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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

September 30, 2021

**Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki, September 30, 2021**

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

2:34 P.M. EDT

MS. PSAKI: Hi, everyone. Okay. Welcome back, Dr. Harper.

Q Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Okay. I'm breaking my streak. I do have some items at the top for all of you. Lots going on in the world.

The U.S. government condemns in the strongest possible terms the government of Ethiopia's unprecedented action to expel the leadership of all of the United Nations organizations involved in ongoing humanitarian operations. We agree with U.N. leaders: This is a stain on our collective conscience and it must stop.

The action follows the release of reports warning that hundreds of thousands of people are starving to death in northern Ethiopia. We're deeply concerned that this action continues a pattern by the Ethiopian government of obstructing the delivery of food, medicine, and other lifesaving supplies that most -- to those most in need.

We call on the U.N. Security Council and members of the international community to take urgent action to make clear to the government of Ethiopia that impeding humanitarian operations and depriving your own citizens of the basic means of survival is unacceptable.

President Biden signed an executive order, earlier this month, enabling the U.S. government to impose financial sanctions

on those prolonging the conflict in northern Ethiopia. We will not hesitate to use this or any other tool at our disposal to respond quickly and decisively to those who obstruct humanitarian assistance to the people of Ethiopia.

One more items -- one more item. Some news from -- out of the First Lady's office: Today, Joining Forces -- the White House initiative led by the First Lady to support military families -- and the National Security Council released a White House report, signed by the President and Secretaries of 15 executive departments, which outlines the first round of administration-wide commitments and proposals to supporting military and veteran families, caregivers, and survivors.

In May of 2021, the Office of the First Lady and the National Security Council launched a Joining Forces Interagency Policy Committee with representatives from across the executive agencies to work collaboratively on priorities related to the families of service members and veterans, caregivers, and survivors.

This report details more than 800 -- 80, sorry -- specific commitments and proposals from across the administration and is the product of the Interagency Policy Committee's months of work.

Going forward, this committee will continue to advance these priorities, including those outlined in the report, through cross-agency working groups and will report results and updated plans annually.

Jonathan, why don't you kick us off.

Q Thank you, Jen. A few -- all on the dealings at Capitol Hill right now. Senator Manchin told reporters a short time ago that he told President Biden that \$1.5 trillion would be as high as he was willing to go for the reconciliation package. What was the President's reaction to that? Is that an acceptable number?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, I would say, as we've said many times, we're not going to outline private negotiations or private discussions, and we'll let the senators speak for that, as Senator Manchin did earlier today. The way the President sees it is that this is an ongoing discussion, an ongoing negotiation.

Here's what we know: We know that timelines help make progress. We've seen that play out over the course of the last couple of days. We know that compromise is inevitable. We've also seen that play out over the last couple of days. And right now, we're clearly in the thick of it.

I'd also note that during his -- during Senator Manchin's -- and obviously, I'm not his spokesperson; he can certainly speak for himself -- but during his Q&A he did on the Hill today, he also referenced the fact that he -- that there was a document from a couple of months ago. And I'll let him and Senator -- Leader Schumer speak to that. And he was repeatedly pushed and asked, "Would you go higher than 1.5? Would you go higher than 1.5?" I will leave it to all of you to determine if he answered that question.

But this is an ongoing discussion, an ongoing negotiation. And as I said yesterday, that's going to require all sides giving a little, and we're in the midst of that right now.

Q So on that -- so, key Democratic House leaders have said they will, quote, "stay here all weekend" to work to get a deal. Does the President plan to do the same? Will he be at the White House working this weekend, having visitors, calling and hosting congressional lawmakers?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as Speaker Pelosi said earlier -- and we're following the same motto -- we're taking it hour by hour here and making a decision and determination about what's most needed.

So, as it relates to what's even going to happen this afternoon, we're open; he's available. He's been making calls this morning. He's open to having visitors. He's open to going places. But we're going to make those decisions hour by hour.

So, the weekend is a little bit away, but I will tell you that this is the President's top priority right now: getting relief to the



American people; making sure we're lowering costs for the American people; we're addressing the climate crisis; we're rebuilding our roads, rails, and bridges. We've made progress, and we're still at work at it.

Q All right. And last one from me. One of the President's central promises when he was elected was to restore Americans' ability to be confident in their government again, to believe in institutions again. What is the White House's message to Americans right now who look at this and see a mess? Nearly a government shutdown, the debt ceiling is unclear, legislation not being passed, at least not yet, even though Democrats control all the bodies of government. And those Americans don't feel that they can be confident in government.

What's the White House's response?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, I would say: The President, the Speaker of the House, and the Leader have more experience getting legislation across the finish line than any group of Democrat -- Democratic leaders in history.

We're in the middle of it right now. It's messy, this sausage-making, on Capitol Hill. Policymaking is messy. There's negotiations. They all have representatives who are advocating for their points of view. That's democracy in action.

What I can tell them is that we're on the path to keep the government open. You just saw that pass the Senate. It was going over to the House. That's not just keeping the government open, that's getting relief to make sure we can -- we can take care of refugees, people who fought by our side in Afghanistan; that's to make sure we get relief to the Gulf Coast -- additional relief to the Gulf Coast. All important priorities.

And we would also tell them that the President is going to stop at -- he's going to use every lever at his disposal to fight to get this legislation passed -- these two pieces of legislation -- that will have a historic -- make historic investments. And he's doing it because he wants to have an impact on their lives.

But these type of packages, not a lot of precedent for them, but he's going to work at it. He's going to get it done. That's what he would tell them.

Go ahead.

Q Does the President see any strategic value in a vote failing on the House floor?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as Speaker Pelosi said earlier today, we're on a path to win. I don't want to even consider any other options than that. We're in it to win it. The President is also in it to win it. That's what we're working toward. It's only 2:40 right now; lots of time left in the day. And he's going to continue to engage -- stay closely engaged with her about the path forward.

Q You've repeatedly referred to this week -- to this moment as an "inflection point." How is the President viewing this moment, given where his caucuses are and where his members are?

MS. PSAKI: This moment as in "this moment" -- 2:40 p.m. this afternoon -- or just today?

Q As in it's deadline day for an infrastructure bill; he doesn't have the votes. One member of the United States Senate is about \$2 trillion below his topline number, and there's no clear way to bridge those gaps.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think the President views this as the last several days and even longer than that. His view is we've made some progress. You've seen some members come down. You've seen some members come up. You've seen active negotiations. He's obviously been hard at work at them himself.

And what we clearly see is an agreement about the need to get this done, whether it's the infrastructure bill or the reconciliation practice -- package, which has key priorities for the President -- key priorities. I think the Speaker referred



to it earlier today as the cause of her -- as her public li- -- as her time in public life. That's a bit of a paraphrase. I'll leave you to her words.

So, look, he sees this moment -- he knew that as we got closer to self-imposed timelines, which are important -- often these timelines can help make progress; we've seen progress made -- that more members would be out there advocating for what was important to them. That's happening.

We saw -- we would hopefully see more willingness to compromise; that's happening too. We're hard at work. And he's been through this before, so he's not too thrown off his game on it.

Q And then just one quick last one. Do you guys see a possibility of some type of framework agreement that could unlock the infrastructure vote today?

MS. PSAKI: That's what we're working towards.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. You talked about "self-imposed timelines" as opposed to the other real timelines for debt ceiling and the CR. The progressives don't seem to feel any sense of urgency about passing infrastructure, and the moderates, like Manchin, don't seem to feel any urgency about passing reconciliation. The only Democrat that I can think of who really has a sense of urgency is Terry McAuliffe.

Do you feel it -- does the President want this done in a certain amount of time, or does he also feel that this could play out over weeks and months and still come to the conclusion that he wants?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as I said a little bit earlier, we know -- and the President knows from his time in public office -- that timelines can help make progress. That's often how legislating happens on the Hill. And as the Speaker --

Q These ones aren't.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we would -- we would disagree with that. You've seen a lot of members out there advocating for their viewpoints, being very vocal about what they want to see; some coming up, some coming down. That's a sense of progress. And we're working at it hour by hour here.

Q But does he have -- does he feel that he needs it done by a certain time, like the end of the year?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to set new deadlines here for you. Obviously, we're trying to get it done now. We're working on it as of right now, today, and that's what our focus is on in this moment.

Go ahead. I'll go back to you, Weijia. Go ahead.

Q It's all right.

Q To follow up a little on what Phil was asking --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- what does the President want and what is he asking members of Congress to do on this infrastructure vote tonight? Is he calling progressives, and Republicans even, asking them to vote for it? Does he definitely want this vote tonight? Or is this all still this murky -- sort of trying to link these two things together and hope something emerges out of that?

MS. PSAKI: There's nothing really murky about what's going on here. I mean, we understand what progressive members



want. Right? They've been out there vocally talking to all of you about what they want.

It's clear we also need their votes in order to pass an infrastructure bill. They want to have a clear path forward on a reconciliation package. The President wants both pieces of legislation to pass. That's what he wants, bottom line. He's also going to work with the Speaker and the Leader to get that done.

So, what he's been spending his time on over the last couple of days is that -- having conversations with Senator Manchin, Senator Sinema, and others who have been very vocal about the fact that they're not quite there yet. And his objective is to try to get them there because that's what members of the Progressive Caucus are looking for in order to support an infrastructure bill, many compo- -- of components of which they support.

Q I guess, to put a finer point on it: If your choice is between a vote tonight that fails but sort of puts everybody on the record, or pulling the vote tonight and continuing deliberations despite it potentially upsetting moderates who feel like they've been promised this vote, what does the President prefer?

MS. PSAKI: We're working towards winning a vote tonight. We have several hours left in the day.

Q All right. Last one. What's the plan on the debt ceiling? I mean, Republicans have sort of made clear that they're not going to back any efforts. So it would seem at this point that Democrats' only hope here is to turn towards a reconciliation process on the debt ceiling.

I understand that you've made the point many times that Mitch McConnell is being hypocritical on this, that Republicans should support it, but it does seem now that the votes are on the table, that you're kind of pursuing this political point at the potential risk of default for the U.S. economy.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think that's a bit of a shorthand of what's happening, which I understand; it's a bit of a complicated thing.

But first, since you gave me the opportunity, it's not just Senator McConnell; Republicans are playing politics with an economic catastrophe, and they're treating a calamity for working families like a D.C. game. There are huge impacts here.

You touched on the fact, but let me give the public a little sense of that: an instant recession, 6 million jobs lost, \$15 trillion in savings wiped out, Social Security checks and payments to our troops blocked. Those are real impacts.

Republicans in Congress are treating this like a game. Let me give you some examples. Senator Rick Scott -- and this is a real quote, I will note: "This is going to be a...ball. I'm going to have so much fun." That's about the debt limit.

Senator Kevin Kramer: "It's sort of fun to watch."

And Senator Cornyn said yesterday that Republicans would use every tool at their disposal to slow Democrats from doing this on their own.

What we're trying to do right now is do it on their own -- do it on our own. That is what Leader Schumer is working to proceed -- working to move forward on.

And, obviously, as you know, Republicans have blocked that effort. So, of course, we are going to continue to press. We're not going to let up on that, on Republicans, to do what's responsible, to protect the full faith and credit of the United States, as has been done 80 times in the past.

We've also been working to do it on our own. We're going to keep working with Leader Schumer to get that done.

Q But you're not going to ask for reconcil- -- Democrats to push on reconciliation, (inaudible)?



MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to get into additional mechanisms here. We're going to continue. I don't think -- we're not going to, nor should anyone, let Republicans off the hook here, so we're going to continue to press them on it.

Q One of the things that Senator Manchin said today was that the, kind of -- the concern that he has around the 3.5 number is about how it would impact inflation in the economy. And I'm curious what the White House thinks of that concern and what you've done to allay that concern.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we've conveyed privately what we've said publicly and what many, many economists have also conveyed publicly, which is that what these packages will do is they will address -- address inflation and costs over the long term. That's one of the core reasons that people should be supporting them. So, if you are concerned about inflation, that's exactly a reason you should support these packages.

Q And would the President sign a reconciliation bill that does not include negotiating on drug prices?

MS. PSAKI: The President has obviously proposed that. He feels strongly about the need to make drugs -- prescription drugs, I should say, more affordable to the American public. I'm not going to negotiate further from here.

Q One other thing, just on a different topic: Jake Sullivan's conversations in Saudi Arabia. Did rising oil prices come up in those conversations? What was his message to the Saudis about alleviating some of the concerns that people have as they're paying a dollar more for gasoline now than they did a year ago?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah, so, I know someone asked about this the other day. And, obviously, the focus of his trip was on Yemen and working with the Saudis on Yemen. And our -- Tim Lenderki -- Lenderking was -- joined him in those meetings, who's our envoy to Yemen, to kind of figure out the path forward.

He was -- obviously, the price of oil is of concern. We have been in touch with OPEC. And I believe it was going to be raised, but I haven't had a chance to get a readout beyond that. I can try to do that for you after the briefing.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. So, putting the topline number aside, Senators Manchin and Sinema have been very opaque about what it is they want and do not want in this reconciliation bill. Without revealing details, does the White House and the President have a clear understanding of what it is each one of them wants?

MS. PSAKI: We've had a lot of private conversations with both of the senators about what their priorities are, as they've said publicly. And I think as Senator Manchin said publicly today, what their priorities are and what that looks like in a final package, that's still an ongoing discussion.

Q Are they asking for the same things? Are the two of them on board with the same (inaudible)?

MS. PSAKI: I'll let them speak for their priorities and how they line up with each other.

Q Okay. And then to build on what Justin was asking about --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q -- decoupling these two.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q Is the President worried at all about eroding trust with Republicans who signed on to the bipartisan deal after he



reassured them that it would not be conditional on reconciliation?

MS. PSAKI: Well, let's remember what's actually going on on the Hill here. Republicans in the House, led by Kevin McCarthy, are opting to vote against rebuilding roads and railways and bridges, despite the fact that the package was sent over with the support of 69 senators.

So, I think if you're asking about trust or whether people are delivering for the American people, you should direct it at Kevin McCarthy.

Go ahead.

Q I'm asking because the progressives have made so clear that they refuse to vote on infrastructure without a vote on reconciliation first. Why doesn't the President ask them to treat them separately?

MS. PSAKI: To treat -- well, I think the --

Q To treat the two bills separately.

MS. PSAKI: The President has made clear both are his priorities. He's also made clear he wants to get them both across the finish line.

What we're talking about now is the legislative process and how you get the majority of votes to get both of them done. And that's what he's working to negotiate and working to unify the caucus around.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks. And just one more --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- on a separate topic.

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Go ahead.

Q The National School Boards Association has sent a letter to the President asking for help from federal law enforcement agencies because of the violence and the threats that they're seeing across the country. Has the President received that request? And are you considering offering that help?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, let me say we take the security of public servants and elected officials across the country very seriously. And, obviously, these threats to school board members is horrible. They're doing their jobs.

Obviously, there are going to be different law enforcement authorities that will be related to each community and -- where this is happening, so we'd certainly refer you to them about any specific threats. And we'd encourage individuals to report any threats they face to local and state law enforcement agencies. And we're continuing to explore what more can be done from across the administration.

But again, a lot of this will be local law enforcement and how they can help ensure these school board members feel protected.

Q Thanks.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.



Q Thank you, Jen. Has the President at all lost control of his party? Depending on which perspective you're looking at this from -- you know, some people say that it appears that progressives are running the show, they're banding together and making their demands. Other people are saying it looks like Joe Manchin is playing president. So, who is in charge?

MS. PSAKI: Well, this is how democracy works. I know it feels foreign because there wasn't much that happened over the last couple of years. But how it works is the American people elect their elected officials, the President of the United States puts forward a bold and ambitious proposal, and then everybody negotiates about it, and they have different points of view. That's how democracy should work. We're in the midst of it right now. We're not trying to paint over how messy it looks from the outside. We know that.

But what -- the good news is, is that there is agreement that -- among most Democrats, if not every single one of them, that we need to get something done; that we need to do more to rebuild our roads and railways and bridges; that we need to cut costs for the American people; we need to address the climate crisis. There's agreement on that.

Now we're in the nitty-gritty details, which is very important, but that's the end stage of this process. And the American people should know that that's what the President is working on.

Q And I want to follow up on Weijia's question. So, if the bipartisan bill fails or is stalled or doesn't happen today, it would appear that these two bills -- the reconciliation and the infrastructure -- are linked. And the President, you know, made statements that Republicans should be able to vote for the bipartisan bill on its merits. He stood in front of the White House with a group of Republicans who negotiated that infrastructure bill. Is there a message that he has to those Republican senators, who voted to pass that bill on its merits, that this bill is somehow not linked with the reconciliation because of what's happening in the House?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we're working towards victory here and a win. If it doesn't pass, it's because it doesn't have enough votes. I think Republicans in the Senate understand that and know how this process works.

But that's what we're working towards now. That's what the President has been making phone calls about. That's what we have his schedule cleared for this afternoon. And I'm not going to make a prediction of what the outcome will look like several hours from now.

Q And then with the Vice President -- and she was a senator as recently as this year --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- why isn't she on the Hill helping to broker this deal?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the Vice President had the CBC over, the CHC last week. She's been making calls herself, just like the President. If it's constructive for her to go to the Hill or for him to go to the Hill, to have members down here, they'll do that.

We're ready and willing. This is our top priority. All hands on deck. But a lot of what's happening right now is discussions at a staff level, a senior staff level to get through these intricate details, and that's where the focus is in this moment.

Go ahead, Kelly.

Q Since we haven't seen the President much publicly this week --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- and you talked about leaving room in his schedule, can you paint more of a picture of what's happening behind the scenes? Are there calls happening from the Oval Office inviting members to the President? Does he have scheduled meetings with



scenes? Are these calls happening from the Oval? Is he inviting guests to the Residence? Does he have a whiteboard with his own whip count? Can you give us a picture of what it looks like (inaudible)?

MS. PSAKI: (Laughs.) I like that visual. I would say he does not have a whiteboard with a whip count. I can assure you he's more of a paper and pen kind of guy.

But, look, he's been meeting with staff, he's been getting updates from staff as they've been having engagements with the Hill. You all know who the senior members of his team are who are negotiating, whether that's Steve Ricchetti or Louisa Terrell, Brian Deese, Susan Rice.

What he's asked his team to do is -- including the policy members, which people don't always factor this in -- is be available to have conversations with members about questions they have, to help address any parts of it they have suggestions on.

So, he's getting regular updates. People are in and out of the Oval Office providing him updates on their individual conversations. And he's picking up the phone and calling people as needed, whether that's the Speaker or Leader Schumer or other members, to have a conversation about the status, to check on where they are, to follow up on maybe a conversation they may have had with his staff.

These conversations are happening from the Oval Office, but certainly he does some from the Residence; it depends on what time of day it may be.

Q And are you running your own whip count, or are you relying on Hill resources to do that?

MS. PSAKI: We're very closely in touch, as you know, with leadership on the Hill; the President himself is. Of course, we're certainly in touch with members ourselves -- ourselves about where they stand, where they may have concerns, or any hesitations.

Go ahead. I'll come back to you, Terry. I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Q We finally learned today Senator Manchin's position on his topline number. Senator Schumer has been aware of it since late July, and Senator Manchin said that he told the President already this \$1.5 trillion number. Why has the decision been made strategically to pursue Senator Manchin, Senator Sinema, and not try to, within the last couple of weeks, apply more pressure on progressives to take half a loaf and say, "This is low-hanging fruit; it's a \$1.2 trillion infrastructure plan. Let's move on that"? Why was that strategic decision made not to do that?

MS. PSAKI: Both of these are huge priorities to the President. I'd also note that when Senator Manchin was asked -- and he can obviously speak for himself -- but just since I've read the whole transcript here, he also repeatedly referred back to a document that went back to July 28th. I'd remind you all that this is an active negotiation and discussion, and it is incumbent upon members to put out where they stand and where they are. And as we've seen over the past couple days, that's an everchanging process.

So, before you make conclusions about what the end results will be, I would remind you to look at the last several days or even weeks about how these discussions have progressed.

Q But Senator Manchin said today he believes his position is -- it sounded to me like his position was firm. And he also said that if progressives feel that the Congress should spend \$3.5 trillion, that they should convince voters to send more progressives to Washington. That sounded to me like he's saying that, through the end of this Congress, he's not going to agree to \$3.5 trillion.

MS. PSAKI: We could certainly parse Senator Manchin's words, but I am certain he'll go answer questions again, and your colleagues should ask him more questions.



Q But why do you think that this is not -- why do you think that Senator Manchin's position on this is not final?

MS. PSAKI: Because this is an active negotiation, because he was pushed repeatedly during the gaggle that he did on Capitol Hill about where he stood. But again, I'm not here to speak for Senator Manchin; he is -- certainly can speak for himself and what his points of view -- views are. And I certainly encourage you all to keep asking him questions about where he stands.

Go ahead.

Q Back on the deadline that was set at the beginning of the week -- announced at -- this is a big week: Democrats are in charge here at the White House and in both houses of Congress. And they set the deadline; Democrats set the deadline. Now they --

MS. PSAKI: To be clear, they just set the date of a vote.

Q All right. You called it a "deadline." I was just using your words.

MS. PSAKI: Okay. Fair. But -- thank you for the clarification. It's -- they set the time of a vote.

Q All right. Democrats set this vote. Now they're going to miss it, fail to make it. Why is it that --

MS. PSAKI: We don't know that. It's only three o'clock.

Q Can you tell us if they're going to vote tonight?

MS. PSAKI: That's what Speaker Pelosi indicated her plan was.

Q All right. My question is: Why isn't it fair to see this as a failure of the President to get his own party to back him and his agenda?

MS. PSAKI: Why isn't it, before we've even had a vote and we don't even know where it sits, a failure of the President?

Q It feels like we're farther away today than we were on Monday.

MS. PSAKI: I don't think the President feels that way, and I don't think members of Congress feel that way.

Q You've talked about progress. Can you explain what progress is? You said it's people talking about where they are.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q That sounds like -- that sounds like an earlier part of the process when you had set a vote for the end of the week.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would point you again to what Speaker Pelosi said earlier today: In the end stages, the later stages of a process -- where we are now -- when you get closer to a vote, a time of a vote being set, that's when the negotiations get serious. That's when people start putting down bottom lines of where they stand. You've seen some people do that publicly. A lot more of it happens behind the scenes. That's what I mean by progress.

You've seen members come down in numbers. You've seen members come up in numbers. That's what we're working on -- to get to an agreed-upon path forward.

Q So there's progress, and it's people behind the scenes saying that -- where their numbers move.



MS. PSAKI: They've also said it publicly.

Q One more. A lot of Democrats are looking at what's happening, and they're saying Senator Manchin and Senator Sinema are holding this President and his agenda hostage. What would you say to that?

MS. PSAKI: I would say we have 50 votes in the Senate -- 50 Democrats in the Senate. So, we need the majority to win. That's how a bill becomes a law.

Q They've got the leverage.

MS. PSAKI: We need all 50 votes in the Senate to move this forward. That's where we stand now.

Go ahead.

Q I just wanted to go back to the debt ceiling for a second.

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q Democrats control all branches of government right now. Can you assure the American people and the financial markets that the United States will not default on its debt?

MS. PSAKI: That is absolutely what we're trying to accomplish. And I'd remind you that we would have gotten that done had Republicans done what they've done 80 times before -- supporting a bipartisan vote to do something that has been pretty standard in the past -- or if they had allowed Leader Schumer to move forward.

But, absolutely, we're going to do everything to prevent the federal -- us from defaulting --

Q But does the plan involve changing Mitch McConnell's mind -- Leader McConnell's mind in some way? Or is there a plan to just go forward using either reconciliation or --

MS. PSAKI: Well, Leader Schumer has already tried to -- already been working to move things forward. And it's been blocked by Republicans -- not just their vote; an effort to move it forward has been blocked.

Q But there clearly are ways -- I mean, getting rid of the filibuster, for example, for this particular vote would be one way to move forward. And is that something that the President would consider to avoid losing, let's say, 10 percent of the value of the stock market?

MS. PSAKI: I just outlined how concerning we are -- how concerned we are, which you just echoed -- or echoed different components of it. And that's an issue we take incredibly seriously. You've also heard Secretary Yellen on the Hill talking about this. We're not going to let Republicans off the hook. We don't think they should be. This is not a game. This is the faith -- full faith and credit of the United States.

We're working with Leader Schumer on a path forward, but beyond that, I don't have more to preview for you.

Q But you can do it without Republicans if you got rid of the filibuster for this --

MS. PSAKI: We could do it if they let us move forward, and they haven't. So I have no more details on the pa- -- on the legislative process.

Q And just on the reconciliation package, is \$1.5 trillion enough in your spending to cover Biden's priorities -- the President's priorities?



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MS. PSAKI: I understand that's a number that's been put out there. It's an active negotiation. I'm not going to weigh in from here on what is or isn't acceptable to the Democratic Caucus.

Go ahead.

Q A couple different topics. So, on immigration, there seems to be a real sense among advocates for immigrants -- people who have been fighting for legalization, for a pathway to citizenship -- there's a real sense of doom; people who described this, yesterday, even crying about the latest parliamentary ruling.

Do you -- what does the President -- you know, what would the President say or what does the President say if that -- if he is unable to move forward on any of the, sort of, big, sweeping promises that he made as a candidate to get -- to finally be the President to get something done on immigration?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we don't accept that. We're nine months into his presidency. And we share the disappointment. Obviously, as you know and you touched on, the parliamentarian ruled twice, in different ways, that it could be included in the reconciliation package -- or components, I should say, of immigration reform could not be included in the reconciliation practice -- process. Sorry, package.

That's disappointing to the President as well. So, clearly, now we need to figure out what the vehicle forward is.

I would say the President's plan is about certainly protecting DREAMers, farm workers, and others. It's also about investing in border security, making sure it makes sense and we're investing in it in a way that makes sense, and creating an asylum processing system that is actually functional, which I think we all agree it's not.

So there are several components of what he's proposed, and, certainly, we share the disappointment of many advocates that this wasn't included and the desire to find a vehicle to move it forward.

Q On one other separate topic: There have been a number of issues in the last, say, several weeks in which advocates -- allies of the President are describing him as "Trump-like." Most -- less in terms of his personality and sort of tone and tenor, obviously, but in terms of policy. Even today, a representative of the Cuban government describing the frustration with the President continuing to maintain Trump-era policies vis-à-vis Cuba.

Does the -- what's the President's reaction? And does he accept that in some areas of policy he is, you know, in agreement with the former President?

MS. PSAKI: So, just for the sake of argument here -- not argument, but discussion -- beyond the representative of the Cuban government who --

Q Afghanistan, immigration --

MS. PSAKI: Well, but who? Who are we talking about here?

Q Who --

MS. PSAKI: Who is saying that the President is like Trump?

Q Oh, I mean there -- there -- I mean, I could find you quotes. We have -- there have been quotes in our paper and quotes in lots of -- lots of folks have, depending on the issue, whether they are immigration advocates or, you know, folks in the Afghanistan -- who sort of watch Afghanistan. There have been numerous on-the-record descriptions of the President embracing -- and it's actually, in some ways, just a factual thing, right?



MS. PSAKI: But like on what policy?

Q Like the President has --

MS. PSAKI: On what policy? Sorry, I didn't -- you can -- you can name people but -- or what specific policies.

Q Well, I mean, for example, Afghanistan would have been the maintaining of the former President's decision to withdraw troops. On immigration, it's in maintaining Title 42 and keeping Title 42 in place. I mean they're --

Q Sub- --

Q Hm?

Q Submarines.

Q The submarine -- yeah. (Laughter.)

MS. PSAKI: Which one?

Q The submarine -- I'm just --

Q Yeah, the --

Q AUKUS.

Q The President was --

Q AUKUS.

Q -- yeah -- was compared to Trump --

Q -- to Trump. Well, the -- that's the French -- the French Foreign Minister compared him to Trump, in terms of how he handled the AUKUS negotiations.

MS. PSAKI: So, look, I'd take each one of these: On Afghanistan, the former President struck a deal without the Afghan government that, we heard the military convey yesterday, led to the demoralization of the Afghan Security Forces and the Afghan government, where he also released 5,000 Taliban fighters into Afghanistan.

I would say the President took a pretty different approach than that in ending a war that the former President didn't end -- something the American people strongly support.

As it relates to AUKUS, I'm not even sure what that's referring to, in terms of what they're comparing. The President worked with key partners -- Australia and the United Kingdom -- to come to an agreement that would help provide security in an important part of the world -- in the Indo-Pacific -- a priority that, frankly, getting out of the war in Afghanistan leaves space for us to spend more time addressing.

What was the last one? Immigration?

Q Immigration, Title 42, tariffs on China. I mean, there's --

MS. PSAKI: Title 42 is a public health -- is a public health requirement, a public health -- because we're in the middle of a pandemic, which, by the way --



Q The President and his allies --

MS. PSAKI: -- we would have made progress on had the former President actually addressed --

Q Right, but the --

MS. PSAKI: -- the pandemic and not suggested people inject bleach.

So, I think we're in a bit of a different place. I'm happy to discuss more examples. I think it's -- people would be pretty hard pressed to argue that the President has taken any aspect of the former President's playbook and used it as a model of his own.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q Senator Manchin has also said that he wants to means test as much as possible of this reconciliation package. Without getting into or speaking for the senator, as you've said, what is the White House's position on, I guess, means testing in this package?

MS. PSAKI: Well, you can call it whatever you want. Sometimes means -- when you say "means testing" -- not you, but when -- when it's said, it sometimes has it not the right connotation or the wrong connotation.

The President's proposals, many of them have been targeted at the middle class, as have these proposals and these initiatives, which means there's a cap on income through which you can benefit. That's what -- you can call it whatever you want, if you call it "means testing." The President is very open to targeting, by income, many of his proposals. And that's something that you can see throughout many components of his agenda that have been proposed and many that have passed to date.

Q Does the White House believe that you all are currently in alignment with Manchin on what those thresholds would look like or --

MS. PSAKI: It's an ongoing discussion. But, again, our objective is to -- is to target and focus on bringing relief to the middle class. That's what the President wants to see this agenda accomplish.

Q In an op-ed for USA Today this morning, Senator Bernie Sanders defended the \$3.5 trillion price tag, asking, "Please tell me what [where] we should cut." This came out before Senator Manchin gave his line in the sand.

Does -- without speaking for either senator, does the White House believe that there's any provisions that, if we are talking about getting somewhere between 3.5 and 1.5, that are absolutely -- you all cannot stomach not having them in the final package?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to put anything on the table here. It's clear, as numbers come down, which they will, that there will be cuts to different components. That's just the nature of the totals here. But we'll leave those conversations private. I know you're eager [sic] -- eager to know more, and hopefully we'll have more to share soon.

Q And then just finally -- just one more point. As you all have said from here, the public -- public polling has consistently found that many parts of this -- of both packages are very supported by the American people. The American people are also very consistently pessimistic about action in Washington.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.



Q Ahead of what we're going to be seeing, whichever way this vote goes tonight, what is your message to the public as they look at the ongoing situation in Washington about -- what is your message to the American people as they look at, as you've said, a messy situation, the chaos of democracy?

MS. PSAKI: We hope we can prove them wrong.

Q Okay.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead, Karen.

Q Thanks, Jen. I know "hour by hour" is kind of the phrase of the day.

MS. PSAKI: (Laughs.) Yeah.

Q But given that, can we expect to hear from the President today? Or what would have to happen for us to hear from the President today?

MS. PSAKI: We'll see. I can't make a prediction for you now, but it is certainly possible. It's also possible he has more meetings. He'll certainly make more phone calls, possibly moves. But I don't have anything to predict for you at this point in time.

Q And, last night, he went to the congressional baseball game. Did he go specifically to do some arm twisting or lobbying on infrastructure? And he spent some time with Republican lawmakers -- something he really hasn't done here at the White House. Can you give us a sense of what he talked about with those Republican lawmakers? What was the interaction like, the tone of those conversations?

MS. PSAKI: I think you're undervaluing his baseball prowess -- (laughter) -- and history, which he was honored for last night.

No, look, I think what the President -- and I saw him this morning; he was reflecting on how it was -- and I think this is a tradition -- the Congressional Baseball Game. You know, it's something that has been around for some time, where Democrats and Republicans go participate in America's -- one of America's favorite pastimes.

And you saw -- I think you all saw in photos, but for people who didn't see -- he visited with some Republicans down in their area -- dugout?

Q Dugout.

MS. PSAKI: I don't even know it's called. (Laughter.) Okay, dugout. Help me out here. Thank you. He visited -- (laughs) -- with some -- my husband is going to be really mad about that.

He visited with some Republicans. You know, he wasn't -- it wasn't meant to be a negotiation; it was a discussion about, you know, how things are going and work we're all committed to and just saying hello to them. And sometimes, you know, that's important and powerful too at a time where there's been so much division, where there's a view from many in the public -- as per the question earlier -- that people can't work together, can't get things done.

And this was an opportunity to have a moment to visit with, to see people that you've known be -- you've known a long time, to meet new people, and to move beyond partisanship to celebrate one of America's favorite pastimes.

Q Did he have a response to you about getting booed last night? Any reaction to that?



MS. PSAKI: He's been in public life long enough to know there's going to be some yays and jeers in most big, public places.

Go ahead.

Q Can I just follow up on that? Is -- in some ways, does his visit and the rituals of getting together sort of prove the point that the face time doesn't work? I mean, you still -- you referred to Leader McConnell and the Republican Party not willing to raise the debt limit. He's had plenty of face time with Leader McConnell for decades. Maybe it just doesn't matter and people are going to do what their political interests or what they believe their political interests tells them to do?

