

EXHIBIT 23

JUNE 23, 2023

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre and NSC Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

1:40 P.M. EDT

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Hey, hey. Happy Friday.

Okay, let's get started. We have a couple things at the top before we start with your questions.

So, tomorrow will mark one year since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* and eliminated a constitutional right that it had previously recognized for nearly 50 years.

That decision opened the floodgates for extreme abortion bans we are seeing Republican officials pass in states across the country.

Today, more than 23 million women of reproductive age live in one of the — one of the 18 states with an abortion ban that is in effect.

In the last year, women have been denied essential medical care to preserve their health and even save their lives. They have been turned away from emergency rooms, forced to delay care, and made to travel hundreds of miles for needed medical care.

Earlier this week, the First Lady heard from some of those women who shared their stories of being denied needed healthcare in Florida, in Louisiana, and in Texas. And for those of you who watched, they were incredibly and powerful stories that these women shared with the First Lady.

Tomorrow, the Vice President will deliver remarks in Charlotte, North Carolina, to highlight leaders on the frontlines of protecting abortion access in states across the country. And as you've seen, tonight, the President, the Vice

President, the First Lady, and the Second Gentleman will participate in a campaign event with reproductive rights groups.

President Biden and Vice President Harris stand with the majority of Americans who believe the right to choose is fundamental.

As the President has made clear, the only way to ensure women in every state have access to abortion is for Congress — is for Congress to pass a law restoring the protections of Roe.

After Dobbs, the President issued two executive orders directing a comprehensive slate of actions to protect access to reproductive healthcare services, including abortion.

And today, the President issued a third executive order focused on strengthening access to affordable, high-quality contraception.

Access to contraception has become more important than ever following the Supreme Court's decision and ensuing crisis for women's health.

And today's action helps ensure that women can make decisions about their own health, lives, and also their families.

Now, as you all know, when a section of I-95 collapsed just 12 days ago, President Biden made clear that his administration would move heaven and earth to get I-95 reopened as soon as possible.

Six days ago, as you all covered and may have been there yourselves, he visited Philadelphia where he viewed the site of the collapse and met with the union workers and local officials working day and night to rebuild the bridge.

Now, today, the President called into Governor Shapiro's — he called into Governor Shapiro just ahead of the press conference that he had — that the Governor held, announcing to people in Philadelphia that the I-95 is now reopened.

This phase of the emergency repair is 100 percent federally funded, and all approvals were given as quick as possible.

We also deployed officials from the U.S. Department of Transportation to the crash site within hours to help fast-track the effort. We are proving that when we work together, there is nothing that we cannot do.

This is an important step forward. And the President and his entire administration are making clear to the people of Pennsylvania that we will be here to provide whatever it takes to keep the permanent repairs on track.

Now, we'll have more to share on this, but — later today and on the full a- — full week ahead. But on Wednesday, the President will travel to Chicago to deliver a major address on “Bidenomics,” his vision for growing the economy from the middle out and bottom up, not from the top down.

The President will highlight how, for too long, failed trickle-down econ- — economic policies had continued to be pushed by congressional Repub- — Republicans have hollowed out the middle class and sent jobs overseas.

President Biden's economic plan is a break — it is a break from those failed policies. It is focused on growing the middle class and empowering workers, investing in America, and lowering costs. That plan is delivering results, with more than 13 million jobs created, the strongest economic growth among any of the world lead- — world's leading economies since the pandemic began, and the lowest current inflation among the world's leading economies.

So we'll have more to share on his speech in the days ahead. And we'll have a — a week ahead later today for all of you as well.

And finally, I do want to speak to something that we all watched very closely the last couple of days. Before I get started, I wanted to say a few words about the submersible.

Our hearts go out to the families and loved ones of those who lost their lives on the Ta- — Titan. They have been through a tragic ordeal over the past few days, and we are keeping them in our thoughts and prayers.

We would also like to thank the United States Coast Guard; our Canadian, British, and French partners; and everyone

who participated in the search and rescue efforts these past couple of days.

This whole effort has been a testament — a testament to the skill and also the professionalism that the men and women who serve our nation continue — they continue to demonstrate, continue to show each and every day.

With that, I — as you all know, the Admiral is here to join me at the podium to speak to any questions that you may have after the Prime Minister's visit yesterday and any other foreign policy matters that you all have — may have questions on.

Admiral, the podium is yours.

MR. KIRBY: Karine, thank you.

Good afternoon, everybody. I think, as you know, Prime Minister Modi just concluded a very successful official state visit here to the White House. This morning, the President and the Prime Minister dropped by a meeting between senior officials and CEOs of American and Indian companies gathered to discuss innovation, investment, and manufacturing in a variety of technology sectors, including artificial intelligence, semiconductors, and space. And I think you received a list of all the attendees earlier today.

And now, over the course of this visit, the President and Prime Minister Modi reaffirmed that the partnership between the United States and India is deeper and more expansive than it's ever been. And when we think about the future not only of this relationship, but of the — of the critical and emerging technology, countering climate change, global health, energy security, food security, there's just simply no partner that's going to be more consequential to helping solve those problems than India. And that's exactly what President Biden made clear during this visit.

And as you all saw yesterday — or hopefully you saw — pretty robust set of deliverables on all of those fronts — very, very specific, very tangible deliverables that we're looking forward to carrying into the future with India.

And then, as both leaders reaffirmed, our countries are choosing to work together to truly work closely and cooperatively towards a more prosperous, secure, and healthy future not only for the Indo-Pacific, but for the world.

I'll take questions.

