

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki, December 10, 2021

[whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2021/12/10/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-jen-psaki-december-10-2021](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2021/12/10/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-jen-psaki-december-10-2021)

December 10, 2021

Briefing Room

• Press Briefings

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

2:27 P.M. EST

MS. PSAKI: Hi, everyone. Okay. Just a few things going on today. Okay, so we continue to make further progress on the President's Port Action Plan which will lower the cost of goods for American families by strengthening supply chains and modernizing port operations.

And today I wanted to highlight that the Department of Transportation awarded \$12.6 million in grants to nine marine highway projects across the country in Delaware, Hawaii, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, New York, New Jersey, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. These investments through Amer- — the America's Marine Highway Program will help us move more goods more quickly and more efficiently, and help our agricultural exports get goods to market.

The announcement follows the successful first step — step of the Port Action Plan, which provided the Port of Savannah \$8 million to set up container yards in Georgia and North Carolina, freeing up dock space and speeding up the flow of goods in and out of the port.

Three container sites are already in operation in Savannah, Statesboro, and Atlanta, and are already supporting Georgia businesses such as Home Depot, Carter, and agricultural exporters.

And one more piece of good news for shipping costs: New data, today, confirms the cost of shipping a container between Asia and the West Coast is more than 25 percent lower than it was three months ago. So about fourth — or, sorry, \$6,000 — I was not a math major — \$6,000 lower than it was three months ago, as this chart shows you.

And that's important for the American people to understand and know, because if the cost of shipping a container is less expensive, it means that more goods can be shipped [sic] — shipped, that there should be more on the shelves stocked, and that the cost of goods also will come down. We've seen that play out, but this is definitely a positive sign.

Also wanted to give you a bit of a sense of the week ahead. We'll have more to come in the coming days, I promise. But I can confirm for you that on Thursday, the President will award the Medal of Honor to three Army soldiers for acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty.

And their stories are so amazing. I just wanted to take a brief moment to highlight a couple of them.

Sergeant First Class Alwyn Cashe will receive the Medal of Honor posthumously for his service as a platoon sergeant in Iraq. On October 17th, 2005, Cashe was conducting a nighttime mounted patrol when the Bradley fighting vehicle he was in charge of was attacked by enemy small arms fire. An improvised explosive device disabled the vehicle, causing it to become engulfed in flames. After extracting himself, he set about extracting the driver and his peers trapped in the troop compartment.

Despite the severe second- and third-degree burns covering the majority of his body, he repeatedly entered the burning ~~building~~ [vehicle] to retrieve his fellow soldiers. He selflessly refused evacuation until all of the other wounded soldiers were evacuated.

His heroic actions at the cost of his life saved the lives of his teammates.

Also being awarded a Medal of Honor is Sergeant First Class Christopher Celiz, who will receive the Medal of Honor, also posthumously, for service as the leader of special op — of a special operations unit in Afghanistan on July 12th, 2018. Sergeant Celiz led an operation to clear an area of enemy forces. When a large enemy force attacked, Sergeant First Class Celiz voluntarily exposed himself to intense enemy fire multiple times to retrieve and employ a heavy weapon system; direct and lead a medical evacuation via helicopter; and act as a physical shield for his team, the aircraft, and its crew.

After being hit by enemy fire, he motioned to the aircraft to depart rather than remain to load himself — load him. His selfless actions saved the life of the evacuated partner — partnered force member and almost certainly prevented further casualties. He died of the wounds he received in combat.

And finally, ~~Major~~ [Master] Sergeant Earl Plumlee will receive the Medal of Honor for his service as a weapons sergeant in Afghanistan on August 28th, 2013. Then-Staff Sergeant Plumlee — Plumlee responded to a complex enemy attack when a massive explosion tore a 60-foot breach in the base's perimeter wall and 10 insurgents wearing suicide vests poured through. Staff Sergeant Plumlee and five special operations members mounted two vehicles and raced toward the site of the detonation.

Without cover and with complete disregard for his own safety, Staff Sergeant Plumlee repeatedly advanced on the enemy force, engaging multiple insurgents with only his pistol, killing two insurgents and engaging combatants at close range, including an insurgent whose suicide vest exploded a mere seven meters from his position.

Undeterred, he joined a small group of American and Polish soldiers who moved to counterattack the infiltrators, and carried a wounded soldier to safety.

So, the President looks forward to honoring two of those individuals posthumously, and one — on next Thursday when he awards the Medal of Honor.

With that, Colleen, why don't you kick us off?

Q Okay. Thanks, Jen. I wanted to ask two questions. One is: Can you talk a little bit about the, you know, White House outreach to Senator Manchin and other senators on the Build Back Better Act, in relation to the recent CPI Index reports today?

And then the second question is: I wondered what else the White House can do or should be doing with regards to women's reproductive rights, given everything that's happening? Specifically today, there was a ruling out of Texas that keeps the restrictions intact while the court — sorry, while the lawsuits play out. So, I just wondered what else — aside from the codification of Roe in Congress — can and should the administration be doing.

MS. PSAKI: Absolutely. Well, let me take the first one, first. Let me first say that, as it relates to the CPI — or the Consumer Price Index data this morning, let me start with the data. The data was taken in November. Even since that time, over the course of the last nearly two weeks, we've seen a decrease in costs in some of the areas that account for a big percentage of the rise in inflation.

So, about 50 percent of this — of this inflation — these inflations number — of the inflation numbers, excuse me, is attributed to the rise in gas prices and the rise in car prices.

On gas prices — and we had a chart, and maybe they'll pull it up again — that Brian Deese, our NEC director, talked about just yesterday, what we've seen in recent days are gas prices are coming down from their peak. And this obviously isn't — is not captured in the data since the data was through the course of November.

So, in 20 states, gas is below their 20-year average in real terms, and natural gas is down 25 percent from its November average.

We attribute this to a range of factors, including the President tapping the Strategic Petroleum Reserve in coordination with partners around the world. But more broadly, we're seeing positive signs of supply chain bottlenecks being addressed — that are helping address this as well. And we expect those numbers to continue to decrease across the country.

The other piece that — and gas, I should also note — sorry — the wholesale market is down over 30 cents per gallon since its peak, which is, again, a good sign.

The other piece, as we're seeing, as it relates to cars, is that wholesale car prices are down as well — or used car prices are down as well. So, when car dealers are purchasing cars, they are at a lower cost than they were before for a range of reasons, including the availability of chips, because we've helped solve some issues in supply chain. That means that as we look to the first quarter of next year or the first couple of months of next year, those car prices are going to keep coming down.

