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# Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, May 5, 2021

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

12:32 P.M. EDT

MS. PSAKI: Hi, everyone.

Q Hi, good afternoon.

MS. PSAKI: Good afternoon. Okay. We have another special guest joining us today: Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack.

As you all know, this is Secretary Vilsack's second turn at the Department of Agriculture, which he led in the Obama-Biden administration from 2009 through 2017, making him the longest-serving member of President Obama's Cabinet.

In those years, Secretary Vilsack fought to put Americans back to work by investing in rural infrastructure, renewable energy, and large-scale conservation partnerships. Under his leadership, USDA introduced healthier food choices in school meals to benefit 50 million children, and expanded free and reduced-price lunches for millions of kids.

Prior to his appointment — or nomination and confirmation, I should say — Secretary Vilsack served two terms as the Governor of Iowa, in the Iowa State Senate, and as the Mayor of Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

With that, I will turn it over to the Secretary, who will be — take a few questions once he concludes his remarks.

SECRETARY VILSACK: Jen, thanks very much. It's certainly a pleasure to be here today with all of you.

I'm here primarily to talk about food and nutrition security. And you may think that that is just about food and nutrition security, but, in fact, it's about a lot more than that.

When you understand that 25 percent of America's workforce is directly or indirectly impacted by the food and ag industry, that it represents a significant percentage of our GDP, that educational achievement is somewhat dependent on youngsters having healthy and nutritious food as they begin their school year and school day, and the fact that it is a noted effort in reducing poverty, food and nutrition security becomes an important issue. And certainly, we've seen the impact of that during the course of the pandemic.

When the American Rescue Plan was enacted, hunger in the United States was at 14 percent of our population, which was an incredibly high number. Today, as a result of the investments under the American Rescue Plan, we now know that hunger has dipped to 8 percent of America's population. That's a remarkable drop in a six-month period.

It is a result of extending SNAP, as we did in the American Rescue Plan; creating a Summer EBT program that will institute opportunities for nearly 30 million children to have access to nutrition during the summer months; increasing our commitment to WIC; and basically making a down payment, if you will, on hunger reduction.

We have the opportunity, over the course of the next several months, as Congress considers the American Jobs Plan and the American Family Plan, to cement those — those results and to actually build upon them.

There are three key investments for nutrition and food security in the American Families Plan. First, we are going to make permanent this incredible and historic effort to feed kids during the summer months. There are, as I said, nearly 30 million American children who are in free-and-reduced-lunch status in schools.

At the end of the school year, there is no program, other than the summer feeding program, which impacted and affected several million of those 30 million children. Now we have the opportunity to provide each one of these families with a card that looks like this.

This is the Summer EBT card that's available. It allows parents the opportunity to go to the grocery store — as they do with their SNAP card — and be able to purchase additional fruits and vegetables and other wholesome food for their children, ensuring that 30 million kids will have the opportunity to have nutrition during the summer, which means that they'll be better prepared to begin school ready to learn in the fall.

We're also extending, with this effort, the opportunity to impact free school meals in high-poverty school areas by focusing on the Community Eligibility program that essentially identifies the ability of a school district where SNAP participation is roughly 40 percent to extend free meals to everyone in that school.

This is going to expand opportunities for youngsters to be well fed. And we know from a recent Tufts study that one of the healthiest places in the country for children to eat is now in America's schools. So we're going to see that extended, and we're going to focus — with a specific, laser-like focus — on elementary schools to make sure that our youngest learners have the best possible opportunity.

And finally, we're going to invest a billion dollars, with Congress's help and assistance, in trying to figure out strategies that will improve, even more than we already have, the nutritional value and quality of the meals that youngsters receive in schools.

So, these three steps — these three key investments of the American Families Plan will allow us to cement the gains under the American Rescue Plan and, hopefully, impact and reduce hunger to the point, eventually, one day, where we won't have to have a press conference about — about hunger.

So, with that, I'd be happy to take questions.

MS. PSAKI: Great. Andrea, do you want to kick us off?

Q Yeah. Secretary Vilsack, a couple questions. One about the mines that you — the mine project that you had previously blocked, and then the Trump administration allowed those to open up. Do you have any particular view on whether that should be reopened or not? This is the Twin Metals copper mine.

SECRETARY VILSACK: There's always a very difficult balance to strike in any of these questions. And certainly, in this particular one, you're balancing a pristine, incredibly important, and valuable natural site — the Boundary Waters of the Mississippi, a tremendously unique area. It's one that the late Walter Mondale felt very strongly about, and I know that from a personal experience with the former Vice President. He called me repeatedly on this issue.

So, you've got that on one hand. On the other hand, you obviously have jobs and economic opportunity. And I think the challenge is to try to see if you can strike a balance. And that's what we attempted to do in the previous administration, and I don't see any reason why we should — why we should change that calculation: trying to find the balance between preserving a pristine area and, at the same time, looking for ways in which job growth, economic growth can take place in rural areas. And that's what we're going to attempt to do.

There are no final decisions being made on this. This is obviously something we also have to do in conjunction with the Department of Interior. They have a stake in this issue as well.

Q (Inaudible.)

MS. PSAKI: Alex — oh, I just want to get to a bunch of people, and he has limited time. So, go ahead, Alex.