MS. PSAKI: Well, this is how the President views it: You're going to have strong disagreements, as he does with Senator McConnell about how he's approached the debt limit. You're also going to have areas where you may come to agreement on, as they do on infrastructure and the importance of rebuilding our roads, our railways, and our bridges. And it's important to maintain lines of communication and discussion to figure out where you can work together.

That's also how he views and approaches diplomacy. We can call out and -- publicly and argue strongly privately issues we have with foreign governments. But we also sometimes still look for ways -- most of the time -- for ways to work together.

That's been his approach. I would say that given the infrastructure bill passed with 69 votes, that's evidence of it working.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. You mentioned at the top that on September 17th the President signed an executive order authorizing sanctions to be used against those undermining peace in Ethiopia.

But right now, it doesn't seem the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed, is interested in peace. He refused to meet with Samantha Power when she was there. He has -- he is expelling U.N. staff from the country. He's taken other steps that prove that he has no interest in peace.

Why not take the sanction now? Why not impose the sanction now, or take more drastic action against not just him but also the President of Eritrea, who still have troops inside Ethiopia?

MS. PSAKI: Well, absent clear and concrete changes, we will. We're preparing to take aggressive action under this executive order to impose targeted sanctions against a range of individuals and entities. What we're communicating to the parties on the ground is that we must see meaningful steps within weeks to initiate discussions to achieve a negotiated ceasefire, allow in an unhindered humanitarian access, and ensure respect for human rights. Absent significant progress, we'll take action. And we have the methods to do that. That's why I rec- -- talked about the executive order.

Q And then on Guinea, we've had so many coups in Africa. The President of Guinea has been overthrown. The President of Mali has been overthrown. And we just had the Prime Minister of Sudan who just survived a coup attempt. And the President promised to defend democracy around the world. Is he failing in that promise?

MS. PSAKI: He doesn't expect that to be accomplished in nine months. He expects that to be accomplished over the course of time for advocating for democracy, for human rights, for imposing steps when warranted, and -- as we are considering right now in Ethiopia -- and obviously by having a strong national security team that can convey this on his behalf when he cannot.

Go ahead.

Q I just have a question on Africa.

Q Thanks, Jen. On --

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead. I'll come back to you next.



Q Thanks, Jen. Just to follow up on Mike's question on what the Cuban foreign minister said. Just to be specific, he said, "It's a pity that President Biden couldn't implement his own policy toward Cuba." And I just wondered if you had a specific response.

MS. PSAKI: I don't.

Q And there's a U.S. delegation -- top officials going to Port-au-Prince. What's the goal of that visit?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah, I have some details on this, including who is going. So, let's see. So, what they're doing -- one, we feel it's pretty pivotal to have high-level officials from here engaged in traveling back and forth to Port-au-Prince to have discussions with actors across the political spectrum to see what we can do to help support dialogue and development for the Haitian people.

We know it's clearly a profoundly challenging time on the ground, and it's crucial that we meet with a range of stakeholders to help move this process forward or help support the process moving forward in a way that's in the interest of the Haitian people. So, this is really an effort to be engaged, to be on the ground.

I can tell you -- and you may know this already -- that our newly confirmed Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere, Brian Nichols, is on this as a part of this delegation; our NSC Senior Director for the Western Hemisphere, Juan Gonzales, are there. They're meeting with civil society groups, political stakeholders, the Haitian government. And they're, of course, as I noted, discussing a Haitian-led process charting the path to democratic elections.

But that's the focus, as well as discussing how we can continue to help provide support for the migration response, security, recovery from the earthquake, and the COVID pandemic.

Q Jen, last question.

Q Secretary Mayorkas had said he expected the results of an investigation on the Border Patrol officers --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- on horseback by the end of this week. What's the status of that investigation?

MS. PSAKI: I know he said that; as I understand, it's still on track. But I would really point you to the Department of Homeland Security on any update.

Brian, why don't we go to you last?

Q Yeah, thank you.

Q Oh, you said --

Q Thank you very much. And I appreciate it. I'm -- I wanted to ask what the President's reaction is to Democratic lawmakers calling on him to lean more on Senator Manchin and Senator Sinema. What is the President's reaction to that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would say, first, the President's reaction is -- he's been in the -- he was in the Senate for 36 years. He knows, as does Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, what it takes at this point in negotiations. They've probably done this more, and more successfully, than any combinations of Democratic leaders in history.

And his approach has been: Yes, of course, it's listening. Yes, of course, it's conveying viewpoints and having sometimes, you know, direct and candid discussions, but he knows how to do this.



And a lot of people who are throwing stones aren't a part of these negotiations. They're one on one. So, I think they should leave it to him and others to get them done.

Q But there are members of his party that want him to be more actively involved, and have come out publicly and said, "We want to see the President more actively involved." What's his response to that?

MS. PSAKI: I would say that -- as I would point to something Congresswoman Jayapal said yesterday, "Right now, it's not a secret about what is the holdup." The holdup is that we need to get 50 votes in the Senate to move the infrastructure, to move the reconciliation package forward, in order for members of the Progressive Caucus in the house to feel comfortable that there's a path forward.

As many of them have conveyed, the President's role and work in communicating with Senator Manchin and Senator Sinema to help get that done is probably one of the most constructive roles he can play. And that's what he's been focused on over the last few days.

Q My follow-up question, Jen?

MS. PSAKI: Thanks so much, everyone.

Okay, last one, because I promised you. Go ahead.

Q Thank you. Jen, the President of Angola -- President João Lourenço -- was in D.C. last week, and he met with Jake Sullivan and Madam Speaker of the House. And I just want to check with you if the President made any comment about this visit, because Jake Sullivan, on the day that he met my president, he said he would brief the President on that day. So, I don't -- I'm trying to check with you if you heard any comments from the President (inaudible).

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any additional comment. I think we put a readout out about Jake Sullivan's meeting, but I don't have any additional comments.

Thanks so much, everyone.

3:19 P.M. EDT

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

September 30, 2021

**Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki, September 30, 2021**

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

2:34 P.M. EDT

MS. PSAKI: Hi, everyone. Okay. Welcome back, Dr. Harper.

Q Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Okay. I'm breaking my streak. I do have some items at the top for all of you. Lots going on in the world.

The U.S. government condemns in the strongest possible terms the government of Ethiopia's unprecedented action to expel the leadership of all of the United Nations organizations involved in ongoing humanitarian operations. We agree with U.N. leaders: This is a stain on our collective conscience and it must stop.

The action follows the release of reports warning that hundreds of thousands of people are starving to death in northern Ethiopia. We're deeply concerned that this action continues a pattern by the Ethiopian government of obstructing the delivery of food, medicine, and other lifesaving supplies that most -- to those most in need.

We call on the U.N. Security Council and members of the international community to take urgent action to make clear to the government of Ethiopia that impeding humanitarian operations and depriving your own citizens of the basic means of survival is unacceptable.

President Biden signed an executive order, earlier this month, enabling the U.S. government to impose financial sanctions



on those prolonging the conflict in northern Ethiopia. We will not hesitate to use this or any other tool at our disposal to respond quickly and decisively to those who obstruct humanitarian assistance to the people of Ethiopia.

One more items -- one more item. Some news from -- out of the First Lady's office: Today, Joining Forces -- the White House initiative led by the First Lady to support military families -- and the National Security Council released a White House report, signed by the President and Secretaries of 15 executive departments, which outlines the first round of administration-wide commitments and proposals to supporting military and veteran families, caregivers, and survivors.

In May of 2021, the Office of the First Lady and the National Security Council launched a Joining Forces Interagency Policy Committee with representatives from across the executive agencies to work collaboratively on priorities related to the families of service members and veterans, caregivers, and survivors.

This report details more than 800 -- 80, sorry -- specific commitments and proposals from across the administration and is the product of the Interagency Policy Committee's months of work.

Going forward, this committee will continue to advance these priorities, including those outlined in the report, through cross-agency working groups and will report results and updated plans annually.

Jonathan, why don't you kick us off.

Q Thank you, Jen. A few -- all on the dealings at Capitol Hill right now. Senator Manchin told reporters a short time ago that he told President Biden that \$1.5 trillion would be as high as he was willing to go for the reconciliation package. What was the President's reaction to that? Is that an acceptable number?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, I would say, as we've said many times, we're not going to outline private negotiations or private discussions, and we'll let the senators speak for that, as Senator Manchin did earlier today. The way the President sees it is that this is an ongoing discussion, an ongoing negotiation.

Here's what we know: We know that timelines help make progress. We've seen that play out over the course of the last couple of days. We know that compromise is inevitable. We've also seen that play out over the last couple of days. And right now, we're clearly in the thick of it.

I'd also note that during his -- during Senator Manchin's -- and obviously, I'm not his spokesperson; he can certainly speak for himself -- but during his Q&A he did on the Hill today, he also referenced the fact that he -- that there was a document from a couple of months ago. And I'll let him and Senator -- Leader Schumer speak to that. And he was repeatedly pushed and asked, "Would you go higher than 1.5? Would you go higher than 1.5?" I will leave it to all of you to determine if he answered that question.

But this is an ongoing discussion, an ongoing negotiation. And as I said yesterday, that's going to require all sides giving a little, and we're in the midst of that right now.

Q So on that -- so, key Democratic House leaders have said they will, quote, "stay here all weekend" to work to get a deal. Does the President plan to do the same? Will he be at the White House working this weekend, having visitors, calling and hosting congressional lawmakers?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as Speaker Pelosi said earlier -- and we're following the same motto -- we're taking it hour by hour here and making a decision and determination about what's most needed.

So, as it relates to what's even going to happen this afternoon, we're open; he's available. He's been making calls this morning. He's open to having visitors. He's open to going places. But we're going to make those decisions hour by hour.

So, the weekend is a little bit away, but I will tell you that this is the President's top priority right now: getting relief to the



American people; making sure we're lowering costs for the American people; we're addressing the climate crisis; we're rebuilding our roads, rails, and bridges. We've made progress, and we're still at work at it.

Q All right. And last one from me. One of the President's central promises when he was elected was to restore Americans' ability to be confident in their government again, to believe in institutions again. What is the White House's message to Americans right now who look at this and see a mess? Nearly a government shutdown, the debt ceiling is unclear, legislation not being passed, at least not yet, even though Democrats control all the bodies of government. And those Americans don't feel that they can be confident in government.

What's the White House's response?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, I would say: The President, the Speaker of the House, and the Leader have more experience getting legislation across the finish line than any group of Democrat -- Democratic leaders in history.

We're in the middle of it right now. It's messy, this sausage-making, on Capitol Hill. Policymaking is messy. There's negotiations. They all have representatives who are advocating for their points of view. That's democracy in action.

What I can tell them is that we're on the path to keep the government open. You just saw that pass the Senate. It was going over to the House. That's not just keeping the government open, that's getting relief to make sure we can -- we can take care of refugees, people who fought by our side in Afghanistan; that's to make sure we get relief to the Gulf Coast -- additional relief to the Gulf Coast. All important priorities.

And we would also tell them that the President is going to stop at -- he's going to use every lever at his disposal to fight to get this legislation passed -- these two pieces of legislation -- that will have a historic -- make historic investments. And he's doing it because he wants to have an impact on their lives.

But these type of packages, not a lot of precedent for them, but he's going to work at it. He's going to get it done. That's what he would tell them.

Go ahead.

Q Does the President see any strategic value in a vote failing on the House floor?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as Speaker Pelosi said earlier today, we're on a path to win. I don't want to even consider any other options than that. We're in it to win it. The President is also in it to win it. That's what we're working toward. It's only 2:40 right now; lots of time left in the day. And he's going to continue to engage -- stay closely engaged with her about the path forward.

Q You've repeatedly referred to this week -- to this moment as an "inflection point." How is the President viewing this moment, given where his caucuses are and where his members are?

MS. PSAKI: This moment as in "this moment" -- 2:40 p.m. this afternoon -- or just today?

Q As in it's deadline day for an infrastructure bill; he doesn't have the votes. One member of the United States Senate is about \$2 trillion below his topline number, and there's no clear way to bridge those gaps.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think the President views this as the last several days and even longer than that. His view is we've made some progress. You've seen some members come down. You've seen some members come up. You've seen active negotiations. He's obviously been hard at work at them himself.

And what we clearly see is an agreement about the need to get this done, whether it's the infrastructure bill or the reconciliation practice -- package, which has key priorities for the President -- key priorities. I think the Speaker referred



to it earlier today as the cause of her -- as her public li- -- as her time in public life. That's a bit of a paraphrase. I'll leave you to her words.

So, look, he sees this moment -- he knew that as we got closer to self-imposed timelines, which are important -- often these timelines can help make progress; we've seen progress made -- that more members would be out there advocating for what was important to them. That's happening.

We saw -- we would hopefully see more willingness to compromise; that's happening too. We're hard at work. And he's been through this before, so he's not too thrown off his game on it.

Q And then just one quick last one. Do you guys see a possibility of some type of framework agreement that could unlock the infrastructure vote today?

MS. PSAKI: That's what we're working towards.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. You talked about "self-imposed timelines" as opposed to the other real timelines for debt ceiling and the CR. The progressives don't seem to feel any sense of urgency about passing infrastructure, and the moderates, like Manchin, don't seem to feel any urgency about passing reconciliation. The only Democrat that I can think of who really has a sense of urgency is Terry McAuliffe.

Do you feel it -- does the President want this done in a certain amount of time, or does he also feel that this could play out over weeks and months and still come to the conclusion that he wants?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as I said a little bit earlier, we know -- and the President knows from his time in public office -- that timelines can help make progress. That's often how legislating happens on the Hill. And as the Speaker --

Q These ones aren't.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we would -- we would disagree with that. You've seen a lot of members out there advocating for their viewpoints, being very vocal about what they want to see; some coming up, some coming down. That's a sense of progress. And we're working at it hour by hour here.

Q But does he have -- does he feel that he needs it done by a certain time, like the end of the year?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to set new deadlines here for you. Obviously, we're trying to get it done now. We're working on it as of right now, today, and that's what our focus is on in this moment.

Go ahead. I'll go back to you, Weijia. Go ahead.

Q It's all right.

Q To follow up a little on what Phil was asking --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- what does the President want and what is he asking members of Congress to do on this infrastructure vote tonight? Is he calling progressives, and Republicans even, asking them to vote for it? Does he definitely want this vote tonight? Or is this all still this murky -- sort of trying to link these two things together and hope something emerges out of that?

MS. PSAKI: There's nothing really murky about what's going on here. I mean, we understand what progressive members



want. Right? They've been out there vocally talking to all of you about what they want.

It's clear we also need their votes in order to pass an infrastructure bill. They want to have a clear path forward on a reconciliation package. The President wants both pieces of legislation to pass. That's what he wants, bottom line. He's also going to work with the Speaker and the Leader to get that done.

So, what he's been spending his time on over the last couple of days is that -- having conversations with Senator Manchin, Senator Sinema, and others who have been very vocal about the fact that they're not quite there yet. And his objective is to try to get them there because that's what members of the Progressive Caucus are looking for in order to support an infrastructure bill, many compo- -- of components of which they support.

Q I guess, to put a finer point on it: If your choice is between a vote tonight that fails but sort of puts everybody on the record, or pulling the vote tonight and continuing deliberations despite it potentially upsetting moderates who feel like they've been promised this vote, what does the President prefer?

MS. PSAKI: We're working towards winning a vote tonight. We have several hours left in the day.

Q All right. Last one. What's the plan on the debt ceiling? I mean, Republicans have sort of made clear that they're not going to back any efforts. So it would seem at this point that Democrats' only hope here is to turn towards a reconciliation process on the debt ceiling.

I understand that you've made the point many times that Mitch McConnell is being hypocritical on this, that Republicans should support it, but it does seem now that the votes are on the table, that you're kind of pursuing this political point at the potential risk of default for the U.S. economy.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think that's a bit of a shorthand of what's happening, which I understand; it's a bit of a complicated thing.

But first, since you gave me the opportunity, it's not just Senator McConnell; Republicans are playing politics with an economic catastrophe, and they're treating a calamity for working families like a D.C. game. There are huge impacts here.

You touched on the fact, but let me give the public a little sense of that: an instant recession, 6 million jobs lost, \$15 trillion in savings wiped out, Social Security checks and payments to our troops blocked. Those are real impacts.

Republicans in Congress are treating this like a game. Let me give you some examples. Senator Rick Scott -- and this is a real quote, I will note: "This is going to be a...ball. I'm going to have so much fun." That's about the debt limit.

Senator Kevin Kramer: "It's sort of fun to watch."

And Senator Cornyn said yesterday that Republicans would use every tool at their disposal to slow Democrats from doing this on their own.

What we're trying to do right now is do it on their own -- do it on our own. That is what Leader Schumer is working to proceed -- working to move forward on.

And, obviously, as you know, Republicans have blocked that effort. So, of course, we are going to continue to press. We're not going to let up on that, on Republicans, to do what's responsible, to protect the full faith and credit of the United States, as has been done 80 times in the past.

We've also been working to do it on our own. We're going to keep working with Leader Schumer to get that done.

Q But you're not going to ask for reconcil- -- Democrats to push on reconciliation, (inaudible)?



MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to get into additional mechanisms here. We're going to continue. I don't think -- we're not going to, nor should anyone, let Republicans off the hook here, so we're going to continue to press them on it.

Q One of the things that Senator Manchin said today was that the, kind of -- the concern that he has around the 3.5 number is about how it would impact inflation in the economy. And I'm curious what the White House thinks of that concern and what you've done to allay that concern.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we've conveyed privately what we've said publicly and what many, many economists have also conveyed publicly, which is that what these packages will do is they will address -- address inflation and costs over the long term. That's one of the core reasons that people should be supporting them. So, if you are concerned about inflation, that's exactly a reason you should support these packages.

Q And would the President sign a reconciliation bill that does not include negotiating on drug prices?

MS. PSAKI: The President has obviously proposed that. He feels strongly about the need to make drugs -- prescription drugs, I should say, more affordable to the American public. I'm not going to negotiate further from here.

Q One other thing, just on a different topic: Jake Sullivan's conversations in Saudi Arabia. Did rising oil prices come up in those conversations? What was his message to the Saudis about alleviating some of the concerns that people have as they're paying a dollar more for gasoline now than they did a year ago?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah, so, I know someone asked about this the other day. And, obviously, the focus of his trip was on Yemen and working with the Saudis on Yemen. And our -- Tim Lenderki -- Lenderking was -- joined him in those meetings, who's our envoy to Yemen, to kind of figure out the path forward.

He was -- obviously, the price of oil is of concern. We have been in touch with OPEC. And I believe it was going to be raised, but I haven't had a chance to get a readout beyond that. I can try to do that for you after the briefing.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. So, putting the topline number aside, Senators Manchin and Sinema have been very opaque about what it is they want and do not want in this reconciliation bill. Without revealing details, does the White House and the President have a clear understanding of what it is each one of them wants?

MS. PSAKI: We've had a lot of private conversations with both of the senators about what their priorities are, as they've said publicly. And I think as Senator Manchin said publicly today, what their priorities are and what that looks like in a final package, that's still an ongoing discussion.

Q Are they asking for the same things? Are the two of them on board with the same (inaudible)?

MS. PSAKI: I'll let them speak for their priorities and how they line up with each other.

Q Okay. And then to build on what Justin was asking about --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q -- decoupling these two.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q Is the President worried at all about eroding trust with Republicans who signed on to the bipartisan deal after he



reassured them that it would not be conditional on reconciliation?

MS. PSAKI: Well, let's remember what's actually going on on the Hill here. Republicans in the House, led by Kevin McCarthy, are opting to vote against rebuilding roads and railways and bridges, despite the fact that the package was sent over with the support of 69 senators.

So, I think if you're asking about trust or whether people are delivering for the American people, you should direct it at Kevin McCarthy.

Go ahead.

Q I'm asking because the progressives have made so clear that they refuse to vote on infrastructure without a vote on reconciliation first. Why doesn't the President ask them to treat them separately?

MS. PSAKI: To treat -- well, I think the --

Q To treat the two bills separately.

MS. PSAKI: The President has made clear both are his priorities. He's also made clear he wants to get them both across the finish line.

What we're talking about now is the legislative process and how you get the majority of votes to get both of them done. And that's what he's working to negotiate and working to unify the caucus around.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks. And just one more --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- on a separate topic.

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Go ahead.

Q The National School Boards Association has sent a letter to the President asking for help from federal law enforcement agencies because of the violence and the threats that they're seeing across the country. Has the President received that request? And are you considering offering that help?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, let me say we take the security of public servants and elected officials across the country very seriously. And, obviously, these threats to school board members is horrible. They're doing their jobs.

Obviously, there are going to be different law enforcement authorities that will be related to each community and -- where this is happening, so we'd certainly refer you to them about any specific threats. And we'd encourage individuals to report any threats they face to local and state law enforcement agencies. And we're continuing to explore what more can be done from across the administration.

But again, a lot of this will be local law enforcement and how they can help ensure these school board members feel protected.

Q Thanks.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.



Q Thank you, Jen. Has the President at all lost control of his party? Depending on which perspective you're looking at this from -- you know, some people say that it appears that progressives are running the show, they're banding together and making their demands. Other people are saying it looks like Joe Manchin is playing president. So, who is in charge?

MS. PSAKI: Well, this is how democracy works. I know it feels foreign because there wasn't much that happened over the last couple of years. But how it works is the American people elect their elected officials, the President of the United States puts forward a bold and ambitious proposal, and then everybody negotiates about it, and they have different points of view. That's how democracy should work. We're in the midst of it right now. We're not trying to paint over how messy it looks from the outside. We know that.

But what -- the good news is, is that there is agreement that -- among most Democrats, if not every single one of them, that we need to get something done; that we need to do more to rebuild our roads and railways and bridges; that we need to cut costs for the American people; we need to address the climate crisis. There's agreement on that.

Now we're in the nitty-gritty details, which is very important, but that's the end stage of this process. And the American people should know that that's what the President is working on.

Q And I want to follow up on Weijia's question. So, if the bipartisan bill fails or is stalled or doesn't happen today, it would appear that these two bills -- the reconciliation and the infrastructure -- are linked. And the President, you know, made statements that Republicans should be able to vote for the bipartisan bill on its merits. He stood in front of the White House with a group of Republicans who negotiated that infrastructure bill. Is there a message that he has to those Republican senators, who voted to pass that bill on its merits, that this bill is somehow not linked with the reconciliation because of what's happening in the House?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we're working towards victory here and a win. If it doesn't pass, it's because it doesn't have enough votes. I think Republicans in the Senate understand that and know how this process works.

But that's what we're working towards now. That's what the President has been making phone calls about. That's what we have his schedule cleared for this afternoon. And I'm not going to make a prediction of what the outcome will look like several hours from now.

Q And then with the Vice President -- and she was a senator as recently as this year --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- why isn't she on the Hill helping to broker this deal?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the Vice President had the CBC over, the CHC last week. She's been making calls herself, just like the President. If it's constructive for her to go to the Hill or for him to go to the Hill, to have members down here, they'll do that.

We're ready and willing. This is our top priority. All hands on deck. But a lot of what's happening right now is discussions at a staff level, a senior staff level to get through these intricate details, and that's where the focus is in this moment.

Go ahead, Kelly.

Q Since we haven't seen the President much publicly this week --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- and you talked about leaving room in his schedule, can you paint more of a picture of what's happening behind the scenes? Are there calls happening from the Oval Office inviting members to the President? Does he have scheduled meetings with



scenes? Are these calls happening from the Oval? Is he inviting guests to the Residence? Does he have a whiteboard with his own whip count? Can you give us a picture of what it looks like (inaudible)?

MS. PSAKI: (Laughs.) I like that visual. I would say he does not have a whiteboard with a whip count. I can assure you he's more of a paper and pen kind of guy.

But, look, he's been meeting with staff, he's been getting updates from staff as they've been having engagements with the Hill. You all know who the senior members of his team are who are negotiating, whether that's Steve Ricchetti or Louisa Terrell, Brian Deese, Susan Rice.

What he's asked his team to do is -- including the policy members, which people don't always factor this in -- is be available to have conversations with members about questions they have, to help address any parts of it they have suggestions on.

So, he's getting regular updates. People are in and out of the Oval Office providing him updates on their individual conversations. And he's picking up the phone and calling people as needed, whether that's the Speaker or Leader Schumer or other members, to have a conversation about the status, to check on where they are, to follow up on maybe a conversation they may have had with his staff.

These conversations are happening from the Oval Office, but certainly he does some from the Residence; it depends on what time of day it may be.

Q And are you running your own whip count, or are you relying on Hill resources to do that?

MS. PSAKI: We're very closely in touch, as you know, with leadership on the Hill; the President himself is. Of course, we're certainly in touch with members ourselves -- ourselves about where they stand, where they may have concerns, or any hesitations.

Go ahead. I'll come back to you, Terry. I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Q We finally learned today Senator Manchin's position on his topline number. Senator Schumer has been aware of it since late July, and Senator Manchin said that he told the President already this \$1.5 trillion number. Why has the decision been made strategically to pursue Senator Manchin, Senator Sinema, and not try to, within the last couple of weeks, apply more pressure on progressives to take half a loaf and say, "This is low-hanging fruit; it's a \$1.2 trillion infrastructure plan. Let's move on that"? Why was that strategic decision made not to do that?

MS. PSAKI: Both of these are huge priorities to the President. I'd also note that when Senator Manchin was asked -- and he can obviously speak for himself -- but just since I've read the whole transcript here, he also repeatedly referred back to a document that went back to July 28th. I'd remind you all that this is an active negotiation and discussion, and it is incumbent upon members to put out where they stand and where they are. And as we've seen over the past couple days, that's an everchanging process.

So, before you make conclusions about what the end results will be, I would remind you to look at the last several days or even weeks about how these discussions have progressed.

Q But Senator Manchin said today he believes his position is -- it sounded to me like his position was firm. And he also said that if progressives feel that the Congress should spend \$3.5 trillion, that they should convince voters to send more progressives to Washington. That sounded to me like he's saying that, through the end of this Congress, he's not going to agree to \$3.5 trillion.

MS. PSAKI: We could certainly parse Senator Manchin's words, but I am certain he'll go answer questions again, and your colleagues should ask him more questions.



Q But why do you think that this is not -- why do you think that Senator Manchin's position on this is not final?

MS. PSAKI: Because this is an active negotiation, because he was pushed repeatedly during the gaggle that he did on Capitol Hill about where he stood. But again, I'm not here to speak for Senator Manchin; he is -- certainly can speak for himself and what his points of view -- views are. And I certainly encourage you all to keep asking him questions about where he stands.

Go ahead.

Q Back on the deadline that was set at the beginning of the week -- announced at -- this is a big week: Democrats are in charge here at the White House and in both houses of Congress. And they set the deadline; Democrats set the deadline. Now they --

MS. PSAKI: To be clear, they just set the date of a vote.

Q All right. You called it a "deadline." I was just using your words.

MS. PSAKI: Okay. Fair. But -- thank you for the clarification. It's -- they set the time of a vote.

Q All right. Democrats set this vote. Now they're going to miss it, fail to make it. Why is it that --

MS. PSAKI: We don't know that. It's only three o'clock.

Q Can you tell us if they're going to vote tonight?

MS. PSAKI: That's what Speaker Pelosi indicated her plan was.

Q All right. My question is: Why isn't it fair to see this as a failure of the President to get his own party to back him and his agenda?

MS. PSAKI: Why isn't it, before we've even had a vote and we don't even know where it sits, a failure of the President?

Q It feels like we're farther away today than we were on Monday.

MS. PSAKI: I don't think the President feels that way, and I don't think members of Congress feel that way.

Q You've talked about progress. Can you explain what progress is? You said it's people talking about where they are.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q That sounds like -- that sounds like an earlier part of the process when you had set a vote for the end of the week.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would point you again to what Speaker Pelosi said earlier today: In the end stages, the later stages of a process -- where we are now -- when you get closer to a vote, a time of a vote being set, that's when the negotiations get serious. That's when people start putting down bottom lines of where they stand. You've seen some people do that publicly. A lot more of it happens behind the scenes. That's what I mean by progress.

You've seen members come down in numbers. You've seen members come up in numbers. That's what we're working on -- to get to an agreed-upon path forward.

Q So there's progress, and it's people behind the scenes saying that -- where their numbers move.



MS. PSAKI: They've also said it publicly.

Q One more. A lot of Democrats are looking at what's happening, and they're saying Senator Manchin and Senator Sinema are holding this President and his agenda hostage. What would you say to that?

MS. PSAKI: I would say we have 50 votes in the Senate -- 50 Democrats in the Senate. So, we need the majority to win. That's how a bill becomes a law.

Q They've got the leverage.

MS. PSAKI: We need all 50 votes in the Senate to move this forward. That's where we stand now.

Go ahead.

Q I just wanted to go back to the debt ceiling for a second.

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q Democrats control all branches of government right now. Can you assure the American people and the financial markets that the United States will not default on its debt?

MS. PSAKI: That is absolutely what we're trying to accomplish. And I'd remind you that we would have gotten that done had Republicans done what they've done 80 times before -- supporting a bipartisan vote to do something that has been pretty standard in the past -- or if they had allowed Leader Schumer to move forward.

But, absolutely, we're going to do everything to prevent the federal -- us from defaulting --

Q But does the plan involve changing Mitch McConnell's mind -- Leader McConnell's mind in some way? Or is there a plan to just go forward using either reconciliation or --

MS. PSAKI: Well, Leader Schumer has already tried to -- already been working to move things forward. And it's been blocked by Republicans -- not just their vote; an effort to move it forward has been blocked.

Q But there clearly are ways -- I mean, getting rid of the filibuster, for example, for this particular vote would be one way to move forward. And is that something that the President would consider to avoid losing, let's say, 10 percent of the value of the stock market?

MS. PSAKI: I just outlined how concerning we are -- how concerned we are, which you just echoed -- or echoed different components of it. And that's an issue we take incredibly seriously. You've also heard Secretary Yellen on the Hill talking about this. We're not going to let Republicans off the hook. We don't think they should be. This is not a game. This is the faith -- full faith and credit of the United States.

We're working with Leader Schumer on a path forward, but beyond that, I don't have more to preview for you.

Q But you can do it without Republicans if you got rid of the filibuster for this --

MS. PSAKI: We could do it if they let us move forward, and they haven't. So I have no more details on the pa- -- on the legislative process.

Q And just on the reconciliation package, is \$1.5 trillion enough in your spending to cover Biden's priorities -- the President's priorities?



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MS. PSAKI: I understand that's a number that's been put out there. It's an active negotiation. I'm not going to weigh in from here on what is or isn't acceptable to the Democratic Caucus.

Go ahead.

Q A couple different topics. So, on immigration, there seems to be a real sense among advocates for immigrants -- people who have been fighting for legalization, for a pathway to citizenship -- there's a real sense of doom; people who described this, yesterday, even crying about the latest parliamentary ruling.

Do you -- what does the President -- you know, what would the President say or what does the President say if that -- if he is unable to move forward on any of the, sort of, big, sweeping promises that he made as a candidate to get -- to finally be the President to get something done on immigration?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we don't accept that. We're nine months into his presidency. And we share the disappointment. Obviously, as you know and you touched on, the parliamentarian ruled twice, in different ways, that it could be included in the reconciliation package -- or components, I should say, of immigration reform could not be included in the reconciliation practice -- process. Sorry, package.

That's disappointing to the President as well. So, clearly, now we need to figure out what the vehicle forward is.

I would say the President's plan is about certainly protecting DREAMers, farm workers, and others. It's also about investing in border security, making sure it makes sense and we're investing in it in a way that makes sense, and creating an asylum processing system that is actually functional, which I think we all agree it's not.

So there are several components of what he's proposed, and, certainly, we share the disappointment of many advocates that this wasn't included and the desire to find a vehicle to move it forward.

Q On one other separate topic: There have been a number of issues in the last, say, several weeks in which advocates -- allies of the President are describing him as "Trump-like." Most -- less in terms of his personality and sort of tone and tenor, obviously, but in terms of policy. Even today, a representative of the Cuban government describing the frustration with the President continuing to maintain Trump-era policies vis-à-vis Cuba.

Does the -- what's the President's reaction? And does he accept that in some areas of policy he is, you know, in agreement with the former President?

MS. PSAKI: So, just for the sake of argument here -- not argument, but discussion -- beyond the representative of the Cuban government who --

Q Afghanistan, immigration --

MS. PSAKI: Well, but who? Who are we talking about here?

Q Who --

MS. PSAKI: Who is saying that the President is like Trump?

Q Oh, I mean there -- there -- I mean, I could find you quotes. We have -- there have been quotes in our paper and quotes in lots of -- lots of folks have, depending on the issue, whether they are immigration advocates or, you know, folks in the Afghanistan -- who sort of watch Afghanistan. There have been numerous on-the-record descriptions of the President embracing -- and it's actually, in some ways, just a factual thing, right?



MS. PSAKI: But like on what policy?

Q Like the President has --

MS. PSAKI: On what policy? Sorry, I didn't -- you can -- you can name people but -- or what specific policies.

Q Well, I mean, for example, Afghanistan would have been the maintaining of the former President's decision to withdraw troops. On immigration, it's in maintaining Title 42 and keeping Title 42 in place. I mean they're --

Q Sub- --

Q Hm?

Q Submarines.

Q The submarine -- yeah. (Laughter.)

MS. PSAKI: Which one?

Q The submarine -- I'm just --

Q Yeah, the --

Q AUKUS.

Q The President was --

Q AUKUS.

Q -- yeah -- was compared to Trump --

Q -- to Trump. Well, the -- that's the French -- the French Foreign Minister compared him to Trump, in terms of how he handled the AUKUS negotiations.

MS. PSAKI: So, look, I'd take each one of these: On Afghanistan, the former President struck a deal without the Afghan government that, we heard the military convey yesterday, led to the demoralization of the Afghan Security Forces and the Afghan government, where he also released 5,000 Taliban fighters into Afghanistan.