One other — third note — let me just note — in the data: One of, of course, the factors as it relates to cost that consumers are experiencing — or the American people are experiencing — is, of course, the cost of food, when you go to the grocery store. Twenty-

five percent of that, our economists — our economic experts estimate is related to meat prices. You go, you buy a pound of burger, or you buy a poultry — whatever it may be.

And our assessment here — and we've taken steps as it relates to our competition agenda — is that dominant corporations in these industries are taking advantage of their market power to raise prices while increasing their own profit margins. Meat prices are a very good example of that — something we're working to crack down on.

And just to give you a sense: Gross profit margins for big meat processes are up 50 percent, and net margins are up over 300 percent; that should not be the case. That is not all attributed to supply chain issues, et cetera.

So, I just wanted to dig into some of the data things there first. But I will note, as it relates to how this — how we have these conversations now with this data out — our argument is that this makes passing Build Back Better even more imperative, even more important. Because what Build Back Better will do is it will start cutting costs early next year, including for childcare ca- — cost, cutting them in half in 2022; making preschool free for many families, starting in 2022; saving families — saving families the eight hu- — \$8,600 a typical family currently spends on preschool; leading to the construction of additional housing units, starting in 2022.

These are all areas — the way people — and the President just talked about this too — experience inflation, as you all know, is not through the data or graphs — as much as we love graphs in here — but it's about the cost on their family budgets. And so that's why, in our view and the President's view, the argument is even stronger to get it done now.

The last thing I would note on this — and then I'll get to the other question you had — is that the President just noted — and I don't know if you saw — that he would be speaking with Senator Manchin early next week. Obviously, we're in touch at a staff level. But I will leave it, of course, to Senator Manchin to speak to that further.

As it relates to the question about the Supreme Court ruling this morning, one, you can — the President has obviously been at former Senator Dole's funeral for the majority of the day, but we will be issuing a statement in his name. We, naturally, wanted him to see and review and edit first, so you will all be getting that shortly.

But let me just note that we are — the President is very concerned by the Supreme Court's decision allowing S.B. 8 to remain in effect, given the consequences the law has for women in Texas and around the country and for the rule of law.

I know you noted this, but I would just like to reiterate that the President is deeply committed to the constitutional right recognizing *Roe v. Wade*. And he has argued and advocated in the past for codifying *Roe* through passing the Women's Health Protection Act. And the ruling this morning is a reminder of how much these rights are at risk and how women across the country who have now — in Texas, especially, it's been 101 days since this was put in place; 101 days where their health, their access to what has been law of the land for many decades now has been questioned and put — and challenged.

And so, this is just a reiteration of how much — a reinforcement, I should say — of how important it is to codify Roe and move forward with the Women’s Health Protection Act. And he’s certainly hopeful that they will move forward with that. It’s already passed the House — so, in the Senate.

I would note, in terms of additional administration actions, HHS announced a department-wide response to protect patients and providers in response to Texas law S.B. 8. These actions include — and they will continue to be built upon in coordination with the Gender Policy Council here — issuing Title 10 grant support for health service providers, with Title 10 grantees receiving significant funding to support expansion of family planning services, as well as plan to expand access to emergency contraception and family planning services to any eligible applicant.

These are steps that have already been underway, but we will continue to explore what more can be done.

All right. Go ahead, Jeff.

Q Hi, Jen. What are the next steps in the U.S. process to extradite Julian Assange after the latest UK court decision?

MS. PSAKI: Well, this is really a case for — it’s an ongoing criminal case, so I’d refer you to the Department of Justice and their statement. The President is committed to an independent Department of Justice, and so we’d really let them speak to any next steps.

Q Okay. And on another topic, Russia spelled out some specific demands for NATO today, including that NATO should rescind its promises that Ukraine and Georgia may eventually join the Alliance and that NATO not deploy weapons in countries that border Russia. What’s the U.S. response to that? Have you seen those? And can you give us an update on when that meeting between the other NATO countries, the U.S., and Russia will take place?

MS. PSAKI: Well, this list — which we have certainly seen but should not come as a surprise — it’s the same list of demands that the Russians have been advocating for and voicing for several months, if not years. And that is their prerogative to have — to have their views and demands. We have our own, and we have our own concerns about security circumstances around the world, including, of course, on the border of Russia and Ukraine.

Russia can raise their concerns; we can raise ours. Europeans can raise their concerns. That’s the whole point of having a dialogue and a discussion.

While I don’t have an update on what format that may take, which I think is the second part of your question, it’s important to note that there have been formats for conversations about European security with Russia for 70 years, approximately. And many of those are formats that could work and we are open to being the format, moving forward.

I would note, also, that even as we're determining what that looks like, we have been engaged on a daily basis with all of the players here — our European partners — at a range of levels. Obviously, you saw the President have the call with the G7 leaders yesterday, as well as the Ukrainians. But we are in touch with — through senior officials at the State Department, in the White House, and we will continue to be. But I don't have any update at this point on the format.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. The President said, just a few moments ago, that he thought that inflation may be at its peak right now. Is that the determination of your economic team when they look — when they analyze, kind of, the state of play in the market right now? Or where is he kind of basing — what's he basing that on?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think if the President were standing here — I know he's always invited, which may be the next thing someone says, but — which is okay — you're invited if you're listening — is that — would be that we, of course, defer to the Federal Reserve and their assessments that they make, as they make predictions about inflation. They are predicting, as outside economists are, that inflation will come down next year. So, we would really defer to them, as would the President.

I think — I have not obviously had a chance to speak to him, post his comments, because it was just shortly — not so long ago. But I think what he is — in his mind, as he went on to articulate, is what we're doing to lower costs for the American people. And that's how he sees it. It is — of course, "inflation" is a term we use here, we use at the Federal Reserve — a very important economic term.

The way the American people experience this at home is costs and what things cost. Whether it is the cost of gas or natural gas, heating your home or putting gas in your car, we're seeing those prices come down; or whether it is buying a car, again, we're projecting those prices will come down. We're obviously working to bring the cost of food down.

So, we are seeing those move in a good trajectory and in a good direction. And I think that's how he was articulating it.