Q Hey, John. A couple questions: You mentioned this — we saw yesterday the President and the Prime Minister held a one-and-one in the East Room instead of the usual two-and-two. Can you speak a little bit to be the conversations that — the negotiations that went on in advance of that? It's obviously unusual for the Indian Prime Minister to have a press conference, but for it not to be at the U.S. standard of two. Why did the President and why did the White House not push for it to be two questions to each leader?

MR. KIRBY: Yeah, I'm not going to get into the sausage-making on this. I mean, we had good discussions with the Indians as we were preparing for this visit. We felt it was important for President Biden, certainly for both leaders, to — to be able to talk to you guys, read out their discussions, and take some questions. And we're glad that Prime Minister Modi and his team felt the same way.

Q And then, secondly, on Jake's travels this weekend, particularly his meetings with the — the BRICS, minus Russia, and China officials from — from Brazil, India, and South Africa, do you have any preview of what to expect from that — those conversations?

MR. KIRBY: I don't have travel to really read out or talk to you today. I would just tell you that — that Jake, especially, but all of us here on the national security team work closely with the Ukrainians almost every day, whether it's talking to them about security assistance or whether it's talking to them about this idea of a just peace and the principles behind that and how you get that.

And those conversations are ongoing and we'll continue — we'll continue to conduct them not only with the Ukrainians, but with allies and partners alike.

Q Thank you, John. China is complaining that the President's description of Xi as a "dictator" is a provocation. Could you walk us through the President's thinking on this comment?

MR. KIRBY: Well, the President, I think, walked you through that himself yesterday, Steve. We — we're not bashful about speaking plainly about some of the concerns and issues that we have with — with the PRC and with the challenges that they propose. And the President is very

forthright in the way he addresses those challenges and the complicated nature of this relationship.

But it is an important relationship. And you heard the President talk about that yesterday, as well. It's one of the most consequential bilateral relationships in the world today and likely will be going forward.

And that's why it was important to see Secretary Blinken make that trip to Beijing. That's why we're in discussions with the PRC about potential follow-on visits by – by Cabinet officials. We'll see where that goes.

But, more critically, that's why we want to make sure we can keep the lines of communication open. And as the President said, he has every expectation that we'll be able to do that.

Q And do you see India as a counterweight to China?

MR. KIRBY: This wasn't – this state visit wasn't about China. And, look, India has challenges with China as well, right on their doorstep, but also more broadly in the region. And, clearly, the challenges presented by the PRC to both our nations were on the agenda yesterday, no question about that.

But this wasn't about leveraging India to be some sort of counterweight. India is a sovereign independent state. They have their own foreign policy that they have to manage. And they live in a – in a tough neighborhood.

They are becoming an increasing exporter of security, which we welcome. And you can see a lot of that – that – our desire to improve the defense cooperation on hand yesterday in some of the deliverables, whether it's coproduction of jet engines, whether it's their purchase of MQ-9 drones. There is a lot we can do in the security front together, and that's really what we're focused on.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Go ahead, Weijia.

Q Thank you. So, John, just to follow up: You're saying that the U.S. does not view India as having any role in its overall competition against China.

MR. KIRBY: I didn't say that. I said that we're not viewing India as a counterweight to China, and we weren't approaching the state visit as some sort of messaging

opportunity to China. It was about sending a message to the American people and the Indian people about how important this bilateral relationship is, quite frankly, to people around the world.

India has challenges with China on their own. And they address those challenges largely on their own.

Now, I will add that they are a member of the Indo-Pacific Quad and have been a terrific contributor through that multilateral forum. It's not a formal alliance. It's not — you know, it's not a military organization. And they have legitimate concerns in the Indo-Pacific that they're addressing through their own vehicles as — as appropriate.

Q And just to follow up on Steve's question, you know, the President was so confident in saying that his "dictator" remark had no impact and no real consequence on the work that the U.S. and China continue to do to try to find, you know, a place of compromise and competition. China is reacting differently. So, why is the President saying so confidently that his remark had no — no real con- — consequence?

MR. KIRBY: Because he believes it. And we're still in communication with the PRC about moving this relationship forward. That's what we're focused on.

And every indication that we're getting is that that's what the PRC wants to focus on as well.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Okay. Go ahead, Nadia.

Q Thank you. Hi, John. The U.N. is saying that the violence in the West Bank might get out of hand. And the Israeli —

MR. KIRBY: Yeah.

Q — settlers' violence against Palestinians, including American Palestinians — as you know, in many villages in the West Bank, their houses have been burned down to the ground. Your own ambassador said that we cannot stand by and watch. So what does it mean? What practically — how does the White House translate this?

MR. KIRBY: Well, look, we've seen — we've certainly seen reports now of U.S. citizens at risk and potential victims here — actually vic- — having become victims of some of the

— the violence. And we’re actively engaging with the government of Israel about that.

Several U.S. government officials visited the West Bank and met with the victims of this violence in a place called Turmus Ayya. I hope I’m pronouncing that right. And consular officials have been providing assistance to U.S. citizens as requested. So we’ll continue to stand ready to do that.

Look, I’ll say it again for the “I don’t know how many-eth” time: We condemn all acts of violence. We certainly extend our condolences to the families of those that were affected, and we wish a speedy recovery for those that were injured.

But the violence isn’t helping reduce the tensions at all. And we — and when you have a situation like this, leadership is really required — leadership on both sides — to stop the violence and to be demonstrable in doing so, so that the tensions can be — can be turned down. And that’s what we want to see.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Okay. A follow-up in the back.

Q Thank you. The Israeli National Security Minister spoke today at a settler outpost, and he urged Israeli settlers to expand their activities to be included in all of the West Bank mountains. Despite of the violence that you just talked about and the international calls to halt settlements and settlement buildings, we’re still hearing this from high officials from the Israeli Cabinet. Why do we still hear this? And does the White House condemn actions and calls like that?

