we still believe is a positive step forward to extend.

Go ahead.

Q What drove the shift in the President's posture this week, in terms of he laid out a lot of details to rank-and-file members on Tuesday; he laid out a lot of details to the entire world last night? Something you guys haven't been wanting to talk about over the course the last several months. Why now? Why has he moved in this direction?

MS. PSAKI: The charm of Anderson Cooper, I guess.

Q I get that. (Laughs.)

MS. PSAKI: I'm just kidding.

Look, I think, Phil, that we are at this point in the conversation and in the debate where we are getting into the nitty-gritty details, and the President is deeply engaged in those discussions.

I think what you saw last night — what the American people saw last night is that the President has rolled up his sleeves and he is deep in the details of spreadsheets and numbers and what the potential impact can be to help the American people.

And he's — he was candid, and he was candid about where the negotiation stood and also wanted the American people to understand, as I just outlined earlier, that progress here is a historic package that will put in place systems and programs that have never existed in our society before.

So, I think what you're seeing is that we're getting closer, we're into the nitty-gritty details, there is agreement about some fundamental investments in our society, and he loves having conversations with the American people about what he's fighting for.

Q And then two more, just to follow up on last night. Can you clarify where discussions are, if they exist at all, in terms of the National Guard and the supply chain?

MS. PSAKI: Oh, can I clarify where things stand?

Q Yeah, I just — my understanding is it had been talked about but it wasn't something you guys were moving toward. The President seemed to say differently last night.

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Well, any President has the ability to use the National Guard from the federal level. Requesting the use of the National Guard at the state level, which is often how it's done, is under the purview of governors. And we're not actively asking them to do that, and we're not actively pursuing the use of the National Guard on a federal level. But it is something that any President would have the capacity to do, the authority to do, but it is not something under active consideration.

Q And then, one more. The President was asked if the U.S. would come to Taiwan's defense if attacked by China, and he said, "Yes, we have a commitment to do that." Is there a shift in U.S. policy as it relates to Taiwan and a defense agreement?

MS. PSAKI: Well, there has been no shift. The President was not announcing any change in our policy nor has he made a decision to change our policy. There is no change in our policy.

Our defense relationship with Taiwan is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act. Some of the principles of the Taiwan Relations Act that the United States will continue to abide by, of course, is assisting Taiwan in maintaining a sufficient self-defense capability. Another principle is that the United States would regard any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific and of grave concern to the United States.

I would also note that Secretary Austin also spoke to this earlier today, and he said — as the Secretary of Defense, of course — "Nobody wants to see cross-Strait issues come to blows." Certainly not President Biden. And there's no reason that it should. And that is certainly emblematic of our approach as well.

Go ahead, Jeff.

Q Just piggybacking on that question about Taiwan, the U.S. policy one of strategic ambiguity on this. He seemed pretty unambiguous with what he said last night. Was that intentional?

MS. PSAKI: What I can convey to you is that our policy has not changed. He was not intending to convey a change in policy nor has he made a decision to change our policy.

Q Okay. And moving back to the legislation: Is the President confident or is he hoping for a vote on this before he heads to Europe next week?

MS. PSAKI: Well, his preference would certainly be to get something done in the coming days, and obviously he will work closely with Speaker Pelosi and Leader Schumer to do exactly that.

But I don't have any new deadlines or timelines to set for you today.

Q Beyond citing the Rhodium report, if he arrives in Glasgow without this in hand, what does he — what is his message to world leaders on that world stage?

MS. PSAKI: His message is that he is a President who will bring the climate crisis back to the top of the priority list for the United States, and he has already taken steps to do exactly that — not just by rejoining the Paris Climate Agreement, but by taking steps, working with the leaders of the auto industry, to move towards electric vehicles and an electric vehicle future to reduce greenhouse gas emissions here in the United States, and that he has proposed the largest investment in addressing the climate crisis in American history.

And that is something we are on track to deliver on, even with a smaller package.

Q And just lastly, does the President or the White House have a reaction to the Alec Baldwin shooting incident in New Mexico?

MS. PSAKI: Other than to say that it is obviously a tragedy — the loss of life and, as I understand it, the individual who is in the hospital. And so our thoughts and prayers go out to their family members.

But, no, beyond that, we don't have an additional U.S. reaction.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. A follow on China and Taiwan. Just to be crystal clear: When the President says that the U.S. has a commitment to protect Taiwan, does that commitment include military intervention in the event of a Chinese attack?