Q And then, you guys have been consistent on your argument, as it relates to Build Back Better and inflation, now for weeks, if not months. Senator Manchin has been consistent in his position for weeks, and not months. Obviously, something is going to need to change in that dynamic on the Senator's side of things for him, I presume, to support Build Back Better. What changes in your argument that resonates with the Senator, given his long-held positions here on inflation?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we will certainly let the Senator speak for himself. He will, of course, be speaking with the President, as the President alluded to, early next week. And I would expect the President will convey much of which we've — what we've conveyed publicly: that while we've seen costs increase in some areas and we've seen a good direct- — them move in a good direction in some areas as well, what we need to do now is think about what we're going to do about rising costs, what is our plan to address rising costs.

You know, you saw every single Republican in the House vote against Build Back Better. What were they voting against? Yes, they were voting against the President's agenda. They were also voting against lowering costs. They were voting against lowering costs for childcare, lowering costs for eldercare, lowering costs for healthcare.

And I think the — not argument, because he has a very good working relationship with Senator Manchin — but I think the case he will make is that this is exactly the time to pass this bill and move it forward so that we can lower costs for the American people on all of those topics, including insulin, in areas that really pinch — force American families to pinch pennies.

Go ahead.

Q On that same point though, just politically, do these numbers make it more challenging, you think, to pass Build Back Better, given the fact that opponents and even Manchin argue that pouring more money into the economy will only make things worse?

MS. PSAKI: Well, what we know is what 17 Nobel economists — laureate economists have conveyed, which is that this will help address inflation. We know that economists across the board — many, many across the board — have conveyed that this will help address what we see as rising costs.

And we also know that for American families sitting at home, they don't necessarily think of it as what the data and what the economists are saying; they think of it as what their daily — what their weekly budgets are, what their monthly budgets are, and who — which leader has a plan to address that.

So, actually, for us, politically, arguing we're going to bring down the cost of childcare, we're going to bring down the cost of preschool, we're going to make affordable housing a reality — and on the other side of the aisle, you have people who are opposed to lowering that cost — is a pretty viable argument.

Q And on the timeline here — just to put a finer point on it — you know, you noted some — the costs are already going down that may not be reflected in this report and that you may see changes next year. But if, you know, you're an American at home worried about these rising prices, how long do you think Americans should be prepared for these increased prices to persist?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think the way Amer- — the American people look at it is not through data. Right? They look at it through how things are impacting their lives. So, what they can know is that gas prices are coming down in about 20 states across the country. We expect that to happen in more.

Natural gas prices are coming down. That means if they're looking to heat their homes — it was a very cold day here yesterday; other cold days around the country — those prices are coming down.

If they're looking to buy a used car, those prices should come down early next year. And also, there are steps we're taking to address areas of — where we see prices increasing, like when they go to the store to buy some, you know, burgers for a barbecue — that we're working to go after meat conglomerates for raising prices and jacking prices up.

So, it's area to area. But what we can tell them is where we're seeing progress, where we're still going after the problem. And what we would also convey to them is: You should look closely at who has a plan here and who's just shouting from a megaphone about it being a problem. We all agree it's a problem; it's who's going to do something about it.

Q And how worried are you that the Fed may have to raise interest rates?

MS. PSAKI: We really, of course, defer to the independence of the Federal Reserve in making those decisions and what they feel is right for the economy. So, I wouldn't say we're worried. We leave them to their independent assessment of what's needed.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. Is the Manchin conversation happening here at the White House in person or by phone?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything on the format. And, obviously, we've been in close touch with Senator Manchin, but I just was echoing what the President said just a few minutes ago.

Q Got it. And then on Assange, the High Court issued its ruling in part because of assurances from the administration that Assange would not be kept under the harsh conditions that are typically reserved for high-security prisoners. Can you talk about what assurances those were and where he might be held?

MS. PSAKI: Well, Weijia, it's really all through the Department of Justice, which is where those discussions would happen, so I'd really point you to them.

Q Okay. And then one more on COVID, because the President received a briefing yesterday: Is there anything you can share about what the doctors told him? Especially because it's been about two weeks since Dr. Fauci said it would be two weeks until we had more definitive information about Omicron.

MS. PSAKI: Well, he said it would be two weeks — a few weeks. Obviously, we want to wait until there's an assessment that the doctors feel comfortable and confident in providing to the American people. I don't have an update for you here today, but as soon as they have an assessment to make, they will make it. There's also a briefing this afternoon with the COVID team as well.

Q Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. Republicans are circulating a modified version of the CBO score for Build Back Better. In their version, it included extensions of programs without being paid for, which we understand is not how the President put forward this legislation. But the reason that they're saying they did that is because — Lindsey Graham says, "If you believe these programs [are going to] go away [after] one, [or] two...years, you shouldn't have a driver's license." We all know Child Tax Credits are not going to go away after a year. What does the White House say to that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, to quote, of all people, Norm Ornstein at the American Enterprise Institute who put this quite well — quote, "You can't assume programs will be extended just because Lindsey Graham wants to assure that. An estimate based on what's not in the bill is bogus and fundamentally dishonest."

I mean, this is not a CBO score. This is a fake CBO score. It's not about the existing bill anybody is debating or voting on. This is about proposing the extension of programs that has not been agreed to without the commitment of the President — which he's made repeatedly, publicly, that he would never support extending these programs if they weren't paid for, period. That has been his commitment. That is his commitment.

I would also note that there's a particular irony here that it shouldn't be lost on Senator Graham — maybe it is lost on Senator Graham; I don't know — that the plan they proposed and passed for and passed into law, the 2017 tax cuts, were \$2 trillion, which were not paid for in any way, shape, or form. That didn't seem to upset them at all.

And I will say — and they can thank us in any way they would like for this — that what our projections and the projections of our economists predict is that, for our plan, if — as this plan continues in the second decade, it would actually reduce the deficit by \$2 trillion.

So, we're actually covering their irresponsible tax cuts to corporations and high-wealth net worth individuals. They're very welcome for that.

Q Thank you. And then on crime: The National Sheriffs Association alleged that they haven't seen the kinds of federal support to crack down on crime that we talked about here in the briefing room earlier this week. I already have lengthy statements from the White House and the DOJ detailing and countering some of the points that they made.

But more broadly, if the feeling among communities and law enforcement groups is that things are getting worse and not better, and that they're not visibly enough seeing results from what the White House is doing, how can the White House project a stronger image that they're tough on crime and crack down on this?