MR. KIRBY: We — we have been clear and consistent that we do not support additional settlement activity. The — our policy with respect to settlements has not changed and will not change, and we have been — will not change. And we have been very consistent in communicating that directly to government officials in Israel.

I can’t speak to their comments or — or why they’re saying what they’re saying. That’s a better question for them.

I can just tell you that our policy on settlements has not changed, and there’s not going to be a change to it.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Go ahead, Raquel.

Q Thank you so much, Karine. Hi, John. So, two questions about the trip to Copenhagen tomorrow. Some countries that we will be — will be there — like Brazil, for example — are saying that both sides will have to concede in order to have a peace plan to work.

So what does the National Security Advisor want to accomplish when he's meeting representatives of Brazil, India, South Africa, and Turkey? And does the White House believe some progress can be made during this weekend?

MR. KIRBY: My answer is going to be pretty much the same. I don't have any trips or travel to speak to here for Mr. Sullivan. I'll just tell you that we routinely have engagements of all different varieties with the Ukrainians and with our allies and partners about trying to seek a just peace and to discuss the peace principles around that. We'll continue to do that.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Go ahead, J- —

Q And just one more question very quickly, if I might.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Go ahead.

Q So the United States and Russia have requested from Brazil the extradition of a Russian spy who is in jail there. Is the United States seeing him as a potential candidate for a prisoner swap deal to free the Wall Street Journal reporter, Evan Gershkovich? Is this being considered?

MR. KIRBY: I'm afraid I don't have any context for you on that at all.

But just broadly speaking, what happened that you saw yesterday: Evan's appeal was denied. Not surprising. But just another example of the egregious nature of the so-called justice system in Russia.

Nothing is going to change about our efforts to try to get Evan and Paul Whelan home to their families where they belong.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: J.J.

Q On Taiwan and India, what does the U.S. expect India's involvement would be at this point if China were to invade Taiwan?

MR. KIRBY: That's up to the Indian government and Prime Minister Modi to determine.

Q So you can't say anything about whether anything was discussed along those lines with (inaudible)?

MR. KIRBY: As I said earlier, clearly, our mutual challenges with the PRC in the Indo-Pacific was a matter of discussion. The Indians have been very vocal about their concerns, too, with respect to what the PRC is doing. But — but I don't have anything specific — more specific to read out to you in terms of the conversations, specifically regarding Taiwan.

All I can tell you on Taiwan is our policy has not changed.

Q And then, on the adventure tourism vessel that was headed to the Titanic. If the Navy had audio suggesting that it had imploded, was that communicated with all the partners that that — that you had that audio? Or — so that they could —

MR. KIRBY: The Navy did pass on to the incident commander the acoustic data that they had received. But they were also quick to make clear that they couldn't be definitive about what that data meant, and they couldn't be clear that that data was connected to the Titan, to the submersible.

But they did pass that information up to the incident commander, as you would expect they would. And — and I'm sure that that was factored into the search plan in some way. But I'd refer you to the Coast Guard to speak to specifics.

Q So any concerns that resources were wasted in searching the area the size of Connecticut?

MR. KIRBY: No. I think the Coast Guard has spoken definitively about this and quite well every day here — or at least every day until — until we got the tragic news — that there was an awful lot of effort put into trying to locate the Titan.

Look, when you're in a search-and-rescue operation, particularly at sea, particularly in deep sea, I mean, time is not your friend. And I think you can see from the way in which this was put together in a pretty quick fashion, with a lot of resources from — as Karine mentioned — from

multiple countries, that there was a tremendous effort put forward to try to find the Titan as quickly as possible, knowing that time was not going to be anybody's friend.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Go ahead.

Q John, when the President said yesterday he expects to meet with President Xi in the future "near term," can you define what that means? Should we expect that by the end of the year?

MR. KIRBY: "Near term" — we don't — I don't have anything more specific for you than that. The President will absolutely get together with President Xi again in a — at the appropriate time. I just don't have anything for you on that.

Q And was the President satisfied yesterday with Prime Minister Modi's answer on human rights concerns in India?

MR. KIRBY: The President was satisfied that he had the opportunity to discuss concerns over human rights with Prime Minister Modi. And in the end, he did, as he always does. We don't shy away from discussing human rights with foreign leaders.

And one of the reasons you have partnerships and friendships is so that you can be honest and direct. But — but — and he — I think he addressed that pretty well in his answer to you guys.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Go ahead, Jeremy.

Q Thanks. John, the President said in his comments yesterday that his — he doesn't believe his China comments have had any consequence. Isn't China issuing a demarche to the U.S. Ambassador in Beijing a consequence?

MR. KIRBY: If demarches issued by nations against other nations were some sort of bellwether for whether a relationship was collapsing or — or in any danger —

Q I didn't say collapsing.

MR. KIRBY: — I mean, my goodness.

Q I said a "consequence."

MR. KIRBY: I mean, my goodness, Jeremy.

Q I said a “consequence.”

MR. KIRBY: A demarche is a demarche. That happens all the time. I — I’m not going to get into the specifics.

Q It doesn’t happen every day.

MR. KIRBY: I’m not going to get into the specifics of this one.

The President is firm that this relationship matters; it’s important. We need to move it forward, and he’s absolutely confident that we’ll be able to.

Q Let me ask you this: Other than a demarche, have you seen any other consequences —

MR. KIRBY: No.

Q — in the relationship?

MR. KIRBY: No, nothing.

Q And then, secondly, the — the President, in his comments at that fundraiser, he also revealed a U.S. intelligence assessment that Xi was not aware of the spy balloon flying over the U.S. in February. What was the strategic value of disclosing that intelligence at a fundraiser?

