

# Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki, July 9, 2021

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## Briefing Room

### • Press Briefings

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

12:50 P.M. EDT

MS. PSAKI: Hi, everyone. Happy Friday. I have a couple of items for all of you at the top.

First, we welcome the unanimous adoption today in the U.N. Security Council to extend the mandate for a critical humanitarian aid lifeline to Syria. This agreement, which will directly impact the lives of millions of Syrians, was the result of hard work among the members of the Council and intensive diplomacy following a detailed discussion at the Geneva summit between President Biden and President Putin.

Today's resolution, which renews the cross-border agreement that would have expired on July 10th, will provide further lifesaving humanitarian assistance to the people of northwest Syria and is part of a broader humanitarian initiative led by the United Nations.

The two leaders, today, on their call — there was a readout that just went out that should be in your inboxes, you may have seen — commended the work of their respective teams following the summit and welcomed the unanimous vote in the Council.

There was a readout, I should note, that just went out, of a call that President Biden did with President Putin this morning. I'm sure we'll talk more about that. But just to note for all of your inboxes.

Also, today, the President will sign an executive order that will direct a historic whole-of-government effort to promote competition in the American economy. This effort has three goals: lower prices for consumers, higher wages for workers, and more innovation and economic growth.

Lack of competition drives up prices for consumers. Barriers to competition also drive down wages for workers. When there are only a few employers in town, workers have less opportunity to bargain for a higher wage and to demand dignity and respect.

In total, higher prices and lower wages caused by lack of competition are now estimated to cost the median American household \$5,000 per year, so we want to work to address that.

Competition is the engine of our economy. And this is just the beginning. We'll be back, in the weeks ahead, to update you on the progress we're making on this executive order and the concrete benefits we are delivering to the American people.

I also wanted to provide a quick update for you on our work in Haiti. The United States remains engaged and in close consultations with our Haitian and international partners to support the Haitian people in the aftermath of the assassination of the president.

In response to the Haitian government's request for security and investigative assistance, we will be sending senior FBI and DHS officials to Port-au-Prince as soon as possible to assess the situation and how we may be able to assist.

I also wanted to note that in January of 2021, we announced a \$75.5 million for a wide range of issues, including democratic governance, health, education, agricultural development, and strengthening of pre-election activities. Strengthening Haiti's law enforcement capacity is a key U.S. priority — was before the assassination a few days ago, continues to be.

And the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs provides assistance directly to the Haitian National Police.

We are also providing \$5 million to strengthen the Haitian National Police capacity to work with communities to resist gangs.

I also wanted to remind you all that, earlier this year, the Department of Homeland Security re-designated Temporary Protected Status for Haiti for 18 months — something the Secretary announced in May and something we are working to implement.

And finally, Haiti is one of the countries that is — will be receiving vaccines from the United States. We will be prepared to deliver those, hopefully as early as next week. Part of that is assessing what the airport — what can happen with the airport and how we will be able to deliver these.

Sorry, one other — two other updates. One other update and the week ahead.

On global vaccines, today we are sending 3 million doses to Indonesia, 1.5 million doses to Nepal, 500,000 doses to Moldova, and 500,000 doses to Bhutan. With these shipments, in this week alone, we have sent nearly 15 million doses to countries including Guatemala, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, Afghanistan, and Vietnam.

On Indonesia, I also wanted to add that, in addition to the vaccines, we are also sending — we are also moving forward on plans to increase assistance for Indonesia's broader COVID-19 response efforts. We recognize the difficult situation Indonesia currently finds itself in with a surge of COVID cases, and our thoughts are with all those in Indonesia who are affected.

Finally, let me get to the week ahead.

On Monday, the President will meet with local leaders — including law enforcement, elected officials, and a community violence intervention advocate — to discuss his administration’s comprehensive strategy to reduce gun crimes and other violent crimes. And that’s here at the White House.

On Tuesday, the President will deliver remarks in Philadelphia — the birthplace of democracy — on his administration’s actions to protect the sacred, constitutional right to vote and the need to overcome anti-voter laws. He will make the moral case to the American people on why the right to vote is fundamental to who we are as a nation.

On Thursday, the President will deliver remarks to mark the day that tens of millions of families will get their first monthly tax relief payments thanks to the American Rescue Plan. The expanded Child Tax Credit provides working families \$250 each month for every child 6 to 17 years old, and \$300 each month for every child under 6 years old.

Also Thursday, the President will welcome German Chancellor Angela Merkel to the White House for an official working visit. Her visit will affirm the deep and enduring bilateral ties between the United States and Germany. This forward-looking visit will address our robust partnership on shared global challenges and identify areas to further strengthen cooperation in the months and years ahead.

And on Friday, the President will participate in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Leaders Retreat — remotely, obviously — on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. On Friday afternoon, the President will travel to Camp David, where he will remain over the weekend.

Alex. That was a lot of information, hopefully. Go ahead.