MS. PSAKI: Again, as I said earlier, he wasn't announcing a change in policy nor was he — nor have we changed our policy, which I think is the most important point here. And we are guided by the Taiwan Relations Act, and I just outlined what some of those principles are, which is ensuring that we continue to assist Taiwan in maintaining a sufficient self-defense capability, and that is something we remain committed to doing.

Q So, can you just remind us? That policy is, “No, there would not be military intervention,” right?

MS. PSAKI: Our policy is to be guided by the Taiwan Relations Act, which is — the specifics of that are that we are going to continue assisting Taiwan in maintaining a sufficient self-defense capability. Another principle is that we regard any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means as a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific.

But as I noted earlier, our Secretary of Defense conveyed clearly what our policy and our view is, which is that no one wants to see cross-Strait issues come to blows; that is what we want to avoid. And that's what the American people should understand is our focus.

That's the view of the President, that's the view of the Secretary of Defense, and there's no reason anyone should think otherwise.

Q And then a follow-up on all those tax options that you might have if the corporate tax is not raised and if there's no hike in taxes on the wealthy. Will all of those still guarantee that this package will not be deficit spending?

MS. PSAKI: Yes.

Q Okay.

MS. PSAKI: And none of that has been concluded. I think I gave all those additional components of tax options that are out there that — and Senator Sinema can obviously speak for herself, as I always convey from here, but she has been supportive of another — a number of these options, as have others. And those are all options that can help ensure we're moving toward a more fair tax system but also pay for these investments.

Q Thanks. And just one more on the filibuster. What are some ways that the filibuster can be fundamentally altered without ending it altogether?

MS. PSAKI: Look, I think the President will have more to say about this in the coming weeks. But I think what you heard him say last night is that we're at an inflection point, and a range of it — on a range of issues, including — and this is often why it comes up — voting rights.

And he talked about this a little bit yesterday when he was at the 10th anniversary of the MLK Memorial. We know the right to vote and the rule of law are under unrelenting assault from Republican governors, attorneys general, secretaries of state, state legislators, and legislators.

And time and time again, when offered the choice three times over the last several months, when a hand has been extended by Democrats to work together to protect the fundamental right, Republicans have not only recoiled, they have blocked the ability to make any semblance of progress.

So, what the President is referring to is the fact that that is unacceptable. The protection of a fundamental — the fundamental right to vote is something that has been bipartisan in the past. He spoke back in March about — about his concerns or how he would view it if the Republicans continue to be obstructionist around it. And we've seen that time and time again.

So he will discuss what that looks like, because not getting voting rights done is not an option.

Q So, is that frustration — does that frustration explain his evolution of thinking on the filibuster? In July, he said eliminating it would throw Congress into "chaos" and nothing would get done.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would also note that, back in March, he noted that if there was obstruction, that it was something that we would have to take a look at.

So, look, I think people — many of you have covered the President for some time, and you know that his view is that we should pursue ways to work in a bipartisan manner; that we should pursue paths forward that can get things done for the American people.

When he helped lead the effort to authorize the voting rights bill back when he was a senator, that was done in a bipartisan way. And he is frustrated, he is disappointed, he is sad that this is not something that Republicans seem willing to engage on, to work on.

And I think what you saw reflected last night is his view that, in light of the tax on our democracy, what we've seen across the country in states and by state legislators — that it is time to have a conversation about what this looks like moving forward.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. The leader of the union representing FedEx, UPS, and DHL is saying that supply chain problems are going to get worse with labor shortages right before the holidays, unless the President postpones the requirement to get vaccinated by December 8th. So what is more important to this President: the vaccine mandates or fixing the supply chain as fast as possible?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, I would say that that is not actually what we've seen at companies that have implemented these vaccine requirements that are not even part of federal law yet.

Q I understand. But just looking at —

MS. PSAKI: Let me just — let me just finish.

Q Okay.

MS. PSAKI: I'm going to let you talk. Don't worry about it. I'm going to let you talk. Okay?

So, American and Southwest CEOs have made clear this will — their workers will not be — there won't be a labor shortage. We've seen United Airlines implement this.

And as we've also said: As we work to implement these federal employee requirements, the first step is not firings; it's actually education and counseling. So, we don't actually anticipate these disruptions. What we've seen for companies who have implemented these requirements is an increase from 20 to 90 percent.

Last thing, and then I'll let you ask your follow-up, is that the other piece of this is that COVID is an enormous labor disrupter — not only because it's the number one cause of death in some industries, in some professions, including police forces across the country, but because people are out sick, people are worried about coming to work. This is one of the reasons that a lot of these companies have implemented these requirements.