MS. PSAKI: Well, Jacqui, I would first say that we recognize, and let me just reiterate, that we agree that violent crime is a serious problem. We have concerns about what we've seen — serious concerns — about retail theft in a range of communities across the country.

And I know you are aware of this, but we have actually taken some, what we would consider, serious steps to help work with these communities, whether it's plussing up police forces in San Francisco and LA, or having the FBI work directly with the LA Police Department to address areas where we have seen an increase in retail theft.

I would also note that what the President has proposed — and obviously we're on the CR short-term budget right now — is an increase and a plus-up in funding for the COPS program of almost \$300 billion more than what was proposed by the former President, because he believes that police departments and law enforcement should be properly funded and supported. That is something he's been a believer in his entire career.

So, I would say, we are committed to — but we are working — we have proposed additional funding. We are working directly now. And, obviously, this work is ongoing.

Q And then one real quick one on the Jussie Smollett verdict. Both the President and Vice President tweeted at the time of the attack. The President tweeted: "What happened to @JussieSmollett must never be tolerated in this country." "We are with you, Jussie." The Vice President called it an "attempted modern-day lynching."

Since the guilty verdict, are there any lessons learned here on rushing to judgment when a crime is alleged?

MS. PSAKI: I think there are lessons learned perhaps for everybody who commented at the time, including former President Trump. I wish April Ryan was here because I think she asked him the question. Do I see her somewhere, or no? Okay.

Q She just left.

MS. PSAKI: She just left!

Where he said, "I can tell you that it's horrible. It's doesn't get worse," in response to her question about the trial — about the — about Jussie Smollett at the time.

I would say that we respect the jury's decision. Lying to the police, particularly about something as heinous as a hate crime, is shameful. Instances of that need to be investigated fully. And those found guilty need to be punished. And false accusations divert valuable police resources away from important investigations. They make it harder for real victims to come forward and be believed.

You know, if you look back at the time — it's also true and important to note that accusations of hate crimes should be taken seriously, and they need to be fully investigated.

But that's where everybody was looking at it at the time. But certainly knowing what we know now, it's important to also note the danger of lying to police and lying about hate crimes and the fact that it diverts important resources.

Go ahead, Kristen.

Q Thank you, Jen. I know you've gotten some questions about the timeline of inflation, but let me just try again in this context.

I think it bears repeating, because now we have the numbers: Fed Chair Jerome Powell said that "transitory" is no longer the right way to describe inflation. He said it "now appears that factors pushing inflation upward will linger well into next year."

I asked Brian Deese this question yesterday, so let me put it to you today. Given that — given what Jerome Powell is now saying, does the administration, does the President acknowledge that inflation is more entrenched and not transitory?

MS. PSAKI: Well, Kristen, I would say that — I can't speak, obviously, for Jerome Powell. But I think part of the point here is that it doesn't really matter what you call it. Our view, but more importantly, the view of the Federal Reserve — which he oversees — private sector forecasters in the markets has been and remains — and has been for months — that inflation will ease over time. That is the projections of the Federal Reserve, that is the projections of outside forecasters — and that it will — it will ease next year, and that our supply chain issues and higher prices are rooted in the pandemic, which will subside as it gets under control.

So, I can't parse for him his comments, but they make projections on a regular basis, on a predictable basis, which is important for the markets, important for people to look to, as do we — which I think is the most important thing to watch.

They are predicting, as they have for months — which hasn't changed even when he made those comments — that it will subside next year.

Q And I think when people hear the term "well into next year," though — I interviewed a business owner today, some families who say it's this piling up of prices that's causing the suffering. What do you say to those families who are suffering and they hear a term like "well into next year" and they feel panicked?

MS. PSAKI: I would say that we take the rise in prices — and that impacts individual families, small businesses, anyone across this country — incredibly seriously, Kristen. And that's why it's so important to note and to detail, as I did at the beginning — but I can highlight a little bit more — what the President is doing and what this administration is doing to lower prices. And that includes using every lever at our disposal to lower gas prices — something that's impacting people across this country.

We've seen some progress: Twenty states across the country, we've seen it go down. We expect that to increase.

Another key driver in these inflation numbers is the price of cars. We're seeing wholesale car prices come down. That means when families go to a lot to buy a used car — first quarter of next year, the prices will be lower.

And we're also using tools at the President's disposal to go after meat conglomerates, where we're seeing — when people go to the grocery store and a pound of meat is more expensive than it should be. We agree. That's less related to supply chain issues. A lot of that is related to the actions these conglomerates are taking to take advantage of the American people in the industry.

So what people should understand is that the President is focused on bringing down costs in all of these industries, how they're impacting their daily lives — which is what's most important to him — and that also getting the Build Back Better Agenda and Bill passed will help lower a range of costs that impact people's bottom lines, their pocketbooks, their budgets.

Q And, obviously, the Child Tax Credit is a part of the Build Back Better plan. I asked you about this yesterday, if there's any discussion about pulling it out as a standalone piece for the families who rely on that tax credit. Will the President say to Congress, "Don't leave until we get this done" to make sure that that Child Tax Credit does get extended? What's his plan for that?

MS. PSAKI: I think it's important to note that there's not a single Republican who supports extending the Child Tax Credit, as I — unless they want to speak out, and, if they do, they're welcome to join us in supporting the extension of that.

We believe that the full package — the entirety of the package has key components that will lower costs for American families. That's what we're advocating to push to pass. That's what Leader Schumer would like to do and see passed. And that's what our focus is on at this point in time.

Go ahead.

Q Jen, thanks. Going back to abortion: What path does this White House see for the Women's Health Protection Act, given the current balance in the Senate? Would you advocate for a filibuster carveout in order to pass that bill and protect access to abortion?

MS. PSAKI: I would say that we would like to see that bill come up for a vote in the Senate. We would like to see that bill move forward. But in terms of the mechanisms for that, I don't have anything new on that; we will defer to leaders in the Senate.

Q And then, also, there's some reports today about conversations among senators about potentially exploring a rules change to expedite ambassador nominations. Is the White House involved in this conversation at all? And how worried are you about a scenario where, you know, tensions are escalating at the border of Ukraine and you don't have ambassadors in some of these key European cities?

MS. PSAKI: We're deeply worried about it. You know, it is true, let me first state, having worked at the State Department for quite — for a few years — that we have a very talented Foreign Service — Foreign Service team and officials around the countr- — around the world, and career officials that are around the world.