Q It was. And we have new information about a call with President Putin. Can you tell us more about what prompted this? Was it decided in response to these recent randomware — ransomware attacks? What exactly did President Biden say? He reiterated that the United States will take any necessary action to defend its people. What threats, if any, did he make?

And then, I wanted to know — the top of readout suggests that it was partly, sort of, a pleasant call. The leaders commended their joint work. So can you explain why President Biden was at all pleasant in this call when it seems that there are all of these ransomware attacks coming from Russia that may have been government-approved?

MS. PSAKI: First, let me say that the President is a believer in face-to-face diplomacy when possible and leader-to-leader diplomacy when that’s not possible, and this is an example of that.

And this is the first time — even though ransomware attacks have been increasing over the past 18 months, if not longer — that there has been this level of engagement at this level. And certainly, the President knew, even when they met in Geneva, that there would be a need for ongoing discussions and engagements.

I would say the reason that they commended the work of their teams is: This is consistent with the President's view that diplomacy includes working together where there is opportunity and agreement, and being clear and candid and forthright when there's disagreement. And this call is an example of that.

So, because of their agreement and the discussion they had in Geneva, the U.N. Security Council is going to extend access for humanitarian corridors — providing assistance, humanitarian assistance to people in Syria. That's something that is pivotal and that is going to save lives. That is something to be commended.

At the same time, the President made clear, as I think you could see in the readout, that — he underscored the need for President Putin to take action to disrupt these ransomware groups. While REvil, we know, operates in Russia and other countries around the world, and we don't have additional or new information suggesting the Russian government directed these attacks, we also know and we also believe that they have a responsibility. They have a responsibility to take action.

And as you can see in the readout, the President also made clear that the United States will take any necessary action to defend its people and its critical infrastructure.

So, this was an example of leader-to-leader diplomacy — something the President feels is vital as he operates in the world.

Q And a quick note of clarification on the new CDC guidelines on schools —

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q — because there seems to be a lot of confusion when these come out. Schools are now supposed to allow teachers and students that are vaccinated not to wear masks, but they're not recommended to keep track of that. Is that recommendation enforceable? And if not, why even make the recommendation to begin with?

And then, going forward, as we're seeing an increase in vaccinations — or increase in Delta — the Delta variant in some of these under-vaccinated clusters, is there a situation in which the administration would suggest returning to virtual learning at all?

MS. PSAKI: First, the CDC laid out ways, several months ago, that all schools can safely return to in-person learning. That applies to schools in areas where there are high levels of vaccination and areas where there are lower levels of vaccination.

And thanks to the American Rescue Plan — \$122 billion in funding — schools can implement these mitigation measures that they may not have been able to prior.

So this — this guidance today reiterated that masks should be worn indoors by all unvaccinated individuals; schools should continue to maintain at least three feet of physical distance. Screening, testing, ventilation, hand washing, and respiratory

etiquette, staying home when sick, and getting tested, contact tracing with quarantine and isolation, and cleaning and disinfection continue to be important layers of prevention to keep schools safe.

Now, the guidelines that they provided — the guidance — is in line with their public health guidance that they have provided broadly. So if somebody is vaccinated, they are safe. If they are not vaccinated — which obviously applies to children who are under a certain age who are not yet eligible — then there are additional — there are guidelines that remain in place.

How these guidelines will be implemented has always been the purview of local school districts. That has always been the case with vaccines in general, even prior to the coronavirus. So, this is public health guidelines that they are providing. It is up to the school districts to apply and implement.

Go ahead, Jeff.

Q Some three weeks or so ago, President Biden, in Geneva, said that Vladimir Putin “knows there are consequences” — “he knows I will take action.” Did he raise the volume of a similar message in their call today, or did he amplify it in any way, or did he just repeat it?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think, as the readout makes clear, he reiterated that the United States will take any necessary action to defend its people and its critical infrastructure. And he also reiterated his expectation that President Putin take action, even if it is not directed by the Russian government and if it is because of criminal actors in his own country.

So, I’m not going to give you a tone-and-tenor readout here. But the President believes that this is — that — and he’s always believed this was going to need to be an ongoing diplomatic engagement with the Russians. We’ve had expert-level talks. We’ve had those talks focused on cyber, focused on ransomware, but he also understands that there’s going to need to be talks at times at the leader level (inaudible).

Q You said you don’t have new information that Russia was involved, specifically, in these attacks. Is that right?

MS. PSAKI: Correct.

Q Are the cyber groups still meeting next week — the U.S. group and the Russia side meeting next week on cyber?

MS. PSAKI: Yes.

Yes, go ahead.

Q So, in this call with President Putin, did Putin provide any assurances to President Biden that he will in fact crack down on cyber criminals that are in his country?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I'm not going to read out on behalf of the Kremlin. I will let them read out their own — what the President conveyed —

Q But did —

MS. PSAKI: — to President Biden.

Q Oh, sorry. I didn't mean to cut you off. But did President Putin provide any assurances to President Biden on that call at all?