Q Sure. One way of increasing SNAP benefits is by reforming the Thrifty Food Plan, and I know that that is under review right now. Can you talk a little bit about what that review entails, and when we should expect results, and how the reforms would be implemented if the program is (inaudible)?

SECRETARY VILSACK: It's a complicated question, and one that hasn't been reviewed in detail for quite some time. And we expect and anticipate, during the course of the summer months, that we will complete our review and then have an opportunity, perhaps, to have a conversation about this in the fall.

And this will be appropriately timed because, as you know, the American Rescue Plan called for an extension of the increase in SNAP over the course of the summer months until the end of September. So it's timely for us to look at this.

I'd simply say that the principles that we're operating under in this area are:

Number one, that the benefit has to be meaningful to families — American families. With the American Rescue Plan, we saw an additional \$100 a month for a family of four being added to the groceries — to their grocery purchases.

It also impacts jobs. As I said before, that SNAP benefit increased and supported tens of thousands of jobs in grocery stores and across the food chain.

It also has to be conveniently available. It's one of the reasons why, again, the American Rescue Plan has provided opportunities for us to look at online purchasing — make it more convenient.

It has to be operated with integrity, obviously.

And it has to be — we have to look for ways in which we can incent and encourage those dollars to be used in the best way possible to provide the most nutritious benefit to American families.

And that's the goal, and that's what we'll look at when we look at the Thrifty Food Plan.

MS. PSAKI: Alex.

Q Secretary, a group of Midwestern farmers, last week, sued over the COVID — a COVID loan forgiveness program, arguing that it's unfair to them because they're white. Your reaction to that lawsuit? And do you stand by the program's structure?

SECRETARY VILSACK: That's a great question. I appreciate it. I think I have to take you back 20, 30 years, when we know for a fact that socially disadvantaged producers were discriminated against by the United States Department of Agriculture. We know this.

We have reimbursed people in the past for those acts of discrimination, but we've never absolutely dealt with the cumulative effect. And by "cumulative effect," I mean this: When I have the full advantage of all the USDA programs throughout the last 30 years, my operation could grow. I could invest in more land. I could get the latest and best technology. I could plant my crop at just the right time. I could make more money. If I had limited access or no access to USDA programs, obviously my operation — significantly limited.

So, the American Rescue Plan's effort is to begin addressing the cumulative effect of that discrimination in terms of socially disadvantaged producers.

Secondly, when you look at the COVID relief packages that had been passed and distributed by USDA prior to the American Rescue Plan, and you take a look at who disproportionately received the benefits of those COVID payments, it's pretty clear that white farmers did pretty well under that program because of the way it was structured. It's structured on size; it's structured on production.

So I think there is a very legitimate reason for doing what we are doing. I think it has to be complemented with additional steps, which the American Rescue Plan provides — an equity commission to take a look at whether or not there are systemic barriers that need to be removed at the Department.

And — and also, taking a look at how we might be able to create better technical assistance, better access to land, better access to markets for socially disadvantaged producers and for local and regional food production.

So we're going to continue to proceed forward. Understand that litigation is

going to be what it is, and we're wal- — we'll obviously have the Department of Justice and others do what they do. An- — but in the meantime, the U.S. Department of Agriculture is going to move forward with that effort.

MS. PSAKI: Kristen.

Q Thank you, Secretary Vilsack. You've just outlined the plans for the ARP funds through the fall to deal with some of the issues around hunger. How long do you anticipate those funds will last, particularly given that next year's schoolyear will be unique — coming off of a year where most schools have been closed for the better part of the year? And will you need more funds from Congress to address this (inaudible)?

SECRETARY VILSACK: Well, I think that's one of the reasons why the President proposed the American Families Plan as a continuation and as — allowing us to basically cement and make more permanent the gains that we've seen from the American Rescue Plan.

In the meantime, we have worked with schools, understanding they are faced with a lot of uncertainty about the upcoming schoolyear. And so we have already decided that we have available resources to be able to provide for universal free lunch for schools throughout the '21-'22 schoolyear. And that will extend, I think, until the end of June 2022.

With the passage of the American Families Plan, we would then have the Summer EBT program to provide additional support and help. And that would give us, I think, enough lead time for school districts to be able to adjust back to what the new normal will be.

In the meantime, we'll be looking at, hopefully, the use of the pilot under the American Rescues — under the American Families Plan, to see if there are ways in which we can incent additional nutritional value for those meals. And we'll be using, hopefully, with the passage of the American Families Plan, a more targeted effort in high-poverty schools — elementary schools — to expand universal free — free meals.

Q Thank you, Secretary.

MS. PSAKI: Kaitlan. That will be the last one.

Q On this idea of a carbon bank, since you've been on the job, what is the feedback that you've gotten from farmers? And is this something that you think needs congressional approval?

SECRETARY VILSACK: You know, I was at a meeting yesterday with the Environmental Protection Agency Administrator, Michael Regan. He did a terrific job. We had probably 25 farmers.

I was very pleased with the level of support and interest that the farm community has for ways in which they can be engaged in this effort to reduce emissions and to be engaged in this climate effort.

We had multiple questions about this in terms of "How can we do this?" — not "We're against it" or "We are opposed to it" or "We don't think it should happen." It was, "How can we do this? How can we be part of this?"