Q Just so that I understand the position then, this union leader says that the looming December 8th mandate for having fully vaccinated workforces creates a significant supply chain problem. You say, “No, it does not.” Is that right?

MS. PSAKI: What I would point, Peter, is the evidence we’ve seen from companies — large companies, private-sector companies — that have implemented these requirements across the board.

Q Okay. Following up on something else the President said last night, why did President Biden say he has been to the border?

MS. PSAKI: Well, Peter, as you may have seen, there’s been reporting that he did drive through the border when he was on the campaign trail in 2008. And he is certainly familiar with the fact — and it stuck with him — with the fact that in El Paso, the border goes right through the center of town.

But what the most important thing everyone should know and understand is that the President has worked on these issues throughout his entire career and is well versed in every aspect of our immigration system, including the border. That includes when he was Vice President. And he went to Mexico and Central America 10 times to address border issues and talk about what we can do to reduce the number of migrants who were coming to the border.

He worked in a bipartisan manner with senators like Ted Kennedy, Harry Reid, John McCain, and others to push for comprehensive immigration reform.

He does not need a visit to the border to know what a mess was left by the last administration. That’s his view.

Q Does that count as a visit? He said, “I’ve been there before.” You’re saying he drove by for a few minutes. Does that count?

MS. PSAKI: What do you — what is the root cause — where are people coming from who are coming to the border, Peter?

Q The President said that he has been to the border —

MS. PSAKI: I’m asking you — I’m asking you a question, because I think people should understand the context.

Q No, you’re answering —

MS. PSAKI: Where do people —

Q — a question with a question.

MS. PSAKI: Where do people —

Q I’m asking you if that counts.

MS. PSAKI: Okay, I'll answer it for you: People come from Central America and Mexico to go to the border. The President has been to those countries 10 times to talk about border issues.

There is a focus right now on a photo op. The President does not believe a photo op is the same as solutions.

Q But he said, "I..." —

MS. PSAKI: That may be a difference he has with Republicans.

Q But that's not what he said either. He said, "I guess I should go down." So, does he think that he needs a photo op? Is that what he's saying? Is that what you're saying?

MS. PSAKI: He doesn't. And that's a fundamental disagreement he has. I would say the former President went to the border at least once, maybe more — you may know the numbers.

Q But has anything changed —

MS. PSAKI: How did that immigration policy result, Peter? That immigration policy resulted in separating kids from their parents, building a border wall that's feckless and that cost billions of dollars for taxpayers. The President fundamentally disagrees on how we need to approach the immigration issue.

Q Has anything changed at the border between 2008, when he drove by, and 2021?

MS. PSAKI: Aside from the fact that migrants are still coming to the border through the course of Democratic and Republican Presidents, and the — the immi- — the need to reform the immigration system is even farther long overdue? No. But we need to work with Democrats and Republicans to get that done.

I think we're going to have to keep chugging along here.

Go ahead.

Q Let me ask you, if I can, about gas prices. The President was asked about that; a lot of Americans have been concerned about the cost to go to the pump these days.

He said, "I don't see anything that's going to happen in the meantime that's going to significantly reduce gas prices." He said, "I don't have a near-term answer." For Americans who are looking for an answer, what is the answer?

MS. PSAKI: Well, what is true — and I think the President as we — as I said earlier, was quite candid last night, as the American people should express from him — expect from him and from any president. And there are limitations to what any president can do, as it relates to gas prices.

Here's what we have been doing: As we've said for some time, we are engaging broadly with OPEC on our concerns at a range of levels. And that is something we will continue to do.

As you know, Jake Sullivan, our National Security Advisor, recently met with leaders in Saudi Arabia and certainly raised this issue.

The President has also been concerned, as the administration has been, about what we have seen as rises in supply that have not been accompanied by drops in costs. That's one of the reasons he's asked the FTC to look into price gouging — something that is no doubt impacting, or we expect might be impacting, the cost of gas around the country.

So, we are working and using every single lever he can. But I think what people heard from him is some candor about what impacts we can have.

Q He mused that he could go into the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and that could bring the cost down. He said it would still be above \$3.00. Will he do that?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything to preview on that front at this point.

Q Let me ask you: Does the White House have any response to the Supreme Court today saying that it's not going to block the Texas abortion ban, although it did grant an expedited review to take place, I think, by the start of November?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would naturally defer any particular questions about the Supreme Court decision and litigation to the Department of Justice. But what I can reiterate is that the President has been clear in his position that S.B. 8 is blatantly unconstitutional. It not only violates the right to safe and legal abortion established under *Roe v. Wade*, but it creates a scheme to allow private citizens to interfere with that right and to evade judicial review.