MS. PSAKI: Again, that's not an appropriate role for the United States to convey. I can convey and read out to you what role President Biden played and what message he delivered to the Russians.

Go ahead.

Q So you've talked about the visit of Chancellor Merkel coming on Thursday. What — to what extent will President Biden ask Germany and other countries that are involved to stand with him in a response to Russia on these ransomware attacks? Is that a big part of your agenda?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would say that it is — it has long been and it was — back to the G7 and the meetings on the President's first foreign trip, part of his message to other European leaders and partners was: We need to stand together and work together to address the threat of ransomware cyberattacks. It is not just an issue for the United States. It is an issue for a range of countries around the globe.

In terms of what percentage of the meeting, I think we'll have more as we get closer to the meeting with — with Chancellor Merkel. But, certainly, I would expect that the rising threat of cyber and ransomware would be part of the agenda.

Q And one more on Germany and then another quick one. So, on Germany, you know, this one residual issue that is still to be addressed has to do with Nord Stream. To what extent are you hopeful that you might be able to reach some kind of an agreement or extract some kind of promises from Germany that would stave off the need to have this tariff — sanctions takes place — take effect?

MS. PSAKI: Well, it certainly will be a part of the discussion. And the President — our view continues to be that it's a bad deal and one that has global issues involved in it. But I'm not going to predict for you what the outcome of the meeting will look like.

Q And just real —

MS. PSAKI: Yep.

Q — real quick on Haiti.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q So we have some reporting that there's an investigation going on about the role that Haitian Americans may have played in that attack. Can you say a few words about your understanding of that? I understand you're sending to the FBI and DHS —

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q — and it may be a bit premature, but any readout now would be helpful.

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything to update in that regard. Obviously, the investigation is being led by Haitian police forces on the ground. There have been some reports, I think you're referencing, but I don't have any update beyond that.

Q Would that be a serious concern for the White House if you found that there were in fact American citizens involved in this assassination?

MS. PSAKI: Well, certainly. But I'm not going to get ahead of where the investigation is going. It's ongoing. It's led by the Haitians on the ground.

Go ahead, Kelly.

Q Did the President, in his conversation with President Putin, expand on the list that he presented to him in Geneva about the types of critical infrastructure and parts of the U.S. economy that were off limits? Has the increase in ransomware informed his view on that to expand that? And should we interpret this call and the implicit warning in there again as a sign that the U.S. will act and act soon?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, I would say that, as you noted, the President did provide a list of critical infrastructure when he met with President Putin just a few weeks ago. He did that because, of course, an attack on critical infrastructure that would take out a swath of the American economy would have a significant national security impact.

He did not provide that list to say: If the attack is not on critical infrastructure, we're not going to take action. That was not the restriction he gave himself.

And I think, in this call today, he was making clear that, again — and reiterating again — that attacks by criminal groups, by actors that may not be directed by the Russian government, you still have a responsibility.

And in terms of actions, he made clear that he's going to take steps to defend the American people and our own infrastructure and our interests here in the United States.

So while we're not going to preview, operationally, what that looks like or what he may decide to do, he did make clear that he reserves that option to take action.

Q And do you think the President's intent in having this call and on this topic within the call was to send that signal that action could be imminent?

MS. PSAKI: I think his intent was to make clear and reiterate, again, that attacks by criminal groups, ransomware attacks by criminal groups on entities in the United States is not acceptable and that we reserve the right to take action.

Go ahead, Weijia.

Q Thank you. Did President Biden specifically ask about Kaseya and the RNC hack in this phone call? And did Putin say he was investigating? Did he deny it? What was that conversation?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I'm still not going to read out what President Putin said, and I'm sure that the Kremlin will do their own readout of what he conveyed. I can tell you broadly that, of course, the ransomware attack that happened over the course of last weekend was a big focus, of course, of the call, which was — was clear in the readout that we provided.

Again, I would reiterate, on the RNC attack, that that — that the information we have to date is that that was on a third-party entity and it's something the FBI is working with them on. We don't have additional information beyond that at this point in time.

Q Did the President express when he would take this action (inaudible)?

MS. PSAKI: I'm just not going to have more to read out for you on operational details or specifics.

Q Okay. And I have a question on Hunter Biden's artwork.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

Q Did the White House play any role in crafting the sales agreement with the New York gallery to protect the — the purchasers — or the ultimate purchasers' identity?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I can tell you that after careful consideration, a system has been established that allows for Hunter Biden to work in his profession within reasonable safeguards.

Of course, he has the right to pursue an artistic career, just like any child of a President has the right to pursue a career. But all interactions regarding the selling of art and the setting of prices will be handled by a professional gallerist, adhering to the highest industry standards. And any offer out of the normal course would be rejected out of hand.

And the gallerist will not share information about buyers or prospective buyers, including their identities, with Hunter Biden or the administration, which provides quite a level of protection and transparency (inaudible).

Q But the gallery owner is a private citizen who might not be privy to who might have some interests in purchasing this artwork. Is the White House doing anything to work with the owner to make sure there's not impropriety there, when it is ultimately sold?