Because farmers understand something very, very fundamental about this: This is the opportunity of a lifetime for us to create additional revenue opportunities for farmers. Now, why is that important? Because today, 89.6 percent of American farms — the majority of income does not come from the farm for those farm families. That means they have to have an off-farm income.

So it's the Department of Agriculture's job to find more, better, and new markets. Climate provides that opportunity. Whether it's a fund or whether it's conservation resources, whether it's investments in technology that will allow them to capture methane and reuse it, or whether it's creating new opportunities for bioprocessing and new jobs in rural places, all of that has to be done.

And I think the USDA has — has enormous capacity, an enormous set of tools that can be used to provide the resources to work with the farm community to embrace this future. And I think they are in agreement with President Biden when he says the net goal here is net-zero emissions by 2050. I think that's doable. And I think in doing it, I think we'll improve income opportunities for farmers, we'll certainly do right by the environment, and I



think we'll also have healthier and better soil and cleaner water.

Q Would it need congressional approval — a carbon bank?

SECRETARY VILSACK: Well, it needs congressional approval in the sense that you have resources in all of these programs that require funding. We have a lot of flexibility already at USDA, and we're going to be utilizing that flexibility in a way that creates more, new, and better markets. And I think farmers are going to find that to be a very — they're going to be very agreeable with that.

Q Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Thank you, Secretary Vilsack. And as always, if you all have follow-up questions, we are happy to connect you with his team following the briefing.

SECRETARY VILSACK: Great.

MS. PSAKI: Thank you. And we'll love to have you back.

SECRETARY VILSACK: You bet. I'll take my notes. Appreciate it.

MS. PSAKI: Thank you so much.

I'll just note my first campaign was for the Secretary's gubernatorial race in 2002, so full circle.

A couple of items — additional items for all of you at the top. This afternoon, President Biden, as you know, will deliver remarks on Amer- — the American Rescue Plan's Restaurant Revitalization Fund — the administration's program to provide relief to restaurants, bars, food trucks, and other food and drink establishments.

As we all know, restaurants were some of the first- and worst-hit businesses in the pandemic. The Restaurant Revitalization Fund provides \$28.6 billion in direct relief to restaurants and food and beverage establishments, and prioritizes those that are women-owned, veteran-owned, and owned by

other socially and economically disadvantaged individuals by only funding applications from these businesses for the first 21 days of the program. Then it expands beyond there.

Earlier today, the President also visited one local restaurant that was a beneficiary of relief funding through the Revitalization Fund's pilot program. Taqueria [Las] Gemelas — I'm going to butcher that and I apologize; I want to go there and have some tacos — is owned in part by Mexican immigrants and, during the pandemic, went from 55 employees to just 7. So clearly, in great need.

These funds will allow business owners to complete delayed projects, rehire and raise the wages of their staff, pay their rent, and operate with confidence again. Applications for the program opens up on Monday. And in just the first two days of the program, 186,200 restaurants, bars, and other eligible businesses in all 50 states; Washington, D.C.; and 5 U.S. territories applied for relief.

Ninety-seven thousand six hundred applications came from restaurants, bars, and other eligible businesses owned and controlled by women, veterans, socially and economically disadvantaged individuals, or some combination of the three.

Sixty-one thousand seven hundred applications came from businesses with under \$500,000 in annual pre-pandemic revenue, representing some of the smallest restaurants and bars and businesses in America. And we look forward to implementing that program.

With that, I think we can go, Alex, to you. Questions.

Q So the CDC's summer camp guidance is very strict. As Dr. Fauci acknowledged today, it requires even adults who have been vaccinated to wear masks outside at all times. It requires children to be socially distanced. Can you explain why that contradicts the administration's guidance that vaccinated adults don't have to wear masks outside?

And also, Dr. Fauci suggested that it may change as the science becomes clear, but are — is the administration at all concerned that there won't be

compliance with something this strict and there won't be compliance if it continuously changes?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Well, first, I think everyone can expect that the guidance will continue to be updated and will continue to change. And I think, as a parent myself of kids going to summer school — not summer school, summer camp; don't tell them I said that — (laughter) — you know, they — I would welcome that.

And there's no question what the CDC is trying to do is provide guidance to the American public — to parents, to families — that they can trust, that they know is reliable — based on medical experts, doctors; based on data — on how they can feel safe. The guidance that was r- — that was rolled out last week does not convey that when you're outside in a crowd, you cannot — you should not wear a mask.

If you're outside and you're not in a crowd, then you — and you're vaccinated, you don't need to wear a mask. Obviously, there is nuance in all of these applications, and people are still learning how to apply it.

But as kids are dropping off — as parents, I should say, are dropping off their kids at summer camp; as there are tons of kids, tons of parents, counselors — you know, that certainly wouldn't — wouldn't be someone alone.

But I think what Dr. Fauci was conveying, Alex, is that the data — they're going to continue to look at the data. And they want to put out updated guidance as they feel comfortable and confident in what they can provide to the American public.

Q Sure. And there's a new evaluation of the American Families Plan out by the Penn Wharton Budget Model. And they found, actually, that the plan would increase the deficit and fail to grow the economy as much as President Biden has claimed.

And so it's — is there a risk, in the long term, that the President might not be able to fully deliver on what he's promised economically?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, let me say we strongly agree — disagree with the

analysis, as do other independent experts.