I would say the President took a pretty different approach than that in ending a war that the former President didn't end -- something the American people strongly support.

As it relates to AUKUS, I'm not even sure what that's referring to, in terms of what they're comparing. The President worked with key partners -- Australia and the United Kingdom -- to come to an agreement that would help provide security in an important part of the world -- in the Indo-Pacific -- a priority that, frankly, getting out of the war in Afghanistan leaves space for us to spend more time addressing.

What was the last one? Immigration?

Q Immigration, Title 42, tariffs on China. I mean, there's --

MS. PSAKI: Title 42 is a public health -- is a public health requirement, a public health -- because we're in the middle of a pandemic, which, by the way --



Q The President and his allies --

MS. PSAKI: -- we would have made progress on had the former President actually addressed --

Q Right, but the --

MS. PSAKI: -- the pandemic and not suggested people inject bleach.

So, I think we're in a bit of a different place. I'm happy to discuss more examples. I think it's -- people would be pretty hard pressed to argue that the President has taken any aspect of the former President's playbook and used it as a model of his own.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q Senator Manchin has also said that he wants to means test as much as possible of this reconciliation package. Without getting into or speaking for the senator, as you've said, what is the White House's position on, I guess, means testing in this package?

MS. PSAKI: Well, you can call it whatever you want. Sometimes means -- when you say "means testing" -- not you, but when -- when it's said, it sometimes has it not the right connotation or the wrong connotation.

The President's proposals, many of them have been targeted at the middle class, as have these proposals and these initiatives, which means there's a cap on income through which you can benefit. That's what -- you can call it whatever you want, if you call it "means testing." The President is very open to targeting, by income, many of his proposals. And that's something that you can see throughout many components of his agenda that have been proposed and many that have passed to date.

Q Does the White House believe that you all are currently in alignment with Manchin on what those thresholds would look like or --

MS. PSAKI: It's an ongoing discussion. But, again, our objective is to -- is to target and focus on bringing relief to the middle class. That's what the President wants to see this agenda accomplish.

Q In an op-ed for USA Today this morning, Senator Bernie Sanders defended the \$3.5 trillion price tag, asking, "Please tell me what [where] we should cut." This came out before Senator Manchin gave his line in the sand.

Does -- without speaking for either senator, does the White House believe that there's any provisions that, if we are talking about getting somewhere between 3.5 and 1.5, that are absolutely -- you all cannot stomach not having them in the final package?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to put anything on the table here. It's clear, as numbers come down, which they will, that there will be cuts to different components. That's just the nature of the totals here. But we'll leave those conversations private. I know you're eager [sic] -- eager to know more, and hopefully we'll have more to share soon.

Q And then just finally -- just one more point. As you all have said from here, the public -- public polling has consistently found that many parts of this -- of both packages are very supported by the American people. The American people are also very consistently pessimistic about action in Washington.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.



Q Ahead of what we're going to be seeing, whichever way this vote goes tonight, what is your message to the public as they look at the ongoing situation in Washington about -- what is your message to the American people as they look at, as you've said, a messy situation, the chaos of democracy?

MS. PSAKI: We hope we can prove them wrong.

Q Okay.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead, Karen.

Q Thanks, Jen. I know "hour by hour" is kind of the phrase of the day.

MS. PSAKI: (Laughs.) Yeah.

Q But given that, can we expect to hear from the President today? Or what would have to happen for us to hear from the President today?

MS. PSAKI: We'll see. I can't make a prediction for you now, but it is certainly possible. It's also possible he has more meetings. He'll certainly make more phone calls, possibly moves. But I don't have anything to predict for you at this point in time.

Q And, last night, he went to the congressional baseball game. Did he go specifically to do some arm twisting or lobbying on infrastructure? And he spent some time with Republican lawmakers -- something he really hasn't done here at the White House. Can you give us a sense of what he talked about with those Republican lawmakers? What was the interaction like, the tone of those conversations?

MS. PSAKI: I think you're undervaluing his baseball prowess -- (laughter) -- and history, which he was honored for last night.

No, look, I think what the President -- and I saw him this morning; he was reflecting on how it was -- and I think this is a tradition -- the Congressional Baseball Game. You know, it's something that has been around for some time, where Democrats and Republicans go participate in America's -- one of America's favorite pastimes.

And you saw -- I think you all saw in photos, but for people who didn't see -- he visited with some Republicans down in their area -- dugout?

Q Dugout.

MS. PSAKI: I don't even know it's called. (Laughter.) Okay, dugout. Help me out here. Thank you. He visited -- (laughs) -- with some -- my husband is going to be really mad about that.

He visited with some Republicans. You know, he wasn't -- it wasn't meant to be a negotiation; it was a discussion about, you know, how things are going and work we're all committed to and just saying hello to them. And sometimes, you know, that's important and powerful too at a time where there's been so much division, where there's a view from many in the public -- as per the question earlier -- that people can't work together, can't get things done.

And this was an opportunity to have a moment to visit with, to see people that you've known be -- you've known a long time, to meet new people, and to move beyond partisanship to celebrate one of America's favorite pastimes.

Q Did he have a response to you about getting booed last night? Any reaction to that?



MS. PSAKI: He's been in public life long enough to know there's going to be some yays and jeers in most big, public places.

Go ahead.

Q Can I just follow up on that? Is -- in some ways, does his visit and the rituals of getting together sort of prove the point that the face time doesn't work? I mean, you still -- you referred to Leader McConnell and the Republican Party not willing to raise the debt limit. He's had plenty of face time with Leader McConnell for decades. Maybe it just doesn't matter and people are going to do what their political interests or what they believe their political interests tells them to do?

MS. PSAKI: Well, this is how the President views it: You're going to have strong disagreements, as he does with Senator McConnell about how he's approached the debt limit. You're also going to have areas where you may come to agreement on, as they do on infrastructure and the importance of rebuilding our roads, our railways, and our bridges. And it's important to maintain lines of communication and discussion to figure out where you can work together.

That's also how he views and approaches diplomacy. We can call out and -- publicly and argue strongly privately issues we have with foreign governments. But we also sometimes still look for ways -- most of the time -- for ways to work together.

That's been his approach. I would say that given the infrastructure bill passed with 69 votes, that's evidence of it working.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. You mentioned at the top that on September 17th the President signed an executive order authorizing sanctions to be used against those undermining peace in Ethiopia.

But right now, it doesn't seem the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed, is interested in peace. He refused to meet with Samantha Power when she was there. He has -- he is expelling U.N. staff from the country. He's taken other steps that prove that he has no interest in peace.

Why not take the sanction now? Why not impose the sanction now, or take more drastic action against not just him but also the President of Eritrea, who still have troops inside Ethiopia?

MS. PSAKI: Well, absent clear and concrete changes, we will. We're preparing to take aggressive action under this executive order to impose targeted sanctions against a range of individuals and entities. What we're communicating to the parties on the ground is that we must see meaningful steps within weeks to initiate discussions to achieve a negotiated ceasefire, allow in an unhindered humanitarian access, and ensure respect for human rights. Absent significant progress, we'll take action. And we have the methods to do that. That's why I rec- -- talked about the executive order.

Q And then on Guinea, we've had so many coups in Africa. The President of Guinea has been overthrown. The President of Mali has been overthrown. And we just had the Prime Minister of Sudan who just survived a coup attempt. And the President promised to defend democracy around the world. Is he failing in that promise?

MS. PSAKI: He doesn't expect that to be accomplished in nine months. He expects that to be accomplished over the course of time for advocating for democracy, for human rights, for imposing steps when warranted, and -- as we are considering right now in Ethiopia -- and obviously by having a strong national security team that can convey this on his behalf when he cannot.

Go ahead.

Q I just have a question on Africa.

Q Thanks, Jen. On --

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead. I'll come back to you next.



Q Thanks, Jen. Just to follow up on Mike's question on what the Cuban foreign minister said. Just to be specific, he said, "It's a pity that President Biden couldn't implement his own policy toward Cuba." And I just wondered if you had a specific response.

MS. PSAKI: I don't.

Q And there's a U.S. delegation -- top officials going to Port-au-Prince. What's the goal of that visit?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah, I have some details on this, including who is going. So, let's see. So, what they're doing -- one, we feel it's pretty pivotal to have high-level officials from here engaged in traveling back and forth to Port-au-Prince to have discussions with actors across the political spectrum to see what we can do to help support dialogue and development for the Haitian people.

We know it's clearly a profoundly challenging time on the ground, and it's crucial that we meet with a range of stakeholders to help move this process forward or help support the process moving forward in a way that's in the interest of the Haitian people. So, this is really an effort to be engaged, to be on the ground.

I can tell you -- and you may know this already -- that our newly confirmed Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere, Brian Nichols, is on this as a part of this delegation; our NSC Senior Director for the Western Hemisphere, Juan Gonzales, are there. They're meeting with civil society groups, political stakeholders, the Haitian government. And they're, of course, as I noted, discussing a Haitian-led process charting the path to democratic elections.

But that's the focus, as well as discussing how we can continue to help provide support for the migration response, security, recovery from the earthquake, and the COVID pandemic.

Q Jen, last question.

Q Secretary Mayorkas had said he expected the results of an investigation on the Border Patrol officers --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- on horseback by the end of this week. What's the status of that investigation?

MS. PSAKI: I know he said that; as I understand, it's still on track. But I would really point you to the Department of Homeland Security on any update.

Brian, why don't we go to you last?

Q Yeah, thank you.

Q Oh, you said --

Q Thank you very much. And I appreciate it. I'm -- I wanted to ask what the President's reaction is to Democratic lawmakers calling on him to lean more on Senator Manchin and Senator Sinema. What is the President's reaction to that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would say, first, the President's reaction is -- he's been in the -- he was in the Senate for 36 years. He knows, as does Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, what it takes at this point in negotiations. They've probably done this more, and more successfully, than any combinations of Democratic leaders in history.

And his approach has been: Yes, of course, it's listening. Yes, of course, it's conveying viewpoints and having sometimes, you know, direct and candid discussions, but he knows how to do this.



And a lot of people who are throwing stones aren't a part of these negotiations. They're one on one. So, I think they should leave it to him and others to get them done.

Q But there are members of his party that want him to be more actively involved, and have come out publicly and said, "We want to see the President more actively involved." What's his response to that?

MS. PSAKI: I would say that -- as I would point to something Congresswoman Jayapal said yesterday, "Right now, it's not a secret about what is the holdup." The holdup is that we need to get 50 votes in the Senate to move the infrastructure, to move the reconciliation package forward, in order for members of the Progressive Caucus in the house to feel comfortable that there's a path forward.

As many of them have conveyed, the President's role and work in communicating with Senator Manchin and Senator Sinema to help get that done is probably one of the most constructive roles he can play. And that's what he's been focused on over the last few days.

Q My follow-up question, Jen?

MS. PSAKI: Thanks so much, everyone.

Okay, last one, because I promised you. Go ahead.

Q Thank you. Jen, the President of Angola -- President João Lourenço -- was in D.C. last week, and he met with Jake Sullivan and Madam Speaker of the House. And I just want to check with you if the President made any comment about this visit, because Jake Sullivan, on the day that he met my president, he said he would brief the President on that day. So, I don't -- I'm trying to check with you if you heard any comments from the President (inaudible).

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any additional comment. I think we put a readout out about Jake Sullivan's meeting, but I don't have any additional comments.

Thanks so much, everyone.

3:19 P.M. EDT

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**From:** White House Press Office  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

September 30, 2021

**Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki, September 30, 2021**

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

2:34 P.M. EDT

MS. PSAKI: Hi, everyone. Okay. Welcome back, Dr. Harper.

Q Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Okay. I'm breaking my streak. I do have some items at the top for all of you. Lots going on in the world.

The U.S. government condemns in the strongest possible terms the government of Ethiopia's unprecedented action to expel the leadership of all of the United Nations organizations involved in ongoing humanitarian operations. We agree with U.N. leaders: This is a stain on our collective conscience and it must stop.

The action follows the release of reports warning that hundreds of thousands of people are starving to death in northern Ethiopia. We're deeply concerned that this action continues a pattern by the Ethiopian government of obstructing the delivery of food, medicine, and other lifesaving supplies that most -- to those most in need.

We call on the U.N. Security Council and members of the international community to take urgent action to make clear to the government of Ethiopia that impeding humanitarian operations and depriving your own citizens of the basic means of survival is unacceptable.

President Biden signed an executive order, earlier this month, enabling the U.S. government to impose financial sanctions

on those prolonging the conflict in northern Ethiopia. We will not hesitate to use this or any other tool at our disposal to respond quickly and decisively to those who obstruct humanitarian assistance to the people of Ethiopia.

One more items -- one more item. Some news from -- out of the First Lady's office: Today, Joining Forces -- the White House initiative led by the First Lady to support military families -- and the National Security Council released a White House report, signed by the President and Secretaries of 15 executive departments, which outlines the first round of administration-wide commitments and proposals to supporting military and veteran families, caregivers, and survivors.

In May of 2021, the Office of the First Lady and the National Security Council launched a Joining Forces Interagency Policy Committee with representatives from across the executive agencies to work collaboratively on priorities related to the families of service members and veterans, caregivers, and survivors.

This report details more than 800 -- 80, sorry -- specific commitments and proposals from across the administration and is the product of the Interagency Policy Committee's months of work.

Going forward, this committee will continue to advance these priorities, including those outlined in the report, through cross-agency working groups and will report results and updated plans annually.

Jonathan, why don't you kick us off.

Q Thank you, Jen. A few -- all on the dealings at Capitol Hill right now. Senator Manchin told reporters a short time ago that he told President Biden that \$1.5 trillion would be as high as he was willing to go for the reconciliation package. What was the President's reaction to that? Is that an acceptable number?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, I would say, as we've said many times, we're not going to outline private negotiations or private discussions, and we'll let the senators speak for that, as Senator Manchin did earlier today. The way the President sees it is that this is an ongoing discussion, an ongoing negotiation.

Here's what we know: We know that timelines help make progress. We've seen that play out over the course of the last couple of days. We know that compromise is inevitable. We've also seen that play out over the last couple of days. And right now, we're clearly in the thick of it.

I'd also note that during his -- during Senator Manchin's -- and obviously, I'm not his spokesperson; he can certainly speak for himself -- but during his Q&A he did on the Hill today, he also referenced the fact that he -- that there was a document from a couple of months ago. And I'll let him and Senator -- Leader Schumer speak to that. And he was repeatedly pushed and asked, "Would you go higher than 1.5? Would you go higher than 1.5?" I will leave it to all of you to determine if he answered that question.

But this is an ongoing discussion, an ongoing negotiation. And as I said yesterday, that's going to require all sides giving a little, and we're in the midst of that right now.

Q So on that -- so, key Democratic House leaders have said they will, quote, "stay here all weekend" to work to get a deal. Does the President plan to do the same? Will he be at the White House working this weekend, having visitors, calling and hosting congressional lawmakers?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as Speaker Pelosi said earlier -- and we're following the same motto -- we're taking it hour by hour here and making a decision and determination about what's most needed.

So, as it relates to what's even going to happen this afternoon, we're open; he's available. He's been making calls this morning. He's open to having visitors. He's open to going places. But we're going to make those decisions hour by hour.

So, the weekend is a little bit away, but I will tell you that this is the President's top priority right now: getting relief to the



American people; making sure we're lowering costs for the American people; we're addressing the climate crisis; we're rebuilding our roads, rails, and bridges. We've made progress, and we're still at work at it.

Q All right. And last one from me. One of the President's central promises when he was elected was to restore Americans' ability to be confident in their government again, to believe in institutions again. What is the White House's message to Americans right now who look at this and see a mess? Nearly a government shutdown, the debt ceiling is unclear, legislation not being passed, at least not yet, even though Democrats control all the bodies of government. And those Americans don't feel that they can be confident in government.

What's the White House's response?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, I would say: The President, the Speaker of the House, and the Leader have more experience getting legislation across the finish line than any group of Democrat -- Democratic leaders in history.

We're in the middle of it right now. It's messy, this sausage-making, on Capitol Hill. Policymaking is messy. There's negotiations. They all have representatives who are advocating for their points of view. That's democracy in action.

What I can tell them is that we're on the path to keep the government open. You just saw that pass the Senate. It was going over to the House. That's not just keeping the government open, that's getting relief to make sure we can -- we can take care of refugees, people who fought by our side in Afghanistan; that's to make sure we get relief to the Gulf Coast -- additional relief to the Gulf Coast. All important priorities.

And we would also tell them that the President is going to stop at -- he's going to use every lever at his disposal to fight to get this legislation passed -- these two pieces of legislation -- that will have a historic -- make historic investments. And he's doing it because he wants to have an impact on their lives.

But these type of packages, not a lot of precedent for them, but he's going to work at it. He's going to get it done. That's what he would tell them.

Go ahead.

Q Does the President see any strategic value in a vote failing on the House floor?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as Speaker Pelosi said earlier today, we're on a path to win. I don't want to even consider any other options than that. We're in it to win it. The President is also in it to win it. That's what we're working toward. It's only 2:40 right now; lots of time left in the day. And he's going to continue to engage -- stay closely engaged with her about the path forward.

Q You've repeatedly referred to this week -- to this moment as an "inflection point." How is the President viewing this moment, given where his caucuses are and where his members are?

MS. PSAKI: This moment as in "this moment" -- 2:40 p.m. this afternoon -- or just today?

Q As in it's deadline day for an infrastructure bill; he doesn't have the votes. One member of the United States Senate is about \$2 trillion below his topline number, and there's no clear way to bridge those gaps.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think the President views this as the last several days and even longer than that. His view is we've made some progress. You've seen some members come down. You've seen some members come up. You've seen active negotiations. He's obviously been hard at work at them himself.

And what we clearly see is an agreement about the need to get this done, whether it's the infrastructure bill or the reconciliation practice -- package, which has key priorities for the President -- key priorities. I think the Speaker referred



to it earlier today as the cause of her -- as her public li- -- as her time in public life. That's a bit of a paraphrase. I'll leave you to her words.

So, look, he sees this moment -- he knew that as we got closer to self-imposed timelines, which are important -- often these timelines can help make progress; we've seen progress made -- that more members would be out there advocating for what was important to them. That's happening.

We saw -- we would hopefully see more willingness to compromise; that's happening too. We're hard at work. And he's been through this before, so he's not too thrown off his game on it.

Q And then just one quick last one. Do you guys see a possibility of some type of framework agreement that could unlock the infrastructure vote today?

MS. PSAKI: That's what we're working towards.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. You talked about "self-imposed timelines" as opposed to the other real timelines for debt ceiling and the CR. The progressives don't seem to feel any sense of urgency about passing infrastructure, and the moderates, like Manchin, don't seem to feel any urgency about passing reconciliation. The only Democrat that I can think of who really has a sense of urgency is Terry McAuliffe.

Do you feel it -- does the President want this done in a certain amount of time, or does he also feel that this could play out over weeks and months and still come to the conclusion that he wants?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as I said a little bit earlier, we know -- and the President knows from his time in public office -- that timelines can help make progress. That's often how legislating happens on the Hill. And as the Speaker --

Q These ones aren't.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we would -- we would disagree with that. You've seen a lot of members out there advocating for their viewpoints, being very vocal about what they want to see; some coming up, some coming down. That's a sense of progress. And we're working at it hour by hour here.

Q But does he have -- does he feel that he needs it done by a certain time, like the end of the year?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to set new deadlines here for you. Obviously, we're trying to get it done now. We're working on it as of right now, today, and that's what our focus is on in this moment.

Go ahead. I'll go back to you, Weijia. Go ahead.

Q It's all right.

Q To follow up a little on what Phil was asking --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- what does the President want and what is he asking members of Congress to do on this infrastructure vote tonight? Is he calling progressives, and Republicans even, asking them to vote for it? Does he definitely want this vote tonight? Or is this all still this murky -- sort of trying to link these two things together and hope something emerges out of that?

MS. PSAKI: There's nothing really murky about what's going on here. I mean, we understand what progressive members



want. Right? They've been out there vocally talking to all of you about what they want.

It's clear we also need their votes in order to pass an infrastructure bill. They want to have a clear path forward on a reconciliation package. The President wants both pieces of legislation to pass. That's what he wants, bottom line. He's also going to work with the Speaker and the Leader to get that done.

So, what he's been spending his time on over the last couple of days is that -- having conversations with Senator Manchin, Senator Sinema, and others who have been very vocal about the fact that they're not quite there yet. And his objective is to try to get them there because that's what members of the Progressive Caucus are looking for in order to support an infrastructure bill, many compo- -- of components of which they support.

Q I guess, to put a finer point on it: If your choice is between a vote tonight that fails but sort of puts everybody on the record, or pulling the vote tonight and continuing deliberations despite it potentially upsetting moderates who feel like they've been promised this vote, what does the President prefer?

MS. PSAKI: We're working towards winning a vote tonight. We have several hours left in the day.

Q All right. Last one. What's the plan on the debt ceiling? I mean, Republicans have sort of made clear that they're not going to back any efforts. So it would seem at this point that Democrats' only hope here is to turn towards a reconciliation process on the debt ceiling.

I understand that you've made the point many times that Mitch McConnell is being hypocritical on this, that Republicans should support it, but it does seem now that the votes are on the table, that you're kind of pursuing this political point at the potential risk of default for the U.S. economy.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think that's a bit of a shorthand of what's happening, which I understand; it's a bit of a complicated thing.

But first, since you gave me the opportunity, it's not just Senator McConnell; Republicans are playing politics with an economic catastrophe, and they're treating a calamity for working families like a D.C. game. There are huge impacts here.

You touched on the fact, but let me give the public a little sense of that: an instant recession, 6 million jobs lost, \$15 trillion in savings wiped out, Social Security checks and payments to our troops blocked. Those are real impacts.

Republicans in Congress are treating this like a game. Let me give you some examples. Senator Rick Scott -- and this is a real quote, I will note: "This is going to be a...ball. I'm going to have so much fun." That's about the debt limit.

Senator Kevin Kramer: "It's sort of fun to watch."

And Senator Cornyn said yesterday that Republicans would use every tool at their disposal to slow Democrats from doing this on their own.

What we're trying to do right now is do it on their own -- do it on our own. That is what Leader Schumer is working to proceed -- working to move forward on.

And, obviously, as you know, Republicans have blocked that effort. So, of course, we are going to continue to press. We're not going to let up on that, on Republicans, to do what's responsible, to protect the full faith and credit of the United States, as has been done 80 times in the past.

We've also been working to do it on our own. We're going to keep working with Leader Schumer to get that done.

Q But you're not going to ask for reconcil- -- Democrats to push on reconciliation, (inaudible)?



MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to get into additional mechanisms here. We're going to continue. I don't think -- we're not going to, nor should anyone, let Republicans off the hook here, so we're going to continue to press them on it.

Q One of the things that Senator Manchin said today was that the, kind of -- the concern that he has around the 3.5 number is about how it would impact inflation in the economy. And I'm curious what the White House thinks of that concern and what you've done to allay that concern.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we've conveyed privately what we've said publicly and what many, many economists have also conveyed publicly, which is that what these packages will do is they will address -- address inflation and costs over the long term. That's one of the core reasons that people should be supporting them. So, if you are concerned about inflation, that's exactly a reason you should support these packages.

Q And would the President sign a reconciliation bill that does not include negotiating on drug prices?

MS. PSAKI: The President has obviously proposed that. He feels strongly about the need to make drugs -- prescription drugs, I should say, more affordable to the American public. I'm not going to negotiate further from here.

Q One other thing, just on a different topic: Jake Sullivan's conversations in Saudi Arabia. Did rising oil prices come up in those conversations? What was his message to the Saudis about alleviating some of the concerns that people have as they're paying a dollar more for gasoline now than they did a year ago?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah, so, I know someone asked about this the other day. And, obviously, the focus of his trip was on Yemen and working with the Saudis on Yemen. And our -- Tim Lenderki -- Lenderking was -- joined him in those meetings, who's our envoy to Yemen, to kind of figure out the path forward.

He was -- obviously, the price of oil is of concern. We have been in touch with OPEC. And I believe it was going to be raised, but I haven't had a chance to get a readout beyond that. I can try to do that for you after the briefing.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. So, putting the topline number aside, Senators Manchin and Sinema have been very opaque about what it is they want and do not want in this reconciliation bill. Without revealing details, does the White House and the President have a clear understanding of what it is each one of them wants?

MS. PSAKI: We've had a lot of private conversations with both of the senators about what their priorities are, as they've said publicly. And I think as Senator Manchin said publicly today, what their priorities are and what that looks like in a final package, that's still an ongoing discussion.

Q Are they asking for the same things? Are the two of them on board with the same (inaudible)?

MS. PSAKI: I'll let them speak for their priorities and how they line up with each other.

Q Okay. And then to build on what Justin was asking about --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q -- decoupling these two.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q Is the President worried at all about eroding trust with Republicans who signed on to the bipartisan deal after he



reassured them that it would not be conditional on reconciliation?

MS. PSAKI: Well, let's remember what's actually going on on the Hill here. Republicans in the House, led by Kevin McCarthy, are opting to vote against rebuilding roads and railways and bridges, despite the fact that the package was sent over with the support of 69 senators.

So, I think if you're asking about trust or whether people are delivering for the American people, you should direct it at Kevin McCarthy.

Go ahead.

Q I'm asking because the progressives have made so clear that they refuse to vote on infrastructure without a vote on reconciliation first. Why doesn't the President ask them to treat them separately?

MS. PSAKI: To treat -- well, I think the --

Q To treat the two bills separately.

MS. PSAKI: The President has made clear both are his priorities. He's also made clear he wants to get them both across the finish line.

What we're talking about now is the legislative process and how you get the majority of votes to get both of them done. And that's what he's working to negotiate and working to unify the caucus around.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks. And just one more --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- on a separate topic.

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Go ahead.

Q The National School Boards Association has sent a letter to the President asking for help from federal law enforcement agencies because of the violence and the threats that they're seeing across the country. Has the President received that request? And are you considering offering that help?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, let me say we take the security of public servants and elected officials across the country very seriously. And, obviously, these threats to school board members is horrible. They're doing their jobs.

Obviously, there are going to be different law enforcement authorities that will be related to each community and -- where this is happening, so we'd certainly refer you to them about any specific threats. And we'd encourage individuals to report any threats they face to local and state law enforcement agencies. And we're continuing to explore what more can be done from across the administration.

But again, a lot of this will be local law enforcement and how they can help ensure these school board members feel protected.

Q Thanks.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.



Q Thank you, Jen. Has the President at all lost control of his party? Depending on which perspective you're looking at this from -- you know, some people say that it appears that progressives are running the show, they're banding together and making their demands. Other people are saying it looks like Joe Manchin is playing president. So, who is in charge?

MS. PSAKI: Well, this is how democracy works. I know it feels foreign because there wasn't much that happened over the last couple of years. But how it works is the American people elect their elected officials, the President of the United States puts forward a bold and ambitious proposal, and then everybody negotiates about it, and they have different points of view. That's how democracy should work. We're in the midst of it right now. We're not trying to paint over how messy it looks from the outside. We know that.

But what -- the good news is, is that there is agreement that -- among most Democrats, if not every single one of them, that we need to get something done; that we need to do more to rebuild our roads and railways and bridges; that we need to cut costs for the American people; we need to address the climate crisis. There's agreement on that.

Now we're in the nitty-gritty details, which is very important, but that's the end stage of this process. And the American people should know that that's what the President is working on.

Q And I want to follow up on Weijia's question. So, if the bipartisan bill fails or is stalled or doesn't happen today, it would appear that these two bills -- the reconciliation and the infrastructure -- are linked. And the President, you know, made statements that Republicans should be able to vote for the bipartisan bill on its merits. He stood in front of the White House with a group of Republicans who negotiated that infrastructure bill. Is there a message that he has to those Republican senators, who voted to pass that bill on its merits, that this bill is somehow not linked with the reconciliation because of what's happening in the House?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we're working towards victory here and a win. If it doesn't pass, it's because it doesn't have enough votes. I think Republicans in the Senate understand that and know how this process works.

But that's what we're working towards now. That's what the President has been making phone calls about. That's what we have his schedule cleared for this afternoon. And I'm not going to make a prediction of what the outcome will look like several hours from now.

Q And then with the Vice President -- and she was a senator as recently as this year --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- why isn't she on the Hill helping to broker this deal?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the Vice President had the CBC over, the CHC last week. She's been making calls herself, just like the President. If it's constructive for her to go to the Hill or for him to go to the Hill, to have members down here, they'll do that.

We're ready and willing. This is our top priority. All hands on deck. But a lot of what's happening right now is discussions at a staff level, a senior staff level to get through these intricate details, and that's where the focus is in this moment.

Go ahead, Kelly.

Q Since we haven't seen the President much publicly this week --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- and you talked about leaving room in his schedule, can you paint more of a picture of what's happening behind the scenes? Are there calls happening from the Oval Office inviting members to the President? Does he have scheduled time with



scenes? Are these calls happening from the Oval? Is he inviting guests to the Residence? Does he have a whiteboard with his own whip count? Can you give us a picture of what it looks like (inaudible)?

MS. PSAKI: (Laughs.) I like that visual. I would say he does not have a whiteboard with a whip count. I can assure you he's more of a paper and pen kind of guy.

But, look, he's been meeting with staff, he's been getting updates from staff as they've been having engagements with the Hill. You all know who the senior members of his team are who are negotiating, whether that's Steve Ricchetti or Louisa Terrell, Brian Deese, Susan Rice.

What he's asked his team to do is -- including the policy members, which people don't always factor this in -- is be available to have conversations with members about questions they have, to help address any parts of it they have suggestions on.

So, he's getting regular updates. People are in and out of the Oval Office providing him updates on their individual conversations. And he's picking up the phone and calling people as needed, whether that's the Speaker or Leader Schumer or other members, to have a conversation about the status, to check on where they are, to follow up on maybe a conversation they may have had with his staff.

These conversations are happening from the Oval Office, but certainly he does some from the Residence; it depends on what time of day it may be.

Q And are you running your own whip count, or are you relying on Hill resources to do that?

MS. PSAKI: We're very closely in touch, as you know, with leadership on the Hill; the President himself is. Of course, we're certainly in touch with members ourselves -- ourselves about where they stand, where they may have concerns, or any hesitations.

Go ahead. I'll come back to you, Terry. I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Q We finally learned today Senator Manchin's position on his topline number. Senator Schumer has been aware of it since late July, and Senator Manchin said that he told the President already this \$1.5 trillion number. Why has the decision been made strategically to pursue Senator Manchin, Senator Sinema, and not try to, within the last couple of weeks, apply more pressure on progressives to take half a loaf and say, "This is low-hanging fruit; it's a \$1.2 trillion infrastructure plan. Let's move on that"? Why was that strategic decision made not to do that?

MS. PSAKI: Both of these are huge priorities to the President. I'd also note that when Senator Manchin was asked -- and he can obviously speak for himself -- but just since I've read the whole transcript here, he also repeatedly referred back to a document that went back to July 28th. I'd remind you all that this is an active negotiation and discussion, and it is incumbent upon members to put out where they stand and where they are. And as we've seen over the past couple days, that's an everchanging process.

So, before you make conclusions about what the end results will be, I would remind you to look at the last several days or even weeks about how these discussions have progressed.

Q But Senator Manchin said today he believes his position is -- it sounded to me like his position was firm. And he also said that if progressives feel that the Congress should spend \$3.5 trillion, that they should convince voters to send more progressives to Washington. That sounded to me like he's saying that, through the end of this Congress, he's not going to agree to \$3.5 trillion.

MS. PSAKI: We could certainly parse Senator Manchin's words, but I am certain he'll go answer questions again, and your colleagues should ask him more questions.



Q But why do you think that this is not -- why do you think that Senator Manchin's position on this is not final?

MS. PSAKI: Because this is an active negotiation, because he was pushed repeatedly during the gaggle that he did on Capitol Hill about where he stood. But again, I'm not here to speak for Senator Manchin; he is -- certainly can speak for himself and what his points of view -- views are. And I certainly encourage you all to keep asking him questions about where he stands.

Go ahead.

Q Back on the deadline that was set at the beginning of the week -- announced at -- this is a big week: Democrats are in charge here at the White House and in both houses of Congress. And they set the deadline; Democrats set the deadline. Now they --

MS. PSAKI: To be clear, they just set the date of a vote.

Q All right. You called it a "deadline." I was just using your words.

MS. PSAKI: Okay. Fair. But -- thank you for the clarification. It's -- they set the time of a vote.

Q All right. Democrats set this vote. Now they're going to miss it, fail to make it. Why is it that --

MS. PSAKI: We don't know that. It's only three o'clock.

Q Can you tell us if they're going to vote tonight?

MS. PSAKI: That's what Speaker Pelosi indicated her plan was.

Q All right. My question is: Why isn't it fair to see this as a failure of the President to get his own party to back him and his agenda?

MS. PSAKI: Why isn't it, before we've even had a vote and we don't even know where it sits, a failure of the President?

Q It feels like we're farther away today than we were on Monday.

MS. PSAKI: I don't think the President feels that way, and I don't think members of Congress feel that way.

Q You've talked about progress. Can you explain what progress is? You said it's people talking about where they are.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q That sounds like -- that sounds like an earlier part of the process when you had set a vote for the end of the week.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would point you again to what Speaker Pelosi said earlier today: In the end stages, the later stages of a process -- where we are now -- when you get closer to a vote, a time of a vote being set, that's when the negotiations get serious. That's when people start putting down bottom lines of where they stand. You've seen some people do that publicly. A lot more of it happens behind the scenes. That's what I mean by progress.

You've seen members come down in numbers. You've seen members come up in numbers. That's what we're working on -- to get to an agreed-upon path forward.

Q So there's progress, and it's people behind the scenes saying that -- where their numbers move.



MS. PSAKI: They've also said it publicly.