That is why he's directed a whole-of-government response to it and why he will continue to stand side-by-side with women across the country to protect their rights.

But, in terms of any litigation steps, I would point you to the Department of Justice.

Q But contingencies if the Supreme Court is to uphold that present ban? What contingencies — what process takes place behind closed doors here at the White House to help look out for the women in that state?

MS. PSAKI: Again, as you know, the Gender Policy Council and leaders there are leading the effort to work and see what levers in government we can use to continue to protect women's fundamental rights. We will see if there's an update on that to provide to all of you.

Go ahead, Sabrina.

Q Afghanistan, please?

MS. PSAKI: I'll come to you next.

Q Thank you.

Q The attack on a military outpost in southern Syria this week did not result in any American casualties, but the U.S. military considers it to be a serious but failed attempt to take American lives. Do you know who's responsible? And what is the administration doing to prevent another attack or hold the perpetrators accountable?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any updates for you on the — on the responsibility. And, of course, what happened is something that is great concern to us. I have nothing to preview in terms of what additional steps will be.

Q To follow up: Some governments, including U.S. partners in the region, have moved toward normalizing relations with the Assad regime. Has the administration directly urged its counterparts against doing so?

MS. PSAKI: Nothing has changed about the U.S. position as it relates to the Assad regime. In terms of private diplomatic conversations, I'd point you to the State Department.

Q Just lastly, because, you know, there was a broader sanc- — review of sanctions policy by the Treasury Department that was released this week. It stated sanctions are most effective on a multilateral basis.

So if other countries, including U.S. partners, are resuming diplomatic and commercial ties with Syria, does it not undermine U.S. sanctions? And what does the administration plan to do about it?

MS. PSAKI: Under — say that last part one more time?

Q Does it not undermine U.S. sanctions if other partners are resuming diplomatic and commercial ties with the Assad regime? Is there anything the administration plans to do about that?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything to preview for you at this point in time. I, again, would point you to the State Department.

Our view of the Assad regime has not changed. I would note, on the attack, which you asked me about — let me give you all a little bit more context on that: U.S. Central Command confirmed last night and put out a statement — or maybe it was earlier, sorry — that the — the al-Tanf garrison area was subjected to a deliberate and coordinated attack. Initial reports indicate both unmanned aerial systems and rockets were used in the attack. All U.S. personnel have been accounted for. We're not aware of any injuries to U.S. personnel at this time. Of course, we always reserve the right to respond. As I noted, we have nothing to preview on that front. And we're still investigating.

Go ahead.

Q Regarding kids and vaccines: A new poll was talking about two thirds of parents with kids between 5 and 11 — they're having a "wait and see" attitude or they're resisting it altogether. And so, what is the White House doing to combat that vaccine hesitancy amongst parents?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, I would note that we have experienced this before, because if you look back to December, only about 30 percent, or just over that, of people who are eligible for vaccines said they would want to take a vaccine. And now we're at nearly 80 percent of eligible adults or people who are eli- — of the eligible age who have now received their first dose.

We have launched — and we announced the launch last week — or intention to launch — a major campaign to communicate with parents, to communicate with families about the safety and the efficacy of these vaccines should they get approval.

We will also be prepared to have the doses needed to ensure that parents can get vaccines to their kids. But what we're really focusing on is working with pediatricians.

We know that the pediatricians are one of the most trusted sources of information for any parent. I can confirm that myself. And so, we're really encouraging parents to talk to their pediatricians — of course, to wait for approval before, you know, they proceed — but to have those conversations. And that will be what our strategy is guided around.

Q Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. Two question. One is about the Moscow Conference. The United States was not able to participate it. What was the reason?

Number two, NATO conference. Any result?

And number three, so many Afghan people, especially women, they are under torture of the Taliban and they have high expectation from the United States. I don't know — you guys still committed to help Afghan people, or United States totally forget Afghan people?

MS. PSAKI: Absolutely not, on the last piece. We remain absolutely committed to helping the Afghan people. We remain the largest provider of humanitarian assistance of any country in the world. And we're committed to ensuring there is the ability for people who want to leave to depart; ensuring there are flights that can depart to do that or people can cross over land; and continue to work with relied-on — reliable international organizations like the World Food Program to provide that assistance.

In terms of the NATO conference, I know our Secretary of Defense spoke to that. I'd point you to his comments in his press conference on the ground.