But it should be that if there are qualified, talented, experienced nominees who have been nominated by a President to serve in key positions around the world, they should move forward through the Senate. And what we're seeing now is that there is a delay in process.

A number of these nominees will end up with a majority of votes — not everyone — not everyone, but a vast majority of votes, Democrats and Republicans. Yet there's an insistence on hours and hours of debate that's slowing the process.

And you're absolutely right, there are key countries in the world where we have not had ambassadors. The President has been in office for almost a year now, and they're still not confirmed. So, it is an area of serious concern.

In terms of the process piece, I'd have to check on that. And our engagement, I'll talk to the legislative team about that.

Go ahead.

Q The CENTCOM commander did an interview this week in which he indicated that the 2,500 troops in Iraq might come under increased pressure from Iranian-backed militias that want the U.S. out of Iraq. One of the reasons the President pulled out of Afghanistan was because he was afraid that American troops there would come under increased risk if the Taliban took over the country. Can you explain why the U.S. presence in Iraq will remain if the President was so interested for that reason in getting out of Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to talk to our national security team about their specific view on this, and probably the Department of Defense and their team about it. I would say that Afghanistan was, of course, a war that we fought for 20 years, where we had troops on the ground and — who were fighting a war on behalf of the Afghans they were unwilling to fight for themselves. I know it's tempting to compare different warzones; they're always a little different and have different circumstances. But I can check with them on this specific case.

Q And one other question. We understand the mother of Austin Tice — the journalist who's been captive in Syria for so long — was going to be meeting with the National Security Advisor. Do you have an update on that meeting? And does the U.S. government have hope that Austin Tice might soon be returned to this family?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I can confirm that Debra Tice met with Jake Sullivan, our National Security Advisor, today. I would also note that she has been, and her family have been, in touch and have met a number of times with members of our national security team and been on phone calls, as we have been with all families of individuals who are held overseas.

It's our standard practice not to share specific details about any potential meetings or specific cases, out of respect for the families and to preserve confidentiality.

Our team, of course, will remain in close contact, but I can't give you an assessment.

Obviously, we're going to do everything we can to bring Austin Tice and any individual and any American who's being held overseas.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. First, I just wanted to ask quickly — the Chinese firm Evergrande has slipped into default. You were asked about this a couple months ago and said that the U.S. was monitoring. But now that it's actually happened, I'm wondering, sort of, what the level of concern is and if the administration or the White House has undertaken any action in response.

MS. PSAKI: Well, the vast majority of their business and, of course, market impact is in China, not in the United States, as I think you well know. Obviously, any potential impact would be monitored by the Department of Treasury.

I have not heard any additional or new assessment on that. But, of course, we certainly — they monitor not only domestic but also global markets.

Q And I just wanted to sort of diagram a sentence that you said earlier.

MS. PSAKI: Oh, okay. (Laughter.) It's a Friday. Give me a break.

Q I know.

Well, I'll explain. You said —

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

Q — you were talking about —

MS. PSAKI: You need a chalkboard or something.

Q — yeah — the CBO —

Q Charts. Charts.

Q — the CBO report of the —

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q — non-existent bill. And you, in explaining why you didn't think it was valid, said that the President would never support extending these programs if they weren't paid for, period.

And the reason I'm asking this question is —

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q — I envision a scenario where in, like, two or three years I'm still sitting here, maybe you're not — but a press — (laughter) —

MS. PSAKI: Wow.

Q — but a new press secretary —

MS. PSAKI: This is like a real harsh line of questioning. (Laughter.)

Q You might be done with us. But a Biden press secretary is sitting here and you're trying to extend some element of Build Back Better, because, as we all know, the package is not going to move — or the elements of the package wouldn't all move together in a "we're just renewing Build Back Better." So, I want to be extremely specific. If there's an element of Build Back Better that expires, the President will never support renewing that element unless it is fully paid for and deficit-neutral?

MS. PSAKI: He wants to — he would only support extending these programs if they were paid for, period. I'm not going to parse all individual moments. But that is what he has stated publicly. That is his commitment. He is a person who is fiscally responsible, unlike the person who asked for the fake CBO score. And that is his commitment as long as he is President.

Q So if it's Child Tax Credit or, you know, payments for childcare comes up — you know, it's expiring, it's on its own, you don't have a way for to pay for it if you —

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to get ahead of a hypothetical. But, again, what this fake CBO score was about was extending all of the programs that would expire without paying for them. The President would pay for them.

There's no bill that exists on this front. And we —

Q Okay, I understand, but it's more like a —

MS. PSAKI: — don't even know what the vehicle would be.

But, again, the President has been clear about his intention to pay for these programs. And so, that's one of the reasons why this is so disingenuous.

Go ahead.

Q You're saying that Americans aren't focused on big-picture data lines. But, yesterday, Brian talked to us for 40 minutes about lots of data points that are moving in the right direction.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q So, I'm wondering, given all of those things and given what you're talking about — prices, month to month, moving in the right direction — what's the White House's big-picture view on why so many Americans are so pessimistic about the economy and about the direction of the country? Because another data point is: More and more Americans are saying "wrong track," on monthly polling, on that key question.

MS. PSAKI: Well, what I was — there may be — there are certainly Americans who look at data; I'm not suggesting that. Many of them work in New York and other places. I'm conveying that the way people experience it — I think you know what I'm saying. But the way people experience it — and the President just said this as well — is not by looking at charts in the paper, right? As much as we love charts, because they're — it's important for us to note — it's about their monthly budget and how much it takes to fill up their car — their tank of gas, how much it takes to buy meat to have burgers for a barbecue. That's — that's what I was saying.

Why are people experiencing things or why — because — and I — we've talked about this a little bit before. But, you know, a lot of it — what we're seeing in our data is people's psychology on the economy, on how they're experiencing things in the country right now is related to COVID and the fact that COVID — we're still in a fight against this virus. People expected it to be over sooner. We have new variants that have come up. And people are looking to get back to a normal version of life.

And so that's our best assessment.

Obviously, Americans will experience things different ways, and we certainly understand that. But broadly, when you look at data, that's what we see.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. I wanted to ask you something in light of this week's Democracy Summit.

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q Former President Trump has been undermining the 2020 election result for most of this year; you know, he puts out statements, various releases. And I wonder why President Biden has not used his bully pulpit to push back on the misinformation coming from former President Trump, just given that democracy is such a top concern?

MS. PSAKI: Why does President Bid- — sorry, just so I understand your question: Why does President Biden not debate or lift up President Trump and his statements?