According to an analysis out this week from Moody's, GDP in 2030 will be more than \$700 billion higher than it would be without the Jobs and Family — the Jobs Act — the Jobs Plan and the Families Plan.

This is in large part because labor force participation will be nearly a full percentage point higher due to the effects of the benefits of childcare support — child support — childcare support and paid family leave. And that same analysis found that the economic benefits would only increase over time due to increased college enrollment and universal pre-K, which will help some of the 2 million women who are no longer in the workforce get back in.

The Penn Wharton Model analysis is also off in a number of important ways. It gets the cost of the investments wrong by about \$700 billion, even though our estimates come from career officials at OMB. Moody's, for example, arrived at deficits even lower than the administration when — than we had when it came to the effect of the Families Plan.

And, of course, our plan would be implemented over a series of 8 years and 10 years, and paid for over 15. So, we're going to rely on the majority of economic analysis out there and our own analysis in here. And we are confident we'll be able to reach both our job creation projections and, of course, do it in a way we can pay for it.

Q And one international question: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu missed the deadline to put together a coalition government yesterday — or a new governing coalition. Is the President monitoring this situation? And does the administration have any sort of response or perspective on the possibility of a new coalition government there?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we do read all of your news coverage, but we are not going to comment publicly on government formation while that process is underway.

Go ahead, Andrea.

Q Okay, there are a couple follow-ups on Vilsack's answer — Secretary

Vilsack's answer on the Twin Metals thing. Is that a decision that you think will be coming at any point soon? Or is that just, sort of, carved out?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have a prediction of that. I would say I would refer you to the Department of Agriculture. And they would, of course, be the right source for that information. We can see if there's more follow up on it, on the timeline.

Q Okay. And then, on the issue of the G7 meeting and the subsequent meetings group — Putin. Have you — do you have any news for us on that front, in terms of timing and also the agenda?

MS. PSAKI: Not quite yet. As soon as we have details or any confirmed details of timing, location, date, participation, we will of course share that with you. And I would expect we wouldn't have more specifics on an agenda, if and when we have it confirmed, until much closer.

Q And then just one more on my favorite topic of the WTO.

MS. PSAKI: Oh, I don't know which one it is.

Q TRIPS waivers.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

Q TRIPS wai- — (laughter.) TRIPS waivers.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

Q So, this morning there was a meeting of the WTO. Katherine Tai made some comments during an FT session talking about, you know, time being of the essence — really, sort of, underscoring.

There are multiple reports out, also, about, kind of, a division within the administration on this waiver issue. Can you just really walk us through what your perspective is on this and why?

So the — there's so many people in institutions and organizations now really

putting pressure on President Biden to back this waiver.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think it's important, first, to just take a step back and remind everyone that President — the President spoke about his support for this type of a waiver back during the campaign.

But it — we are running a process — we have been running a process in the administration that includes all stakeholders in the administration. And he is somebody who has welcomed people of different views. He wants to know the details. He's a details guy, and he wants to dig into the pros and cons and all of the considerations for any decision.

As we look at this decision, what we're really talking about — I know you know this, Andrea, but for others — we're really talking about the U.S. position as it relates to the WTO process, right? And that process will take a series of months, and requires a unanimous point of view to move forward.

So what we are — the consideration now is — the U.S. position, our objective overall, as we look at this decision is: How can we provide as much supply in the most cost-effective way to the global community? And clearly, there are steps we've announced. We've take — we're in the process of taking — providing 60 million doses to the global community — once we have that available — that are AstraZeneca doses.

Earlier this week, Pfizer announced they'll also be sending doses, or manufacturing doses, for the global community. And we're going to continue to work with our partners. I expect we'll have more — now that the WTO meetings are underway, we'll have more to say very soon on this.

Q Are you concerned about setting a precedent that could be — so, even if India and South Africa narrow their proposal, which is apparently something that's going on — and maybe you could ask — you could — you could confirm that that is your understanding — even if that proposal is narrowed, are you concerned that you're going to be setting a precedent that could harm U.S. companies in the future — which is what, you know, we hear from U.S. industry?

MS. PSAKI: Well, clearly as these decisions are weighed, we take intellectual

property incredibly seriously. And we also, though, are in the midst of a historic global pandemic, which requires a range of creative solutions. And we're looking at it through that prism.

Q It sounds — I'm sorry, Jen, I just want to be very clear. It sounds like you're pushing us or leaning towards some kind of a — a waiver of some kind.

MS. PSAKI: I'm not trying to give you an indication. That, obviously, would be an announcement or a decision that would be recommended by the USTR and a decision I would expect that would be made by the USTR. But what I'm trying to give you an understanding of, which I think was your question, is what the considerations are in the thinking and decision.

Q When do you think a decision will be made?

MS. PSAKI: Soon.

Go ahead.

Q I have questions on a couple of different topics. The first is on the debt limit: Is the White House concerned about being able to avoid a government shutdown and raising the debt limit considering the Treasury is unsure how long it can use the extraordinary measures it has? And what's the White House's strategy for pressuring Congress to agree to raise or suspended the debt limit? Or are you leaving that to Treasury to figure out?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, I will say that, on the issue at hand, raising or suspending the debt ceiling does not authorize new spending. Sometimes — I'm not saying you're confused about that; some people sometimes are. It merely allows Treasury to meet obligations that Congress has already approved. So, certainly, they would be in the lead, as they have historically been in most administrations, on making that case.