And on your first question, I know my colleague at the State Department, Ned Price, said that the United States supported the talks. We were unable to attend for logistical reasons. We believe the Troika Plus, which is what this forum — or format is — has been

an effective and constructive forum.

We look forward to engaging that forum going forward. But we weren't in a position to be a part of it this week. But we will in the future.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you. I wanted to clarify — you've been — you know, earlier, at the start of this, you talked about how universal pre-K, family leave — are those things that will definitely be in the bill? Because you're saying, no matter what happens, it looks like we'll have at least as much. So, I was just wondering — can you clarify, is that — are those things definitely going to be in there? Are those red lines for the President?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not here to set new red lines. What we know is that this is going to be the most historic investment in childcare, in care — in the care economy ever in history, and that there will be programs put in place that have not existed in the past. Hopefully, we will know more soon what the final package looks like, but I just wanted to outline some of the key components that there's continued discussion about.

Q And I noticed you didn't mention Medicare expansion in that. Is that intentional? Like, why not (inaudible)?

MS. PSAKI: It was not intentional. I was trying to give a couple of —

Q You're sending a message? (Laughs.)

MS. PSAKI: I was trying to give a couple of examples because sometimes we miss the historic comparison here on what we're talking about, and what kind of a dramatic impact this package will have on families across the country, and what it's tracking to be. There are still final pieces that need to be concluded, and I can't give you a final factsheet quite yet, but that's what I wanted to lay out for all of you.

Q And another quick question. Does the White House have any thoughts on the Supreme Court? Yes, they're taking up the Texas — the Texas abortion law, but they're not going to rule on the constitutionality of it. Does the White House have any thoughts on that?

MS. PSAKI: Beyond what I said to Peter, I don't have anything additional from here. I'd point you to the Department of Justice.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. Just to follow up on the Medicare expansion: Do you have any updates — President Biden addressed some of these discussions last night — and whether this will be an actual expansion or vouchers for things, such as dental work? Is there any update in those discussions?

MS. PSAKI: Not yet. He talked a little bit — for those of you who didn't watch the town hall last night from 8:00 to 9:30 — he talked a little bit about how he wants to — his objective of working to bring down the cost.

So, I think you're referring — just to translate for everybody, to bring them up — he talked a little bit about the possibility of vouchers for dental; it's something that's in discussion, but there's no new information I can provide to all of you.

He also talked about the hearing aids and bringing down the cost of hearing aids. And bringing that cost down and addressing it for seniors is a huge priority to him.

He also mentioned last night how, when you look at seniors and what they're struggling with, including dementia, that hearing and the ability to hear is an important priority. It's still in discussion. Clearly a priority to a number of key leaders in the Senate, but there's not a final conclusion before I came out here today.

Q Along those lines, Nancy Pelosi, who I believe had breakfast here this morning —

MS. PSAKI: She did. She was here. I'm not sure what they ate, but they met — so, yes.

Q Okay. She indicated that a climate deal was close and suggested it could be done. Has the White House and congressional Democrats identified any substitute for the Clean Energy Performance Program that looks to be removed at Joe Manchin's request? And if so, what is it?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the President talked a little bit last night about the fact that — and I would say it's still on track to be because there are so many climate components in these two packages that the President has proposed, including climate tax credit — tax credits and tax cuts, which are — have been a part of his proposal, has broad support in the Senate.

There are also key components — since you gave me the opportunity — that had been in the infrastructure plan that often we don't talk enough about, including moving toward electric vehicles, 500,000 charging stations across the country, which would be a huge impact — have a big impact in moving toward an industry that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions; replacing lead pipes and water — I think many of you may have seen today that the state of Michigan issued a state of emergency because of lead in pipes. This is an area and a place that has a climate impact; it has a humane impact.

These are all components that are under discussion — and obviously the infrastructure pieces have passed — but continue to be a part of what the President has proposed. But addressing the climate, making this the largest climate bill in history — we continue to be on track toward that.

Q Just lastly: The President, last night, said he would entertain the notion of doing away with the filibuster to pass voting rights, and then he added, "And maybe more." What's the "maybe more"?

MS. PSAKI: Stay tuned. It's a — it's to have a discussion. I expect you'll hear more from the President about it in the coming weeks.

Go ahead.

Q Matt took my climate question. But on —

MS. PSAKI: That's okay. You can ask in a different way.

Q No, I won't do that. (Laughter.) I've got others.

On immigration, though, the President said yesterday that the administration's stance is that it is opposed to MPP — the Remain in Mexico policy.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q But there's a court order, and you're implementing that court order right now.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q But even with that, that court order addressed a previous memo the administration issued to terminate MPP.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q It's been months since this court order and there's still no new memo out. Why is that?