Q One more. A lot of Democrats are looking at what's happening, and they're saying Senator Manchin and Senator Sinema are holding this President and his agenda hostage. What would you say to that?

MS. PSAKI: I would say we have 50 votes in the Senate -- 50 Democrats in the Senate. So, we need the majority to win. That's how a bill becomes a law.

Q They've got the leverage.

MS. PSAKI: We need all 50 votes in the Senate to move this forward. That's where we stand now.

Go ahead.

Q I just wanted to go back to the debt ceiling for a second.

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q Democrats control all branches of government right now. Can you assure the American people and the financial markets that the United States will not default on its debt?

MS. PSAKI: That is absolutely what we're trying to accomplish. And I'd remind you that we would have gotten that done had Republicans done what they've done 80 times before -- supporting a bipartisan vote to do something that has been pretty standard in the past -- or if they had allowed Leader Schumer to move forward.

But, absolutely, we're going to do everything to prevent the federal -- us from defaulting --

Q But does the plan involve changing Mitch McConnell's mind -- Leader McConnell's mind in some way? Or is there a plan to just go forward using either reconciliation or --

MS. PSAKI: Well, Leader Schumer has already tried to -- already been working to move things forward. And it's been blocked by Republicans -- not just their vote; an effort to move it forward has been blocked.

Q But there clearly are ways -- I mean, getting rid of the filibuster, for example, for this particular vote would be one way to move forward. And is that something that the President would consider to avoid losing, let's say, 10 percent of the value of the stock market?

MS. PSAKI: I just outlined how concerning we are -- how concerned we are, which you just echoed -- or echoed different components of it. And that's an issue we take incredibly seriously. You've also heard Secretary Yellen on the Hill talking about this. We're not going to let Republicans off the hook. We don't think they should be. This is not a game. This is the faith -- full faith and credit of the United States.

We're working with Leader Schumer on a path forward, but beyond that, I don't have more to preview for you.

Q But you can do it without Republicans if you got rid of the filibuster for this --

MS. PSAKI: We could do it if they let us move forward, and they haven't. So I have no more details on the pa- -- on the legislative process.

Q And just on the reconciliation package, is \$1.5 trillion enough in your spending to cover Biden's priorities -- the President's priorities?



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MS. PSAKI: I understand that's a number that's been put out there. It's an active negotiation. I'm not going to weigh in from here on what is or isn't acceptable to the Democratic Caucus.

Go ahead.

Q A couple different topics. So, on immigration, there seems to be a real sense among advocates for immigrants -- people who have been fighting for legalization, for a pathway to citizenship -- there's a real sense of doom; people who described this, yesterday, even crying about the latest parliamentary ruling.

Do you -- what does the President -- you know, what would the President say or what does the President say if that -- if he is unable to move forward on any of the, sort of, big, sweeping promises that he made as a candidate to get -- to finally be the President to get something done on immigration?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we don't accept that. We're nine months into his presidency. And we share the disappointment. Obviously, as you know and you touched on, the parliamentarian ruled twice, in different ways, that it could be included in the reconciliation package -- or components, I should say, of immigration reform could not be included in the reconciliation practice -- process. Sorry, package.

That's disappointing to the President as well. So, clearly, now we need to figure out what the vehicle forward is.

I would say the President's plan is about certainly protecting DREAMers, farm workers, and others. It's also about investing in border security, making sure it makes sense and we're investing in it in a way that makes sense, and creating an asylum processing system that is actually functional, which I think we all agree it's not.

So there are several components of what he's proposed, and, certainly, we share the disappointment of many advocates that this wasn't included and the desire to find a vehicle to move it forward.

Q On one other separate topic: There have been a number of issues in the last, say, several weeks in which advocates -- allies of the President are describing him as "Trump-like." Most -- less in terms of his personality and sort of tone and tenor, obviously, but in terms of policy. Even today, a representative of the Cuban government describing the frustration with the President continuing to maintain Trump-era policies vis-à-vis Cuba.

Does the -- what's the President's reaction? And does he accept that in some areas of policy he is, you know, in agreement with the former President?

MS. PSAKI: So, just for the sake of argument here -- not argument, but discussion -- beyond the representative of the Cuban government who --

Q Afghanistan, immigration --

MS. PSAKI: Well, but who? Who are we talking about here?

Q Who --

MS. PSAKI: Who is saying that the President is like Trump?

Q Oh, I mean there -- there -- I mean, I could find you quotes. We have -- there have been quotes in our paper and quotes in lots of -- lots of folks have, depending on the issue, whether they are immigration advocates or, you know, folks in the Afghanistan -- who sort of watch Afghanistan. There have been numerous on-the-record descriptions of the President embracing -- and it's actually, in some ways, just a factual thing, right?



MS. PSAKI: But like on what policy?

Q Like the President has --

MS. PSAKI: On what policy? Sorry, I didn't -- you can -- you can name people but -- or what specific policies.

Q Well, I mean, for example, Afghanistan would have been the maintaining of the former President's decision to withdraw troops. On immigration, it's in maintaining Title 42 and keeping Title 42 in place. I mean they're --

Q Sub- --

Q Hm?

Q Submarines.

Q The submarine -- yeah. (Laughter.)

MS. PSAKI: Which one?

Q The submarine -- I'm just --

Q Yeah, the --

Q AUKUS.

Q The President was --

Q AUKUS.

Q -- yeah -- was compared to Trump --

Q -- to Trump. Well, the -- that's the French -- the French Foreign Minister compared him to Trump, in terms of how he handled the AUKUS negotiations.

MS. PSAKI: So, look, I'd take each one of these: On Afghanistan, the former President struck a deal without the Afghan government that, we heard the military convey yesterday, led to the demoralization of the Afghan Security Forces and the Afghan government, where he also released 5,000 Taliban fighters into Afghanistan.

I would say the President took a pretty different approach than that in ending a war that the former President didn't end -- something the American people strongly support.

As it relates to AUKUS, I'm not even sure what that's referring to, in terms of what they're comparing. The President worked with key partners -- Australia and the United Kingdom -- to come to an agreement that would help provide security in an important part of the world -- in the Indo-Pacific -- a priority that, frankly, getting out of the war in Afghanistan leaves space for us to spend more time addressing.

What was the last one? Immigration?

Q Immigration, Title 42, tariffs on China. I mean, there's --

MS. PSAKI: Title 42 is a public health -- is a public health requirement, a public health -- because we're in the middle of a pandemic, which, by the way --



Q The President and his allies --

MS. PSAKI: -- we would have made progress on had the former President actually addressed --

Q Right, but the --

MS. PSAKI: -- the pandemic and not suggested people inject bleach.

So, I think we're in a bit of a different place. I'm happy to discuss more examples. I think it's -- people would be pretty hard pressed to argue that the President has taken any aspect of the former President's playbook and used it as a model of his own.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q Senator Manchin has also said that he wants to means test as much as possible of this reconciliation package. Without getting into or speaking for the senator, as you've said, what is the White House's position on, I guess, means testing in this package?

MS. PSAKI: Well, you can call it whatever you want. Sometimes means -- when you say "means testing" -- not you, but when -- when it's said, it sometimes has it not the right connotation or the wrong connotation.

The President's proposals, many of them have been targeted at the middle class, as have these proposals and these initiatives, which means there's a cap on income through which you can benefit. That's what -- you can call it whatever you want, if you call it "means testing." The President is very open to targeting, by income, many of his proposals. And that's something that you can see throughout many components of his agenda that have been proposed and many that have passed to date.

Q Does the White House believe that you all are currently in alignment with Manchin on what those thresholds would look like or --

MS. PSAKI: It's an ongoing discussion. But, again, our objective is to -- is to target and focus on bringing relief to the middle class. That's what the President wants to see this agenda accomplish.

Q In an op-ed for USA Today this morning, Senator Bernie Sanders defended the \$3.5 trillion price tag, asking, "Please tell me what [where] we should cut." This came out before Senator Manchin gave his line in the sand.

Does -- without speaking for either senator, does the White House believe that there's any provisions that, if we are talking about getting somewhere between 3.5 and 1.5, that are absolutely -- you all cannot stomach not having them in the final package?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to put anything on the table here. It's clear, as numbers come down, which they will, that there will be cuts to different components. That's just the nature of the totals here. But we'll leave those conversations private. I know you're eager [sic] -- eager to know more, and hopefully we'll have more to share soon.

Q And then just finally -- just one more point. As you all have said from here, the public -- public polling has consistently found that many parts of this -- of both packages are very supported by the American people. The American people are also very consistently pessimistic about action in Washington.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.



Q Ahead of what we're going to be seeing, whichever way this vote goes tonight, what is your message to the public as they look at the ongoing situation in Washington about -- what is your message to the American people as they look at, as you've said, a messy situation, the chaos of democracy?

MS. PSAKI: We hope we can prove them wrong.

Q Okay.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead, Karen.

Q Thanks, Jen. I know "hour by hour" is kind of the phrase of the day.

MS. PSAKI: (Laughs.) Yeah.

Q But given that, can we expect to hear from the President today? Or what would have to happen for us to hear from the President today?

MS. PSAKI: We'll see. I can't make a prediction for you now, but it is certainly possible. It's also possible he has more meetings. He'll certainly make more phone calls, possibly moves. But I don't have anything to predict for you at this point in time.

Q And, last night, he went to the congressional baseball game. Did he go specifically to do some arm twisting or lobbying on infrastructure? And he spent some time with Republican lawmakers -- something he really hasn't done here at the White House. Can you give us a sense of what he talked about with those Republican lawmakers? What was the interaction like, the tone of those conversations?

MS. PSAKI: I think you're undervaluing his baseball prowess -- (laughter) -- and history, which he was honored for last night.

No, look, I think what the President -- and I saw him this morning; he was reflecting on how it was -- and I think this is a tradition -- the Congressional Baseball Game. You know, it's something that has been around for some time, where Democrats and Republicans go participate in America's -- one of America's favorite pastimes.

And you saw -- I think you all saw in photos, but for people who didn't see -- he visited with some Republicans down in their area -- dugout?

Q Dugout.

MS. PSAKI: I don't even know it's called. (Laughter.) Okay, dugout. Help me out here. Thank you. He visited -- (laughs) -- with some -- my husband is going to be really mad about that.

He visited with some Republicans. You know, he wasn't -- it wasn't meant to be a negotiation; it was a discussion about, you know, how things are going and work we're all committed to and just saying hello to them. And sometimes, you know, that's important and powerful too at a time where there's been so much division, where there's a view from many in the public -- as per the question earlier -- that people can't work together, can't get things done.

And this was an opportunity to have a moment to visit with, to see people that you've known be -- you've known a long time, to meet new people, and to move beyond partisanship to celebrate one of America's favorite pastimes.

Q Did he have a response to you about getting booed last night? Any reaction to that?



MS. PSAKI: He's been in public life long enough to know there's going to be some yays and jeers in most big, public places.

Go ahead.

Q Can I just follow up on that? Is -- in some ways, does his visit and the rituals of getting together sort of prove the point that the face time doesn't work? I mean, you still -- you referred to Leader McConnell and the Republican Party not willing to raise the debt limit. He's had plenty of face time with Leader McConnell for decades. Maybe it just doesn't matter and people are going to do what their political interests or what they believe their political interests tells them to do?

MS. PSAKI: Well, this is how the President views it: You're going to have strong disagreements, as he does with Senator McConnell about how he's approached the debt limit. You're also going to have areas where you may come to agreement on, as they do on infrastructure and the importance of rebuilding our roads, our railways, and our bridges. And it's important to maintain lines of communication and discussion to figure out where you can work together.

That's also how he views and approaches diplomacy. We can call out and -- publicly and argue strongly privately issues we have with foreign governments. But we also sometimes still look for ways -- most of the time -- for ways to work together.

That's been his approach. I would say that given the infrastructure bill passed with 69 votes, that's evidence of it working.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. You mentioned at the top that on September 17th the President signed an executive order authorizing sanctions to be used against those undermining peace in Ethiopia.

But right now, it doesn't seem the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed, is interested in peace. He refused to meet with Samantha Power when she was there. He has -- he is expelling U.N. staff from the country. He's taken other steps that prove that he has no interest in peace.

Why not take the sanction now? Why not impose the sanction now, or take more drastic action against not just him but also the President of Eritrea, who still have troops inside Ethiopia?

MS. PSAKI: Well, absent clear and concrete changes, we will. We're preparing to take aggressive action under this executive order to impose targeted sanctions against a range of individuals and entities. What we're communicating to the parties on the ground is that we must see meaningful steps within weeks to initiate discussions to achieve a negotiated ceasefire, allow in an unhindered humanitarian access, and ensure respect for human rights. Absent significant progress, we'll take action. And we have the methods to do that. That's why I rec- -- talked about the executive order.

Q And then on Guinea, we've had so many coups in Africa. The President of Guinea has been overthrown. The President of Mali has been overthrown. And we just had the Prime Minister of Sudan who just survived a coup attempt. And the President promised to defend democracy around the world. Is he failing in that promise?

MS. PSAKI: He doesn't expect that to be accomplished in nine months. He expects that to be accomplished over the course of time for advocating for democracy, for human rights, for imposing steps when warranted, and -- as we are considering right now in Ethiopia -- and obviously by having a strong national security team that can convey this on his behalf when he cannot.

Go ahead.

Q I just have a question on Africa.

Q Thanks, Jen. On --

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead. I'll come back to you next.



Q Thanks, Jen. Just to follow up on Mike's question on what the Cuban foreign minister said. Just to be specific, he said, "It's a pity that President Biden couldn't implement his own policy toward Cuba." And I just wondered if you had a specific response.

MS. PSAKI: I don't.

Q And there's a U.S. delegation -- top officials going to Port-au-Prince. What's the goal of that visit?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah, I have some details on this, including who is going. So, let's see. So, what they're doing -- one, we feel it's pretty pivotal to have high-level officials from here engaged in traveling back and forth to Port-au-Prince to have discussions with actors across the political spectrum to see what we can do to help support dialogue and development for the Haitian people.

We know it's clearly a profoundly challenging time on the ground, and it's crucial that we meet with a range of stakeholders to help move this process forward or help support the process moving forward in a way that's in the interest of the Haitian people. So, this is really an effort to be engaged, to be on the ground.

I can tell you -- and you may know this already -- that our newly confirmed Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere, Brian Nichols, is on this as a part of this delegation; our NSC Senior Director for the Western Hemisphere, Juan Gonzales, are there. They're meeting with civil society groups, political stakeholders, the Haitian government. And they're, of course, as I noted, discussing a Haitian-led process charting the path to democratic elections.

But that's the focus, as well as discussing how we can continue to help provide support for the migration response, security, recovery from the earthquake, and the COVID pandemic.

Q Jen, last question.

Q Secretary Mayorkas had said he expected the results of an investigation on the Border Patrol officers --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- on horseback by the end of this week. What's the status of that investigation?

MS. PSAKI: I know he said that; as I understand, it's still on track. But I would really point you to the Department of Homeland Security on any update.

Brian, why don't we go to you last?

Q Yeah, thank you.

Q Oh, you said --

Q Thank you very much. And I appreciate it. I'm -- I wanted to ask what the President's reaction is to Democratic lawmakers calling on him to lean more on Senator Manchin and Senator Sinema. What is the President's reaction to that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would say, first, the President's reaction is -- he's been in the -- he was in the Senate for 36 years. He knows, as does Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, what it takes at this point in negotiations. They've probably done this more, and more successfully, than any combinations of Democratic leaders in history.

And his approach has been: Yes, of course, it's listening. Yes, of course, it's conveying viewpoints and having sometimes, you know, direct and candid discussions, but he knows how to do this.



And a lot of people who are throwing stones aren't a part of these negotiations. They're one on one. So, I think they should leave it to him and others to get them done.

Q But there are members of his party that want him to be more actively involved, and have come out publicly and said, "We want to see the President more actively involved." What's his response to that?

MS. PSAKI: I would say that -- as I would point to something Congresswoman Jayapal said yesterday, "Right now, it's not a secret about what is the holdup." The holdup is that we need to get 50 votes in the Senate to move the infrastructure, to move the reconciliation package forward, in order for members of the Progressive Caucus in the house to feel comfortable that there's a path forward.

As many of them have conveyed, the President's role and work in communicating with Senator Manchin and Senator Sinema to help get that done is probably one of the most constructive roles he can play. And that's what he's been focused on over the last few days.

Q My follow-up question, Jen?

MS. PSAKI: Thanks so much, everyone.

Okay, last one, because I promised you. Go ahead.

Q Thank you. Jen, the President of Angola -- President João Lourenço -- was in D.C. last week, and he met with Jake Sullivan and Madam Speaker of the House. And I just want to check with you if the President made any comment about this visit, because Jake Sullivan, on the day that he met my president, he said he would brief the President on that day. So, I don't -- I'm trying to check with you if you heard any comments from the President (inaudible).

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any additional comment. I think we put a readout out about Jake Sullivan's meeting, but I don't have any additional comments.

Thanks so much, everyone.

3:19 P.M. EDT

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**From:** White House Press Office  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

September 30, 2021

**Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki, September 30, 2021**

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

2:34 P.M. EDT

MS. PSAKI: Hi, everyone. Okay. Welcome back, Dr. Harper.

Q Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Okay. I'm breaking my streak. I do have some items at the top for all of you. Lots going on in the world.

The U.S. government condemns in the strongest possible terms the government of Ethiopia's unprecedented action to expel the leadership of all of the United Nations organizations involved in ongoing humanitarian operations. We agree with U.N. leaders: This is a stain on our collective conscience and it must stop.

The action follows the release of reports warning that hundreds of thousands of people are starving to death in northern Ethiopia. We're deeply concerned that this action continues a pattern by the Ethiopian government of obstructing the delivery of food, medicine, and other lifesaving supplies that most -- to those most in need.

We call on the U.N. Security Council and members of the international community to take urgent action to make clear to the government of Ethiopia that impeding humanitarian operations and depriving your own citizens of the basic means of survival is unacceptable.

President Biden signed an executive order, earlier this month, enabling the U.S. government to impose financial sanctions



on those prolonging the conflict in northern Ethiopia. We will not hesitate to use this or any other tool at our disposal to respond quickly and decisively to those who obstruct humanitarian assistance to the people of Ethiopia.

One more items -- one more item. Some news from -- out of the First Lady's office: Today, Joining Forces -- the White House initiative led by the First Lady to support military families -- and the National Security Council released a White House report, signed by the President and Secretaries of 15 executive departments, which outlines the first round of administration-wide commitments and proposals to supporting military and veteran families, caregivers, and survivors.

In May of 2021, the Office of the First Lady and the National Security Council launched a Joining Forces Interagency Policy Committee with representatives from across the executive agencies to work collaboratively on priorities related to the families of service members and veterans, caregivers, and survivors.

This report details more than 800 -- 80, sorry -- specific commitments and proposals from across the administration and is the product of the Interagency Policy Committee's months of work.

Going forward, this committee will continue to advance these priorities, including those outlined in the report, through cross-agency working groups and will report results and updated plans annually.

Jonathan, why don't you kick us off.

Q Thank you, Jen. A few -- all on the dealings at Capitol Hill right now. Senator Manchin told reporters a short time ago that he told President Biden that \$1.5 trillion would be as high as he was willing to go for the reconciliation package. What was the President's reaction to that? Is that an acceptable number?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, I would say, as we've said many times, we're not going to outline private negotiations or private discussions, and we'll let the senators speak for that, as Senator Manchin did earlier today. The way the President sees it is that this is an ongoing discussion, an ongoing negotiation.

Here's what we know: We know that timelines help make progress. We've seen that play out over the course of the last couple of days. We know that compromise is inevitable. We've also seen that play out over the last couple of days. And right now, we're clearly in the thick of it.

I'd also note that during his -- during Senator Manchin's -- and obviously, I'm not his spokesperson; he can certainly speak for himself -- but during his Q&A he did on the Hill today, he also referenced the fact that he -- that there was a document from a couple of months ago. And I'll let him and Senator -- Leader Schumer speak to that. And he was repeatedly pushed and asked, "Would you go higher than 1.5? Would you go higher than 1.5?" I will leave it to all of you to determine if he answered that question.

But this is an ongoing discussion, an ongoing negotiation. And as I said yesterday, that's going to require all sides giving a little, and we're in the midst of that right now.

Q So on that -- so, key Democratic House leaders have said they will, quote, "stay here all weekend" to work to get a deal. Does the President plan to do the same? Will he be at the White House working this weekend, having visitors, calling and hosting congressional lawmakers?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as Speaker Pelosi said earlier -- and we're following the same motto -- we're taking it hour by hour here and making a decision and determination about what's most needed.

So, as it relates to what's even going to happen this afternoon, we're open; he's available. He's been making calls this morning. He's open to having visitors. He's open to going places. But we're going to make those decisions hour by hour.

So, the weekend is a little bit away, but I will tell you that this is the President's top priority right now: getting relief to the



American people; making sure we're lowering costs for the American people; we're addressing the climate crisis; we're rebuilding our roads, rails, and bridges. We've made progress, and we're still at work at it.

Q All right. And last one from me. One of the President's central promises when he was elected was to restore Americans' ability to be confident in their government again, to believe in institutions again. What is the White House's message to Americans right now who look at this and see a mess? Nearly a government shutdown, the debt ceiling is unclear, legislation not being passed, at least not yet, even though Democrats control all the bodies of government. And those Americans don't feel that they can be confident in government.

What's the White House's response?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, I would say: The President, the Speaker of the House, and the Leader have more experience getting legislation across the finish line than any group of Democrat -- Democratic leaders in history.

We're in the middle of it right now. It's messy, this sausage-making, on Capitol Hill. Policymaking is messy. There's negotiations. They all have representatives who are advocating for their points of view. That's democracy in action.

What I can tell them is that we're on the path to keep the government open. You just saw that pass the Senate. It was going over to the House. That's not just keeping the government open, that's getting relief to make sure we can -- we can take care of refugees, people who fought by our side in Afghanistan; that's to make sure we get relief to the Gulf Coast -- additional relief to the Gulf Coast. All important priorities.

And we would also tell them that the President is going to stop at -- he's going to use every lever at his disposal to fight to get this legislation passed -- these two pieces of legislation -- that will have a historic -- make historic investments. And he's doing it because he wants to have an impact on their lives.

But these type of packages, not a lot of precedent for them, but he's going to work at it. He's going to get it done. That's what he would tell them.

Go ahead.

Q Does the President see any strategic value in a vote failing on the House floor?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as Speaker Pelosi said earlier today, we're on a path to win. I don't want to even consider any other options than that. We're in it to win it. The President is also in it to win it. That's what we're working toward. It's only 2:40 right now; lots of time left in the day. And he's going to continue to engage -- stay closely engaged with her about the path forward.

Q You've repeatedly referred to this week -- to this moment as an "inflection point." How is the President viewing this moment, given where his caucuses are and where his members are?

MS. PSAKI: This moment as in "this moment" -- 2:40 p.m. this afternoon -- or just today?

Q As in it's deadline day for an infrastructure bill; he doesn't have the votes. One member of the United States Senate is about \$2 trillion below his topline number, and there's no clear way to bridge those gaps.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think the President views this as the last several days and even longer than that. His view is we've made some progress. You've seen some members come down. You've seen some members come up. You've seen active negotiations. He's obviously been hard at work at them himself.

And what we clearly see is an agreement about the need to get this done, whether it's the infrastructure bill or the reconciliation practice -- package, which has key priorities for the President -- key priorities. I think the Speaker referred



to it earlier today as the cause of her -- as her public li- -- as her time in public life. That's a bit of a paraphrase. I'll leave you to her words.

So, look, he sees this moment -- he knew that as we got closer to self-imposed timelines, which are important -- often these timelines can help make progress; we've seen progress made -- that more members would be out there advocating for what was important to them. That's happening.

We saw -- we would hopefully see more willingness to compromise; that's happening too. We're hard at work. And he's been through this before, so he's not too thrown off his game on it.

Q And then just one quick last one. Do you guys see a possibility of some type of framework agreement that could unlock the infrastructure vote today?

MS. PSAKI: That's what we're working towards.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. You talked about "self-imposed timelines" as opposed to the other real timelines for debt ceiling and the CR. The progressives don't seem to feel any sense of urgency about passing infrastructure, and the moderates, like Manchin, don't seem to feel any urgency about passing reconciliation. The only Democrat that I can think of who really has a sense of urgency is Terry McAuliffe.

Do you feel it -- does the President want this done in a certain amount of time, or does he also feel that this could play out over weeks and months and still come to the conclusion that he wants?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as I said a little bit earlier, we know -- and the President knows from his time in public office -- that timelines can help make progress. That's often how legislating happens on the Hill. And as the Speaker --

Q These ones aren't.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we would -- we would disagree with that. You've seen a lot of members out there advocating for their viewpoints, being very vocal about what they want to see; some coming up, some coming down. That's a sense of progress. And we're working at it hour by hour here.

Q But does he have -- does he feel that he needs it done by a certain time, like the end of the year?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to set new deadlines here for you. Obviously, we're trying to get it done now. We're working on it as of right now, today, and that's what our focus is on in this moment.

Go ahead. I'll go back to you, Weijia. Go ahead.

Q It's all right.

Q To follow up a little on what Phil was asking --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- what does the President want and what is he asking members of Congress to do on this infrastructure vote tonight? Is he calling progressives, and Republicans even, asking them to vote for it? Does he definitely want this vote tonight? Or is this all still this murky -- sort of trying to link these two things together and hope something emerges out of that?

MS. PSAKI: There's nothing really murky about what's going on here. I mean, we understand what progressive members



want. Right? They've been out there vocally talking to all of you about what they want.

It's clear we also need their votes in order to pass an infrastructure bill. They want to have a clear path forward on a reconciliation package. The President wants both pieces of legislation to pass. That's what he wants, bottom line. He's also going to work with the Speaker and the Leader to get that done.

So, what he's been spending his time on over the last couple of days is that -- having conversations with Senator Manchin, Senator Sinema, and others who have been very vocal about the fact that they're not quite there yet. And his objective is to try to get them there because that's what members of the Progressive Caucus are looking for in order to support an infrastructure bill, many compo- -- of components of which they support.

Q I guess, to put a finer point on it: If your choice is between a vote tonight that fails but sort of puts everybody on the record, or pulling the vote tonight and continuing deliberations despite it potentially upsetting moderates who feel like they've been promised this vote, what does the President prefer?

MS. PSAKI: We're working towards winning a vote tonight. We have several hours left in the day.

Q All right. Last one. What's the plan on the debt ceiling? I mean, Republicans have sort of made clear that they're not going to back any efforts. So it would seem at this point that Democrats' only hope here is to turn towards a reconciliation process on the debt ceiling.

I understand that you've made the point many times that Mitch McConnell is being hypocritical on this, that Republicans should support it, but it does seem now that the votes are on the table, that you're kind of pursuing this political point at the potential risk of default for the U.S. economy.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think that's a bit of a shorthand of what's happening, which I understand; it's a bit of a complicated thing.

But first, since you gave me the opportunity, it's not just Senator McConnell; Republicans are playing politics with an economic catastrophe, and they're treating a calamity for working families like a D.C. game. There are huge impacts here.

You touched on the fact, but let me give the public a little sense of that: an instant recession, 6 million jobs lost, \$15 trillion in savings wiped out, Social Security checks and payments to our troops blocked. Those are real impacts.

Republicans in Congress are treating this like a game. Let me give you some examples. Senator Rick Scott -- and this is a real quote, I will note: "This is going to be a...ball. I'm going to have so much fun." That's about the debt limit.

Senator Kevin Kramer: "It's sort of fun to watch."

And Senator Cornyn said yesterday that Republicans would use every tool at their disposal to slow Democrats from doing this on their own.

What we're trying to do right now is do it on their own -- do it on our own. That is what Leader Schumer is working to proceed -- working to move forward on.

And, obviously, as you know, Republicans have blocked that effort. So, of course, we are going to continue to press. We're not going to let up on that, on Republicans, to do what's responsible, to protect the full faith and credit of the United States, as has been done 80 times in the past.

We've also been working to do it on our own. We're going to keep working with Leader Schumer to get that done.

Q But you're not going to ask for reconcil- -- Democrats to push on reconciliation, (inaudible)?



MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to get into additional mechanisms here. We're going to continue. I don't think -- we're not going to, nor should anyone, let Republicans off the hook here, so we're going to continue to press them on it.

Q One of the things that Senator Manchin said today was that the, kind of -- the concern that he has around the 3.5 number is about how it would impact inflation in the economy. And I'm curious what the White House thinks of that concern and what you've done to allay that concern.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we've conveyed privately what we've said publicly and what many, many economists have also conveyed publicly, which is that what these packages will do is they will address -- address inflation and costs over the long term. That's one of the core reasons that people should be supporting them. So, if you are concerned about inflation, that's exactly a reason you should support these packages.

Q And would the President sign a reconciliation bill that does not include negotiating on drug prices?

MS. PSAKI: The President has obviously proposed that. He feels strongly about the need to make drugs -- prescription drugs, I should say, more affordable to the American public. I'm not going to negotiate further from here.

Q One other thing, just on a different topic: Jake Sullivan's conversations in Saudi Arabia. Did rising oil prices come up in those conversations? What was his message to the Saudis about alleviating some of the concerns that people have as they're paying a dollar more for gasoline now than they did a year ago?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah, so, I know someone asked about this the other day. And, obviously, the focus of his trip was on Yemen and working with the Saudis on Yemen. And our -- Tim Lenderki -- Lenderking was -- joined him in those meetings, who's our envoy to Yemen, to kind of figure out the path forward.

He was -- obviously, the price of oil is of concern. We have been in touch with OPEC. And I believe it was going to be raised, but I haven't had a chance to get a readout beyond that. I can try to do that for you after the briefing.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. So, putting the topline number aside, Senators Manchin and Sinema have been very opaque about what it is they want and do not want in this reconciliation bill. Without revealing details, does the White House and the President have a clear understanding of what it is each one of them wants?

MS. PSAKI: We've had a lot of private conversations with both of the senators about what their priorities are, as they've said publicly. And I think as Senator Manchin said publicly today, what their priorities are and what that looks like in a final package, that's still an ongoing discussion.

Q Are they asking for the same things? Are the two of them on board with the same (inaudible)?

MS. PSAKI: I'll let them speak for their priorities and how they line up with each other.

Q Okay. And then to build on what Justin was asking about --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q -- decoupling these two.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q Is the President worried at all about eroding trust with Republicans who signed on to the bipartisan deal after he

reassured them that it would not be conditional on reconciliation?

MS. PSAKI: Well, let's remember what's actually going on on the Hill here. Republicans in the House, led by Kevin McCarthy, are opting to vote against rebuilding roads and railways and bridges, despite the fact that the package was sent over with the support of 69 senators.

So, I think if you're asking about trust or whether people are delivering for the American people, you should direct it at Kevin McCarthy.

Go ahead.

Q I'm asking because the progressives have made so clear that they refuse to vote on infrastructure without a vote on reconciliation first. Why doesn't the President ask them to treat them separately?

MS. PSAKI: To treat -- well, I think the --

Q To treat the two bills separately.

MS. PSAKI: The President has made clear both are his priorities. He's also made clear he wants to get them both across the finish line.

What we're talking about now is the legislative process and how you get the majority of votes to get both of them done. And that's what he's working to negotiate and working to unify the caucus around.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks. And just one more --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- on a separate topic.

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Go ahead.

Q The National School Boards Association has sent a letter to the President asking for help from federal law enforcement agencies because of the violence and the threats that they're seeing across the country. Has the President received that request? And are you considering offering that help?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, let me say we take the security of public servants and elected officials across the country very seriously. And, obviously, these threats to school board members is horrible. They're doing their jobs.

Obviously, there are going to be different law enforcement authorities that will be related to each community and -- where this is happening, so we'd certainly refer you to them about any specific threats. And we'd encourage individuals to report any threats they face to local and state law enforcement agencies. And we're continuing to explore what more can be done from across the administration.

But again, a lot of this will be local law enforcement and how they can help ensure these school board members feel protected.

Q Thanks.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.



Q Thank you, Jen. Has the President at all lost control of his party? Depending on which perspective you're looking at this from -- you know, some people say that it appears that progressives are running the show, they're banding together and making their demands. Other people are saying it looks like Joe Manchin is playing president. So, who is in charge?

MS. PSAKI: Well, this is how democracy works. I know it feels foreign because there wasn't much that happened over the last couple of years. But how it works is the American people elect their elected officials, the President of the United States puts forward a bold and ambitious proposal, and then everybody negotiates about it, and they have different points of view. That's how democracy should work. We're in the midst of it right now. We're not trying to paint over how messy it looks from the outside. We know that.

But what -- the good news is, is that there is agreement that -- among most Democrats, if not every single one of them, that we need to get something done; that we need to do more to rebuild our roads and railways and bridges; that we need to cut costs for the American people; we need to address the climate crisis. There's agreement on that.

Now we're in the nitty-gritty details, which is very important, but that's the end stage of this process. And the American people should know that that's what the President is working on.

Q And I want to follow up on Weijia's question. So, if the bipartisan bill fails or is stalled or doesn't happen today, it would appear that these two bills -- the reconciliation and the infrastructure -- are linked. And the President, you know, made statements that Republicans should be able to vote for the bipartisan bill on its merits. He stood in front of the White House with a group of Republicans who negotiated that infrastructure bill. Is there a message that he has to those Republican senators, who voted to pass that bill on its merits, that this bill is somehow not linked with the reconciliation because of what's happening in the House?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we're working towards victory here and a win. If it doesn't pass, it's because it doesn't have enough votes. I think Republicans in the Senate understand that and know how this process works.

But that's what we're working towards now. That's what the President has been making phone calls about. That's what we have his schedule cleared for this afternoon. And I'm not going to make a prediction of what the outcome will look like several hours from now.