MR. KIRBY: That wasn’t a disclosure. That’s been in the public domain.

Q Not — not on the record from any —

MR. KIRBY: Yeah, it has.

Q — U.S. official.

MR. KIRBY: Yeah, it was.

Q By who?

MR. KIRBY: It was. A senior defense official had talked about it before, on the record, that that was a possibility. Yeah.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Go ahead, Patsy.

Q Thank you, Karine. Hi, John. Honestly, I'm a little confused why you're not confirming Jake Sullivan's trip to Copenhagen, but especially because it's been reported by other countries' media who was attending.

But let me try it this way: Can you specify the kind of request that was made by the President to Prime Minister Modi, in terms of supporting or getting the support of Global South countries for Ukraine?

And also, on that note, did the President and the Prime Minister discuss whether President Putin will be welcome at the G20 in New Delhi?

MR. KIRBY: I don't have anything additional to speak to with respect to the G20 and — and how that's shaping up. That's really for our Indian counterparts to speak to.

And I'm not going to get into any greater detail on the discussions than what the two leaders talked to you guys about from the — from the podium.

And as for Jake's travel, if and when we have some travel to talk to, then, by goodness, we'll talk about it.

Q Okay. And one more question on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. There's a little bit of confusion. I think President Zelenskyy is saying — or was — said yesterday that Russia is plotting a terror attack on the nuclear power plant. President Putin today is urging the International Atomic Energy Agency to ensure that Ukraine does not attack the power plant. What is the administration's understanding on this? What's your assessment? And are there anything that you're doing in particular to that issue?

MR. KIRBY: We're continuing to monitor it closely. We are able to monitor some radiation sensors that are around the plant. And thus far, we've detected no elevated levels of radioactivity.

Q Do you have any sense of who's going to attack, if anyone is?

MR. KIRBY: Look, I've seen those reports. I've seen those comments. I just don't have anything to confirm them or speak to the validity of them.

The only other thing I'd say, and we've said this before too, is that I think we should all be able to agree that a nuclear power plant is not a great site for military operations, one way or the other.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Go ahead, Ken.

Q Thank you.

Q John, just on the issue of Russian oil: Does the President come out of this meeting with Modi with the belief that India may actually reduce its purchases of Russian oil? And — and to what extent did that come up in their conversation?

MR. KIRBY: India has to make its own choices about oil purchases. And we hope that we can continue to see that they purchase Russian oil at or below the price cap, as they have been.

Q And — and then just on NATO. The President is going to be leaving in a — in a couple of weeks. Where do things stand in terms of, you know, his effort to help Sweden become a member of NATO? Do you — should we expect a call with Erdoğan in — in the coming weeks?

MR. KIRBY: There's conversations ongoing between the Swedish government and President Erdoğan. We have been encouraging those conversations to continue. That's — it's important for them to do that.

And as the President has said, he's confident that the two nations will be able to come to an accord and will be able to welcome Sweden as the 32nd Ally in NATO.

I couldn't begin right now to give you, like, a timeframe of what that's going to look like, when, and under what circumstances. But the fact that they're still talking is a good thing. And again, the President remains optimistic.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: All right, a couple more.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Karine. John, in light of what's happening in the West Bank, many scholars believe that the two-state solution option is not viable. Yet, you are stressing that it is viable. The question — what — you didn't do anything

actively to revive the talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Why?

And I have another question.

MR. KIRBY: We have been engaging both sides. When the President visited last summer, he met with the Palestinian leaders as well as Israeli leaders. And we have followed up through diplomatic channels ever since then. And we're not walking away from the — the belief in a viable two-state solution. We absolutely still believe that that's possible.

So, I just actually take issue with the — you know, with the — with the implication in the question that — that we're not — that we don't care about this or we're not following up on it or that we're not engaging. We absolutely are.

Q Can you please confirm that the State Department informed the government agency that scientific and technical cooperation with Israel beyond the Green Line is not consistent with the law?

MR. KIRBY: I'm sorry, can you repeat that?

Q Yes. The State Department informed the gov- — all the government agencies that scientific and technical cooperation with Israel beyond the Green Line is not consistent with the law. Can you confirm that?

MR. KIRBY: I have — no, I can't. I don't — I don't have anything for you on that.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Go ahead, Janne.

Q Thank you. Thank you, Karine. And thank you, John. I have a two questions: one on China, one on North Korea. If President Biden does not apologize for the "dictator" remark to China, today the Chinese government announced that it will use other methods and China would not ex- — exert influence on North Korean issues. How will you respond to this?

And second question, on North Korea. North Korea continues to use, develop the nuclear missile and new cryptocurrencies and cyber-hacking. What action is the United States taking currently? And what was specifically discussed at the U.S.-South Korea cybersecurity talks this week?

MR. KIRBY: Well, I make it a habit not to talk about cybersecurity talks very much, for good reason.

But, on your first question, look, we know that Beijing has influence in Pyongyang. And we continue to urge them to use that influence. We continue to urge them to actually implement the U.N. sanctions that have been — long been in place on North Korea's program. And we continue to urge China to take a broader, longer view here of the challenges that are presented by North Korea's burgeoning program — both their ballistic missile program and their nuclear ambitions.

Q Do you think the President will be going to apologize (inaudible)?

MR. KIRBY: The President was very clear yesterday that he'll continue to speak forthrightly and bluntly about the challenges that we face with the PRC. He will also continue to speak bluntly and forthrightly about the opportunities that are still resident in that relationship and trying to move that relationship forward.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Go ahead.

Q The State Department says that they've organized the meeting earlier this month in Cairo with other nuclear powers, including Russia. Just curious if you could tell us what was accomplished during those couple of days. I know Russia was involved — representatives from —

MR. KIRBY: Yeah, so, look —

Q — the Russian Federation.