MS. PSAKI: Well, I think it would be challenging for an anonymous person who we don't know and Hunter Biden doesn't know to have influence. So that's a protection.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. On this call this morning with the Russian President, did President Biden discuss at all the Taliban delegation that was in Moscow yesterday?

MS. PSAKI: The focus of the call and the conversation, which I can tell you was about an hour long, was really primarily on these two topics. I can see if there was anything in addition that was raised, and I can follow up with you after the briefing.

Q Okay. Thank you. And then, on the Afghan translators: Does the President believe he has any executive authority to determine where these Afghan nationals await their visas? I know that the President said, yesterday, you guys are working closely with Congress. I want to know what that looks like.

But in addition, does he have any influence on where they wait out this time period for their visas — as he's similarly exercised with immigrants at the southern border by ending the "Remain in Mexico" policy?

MS. PSAKI: Well, it's a different program, obviously — which I know you're conveying. And what we are trying to determine is U.S. facilities and bases that are located in different parts of the world where we can house these brave and courageous individuals while their processing continues.

So that's what we're determining. We have not made a final determination of that. We're trying to also protect, for security and operational reasons, what that may look like, even when a final determination is made. So I would see it as a different type of a program. And — but those are the considerations.

And it's already law, so we are — we are in a position where we can make a decision to — to relocate individuals from Afghanistan to these third-party countries.

Q And then, on the vaccine: Pfizer requesting approval for a third shot from regulators. CDC, FDA said, at this time, you don't need a booster to be considered vaccinated. But what's the timeline that you guys are looking at on when that would be recommended, especially as it pertains to meeting vaccination requirements to forego things like masks?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first — and you referenced this, but just for others — the CDC and the FDA put out a pretty clear statement last night after the announcement by Pfizer, making clear that Americans who have been fully vaccinated do not need a booster shot at this time.

I'd also note that they are constantly engaged in a rigorous process to consider when — when a booster might be necessary. But it's — I can't make a prediction of that; that's going to be led by the data and by the science. But at this time, that is not a determination

that they have made, and we wanted to make clear that that is not something that the American people need to plan for at this moment.

Q Jen?

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead. I'm just going to jump around because I haven't gotten to a bunch of people in this room in a couple days.

Q (Inaudible.)

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead, go ahead, go ahead.

Q Jen, a couple on Afghanistan, just to follow. Yesterday, the President said that he den- — he actually denied that the intelligence community had assessed that Af- — that the Afghan governments could collapse. That conflicts with the reporting at the Journal and other news outlets that said that it could collapse within six months. Was he not briefed on that intelligence? Or are you denying that intelligence exists at all?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, I would say that we, of course, abide by the intelligence presented by our own intelligence community. But the way the question was answered — and, in part, presented — was whether it was inevitable. And the President does not believe that it is inevitable.

The intelligence community has never said it was inevitable for the — for the Taliban to take over the country. And so his objective or his — what he was trying to convey was that there's a responsibility and the responsibility now lies in the hands of the Afghans.

We have provided — we have trained over 300,000. We've provided \$3.9 billion in humanitarian assistance. These are brave fighters who have fought off — taken on casualties and fought off over the course of the last several years. We want to equip and empower them, and it is now in their hands. But it is not inevitable, nor has any intelligence assessment predicted it was inevitable.

Q And just one more. Yesterday, he also said that the U.S. doesn't bear responsibility for any deaths that might occur after the U.S. withdraws. Can you explain, you know, how the U.S. doesn't bear any responsibility for that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think what the President was conveying is that we are doing everything we can to equip, train, empower the Afghan National Security Forces, and we're going to continue to remain engaged not just through the end of August, but then forward. But it's going to be up to them to — it is ultimately their job and responsibility now to demonstrate their capabilities and their will to defend their country. And that was what he was working — attempting to convey yesterday.

Q And just really briefly on the competition executive order: Was there any discussion about trying to accomplish those goals through legislation? And would that be the President's preferred approach over an executive order that could be overturned by his successor?

MS. PSAKI: Well, there's certainly value in legislation; it makes it more permanent. So there's no question about that. But the President is going to continue to use authorities that every President before him has had — executive actions, executive — which allow him to take actions to make industries more competitive, to bring relief to consumers and the American people.

So I'm not going to rule out future legislative discussions with Congress should they want to pursue them. But these are actions he could take that could have a huge, immediate impact on the American people.

Go ahead, in the middle.

Q Just two quick questions, Jen. The first is: I spoke with a number of justice organizations and families that want to know if the President is going to address the over 4,000 inmates — low-offending inmates — that are at home, sent home due to the pandemic, then they have to go back.

They're saying that they want to know: Is he going to make a statement, how is he going to address it, and is he willing to find a way to keep them home, whether that's granting clemency or ordering the DOJ to go back and revisit that memo that was done under the Trump administration?