We expect Congress to act in a timely manner to raise or suspend the debt ceiling, as they did three times on a broad bipartisan basis during the last administration, including the same year that the former President signed into law tax cuts that added \$2 trillion to the deficit.

So, we certainly expect they will move forward, that this is something that has been done in a bipartisan basis; Democrats and Republicans have called for it in the past. And that's what we'll be advocating for.

Q Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said this morning — when asked about, kind of, the issues within his own party — that, quote, “100 percent of my focus is on stopping this new administration.” And he touted, kind of, the unity within his caucus, from Susan Collins to Ted Cruz. Are you concerned that it will be difficult to work with Republicans when you're — when you have these kinds of statements coming from their Leader?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I guess the contrast for people to consider is 100 percent of our focus is on delivering relief to the American people and getting the pandemic under control and putting people back to work. And we welcome — support engagement and work with the Republicans on that. And there's — the President has extended an open arm to that. The door to the Oval Office is open. He's invited Senator Capito to bring a group of her choosing to the White House next week. And we think there is opportunity for agreement to deliver on — on relief to the American people.

Q Just one quick question: A judge, this morning, struck down the CDC's national moratorium on evictions. Do you have a response to that and the administration's plans to appeal, potentially?

MS. PSAKI: Yes, I do — we understand that it's just happened, as you alluded to, this morning. We understand the Department of Justice is reviewing the court's decision and should have more to say later today. We also recognize, of course, the importance of the eviction moratorium for Americans who have fallen behind on rent during the pandemic.

A recent study estimates that there were 1.55 million fewer evictions filed during 2020 than would be expected, due to the eviction moratorium. So it's clearly — has had a huge benefit. But we would expect that a response and any, of course, decision about additional action would come from DOJ. And you may hear more from them today.

Go ahead, Kristen.



Q Thanks, Jen. Facebook has decided to keep former President Trump off of its platform for now. Senator Ted Cruz tweeted the following: “For every liberal celebrating Trump’s social media ban, if the Big Tech oligarchs can muzzle the former President, what’s to stop them from silencing you?” What do you make of that comment? Does he have a point?

MS. PSAKI: Well, let me first say that this is an independent board’s decision, and we’re not going to have any comment on the future of the former President’s social media platform. That’s a decision that, it sounds like, the independent board punted back to Facebook to make in the next six months, as I know you all have reported.

The President’s view is that the major platforms have a responsibility related to the health and safety of all Americans to stop amplifying untrustworthy content, disinformation, and misinformation, especially related to COVID-19, vaccinations, and elections. And we’ve seen that over the past several months, broadly speaking. I’m not placing any blame on any individual or group; we’ve seen it from a number of sources.

He also supports better privacy protections and a robust anti-trust program. So his view is that there’s more that needs to be done to ensure that this type of misinformation; disinformation; damaging, sometimes life-threatening information is not going out to the American public.

Q You’re saying more that needs to be done. Are there any concerns though about First Amendment rights? And where does the White House draw the line on that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, look, I think we are, of course, a believer in First Amendment rights. I think what the decisions are that the social media platforms need to make is how they address the disinformation, misinformation — especially related to life-threatening issues like COVID-19 and vaccinations that are — continue to proliferate on their platforms.

Q I want to ask you, also, Jen, about police reform. President Biden said he wanted it done by the first anniversary of George Floyd’s death: May 25th. Is he confident that Congress can meet that benchmark? Where do those

negotiations stand?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the negotiations are between members of Congress. So — and he, of course, is confident in the — those discussions and the work that is happening under the leadership of everyone from Congresswoman Karen Bass to Senator Cory Booker — obviously, Senator Tim Scott, who he called out in his speech just last week.

And we are — we remain — we are in close touch with, of course, negotiators and kept abreast of their progress, but we will wait to see what comes out of those discussions.

Q If you do the math, though, this puts police reform, in some regard, ahead of the negotiations, one would think, for the American Families Plan, the infrastructure plan, which he set an end-of-the-summer deadline for. Is this now the President's top priority? Does he want Congress to tackle this first?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would say that the President believes Congress can and should move forward with multiple policies at the same time. And, certainly, that — that is what is happening on Capitol Hill. I know those members who are playing central role — roles in these negotiations — and, obviously, they can speak to the frequency of the discussions and the status of them and we defer to them — they will be important participants, of course, in any outcome of negotiations around the American Jobs Plan, but those negotiations can happen simultaneously.

Q Just finally, Jen, how does he see his role? I mean, he's the one making this call to get this done. Has he reached out to Tim Scott — the person who's leading the charge on the GOP side?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any calls or engagements to read out to you, but I can say that, as you know, a number of representatives of the families were here just last week, meeting with some senior members of the White House leadership.

The President has talked about how it's long overdue to put in place police reform measures — that that will help rebuild trust in our communities.

He used his joint session speech — the highest-profile moment in a first — in a President's first year — to talk about that and make the case.

And — but the negotiations are happening between members of Congress. He feels that's the appropriate place for them to be. And we will continue to use opportunities to call for this moving forward.

Go ahead, Kristin — Kristin? Kristen? Kristin? I got confused. Kaitlan.

Q There's a lot of "Ks." A lot of "Ks."

MS. PSAKI: There's a lot of "Ks." It's a Wednesday. Go ahead, Kaitlan.