MS. PSAKI: And Secretary Mayorkas has indicated he plans to issue a new memo and that we do oppose the MPP program, as the President said last night. I would point you to the Department of Homeland Security on an update on the status.

Q But given that he is saying the administration is opposed, and he's criticized this in the past, it seems like there's not a sense of urgency to get this memo out since it's been months at this point.

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't agree with that. I think we've been clear about our opposition to this. But again, there was a court order, so what we're working to do is move toward the release of a new memorandum — something that would come from the Department of Homeland Security and — while also abiding in good faith by a court order and following the law.

Q I have a follow-up on Afghanistan too.

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q Just if — given that the embassy is currently closed right now — in Kabul, as well — if you're an Afghan and you still are hoping to find relief and come to the U.S., is there any way to actually get parole or refugee status without going to a third country?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we have a presence in Doha — one that engages with counterpart — with officials on the ground. We've also had recent meetings with leaders of the Taliban, as you all know, and has been reported publicly. And our State Department is leading this effort. So, yes, absolutely there is.

We have worked to help individuals who have stood by our side and fought by our side over the course of the last two months since we left — we ended our military presence there.

We've put out — I know the State Department put out numbers on U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents who have departed from Kabul. We wouldn't be able to do that unless we had the diplomatic presence in Doha and we're able to engage with and work with authorities on the ground.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. Last night, also the President said that paid leave was down to four weeks. When he said that, did he mean that it would be a permanent program in that it wouldn't be sunsetted at any time over the next decade? And did he mean that it would be four weeks and scale up, or just four weeks flat?

MS. PSAKI: I think he was conveying that he had proposed 12 weeks; it was closer to four. The specifics of the details and where that sits right now, I don't have an update for you on.

Q Okay. So, closer to four; not necessarily four.

MS. PSAKI: Again, Francesca, he was just speaking to where things stood last night. There's obviously been ongoing discussions this morning, but clearly making sure paid leave is a — is law, is a reality for working parents across the country is a priority. That's why he proposed it. But in terms of the exact status, I don't have an update for you on that in this moment.

Q And on free community college, he said, "I promise you, I guarantee you we're going to get free community college in the next several years...across the board." So, what makes him so certain that he'll be able to get community college — free community college in the next several years if it's not going to be included right now?

MS. PSAKI: He's in the first nine months of his presidency, and he knows and understands, as he said last night, that making community college accessible, that ensuring we have a more educated workforce out in the country is in the interest of the private sector, in the interest of U.S. competitiveness, and certainly in the interest of the American people. There's still discussions about how to make community college more accessible, more affordable. These pieces are still being negotiated.

I think what you heard from him or what the American people heard from him last night is not just his marital obligation, but is his commitment to getting this done because he thinks it's in the interests of the United States and our workforce here.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. Thank you. I'd like to ask first about press access and then about coronavirus origins.

We, as a press corps, are fairly unanimous in our opposition to the mysterious prescreening process that's been going on for presidential events in the East Room, and so I'm hoping that you can demystify for us how White House staff are selecting which journalists get into these events. Is it first come, first served, or something else? Also, how long will this prescreening remain in place?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we have — we are still in the middle of a pandemic, as you know. People are wearing masks in this room as a reflection of that. We have certain requirements here, as well, among staff. And I think we don't have this size of numbers that we would all like to have in the East Room, and we hope that we make changes to that soon.

Q Yes. But how are the decisions made about who —

MS. PSAKI: Is that not important that we're going to expand access and make sure more people can get into the East Wing?

Q Well, that's welcome news to everyone here. But how are the decisions made about who gets to go in?

MS. PSAKI: There's a limited number that we have based on how many — how many people are attending as guests.

Q Is it first come, first served then?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any more information on that.

Go ahead, Karen.

Q My second question —

MS. PSAKI: I think we're going to move on.

Go ahead, Karen. I think we're going to move on. Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. Has the President spoken to Senators Manchin or Sinema today, since the town hall last night?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any updates on his calls specifically, but we have been in regular touch with them, even through the course of the morning, from senior staff.

Q And you had said, in answer to Phil's question, that, you know, the President last night was focusing on the nitty-gritty details and that he was candid about where the negotiations stood. He was also much more candid in pointing out the roadblocks that

Senators Manchin and Sinema have put up to some of the things he would like to do, and what they're opposed to. Did he do that to try and move them through public pressure, or was it to lay the groundwork for what will be a scaled-back, final deal on this?