MS. PSAKI: Sure, it's — it's a great question. It is something that President is following closely. A lot of it is under the purview of the Department of Justice. I can see if there's any new update for you that I can provide to you after the briefing.

Q Secondly, on the campaign trail, the President said, "Especially for those moments when this campaign was at its lowest, the African American community stood up again for me." Then, "They always have my back and I'll have theirs."

With that said, I know you said on Tuesday he's going to Philly, but there are many activists on the ground who feel like the President has not done all that he can. Are we going to see him going state to state, like he did with infrastructure, and having a very in-your-face approach with many Republicans, like in Arizona, confronting some of these rules or even pressing Democrats when it comes to nuking the filibuster?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, I would say that the speech the President is delivering is about our fundamental right to vote in the country and the moral obligation we all have to defend that, stand up for that. It's not about legislative process, and this issue is bigger than that.

And I would say that: To those who are critics, we stand with you in wanting to make voting more accessible around the country. And that's why the President signed a historic executive order into law in his first month in office. That's why he — his Department of Justice has already taken action to double the funding and support around the country to fighting voter laws and fighting voter suppression. That's why he fought — nominated and fought for the confirmation of Kristen Clarke and Vanita Gupta, two civil rights activists who are now playing prominent roles in the Department of Justice.

He has said this will be the cause of his presidency. He's delivering a speech in Philadelphia — the foundation of democracy — next Tuesday. And that's a continuation of his efforts.

Go ahead.

Q Jen, thank you. Nobody really would expect you to preview what the United States might do as a retaliatory cyberattack on Russia, but does the President understand that — assuming Russia would not acknowledge such an attack, does he understand that for political consumption — domestic political consumption, perhaps worldwide political consumption — that we have to make some kind of show of it; we have to point out that we have to respond and the United States has responded and then the President has fulfilled what he said he would do?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would say the President doesn't make his global decisions or his decisions as Commander-in-Chief or a leader in the global community based on politics; he makes them on what is in the interests of our national security, in the interests of the American people.

And certainly — I know you alluded to this — but I don't think anyone expects him or us to preview our punches. He reserves that option, has been clear about that, and we're probably not going to preview that in advance.

Go ahead, Karen.

Q But doesn't he want to make a show of it, though?

MS. PSAKI: I think I've answered your question.

Go ahead, Karen.

Q Thanks. Two questions on vaccines, and back to Pfizer saying that the third shot is better. You've mentioned that the FDA and the CDC came out very quickly with a statement saying it's not needed at this time, but is anybody in the administration asking Pfizer to coordinate on announcements like this so Americans are not confused to see such a whiplash of headlines?

MS. PSAKI: Well, they are a private-sector company. I can't speak to their — the origin or the motivation of their announcement; you'd have to ask them that. But the role we can play from the U.S. government is to provide accurate information and public health information, which is what we ventured to do last night pretty rapidly in response to the announcement.

Q And you were asked about this on Wednesday on Air Force One, but I just want to go back to it because there's still pushback about the President's comments about going door to door to encourage vaccinations.

The South Carolina governor said today that “Enticing, coercing, intimidating, mandating, or pressuring anyone to take a vaccine is a bad policy that will deteriorate the public trust and confidence in the state’s efforts.” And Governor McMaster said he’s going to prohibit the state health agency from using the administration’s targeted tactics. Can you respond to the governor and explain what it is that is being done and what is not being done in this outreach?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Well, let me first say that the failure to provide accurate public health information, including the efficacy of vaccines and the accessibility of them to people across the country, including South Carolina, is literally killing people, so maybe they should consider that. But I would say that what this is and what is — it is not — this is not federal employees going door to door.

This is grassroots volunteers, this is members of the clergy, these are volunteers who believe that people across the country, especially in low-vaccinated areas, should have accurate information, should have information about where they can get vaccinated, where they can save their own lives and their neighbors’ lives and their family members’ lives.

That’s exactly what this is. It’s something that’s been going on since April. And it’s something where we’ve seen an impact in states where there are lower vaccination rates. So, it is something we will continue to — to work with local groups to do. And it’s a disservice to the country and to the people who may lose their lives, who may lose family members to provide inaccurate disinformation at a moment when we’re still fighting a pandemic.

Go ahead, George.

Q Thanks. Two questions on the President’s trade agenda. He’s spoken a lot about “Buy America” and he settled the Airbus thing, but when can we expect activity on the major things like lifting the Trump tariffs or the UK talks?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. This is, of course, under the purview of Ambassador Tai, and somebody who is working every day to work with countries around the world to communicate what our agenda is. I don’t have anything to predict for you in terms of additional components of his trade agenda.

I will note that as he looks at our global approach, our economic approach, he believes that we need to build the middle class, make sure we are making decisions through the prism of what’s going to help the middle class here in the United States.

Yeah.

Q Any reaction to the IMF calling on him to lift the tariffs?

MS. PSAKI: We’re continuing to review. I don’t have any update for you on a timeline.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you. So, I have a question on vaccine sharing, and then on Afghanistan.