Q That's all right. Kristin and I also have been dressing alike lately, so it's fine.

MS. PSAKI: Kristin has a very good mask on today. This Kristin. Both of your masks.

Go ahead, okay.

Q My question is on these restaurant funds.

MS. PSAKI: Yes.

Q When will they start being awarded? And does the President envision having to ask Congress for more money for this?

MS. PSAKI: Well, on the second piece — well, first, the first awards, as part of the pilot program, will be funded Friday. So —

Q Right. But for this program, not the pilot — the —the sec- — the actual part of it, not the pilot.

MS. PSAKI: Those who applied this week can expect up to — up to 14 days, on average, from submission to funding. So it will be a very rapid turnaround.

Q Okay. And does he envision asking Congress for more money for this?

MS. PSAKI: When Congress comes back, we are happy to discuss the best ways to further support small businesses, including restaurants hurt by the crisis. So he's certainly open to that.

And as I noted, there has already been a large interest in this program. And there are great needs across the country from these small businesses, from these restaurants that are in communities across the country.

So we will — we're happy to have a conversation with Congress about that.

Q Okay. And my question on the patents — you were talking about how the President, last summer, expressed his favor for waiving these so countries would be able to mass produce these vaccines once they're ready. Of course, that was when they were not ready yet last summer.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q So, just to be clear: Is that still his position?

MS. PSAKI: That has been — that has been his position. He also believes that there needs to be an internal policy process. That's what's been ongoing.

The recommendation — the appropriate process — the recommendation to come from the USTR, and then any announcement about a decision would come from USTR. And that's how government should function and should work.

And as — and I noted, in response to Andrea's question — there are, of course, considerations, but we're also in the midst of a global pandemic, and we are — our objective is to getting as much supply out into the global community as — as quickly as possible and in the most cost-effective manner as we can.

Q But what did he communicate to Katherine Tai, his Trade Representative, before these meetings with the WTO on this are underway?

MS. PSAKI: Well, there have been discussions happening here in — through

a policy process. I don't think his comments he made last summer are a secret. They're certainly not.

But, again, he's a believer that you need to have all parties at the table — everyone providing information, hearing details, pros and cons of every decision. And that's exactly what he asked for from his policy teams.

Q So given what he's heard from the policy teams, from the health experts — people like Dr. Fauci have weighed in publicly about whether this would be helpful in making vaccines right now or if that would be further down the road — but is it — is his position still what he said last summer, which is “absolutely, positively,” he will “ensure there are no patents [standing] in the way of other countries and companies’ mass producing these lifesaving vaccines?”

MS. PSAKI: That has been his position, but he is the President of the United States, who believes in the advice, the counsel, the considerations of his policy teams. And that has been the process that's been ongoing over the last several weeks. And I expect we'll have more to say quite soon.

It's also important to note, just — just in response to one of the things you said, that this is not — this would not be — this is about the U.S. position. There would be an entire process at the WTO that would be — likely be months in the making.

And that's just how the process works. So there's also a consideration leading up to that.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Okay. Go ahead.

Q Thank you, Jen. Yesterday, you said that the CDC engaged with around 50 stakeholders when coming up with these guidelines for reopening schools.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q So, in addition to the teachers union — the American Federation of Teachers — who are these other roughly 50 stakeholders?

MS. PSAKI: Well, let me give you — I'm not going to read all 50 because, you know, but — and I'm happy to send them to you after.

But just as an example, while I find this lengthy list: You know, they include the YMCA. They include the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Association of School Nurses, the National Governors Association, Big Cities Health Coalition, Autism Speaks, Council of Great City Schools.

So there's a range of organizations. And as we were talking about yesterday, the objective is to have a better understanding of implementation, how it would work, and ensure that these guidelines can be implemented and they would not provide harm to the communities that they would be impacting.

Q But can you just explain maybe just a little bit more — you know why the CDC needs all of this input from so many outside entities? Why can't it just come up with these science-based guidelines on its own?

MS. PSAKI: Well, they do so to ensure that the recommendations are feasible to implement and that they adequately address the safety and wellbeing of individuals the guidance is aimed to protect, and that type of consultation is pretty standard as a part of their consideration processes.

Q One other topic.

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q Right now, there is a huge Chinese rocket in outer space that's going to be crashing down to Earth, likely on Saturday, and nobody knows exactly where. It'll likely be in an ocean, but it could — or pieces of it could come down over a populated area, and this isn't the first time that China has allowed — knowingly allowed something like this to happen.

So does the White House condemn this kind of repeated reckless behavior from China's space program?

MS. PSAKI: Well, let me first say that U.S. Space Command is aware of and tracking the location of the Chinese Long March 5B in space. And obviously, the Space Command would have more specifics on that tracking and — and additional details.

The United States is committed to addressing the risks of growing congestion due to space debris and growing activity in space. And we want to work with the international community to promote leadership and responsible space behaviors. It's in the shared interests of all nations to act responsibly in space to ensure the safety, stability, security, and long-term sustainability of outer space activities.

So cooperation is a hallmark of our approach. We're going to work with our international partners on that. And certainly, addressing this is something we'll do through those channels.

Q And just a quick follow-up: If this rocket does cause some — some serious damages here on Earth, would the White House enforce China paying some sort of compensation as required by the U.N. Liability — Space Liability Convention?