MR. KIRBY: — this is a routine, continuing dialogue. We just happened to be the chair of the — of these nuclear nations — nuclear-armed nations, and it's done at a working level.

This one was in Cairo earlier this month. We chaired it. It was a good opportunity. The State Department put a statement out; I'd certainly encourage you to talk to them. But, you know, it was a good opportunity for dialogue about nuclear safety protocols and procedures. It's done at a working level.

Q But it's not like a precursor to any like broader talks? Is it (inaudible) —

MR. KIRBY: It is a rou- —

Q — new — new treaties or anything like that?

MR. KIRBY: No, it's a routine process. We happen to be the chair, and we convene the meeting as the chair of this working group. And it is at a working-group level.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Go ahead, Ed. And then, we're going to go.

Q Thanks. So, back to India. Is it — this push for American companies to do more business — this push for American companies to do more business in India, is that a way to move away from China?

MR. KIRBY: A way to move — for — for —

Q To move the supply chains —

MR. KIRBY: For who to move away from China?

Q From the U.S. Is it — is — is pushing U.S. companies to do business in India a way to move those companies away from China?

MR. KIRBY: It's a way to encourage mutual investment with India.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Okay. Last two.

Karen.

Q Thanks. President Zelenskyy said this week that the pace of the counteroffensive is moving slower than desired. Does — is the administration concerned right now about the pace and what you guys are seeing and hearing from talking with Ukrainian officials?

MR. KIRBY: We're focused on making sure that the Ukrainian Armed Forces have everything that they need to be successful. War is unpredictable, and the enemy gets a vote.

And I'm certainly not going to get up here and speak to Ukrainian offensive operations. They — they should be the ones to do that. But I don't think that — that they went into this with some sort of false sense of — of confidence about — about how tough it was going to be.

It's not as if the Russians — and we talked about this many times from here — that the Russians were preparing for this; throwing bodies at the — at the problem set; putting in additional forces; building defense lines, sometimes three lines deep. It's not as if the Russians weren't preparing for defense, and defense is a strong form of war.

And, you know, the Ukrainians are — are fighting through this. I think we just all have to recognize that combat can be unpredictable. And sometimes your plans don't always go exactly the way that you — you expected them to, but — but that's what's expected when you're — when you're in combat.

What we're going to focus on, again, is making sure that they can be ultimately successful.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: All right. James and then behind you, the last — has the last one. But, James, go first.

Q Karine, thank you, as always. Admiral, thank you.

The House Ways and Means Committee yesterday released documents — their authenticity nowhere challenged — that included a July 2017 WhatsApp message sent by Hunter Biden to Henry Zhao, a Chinese Communist Party official, which stated, in its entirety, and I quote:

“I am sitting here with my father, and we would like to understand why the commitment made has not been fulfilled. Tell the director that I would like to resolve this now before it gets out of hand, and now means tonight. And, Z, if I get a call or text from anyone involved in this other than you, Zhang, or the chairman, I will make certain that between the man sitting next to me and every person he knows and my ability to forever hold a grudge, that you will regret not following my direction. I am sitting here waiting for the call with my father.” Unquote.

So, just a couple of questions about this. First, does this not undermine the President's claim during the 2020 campaign, and the reaffirmations of that claim by his two press secretaries since then, that he never once discussed his son's overseas business dealings with him?

MR. KIRBY: No. And I'm not going to comment further on this.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: We're going to — we're —

Q Where was he on July 30th?

MR. KIRBY: I'm not — James — James, let me just —

Q You said “no.”

MR. KIRBY: Let me save you some —

Q Your answer was, “No,” it doesn't undercut it.

MR. KIRBY: Let me save —

Q So, I'm asking you to explain that.

MR. KIRBY: Let me sa- — let me save you some breath. If you're going to ask about this, I am not address- —

Q I have an abundance of breath, as you know.

MR. KIRBY: I don't — I know you do, more than I'd like you to have. I am not going to address this issue from this podium. I'm just not going to do it.

Q Why not? Is there a reason?

MR. KIRBY: Not going to do it.

Q Where was the President on the date of that message?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: All right. Thanks. Thanks, Admiral. Thank you.

MR. KIRBY: Thanks, guys. Have a great weekend.

Q (Inaudible) father's house.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Okay. Zeke, you want to kick us off?

Q Thanks, Karine. Just following up on John Kirby's comments and the President's press conference yesterday, is the — is — does the President continue to — will you say that Xi Jinping is a dictator? Is that the official position of the U.S. government?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Look, the President spoke for himself. I'm just not going to go beyond what he said. John just spoke to it and then —

(Audio echoes in the room.)

Hmm, there's a feedback. (Laughter.) It's weird hearing your voice.

Q It's a new form of message discipline.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: That's one way to look at it there, James.

Q So —

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Is it good? Are we good to go?

Q We don't object to hearing more from you.

Q Are we good?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I object. (Laughs.)

Hello?

AIDE: Do you need me to call WHCA? Or is it a —

Q I think you should call WHCA.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: All right. I'll tr- — I'll try my best here. This sounds so weird, guys.

So, look, the President is going to continue to speak candidly. That will never change —

Q (Inaudible.)

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: — about China, as he's done the last two years. And he'll talk about the differences, clearly —

Q There we go.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: — that they have and disagreements. That is something that the President — if you think about the President believing in diplomacy, believing in having those conversations with the heads of — head of states in an honest ways, that's what the President is going to do. As you know — you guys have covered him for some time — he's very candid, he speaks honestly, but he also believes that diplomacy is incredibly important, which is why you saw this really consequential trip that the Secretary — Secretary Blinken was able to do.