Q And then with the Vice President -- and she was a senator as recently as this year --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- why isn't she on the Hill helping to broker this deal?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the Vice President had the CBC over, the CHC last week. She's been making calls herself, just like the President. If it's constructive for her to go to the Hill or for him to go to the Hill, to have members down here, they'll do that.

We're ready and willing. This is our top priority. All hands on deck. But a lot of what's happening right now is discussions at a staff level, a senior staff level to get through these intricate details, and that's where the focus is in this moment.

Go ahead, Kelly.

Q Since we haven't seen the President much publicly this week --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- and you talked about leaving room in his schedule, can you paint more of a picture of what's happening behind the scenes? Are there calls happening from the Oval Office inviting members to the President? Does he have scheduled time with



scenes? Are these calls happening from the Oval? Is he inviting guests to the Residence? Does he have a whiteboard with his own whip count? Can you give us a picture of what it looks like (inaudible)?

MS. PSAKI: (Laughs.) I like that visual. I would say he does not have a whiteboard with a whip count. I can assure you he's more of a paper and pen kind of guy.

But, look, he's been meeting with staff, he's been getting updates from staff as they've been having engagements with the Hill. You all know who the senior members of his team are who are negotiating, whether that's Steve Ricchetti or Louisa Terrell, Brian Deese, Susan Rice.

What he's asked his team to do is -- including the policy members, which people don't always factor this in -- is be available to have conversations with members about questions they have, to help address any parts of it they have suggestions on.

So, he's getting regular updates. People are in and out of the Oval Office providing him updates on their individual conversations. And he's picking up the phone and calling people as needed, whether that's the Speaker or Leader Schumer or other members, to have a conversation about the status, to check on where they are, to follow up on maybe a conversation they may have had with his staff.

These conversations are happening from the Oval Office, but certainly he does some from the Residence; it depends on what time of day it may be.

Q And are you running your own whip count, or are you relying on Hill resources to do that?

MS. PSAKI: We're very closely in touch, as you know, with leadership on the Hill; the President himself is. Of course, we're certainly in touch with members ourselves -- ourselves about where they stand, where they may have concerns, or any hesitations.

Go ahead. I'll come back to you, Terry. I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Q We finally learned today Senator Manchin's position on his topline number. Senator Schumer has been aware of it since late July, and Senator Manchin said that he told the President already this \$1.5 trillion number. Why has the decision been made strategically to pursue Senator Manchin, Senator Sinema, and not try to, within the last couple of weeks, apply more pressure on progressives to take half a loaf and say, "This is low-hanging fruit; it's a \$1.2 trillion infrastructure plan. Let's move on that"? Why was that strategic decision made not to do that?

MS. PSAKI: Both of these are huge priorities to the President. I'd also note that when Senator Manchin was asked -- and he can obviously speak for himself -- but just since I've read the whole transcript here, he also repeatedly referred back to a document that went back to July 28th. I'd remind you all that this is an active negotiation and discussion, and it is incumbent upon members to put out where they stand and where they are. And as we've seen over the past couple days, that's an everchanging process.

So, before you make conclusions about what the end results will be, I would remind you to look at the last several days or even weeks about how these discussions have progressed.

Q But Senator Manchin said today he believes his position is -- it sounded to me like his position was firm. And he also said that if progressives feel that the Congress should spend \$3.5 trillion, that they should convince voters to send more progressives to Washington. That sounded to me like he's saying that, through the end of this Congress, he's not going to agree to \$3.5 trillion.

MS. PSAKI: We could certainly parse Senator Manchin's words, but I am certain he'll go answer questions again, and your colleagues should ask him more questions.



Q But why do you think that this is not -- why do you think that Senator Manchin's position on this is not final?

MS. PSAKI: Because this is an active negotiation, because he was pushed repeatedly during the gaggle that he did on Capitol Hill about where he stood. But again, I'm not here to speak for Senator Manchin; he is -- certainly can speak for himself and what his points of view -- views are. And I certainly encourage you all to keep asking him questions about where he stands.

Go ahead.

Q Back on the deadline that was set at the beginning of the week -- announced at -- this is a big week: Democrats are in charge here at the White House and in both houses of Congress. And they set the deadline; Democrats set the deadline. Now they --

MS. PSAKI: To be clear, they just set the date of a vote.

Q All right. You called it a "deadline." I was just using your words.

MS. PSAKI: Okay. Fair. But -- thank you for the clarification. It's -- they set the time of a vote.

Q All right. Democrats set this vote. Now they're going to miss it, fail to make it. Why is it that --

MS. PSAKI: We don't know that. It's only three o'clock.

Q Can you tell us if they're going to vote tonight?

MS. PSAKI: That's what Speaker Pelosi indicated her plan was.

Q All right. My question is: Why isn't it fair to see this as a failure of the President to get his own party to back him and his agenda?

MS. PSAKI: Why isn't it, before we've even had a vote and we don't even know where it sits, a failure of the President?

Q It feels like we're farther away today than we were on Monday.

MS. PSAKI: I don't think the President feels that way, and I don't think members of Congress feel that way.

Q You've talked about progress. Can you explain what progress is? You said it's people talking about where they are.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q That sounds like -- that sounds like an earlier part of the process when you had set a vote for the end of the week.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would point you again to what Speaker Pelosi said earlier today: In the end stages, the later stages of a process -- where we are now -- when you get closer to a vote, a time of a vote being set, that's when the negotiations get serious. That's when people start putting down bottom lines of where they stand. You've seen some people do that publicly. A lot more of it happens behind the scenes. That's what I mean by progress.

You've seen members come down in numbers. You've seen members come up in numbers. That's what we're working on -- to get to an agreed-upon path forward.

Q So there's progress, and it's people behind the scenes saying that -- where their numbers move.

MS. PSAKI: They've also said it publicly.

Q One more. A lot of Democrats are looking at what's happening, and they're saying Senator Manchin and Senator Sinema are holding this President and his agenda hostage. What would you say to that?

MS. PSAKI: I would say we have 50 votes in the Senate -- 50 Democrats in the Senate. So, we need the majority to win. That's how a bill becomes a law.

Q They've got the leverage.

MS. PSAKI: We need all 50 votes in the Senate to move this forward. That's where we stand now.

Go ahead.

Q I just wanted to go back to the debt ceiling for a second.

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q Democrats control all branches of government right now. Can you assure the American people and the financial markets that the United States will not default on its debt?

MS. PSAKI: That is absolutely what we're trying to accomplish. And I'd remind you that we would have gotten that done had Republicans done what they've done 80 times before -- supporting a bipartisan vote to do something that has been pretty standard in the past -- or if they had allowed Leader Schumer to move forward.

But, absolutely, we're going to do everything to prevent the federal -- us from defaulting --

Q But does the plan involve changing Mitch McConnell's mind -- Leader McConnell's mind in some way? Or is there a plan to just go forward using either reconciliation or --

MS. PSAKI: Well, Leader Schumer has already tried to -- already been working to move things forward. And it's been blocked by Republicans -- not just their vote; an effort to move it forward has been blocked.

Q But there clearly are ways -- I mean, getting rid of the filibuster, for example, for this particular vote would be one way to move forward. And is that something that the President would consider to avoid losing, let's say, 10 percent of the value of the stock market?

MS. PSAKI: I just outlined how concerning we are -- how concerned we are, which you just echoed -- or echoed different components of it. And that's an issue we take incredibly seriously. You've also heard Secretary Yellen on the Hill talking about this. We're not going to let Republicans off the hook. We don't think they should be. This is not a game. This is the faith -- full faith and credit of the United States.

We're working with Leader Schumer on a path forward, but beyond that, I don't have more to preview for you.

Q But you can do it without Republicans if you got rid of the filibuster for this --

MS. PSAKI: We could do it if they let us move forward, and they haven't. So I have no more details on the pa- -- on the legislative process.

Q And just on the reconciliation package, is \$1.5 trillion enough in your spending to cover Biden's priorities -- the President's priorities?



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MS. PSAKI: I understand that's a number that's been put out there. It's an active negotiation. I'm not going to weigh in from here on what is or isn't acceptable to the Democratic Caucus.

Go ahead.

Q A couple different topics. So, on immigration, there seems to be a real sense among advocates for immigrants -- people who have been fighting for legalization, for a pathway to citizenship -- there's a real sense of doom; people who described this, yesterday, even crying about the latest parliamentary ruling.

Do you -- what does the President -- you know, what would the President say or what does the President say if that -- if he is unable to move forward on any of the, sort of, big, sweeping promises that he made as a candidate to get -- to finally be the President to get something done on immigration?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we don't accept that. We're nine months into his presidency. And we share the disappointment. Obviously, as you know and you touched on, the parliamentarian ruled twice, in different ways, that it could be included in the reconciliation package -- or components, I should say, of immigration reform could not be included in the reconciliation practice -- process. Sorry, package.

That's disappointing to the President as well. So, clearly, now we need to figure out what the vehicle forward is.

I would say the President's plan is about certainly protecting DREAMers, farm workers, and others. It's also about investing in border security, making sure it makes sense and we're investing in it in a way that makes sense, and creating an asylum processing system that is actually functional, which I think we all agree it's not.

So there are several components of what he's proposed, and, certainly, we share the disappointment of many advocates that this wasn't included and the desire to find a vehicle to move it forward.

Q On one other separate topic: There have been a number of issues in the last, say, several weeks in which advocates -- allies of the President are describing him as "Trump-like." Most -- less in terms of his personality and sort of tone and tenor, obviously, but in terms of policy. Even today, a representative of the Cuban government describing the frustration with the President continuing to maintain Trump-era policies vis-à-vis Cuba.

Does the -- what's the President's reaction? And does he accept that in some areas of policy he is, you know, in agreement with the former President?

MS. PSAKI: So, just for the sake of argument here -- not argument, but discussion -- beyond the representative of the Cuban government who --

Q Afghanistan, immigration --

MS. PSAKI: Well, but who? Who are we talking about here?

Q Who --

MS. PSAKI: Who is saying that the President is like Trump?

Q Oh, I mean there -- there -- I mean, I could find you quotes. We have -- there have been quotes in our paper and quotes in lots of -- lots of folks have, depending on the issue, whether they are immigration advocates or, you know, folks in the Afghanistan -- who sort of watch Afghanistan. There have been numerous on-the-record descriptions of the President embracing -- and it's actually, in some ways, just a factual thing, right?

MS. PSAKI: But like on what policy?

Q Like the President has --

MS. PSAKI: On what policy? Sorry, I didn't -- you can -- you can name people but -- or what specific policies.

Q Well, I mean, for example, Afghanistan would have been the maintaining of the former President's decision to withdraw troops. On immigration, it's in maintaining Title 42 and keeping Title 42 in place. I mean they're --

Q Sub- --

Q Hm?

Q Submarines.

Q The submarine -- yeah. (Laughter.)

MS. PSAKI: Which one?

Q The submarine -- I'm just --

Q Yeah, the --

Q AUKUS.

Q The President was --

Q AUKUS.

Q -- yeah -- was compared to Trump --

Q -- to Trump. Well, the -- that's the French -- the French Foreign Minister compared him to Trump, in terms of how he handled the AUKUS negotiations.

MS. PSAKI: So, look, I'd take each one of these: On Afghanistan, the former President struck a deal without the Afghan government that, we heard the military convey yesterday, led to the demoralization of the Afghan Security Forces and the Afghan government, where he also released 5,000 Taliban fighters into Afghanistan.

I would say the President took a pretty different approach than that in ending a war that the former President didn't end -- something the American people strongly support.

As it relates to AUKUS, I'm not even sure what that's referring to, in terms of what they're comparing. The President worked with key partners -- Australia and the United Kingdom -- to come to an agreement that would help provide security in an important part of the world -- in the Indo-Pacific -- a priority that, frankly, getting out of the war in Afghanistan leaves space for us to spend more time addressing.

What was the last one? Immigration?

Q Immigration, Title 42, tariffs on China. I mean, there's --

MS. PSAKI: Title 42 is a public health -- is a public health requirement, a public health -- because we're in the middle of a pandemic, which, by the way --



Q The President and his allies --

MS. PSAKI: -- we would have made progress on had the former President actually addressed --

Q Right, but the --

MS. PSAKI: -- the pandemic and not suggested people inject bleach.

So, I think we're in a bit of a different place. I'm happy to discuss more examples. I think it's -- people would be pretty hard pressed to argue that the President has taken any aspect of the former President's playbook and used it as a model of his own.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q Senator Manchin has also said that he wants to means test as much as possible of this reconciliation package. Without getting into or speaking for the senator, as you've said, what is the White House's position on, I guess, means testing in this package?

MS. PSAKI: Well, you can call it whatever you want. Sometimes means -- when you say "means testing" -- not you, but when -- when it's said, it sometimes has it not the right connotation or the wrong connotation.

The President's proposals, many of them have been targeted at the middle class, as have these proposals and these initiatives, which means there's a cap on income through which you can benefit. That's what -- you can call it whatever you want, if you call it "means testing." The President is very open to targeting, by income, many of his proposals. And that's something that you can see throughout many components of his agenda that have been proposed and many that have passed to date.

Q Does the White House believe that you all are currently in alignment with Manchin on what those thresholds would look like or --

MS. PSAKI: It's an ongoing discussion. But, again, our objective is to -- is to target and focus on bringing relief to the middle class. That's what the President wants to see this agenda accomplish.

Q In an op-ed for USA Today this morning, Senator Bernie Sanders defended the \$3.5 trillion price tag, asking, "Please tell me what [where] we should cut." This came out before Senator Manchin gave his line in the sand.

Does -- without speaking for either senator, does the White House believe that there's any provisions that, if we are talking about getting somewhere between 3.5 and 1.5, that are absolutely -- you all cannot stomach not having them in the final package?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to put anything on the table here. It's clear, as numbers come down, which they will, that there will be cuts to different components. That's just the nature of the totals here. But we'll leave those conversations private. I know you're eager [sic] -- eager to know more, and hopefully we'll have more to share soon.

Q And then just finally -- just one more point. As you all have said from here, the public -- public polling has consistently found that many parts of this -- of both packages are very supported by the American people. The American people are also very consistently pessimistic about action in Washington.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.



Q Ahead of what we're going to be seeing, whichever way this vote goes tonight, what is your message to the public as they look at the ongoing situation in Washington about -- what is your message to the American people as they look at, as you've said, a messy situation, the chaos of democracy?

MS. PSAKI: We hope we can prove them wrong.

Q Okay.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead, Karen.

Q Thanks, Jen. I know "hour by hour" is kind of the phrase of the day.

MS. PSAKI: (Laughs.) Yeah.

Q But given that, can we expect to hear from the President today? Or what would have to happen for us to hear from the President today?

MS. PSAKI: We'll see. I can't make a prediction for you now, but it is certainly possible. It's also possible he has more meetings. He'll certainly make more phone calls, possibly moves. But I don't have anything to predict for you at this point in time.

Q And, last night, he went to the congressional baseball game. Did he go specifically to do some arm twisting or lobbying on infrastructure? And he spent some time with Republican lawmakers -- something he really hasn't done here at the White House. Can you give us a sense of what he talked about with those Republican lawmakers? What was the interaction like, the tone of those conversations?

MS. PSAKI: I think you're undervaluing his baseball prowess -- (laughter) -- and history, which he was honored for last night.

No, look, I think what the President -- and I saw him this morning; he was reflecting on how it was -- and I think this is a tradition -- the Congressional Baseball Game. You know, it's something that has been around for some time, where Democrats and Republicans go participate in America's -- one of America's favorite pastimes.

And you saw -- I think you all saw in photos, but for people who didn't see -- he visited with some Republicans down in their area -- dugout?

Q Dugout.

MS. PSAKI: I don't even know it's called. (Laughter.) Okay, dugout. Help me out here. Thank you. He visited -- (laughs) -- with some -- my husband is going to be really mad about that.

He visited with some Republicans. You know, he wasn't -- it wasn't meant to be a negotiation; it was a discussion about, you know, how things are going and work we're all committed to and just saying hello to them. And sometimes, you know, that's important and powerful too at a time where there's been so much division, where there's a view from many in the public -- as per the question earlier -- that people can't work together, can't get things done.

And this was an opportunity to have a moment to visit with, to see people that you've known be -- you've known a long time, to meet new people, and to move beyond partisanship to celebrate one of America's favorite pastimes.

Q Did he have a response to you about getting booed last night? Any reaction to that?



MS. PSAKI: He's been in public life long enough to know there's going to be some yays and jeers in most big, public places.

Go ahead.

Q Can I just follow up on that? Is -- in some ways, does his visit and the rituals of getting together sort of prove the point that the face time doesn't work? I mean, you still -- you referred to Leader McConnell and the Republican Party not willing to raise the debt limit. He's had plenty of face time with Leader McConnell for decades. Maybe it just doesn't matter and people are going to do what their political interests or what they believe their political interests tells them to do?

MS. PSAKI: Well, this is how the President views it: You're going to have strong disagreements, as he does with Senator McConnell about how he's approached the debt limit. You're also going to have areas where you may come to agreement on, as they do on infrastructure and the importance of rebuilding our roads, our railways, and our bridges. And it's important to maintain lines of communication and discussion to figure out where you can work together.

That's also how he views and approaches diplomacy. We can call out and -- publicly and argue strongly privately issues we have with foreign governments. But we also sometimes still look for ways -- most of the time -- for ways to work together.

That's been his approach. I would say that given the infrastructure bill passed with 69 votes, that's evidence of it working.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. You mentioned at the top that on September 17th the President signed an executive order authorizing sanctions to be used against those undermining peace in Ethiopia.

But right now, it doesn't seem the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed, is interested in peace. He refused to meet with Samantha Power when she was there. He has -- he is expelling U.N. staff from the country. He's taken other steps that prove that he has no interest in peace.

Why not take the sanction now? Why not impose the sanction now, or take more drastic action against not just him but also the President of Eritrea, who still have troops inside Ethiopia?

MS. PSAKI: Well, absent clear and concrete changes, we will. We're preparing to take aggressive action under this executive order to impose targeted sanctions against a range of individuals and entities. What we're communicating to the parties on the ground is that we must see meaningful steps within weeks to initiate discussions to achieve a negotiated ceasefire, allow in an unhindered humanitarian access, and ensure respect for human rights. Absent significant progress, we'll take action. And we have the methods to do that. That's why I rec- -- talked about the executive order.

Q And then on Guinea, we've had so many coups in Africa. The President of Guinea has been overthrown. The President of Mali has been overthrown. And we just had the Prime Minister of Sudan who just survived a coup attempt. And the President promised to defend democracy around the world. Is he failing in that promise?

MS. PSAKI: He doesn't expect that to be accomplished in nine months. He expects that to be accomplished over the course of time for advocating for democracy, for human rights, for imposing steps when warranted, and -- as we are considering right now in Ethiopia -- and obviously by having a strong national security team that can convey this on his behalf when he cannot.

Go ahead.

Q I just have a question on Africa.

Q Thanks, Jen. On --

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead. I'll come back to you next.



Q Thanks, Jen. Just to follow up on Mike's question on what the Cuban foreign minister said. Just to be specific, he said, "It's a pity that President Biden couldn't implement his own policy toward Cuba." And I just wondered if you had a specific response.

MS. PSAKI: I don't.

Q And there's a U.S. delegation -- top officials going to Port-au-Prince. What's the goal of that visit?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah, I have some details on this, including who is going. So, let's see. So, what they're doing -- one, we feel it's pretty pivotal to have high-level officials from here engaged in traveling back and forth to Port-au-Prince to have discussions with actors across the political spectrum to see what we can do to help support dialogue and development for the Haitian people.

We know it's clearly a profoundly challenging time on the ground, and it's crucial that we meet with a range of stakeholders to help move this process forward or help support the process moving forward in a way that's in the interest of the Haitian people. So, this is really an effort to be engaged, to be on the ground.

I can tell you -- and you may know this already -- that our newly confirmed Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere, Brian Nichols, is on this as a part of this delegation; our NSC Senior Director for the Western Hemisphere, Juan Gonzales, are there. They're meeting with civil society groups, political stakeholders, the Haitian government. And they're, of course, as I noted, discussing a Haitian-led process charting the path to democratic elections.

But that's the focus, as well as discussing how we can continue to help provide support for the migration response, security, recovery from the earthquake, and the COVID pandemic.

Q Jen, last question.

Q Secretary Mayorkas had said he expected the results of an investigation on the Border Patrol officers --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- on horseback by the end of this week. What's the status of that investigation?

MS. PSAKI: I know he said that; as I understand, it's still on track. But I would really point you to the Department of Homeland Security on any update.

Brian, why don't we go to you last?

Q Yeah, thank you.

Q Oh, you said --

Q Thank you very much. And I appreciate it. I'm -- I wanted to ask what the President's reaction is to Democratic lawmakers calling on him to lean more on Senator Manchin and Senator Sinema. What is the President's reaction to that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would say, first, the President's reaction is -- he's been in the -- he was in the Senate for 36 years. He knows, as does Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, what it takes at this point in negotiations. They've probably done this more, and more successfully, than any combinations of Democratic leaders in history.

And his approach has been: Yes, of course, it's listening. Yes, of course, it's conveying viewpoints and having sometimes, you know, direct and candid discussions, but he knows how to do this.



And a lot of people who are throwing stones aren't a part of these negotiations. They're one on one. So, I think they should leave it to him and others to get them done.

Q But there are members of his party that want him to be more actively involved, and have come out publicly and said, "We want to see the President more actively involved." What's his response to that?

MS. PSAKI: I would say that -- as I would point to something Congresswoman Jayapal said yesterday, "Right now, it's not a secret about what is the holdup." The holdup is that we need to get 50 votes in the Senate to move the infrastructure, to move the reconciliation package forward, in order for members of the Progressive Caucus in the house to feel comfortable that there's a path forward.

As many of them have conveyed, the President's role and work in communicating with Senator Manchin and Senator Sinema to help get that done is probably one of the most constructive roles he can play. And that's what he's been focused on over the last few days.

Q My follow-up question, Jen?

MS. PSAKI: Thanks so much, everyone.

Okay, last one, because I promised you. Go ahead.

Q Thank you. Jen, the President of Angola -- President João Lourenço -- was in D.C. last week, and he met with Jake Sullivan and Madam Speaker of the House. And I just want to check with you if the President made any comment about this visit, because Jake Sullivan, on the day that he met my president, he said he would brief the President on that day. So, I don't -- I'm trying to check with you if you heard any comments from the President (inaudible).

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any additional comment. I think we put a readout out about Jake Sullivan's meeting, but I don't have any additional comments.

Thanks so much, everyone.

3:19 P.M. EDT

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**From:** White House Press Office  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

October 6, 2021

**Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki, October 6, 2021**

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

4:13 P.M. EDT

MS. PSAKI: Hi, everyone. Okay --

Q Or maybe not.

MS. PSAKI: Oh, what did you think was going to happen? (Laughter.) I'm sorry to disappoint. Okay, sorry to disappoint. You never know who's behind the door.

Okay. Okay, tomorrow -- just one item for all of you at the top: Tomorrow, the President will travel to Elk Grove Village, Illinois -- a trip he had planned to do last week -- to meet with public and private sector leaders who have implemented vaccination requirements. The President will visit with a company local to the Chicago area that is imposing its own vaccine requirement ahead of the OSHA rule.

The President's message will be clear: Vaccination requirements work. Vaccination requirements get more people vaccinated, helping to end the pandemic and strengthen the economy.

That's why he's leading and implementing on -- implementing vaccination requirements for 100 million workers, two thirds of all workers in the United States, and that's why we're seeing growing momentum for vaccination requirements across the sectors and across the country.



Alex, go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. I was hoping to get you to weigh in on three different debt limit scenarios since there's so many --

MS. PSAKI: Great.

Q -- developing. So, off the top, Senator Mitch McConnell has proposed for Republicans to either support a short-term hike in the debt limit through December or to support a expedited reconciliation process where Democrats would vote to hike it long term. What's the White House response to that? Is there support for either of those from the President?

And then, I was hoping to get clarification on something the President said yesterday. He seemed to suggest that he would support a carveout in the filibuster, if all else fails, to hike the debt limit. Is that where he stands? Would he be open to that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, right now -- and perhaps this the awkwardness of 4:15, while people are still meeting on the Hill -- right now, Democratic members are meeting on the Hill to discuss options on the path forward. I think Republican members may also be meeting or discussing among themselves.

My understanding, at the point I walked out here, is that there's been no formal offer made. A press release is not a formal offer.

And regardless, even the scant details that have been reported present more complicated, more difficult options than the one that is quite obvious, in the President's view, and is in front of the faces of every member up on the Hill. We could get this done today. We don't need to kick the can. We don't need to go through a cumbersome process that every day brings additional risks.

So, they're discussing up there. We'll, obviously, be in close touch with them, as we will continue to be, and we'll see where we -- where we are at the end of today.

Q And then one foreign policy question. Does the White House have a position yet on the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act which passed unanimously in the Senate?

And just broadly in that same context, how do you respond to the criticism from Senator Rubio and some Republicans that the administration is sort of letting Beijing have some advantage on human rights abuses to try to win over their cooperation on climate issues?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we would absolutely dispute that notion. Unlike the former President, this President has spoken out against human rights abuses, has raised his concerns about human rights abuses directly with President Xi, and we have done that at every level from our national security team.

In terms of the legislation, obviously we have spoken out about our concerns of human rights abuses in Xinjiang. And I would also note that the President also led an effort to have coordination on the international stage to address this issue, unlike his predecessors.

But I'd have to talk to our legislative team about specific views on the -- in the piece of legislation. I know I spoke to it briefly last week, but I'll -- I'll come back to you with that.

Go ahead, Steve.

Q Jake Sullivan reached a deal with the Chinese today for President Biden and President Xi to have a virtual summit before the end of the year. Do you see this happening around the G20 Summit? And what's the advantage of them seeing each other face-to-face?



MS. PSAKI: Well, as I understand it, what came out of the discussions was an agreement to continue dialogue at a very high level.

So, what we've said, of course -- and we continue to believe -- is that leader-level engagement is an important part of our effort to responsibly manage the competition with China, especially given the coalescing of power in Chinese leadership.

We're still working through what that would look like, when, and, of course, the final details. So we don't quite have them yet.

Q Secondly, the President indicated last night that he had spoken to President Xi about Taiwan. Was this in their more recent phone call? And what exactly did he tell him?

MS. PSAKI: So just -- you didn't ask this, but some others have asked us -- he did not have a new call that you're not aware of.

Q Okay. Okay.

MS. PSAKI: So, just for full clarity on that. He has spoken with him twice, as you know.

And certainly, reiterating our position as it relates to -- you know, which is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act and our view that we need to uphold that commitment -- our commitment under the act -- that is what the President reiterated to President Xi last time he talked, and it is something that is raised nearly every time he speaks at a leader level and at other levels as well.

Q And last thing -- and sorry to prolong -- the Energy Secretary, Granholm, in a conference today did not rule out a ban on crude oil exports to keep U.S. energy prices down. Is that something that's seriously being looked at?

MS. PSAKI: I would defer to the Energy Secretary, but I don't have anything new to report on that from internally in the White House.

Q Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q Hey, Jen. So, I understand that you're obviously waiting for more details of this proposal from the Senate Minority Leader, but, you know, would the President accept a short-term deal to raise the debt ceiling while you try and find a broader path out of this crisis?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as I said a few minutes ago, we don't need to kick the can. We don't need to go through a cumbersome process that every day brings additional risks. And you heard many of the business leaders convey that, even as we look to risk tomorrow, the next day, as American -- the American people are looking at the retirement accounts, worrying about their Social Security savings, members of the military worrying about their payments. We don't need to incur that risk uncertainty.

And I think it's important to also remember we're at this point because Republicans in Congress treated the savings accounts and retirement savings of the American people, Social Security checks of retirees, and veterans benefits like a game of Monopoly, putting the stability and security of the American people at risk.

We're at this point because Republicans in Congress blocked efforts by Democrats to raise the debt limit and protect the full faith and credit of the United States, despite having voted for it three times during the Trump administration.

So, obviously, as has been reported, and the vote has been delayed, there's still an opportunity for Republicans to join us in



being adults in the room and ensure that people have confidence in the economic security and their own retirement savings.

Q The Minority Leader's proposal, though, seems to go at one of the key arguments that the President was making yesterday about why he's opposed to using budget reconciliation, which is that it would take time, it's cumbersome, it could lead to, you know, unexpected scenarios.

So, is the Minority Leader taking off the arguments against reconciliation by offering this one-month extension? And if not, then what are your remaining objections? Is it simply that you don't want Democrats to take a vote that will put a specific dollar amount on raising the debt ceiling?

MS. PSAKI: Democrats are very willing to be the adults in the room and take a vote to raise the debt limit. They're not even asking Republicans to do that anymore, since they've clearly shown their refusal to do exactly that.

The point I'm making is that there is a very clear -- the least risky option here that can ensure that there is confidence from the American people about their own checking accounts or about their own retirement savings, that's something Republicans still have the opportunity to participate in and be a part of.

Q And just on Afghanistan, if I could. The ISIS-K suicide bomber had -- you know, who was -- who carried out the attack that resulted in the deaths of 13 U.S. service members and dozens more Afghans had been released from the Parwan prison at Bagram Air Base just days before that attack took place, when the Taliban took control of that base.

Should the Biden administration have done more to secure Bagram or transfer ISIS-K prisoners outside of that? And do you now accept that this attack would not have happened had the United States retained control of Bagram?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I can't speak to the specific case. I'd let it -- leave it to the intelligence community to speak to that. So I'd point you to them.

I'd remind you that, as it relates to Bagram, there was a decision made to close Bagram because it wasn't strategically in the interest of the United States and our national security to keep it open with 5,000 troops there protecting Bagram at a distance that was far away from the capital and far away from where people from the embassy would be evacuated. So, that was the broad-based decision.

I understand you're asking me a different question than that, but I just wanted to reiterate.

Q But would he have made the same decision had he known that it would result --

MS. PSAKI: Again, I can't speak --

Q -- in the deaths of 13 service members?

MS. PSAKI: -- to this particular report. I'd point you to the intelligence community.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. You know, Congress has passed countless short-term government funding measures. They have funded the government for 48 hours before. Wouldn't a short-term debt ceiling hike be preferable to default?

MS. PSAKI: The preference would be just getting this done today so we can move on to more business for the American people. And that option is still on the table.

Q But you -- you know, the White House brought in all of these banking CEOs today to talk about how catastrophic it would be if the U.S. were to default. Why not send the markets that assurance, if you have the opportunity, that, at least



for the next eight weeks, the debt ceiling is going to be secure?

MS. PSAKI: Well, if we're looking at the best options, why kick the can down the road a couple of more weeks? Why create an additional layer of uncertainty? Why not just get it done now? That's what we're continuing to press for, and that's our first choice.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. A week ago, the National School Boards Association wrote to the President to say that their teachers feel like some parents protesting recently "could be the equivalent to a form of domestic terrorism." And then, the Attorney General put the FBI on the case.

So, does the administration agree that parents upset about their kids' curriculums could be considered domestic terrorists?

MS. PSAKI: Well, let me unravel this a little bit, because the National School Board Association is not a part of the U.S. government. I'd point you to them.

What the Department of Justice said in a letter from the Attorney General is that, quote, "Threats against public servants are not only illegal, they run counter to our nation's core values." That is true. These were threats against public servants, threats against members of the school board. Regardless of the reasoning, threats and violence against public servants is illegal. That's what he was conveying from the Department of Justice.

Q But the Department of Justice does now have the FBI on this. Something that the School Boards Association is asking for is for the administration to consider using the PATRIOT Act to investigate some of these school board protestors. So, would the administration be okay with the FBI using the PATRIOT Act to surveil these parents, if that is what they decide?

MS. PSAKI: I don't speak on behalf of the National School Board Association; I speak on behalf of this government. The Attorney General has put out a letter. They will take actions they take, and I would point you to them for more information.

Q And something that you said on Monday after some protestors were hounding Kyrsten Sinema into a restroom -- you said, "The President stands for the fundamental right of people to protest, to object, [and] to criticize." So does the President support the fundamental rights of these parents to protest at school board meetings?

MS. PSAKI: Of course. But he doesn't stand for the fundamental right -- I assume you don't either -- for people to take violent action against members -- public servants. And that's what the threats are about. And so, no, he doesn't stand for that; no one should.

Q Just one more. John Kerry says that after France was cut out of the nuclear submarine deal, and they were upset enough about being left in the dark that they pulled their ambassador, he went to the President and, quote, "The President, literally, had not been aware of what had transpired." So what else are you guys not telling the President?

MS. PSAKI: Of course, he was aware of the French being upset -- let me finish --

Q No, Kerry --

MS. PSAKI: Let me --

Q -- said he "literally..." --

MS. PSAKI: Let me -- let me finish.



Q -- "had not been aware."

MS. PSAKI: I know John Kerry quite well. He, of course, was aware -- the President -- of the French being displeased about the deal with the Australians. John Kerry also speaks regularly to the French, as a part of his role as the Climate Envoy. He's someone who also served as Secretary of State. He's someone I -- alone -- traveled to France with him 25 times.

He, of course, conveyed to the President what his read is -- was of what they were specifically unhappy about and how to help address it.

Q A follow-up on France, Jen?

Q You said -- you've said this President's first love is foreign policy. So, why doesn't he know about these things in real time?

MS. PSAKI: Of course, he knew about the French being displeased about --

Q John Kerry said --

MS. PSAKI: Let me finish.

Q -- he "literally had not be aware."

MS. PSAKI: Peter, I would encourage you to ask John Kerry specifically about the context of his comments. The President and John -- and the former Secretary are also good friends. He relies on his counsel, and -- as he does with many members of his national security team. But that certainly is not what he was intending to convey.

Q Follow-up on France?