MS. PSAKI: Well, again, I think we'd, of course, refer to the advice and guidance from U.S. Space Command and the Department of Defense and others. But we're not — at this point, we are certainly tracking its location through U.S. Space Command. And hopefully, that's not the outcome that we are working through.

Okay. Go ahead, Eli.

Q Thanks, Jen. Just interested if you have any response to some of the moves made this week by a few Republican governors to get rid of, you know, protections that were in place for people — public benefits, also public health restrictions — basically sending the message that the pandemic is over and sort of criticizing Washington — “the CDC bureaucrats,” as Ron DeSantis put it — for telling people they still need to wear masks indoors, those sorts of things — saying that the vaccines have worked.

How are you trying to thread that needle by celebrating the progress of all

the people who have been vaccinated and keeping these things in place — and also trying to keep people from viewing this through a political lens? Any outreach to any of these Republican state officials about the message they're sending? And any response to them from the podium?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Well, first, we not only do a regular — a governors call every single week with governors from across the country, from red states and blue states, to talk about implementation, any changes we're making to allocations — as we talked about just yesterday — but we also have regular engagement with governors and local officials about where the public health guidance is going, questions they have, and even sometimes challenges they have in their communities.

Our position, from the federal government, continues to be that the public health guidelines are in place to keep people safe — not just governors and leaders of states, of course, but people in communities, families, kids, people who are in vulnerable populations. And that we'll continue to communicate that from the federal level, even as governors are pulling back their implementation in some places where it might be premature.

Q And as you — the President, yesterday, was talking about transitioning from the mass vaccination centers, largely in urban and suburban areas, and trying —

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q — to really be more deliberate, proactive about getting the vaccine to people in outlying areas, rural areas.

Is there any concern about having enough vaccinators to reach people in those areas? And will this mostly be run through local pharmacies or is there going to be a similar effort to authorize different people in sort of medical fields to be able to administer vaccines?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we did take that step some time ago to expand the type of individuals who are qualified to be vaccinators, because early on we recognized that it wasn't just about supply, it was also about locations — and obviously, as you alluded to, we've made some changes and adjustments —



but also about vaccinators and ensuring that a larger group of individuals — dentists, veterinarians, others — could also be eligible to do the vaccine and get it into people's arms, because we want to ensure that in a range of communities across the country there's a range of options for people who can do exactly that.

So that's not a concern that we are tracking at this point in time — a lack of — because we did a lot of work preparing for those needs.

And I would say that, you know, there were some mass vaccination sites we opened even last week, but what we announced yesterday is a kind of a phased approach based on the phase we're in at this point in time, which is that we are recognizing the daily numbers will go down a bit because we're at such a high percentage rate, relative to where people thought we were at this point in the pandemic.

And we know it will be harder and harder to reach people and meet people where they are, hence the increase, as you suggested, in walk-in hours or the announcement of walk-in hours on mobile units, on partnerships with primary care physicians and doctors to make it even easier and more accessible for people to get the vaccine.

Q Just one more on tomorrow and the trip to Louisiana. So far, the President has mostly traveled to states that are, you know, competitive swing states. Louisiana is obviously a red state, but has been impacted by COVID.

MS. PSAKI: Except for Texas and Ohio.

Q Well, okay. But I mean, there's been a lot of travel to some of these states. Can you just talk a little bit about the takeaway that people should have when they see the President showing up, you know, in deep-red Louisiana tomorrow, and the issues that he wants to, sort of, draw attention to?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Well, first, the President, when he was elected, knew from day one he was going to govern for all Americans and that was going to be his objective. And so, even if it's for people who didn't vote for him, for states who didn't vote for him, his focus is on delivering for them.

So, tomorrow, he'll make two stops in Louisiana. His focus will be on talking about the American Jobs Plan and how that plan in a historic investment in infrastructure, rebuilding the type of bridges, roads in Louisiana that are long overdue to be upgraded could help not only people's travel and commutes, but also create jobs in these communities. And it's not about just delivering for people who voted for him or people who have blue checkmarks next to their name because they're Democrats. And that's part of what this message should send — this visit should send.

Go ahead, Hans.

Q I get that you, sort of, prefer the Moody's model over the Penn Wharton. I'm just curious if the White House is going to accept whatever CBO and JCT scores the President's proposals at?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think our issue with the Penn Wharton Model was the data it was based on, and that it was off. And so we'll have to look at what the data that any future analysis is based on, and then we'll give an assessment.

Q Okay. So even official — you're not embracing whatever the official assessment will be from CBO and JCT?

MS. PSAKI: Well, Hans, there is no assessment at this point in time. Our assumption is that they would be abiding by accurate data; so we'll look forward to seeing those assessments.

Q And then when do you expect those assumptions and data to come in?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have a prediction of that.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: I suggest you ask them.

Go ahead, Alex.

Q Does President Biden agree with Governor Whitmer's decision on the oil and gas pipeline? She's citing, essentially, water-quality issues. It's really

angered Canada. Does President Biden agree with that decision?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to take a closer look at the pipeline. I mean, we have been evaluating on a case-by-case scenario — which — which pipeline are you talking about?

Q The Enbridge.

MS. PSAKI: The Enbridge one. We look at each pipeline through the prism of the impact on the environment and also the impact on the economy, and we make assessments. So I'd have to talk to our team if that assessment has been concluded or not.