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q On vaccine sharing, many humanitarian organizations say that despite \$1 billion doses pledged by G7, the lion's share of which is coming from the U.S., it's still not nearly enough to get the world vaccinated, to stop the spread of variants. My question is: Does the administration have any plans to expand from the 580 million doses already pledged?

And jumping off on your Indonesia announcement, the Jakarta government has just announced that they're going to use the 3 million Moderna doses to vaccinate one and a half million healthcare workers who have already been vaccinated — fully vaccinated with Sinovac. So, would you care to comment about that in regards to U.S. vaccine diplomacy versus Chinese vaccine goals?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Well, first, I would say that there are no strings attached to our vaccines that we're providing. We're providing them around the world to save lives and to be a contributor to the global effort to fight the pandemic.

You're absolutely right that there are more doses needed beyond the billion. I would note that the United States is far and away the largest contributor in the world to the fight against the pandemic, including specific doses of vaccines. And we have — the President has made clear that we will continue to build from here, and we're working on manufacturing capacity around the world and in the United States, and we will continue to contribute even beyond the billion doses.

Q And on Afghanistan, the Taliban has captured a key border crossing with Iran today — a move that's designed to choke the Kabul government economically. So if the Taliban continues to make military gains to push the Kabul government towards collapse, at what point would the President reconsider his strike policy to include airstrikes on the Taliban rather than just ISIS and al Qaeda?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I'm not going to predict an outcome that we are certainly working to — with the Afghan National Security Forces to push against.

I can reiterate, of course, why the President made the decision he made based on a clear-eyed assessment of what the impact could be.

But at this point in time, what our focus is on is ensuring we are bringing our servicemen and women home from Afghanistan on the timeline he outlined yesterday; that we are spreading our counterterrorism capacity out to parts of the world where we see the biggest threats beyond Afghanistan; that we are continuing to work to empower, equip, train, support financially the Afghan National Security Forces.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. We're almost halfway through the 90-day period that the White House has set for the U.S. intelligence community to redouble its efforts and analyze information about the origin of COVID-19. Is the President receiving or has the President received any update on that front?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any updates to provide to all of you, but go ahead.

Q Thank you. And then, second question: Delegates to the National Education Association, they approved a measure last week calling for support of, quote, "implementation of culturally responsive education, critical race theory, and ethnic studies curriculum" in preK-through-12 and higher education.

The President is obviously a big fan of education. The First Lady is a teacher; she's a union teacher. I'm wondering: What are the President's thoughts on anti-racism curriculum in the classroom?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the President believes that, in our history, there's many dark moments. And there is not just slavery and racism in our history; there are systemic racism that is still impacting society today.

And he believes — as I believe, as a parent of children — that kids should learn about our history. So as the spouse of an educator and as somebody who is — continues to believe that children should learn not just the good, but also the challenging in our history. And that's part of what we're talking about here, even as it's become politically charged.

Q Thank you, Jen.

MS. PSAKI: Thank you.

Go ahead.

Q I just want to follow up on something you said about Pfizer. Before, you said this is a private-sector company.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q This is a company that's gotten billions of dollars from the federal government, and it's a key part of probably the most important effort you're working on right now. Given that, is it still not appropriate to coordinate on messaging that might confuse people?

MS. PSAKI: Well, again, the role we can play is to determine how we communicate from the federal government and how we communicate accurate public health information to the American people. And that's what we ventured to do as quickly as possible last night after the statement came out.

Go ahead, Jen.

Q Just on the EO that the President is about to sign: We've seen some of the business groups that, you know, while not often the allies of Democrats, have been, especially around the infrastructure deal — groups like the Chamber of Commerce — expressing concern that government is just, kind of, inserting itself too much into business dealings.

The National Association of Manufacturers saying they are “solutions in search of a problem” and threaten to “undo progress by undermining free markets [that] are premised on the false notion our workers are not positioned for success.”

And, you know — and more broadly, are you just concerned about the reaction coming from industry that they will try to push back on this, that there will likely be lawsuits and all — and all kinds of other things that can bog down this? And how are you planning to respond to all of that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, there may be, but I think the role and the President's role is to — to focus on what's in the interests of American consumers. And his view is that when you have a lack of competition that's driving up prices for consumers, driving down wages for workers, a lack of competition that is costing the median American household \$5,000 per year, that, as the President of the United States — somebody who represents middle-class Americans across the country — he has a responsibility to act. We understand some may be opposed to that, and that's okay; it's a free country.

Q Can I follow up —

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead. Go ahead, very quickly, Brian.

Q Thank you. The follow-up to that is: You said in the statement today that he's going to take decisive action against consolidation in a lot of industries. Does that include the media industry? I mean, we suffer consolidation more than any other. So is your administration going to break up the large media conglomerates?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything to predict or preview for you on that front.

Go ahead.

Q I'm from a large media conglomerate.

MS. PSAKI: Okay. (Laughter.)