Q Just to put a finer point on that —

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Yeah.

Q – will you say that Xi Jinping is a dictator?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: It's not for me to say. The President spoke – spoke for himself. When this President speaks, we listen, and I step back and let the President certainly deliver his message on his own.

Q And then, on a different topic. There was a lot of discussion last week around the Hatch Act and use of – of the term “MAGA.” Despite the Office of Special Counsel's opinion on the matter, your office has continued to put out paper using that phrase. You have, in the past, have brushed off all questions about any political concern, saying this administration follows the law. So why, in this case, are you going with your own interpretation of the law rather than the independent Office of the Special Counsel?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Oh, I wouldn't say it's our own interpretation of the law. I would strongly disagree with that statement.

What I'll say more broadly – and there's a couple of points that I want to make here: So, look, the White House Counsel's Office is reviewing, as I mentioned last week, OC – OSC's opinion and having a routine dialogue with them. That's what we're doing. That's what we said last week. And that's what's going to continue. It is an ongoing process.

And we believe – from here, from the podium, from this administration – it's our duty to be transparent with the American people. That's what you see from us. And – and it's – it's not – look, on the agenda – right? – on the President's policies, on the President's values, and about the agenda, that's what we want to be transparent about.

And, look, just a couple of facts here: OSC has said that they view terms like “Tea Party” as acceptable, and this is a similar phrase – right? – when you think about the – when you think about MAGA. In fact, OSC itself stated that “MAGA” could be used for official purposes during the Trump administration and permitted Mick Mulvaney to repeatedly use the term in his official capacity.

So congressional Republicans has also used the term, as I mentioned here last week when I was asked about this, the

same phrase — the same phrase to discuss their own agendas, their own proposals, their own policies.

And so, we have used the term “MAGA” in an official capacity. As we are — when you think about the context, when we talk about their proposals, that’s how we’ve used it — and related — and their related values, as Republican officials say.

And so, we never directed it towards a campaign. We’ve never done that, because, again, we respect the rule of law and have not done that. And so that will continue to be the case.

And again, this is being reviewed. Their con- — there’s a conversation that’s going to happen with our White House Counsel and OSC. But, you know, I’ll let that process continue.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Karine. Former Vice President Mike Pence is calling on every GOP presidential candidate to endorse a 15-week abortion ban. In what ways does this administration expect that abortion access and reproductive rights would be targeted if Republicans take control of the White House?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: So I just want to be really mindful, as I was just asked about that Hatch Act, I’m not going to comment on any specific Republican candidate here or anything that’s related to 2024.

What I can speak to easily is, more broadly — and we’ve seen — you’ve heard me at the top talk about how this President and the Vice President is going to continue to fight for fundamental rights as we see it when it comes to reproductive rights, when it comes to having access and women being able to make a decision on — on their own body, to have that conversation with doctors. That’s something that the President is going to and the Vice President is going to continue to fight on.

As it relates to — just more broadly here — to your question about the 15-week or 12 weeks, whatever it is: Look, we have seen from Americans — majority of Americans, who do not want — they do not want politicians making their healthcare decisions for them. That’s been clear. We’ve seen that in majority of — of Republic- — of — pardon me —

of Americans — of — of every ideology — right? — if you think about that.

And so what we are going to continue to do, what we are committed to those Americans — a majority of Americans — all Americans across the country — is that we are going to continue to fight — and the President has been very clear — to restore the protections of Roe. And we believe that needs to happen through national legislation.

Q How worried is the White House that Republicans in Congress or state legislatures will target contraception next?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Look, I mean, it is a concern, right? In this statehouse, just this session alone — right? — in 2023, we have seen more than 300 bills attacking reproductive rights, reproductive healthcare — right? — including contraception, either elim- — eliminating it or limiting it. And that's a problem.

And that's why we've continued to speak to — to this. You ta- — we think about the executive order, the third one that this President signed today, to find ways — for agencies to find ways to really — to really protect contraception for women.

And so the President is going to take action. You're going to hear from — from both the President and the Vice President later today. The Vice President is going to be in North Carolina tomorrow. You saw the First Lady having really impactful, powerful conversations with women and what they've had to deal with.

We have seen stories that many of you have written about when you take away that access, that type of healthcare access for women, it — you know, it — it's hurt women. It's put their lives at risk — literally put their lives at risk. This is what we have seen this past year with these really extreme pieces of legislation.

So the President and the Vice President are going to continue to be very, very clear about this. They're going to continue to fight for those fundamental rights and continue to call on Congress to restore Roe.

Q Just quickly on the executive action: largely symbolic. I mean, are you at the end of the line here when it comes to what you can do without steps from Congress?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: So let me just make clear: I want — do want to speak about that a little bit. It builds on the progress that we've — we believe that we have made already in expanding contraception access for women.

If you think about the Affordable Care Act, it — it helped millions of women save billions of dollars on birth control that they need and want. And so we understand that there are gaps still when it — as it relates to that.

And so that's what this executive order does today. It does a couple of things: It safeguards access. It's — pardon me — it's strengthening access to affordable, high-quality contraception and family planning services. It increased contraception options. It lower — it lowers out-of-pocket costs.

It maximizes contraception through — access through the following ways: insurance coverage for those covered under the Affordable Care Act, as I just mentioned; Medicaid, Medicare; federal-funded healthcare programs, including community health centers, and — and also Title X clinics and the Indian Health Service; public education targeted at employees, college students, veterans, and service members.

So, we don't believe this is symbolic. We believe that this is another step to really deal with this gap that we're seeing across the country and to do everything that we can — everything that we can to continue to fight for — for fundamental rights.

Go ahead, Steve.