Q Okay. And the President is going to be talking about implement — implementation later. What sort of oversight plans are being talked about, as far as the spending and making sure it's —

MS. PSAKI: For the restaurant program or just the programs in general?

Q In general. In general — Inspector Generals — I mean, can you give us an idea of what sort of oversight is being talked about?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, the President came into this job having served as the person overseeing the implementation of the American Rescue and Recovery — of the ARRA — A-R-R-A — back in the early days of the Obama-Biden administration. He takes waste, fraud, and abuse incredibly seriously. And we have put in place changes and reforms to programs at SBA and other programs that have been implemented where we've seen incidents of that in the past.

It's also why he has somebody — Gene Sperling — overseeing the American Rescue Plan implementation to ensure there is coordination across government, that we are tracking where we see issues.

And certainly, he's somebody who welcomes oversight and wants to do everything we can to reduce any waste, fraud, and abuse in these programs.

Q And just finally, I wonder if the President or anyone else in the

administration spoke with the Treasury Secretary yesterday, given some of her remarks that she then sought to clarify?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the Secretary, herself, addressed her remarks later in the afternoon. So I'm not aware of any calls yesterday. She will be here in the briefing room, and they'll have their regular economic briefing on Friday.

Go ahead, in the back.

Q So I want to talk about climate for a second. The President had said in his executive order in January that he would call for a Green Procurement Plan for the federal government.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

Q And part of that was about buying electric cars. The deadline for that plan was April 27th. Do you know what the status of it is and why the delay?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have an update on the status. It is something, as you noted, he talked about early in the administration and he is absolutely committed to. But I'm happy to check with our team and see where our report on that lives.

Q And I also want to ask: Does the Biden administration have a timeline, at this point, for issuing pardons and commutations?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any previewing of that to provide and probably won't from here.

Go ahead, in the back.

Q Yes. Is the Los Angeles mayor, Eric Garcetti, under active consideration to be the ambassador to India or any other country?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any personnel announcements or assessments to make here from the podium. But, hopefully, we'll have some more formal announcements on ambassadors soon.

Q And the Tokyo Olympics are 12 weeks out.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

Q At what point does the President need to make a decision about his attendance and —

MS. PSAKI: His attendance?

Q Yes. And what factors are delaying the announcement?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think the President and his team assess any invitation as it comes in, but 12 weeks is some period of time. I don't have any updates or predictions on whether or not he'll travel or accept the invitation made to attend the Olympics.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. Two questions. First, on the large sports arenas that are beginning to allow for fully vaccinated fans in special sections — both Citi Field and Yankee Stadium in New York have made those announcements, and I know there are some others. Does the administration think that that is a good approach for sports teams to take, and maybe other large event venues?

And are there any concerns about equity when it comes to access to facilities if — particularly, those that were built with some public money, in some cases, I'm sure — when it comes to people who may not have been able to get vaccinated yet?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, everyone in the country is eligible to be vaccinated, and certainly at this point in time. So we are — and we, as we've noted here, have taken a range of steps to ensure we are meeting people where they are, getting these vaccine doses out to communities around the country.

In terms of an assessment of the safety of this approach by sports teams, I'd have to talk to our COVID team about that. And I think it's unlikely we're going to be weighing into every private sector decision about how they're moving forward once people are vaccinated, but I will check with them on

that.

Q Okay. And then the other — the other question, if I can follow up on the — the debt limit question just a little bit.

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q Has there — does the — does the President have a position on whether or not the debt limit itself should exist at all, considering every — every, you know, couple of years we go through this question of: “What are the extraordinary measures?” And, “How much extra time do we have?” And we know, at the end of the day, that it’s going to have to get raised or else we’re going to have some sort of economic calamity.

Does the President have a view on the question, more broadly, of whether or not there even should be a debt limit?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, raising or suspending the debt ceiling doesn’t authorize new spending; it merely allows Treasury to meet obligations that Congress has already approved. Right? It has been the case for many years and there have been bipartisan votes to support.

So, you know, the President does believe that Treasury should be able to meet its obligations and believes that Congress should move forward in a bipartisan manner, as they have historically in the past, including three times during the prior administration.

Go ahead, in the back.

Q Thanks. On the G7 trip, is there any advance on whether the President will meet with the Queen? And, separately, has the President or the First Lady been in contact recently with Prince Harry?

MS. PSAKI: I don’t have any more trip details. Who among us wouldn’t want to go see the Queen? But I don’t have any details to preview at this point in time. I expect as we get closer to the trip, we’ll have more specifics.

And I don’t have any calls or engagements with Prince Harry or Meghan

Markle to — to read out for you with the President or the First Lady.

Q Just one follow-up. Is there a timeline on the announcement for the British ambassador?

MS. PSAKI: A timeline?

Q Yeah.

MS. PSAKI: I don't have a timeline for that.

Q Any — any names or any — anyone under consideration?

MS. PSAKI: No names to float out there for you. Hopefully, we'll have some more ambassadors soon to announce.

Great.

Q When you say "soon," will that be before or after he makes his decision on going to the Olympics?

MS. PSAKI: (Laughs.) I can't order for you, Hans. There's just so much excitement to stay tuned for around here. So, we'll see.

Okay. Thanks everyone.

1:24 P.M. EDT