Q Jen, if I could --

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q -- let me ask you quickly: Yesterday, the President said that he would be speaking with Mitch McConnell, as it related to the debt limit. Has that conversation happened? And what did he -- what did he tell him?

MS. PSAKI: They have not spoken. I think what the President has repeatedly conveyed is that he's certainly open to, as he -- as he has shown throughout the course of his presidency, having conversations with Democrats and Republicans when he feels it would be constructive.

Q He said they will be -- he said they will be speaking. So you were saying he was saying they will at some point, but there was no --

MS. PSAKI: At some -- at some point, if it's constructive in moving things forward.

Q Okay. Does the President trust Mitch McConnell to be an honest broker in this process?

MS. PSAKI: I don't think this is about trust. This is about -- he has known him a long time, but this is about whether you're going to be a leader and take steps that are not based on -- on political calculations and more based on what's in the interest of the United States and the full faith and of the United States.

Q The President discussed that there was a possibility of a filibuster -- a carveout -- as it related to the debt ceiling. If that

were the case, would the President be open to a filibuster carveout for voting rights? Where does that line get drawn for the President?

MS. PSAKI: The President was just simply conveying that there are a range of options that leaders on the Hill are discussing. I think you all have reported that, or your colleagues on the Hill have. Nothing more than that. We'll be in touch with them, and we'll see what the next best options look like.

But what is very clear is that there is an easy, risk-free option here that Republicans could allow Democrats to vote to raise the debt ceiling. We could be done with this today.

Q Can I just follow up very quickly? Why wouldn't the President, given that relationship he has with Mitch McConnell, just call Mitch McConnell and have this conversation with him? Why do this through public events?

MS. PSAKI: What's the conversation about?

Q I don't know. They have the relationship. He's the one who said he could bring the two sides together. So, wouldn't there be some value in having that conversation with one another?

MS. PSAKI: We know what the -- we know what the risk-free option is here. We know what the clear path forward is here. And I think the President has made no secret about his belief on that.

Go ahead.

Q Has the President had time to absorb the criticism of the Fed Chairman? And then, specifically, what does the White House believe should happen -- Fed policy about investments made by top officials there?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we obviously leave the independence of the Fed to an independent Fed -- Federal Reserve. And I'm not going to speak to that from here.

The President is confident in the Chairman of the Federal Reserve, and, beyond that, I don't have any personnel announcements for you.

Q Given that confidence, and also given what you just said, I mean, how close is he to making a decision on that?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything to preview for you at this point.

Q Yesterday, the President said he would sign a reconciliation bill that included the Hyde Amendment. You told us earlier this week that he remains opposed to that. So, is he backtracking on a campaign promise, something that's -- a lot of his supporters believe strongly in?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the President's position hasn't changed. The context of his comments were that there is still a negotiation happening. There's a range of views. His view remains what is reflected in his budget, which is that getting rid of -- which he released in May -- which shows that getting rid of the Hyde Amendment was a priority. That remains his position. This is a package that's still being negotiated, and he said that much -- as much last night as well.

Go ahead.

Q Just confirming what you told Peter: The President, when he signaled yesterday that it's possible that the Senate could change its rules, that -- we should not read that as him expressing support for that notion?

MS. PSAKI: The President was certain simply reporting out what you already have reported out, which is that there are a range of options being discussed on Capitol Hill.



Q I want to ask you separately: The ambassador-designate to India was seen, reportedly, at an event in Los Angeles last week at an art gallery event that featured the artwork of the President's son, Hunter.

The ethicists who have pointed to this arrangement have expressed concern that the President's son selling art could potentially put the President in a situation where those who seek jobs either in this administration or favors from this administration could put this White House in an awkward position.

Should -- first of all, what is the White House's response to the fact that an ambassador nominee was at this event? And secondly, should we expect to see more people who seek jobs in this administration attending events like this in the future?

MS. PSAKI: Well, to be clear, we've spoken to the arrangement that is run by the gallerist and Hunter Biden's representatives that the White House provided suggestions for. I'd refer you to the gallerist for questions about the event and -- as well as the representatives of Mr. Garcetti, in terms of his attendance.

Q But, Jen, just to follow up: This is exactly what ethicists said they were worried about.

MS. PSAKI: What is, specifically?

Q The fact that the President's son --

MS. PSAKI: That he reportedly attended an event?

Q Well, that the President's son would be selling artwork and then meeting, potentially, with people who would seek to buy it. If you have attendees at that event who might be seeking either jobs in this administration or favors from this administration, isn't it an awkward situation to put the President in?

MS. PSAKI: Again, the gallerist has spoken to -- we've spoken to the specifics of what the gallerist has agreed to and what recommendations were made. I've done that several times. I don't have additional details for it from here. I'd point you to them.

Go ahead.

Q So -- but does this White House not have any concerns about the photos that have emerged showing Hunter Biden at that gallery alongside prospective buyers?

MS. PSAKI: I'd point you to the gallerist on specifics of the restrictions that were put in place.

Q Great. But what about the position of this White House? This is a President who ran on being transparent and you've got -- are there no concerns?

MS. PSAKI: And we were very transparent about what recommendations were made to the gallerist, and I would again point you to them or the many times I've spoken about that from here.

Q And just to clarify, has the President's position on doing away with the filibuster changed?

MS. PSAKI: Nothing has -- no, it has not changed.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. The administration reportedly will invest \$1 billion into making rapid-testing COVID kits available. But there are concerns that the tests will be too expensive. I think a lot of Americans are wondering: Is there a universe where these available tests will be free or affordable, or at least less expensive than \$25 a pop?



MS. PSAKI: Yeah, so, there's no question, to your point, that there has been a huge increase and an interest in testing, and getting tests, and making them, and people going out and being able to get them easily.

We announced a \$2 billion investment in September. So, right now, we're on track to ~~double~~ [triple] the number of rapid, at-home tests on the market by early November. And we're also now on track to triple the number of rapid, at-home tests on the market by -- and thanks to the approval of ACON -- sorry -- this Monday, which accelerates the pace. We're now on track to triple the number. Triple the number, not double. I apologize.

So, right now, with these investments, we'll be at 200 million tests per month starting in December, with tens of millions more coming on the market in the coming weeks.

And we're also working to ensure that these tests, in addition to making them more available -- so you could go to CVS or Walmart, or wherever, to get them -- we've been working hard to make sure they are accessible and available in pharmacies, in community centers, in schools. So, we're also working to do that simultaneously and separate from that.

We recognize there's a need. We recognized we needed to do more. And we are pleased by the fact that we are now on track to not only triple by November but also quadruple by December.

Q There was a school shooting in Texas today. The school safety group Everytown says that this year has been the most dangerous back-to-school period for students since they began tracking the data in 2013. That's some 30 instances of gunfire on schoolgrounds since August 1st, and today's shooting means that number is out of date.

Is the administration discussing ways that schools can keep children safe from school violence -- from gun violence?

MS. PSAKI: Absolutely. I mean, one, I would say the President has been an advocate for doing more for gun safety measures through the course of his career. Not only did he fight to get the Brady Bill passed, he fought for the Assault Weapons Ban. It remains a cause of his public life in office.

We, of course, are frustrated by the inability to get commonsense gun reforms through Congress. We should be able to get universal background checks approved. They're supported by the vast majority of the public, as are assault weapons bans.

But in addition to that, we also have taken a number of steps, both by working through the Department of Justice to increase our strike force teams that are going out to specific communities and cities to help address violence. A lot of that is driven by gun violence. That's something that we've been implementing from there. And, of course, our Department of Education is engaged in this effort as well.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. Yesterday's hearing by a Facebook whistleblower underscored several major issues with the company, including, as many senators pointed out, issues with Section 230.

On the campaign trail, Biden said that Section 230 should, quote, "immediately be revoked" and that it should be revoked because, quote, Facebook "is not just an Internet company. It is propagating falsehoods they know to be false." Does the White House stand by that assessment for Section 230, given the revelations now?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the President has long said, as you referenced, that tech platforms must be held accountable for the harms that they cause. And he has been a strong supporter of fundamental reforms to achieve that goal. This includes Section 230 reforms. It also includes privacy and antitrust reforms as well as more transparency. That should also be on the table.

And he looks forward to working with Congress on these bipartisan issues.



He's also called, I would note -- because there were a number -- a range of issues that were raised during the whistleblower's testimony yesterday -- on the FTC to adopt rules to address unfair data collection and surveillance practice -- practices in his Executive Order on Promoting Competition in the American Economy.

So, yes, more needs to be done, reform should happen. We also need to do more on privacy and antitrust. And certainly, watching testimony yesterday raised a lot of those issues again for people.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. Does the President have any intention of speaking with Senators Manchin or Sinema at all this week?

MS. PSAKI: I can't predict for you day by day. I -- we have been in touch with Senator Manchin and Sinema at a senior-staff level, and certainly, I wouldn't rule it out.

Q I wanted to ask a follow-up question on an earlier question about the Hyde Amendment. The President has not been shy about his opposition, in recent years, to the Hyde Amendment. As you mentioned, you know, he made that clear in his budget blueprint; he made that clear as a candidate, when he was running for President.

So, can you explain why it is he's saying that he would sign this bill either way -- you know, with or without this language in it?

MS. PSAKI: He's reflecting that it's a negotiation. It's ongoing. We don't know what the final product will look like.

Go ahead.

Q Jen, can I ask a little bit about energy prices? There -- you know, gas prices in the U.S. are fairly high. We're seeing exceptionally high prices of certain energy products in --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- Europe right now. Is the U.S. domestically considering a release from the SPR to bring down oil prices at this time?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to make any prediction of that from here. I would note that we have seen, as you said, some ticks-up in parts of the country, also in re- -- as a follow-up to Hurricane Ida, because the hurricane hit a region that is a key center of the nation's oil production and refining infrastructure.

So that's something we've been working to focus on. And we took actions in the days and weeks following to help address that, including, at the time, authorizing several million barrels of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve exchanges.

We've also taken steps into -- including engaging with members of OPEC. We've also taken steps to reach out to the FTC to ensure they're using every available tool to monitor the U.S. gasoline market and address any illegal conduct. But I'm not going to make any other predictions at this point in time. We're continuously monitoring. We'll look to take additional steps as needed.

Q Are you or would you consider restricting LNG exports to, I guess, head off the type of shortages and price spikes that we're seeing in Europe -- in parts of Europe?

MS. PSAKI: I'm just not going to make any additional policy predictions at this point in time.

Q Can I, like, broadly say: Overall, these are fundamentally price crunches on, you know, nonrenewable sources of fuel. And we're heading into COP summit here.



MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q Do you worry that this could impact the pledges that countries are willing to make? Will other governments get weak-kneed about going green at a time when they're facing brewing, sort of, political crises at home over, really, skyrocketing prices of non-renewable fuel sources?

MS. PSAKI: We certainly hope not. I mean, I think what COP26 is about is to continue the conversation on the international stage, at the leader level -- that has been going on below the leader level continuously, basically -- about our need to work together to address the climate crisis -- one of the greatest national security crises the President sees. A number of other world leaders agree on that front.

Certainly, we all want to keep gasoline prices low, but the threat of the crisis -- the climate crisis -- certainly can't wait any longer.

Q Thank you.

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

Q Yeah, thanks very much. On the -- you sound pretty lukewarm about the McConnell idea. If the Democratic Caucus were to get behind it, is it a given that the President will get on board? Or --

MS. PSAKI: We'll see where things are. This is an ever-moving news cycle.

Q Because, you know, as we speak, there seems to be some positive vibes there regarding this, whereas you're giving, you know, quite the opposite.

MS. PSAKI: I would say, actually, in my read of it, there's a diversity of views in the Democratic Caucus, as is to be expected. And they're meeting now. We'll be in close touch with them, so I just don't want to get ahead of that process.

Q Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q I know we're still a few weeks away from the G20, but I wanted to see if the President would be open to meeting with Putin again at the G20. And does he feel like his last meeting with Putin was effective? Does the President feel like he's seen any change in Russia or Putin's behavior since then?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't have any predictions for you on the bilateral meetings. That's something that we're still working through at this point in time, every day.

And in terms of the -- how constructive his meeting was with President Putin, as he said at the time, we didn't expect it to be a light switch where, all of a sudden, everything would be hunky-dory in the relationship. It's not. We have remaining concerns, but it was an opportunity to express them at a high level, see what work could be done over the course of the long term to address it.

So I don't know that we're going to do a month-by-month assessment. It's something that we have continued conversations from -- with members of the national security team about many of the issues were raised. Those are ongoing. We're continuing to strive to make progress.

Q Can I follow up on that?

O And do you have any update on Afghanistan and how many Americans are still there? And is the -- do you -- does the



President feel the Taliban is cooperating still with efforts to get those remaining Americans out?

MS. PSAKI: We remain -- through appropriate channels of course -- in touch with Taliban officials. In terms of the specific numbers, I'd point you to the State Department. And they have the most updated number on that, given they oversee that process.

Go ahead.

Q Jen, there's been some reporting that Senate Democrats are planning to accept the short-term debt limit increase. So, given that we now have some reporting on that, can you just give us some guidance on what the White House thinks about that idea?

MS. PSAKI: Not yet. I have to -- I have to dig further into that reporting -- not to question it -- and talk to the team here about where things stand. And as far as when I came out here, they were still meeting, but we'll venture to get back to you as soon as we have something more concrete to convey.

Q Thanks, Jen. When the President was talking today about Republicans and the debt ceiling, he said, "If they don't want to do the job, just get out of the way. We'll take the heat. We'll do it." When he says, "We'll take the heat," what did he mean by that? What political risk is he acknowledging there for Democrats?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think one of the reasons we're at this point is because Republicans in Congress would rather bet on a misleading and inaccurate campaign season talking point. We're not betting that that's going to work, but his point -- the President's point is: Regardless, we're willing -- Democrats are willing to vote alone, without any Republican votes, to raise the debt ceiling. You just need to allow us to proceed with that vote.

Q And on the testing question that had come up, on rapid tests, this \$1 billion investment will quadruple the tests by December, in addition to everything else from the past couple of weeks. But why has it taken so long to get this rapid testing to this point where it will be -- by December, when Europe is flooded with rapid tests? Is it the authorization process and the timeline on that, or is it on the production side, or both?

MS. PSAKI: Well, one of the things we've been working on is to increase production, as you know, and also increase -- I would say that the demand for these tests here has increased a lot in the last several weeks, so we're also working to meet that and ensure that we are meeting the moment here in the United States.

In terms of the specific mechanics, I would encourage you to ask the COVID team that question.

Q Is that missing the moment though by -- you know, the demand has gone up in recent weeks because kids have gone back to school. Should this have been ready for back-to-school so that you could go to a CVS or any of the pharmacies or government sites and get these tests?

MS. PSAKI: I mean, again, we just announced, last month, an enormous investment: We're quadrupling availability by December, tripling by November. I think that is speaking to how seriously we take this and how we're working to ensure there are accessible, cost-effective tests out there and available to the public.

Go ahead.

Q What plans does the White House have to address the risk of oil spills from existing platforms, existing leases that are still operating?

MS. PSAKI: You mean like the one that happened in California?

O Correct.



MS. PSAKI: I would really point you to the Department of Energy for specifics there.

Q But, you know, the White House policies on stopping future leases possibly --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- things like that. But, you know, this is an ongoing threat, you know, that happens as, you know, offshore drilling continues. Is there an interest in investing in the infrastructure of the pipeline to enhance their safety, shutting them down? You know, what are your thoughts on that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, again, I think there -- as we've seen, and there's been an ongoing investigation about what exactly was the root cause here, so I don't want to, kind of, speak to that as that's been ongoing. But, beyond that, I would point you to the Department of Energy.

Q And two very quick things on the spill: Does the White House have a working theory on what caused the spill? And secondly, do you have an update on federal resources that have been dispatched to respond to the spill?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. I think I do have an update on federal resources. Let me see.

On the leak, just so I don't forget to answer this part, it's still under investigation. As you may know, the oil has stopped leaking; the pipeline has been removed from service.

In terms of our government efforts, 4,788 gallons of oil have been recovered and 11,360 feet of containment boom have been deployed. As of yesterday, six miles of shoreline have been cleaned, 328 response personnel with additional assets are on -- have -- on the way have been deployed.

As we said earlier this week, the Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration investigators are on the ground in the Unified/Incident Command Center. And on Monday, we also issued a corrective order -- action order to the operator mandating immediate corrective action, including performing a root cause failure analysis, integrity assessment, and remedial work plan.

Beyond that, Unified Command, of course, who are on the ground would have any additional steps we're taking and that are up to date.

Go ahead, April.

Q Jen, we see there are crisis moments -- everything is in crisis mode here -- but there are other issues that are percolating as well that some feel are at crisis levels -- Black agenda issues. The Vice President just had the heads of Divine Nine in a meeting -- frank, good, direct discussion, we were told -- about issues, particularly voting rights.

What is the President expecting when it comes to dealing with the Black agenda, particularly with those that have this small window, like voting rights and also the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act? What is he expected to do? What is he planning on committing to make sure these things happen?

MS. PSAKI: He wants to get both done. He wants to sign them into law. As you know, and you've told me in the past, the Black agenda is bigger than voting rights and bigger than the George Floyd Police and Justice Act.

Both are hugely important. The President has committed to getting them both done. He wants to sign them into law. We need Congress to move forward on both to get that done.

Q They are -- the Black agenda is huge. It's vast. But in this moment, there's a small window of time before elections



happen, and the concern is is that this President is not doing enough; he has not armed the Vice President or helped her to be able to fight the fight for these things.

MS. PSAKI: I would say the Vice President is more than capable of fighting the fight and the lead on this particular issue and any issue.

Q So how is he --

MS. PSAKI: She's the Vice President of the United States. Pretty powerful.

Q Right, but if the President -- the argument is, if the President is not supporting her with the tools that she needs --

MS. PSAKI: Which tools is she --

Q -- i.e. the filibuster --

MS. PSAKI: -- is she -- is he not providing to her?

Q -- i.e. the filibuster for voting rights, and that is in her portfolio.

You have one of her friends -- and a Democrat, a strategist -- Bakari Sellers, who says her portfolio is trash because he's not supporting her in the way that she needs to be supported for this to pass. So, what do you say? Can he, will he, shall he push for the filibuster for voting rights, even as he's doing it -- thinking about it for the debt ceiling?

MS. PSAKI: Well, that's not exactly what I conveyed earlier, but I will say that the President has conveyed many times that getting voting rights done, signing it into law is top of his agenda.

The Vice President, one of the most powerful people in the world, is leading this effort. He is her -- she is his partner. She's the first in the room, the last in the room, and he's going to continue to work by her side to get it done.

But beyond that and the legislative process and how that will work, I don't have any update on that front.

Go ahead.

Q Sticking on voting rights, with S.4 being introduced in the Senate: The President has, over and over, talked about the pathways that voting rights legislation could take, same thing that he -- apparently, yesterday, you said he was alluding to when he said "real possibility" -- right? -- talking about what could possibly happen on the Hill.

He's never talked about voting rights with any kind of real possibility of a filibuster carveout, and there's a real frustration - - some people have got arrested just yesterday -- among activists on the voting rights issues.

So, other than, "We're frustrated; we stand with you," what do you have to say to activists who are saying this White House, the President isn't doing enough on voting rights specifically?

MS. PSAKI: I think that was just the question I just answered, no?

Q But we're trying to get an answer from you. I mean, it's a legitimate question. And we're trying to --

MS. PSAKI: I'm not saying -- I'm not saying it's not. I'm not saying it's not. I would say that the President is also frustrated that voting rights has not been done. He's also frustrated that Republicans are so afraid of making reforms that would make it easier for people to vote that they have blocked this effort.



And he is frustrated that, despite everything that's happened around the country, there isn't more of a movement to get this done -- I don't mean by activists; certainly, there's a movement there -- in Congress.

What he was certainly -- what he was speaking to yesterday was the fact that there is live conversations right now about a range of options on the debt limit. He was not speaking to anything beyond that. And that's what is happening on the -- on Capitol Hill in this particular moment. That's it.

And so, I would convey to activists that he is absolutely committed. He wants to get this done. He wants to sign it into law. The Vice President just had meetings today on it. She is in the lead on this effort, as one of the most powerful people in this country, maybe even in the world, leading this effort.

Q But, I mean, he's the President. So, when I talk to activists, you know, they say, "You're the President. If you're frustrated, do something." Right? So, I guess that is the -- that is what we're constantly hearing --

MS. PSAKI: Congress is a separate body.

Q Sure, but there's things that he could --

MS. PSAKI: It's a --

Q There are things that he --

MS. PSAKI: It's a -- it's a separate body. You need 50 votes to change the filibuster. You also need the majority of votes to pass legislation into law.

He has made clear that he wants voting rights to be passed into law. He will continue to advocate publicly, privately, and continue to be a partner to the Vice President. He absolutely feels this is essential and we need to get it done.

Go ahead, Patsy.

Q Thank you, Jen. I want to follow up on Taiwan. Administration officials -- including yourself, I believe, on Monday, and Secretary Blinken today -- essentially have issued warnings to China urging China to stop its military activities in Taiwan. However, China has ignored that. In fact, it has dialed up sending even more military jets. So, what does that say about the credibility of U.S. deterrence on this issue?

MS. PSAKI: I think the Secretary of State spoke to this earlier. I don't think I have anything more to add to what he said.

Q Can I -- can I just follow up?

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q How concerned are you that these recent activities might actually escalate and then draw the U.S. into some sort of great power war with China? And so, what are you doing to maintain tensions beyond, kind of, ad hoc meetings like the Zurich meeting that Jake Sullivan is --

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't call a meeting with our National Security Advisor and his counterpart an "ad hoc" meeting.

Obviously, we raise our concerns through a range of channels. The State Department also put out a public statement -- a proactive statement on this, which is not something they do frequently, and the Secretary of State spoke to it today.

Q Do you have regular, you know, meetings to make sure that things like this don't escalate into something bigger?



MS. PSAKI: Of course, we do, as you well know.  
Go ahead.

Q I have another debt ceiling question --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q -- but zooming much farther out.

Earlier today, Jamie Dimon suggested getting rid of the debt ceiling altogether so that this scenario would not happen again.

Secretary Yellen seemed to lend her support to that idea of getting rid of the debt ceiling altogether in the past. Has she spoken with the President about that idea? And does he have a position on, sort of, the larger question of whether or not it should or should not be abolished?

MS. PSAKI: Right now, our focus is on raising the debt ceiling in the limited amount of time we have left to do that and do it without impacting the retirement savings accounts, the Social Security, and the economic security of millions of Americans. There's plenty of time to have a conversation after that.

Q And then a quick follow-up. You were asked about the -- the Uyghur anti-slave labor bill.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah. You asked me about it last week, too -- or the week before. I don't remember.

Q That's right.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q You've noted several times that the President has put out statements.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q There is sanctions as well. Does this administration -- does the President feel that there is anyone in his administration that is opposed to this kind of bipartisan legislation?

MS. PSAKI: I think it's all about taking a look at the legislation and figuring out if it's something we'd support moving forward -- every component of it -- and I'll check and see if we have a statement of administration policy on it.

Q But you don't know of anyone in the administration who currently opposes this?

MS. PSAKI: Again, we're not talking about whether or not we think the treatment of the Uyghurs is outrageous. It is. We've all said that. We're talking about a piece of legislation that has several components, and so I just want to make sure I go through the proper process with that.

Q On food shortages --

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q Hi. I was just wanting to talk to you about food shortages real quick. I'm not sure if you were looking here. But I just wanted to say that, on food shortages, we're seeing in schools the supply chain is kinked and affecting school lunches to the degree that kids are having bread -- or meat with no bread to make sandwiches, for example. And grocery stores, ahead of the holidays, are limiting the amount of food that you can actually purchase.

So, in regard to the debt ceiling talks, if the Senate votes "no" ahead of Thanksgiving, ahead of Christmas, and the coming holiday season -- if they say "no," what will that mean in the big picture for this nation and food shortages and other product delinquencies?

MS. PSAKI: Well, look, I would say -- I just want to dis- -- to make sure we're sending a clear message here about what the impacts of different things are. I know that's why you asked the question.

You'd have to get me more information about how broadly the school issue you're referencing is. I have not heard that from the Department of Education. It doesn't mean that it is not the case in certain schools, but if you have more information on that --

Q I do. (Inaudible) get it to you.

MS. PSAKI: -- come share that with me.

I would say that we know that unless Congress acts to raise the debt limit, what we're talking about here is people's retirement savings, their Social Security benefits, their economic security being at risk. That could mean all sorts of things, to your point about people's economic security, especially people who are at or below the poverty line or above the poverty line. And we're seeing the impact on markets across the country.

We don't want that to be the case, of course. That's why we're working to prevent this from happening.

I would say, in terms of the cost of meat and the cost of goods, we think -- there's a range of issues here. You referenced the supply chain. Another issue is the fact that there's not enough competition among big meat producers. It's something Secretary Vilsack spoke to when he was here just a few weeks ago and something our Department of Agriculture and the Department of Justice also are working to take steps to address.

Q Thank you for that, but just a real quick --

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q -- one -- one more on the shots. We do have an approval for FlowFlex -- I believe is the name of the rapid results test -- and we were expecting today to have -- hear more information about that. But I've written about this, and the New York Times is saying that one of the problems even in going to places like CVS to get a test is, in some places, you don't even -- you can't even buy a rapid results test. And being that school is in session and that we are going to be having more events, for example --

MS. PSAKI: So, Mona, that's exactly why we just announced a \$2 billion investment that's going to quadruple the number of tests that are available at schools, community centers, and also to purchase at home.

Q But that's future focused. I'm talking about --

MS. PSAKI: It's starting to happen now.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. Just to follow up on John Kerry's comments.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q You mentioned that he was, of course, aware of the displeasure after the deal was announced. Was he not aware of something before the deal was announced? Was he not aware that the French weren't read in? Was he not aware of the



French deal on conventional submarines?

MS. PSAKI: Look, I think, right now, what our focus is on is moving forward. As you know and as President Macron spoke to, they're going to be meeting next month. We're working to finalize the details of that.

As you saw, our National Security Advisor and members of our national security team have met with their counterparts or high-level officials in recent weeks.

So, at this point, what our focus is on is how we work with the French moving forward.

Q Thank you, Jen.

MS. PSAKI: Thanks, everyone.

4:56 P.M. EDT

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**From:** White House Press Office  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

October 6, 2021

**Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki, October 6, 2021**

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

4:13 P.M. EDT

MS. PSAKI: Hi, everyone. Okay --

Q Or maybe not.

MS. PSAKI: Oh, what did you think was going to happen? (Laughter.) I'm sorry to disappoint. Okay, sorry to disappoint. You never know who's behind the door.

Okay. Okay, tomorrow -- just one item for all of you at the top: Tomorrow, the President will travel to Elk Grove Village, Illinois -- a trip he had planned to do last week -- to meet with public and private sector leaders who have implemented vaccination requirements. The President will visit with a company local to the Chicago area that is imposing its own vaccine requirement ahead of the OSHA rule.

The President's message will be clear: Vaccination requirements work. Vaccination requirements get more people vaccinated, helping to end the pandemic and strengthen the economy.

That's why he's leading and implementing on -- implementing vaccination requirements for 100 million workers, two thirds of all workers in the United States, and that's why we're seeing growing momentum for vaccination requirements across the sectors and across the country.



Alex, go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. I was hoping to get you to weigh in on three different debt limit scenarios since there's so many --

MS. PSAKI: Great.

Q -- developing. So, off the top, Senator Mitch McConnell has proposed for Republicans to either support a short-term hike in the debt limit through December or to support a expedited reconciliation process where Democrats would vote to hike it long term. What's the White House response to that? Is there support for either of those from the President?

And then, I was hoping to get clarification on something the President said yesterday. He seemed to suggest that he would support a carveout in the filibuster, if all else fails, to hike the debt limit. Is that where he stands? Would he be open to that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, right now -- and perhaps this the awkwardness of 4:15, while people are still meeting on the Hill -- right now, Democratic members are meeting on the Hill to discuss options on the path forward. I think Republican members may also be meeting or discussing among themselves.

My understanding, at the point I walked out here, is that there's been no formal offer made. A press release is not a formal offer.

And regardless, even the scant details that have been reported present more complicated, more difficult options than the one that is quite obvious, in the President's view, and is in front of the faces of every member up on the Hill. We could get this done today. We don't need to kick the can. We don't need to go through a cumbersome process that every day brings additional risks.

So, they're discussing up there. We'll, obviously, be in close touch with them, as we will continue to be, and we'll see where we -- where we are at the end of today.

Q And then one foreign policy question. Does the White House have a position yet on the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act which passed unanimously in the Senate?

And just broadly in that same context, how do you respond to the criticism from Senator Rubio and some Republicans that the administration is sort of letting Beijing have some advantage on human rights abuses to try to win over their cooperation on climate issues?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we would absolutely dispute that notion. Unlike the former President, this President has spoken out against human rights abuses, has raised his concerns about human rights abuses directly with President Xi, and we have done that at every level from our national security team.

In terms of the legislation, obviously we have spoken out about our concerns of human rights abuses in Xinjiang. And I would also note that the President also led an effort to have coordination on the international stage to address this issue, unlike his predecessors.

But I'd have to talk to our legislative team about specific views on the -- in the piece of legislation. I know I spoke to it briefly last week, but I'll -- I'll come back to you with that.

Go ahead, Steve.

Q Jake Sullivan reached a deal with the Chinese today for President Biden and President Xi to have a virtual summit before the end of the year. Do you see this happening around the G20 Summit? And what's the advantage of them seeing each other face-to-face?



MS. PSAKI: Well, as I understand it, what came out of the discussions was an agreement to continue dialogue at a very high level.

So, what we've said, of course -- and we continue to believe -- is that leader-level engagement is an important part of our effort to responsibly manage the competition with China, especially given the coalescing of power in Chinese leadership.

We're still working through what that would look like, when, and, of course, the final details. So we don't quite have them yet.

Q Secondly, the President indicated last night that he had spoken to President Xi about Taiwan. Was this in their more recent phone call? And what exactly did he tell him?

MS. PSAKI: So just -- you didn't ask this, but some others have asked us -- he did not have a new call that you're not aware of.

Q Okay. Okay.

MS. PSAKI: So, just for full clarity on that. He has spoken with him twice, as you know.

And certainly, reiterating our position as it relates to -- you know, which is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act and our view that we need to uphold that commitment -- our commitment under the act -- that is what the President reiterated to President Xi last time he talked, and it is something that is raised nearly every time he speaks at a leader level and at other levels as well.

Q And last thing -- and sorry to prolong -- the Energy Secretary, Granholm, in a conference today did not rule out a ban on crude oil exports to keep U.S. energy prices down. Is that something that's seriously being looked at?

MS. PSAKI: I would defer to the Energy Secretary, but I don't have anything new to report on that from internally in the White House.

Q Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q Hey, Jen. So, I understand that you're obviously waiting for more details of this proposal from the Senate Minority Leader, but, you know, would the President accept a short-term deal to raise the debt ceiling while you try and find a broader path out of this crisis?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as I said a few minutes ago, we don't need to kick the can. We don't need to go through a cumbersome process that every day brings additional risks. And you heard many of the business leaders convey that, even as we look to risk tomorrow, the next day, as American -- the American people are looking at the retirement accounts, worrying about their Social Security savings, members of the military worrying about their payments. We don't need to incur that risk uncertainty.

And I think it's important to also remember we're at this point because Republicans in Congress treated the savings accounts and retirement savings of the American people, Social Security checks of retirees, and veterans benefits like a game of Monopoly, putting the stability and security of the American people at risk.

We're at this point because Republicans in Congress blocked efforts by Democrats to raise the debt limit and protect the full faith and credit of the United States, despite having voted for it three times during the Trump administration.

So, obviously, as has been reported, and the vote has been delayed, there's still an opportunity for Republicans to join us in



being adults in the room and ensure that people have confidence in the economic security and their own retirement savings.

Q The Minority Leader's proposal, though, seems to go at one of the key arguments that the President was making yesterday about why he's opposed to using budget reconciliation, which is that it would take time, it's cumbersome, it could lead to, you know, unexpected scenarios.

So, is the Minority Leader taking off the arguments against reconciliation by offering this one-month extension? And if not, then what are your remaining objections? Is it simply that you don't want Democrats to take a vote that will put a specific dollar amount on raising the debt ceiling?

MS. PSAKI: Democrats are very willing to be the adults in the room and take a vote to raise the debt limit. They're not even asking Republicans to do that anymore, since they've clearly shown their refusal to do exactly that.

The point I'm making is that there is a very clear -- the least risky option here that can ensure that there is confidence from the American people about their own checking accounts or about their own retirement savings, that's something Republicans still have the opportunity to participate in and be a part of.

Q And just on Afghanistan, if I could. The ISIS-K suicide bomber had -- you know, who was -- who carried out the attack that resulted in the deaths of 13 U.S. service members and dozens more Afghans had been released from the Parwan prison at Bagram Air Base just days before that attack took place, when the Taliban took control of that base.

Should the Biden administration have done more to secure Bagram or transfer ISIS-K prisoners outside of that? And do you now accept that this attack would not have happened had the United States retained control of Bagram?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I can't speak to the specific case. I'd let it -- leave it to the intelligence community to speak to that. So I'd point you to them.

I'd remind you that, as it relates to Bagram, there was a decision made to close Bagram because it wasn't strategically in the interest of the United States and our national security to keep it open with 5,000 troops there protecting Bagram at a distance that was far away from the capital and far away from where people from the embassy would be evacuated. So, that was the broad-based decision.

I understand you're asking me a different question than that, but I just wanted to reiterate.

Q But would he have made the same decision had he known that it would result --

MS. PSAKI: Again, I can't speak --

Q -- in the deaths of 13 service members?