Q Would the White House like to see an investigation into what happened with the submersible?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Look, I can't speak to that from here. I will leave it to — to others — the United States Coast Guards and others to speak to it. I'm just not going to comment on that from here.

Q Secondly, the speech you mentioned in Chicago, will the President offer some new proposals or just — his som- — his policies repackaged?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: So I think it — I think what you'll see from the President next week — and we'll certainly have

more and certainly lay out a little bit more as we get closer to Wednesday.

Look, I think it's important. This is a continuation, if you will, of the kickoff of the Invest in America. Right? This is the second tour. We — you've heard us say that we're going to — about to kick off the second tour.

And so the President wanted to lay out what he's going to do, the detail — his economic vision in this country. He wants to speak directly to the American people to do so. As some — as we — as you all have stated to me, some Americans don't quite know all the full impact of the President's economic policy. So this is an opportunity for the President to go to Illinois and do just that.

And it's going to be centered on working people — I can say that — and growing the middle class, as we've talked about many times before. And it is going to be — this is, you know, a corner- — a cornerstone of his speech.

And so, it's — I think it's important, he thinks it's important for the American people to — for American people to hear directly from him as he talks about his economic vision, as he talks about how he sees the next several months and the next several years, when it relates to how he wants to continue to grow the economy without — making sure no one is left behind. And that's what you're going to hear from him.

Of course, he's going to lift up the successes that we have seen the last two years — you've heard me say this at the beginning of the — of the briefing — with the 13 million jobs created; unemployment at a record low; making sure that we're bringing back manufacturing jobs — 800,000 manufacturing jobs created. If you think about inflation, it's the lowest that we have seen since it's — it went down by more than 50 percent in the past — since 11 months — in the past 12 months. And that matters. And we think that matters.

So he's going to talk directly to the American people to make that very, very clear.

And what we're — what we've been trying to do and what we will continue to do as it relates to lowering costs and dealing with an economy that works for all.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Karine. To follow up on that question and — you know, with the President’s speech on the economy next week, it seems like he’s entering a mode where he’s more willing to embrace the current economy, to tout the economic progress that he believes has been made. Is that a reflection of the fact that you guys feel like inflation has cooled significantly to a point where you think this is a trend that is durable and that you feel like you’ve kind of turned the corner and so that’s going to be reflected in the President’s messaging as well?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: So, look, I mean, the President talks about the economy every chance that he can and tries to communicate with the American people and really meet them where they are, as we know that — as we know that lowering costs is a key — key — a key priority for them. That’s what they want to see.

And so, of course, the President is always going to try to meet Americans where they are, which — that’s why you hear us talk about the gas prices going down; you hear us talk about Inflation Reduction Act, a historic piece of legislation, as you all know, that’s going to lower energy costs, lower healthcare.

There things here that he has done in the last two years that we have talked about over and over and over again. This is — gives him an opportunity to do it in a way that he talks about it in a fulsome — in a fulsome, if you — if you will, way, an approach, where he’ll be in Illinois. He’ll talk about Biden economics more broadly. He’ll talk about the next — kind of how he sees the future and dealing with the economy. And I think that’s all incredibly important.

Look, you know — and I think when it — you — as you talk about the economy and where it’s going, we’ve been very clear: We believe that we’re headed to a slow and steady growth. We believe that the work that the President has done was an environmental — I’m sorry, an economic policy — as he continues to move forward with it, as he continues to implement those really key important pieces of legislation — is going to continue to grow important jobs — jobs that are union jobs, jobs that are going to be able for Americans to put food on their table. All of these things are important.

But, like I said, we understand that a lot of Americans don’t know what the President has done.

Q Yeah, I just — I'm just trying to get a better sense of why now for this speech. Is it tied to the progress in the economy? Is it tied to just, like, the moment we are in the political season? I mean, what —

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I think — look, I think it's a combination of things, right? We've shared the good news that we've heard from the data over the past several months, right? We've put that out there. We sh- — we lift up how inflation has gone down, as you just stated.

And also, we want to continue to talk about the historic legislation, right?

So, this is all very important. We talked about the Invest in America. We talked about doing the second portion of the tour. So all of this is all kind of brought together in a way so that he can give this cornerstone speech — right? — this really important speech to the American people.

So, we're trying to have a steady drumbeat — right? — a steady drumbeat of making sure we're communicating with the American people not just the data — right? — not just the piece of legislation, but giving the opportunity to — for the President to talk about his economic plan more broadly. And that's what you're going to see.

And, again, a steady drumbeat — something that's been very consistent. He talks about his — his economic plan consistently and legislations — clearly — the historic pieces of legislation that we bring up. It's all connected. It's all connected to building an economy that grows — that grows for everyone. Certainly not trickle-down, but something that grows from the bottom up, middle out.

Q And then, secondly, the President invited his son, Hunter, to the state dinner last night. I'm wondering if you could take us into the thinking and decision-making of why the President decided to invite his son.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I — I'm just not going to get into family discussion — personal family discussion. As you know, Hunter is his son. I'm just not going to get into that.

Q Well, let me ask you this: If Hunter Biden wasn't the President's son, would he have invited someone who had just reached a plea agreement with federal prosecutors two

—

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Well, a couple —

Q — days earlier to the dinner?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: — a couple of things. Again, that's his son. It's a — he's a family member. It is not uncommon for family members to attend events at the White House. We could look at past presidents; I'm sure you have. So that is not uncommon.

As it relates to anything related to — to Hunter, I'm just not going to respond to it from here.

Go ahead.

Q Can I follow up on that, Karine?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Go ahe- — no, I just called on somebody.

Go ahead.