MS. PSAKI: He was simply candidly answering questions. He also referred to Senator Sinema as someone who's "smart as the devil," which he has used many times in the past to describe the Vice President, to describe Rahm Emanuel. It's a point of endearment from him.

He describes Senator Manchin as "a friend." He believes and continues to believe that he is negotiating and working with both senators in good faith and that we all are working towards shared objectives.

So, he was simply answering questions that were asked by the audience and the moderator.

Q Can I follow up?

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead, George.

Q Yeah, this follows a little bit on the — on that. This week has been an interesting mix of inside game with his —

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q — behind-the-scenes talks and outside game with Scranton and Baltimore.

My question is whether the time has passed where speeches can be expected to be effective in moving any votes. I mean, do you think any member watched the town hall meeting and said, "Oh, that's going to change my vote"? (Laughter.)

MS. PSAKI: You know, I'm not sure that his audience was — were people who are currently residing in this area — in this area code — in the ZIP Code. Right?

His audience was the American people who have questions about what this means for them for childcare and how it will help them, for people who really want to send their kids to pre-k but can't afford it, for people who are worried about paid leave and hoping that's a reality for them when they're at the point of having children or needing to care for loved ones.

And so, this was really — the audience was really the public and the American people. And the vast majority of questions came from individuals in the audience last night.

Q But isn't it fair to say that the important thing right now is the — him working his relationships and the inside game to get the votes?

MS. PSAKI: That — that is — has been important from the beginning. And the President has obviously played a key role here in bringing different viewpoints together toward a shared path forward. That's the role that he play — has played as President, the role he

promised to play when he ran for President — again, running on the fact that compromise is not a dirty word. And he believes he can bring people together from differing viewpoints.

He also believes — and a lot of members will tell you or others this too — that part of his role is talking to the American public about the benefits of these packages and explaining to them beyond sometimes the noise — an important conversation about the mechanisms of who's for it and against it and the size and the numbers — about how this is going to help them. So last night was an opportunity to do that.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. My first question is on the President's climate agenda. So, yesterday, Karine seemed to suggest that should CEPP fail to be included in the reconciliation bill, executive action is an option. Do I have that correctly — do I understand that correctly, first of all?

And then second, should his climate agenda fail in Congress — whether it's CEPP or other components — can we expect executive action, some sort of executive order before the President's trip to Europe so that he may have a stronger message on the global stage on climate?

MS. PSAKI: Well, Pa- — I think it's important to note that some of the progress the President has made to date — some has been executive action, like rejoining the Paris Agreement, but some has been simply by working with leaders — leaders in the auto industry to bring them together, to agree upon shared investments in the electric vehicles industry.

So, there's a lot of ways that the President will continue to work, use the levers of his power to make sure we are reaching his bold and ambitious goals.

And we've talked a little bit in here about the Rhodium study from the other day, which showed that there are a lot of different paths forward to reach those goals — some of them legislative, some of them through actions he can take as President, some of them through working with the private sector and other — other leaders who share his commitment to getting — to addressing the climate crisis.

Q But it seems like you're not opposing that option.

My second question —

MS. PSAKI: Well, you — I didn't — I actually don't think that's the case.

Q Okay.

MS. PSAKI: So, I'd —

Q All right.

MS. PSAKI: Just to be clear — what was your question? Just to be clear for the record here.

Q “Could there be an executive action before the President leaves for Europe next week” is my —

MS. PSAKI: I think what I was giving for you is a contextual answer on how we’re going to achieve our climate objectives, which is, of course, what he’s going to go to Paris — well, Paris, we’re not going there. (Laughter.) But what — I’m always, like, a little — I wish. He — what he’s going to talk about when he’s in Glasgow.

And I think what leaders will understand is that there are a lot of paths to get there. This is a President who is committed to addressing the climate crisis. He’s taken executive action. He’s also brought leaders together.

And as you heard him say last night, he’s confident that we can get this passed and get the biggest climate bill passed through Congress in the — in the near term.

Go ahead.

Q I have second question —

Q Thanks, Jen.

Q — Jen — sorry — on — and I’m going to try this again. I know you’ve answered the question on Taiwan like 10 times already. But as you said yourself, “Words matter.”

So my question is: Did the President simply misspoke last night? Or was he actually sending a signal that there may be some sort of informal shift, that the U.S. commitment towards Taiwan may be more firm?

MS. PSAKI: His policy has not changed —

Q I know you said that —

MS. PSAKI: But that’s, I think, important for people to know and understand.