MS. PSAKI: -- to this particular report. I'd point you to the intelligence community.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. You know, Congress has passed countless short-term government funding measures. They have funded the government for 48 hours before. Wouldn't a short-term debt ceiling hike be preferable to default?

MS. PSAKI: The preference would be just getting this done today so we can move on to more business for the American people. And that option is still on the table.

Q But you -- you know, the White House brought in all of these banking CEOs today to talk about how catastrophic it would be if the U.S. were to default. Why not send the markets that assurance, if you have the opportunity, that, at least



for the next eight weeks, the debt ceiling is going to be secure?

MS. PSAKI: Well, if we're looking at the best options, why kick the can down the road a couple of more weeks? Why create an additional layer of uncertainty? Why not just get it done now? That's what we're continuing to press for, and that's our first choice.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. A week ago, the National School Boards Association wrote to the President to say that their teachers feel like some parents protesting recently "could be the equivalent to a form of domestic terrorism." And then, the Attorney General put the FBI on the case.

So, does the administration agree that parents upset about their kids' curriculums could be considered domestic terrorists?

MS. PSAKI: Well, let me unravel this a little bit, because the National School Board Association is not a part of the U.S. government. I'd point you to them.

What the Department of Justice said in a letter from the Attorney General is that, quote, "Threats against public servants are not only illegal, they run counter to our nation's core values." That is true. These were threats against public servants, threats against members of the school board. Regardless of the reasoning, threats and violence against public servants is illegal. That's what he was conveying from the Department of Justice.

Q But the Department of Justice does now have the FBI on this. Something that the School Boards Association is asking for is for the administration to consider using the PATRIOT Act to investigate some of these school board protestors. So, would the administration be okay with the FBI using the PATRIOT Act to surveil these parents, if that is what they decide?

MS. PSAKI: I don't speak on behalf of the National School Board Association; I speak on behalf of this government. The Attorney General has put out a letter. They will take actions they take, and I would point you to them for more information.

Q And something that you said on Monday after some protestors were hounding Kyrsten Sinema into a restroom -- you said, "The President stands for the fundamental right of people to protest, to object, [and] to criticize." So does the President support the fundamental rights of these parents to protest at school board meetings?

MS. PSAKI: Of course. But he doesn't stand for the fundamental right -- I assume you don't either -- for people to take violent action against members -- public servants. And that's what the threats are about. And so, no, he doesn't stand for that; no one should.

Q Just one more. John Kerry says that after France was cut out of the nuclear submarine deal, and they were upset enough about being left in the dark that they pulled their ambassador, he went to the President and, quote, "The President, literally, had not been aware of what had transpired." So what else are you guys not telling the President?

MS. PSAKI: Of course, he was aware of the French being upset -- let me finish --

Q No, Kerry --

MS. PSAKI: Let me --

Q -- said he "literally..." --

MS. PSAKI: Let me -- let me finish.



Q -- "had not been aware."

MS. PSAKI: I know John Kerry quite well. He, of course, was aware -- the President -- of the French being displeased about the deal with the Australians. John Kerry also speaks regularly to the French, as a part of his role as the Climate Envoy. He's someone who also served as Secretary of State. He's someone I -- alone -- traveled to France with him 25 times.

He, of course, conveyed to the President what his read is -- was of what they were specifically unhappy about and how to help address it.

Q A follow-up on France, Jen?

Q You said -- you've said this President's first love is foreign policy. So, why doesn't he know about these things in real time?

MS. PSAKI: Of course, he knew about the French being displeased about --

Q John Kerry said --

MS. PSAKI: Let me finish.

Q -- he "literally had not be aware."

MS. PSAKI: Peter, I would encourage you to ask John Kerry specifically about the context of his comments. The President and John -- and the former Secretary are also good friends. He relies on his counsel, and -- as he does with many members of his national security team. But that certainly is not what he was intending to convey.

Q Follow-up on France?

Q Jen, if I could --

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q -- let me ask you quickly: Yesterday, the President said that he would be speaking with Mitch McConnell, as it related to the debt limit. Has that conversation happened? And what did he -- what did he tell him?

MS. PSAKI: They have not spoken. I think what the President has repeatedly conveyed is that he's certainly open to, as he -- as he has shown throughout the course of his presidency, having conversations with Democrats and Republicans when he feels it would be constructive.

Q He said they will be -- he said they will be speaking. So you were saying he was saying they will at some point, but there was no --

MS. PSAKI: At some -- at some point, if it's constructive in moving things forward.

Q Okay. Does the President trust Mitch McConnell to be an honest broker in this process?

MS. PSAKI: I don't think this is about trust. This is about -- he has known him a long time, but this is about whether you're going to be a leader and take steps that are not based on -- on political calculations and more based on what's in the interest of the United States and the full faith and of the United States.

Q The President discussed that there was a possibility of a filibuster -- a carveout -- as it related to the debt ceiling. If that

were the case, would the President be open to a filibuster carveout for voting rights? Where does that line get drawn for the President?

MS. PSAKI: The President was just simply conveying that there are a range of options that leaders on the Hill are discussing. I think you all have reported that, or your colleagues on the Hill have. Nothing more than that. We'll be in touch with them, and we'll see what the next best options look like.

But what is very clear is that there is an easy, risk-free option here that Republicans could allow Democrats to vote to raise the debt ceiling. We could be done with this today.

Q Can I just follow up very quickly? Why wouldn't the President, given that relationship he has with Mitch McConnell, just call Mitch McConnell and have this conversation with him? Why do this through public events?

MS. PSAKI: What's the conversation about?

Q I don't know. They have the relationship. He's the one who said he could bring the two sides together. So, wouldn't there be some value in having that conversation with one another?

MS. PSAKI: We know what the -- we know what the risk-free option is here. We know what the clear path forward is here. And I think the President has made no secret about his belief on that.

Go ahead.

Q Has the President had time to absorb the criticism of the Fed Chairman? And then, specifically, what does the White House believe should happen -- Fed policy about investments made by top officials there?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we obviously leave the independence of the Fed to an independent Fed -- Federal Reserve. And I'm not going to speak to that from here.

The President is confident in the Chairman of the Federal Reserve, and, beyond that, I don't have any personnel announcements for you.

Q Given that confidence, and also given what you just said, I mean, how close is he to making a decision on that?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything to preview for you at this point.

Q Yesterday, the President said he would sign a reconciliation bill that included the Hyde Amendment. You told us earlier this week that he remains opposed to that. So, is he backtracking on a campaign promise, something that's -- a lot of his supporters believe strongly in?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the President's position hasn't changed. The context of his comments were that there is still a negotiation happening. There's a range of views. His view remains what is reflected in his budget, which is that getting rid of -- which he released in May -- which shows that getting rid of the Hyde Amendment was a priority. That remains his position. This is a package that's still being negotiated, and he said that much -- as much last night as well.

Go ahead.

Q Just confirming what you told Peter: The President, when he signaled yesterday that it's possible that the Senate could change its rules, that -- we should not read that as him expressing support for that notion?

MS. PSAKI: The President was certain simply reporting out what you already have reported out, which is that there are a range of options being discussed on Capitol Hill.



Q I want to ask you separately: The ambassador-designate to India was seen, reportedly, at an event in Los Angeles last week at an art gallery event that featured the artwork of the President's son, Hunter.

The ethicists who have pointed to this arrangement have expressed concern that the President's son selling art could potentially put the President in a situation where those who seek jobs either in this administration or favors from this administration could put this White House in an awkward position.

Should -- first of all, what is the White House's response to the fact that an ambassador nominee was at this event? And secondly, should we expect to see more people who seek jobs in this administration attending events like this in the future?

MS. PSAKI: Well, to be clear, we've spoken to the arrangement that is run by the gallerist and Hunter Biden's representatives that the White House provided suggestions for. I'd refer you to the gallerist for questions about the event and -- as well as the representatives of Mr. Garcetti, in terms of his attendance.

Q But, Jen, just to follow up: This is exactly what ethicists said they were worried about.

MS. PSAKI: What is, specifically?

Q The fact that the President's son --

MS. PSAKI: That he reportedly attended an event?

Q Well, that the President's son would be selling artwork and then meeting, potentially, with people who would seek to buy it. If you have attendees at that event who might be seeking either jobs in this administration or favors from this administration, isn't it an awkward situation to put the President in?

MS. PSAKI: Again, the gallerist has spoken to -- we've spoken to the specifics of what the gallerist has agreed to and what recommendations were made. I've done that several times. I don't have additional details for it from here. I'd point you to them.

Go ahead.

Q So -- but does this White House not have any concerns about the photos that have emerged showing Hunter Biden at that gallery alongside prospective buyers?

MS. PSAKI: I'd point you to the gallerist on specifics of the restrictions that were put in place.

Q Great. But what about the position of this White House? This is a President who ran on being transparent and you've got -- are there no concerns?

MS. PSAKI: And we were very transparent about what recommendations were made to the gallerist, and I would again point you to them or the many times I've spoken about that from here.

Q And just to clarify, has the President's position on doing away with the filibuster changed?

MS. PSAKI: Nothing has -- no, it has not changed.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. The administration reportedly will invest \$1 billion into making rapid-testing COVID kits available. But there are concerns that the tests will be too expensive. I think a lot of Americans are wondering: Is there a universe where these available tests will be free or affordable, or at least less expensive than \$25 a pop?



MS. PSAKI: Yeah, so, there's no question, to your point, that there has been a huge increase and an interest in testing, and getting tests, and making them, and people going out and being able to get them easily.

We announced a \$2 billion investment in September. So, right now, we're on track to ~~double~~ [triple] the number of rapid, at-home tests on the market by early November. And we're also now on track to triple the number of rapid, at-home tests on the market by -- and thanks to the approval of ACON -- sorry -- this Monday, which accelerates the pace. We're now on track to triple the number. Triple the number, not double. I apologize.

So, right now, with these investments, we'll be at 200 million tests per month starting in December, with tens of millions more coming on the market in the coming weeks.

And we're also working to ensure that these tests, in addition to making them more available -- so you could go to CVS or Walmart, or wherever, to get them -- we've been working hard to make sure they are accessible and available in pharmacies, in community centers, in schools. So, we're also working to do that simultaneously and separate from that.

We recognize there's a need. We recognized we needed to do more. And we are pleased by the fact that we are now on track to not only triple by November but also quadruple by December.

Q There was a school shooting in Texas today. The school safety group Everytown says that this year has been the most dangerous back-to-school period for students since they began tracking the data in 2013. That's some 30 instances of gunfire on schoolgrounds since August 1st, and today's shooting means that number is out of date.

Is the administration discussing ways that schools can keep children safe from school violence -- from gun violence?

MS. PSAKI: Absolutely. I mean, one, I would say the President has been an advocate for doing more for gun safety measures through the course of his career. Not only did he fight to get the Brady Bill passed, he fought for the Assault Weapons Ban. It remains a cause of his public life in office.

We, of course, are frustrated by the inability to get commonsense gun reforms through Congress. We should be able to get universal background checks approved. They're supported by the vast majority of the public, as are assault weapons bans.

But in addition to that, we also have taken a number of steps, both by working through the Department of Justice to increase our strike force teams that are going out to specific communities and cities to help address violence. A lot of that is driven by gun violence. That's something that we've been implementing from there. And, of course, our Department of Education is engaged in this effort as well.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. Yesterday's hearing by a Facebook whistleblower underscored several major issues with the company, including, as many senators pointed out, issues with Section 230.

On the campaign trail, Biden said that Section 230 should, quote, "immediately be revoked" and that it should be revoked because, quote, Facebook "is not just an Internet company. It is propagating falsehoods they know to be false." Does the White House stand by that assessment for Section 230, given the revelations now?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the President has long said, as you referenced, that tech platforms must be held accountable for the harms that they cause. And he has been a strong supporter of fundamental reforms to achieve that goal. This includes Section 230 reforms. It also includes privacy and antitrust reforms as well as more transparency. That should also be on the table.

And he looks forward to working with Congress on these bipartisan issues.



He's also called, I would note -- because there were a number -- a range of issues that were raised during the whistleblower's testimony yesterday -- on the FTC to adopt rules to address unfair data collection and surveillance practice -- practices in his Executive Order on Promoting Competition in the American Economy.

So, yes, more needs to be done, reform should happen. We also need to do more on privacy and antitrust. And certainly, watching testimony yesterday raised a lot of those issues again for people.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. Does the President have any intention of speaking with Senators Manchin or Sinema at all this week?

MS. PSAKI: I can't predict for you day by day. I -- we have been in touch with Senator Manchin and Sinema at a senior-staff level, and certainly, I wouldn't rule it out.

Q I wanted to ask a follow-up question on an earlier question about the Hyde Amendment. The President has not been shy about his opposition, in recent years, to the Hyde Amendment. As you mentioned, you know, he made that clear in his budget blueprint; he made that clear as a candidate, when he was running for President.

So, can you explain why it is he's saying that he would sign this bill either way -- you know, with or without this language in it?

MS. PSAKI: He's reflecting that it's a negotiation. It's ongoing. We don't know what the final product will look like.

Go ahead.

Q Jen, can I ask a little bit about energy prices? There -- you know, gas prices in the U.S. are fairly high. We're seeing exceptionally high prices of certain energy products in --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- Europe right now. Is the U.S. domestically considering a release from the SPR to bring down oil prices at this time?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to make any prediction of that from here. I would note that we have seen, as you said, some ticks-up in parts of the country, also in re- -- as a follow-up to Hurricane Ida, because the hurricane hit a region that is a key center of the nation's oil production and refining infrastructure.

So that's something we've been working to focus on. And we took actions in the days and weeks following to help address that, including, at the time, authorizing several million barrels of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve exchanges.

We've also taken steps into -- including engaging with members of OPEC. We've also taken steps to reach out to the FTC to ensure they're using every available tool to monitor the U.S. gasoline market and address any illegal conduct. But I'm not going to make any other predictions at this point in time. We're continuously monitoring. We'll look to take additional steps as needed.

Q Are you or would you consider restricting LNG exports to, I guess, head off the type of shortages and price spikes that we're seeing in Europe -- in parts of Europe?

MS. PSAKI: I'm just not going to make any additional policy predictions at this point in time.

Q Can I, like, broadly say: Overall, these are fundamentally price crunches on, you know, nonrenewable sources of fuel. And we're heading into COP summit here.



MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q Do you worry that this could impact the pledges that countries are willing to make? Will other governments get weak-kneed about going green at a time when they're facing brewing, sort of, political crises at home over, really, skyrocketing prices of non-renewable fuel sources?

MS. PSAKI: We certainly hope not. I mean, I think what COP26 is about is to continue the conversation on the international stage, at the leader level -- that has been going on below the leader level continuously, basically -- about our need to work together to address the climate crisis -- one of the greatest national security crises the President sees. A number of other world leaders agree on that front.

Certainly, we all want to keep gasoline prices low, but the threat of the crisis -- the climate crisis -- certainly can't wait any longer.

Q Thank you.

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

Q Yeah, thanks very much. On the -- you sound pretty lukewarm about the McConnell idea. If the Democratic Caucus were to get behind it, is it a given that the President will get on board? Or --

MS. PSAKI: We'll see where things are. This is an ever-moving news cycle.

Q Because, you know, as we speak, there seems to be some positive vibes there regarding this, whereas you're giving, you know, quite the opposite.

MS. PSAKI: I would say, actually, in my read of it, there's a diversity of views in the Democratic Caucus, as is to be expected. And they're meeting now. We'll be in close touch with them, so I just don't want to get ahead of that process.

Q Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q I know we're still a few weeks away from the G20, but I wanted to see if the President would be open to meeting with Putin again at the G20. And does he feel like his last meeting with Putin was effective? Does the President feel like he's seen any change in Russia or Putin's behavior since then?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't have any predictions for you on the bilateral meetings. That's something that we're still working through at this point in time, every day.

And in terms of the -- how constructive his meeting was with President Putin, as he said at the time, we didn't expect it to be a light switch where, all of a sudden, everything would be hunky-dory in the relationship. It's not. We have remaining concerns, but it was an opportunity to express them at a high level, see what work could be done over the course of the long term to address it.

So I don't know that we're going to do a month-by-month assessment. It's something that we have continued conversations from -- with members of the national security team about many of the issues were raised. Those are ongoing. We're continuing to strive to make progress.

Q Can I follow up on that?

O And do you have any update on Afghanistan and how many Americans are still there? And is the -- do you -- does the



President feel the Taliban is cooperating still with efforts to get those remaining Americans out?

MS. PSAKI: We remain -- through appropriate channels of course -- in touch with Taliban officials. In terms of the specific numbers, I'd point you to the State Department. And they have the most updated number on that, given they oversee that process.

Go ahead.

Q Jen, there's been some reporting that Senate Democrats are planning to accept the short-term debt limit increase. So, given that we now have some reporting on that, can you just give us some guidance on what the White House thinks about that idea?

MS. PSAKI: Not yet. I have to -- I have to dig further into that reporting -- not to question it -- and talk to the team here about where things stand. And as far as when I came out here, they were still meeting, but we'll venture to get back to you as soon as we have something more concrete to convey.

Q Thanks, Jen. When the President was talking today about Republicans and the debt ceiling, he said, "If they don't want to do the job, just get out of the way. We'll take the heat. We'll do it." When he says, "We'll take the heat," what did he mean by that? What political risk is he acknowledging there for Democrats?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think one of the reasons we're at this point is because Republicans in Congress would rather bet on a misleading and inaccurate campaign season talking point. We're not betting that that's going to work, but his point -- the President's point is: Regardless, we're willing -- Democrats are willing to vote alone, without any Republican votes, to raise the debt ceiling. You just need to allow us to proceed with that vote.

Q And on the testing question that had come up, on rapid tests, this \$1 billion investment will quadruple the tests by December, in addition to everything else from the past couple of weeks. But why has it taken so long to get this rapid testing to this point where it will be -- by December, when Europe is flooded with rapid tests? Is it the authorization process and the timeline on that, or is it on the production side, or both?

MS. PSAKI: Well, one of the things we've been working on is to increase production, as you know, and also increase -- I would say that the demand for these tests here has increased a lot in the last several weeks, so we're also working to meet that and ensure that we are meeting the moment here in the United States.

In terms of the specific mechanics, I would encourage you to ask the COVID team that question.

Q Is that missing the moment though by -- you know, the demand has gone up in recent weeks because kids have gone back to school. Should this have been ready for back-to-school so that you could go to a CVS or any of the pharmacies or government sites and get these tests?

MS. PSAKI: I mean, again, we just announced, last month, an enormous investment: We're quadrupling availability by December, tripling by November. I think that is speaking to how seriously we take this and how we're working to ensure there are accessible, cost-effective tests out there and available to the public.

Go ahead.

Q What plans does the White House have to address the risk of oil spills from existing platforms, existing leases that are still operating?

MS. PSAKI: You mean like the one that happened in California?

O Correct.



MS. PSAKI: I would really point you to the Department of Energy for specifics there.

Q But, you know, the White House policies on stopping future leases possibly --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- things like that. But, you know, this is an ongoing threat, you know, that happens as, you know, offshore drilling continues. Is there an interest in investing in the infrastructure of the pipeline to enhance their safety, shutting them down? You know, what are your thoughts on that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, again, I think there -- as we've seen, and there's been an ongoing investigation about what exactly was the root cause here, so I don't want to, kind of, speak to that as that's been ongoing. But, beyond that, I would point you to the Department of Energy.

Q And two very quick things on the spill: Does the White House have a working theory on what caused the spill? And secondly, do you have an update on federal resources that have been dispatched to respond to the spill?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. I think I do have an update on federal resources. Let me see.

On the leak, just so I don't forget to answer this part, it's still under investigation. As you may know, the oil has stopped leaking; the pipeline has been removed from service.

In terms of our government efforts, 4,788 gallons of oil have been recovered and 11,360 feet of containment boom have been deployed. As of yesterday, six miles of shoreline have been cleaned, 328 response personnel with additional assets are on -- have -- on the way have been deployed.

As we said earlier this week, the Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration investigators are on the ground in the Unified/Incident Command Center. And on Monday, we also issued a corrective order -- action order to the operator mandating immediate corrective action, including performing a root cause failure analysis, integrity assessment, and remedial work plan.

Beyond that, Unified Command, of course, who are on the ground would have any additional steps we're taking and that are up to date.

Go ahead, April.

Q Jen, we see there are crisis moments -- everything is in crisis mode here -- but there are other issues that are percolating as well that some feel are at crisis levels -- Black agenda issues. The Vice President just had the heads of Divine Nine in a meeting -- frank, good, direct discussion, we were told -- about issues, particularly voting rights.

What is the President expecting when it comes to dealing with the Black agenda, particularly with those that have this small window, like voting rights and also the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act? What is he expected to do? What is he planning on committing to make sure these things happen?

MS. PSAKI: He wants to get both done. He wants to sign them into law. As you know, and you've told me in the past, the Black agenda is bigger than voting rights and bigger than the George Floyd Police and Justice Act.

Both are hugely important. The President has committed to getting them both done. He wants to sign them into law. We need Congress to move forward on both to get that done.

Q They are -- the Black agenda is huge. It's vast. But in this moment, there's a small window of time before elections



happen, and the concern is is that this President is not doing enough; he has not armed the Vice President or helped her to be able to fight the fight for these things.

MS. PSAKI: I would say the Vice President is more than capable of fighting the fight and the lead on this particular issue and any issue.

Q So how is he --

MS. PSAKI: She's the Vice President of the United States. Pretty powerful.

Q Right, but if the President -- the argument is, if the President is not supporting her with the tools that she needs --

MS. PSAKI: Which tools is she --

Q -- i.e. the filibuster --

MS. PSAKI: -- is she -- is he not providing to her?

Q -- i.e. the filibuster for voting rights, and that is in her portfolio.

You have one of her friends -- and a Democrat, a strategist -- Bakari Sellers, who says her portfolio is trash because he's not supporting her in the way that she needs to be supported for this to pass. So, what do you say? Can he, will he, shall he push for the filibuster for voting rights, even as he's doing it -- thinking about it for the debt ceiling?

MS. PSAKI: Well, that's not exactly what I conveyed earlier, but I will say that the President has conveyed many times that getting voting rights done, signing it into law is top of his agenda.

The Vice President, one of the most powerful people in the world, is leading this effort. He is her -- she is his partner. She's the first in the room, the last in the room, and he's going to continue to work by her side to get it done.

But beyond that and the legislative process and how that will work, I don't have any update on that front.

Go ahead.

Q Sticking on voting rights, with S.4 being introduced in the Senate: The President has, over and over, talked about the pathways that voting rights legislation could take, same thing that he -- apparently, yesterday, you said he was alluding to when he said "real possibility" -- right? -- talking about what could possibly happen on the Hill.

He's never talked about voting rights with any kind of real possibility of a filibuster carveout, and there's a real frustration -- some people have got arrested just yesterday -- among activists on the voting rights issues.

So, other than, "We're frustrated; we stand with you," what do you have to say to activists who are saying this White House, the President isn't doing enough on voting rights specifically?

MS. PSAKI: I think that was just the question I just answered, no?

Q But we're trying to get an answer from you. I mean, it's a legitimate question. And we're trying to --

MS. PSAKI: I'm not saying -- I'm not saying it's not. I'm not saying it's not. I would say that the President is also frustrated that voting rights has not been done. He's also frustrated that Republicans are so afraid of making reforms that would make it easier for people to vote that they have blocked this effort.



And he is frustrated that, despite everything that's happened around the country, there isn't more of a movement to get this done -- I don't mean by activists; certainly, there's a movement there -- in Congress.

What he was certainly -- what he was speaking to yesterday was the fact that there is live conversations right now about a range of options on the debt limit. He was not speaking to anything beyond that. And that's what is happening on the -- on Capitol Hill in this particular moment. That's it.

And so, I would convey to activists that he is absolutely committed. He wants to get this done. He wants to sign it into law. The Vice President just had meetings today on it. She is in the lead on this effort, as one of the most powerful people in this country, maybe even in the world, leading this effort.

Q But, I mean, he's the President. So, when I talk to activists, you know, they say, "You're the President. If you're frustrated, do something." Right? So, I guess that is the -- that is what we're constantly hearing --

MS. PSAKI: Congress is a separate body.

Q Sure, but there's things that he could --

MS. PSAKI: It's a --

Q There are things that he --

MS. PSAKI: It's a -- it's a separate body. You need 50 votes to change the filibuster. You also need the majority of votes to pass legislation into law.

He has made clear that he wants voting rights to be passed into law. He will continue to advocate publicly, privately, and continue to be a partner to the Vice President. He absolutely feels this is essential and we need to get it done.

Go ahead, Patsy.

Q Thank you, Jen. I want to follow up on Taiwan. Administration officials -- including yourself, I believe, on Monday, and Secretary Blinken today -- essentially have issued warnings to China urging China to stop its military activities in Taiwan. However, China has ignored that. In fact, it has dialed up sending even more military jets. So, what does that say about the credibility of U.S. deterrence on this issue?

MS. PSAKI: I think the Secretary of State spoke to this earlier. I don't think I have anything more to add to what he said.

Q Can I -- can I just follow up?

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q How concerned are you that these recent activities might actually escalate and then draw the U.S. into some sort of great power war with China? And so, what are you doing to maintain tensions beyond, kind of, ad hoc meetings like the Zurich meeting that Jake Sullivan is --

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't call a meeting with our National Security Advisor and his counterpart an "ad hoc" meeting.

Obviously, we raise our concerns through a range of channels. The State Department also put out a public statement -- a proactive statement on this, which is not something they do frequently, and the Secretary of State spoke to it today.

Q Do you have regular, you know, meetings to make sure that things like this don't escalate into something bigger?



MS. PSAKI: Of course, we do, as you well know.  
Go ahead.

Q I have another debt ceiling question --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q -- but zooming much farther out.

Earlier today, Jamie Dimon suggested getting rid of the debt ceiling altogether so that this scenario would not happen again.

Secretary Yellen seemed to lend her support to that idea of getting rid of the debt ceiling altogether in the past. Has she spoken with the President about that idea? And does he have a position on, sort of, the larger question of whether or not it should or should not be abolished?

MS. PSAKI: Right now, our focus is on raising the debt ceiling in the limited amount of time we have left to do that and do it without impacting the retirement savings accounts, the Social Security, and the economic security of millions of Americans. There's plenty of time to have a conversation after that.

Q And then a quick follow-up. You were asked about the -- the Uyghur anti-slave labor bill.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah. You asked me about it last week, too -- or the week before. I don't remember.

Q That's right.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q You've noted several times that the President has put out statements.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q There is sanctions as well. Does this administration -- does the President feel that there is anyone in his administration that is opposed to this kind of bipartisan legislation?

MS. PSAKI: I think it's all about taking a look at the legislation and figuring out if it's something we'd support moving forward -- every component of it -- and I'll check and see if we have a statement of administration policy on it.

Q But you don't know of anyone in the administration who currently opposes this?

MS. PSAKI: Again, we're not talking about whether or not we think the treatment of the Uyghurs is outrageous. It is. We've all said that. We're talking about a piece of legislation that has several components, and so I just want to make sure I go through the proper process with that.

Q On food shortages --

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q Hi. I was just wanting to talk to you about food shortages real quick. I'm not sure if you were looking here. But I just wanted to say that, on food shortages, we're seeing in schools the supply chain is kinked and affecting school lunches to the degree that kids are having bread -- or meat with no bread to make sandwiches, for example. And grocery stores, ahead of the holidays, are limiting the amount of food that you can actually purchase.

So, in regard to the debt ceiling talks, if the Senate votes "no" ahead of Thanksgiving, ahead of Christmas, and the coming holiday season -- if they say "no," what will that mean in the big picture for this nation and food shortages and other product delinquencies?

MS. PSAKI: Well, look, I would say -- I just want to dis- -- to make sure we're sending a clear message here about what the impacts of different things are. I know that's why you asked the question.

You'd have to get me more information about how broadly the school issue you're referencing is. I have not heard that from the Department of Education. It doesn't mean that it is not the case in certain schools, but if you have more information on that --

Q I do. (Inaudible) get it to you.

MS. PSAKI: -- come share that with me.

I would say that we know that unless Congress acts to raise the debt limit, what we're talking about here is people's retirement savings, their Social Security benefits, their economic security being at risk. That could mean all sorts of things, to your point about people's economic security, especially people who are at or below the poverty line or above the poverty line. And we're seeing the impact on markets across the country.

We don't want that to be the case, of course. That's why we're working to prevent this from happening.

I would say, in terms of the cost of meat and the cost of goods, we think -- there's a range of issues here. You referenced the supply chain. Another issue is the fact that there's not enough competition among big meat producers. It's something Secretary Vilsack spoke to when he was here just a few weeks ago and something our Department of Agriculture and the Department of Justice also are working to take steps to address.

Q Thank you for that, but just a real quick --

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q -- one -- one more on the shots. We do have an approval for FlowFlex -- I believe is the name of the rapid results test -- and we were expecting today to have -- hear more information about that. But I've written about this, and the New York Times is saying that one of the problems even in going to places like CVS to get a test is, in some places, you don't even -- you can't even buy a rapid results test. And being that school is in session and that we are going to be having more events, for example --

MS. PSAKI: So, Mona, that's exactly why we just announced a \$2 billion investment that's going to quadruple the number of tests that are available at schools, community centers, and also to purchase at home.

Q But that's future focused. I'm talking about --

MS. PSAKI: It's starting to happen now.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. Just to follow up on John Kerry's comments.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q You mentioned that he was, of course, aware of the displeasure after the deal was announced. Was he not aware of something before the deal was announced? Was he not aware that the French weren't read in? Was he not aware of the



French deal on conventional submarines?

MS. PSAKI: Look, I think, right now, what our focus is on is moving forward. As you know and as President Macron spoke to, they're going to be meeting next month. We're working to finalize the details of that.

As you saw, our National Security Advisor and members of our national security team have met with their counterparts or high-level officials in recent weeks.

So, at this point, what our focus is on is how we work with the French moving forward.

Q Thank you, Jen.

MS. PSAKI: Thanks, everyone.

4:56 P.M. EDT

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**From:** White House Press Office  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki, October 6, 2021  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

October 6, 2021

**Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki, October 6, 2021**

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

4:13 P.M. EDT

MS. PSAKI: Hi, everyone. Okay --

Q Or maybe not.

MS. PSAKI: Oh, what did you think was going to happen? (Laughter.) I'm sorry to disappoint. Okay, sorry to disappoint. You never know who's behind the door.

Okay. Okay, tomorrow -- just one item for all of you at the top: Tomorrow, the President will travel to Elk Grove Village, Illinois -- a trip he had planned to do last week -- to meet with public and private sector leaders who have implemented vaccination requirements. The President will visit with a company local to the Chicago area that is imposing its own vaccine requirement ahead of the OSHA rule.

The President's message will be clear: Vaccination requirements work. Vaccination requirements get more people vaccinated, helping to end the pandemic and strengthen the economy.

That's why he's leading and implementing on -- implementing vaccination requirements for 100 million workers, two thirds of all workers in the United States, and that's why we're seeing growing momentum for vaccination requirements across the sectors and across the country.



Alex, go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. I was hoping to get you to weigh in on three different debt limit scenarios since there's so many --

MS. PSAKI: Great.

Q -- developing. So, off the top, Senator Mitch McConnell has proposed for Republicans to either support a short-term hike in the debt limit through December or to support an expedited reconciliation process where Democrats would vote to hike it long term. What's the White House response to that? Is there support for either of those from the President?

And then, I was hoping to get clarification on something the President said yesterday. He seemed to suggest that he would support a carveout in the filibuster, if all else fails, to hike the debt limit. Is that where he stands? Would he be open to that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, right now -- and perhaps this the awkwardness of 4:15, while people are still meeting on the Hill -- right now, Democratic members are meeting on the Hill to discuss options on the path forward. I think Republican members may also be meeting or discussing among themselves.

My understanding, at the point I walked out here, is that there's been no formal offer made. A press release is not a formal offer.

And regardless, even the scant details that have been reported present more complicated, more difficult options than the one that is quite obvious, in the President's view, and is in front of the faces of every member up on the Hill. We could get this done today. We don't need to kick the can. We don't need to go through a cumbersome process that every day brings additional risks.

So, they're discussing up there. We'll, obviously, be in close touch with them, as we will continue to be, and we'll see where we -- where we are at the end of today.

Q And then one foreign policy question. Does the White House have a position yet on the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act which passed unanimously in the Senate?

And just broadly in that same context, how do you respond to the criticism from Senator Rubio and some Republicans that the administration is sort of letting Beijing have some advantage on human rights abuses to try to win over their cooperation on climate issues?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we would absolutely dispute that notion. Unlike the former President, this President has spoken out against human rights abuses, has raised his concerns about human rights abuses directly with President Xi, and we have done that at every level from our national security team.

In terms of the legislation, obviously we have spoken out about our concerns of human rights abuses in Xinjiang. And I would also note that the President also led an effort to have coordination on the international stage to address this issue, unlike his predecessors.

But I'd have to talk to our legislative team about specific views on the -- in the piece of legislation. I know I spoke to it briefly last week, but I'll -- I'll come back to you with that.

Go ahead, Steve.

Q Jake Sullivan reached a deal with the Chinese today for President Biden and President Xi to have a virtual summit before the end of the year. Do you see this happening around the G20 Summit? And what's the advantage of them seeing each other face-to-face?



MS. PSAKI: Well, as I understand it, what came out of the discussions was an agreement to continue dialogue at a very high level.

So, what we've said, of course -- and we continue to believe -- is that leader-level engagement is an important part of our effort to responsibly manage the competition with China, especially given the coalescing of power in Chinese leadership.

We're still working through what that would look like, when, and, of course, the final details. So we don't quite have them yet.

Q Secondly, the President indicated last night that he had spoken to President Xi about Taiwan. Was this in their more recent phone call? And what exactly did he tell him?