Q I don't think that — no, I don't think that's what I was saying.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

Q Why isn't President Biden pushing back on the misinformation that the former President is putting out?

MS. PSAKI: Look, I think the President is doing what the American people elected him to do, which is to govern the country, to make people's lives better, to solve COVID, to put people back to work, and, certainly, to fight for protections that will protect — save our democracy and — moving forward, not to continue the 2020 election. So that's what he's focused on.

Q But don't you think it would be effective in some way to — you know, this is the most powerful possible podium that exists in the United States from a political leader. Therefore, has there have been any discussion of the President giving some kind of address to the country and speaking clearly about what did and did not happen, and clearing up misinformation? And particularly as democracy is very fragile, as —

MS. PSAKI: I think the President has spoken very clearly — and facts back this up — about the fact that the majority of the American people voted for Joe Biden to govern this country, that it went through dozens of courts who threw out attempts to change the outcome of the election.

But we've made an assessment, which hasn't been the assessment made by everybody, that elevating and giving more fire to the conspiracy theory-laden arguments of the former President isn't constructive nor is it what the American people elected him to do.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. First, President Bukele of El Salvador posted some apparent screenshots alleging that Jean Manes of SOUTHCOM intervened to try and free another politician in El Salvador. And he alleges that she was intervening to try and free another politician who was allegedly assisting gangs in the area of El Salvador. Is the President aware of this interaction between Manes and President Bukele?

And also, posting WhatsApp screenshots of a U.S. diplomat — what does this say about the U.S.'s relationship with what was once an intended partner to curb irregular migration north?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Zolan, it's a great question. I don't have all the details on the specific case — not case, but the specific details of this — this incident that you're referring to, so I can't speak to whether the President is aware of it. Obviously, he's regularly briefed by his national security team. But I'll talk to them and see if there's more details on it.

Q Okay, great. And then on MPP: The Homeland Security Secretary was asked about the expansion of MPP yesterday —

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q — of including Haitians. I know you were asked about this earlier this week. But when asked about expanding it, he said, "We felt the good-faith implementation of this program required us to act." Why — why is it that expanding a policy to include more migrants — a policy that the President has referred to as "inhumane" — is acting in good faith?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think as the Secretary has also stated, and I've stated too: We don't agree with this program. We find it has endemic flaws, it's imposed unjustifiable [sic] human costs — unjustifiable human costs, pulled resources and personnel away from other priority efforts, and failed to address the root causes of irregular migration.

I'd also note that they made some changes to the program to attempt to instill some more humane components, even of a program that we are opposed to.

In terms of how we're implementing it, I mean, my understanding — but I'd really point you to the Department of Homeland Security — is that we are abiding by this Court order and working to implement that as we see the requirement.

But beyond that, I would really point you to them for more details.

Q But the Court order didn't specify expanding it to other nationalities, including Haitians. So, I mean, with everything you just said, given that the administration has, in court documents, criticized this policy — I mean, why then expand it for this other population that the Trump administration did not include either?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would say, first of all, the Trump administration allowed this program to continue, separated families and mothers from their children, and had an absolutely inhumane and horrific approach to immigration. So, I don't think there's any point of comparison there. I will check and see if there's more details on this to share with you.

Q The last one —

MS. PSAKI: Yeah, go ahead.

Q — I have is just with this tragedy involving a truck crash with more than 50 migrants that were killed. That's the initial reports. Just initial reports from people on the ground say that that truck was intending to come to the U.S. border, that those folks were trying to come to the U.S. Is the President, is the administration reaching out to Mexico, to partners in Central America this morning? Does this cause for a certain reevaluation of the strategy to deter migration north?

MS. PSAKI: It would really come through the Department of Homeland Security — that kind of outreach. So, I would point you to them for any more detail about a connection with the Mexican government.

Q Or the Vice President at this point, since this is —

MS. PSAKI: I can check and see, but I suspect that conversation would first happen through the Department of Homeland Security.

Go ahead. Oh, go ahead, Karen.

Q Thanks, Jen. Retail sales recently have been strong, even with prices increasing. Does the White House think that will continue, or is there concern about consumers starting to scale back due to higher prices?

MS. PSAKI: We have seen retail sales up. I mean, it is the holiday season right now. So, without being an economist, I suspect that retail sales are often up around the holiday season as people are engaging in retail therapy, or what have you, this time of year.

In terms of whether it will come down and be — I think — I would assume you mean below what the typical trends would be — we haven't seen that to date, but I don't have any economic projections of what we expect on that front — or I have not heard an expectation from our economic team that we expect them to come down.

Q And on a different topic: Manuel Oliver lost his son in the Parkland, Florida, high school shooting in 2018. He's been here in Washington this week. He spoke to us -- ABC — and said he wants to meet with the President to talk about gun control in the wake of another school shooting.

I know that he's met with the President in the past, and some White House officials in the past have spoken with him, but is there a plan for the President to meet with Mr. Oliver while he's here in Washington? And then I just have one quick one after that about this.

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Sure. Well, let me first say that we have been in touch with Mr. Oliver. Cedric Richmond has been in touch with him. And he was also offered a meeting with Cedric Richmond and members of our senior team.

I don't have anything to preview in terms of a meeting with the President, but certainly he is somebody, as you noted, that the — who the President has met with in the past. We certainly respect and honor, one, his loss, but also his activism — as a follow-up to that — on behalf of gun safety. But I don't have anything to predict at this point for a meeting with the President.

Q And I think you were asked this earlier this week, but just to circle back on that: Has the President spoken with any of the families who lost a child in the Michigan school shooting last week?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have an update on that either at this point in time. Go ahead.

Q So, the Los Angeles school district — 85 percent of its eligible students vaccinated, 12 years older and up, but they're pushing back the deadline for the rest of those students because, you know, tens of thousands were not going to meet that deadline. How does the White House view that experience? Is it viewed that this has been a successful use of a mandate on students? Is this a warning sign that not enough students are getting vaccinated? How would you characterize and look at that situation?

MS. PSAKI: You know, I don't have any specific — excuse me — grade of the — their implementation. Obviously, school districts across the country are going to implement, or not, different requirements to keep their schools safe.

What I would note is that that is a vast majority that is in compliance with what the requirements are — they put in place — by a large population of the school community. And that is something — they have made the decision — will make their community and their school safer, make parents feel more comfortable and confident in sending their kids to school. That's ultimately a good thing. But different schools are going to implement it differently.