Go ahead.

Q Jen, a quick question — a follow-up from yesterday. Your colleague, Karine, said: Last year, under Trump, during the holidays, “families were facing down a dark winter with less economic security than ever before.”

But this year, families are facing the highest gas prices in 70 ye- — 7 years, 30 percent higher costs to heat their homes, inflation that is almost five times higher than it was in December. Groceries are more expensive.

So, I’m wondering what Americans are facing this Thanksgiving and Christmas under President Biden when looking at economic security?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would say we have cut in half the unemployment rate, created 5 million jobs, ensured that 180 million Americans have vacci- — have been vaccinated since last year.

So, yes, are there still — as the economy is turning back on, are there still fundamental issues we're working through? Absolutely. That's why the President is pushing to get his agenda done.

But I think there's no question that, a year ago, when we were locked in our homes; when 1 — only 1 percent of people were vaccinated; when 10 percent of people in this country were unemployed, that was an incredibly dark time and dark period in our country.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks so much, Jen. I want to ask you about public opinion polls, which I'm sure you recognize. The President's public opinion polls have declined sharply over the last few months. And I want to get a sense from you, in speaking to your White House colleagues, why you think that is?

I know you've mentioned COVID before, but is it also because of the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan? Is it the stalled agenda for President Biden? What do you suppose is the reason that we've seen this slide in the President's approval ratings?

MS. PSAKI: Well, a lot of people in this room work for organizations that have done polls, and there's a lot of underlying data in them. And sometimes it differs.

So, I would just go back to what our view is — is that we're still going through a hard time in this country, and people are tired of fighting a pandemic. They're tired of the impact on their lives. Some of them are sick and tired of people who won't get vaccinated, who they feel are impacting their ability to live life in a normal way. Some people are still fearful for loved ones. And we all thought that it would be over at this point in time. Obviously, the Delta variant and other factors have led to — this to be extended.

So, there's no question that the fatigue with COVID is impacting people around the country. The President understands that; he's empathetic to that. And he knows that the best thing he can do is help get COVID under control, continue to work to address some fundamental issues in our economy, put people back to work, and that's what he's focused on every day.

Q And then how do you turn things around, Jen? What's the way? Is it just getting victories? Is it in passing the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill? What's the way that you think President Biden can turn around these sliding approval ratings?

MS. PSAKI: He can keep his head focused on doing the job — doing the job as President, leading the American people, make — putting in place fundamental changes that will make people's lives better.

Go ahead, Shelby.

Q Thanks. The DHS Secretary said — I think it's just about a month ago now — that the investigation into the horseback Border Patrol agents would be completed in days, not weeks. Has the White House received any update on this investigation? Was there any conclusion on whether the Border Patrol agents were whipping migrants?

MS. PSAKI: It's really under the Homeland Security Department. I can check with them and see what the status is. I know what he said at the time, and I will see if there's any particular update on that.

Q So is the White House in active communication with the DHS on this? Like, do we know why this has been stalled?

MS. PSAKI: Yes, but they're overseeing the investigation, so we'll — I would point to them on any update on the status.

Q Thank you, Jen.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead. Okay, one more. Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. Seeing what we — what we're witnessing happen in Haiti right now with the threat of — the 17 missionaries threatened to be killed, is there any conversation within the administration to stop deportations that are happening or using the administration's power to grant humanitarian parole? What's being done? Or even adding U.S. military presence on the ground?

MS. PSAKI: So, what I think it's important to note here is, obviously, we are working around the clock to bring these people home. They're U.S. citizens. And there has been targeting over the course of the last few years of U.S. citizens in Haiti — and other countries, too. It's not the only country, but since we're talking about Haiti and — for kidnapping for ransom.

That is one of the reasons that the State Department issued the warning they did in August about the risk of kidnapping for ransom.

So, this is a little bit of a different category of individuals in the country and what they're being targeted for. That's why we issued that warning.

At the same time, we are continuing to provide humanitarian assistance, to work with officials on the ground, to work through our embassy to certainly address the underlying conditions as people in the country attempt to move forward or try to recover from a combination of the earthquake and the assassination of the leader.

Thanks so much.

Q But not so much with deportations?

MS. PSAKI: Again, I think it's important to note that these individuals were citiz- — U.S. citizens —

Q Right.

MS. PSAKI: — who were targeted. It's — so we're working to bring them home.

Obviously, the Department of Homeland Security and State does evaluate any conditions before they send people back to any country, as they've done here, and there has been no change.

Thank you, everyone.

2:56 P.M. EDT

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