MS. PSAKI: So just -- you didn't ask this, but some others have asked us -- he did not have a new call that you're not aware of.

Q Okay. Okay.

MS. PSAKI: So, just for full clarity on that. He has spoken with him twice, as you know.

And certainly, reiterating our position as it relates to -- you know, which is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act and our view that we need to uphold that commitment -- our commitment under the act -- that is what the President reiterated to President Xi last time he talked, and it is something that is raised nearly every time he speaks at a leader level and at other levels as well.

Q And last thing -- and sorry to prolong -- the Energy Secretary, Granholm, in a conference today did not rule out a ban on crude oil exports to keep U.S. energy prices down. Is that something that's seriously being looked at?

MS. PSAKI: I would defer to the Energy Secretary, but I don't have anything new to report on that from internally in the White House.

Q Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q Hey, Jen. So, I understand that you're obviously waiting for more details of this proposal from the Senate Minority Leader, but, you know, would the President accept a short-term deal to raise the debt ceiling while you try and find a broader path out of this crisis?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as I said a few minutes ago, we don't need to kick the can. We don't need to go through a cumbersome process that every day brings additional risks. And you heard many of the business leaders convey that, even as we look to risk tomorrow, the next day, as American -- the American people are looking at the retirement accounts, worrying about their Social Security savings, members of the military worrying about their payments. We don't need to incur that risk uncertainty.

And I think it's important to also remember we're at this point because Republicans in Congress treated the savings accounts and retirement savings of the American people, Social Security checks of retirees, and veterans benefits like a game of Monopoly, putting the stability and security of the American people at risk.

We're at this point because Republicans in Congress blocked efforts by Democrats to raise the debt limit and protect the full faith and credit of the United States, despite having voted for it three times during the Trump administration.

So, obviously, as has been reported, and the vote has been delayed, there's still an opportunity for Republicans to join us in



being adults in the room and ensure that people have confidence in the economic security and their own retirement savings.

Q The Minority Leader's proposal, though, seems to go at one of the key arguments that the President was making yesterday about why he's opposed to using budget reconciliation, which is that it would take time, it's cumbersome, it could lead to, you know, unexpected scenarios.

So, is the Minority Leader taking off the arguments against reconciliation by offering this one-month extension? And if not, then what are your remaining objections? Is it simply that you don't want Democrats to take a vote that will put a specific dollar amount on raising the debt ceiling?

MS. PSAKI: Democrats are very willing to be the adults in the room and take a vote to raise the debt limit. They're not even asking Republicans to do that anymore, since they've clearly shown their refusal to do exactly that.

The point I'm making is that there is a very clear -- the least risky option here that can ensure that there is confidence from the American people about their own checking accounts or about their own retirement savings, that's something Republicans still have the opportunity to participate in and be a part of.

Q And just on Afghanistan, if I could. The ISIS-K suicide bomber had -- you know, who was -- who carried out the attack that resulted in the deaths of 13 U.S. service members and dozens more Afghans had been released from the Parwan prison at Bagram Air Base just days before that attack took place, when the Taliban took control of that base.

Should the Biden administration have done more to secure Bagram or transfer ISIS-K prisoners outside of that? And do you now accept that this attack would not have happened had the United States retained control of Bagram?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I can't speak to the specific case. I'd let it -- leave it to the intelligence community to speak to that. So I'd point you to them.

I'd remind you that, as it relates to Bagram, there was a decision made to close Bagram because it wasn't strategically in the interest of the United States and our national security to keep it open with 5,000 troops there protecting Bagram at a distance that was far away from the capital and far away from where people from the embassy would be evacuated. So, that was the broad-based decision.

I understand you're asking me a different question than that, but I just wanted to reiterate.

Q But would he have made the same decision had he known that it would result --

MS. PSAKI: Again, I can't speak --

Q -- in the deaths of 13 service members?

MS. PSAKI: -- to this particular report. I'd point you to the intelligence community.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. You know, Congress has passed countless short-term government funding measures. They have funded the government for 48 hours before. Wouldn't a short-term debt ceiling hike be preferable to default?

MS. PSAKI: The preference would be just getting this done today so we can move on to more business for the American people. And that option is still on the table.

Q But you -- you know, the White House brought in all of these banking CEOs today to talk about how catastrophic it would be if the U.S. were to default. Why not send the markets that assurance, if you have the opportunity, that, at least



for the next eight weeks, the debt ceiling is going to be secure?

MS. PSAKI: Well, if we're looking at the best options, why kick the can down the road a couple of more weeks? Why create an additional layer of uncertainty? Why not just get it done now? That's what we're continuing to press for, and that's our first choice.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. A week ago, the National School Boards Association wrote to the President to say that their teachers feel like some parents protesting recently "could be the equivalent to a form of domestic terrorism." And then, the Attorney General put the FBI on the case.

So, does the administration agree that parents upset about their kids' curriculums could be considered domestic terrorists?

MS. PSAKI: Well, let me unravel this a little bit, because the National School Board Association is not a part of the U.S. government. I'd point you to them.

What the Department of Justice said in a letter from the Attorney General is that, quote, "Threats against public servants are not only illegal, they run counter to our nation's core values." That is true. These were threats against public servants, threats against members of the school board. Regardless of the reasoning, threats and violence against public servants is illegal. That's what he was conveying from the Department of Justice.

Q But the Department of Justice does now have the FBI on this. Something that the School Boards Association is asking for is for the administration to consider using the PATRIOT Act to investigate some of these school board protestors. So, would the administration be okay with the FBI using the PATRIOT Act to surveil these parents, if that is what they decide?

MS. PSAKI: I don't speak on behalf of the National School Board Association; I speak on behalf of this government. The Attorney General has put out a letter. They will take actions they take, and I would point you to them for more information.

Q And something that you said on Monday after some protestors were hounding Kyrsten Sinema into a restroom -- you said, "The President stands for the fundamental right of people to protest, to object, [and] to criticize." So does the President support the fundamental rights of these parents to protest at school board meetings?

MS. PSAKI: Of course. But he doesn't stand for the fundamental right -- I assume you don't either -- for people to take violent action against members -- public servants. And that's what the threats are about. And so, no, he doesn't stand for that; no one should.

Q Just one more. John Kerry says that after France was cut out of the nuclear submarine deal, and they were upset enough about being left in the dark that they pulled their ambassador, he went to the President and, quote, "The President, literally, had not been aware of what had transpired." So what else are you guys not telling the President?

MS. PSAKI: Of course, he was aware of the French being upset -- let me finish --

Q No, Kerry --

MS. PSAKI: Let me --

Q -- said he "literally..." --

MS. PSAKI: Let me -- let me finish.



Q -- "had not been aware."

MS. PSAKI: I know John Kerry quite well. He, of course, was aware -- the President -- of the French being displeased about the deal with the Australians. John Kerry also speaks regularly to the French, as a part of his role as the Climate Envoy. He's someone who also served as Secretary of State. He's someone I -- alone -- traveled to France with him 25 times.

He, of course, conveyed to the President what his read is -- was of what they were specifically unhappy about and how to help address it.

Q A follow-up on France, Jen?

Q You said -- you've said this President's first love is foreign policy. So, why doesn't he know about these things in real time?

MS. PSAKI: Of course, he knew about the French being displeased about --

Q John Kerry said --

MS. PSAKI: Let me finish.

Q -- he "literally had not be aware."

MS. PSAKI: Peter, I would encourage you to ask John Kerry specifically about the context of his comments. The President and John -- and the former Secretary are also good friends. He relies on his counsel, and -- as he does with many members of his national security team. But that certainly is not what he was intending to convey.

Q Follow-up on France?

Q Jen, if I could --

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q -- let me ask you quickly: Yesterday, the President said that he would be speaking with Mitch McConnell, as it related to the debt limit. Has that conversation happened? And what did he -- what did he tell him?

MS. PSAKI: They have not spoken. I think what the President has repeatedly conveyed is that he's certainly open to, as he -- as he has shown throughout the course of his presidency, having conversations with Democrats and Republicans when he feels it would be constructive.

Q He said they will be -- he said they will be speaking. So you were saying he was saying they will at some point, but there was no --

MS. PSAKI: At some -- at some point, if it's constructive in moving things forward.

Q Okay. Does the President trust Mitch McConnell to be an honest broker in this process?

MS. PSAKI: I don't think this is about trust. This is about -- he has known him a long time, but this is about whether you're going to be a leader and take steps that are not based on -- on political calculations and more based on what's in the interest of the United States and the full faith and of the United States.

Q The President discussed that there was a possibility of a filibuster -- a carveout -- as it related to the debt ceiling. If that

were the case, would the President be open to a filibuster carveout for voting rights? Where does that line get drawn for the President?

MS. PSAKI: The President was just simply conveying that there are a range of options that leaders on the Hill are discussing. I think you all have reported that, or your colleagues on the Hill have. Nothing more than that. We'll be in touch with them, and we'll see what the next best options look like.

But what is very clear is that there is an easy, risk-free option here that Republicans could allow Democrats to vote to raise the debt ceiling. We could be done with this today.

Q Can I just follow up very quickly? Why wouldn't the President, given that relationship he has with Mitch McConnell, just call Mitch McConnell and have this conversation with him? Why do this through public events?

MS. PSAKI: What's the conversation about?

Q I don't know. They have the relationship. He's the one who said he could bring the two sides together. So, wouldn't there be some value in having that conversation with one another?

MS. PSAKI: We know what the -- we know what the risk-free option is here. We know what the clear path forward is here. And I think the President has made no secret about his belief on that.

Go ahead.

Q Has the President had time to absorb the criticism of the Fed Chairman? And then, specifically, what does the White House believe should happen -- Fed policy about investments made by top officials there?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we obviously leave the independence of the Fed to an independent Fed -- Federal Reserve. And I'm not going to speak to that from here.

The President is confident in the Chairman of the Federal Reserve, and, beyond that, I don't have any personnel announcements for you.

Q Given that confidence, and also given what you just said, I mean, how close is he to making a decision on that?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything to preview for you at this point.

Q Yesterday, the President said he would sign a reconciliation bill that included the Hyde Amendment. You told us earlier this week that he remains opposed to that. So, is he backtracking on a campaign promise, something that's -- a lot of his supporters believe strongly in?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the President's position hasn't changed. The context of his comments were that there is still a negotiation happening. There's a range of views. His view remains what is reflected in his budget, which is that getting rid of -- which he released in May -- which shows that getting rid of the Hyde Amendment was a priority. That remains his position. This is a package that's still being negotiated, and he said that much -- as much last night as well.

Go ahead.

Q Just confirming what you told Peter: The President, when he signaled yesterday that it's possible that the Senate could change its rules, that -- we should not read that as him expressing support for that notion?

MS. PSAKI: The President was certain simply reporting out what you already have reported out, which is that there are a range of options being discussed on Capitol Hill.



Q I want to ask you separately: The ambassador-designate to India was seen, reportedly, at an event in Los Angeles last week at an art gallery event that featured the artwork of the President's son, Hunter.

The ethicists who have pointed to this arrangement have expressed concern that the President's son selling art could potentially put the President in a situation where those who seek jobs either in this administration or favors from this administration could put this White House in an awkward position.

Should -- first of all, what is the White House's response to the fact that an ambassador nominee was at this event? And secondly, should we expect to see more people who seek jobs in this administration attending events like this in the future?

MS. PSAKI: Well, to be clear, we've spoken to the arrangement that is run by the gallerist and Hunter Biden's representatives that the White House provided suggestions for. I'd refer you to the gallerist for questions about the event and -- as well as the representatives of Mr. Garcetti, in terms of his attendance.

Q But, Jen, just to follow up: This is exactly what ethicists said they were worried about.

MS. PSAKI: What is, specifically?

Q The fact that the President's son --

MS. PSAKI: That he reportedly attended an event?

Q Well, that the President's son would be selling artwork and then meeting, potentially, with people who would seek to buy it. If you have attendees at that event who might be seeking either jobs in this administration or favors from this administration, isn't it an awkward situation to put the President in?

MS. PSAKI: Again, the gallerist has spoken to -- we've spoken to the specifics of what the gallerist has agreed to and what recommendations were made. I've done that several times. I don't have additional details for it from here. I'd point you to them.

Go ahead.

Q So -- but does this White House not have any concerns about the photos that have emerged showing Hunter Biden at that gallery alongside prospective buyers?

MS. PSAKI: I'd point you to the gallerist on specifics of the restrictions that were put in place.

Q Great. But what about the position of this White House? This is a President who ran on being transparent and you've got -- are there no concerns?

MS. PSAKI: And we were very transparent about what recommendations were made to the gallerist, and I would again point you to them or the many times I've spoken about that from here.

Q And just to clarify, has the President's position on doing away with the filibuster changed?

MS. PSAKI: Nothing has -- no, it has not changed.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. The administration reportedly will invest \$1 billion into making rapid-testing COVID kits available. But there are concerns that the tests will be too expensive. I think a lot of Americans are wondering: Is there a universe where these available tests will be free or affordable, or at least less expensive than \$25 a pop?



MS. PSAKI: Yeah, so, there's no question, to your point, that there has been a huge increase and an interest in testing, and getting tests, and making them, and people going out and being able to get them easily.

We announced a \$2 billion investment in September. So, right now, we're on track to ~~double~~ [triple] the number of rapid, at-home tests on the market by early November. And we're also now on track to triple the number of rapid, at-home tests on the market by -- and thanks to the approval of ACON -- sorry -- this Monday, which accelerates the pace. We're now on track to triple the number. Triple the number, not double. I apologize.

So, right now, with these investments, we'll be at 200 million tests per month starting in December, with tens of millions more coming on the market in the coming weeks.

And we're also working to ensure that these tests, in addition to making them more available -- so you could go to CVS or Walmart, or wherever, to get them -- we've been working hard to make sure they are accessible and available in pharmacies, in community centers, in schools. So, we're also working to do that simultaneously and separate from that.

We recognize there's a need. We recognized we needed to do more. And we are pleased by the fact that we are now on track to not only triple by November but also quadruple by December.

Q There was a school shooting in Texas today. The school safety group Everytown says that this year has been the most dangerous back-to-school period for students since they began tracking the data in 2013. That's some 30 instances of gunfire on schoolgrounds since August 1st, and today's shooting means that number is out of date.

Is the administration discussing ways that schools can keep children safe from school violence -- from gun violence?

MS. PSAKI: Absolutely. I mean, one, I would say the President has been an advocate for doing more for gun safety measures through the course of his career. Not only did he fight to get the Brady Bill passed, he fought for the Assault Weapons Ban. It remains a cause of his public life in office.

We, of course, are frustrated by the inability to get commonsense gun reforms through Congress. We should be able to get universal background checks approved. They're supported by the vast majority of the public, as are assault weapons bans.

But in addition to that, we also have taken a number of steps, both by working through the Department of Justice to increase our strike force teams that are going out to specific communities and cities to help address violence. A lot of that is driven by gun violence. That's something that we've been implementing from there. And, of course, our Department of Education is engaged in this effort as well.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. Yesterday's hearing by a Facebook whistleblower underscored several major issues with the company, including, as many senators pointed out, issues with Section 230.

On the campaign trail, Biden said that Section 230 should, quote, "immediately be revoked" and that it should be revoked because, quote, Facebook "is not just an Internet company. It is propagating falsehoods they know to be false." Does the White House stand by that assessment for Section 230, given the revelations now?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the President has long said, as you referenced, that tech platforms must be held accountable for the harms that they cause. And he has been a strong supporter of fundamental reforms to achieve that goal. This includes Section 230 reforms. It also includes privacy and antitrust reforms as well as more transparency. That should also be on the table.

And he looks forward to working with Congress on these bipartisan issues.



He's also called, I would note -- because there were a number -- a range of issues that were raised during the whistleblower's testimony yesterday -- on the FTC to adopt rules to address unfair data collection and surveillance practice -- practices in his Executive Order on Promoting Competition in the American Economy.

So, yes, more needs to be done, reform should happen. We also need to do more on privacy and antitrust. And certainly, watching testimony yesterday raised a lot of those issues again for people.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. Does the President have any intention of speaking with Senators Manchin or Sinema at all this week?

MS. PSAKI: I can't predict for you day by day. I -- we have been in touch with Senator Manchin and Sinema at a senior-staff level, and certainly, I wouldn't rule it out.

Q I wanted to ask a follow-up question on an earlier question about the Hyde Amendment. The President has not been shy about his opposition, in recent years, to the Hyde Amendment. As you mentioned, you know, he made that clear in his budget blueprint; he made that clear as a candidate, when he was running for President.

So, can you explain why it is he's saying that he would sign this bill either way -- you know, with or without this language in it?

MS. PSAKI: He's reflecting that it's a negotiation. It's ongoing. We don't know what the final product will look like.

Go ahead.

Q Jen, can I ask a little bit about energy prices? There -- you know, gas prices in the U.S. are fairly high. We're seeing exceptionally high prices of certain energy products in --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- Europe right now. Is the U.S. domestically considering a release from the SPR to bring down oil prices at this time?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to make any prediction of that from here. I would note that we have seen, as you said, some ticks-up in parts of the country, also in re- -- as a follow-up to Hurricane Ida, because the hurricane hit a region that is a key center of the nation's oil production and refining infrastructure.

So that's something we've been working to focus on. And we took actions in the days and weeks following to help address that, including, at the time, authorizing several million barrels of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve exchanges.

We've also taken steps into -- including engaging with members of OPEC. We've also taken steps to reach out to the FTC to ensure they're using every available tool to monitor the U.S. gasoline market and address any illegal conduct. But I'm not going to make any other predictions at this point in time. We're continuously monitoring. We'll look to take additional steps as needed.

Q Are you or would you consider restricting LNG exports to, I guess, head off the type of shortages and price spikes that we're seeing in Europe -- in parts of Europe?

MS. PSAKI: I'm just not going to make any additional policy predictions at this point in time.

Q Can I, like, broadly say: Overall, these are fundamentally price crunches on, you know, nonrenewable sources of fuel. And we're heading into COP summit here.



MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q Do you worry that this could impact the pledges that countries are willing to make? Will other governments get weak-kneed about going green at a time when they're facing brewing, sort of, political crises at home over, really, skyrocketing prices of non-renewable fuel sources?

MS. PSAKI: We certainly hope not. I mean, I think what COP26 is about is to continue the conversation on the international stage, at the leader level -- that has been going on below the leader level continuously, basically -- about our need to work together to address the climate crisis -- one of the greatest national security crises the President sees. A number of other world leaders agree on that front.

Certainly, we all want to keep gasoline prices low, but the threat of the crisis -- the climate crisis -- certainly can't wait any longer.

Q Thank you.

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

Q Yeah, thanks very much. On the -- you sound pretty lukewarm about the McConnell idea. If the Democratic Caucus were to get behind it, is it a given that the President will get on board? Or --

MS. PSAKI: We'll see where things are. This is an ever-moving news cycle.

Q Because, you know, as we speak, there seems to be some positive vibes there regarding this, whereas you're giving, you know, quite the opposite.

MS. PSAKI: I would say, actually, in my read of it, there's a diversity of views in the Democratic Caucus, as is to be expected. And they're meeting now. We'll be in close touch with them, so I just don't want to get ahead of that process.

Q Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q I know we're still a few weeks away from the G20, but I wanted to see if the President would be open to meeting with Putin again at the G20. And does he feel like his last meeting with Putin was effective? Does the President feel like he's seen any change in Russia or Putin's behavior since then?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't have any predictions for you on the bilateral meetings. That's something that we're still working through at this point in time, every day.

And in terms of the -- how constructive his meeting was with President Putin, as he said at the time, we didn't expect it to be a light switch where, all of a sudden, everything would be hunky-dory in the relationship. It's not. We have remaining concerns, but it was an opportunity to express them at a high level, see what work could be done over the course of the long term to address it.

So I don't know that we're going to do a month-by-month assessment. It's something that we have continued conversations from -- with members of the national security team about many of the issues were raised. Those are ongoing. We're continuing to strive to make progress.

Q Can I follow up on that?

O And do you have any update on Afghanistan and how many Americans are still there? And is the -- do you -- does the



President feel the Taliban is cooperating still with efforts to get those remaining Americans out?

MS. PSAKI: We remain -- through appropriate channels of course -- in touch with Taliban officials. In terms of the specific numbers, I'd point you to the State Department. And they have the most updated number on that, given they oversee that process.

Go ahead.

Q Jen, there's been some reporting that Senate Democrats are planning to accept the short-term debt limit increase. So, given that we now have some reporting on that, can you just give us some guidance on what the White House thinks about that idea?

MS. PSAKI: Not yet. I have to -- I have to dig further into that reporting -- not to question it -- and talk to the team here about where things stand. And as far as when I came out here, they were still meeting, but we'll venture to get back to you as soon as we have something more concrete to convey.

Q Thanks, Jen. When the President was talking today about Republicans and the debt ceiling, he said, "If they don't want to do the job, just get out of the way. We'll take the heat. We'll do it." When he says, "We'll take the heat," what did he mean by that? What political risk is he acknowledging there for Democrats?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think one of the reasons we're at this point is because Republicans in Congress would rather bet on a misleading and inaccurate campaign season talking point. We're not betting that that's going to work, but his point -- the President's point is: Regardless, we're willing -- Democrats are willing to vote alone, without any Republican votes, to raise the debt ceiling. You just need to allow us to proceed with that vote.

Q And on the testing question that had come up, on rapid tests, this \$1 billion investment will quadruple the tests by December, in addition to everything else from the past couple of weeks. But why has it taken so long to get this rapid testing to this point where it will be -- by December, when Europe is flooded with rapid tests? Is it the authorization process and the timeline on that, or is it on the production side, or both?

MS. PSAKI: Well, one of the things we've been working on is to increase production, as you know, and also increase -- I would say that the demand for these tests here has increased a lot in the last several weeks, so we're also working to meet that and ensure that we are meeting the moment here in the United States.

In terms of the specific mechanics, I would encourage you to ask the COVID team that question.

Q Is that missing the moment though by -- you know, the demand has gone up in recent weeks because kids have gone back to school. Should this have been ready for back-to-school so that you could go to a CVS or any of the pharmacies or government sites and get these tests?

MS. PSAKI: I mean, again, we just announced, last month, an enormous investment: We're quadrupling availability by December, tripling by November. I think that is speaking to how seriously we take this and how we're working to ensure there are accessible, cost-effective tests out there and available to the public.

Go ahead.

Q What plans does the White House have to address the risk of oil spills from existing platforms, existing leases that are still operating?

MS. PSAKI: You mean like the one that happened in California?

O Correct.



MS. PSAKI: I would really point you to the Department of Energy for specifics there.

Q But, you know, the White House policies on stopping future leases possibly --

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q -- things like that. But, you know, this is an ongoing threat, you know, that happens as, you know, offshore drilling continues. Is there an interest in investing in the infrastructure of the pipeline to enhance their safety, shutting them down? You know, what are your thoughts on that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, again, I think there -- as we've seen, and there's been an ongoing investigation about what exactly was the root cause here, so I don't want to, kind of, speak to that as that's been ongoing. But, beyond that, I would point you to the Department of Energy.

Q And two very quick things on the spill: Does the White House have a working theory on what caused the spill? And secondly, do you have an update on federal resources that have been dispatched to respond to the spill?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. I think I do have an update on federal resources. Let me see.

On the leak, just so I don't forget to answer this part, it's still under investigation. As you may know, the oil has stopped leaking; the pipeline has been removed from service.

In terms of our government efforts, 4,788 gallons of oil have been recovered and 11,360 feet of containment boom have been deployed. As of yesterday, six miles of shoreline have been cleaned, 328 response personnel with additional assets are on -- have -- on the way have been deployed.

As we said earlier this week, the Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration investigators are on the ground in the Unified/Incident Command Center. And on Monday, we also issued a corrective order -- action order to the operator mandating immediate corrective action, including performing a root cause failure analysis, integrity assessment, and remedial work plan.

Beyond that, Unified Command, of course, who are on the ground would have any additional steps we're taking and that are up to date.

Go ahead, April.

Q Jen, we see there are crisis moments -- everything is in crisis mode here -- but there are other issues that are percolating as well that some feel are at crisis levels -- Black agenda issues. The Vice President just had the heads of Divine Nine in a meeting -- frank, good, direct discussion, we were told -- about issues, particularly voting rights.

What is the President expecting when it comes to dealing with the Black agenda, particularly with those that have this small window, like voting rights and also the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act? What is he expected to do? What is he planning on committing to make sure these things happen?

MS. PSAKI: He wants to get both done. He wants to sign them into law. As you know, and you've told me in the past, the Black agenda is bigger than voting rights and bigger than the George Floyd Police and Justice Act.

Both are hugely important. The President has committed to getting them both done. He wants to sign them into law. We need Congress to move forward on both to get that done.

Q They are -- the Black agenda is huge. It's vast. But in this moment, there's a small window of time before elections



happen, and the concern is is that this President is not doing enough; he has not armed the Vice President or helped her to be able to fight the fight for these things.

MS. PSAKI: I would say the Vice President is more than capable of fighting the fight and the lead on this particular issue and any issue.

Q So how is he --

MS. PSAKI: She's the Vice President of the United States. Pretty powerful.

Q Right, but if the President -- the argument is, if the President is not supporting her with the tools that she needs --

MS. PSAKI: Which tools is she --

Q -- i.e. the filibuster --

MS. PSAKI: -- is she -- is he not providing to her?

Q -- i.e. the filibuster for voting rights, and that is in her portfolio.

You have one of her friends -- and a Democrat, a strategist -- Bakari Sellers, who says her portfolio is trash because he's not supporting her in the way that she needs to be supported for this to pass. So, what do you say? Can he, will he, shall he push for the filibuster for voting rights, even as he's doing it -- thinking about it for the debt ceiling?

MS. PSAKI: Well, that's not exactly what I conveyed earlier, but I will say that the President has conveyed many times that getting voting rights done, signing it into law is top of his agenda.

The Vice President, one of the most powerful people in the world, is leading this effort. He is her -- she is his partner. She's the first in the room, the last in the room, and he's going to continue to work by her side to get it done.

But beyond that and the legislative process and how that will work, I don't have any update on that front.

Go ahead.

Q Sticking on voting rights, with S.4 being introduced in the Senate: The President has, over and over, talked about the pathways that voting rights legislation could take, same thing that he -- apparently, yesterday, you said he was alluding to when he said "real possibility" -- right? -- talking about what could possibly happen on the Hill.

He's never talked about voting rights with any kind of real possibility of a filibuster carveout, and there's a real frustration -- some people have got arrested just yesterday -- among activists on the voting rights issues.

So, other than, "We're frustrated; we stand with you," what do you have to say to activists who are saying this White House, the President isn't doing enough on voting rights specifically?

MS. PSAKI: I think that was just the question I just answered, no?

Q But we're trying to get an answer from you. I mean, it's a legitimate question. And we're trying to --

MS. PSAKI: I'm not saying -- I'm not saying it's not. I'm not saying it's not. I would say that the President is also frustrated that voting rights has not been done. He's also frustrated that Republicans are so afraid of making reforms that would make it easier for people to vote that they have blocked this effort.



And he is frustrated that, despite everything that's happened around the country, there isn't more of a movement to get this done -- I don't mean by activists; certainly, there's a movement there -- in Congress.

What he was certainly -- what he was speaking to yesterday was the fact that there is live conversations right now about a range of options on the debt limit. He was not speaking to anything beyond that. And that's what is happening on the -- on Capitol Hill in this particular moment. That's it.

And so, I would convey to activists that he is absolutely committed. He wants to get this done. He wants to sign it into law. The Vice President just had meetings today on it. She is in the lead on this effort, as one of the most powerful people in this country, maybe even in the world, leading this effort.

Q But, I mean, he's the President. So, when I talk to activists, you know, they say, "You're the President. If you're frustrated, do something." Right? So, I guess that is the -- that is what we're constantly hearing --

MS. PSAKI: Congress is a separate body.

Q Sure, but there's things that he could --

MS. PSAKI: It's a --

Q There are things that he --

MS. PSAKI: It's a -- it's a separate body. You need 50 votes to change the filibuster. You also need the majority of votes to pass legislation into law.

He has made clear that he wants voting rights to be passed into law. He will continue to advocate publicly, privately, and continue to be a partner to the Vice President. He absolutely feels this is essential and we need to get it done.

Go ahead, Patsy.

Q Thank you, Jen. I want to follow up on Taiwan. Administration officials -- including yourself, I believe, on Monday, and Secretary Blinken today -- essentially have issued warnings to China urging China to stop its military activities in Taiwan. However, China has ignored that. In fact, it has dialed up sending even more military jets. So, what does that say about the credibility of U.S. deterrence on this issue?

MS. PSAKI: I think the Secretary of State spoke to this earlier. I don't think I have anything more to add to what he said.

Q Can I -- can I just follow up?

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q How concerned are you that these recent activities might actually escalate and then draw the U.S. into some sort of great power war with China? And so, what are you doing to maintain tensions beyond, kind of, ad hoc meetings like the Zurich meeting that Jake Sullivan is --

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't call a meeting with our National Security Advisor and his counterpart an "ad hoc" meeting.

Obviously, we raise our concerns through a range of channels. The State Department also put out a public statement -- a proactive statement on this, which is not something they do frequently, and the Secretary of State spoke to it today.

Q Do you have regular, you know, meetings to make sure that things like this don't escalate into something bigger?



MS. PSAKI: Of course, we do, as you well know.  
Go ahead.

Q I have another debt ceiling question --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q -- but zooming much farther out.

Earlier today, Jamie Dimon suggested getting rid of the debt ceiling altogether so that this scenario would not happen again.

Secretary Yellen seemed to lend her support to that idea of getting rid of the debt ceiling altogether in the past. Has she spoken with the President about that idea? And does he have a position on, sort of, the larger question of whether or not it should or should not be abolished?

MS. PSAKI: Right now, our focus is on raising the debt ceiling in the limited amount of time we have left to do that and do it without impacting the retirement savings accounts, the Social Security, and the economic security of millions of Americans. There's plenty of time to have a conversation after that.

Q And then a quick follow-up. You were asked about the -- the Uyghur anti-slave labor bill.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah. You asked me about it last week, too -- or the week before. I don't remember.

Q That's right.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q You've noted several times that the President has put out statements.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q There is sanctions as well. Does this administration -- does the President feel that there is anyone in his administration that is opposed to this kind of bipartisan legislation?

MS. PSAKI: I think it's all about taking a look at the legislation and figuring out if it's something we'd support moving forward -- every component of it -- and I'll check and see if we have a statement of administration policy on it.

Q But you don't know of anyone in the administration who currently opposes this?

MS. PSAKI: Again, we're not talking about whether or not we think the treatment of the Uyghurs is outrageous. It is. We've all said that. We're talking about a piece of legislation that has several components, and so I just want to make sure I go through the proper process with that.

Q On food shortages --

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q Hi. I was just wanting to talk to you about food shortages real quick. I'm not sure if you were looking here. But I just wanted to say that, on food shortages, we're seeing in schools the supply chain is kinked and affecting school lunches to the degree that kids are having bread -- or meat with no bread to make sandwiches, for example. And grocery stores, ahead of the holidays, are limiting the amount of food that you can actually purchase.

So, in regard to the debt ceiling talks, if the Senate votes "no" ahead of Thanksgiving, ahead of Christmas, and the coming holiday season -- if they say "no," what will that mean in the big picture for this nation and food shortages and other product delinquencies?

MS. PSAKI: Well, look, I would say -- I just want to dis- -- to make sure we're sending a clear message here about what the impacts of different things are. I know that's why you asked the question.

You'd have to get me more information about how broadly the school issue you're referencing is. I have not heard that from the Department of Education. It doesn't mean that it is not the case in certain schools, but if you have more information on that --

Q I do. (Inaudible) get it to you.

MS. PSAKI: -- come share that with me.

I would say that we know that unless Congress acts to raise the debt limit, what we're talking about here is people's retirement savings, their Social Security benefits, their economic security being at risk. That could mean all sorts of things, to your point about people's economic security, especially people who are at or below the poverty line or above the poverty line. And we're seeing the impact on markets across the country.

We don't want that to be the case, of course. That's why we're working to prevent this from happening.

I would say, in terms of the cost of meat and the cost of goods, we think -- there's a range of issues here. You referenced the supply chain. Another issue is the fact that there's not enough competition among big meat producers. It's something Secretary Vilsack spoke to when he was here just a few weeks ago and something our Department of Agriculture and the Department of Justice also are working to take steps to address.

Q Thank you for that, but just a real quick --

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q -- one -- one more on the shots. We do have an approval for FlowFlex -- I believe is the name of the rapid results test -- and we were expecting today to have -- hear more information about that. But I've written about this, and the New York Times is saying that one of the problems even in going to places like CVS to get a test is, in some places, you don't even -- you can't even buy a rapid results test. And being that school is in session and that we are going to be having more events, for example --

MS. PSAKI: So, Mona, that's exactly why we just announced a \$2 billion investment that's going to quadruple the number of tests that are available at schools, community centers, and also to purchase at home.

Q But that's future focused. I'm talking about --

MS. PSAKI: It's starting to happen now.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. Just to follow up on John Kerry's comments.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q You mentioned that he was, of course, aware of the displeasure after the deal was announced. Was he not aware of something before the deal was announced? Was he not aware that the French weren't read in? Was he not aware of the



French deal on conventional submarines?

MS. PSAKI: Look, I think, right now, what our focus is on is moving forward. As you know and as President Macron spoke to, they're going to be meeting next month. We're working to finalize the details of that.

As you saw, our National Security Advisor and members of our national security team have met with their counterparts or high-level officials in recent weeks.

So, at this point, what our focus is on is how we work with the French moving forward.

Q Thank you, Jen.

MS. PSAKI: Thanks, everyone.

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