Q Jen, a question — a question on Haiti.

(Some members of the press exit the briefing room.)

MS. PSAKI: Nothing crazy is happening. The pool has to gather.

Go ahead. (Laughter.)

Q A question on Haiti: How will the arrest of two Americans affect the assistance that the FBI and DHS provides to Haitian authorities?



MS. PSAKI: Our assistance is to help the people of Haiti and to help them get through what is a very challenging time and has long been even before the assassination of the President. So, the investigation is not going to impact the assistance we're providing to the people of Haiti.

But as you — as I announced at the beginning, we are sending — because supporting law enforcement efforts on the ground and making sure we are providing resources — in terms of women- and manpower, but also financial resources — is part of what our objective is as well.

Q And how many law enforcement agents are we sending? And have there been any requests for any additional aid from the U.S., either from the State Department or another agency?

MS. PSAKI: Well, this — this action was in response to a specific request. So, that's what it exactly was. I don't have a specific number. I can check and see if there's something more specific we can provide to you.

Go ahead, Eugene.

Q Is the Biden administration considering easing travel restrictions to allow vaccinated people into the U.S.? The CDC has already said that you can — it's safe to travel — I've done it; a lot of us have done it — if you're fully vaccinated.

MS. PSAKI: There's an ongoing process, which I know is to the frustration of many, which includes working groups with countries so that we can communicate about and share information about what the criteria will be for easing these travel restrictions.

We certainly want to ensure families are reunited, people are reunited, people can travel — as you have, as you've said — but I don't have anything to predict in terms of the timeline there.

Q The question is: If the conditions are the same — they're otherwise the same — why does the destination matter?

MS. PSAKI: They look at a range of criteria, but it's based on public health discussions. Public health experts are a part of these discussions on all sides from our country and from the others who are participating.

Q And last question: In May, the administration came out in support of the TRIPS Waiver, which would make vaccines more available around the world by waiving the IP protections. Angela Merkel will be here next Thursday. Germany is against the TRIPS Waiver. They — and I think it has to be unanimous. Is President Biden — is that on the agenda for President Biden to talk to her about that?

MS. PSAKI: He is a strong proponent of it. It's one tool in our toolbox. There are a number of others, including increasing manufacturing. Obviously, we've already made an announcement about the number of doses — the 500 million we're sharing around the

world — and we've already started implementing them.

I know — it sounds like there's a lot of interest in what will be on the agenda. Let me see if there's more about the agenda for the meeting with the German Chancellor to predict.

Let me go all the way to the — go ahead, in the middle. Go, in the middle.

Q Thanks, Jen. Just two quick questions. First, on voting rights: Is the speech next week in Pennsylvania — is it like a one-off speech or is the President going to, sort of, consistently start to deliver speeches and have events publicly on this issue?

MS. PSAKI: Well, he just had a meeting with civil rights leaders yesterday. And we provided a readout of that. So, I can't predict for you what the schedule will look like beyond next Tuesday, but this is an opportunity to go to the birthplace of democracy to make the case for the moral imperative of making voting more accessible to people across the country.

Q And just quickly on — it's been several months since Neera Tanden was withdrawn as the nominee to lead OMB. Is there an update on the timeline for when the President might nominate a full-time nominee to lead that department?

MS. PSAKI: There — I do not have a timeline update for you.

Go ahead.

Q Yes, thanks, Jen. As you probably have noticed, gas prices are up considerably right now all across the U.S. The average price of gasoline is \$3.14. In fact, gas prices are up 40 percent since the very beginning of the year. What is your message to motorists out there in the country that are concerned about how much it costs to get to work every day, how it's really impacting their family budgets?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, I would say that gas prices do historically rise in the summer, and that's particularly true even in moments like this where there's a spike in people traveling. And even more people are hitting the road now because of our success in defeating the pandemic.

So, in the last 10 years pre-pandemic, for example, the average price of gas in July is nearly 30 cents higher than it is in January. And any prices are higher now than they were last year because Americans are finally able to travel.

I just thought that context was important as it relates, but the President is quite focused on ensuring that we are doing everything we can to keep prices low for the — to keep the cost of living low for the American people, including the cost of gas. That's why he was against — vehemently against a gas tax; why he was against a vehicle mileage tax.

We are not a member — a party of OPEC, as you know. We are engaged with a number of countries, in part because we want to ensure that we are remaining abreast of what is happening in those discussions as well, because that will have an impact.

But his direct message to the American people is that he is going to work — just as he worked to get the virus under control, he’s going to — and to create jobs — he’s going to work to ensure we are doing everything we can to keep the gas price low.

Q Will releasing oil from the SPR have any impact? Is that a consideration of the administration?

MS. PSAKI: I don’t have anything to predict on that front.

Q Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Sure, go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. As a candidate, President Biden said — and I’m quoting — quote, “I have never spoken to my son about his overseas business dealings.” But recently, photographs and documents have called that into question.