I think the President's principle is, ultimately, that there should not be a cliff, that there should be efforts to find accommodation to ensure there is counseling, that there is communication and education about the efficacy of vaccines or alternatives like testing. And that is certainly something that we've conveyed to entities across the country.

Q And one more question on schools. Obviously, the White House wants schools to be open, been encouraging schools to open. Many schools are fully open. But inside schools, there are often very strict rules. For example, sometimes students are required to eat outside or eat distanced from each other or not talk to each other while they're eating. Does the White House want to see those rules lifted, as well, to get back to a little more normal school experience?

MS. PSAKI: Well, schools are taking steps — especially since we've only recently approved, through the CDC and FDA, vaccines for 5- to 11-year-olds; they're not approved for kids younger than that — to keep their kids safe and keep students safe.

I will tell you, I have a three-year-old who goes to school, sits outside for snacks and lunch, wears a mask inside, and it's no big deal to him. I'm not saying that's the case for everybody, but these are steps that schools are taking to keep kids safe. And I think the vast majority of parents appreciate that.

Obviously, we want to get to a point where we're turning to a version of normalcy for everybody, right? Where you're not sending your kid's backpack with seven extra masks, right? Where you're not adding two hats so that they're warm outside for a snack. There's no question that's the case. But we also think the most important thing should be safety — the safety of kids; keeping kids in school, which the President is very focused on. And some of these steps — creative steps that schools have taken have enabled that to be possible.

Go ahead, Tina.

Q Is the Biden administration considering extending that student loan payment pause? I know there's — if not, besides legislation that probably won't pass, what are some of the options that would help these people?

MS. PSAKI: You're talking about the student loan payment pause that expires in February, just for clarity?

Q Yes.

MS. PSAKI: So, in the coming weeks, we will release more details about our plans and will engage directly with federal student loan borrowers to ensure they have the resources they need and are in the appropriate repayment plan.

We're still assessing the impact of the Omicron variant. But a smooth transition back into repayment is a high priority for the administration. The Department of Education is already communicating with borrowers to help them to prepare for return to repayment on February 1st and has secured contract extensions with loan servicers.

So, we are preparing for a range of steps here. These steps have provided, I would just note, more than \$12.5 billion in discharges to nearly 640,000 borrowers, plus tens of billions more saved by the 41 million borrowers who have benefited from the extended student loan payment pause. But it expires February 1, so, right now, we're just making a range of preparations.

Q Okay. And then on the Olympics: China earlier this week said, when they learned of the diplomatic boycott, that there might be some retaliation. Are there counter actions that have been discussed within the administration?

MS. PSAKI: We would certainly let China speak for themselves, as we noted when we made this announcement. We felt — the President felt that we could not proceed with business as usual and send a diplomatic delegation to the Olympics.

But obviously, we work with China on issues where there is agreement and we make clear where we have concerns, and that includes our strong concerns about human rights abuses, specifically in Xinjiang.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. Just following up on Zeke's question on Austin Tice: You mentioned that the administration is doing everything it can to free him. Does "everything" include direct engagement with the Assad government in Syria?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to detail anything further. Our objective is, of course, bringing people home.

Q And not just the Tice family, but other families of those who have been held captive have criticized the President that they haven't seen direct, personal engagement on their family cases. Maybe you could explain what the President has done directly to help free some of these Americans abroad.

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to detail the President's engagement because it's not advantageous to our objective of bringing people home.

What I can tell you is that Austin Tice's mother and all of the families of Americans who are being held overseas have been in touch with our national security team, have been in touch with Jake Sullivan and other senior officials in a range of departments, at the State Department and others, multiple times. And we are absolutely committed to closely coordinating with them, to doing everything we can from here in the United States government to bring their loved ones home.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. Following on that UK court ruling on Assange, has the President ever given any consideration at all to a pardon? And also, what is your response to the message in some quarters that prosecuting Assange is an assault on freedom of speech, freedom of the press, information, et cetera?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would again reiterate that this is a case that is still ongoing. It's really under the purview of the Department of Justice. They've put out a statement. I'd point you to that for any further comment.

I would say, broadly speaking, outside of this case, that the President has been an advocate for freedom of speech, freedom of press. He's holding a two-day Democracy Summit that's wrapping up today.

The freedom of media and press is a central component of that. He announced an additional tranche of funding to ensure we're advocating for that, and he is somebody who's going to continue to advocate that, domestically and internationally, through the course of his presidency.

Go ahead, Nadia.

Q Thank you, Jen. You said you're expecting the price oil to go down soon. What do you base that on? And will the President reach out to OPEC Plus producer countries again? And then I have another question.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we've already seen the price go down some. So I was basing it on what we've seen in the data, in the oil markets.

Q And yesterday you talked elaborately about possible sanctions -- economic sanction on Iraq -- on Iran, sorry -- on Iran. And you said that you would send delegations perhaps to the UAE --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- and talk to your allies, like Japan and South Korea and the rest. Two questions. Number one is: Are you going back to the maximum pressure campaign that the previous administration used to convince Iran to come back to the negotiation? And second, what kind of leverage do you have on China to stop importing Iranian oil?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would say: First, we're not using the last administration's approach as a model. They pulled out of the Iran nuclear deal, which meant that we -- they've been able to proceed and progress in their nuclear program without visibility from the United States or the global community in a way that it leads to a reduction in everyone's security and is -- ultimately, has enormously negative impacts globally.

As it relates to what our leverage is on China: China was a constructive member of the P5+1, has continued to be, and obviously there are certain restrictions and requirements everybody would have to implement in order for this to move forward. That's all a part of the negotiations. I don't think anyone wants to see Iran acquire a nuclear weapon. I'm not sure if you would call that leverage as much as something that is important to the security of the global community.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks. On China, U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai has previously said there's this range of enforcement mechanisms on the table to hold China accountable to the phase one trade deal. But China is on track to fall short of the goals, primarily boosting imports of U.S. agricultural goods. How confident is the President he can hold China accountable to those commitments in time since those obligations are expiring?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I know they're expiring at the end of the year. Right? Am I remembering this correctly? So we have a couple more weeks. Ambassador Tai is, of course, running point for the administration on the implementation on these phase one negotiations and discussions. I don't have an update from here, but I can certainly check and see if there's more to report.