Q Yeah, so, but I mean — so Kirby wouldn't answer James's question though. Are you going to answer the question? I mean, it's not — I mean, not an unreasonable question to ask if —

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: No, I —

Q — President of the United States was involved, as this message seems to suggest, in some sort of a coercive conversation for business dealings by his son. Is that something — if he wasn't, then maybe you should tell us.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: So here's the thing: I — and I appreciate the question. I believe my colleague at the White House Counsel has answered this question already, has dealt with this, has made it very clear. I just don't have anything to share outside of what my colleagues have shared.

And so, I would refer you to him and the D- — and the DOJ. Just not going to comment from here.

Q He hasn't said anything about the text message —

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I will — all — what I can tell you is I know that my colleague has dealt with this. He — he

addressed this, though, at the White House Counsel. I just don't have anything else to share.

Q Was the President involved in the shakedown attempt or no? Can you say "yes" or "no"?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I just — I just answered the question.

Q Karine —

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I just answered the question.

Q — can I just ask about one statement —

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Go ahead.

Q — that you've made.

Q No, you didn't. Yes or no: Was the President involved in the shakedown attempt?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I just ans- — Steven —

Q Is it a "yes" or a "no" then?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Steven, I just answered the question. I just —

Q Is it "yes" or "no"?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I just said — I just — this isn't — it's not up to you how I answer the question. I just answered the question by telling you my colleagues at the White House Counsel has dealt with this, and I would refer you to them.

Go ahead.

Q Karine, can you just remind us what your colleague said, from the White House Counsel, so we have it from you at the podium?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I would — I would refer you to them, and they will share their statement with all of you.

Q My question is about your statements from that podium. You've stated that the President stands by his comment from the 2020 campaign — that he never once discussed his son's overseas business dealings with his son.

And you stood at that podium and you reaffirmed that. Do you stand by your reaffirmation of it?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I — what I will say is nothing has changed. Nothing has changed. And I will leave it there.

Anything else, I would refer you to the White House Counsel.

Q The production of this evidence is not a change?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I just answered the question. You a — you just asked me: Do — does my statement change? I just told you nothing has changed. That's answering the question.

Q There's evidence the First Son was at —

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Go ahead.

Q — the President's home —

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Go ahead. Go ahead.

Q — and that the President was there —

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Go ahead.

Q — two days prior.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Steven, I'm calling on your colleague right now.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you. To follow up on my colleague, is there anything that you can say with regard to this text message and what the President's son was alleging? Was the President there or not?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I would refer you to my colleagues at the White House Counsel. They have addressed this, and I'd refer you to them.

Go ahead.

Q Karine, have you spoken to the President about this?

Have you asked him whether he was there with his son on July 30th, 2017?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: This is not a conversation that I've had with the President. Again, I would refer you to the White House Counsel.

Q Do you plane to have that conversation —

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: No.

Q — with the President?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: No.

Q Did the President speak with the Attorney General at all —

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I can't —

Q — last night —

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I —

Q — at the state dinner?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I cannot say if the President had had a conversation with the Attorney General last night. What I can refer you to is the White House Counsel's Office, as it relates to the allegations. They've already addressed this. This is something for them to deal with. I'd refer you to the Department of Justice on anything else if you don't want to speak to the White House Counsel's Office.

Q And there was reporting earlier in the week that after the plea agreement was reached by Hunter Biden that the President felt relieved that that part of it was behind him. Is that true? Can you speak to —

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I can't speak to that.

Q — his mindset?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I cannot speak to the President's mindset.

Again, I would refer you to the White House Counsel's

Office.

Go ahead, Ed.

Q Oh yeah, thanks. Back to India, if we could. So, India is on a U.S. Priority Watch List with China and Russia for failing to protect intellectual property. With this push to get American businesses to move into India more and invest in India, what assurances did you get from Prime Minister Modi that India will protect intellectual property?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: So, look, as — as the two countries and leaders who are — who are certainly leading in innovation and technology, the United States and — and India have a strong and shared interest in protecting intellectual property and a shared technology ecosystem.

So, protecting IP — intellectual property — along with expanding market opportunities for U.S. firms in India, welcoming major Indian investments in the United States, and diversifying our supply chains were all topics of discussion on this historic official visit.

And so, I'll leave it there. But again, they are both — they are both leaders in innovation and technology. So, certainly, they have shared interest.

Q So, on inflation, quickly: Does the President still believe companies are causing inflation?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: So, look, as you know, the President, when it comes — I just went to — laid it — laid it down for Jeremy about how important it is for this President to deal with inflation. We've seen inflation go down by more than 50 percent in the last 12 months. And we think that's incredibly important.

And so, the way that we're going to continue to do the work of making sure that we lower — whether it's lowering — lowering costs for Americans at the pump — and so, but to your question — and other things — right? — whether it's healthcare or energy costs.

But during the pandemic, as you know, we saw profit margins increase to historic high levels. And we expect that as — as profit margins fall to more historically normal levels, inflation should moderate further, as well.

And so, the President said this in his Wall Street op-ed, and I'll quote him: "As supply chains continue to unsnarl, company profits margins fall from historical..." — "... historically high levels, and rents continue to moderate, inflation should decline further, creating more breathing room for working families."

Q And did the President confront the CEOs here today about that?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I — I'm not going to get into — into conversations — private conversations that the President has had. But I just laid out what — how we see the future as it relates to profit margins. And I'll just leave it there.

Q Thanks, Karine.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I'll take — I'll take one more question.

Go ahead, sir.

Q Hey, Karine. Thanks so much. I wanted to ask you if there is video of the President signing this executive order today, because we were wondering —

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I believe there was digital content taken from the President signing this order. And so, we'll probably be releasing that. I don't have anything else from that.

Q Thank you.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Okay, great. Thanks, everybody.

2:33 P.M. EDT