In 2015, President Biden, as Vice President, met at Cafe Milano with his son’s Ukrainian, Russian, and Kazakhstani business associates one day before a Burisma executive thanked the First Son for the opportunity to meet his father.

And also, in 2015, as Vice President, the President hosted at the Naval Observatory Mexican business associates of Hunter Biden before Hunter Biden emailed these associates from Air Force Two the next year, going to Mexico.

So I have kind of a two-part question. Was President Biden indeed unaware that his son was pursuing business opportunities with these people he met? And also, according to recent reporting, the First Son still has a stake in a Chinese investment company. When is he going to unload that?

MS. PSAKI: On the last part: He’s working to unload that. I’d point you to his representatives. The President does not discuss business dealings with family members. And otherwise, I’m not going to respond to Rudy Giuliani’s lawyer.

Go ahead, in the back. Go ahead. Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. I wanted to ask you about the executive order that the President is going to sign on competition. Most of that executive order, to me, looks like it would be done through regulation at the agencies —

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q — and in directing a whole bunch of different rulemaking. Can you talk about — so, the office inside OMB that handles regulations still has no director — or administrator, I believe, is the title. Can you talk about how the coordination is going to go to get this all out the door and make sure that it’s — I mean, cross the T’s and dot the i’s without someone in that job that would traditionally do that?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Well, first, I would say that OMB has — is one of the agencies in the federal government that is also staffed by talented men and women from the Career Service, and they can help make sure we are continuing to function and implement government actions, and that continues to be the case in this regard.

As you noted, the order includes several actions that agencies would take, which — those actions would be implemented within agencies; even independent agencies, of course, will make their own decisions. So this order is encouraging independent agencies to take certain actions, even as they make those decisions.

But the federal government is designed in a way so that we can function from administration to administration, even as individuals need to be nominated and confirmed. And that is certainly the case in this regard as well.

All right, let's see. Go ahead. Go ahead, Nikki. Go ahead.

Q Oh, thanks. So, since Tampa won the Stanley Cup, what is President Biden —

MS. PSAKI: All right, that wasn't on my bingo card today, but that's fine.

Q A fun little segue.

MS. PSAKI: Yep.

Q What is President Biden receiving from Prime Minister Trudeau? Because I know that there's a bet out there.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

Q And then, when are we going to see the Lightning or other, sort of, bigger events start happening again at the White House?

MS. PSAKI: Soon. We've already started to have events. As you all know, we've had some over the course of the last few weeks. We've already welcomed one sports team here to the White House, and there will be more to come.

I don't have a prediction of the timeline, but we are starting to schedule and plan those events for the coming months.

Q And do you know the winnings? Like what is the President getting from the Prime Minister?

MS. PSAKI: (Laughs.) I don't have an update on that specifically, but we can see if there's more detail to share.

Why don't we go all the way in the back.

Q Thanks, Jen. Can you give us an update on the nuclear talks in Vienna? Will we have a seventh round of talks?

MS. PSAKI: Sorry, I didn't hear the last part.

Q Nuclear talks in Vienna.

MS. PSAKI: Yes.

Q Nuclear talks. Will we have a seventh round of talks?

MS. PSAKI: That is certainly the intention, but I don't have any update on the timeline of those.

Go ahead, next to you.

Q Thank you very much, Jen. On China: Is the White House planning to hold another phone call with Chinese leader Xi? At the G20 Summit in October, is President Biden willing to hold a summit with Xi, on the sidelines?

MS. PSAKI: I know the G20 summit is coming up right around Halloween, but that is quite some time from now in terms of the planning and what other events may or may not be around it.

Certainly, we are in touch, at a very high level, with Chinese leaders. In terms of an upcoming call with President Xi, I don't have anything to predict on that front.

Why don't we go all the way — I'm just trying to get all the way to the back because I'm not great at doing that. Go all the way in the — yeah, go ahead. Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. On the competition policy executive order, are there any additional steps that have already been taken, like at the interagency level, so that we're going to see a proposed rule from the Department of Transportation on airline fees or something —

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q — next Tuesday? How much of this is sort of pre-staged versus starting at the beginning of the process?

MS. PSAKI: Well, where appropriate, with agencies that — of course, not independent agencies that we've been working closely with — we have been working with them to develop policies and do that in alignment.

The timing of proposed rules, I would point you to each agency. Obviously, as you know, that takes some time depending on the complication of the rule. But we developed this through an interagency process, where appropriate, and there is, of course, broad support for the competition agenda in the administration.

Q Can I also just also ask: Because there was another — the Bipartisan Policy Center had a report the other day on the debt limit. Treasury has been unclear on when exactly the "X date" will arrive. Is the President going to be pushing Congress to raise the debt limit or suspend it again before they leave for the August recess in the early August?

MS. PSAKI: I think the President certainly expects that Congress will take steps, as they have three times during the prior administration, to raise the debt limit.

All right, I think we have to wrap up because I think you have to — we're going to move to the President's remarks. Thank you, everyone. Have a wonderful weekend.

1:37 P.M. EDT

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