Q All right. But what message does it send to American farmers who were, you know, hoping for a boost from these export obligations if they aren't met? And should we expect the President to take action if that is the case?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as you know, there's an ongoing review and assessment — and maybe this is what I shorthanded — was referencing — that is over — being overseen by Ambassador Tai about these tariffs and how they impact negatively, unintentionally, certain industries in the United States. I don't have anything to preview on that front, but that is also an ongoing process that's happening right now.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. A follow-up on that question about El Salvador. What's the White House response to the President of El Salvador accusations against the U.S.? He says, and I quote, "The interests of the United States has nothing to do with democracy in any country." End quote.

And any comment on the decision of Nicaragua to break relations with Taiwan and return (inaudible) to China?

MS. PSAKI: Sure, let me start with Nicaragua. The decision deprives Nicaragua's people of a reliable and democratic partner in Taiwan. Taiwan is a like-minded democratic partner, a steadfast partner and friend to countries throughout the region. We encourage all countries that care about democratic institutions, transparency, the rule of law, and promoting economic prosperity for their citizens to expand engagement with Taiwan. We refer you to the State Department for anything further, but I would note that they put out an extensive statement on that.

Go ahead.

Q And the point on El Salvador —

MS. PSAKI: On --

Q — on the quote of the President of El Salvador saying that the U.S. government has nothing to do with democracy in any country.

MS. PSAKI: It's hard for me to even know the context of that statement. The United States just hosted a two-day Democracy Summit, where we announced an extensive financial commitment to contribute to the preservation of democracy around the world.

The President — as the President conveyed, democracy “works best with consensus and cooperation.” And he's also noted that we all need to continue to work harder to preserve our own democracy. I don't have an exact reaction to them.

Go ahead.

Q Two quick foreign policy questions for you.

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q One is on Afghanistan. Yesterday, as was mentioned earlier, the head of Central Command did an interview, and during that interview, he said that the number of al Qaeda members in Afghanistan has, in his words, “probably slightly increased.” Does that surprise the President? Is that a concern for the President?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would say first that President Biden made clear from the start of the Afghanistan withdrawal process that it's critical for us to retain our over-the-horizon with- — counterterrorism abilities, our ability to prevent, detect, and disrupt terrorism threats without having a permanent military presence on the ground that could be a target.

And that is something he is committed to ensuring. Our national security team is working to ensure we have the capabilities, working with partner countries in the region who share that concern, who do not want terrorism to have a birthplace or rebirth place in the region.

And we have also been clear that we will not allow terrorists to threaten the homeland from Afghanistan, and we will hold the Taliban accountable.

I know we obviously do regular assessments for our — from our intelligence team on this — from the CIA Director, from our Director of the National Intelligence Agency. I'd really point you to them on our — on their assessments. But the President takes his commitment to ensuring they do not rebuild, they do not gather, and they do not threaten — pose a threat to the Homeland quite seriously.

Q And then on Russia: Just a few days after President Biden's conversation with President Putin, is it fair to say that the ball is now in President Putin's court in the sense that the next step is up to him as to whether or not he pulls back his troops from the Russian-Ukrainian border or he moves into Ukraine? What's your assessment there? Is that a fair and accurate assessment?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would say first that our objective continues to be diplomatic discussions. And to go back to Jeff's earlier question, those could take a range of formats. There's decades of precedent on this and a lot of formats that exist where those could

continue. And those could — and that is really our objective and our focus. Those would not, of course, involve just the Russians.

Our overarching approach here is that we're not going to have conversations without the key players involved, whether that is conversations about Ukraine without Ukraine or conversations about NATO without NATO. Those are our principles.

So, that's really what our focus is on at this point. Obviously, all of this effort — diplomatic effort to date, coordination with our European partners, the President's very direct conversation with President Putin — was meant to convey very clearly that if he were to choose to invade, there would be severe and significant economic consequences.

Obviously, you know, he is the one who has control over the military troops of Russia, not other countries. But, certainly, our effort and our focus is to have those diplomatic discussions and have the ball move forward through that channel.

I think I'm going to have to wrap it up here in just a moment.

Let's go. Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. I have two quick follow-ups.

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q The first is: You've been consistent on this, and so has the President, about your support for codifying *Roe v. Wade*.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q What's more, Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Schumer have also voiced their support. Has the White House been doing outreach on this? And do you think that you would have the votes to be successful?

MS. PSAKI: I can't give an assessment of the vote count at this point. What I will tell you is that we have been engaged with leaders on Capitol Hill — many of whom have been quite outspoken about their concern and the need to move forward with the Women's Health Protection Act — today, in light of the fact that women in Texas have been — for 101 days, they've had their basic access to women's healthcare, to their fundamental right that's been the law of the land for decades be put into question and at risk.

In terms of what our engagement will be, we will continue to be engaged. And the ruling this morning reinforces that there is more work to be done, reinforces that need to engage on Capitol Hill and with localities around the country.

Q And then my second follow-up: Moments ago, you were pretty definitive when you said that President Biden “would only support extending these programs if they were paid for, period.” Does that necessarily mean that, sometime in the future, President Biden would be prepared to raise taxes?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think President Biden has been pretty clear about his protection of keeping taxes low for the middle class and lowering them, but we don't have any hypothetical bill we're talking about here.

I think you've seen him convey that pretty clearly, and all of the bills he's supported have been consistent. But we'll have hypothetical -- we'll have real conversations when real bills exist.

Edward, why don't you do the last one.

Q Thank you. Thank you, Jen. So you talked about inflation here in the room -- the highest we haven't seen since 1982. The President has been in office about 11 months. What grade does the President give himself on his handling of the economy?

MS. PSAKI: I think every President I've ever worked for -- I've only worked for two -- but they try not to grade themselves. But I will tell you what the President is proud of working on with Congress, with governors, with leaders across the country is his effort to lower prices for people across the country -- whether it's the steps he took to lower the price of gas; whether it's the steps he took from the beginning to address bottlenecks in the supply chain that we're seeing play out now positively in terms of improvements; or whether it's his effort -- his proposal to introduce Build Back Better, which will cut costs for people across the country.

All right, happy Friday, everyone. Thank you, everyone. Have a good day.

3:29 P.M. EST

[Next Post: Statement by President Joe Biden on Supreme Court Decision on Texas SB8](#)

Statement by President Joe Biden on Supreme Court Decision on Texas SB8

December 10, 2021 • Statements and Releases

Next Post



THE 
WHITE
HOUSE

Stay Connected
