



BRIEFING ROOM

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki and Deputy National Security Advisor for Cyber and Emerging Technologies Anne Neuberger, September 2, 2021

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James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

2:07 P.M. EDT

MS. PSAKI: So we have another special guest today — a return visitor — Deputy National Security Advisor Anne Neuberger, who is going to speak to you briefly about cyberthreats. She only has time for just a very few questions because she has to run off to a meeting. I will always be the bad cop.

With that, come on up. And then we'll, of course, do a full briefing.

MS. NEUBERGER: Good afternoon, everyone. So, we want to take a moment to encourage organizations to be on guard for malicious cyberactivity in advance of the holiday weekend.

To be clear, we have no specific threat information or information regarding attacks this weekend, but what we do have is history. And in the past, over holiday weekends, attackers have sometimes focused on security operation centers that may be understaffed or a sense that there are fewer key personnel on duty as they may be on vacation. And indeed, a long

weekend can sometimes make attackers feel they have extra time to navigate in a network before they are detected.

So, as a long weekend comes, we want to raise awareness. And this need for awareness is particularly for critical infrastructure owners and operators who operate critical services for Americans.

As part of the administration's ongoing efforts to secure our — America's defenses against cybercrime and ransomware, on Tuesday, the FBI and DHS's CISA released an advisory outlining specific steps that organizations and individuals can take to really increase their defenses and be safe online.

You can find this on CISA's one-stop shop for information: [StopRansomware.gov](https://www.stopransomware.gov). And we encourage you to please visit the site, read the advisory, and take those critical steps.

Organizations and individuals should be on alert now because criminals sometimes lay in their steps in advance and begin their planning.

Now, I want to walk through a few specific things you can do right now to protect against possible attacks and to ensure that you can recover quickly in the event that an organization is compromised.

Specifically, I'd like to call on executives to please bring together your leadership teams and run through this set of activities to ensure that your organizations are as secure as they need to be before the holiday weekend:

First, update and patch all software. We continuously see attackers compromising organizations based on vulnerabilities that are known, for which patches are available.

Second, ensure that individuals have strong passwords in place. And indeed, for key personnel, encourage them to change their passwords now.

Third, implement multifactor authentication, particularly for key personnel and IT staff. Multifactor authentication is something more than a password. It could be a biometric, like a fingerprint. It could be a code that comes off software.

Last week, President Biden hosted key executives from technology companies as part of his efforts to really secure America online. And a number of those executives pointed to multifactor authentication as preventing 80 to 90 percent of cyberattacks. Indeed, because it is such a helpful way to address cyber vulnerabilities, it's one of the five things President Biden mandated be rolled out across the federal government quickly as part of his executive order in May.

Fourth, review your incident response plan and do a drill against it to ensure that, if a compromise occurs, you're ready to react and respond quickly.

And finally, ensure that you have up-to-date backups and that they're segregated from a network so that they're not accessible to an attacker.

There are a couple of other good practices to do. Security teams should proactively hunt on a network. It's kind of like a digital version of walking the beat. Look for any initial signs of compromise or anything unusual on a network.

And everyone should be extra vigilant for phishing emails and clicking on links that may be new or something that looks unusual.

I want to repeat that we have no information about any specific threats or attacks, so the purpose of this is really to raise awareness before a holiday weekend, given the history of increased criminal cyberactivity during holiday weekends.

As always, CISA, FBI, and other U.S. government partners are positioned to support any organization that needs it. Please visit [StopRansomware.gov](https://www.stopransomware.gov) and follow the practices that you see.

Taking a step back for a moment, the Biden administration is committed to addressing cyber threats to the country. And indeed, as I mentioned, last week, President Biden hosted

executives from technology companies, education firms, critical infrastructure, and others to focus on addressing the root causes of cyber. The technology companies, in particular, announced a set of commitments online to address some of the root causes of technology vulnerabilities and improve security of their products.

Thank you. Wishing you a safe and enjoyable holiday weekend.

MS. PSAKI: Steve.

Q It's been more than two months since the President's meeting with President Putin. Have the Russians done anything to crack down on ransomware attackers?

MS. NEUBERGER: Thank you for the question. The discussions with the Russians continue. As President Biden noted, he's looking for action with regard to addressing cyberactivity. And we continue to see — to look for that.

That being said, we also need to look at our own activity — and it's the reason for this today — to ensure that we're doing everything we can to lock our digital doors and ensure that our networks and our organizations are as safe as they need to be online.

MS. PSAKI: Jacqui.

Q Have you guys determined who is responsible for the attack on the State Department a couple of weeks ago?

MS. NEUBERGER: I won't address specific incidents here. We're certainly looking at that. And we're also focused on, as I noted, the rollout of the five particular technologies across the federal government so we can confidently reduce the risk of such continued attacks.

Those are on a tight timeline. So far, both CISA and Commerce's NIST have met every single timeline, and those key technologies are scheduled to be rolled out within six months of the President's executive order last May. So we're really tracking October and November to ensure that we've modernized our defenses across the federal government.

Q Do you believe that the patches that need to have been done have happened across agencies?

MS. NEUBERGER: That work continues. As I noted in a prior discussion, there's a great deal of work to modernize our federal network [sic] — networks. They were not where they needed to be.

And that's one of the reasons that the President mandated such aggressive — we believe achievable, but aggressive — steps to bring them up to where they need to be to meet the level of the attackers' focus on those networks.

MS. PSAKI: Jen.

Q Some of my colleagues at Bloomberg reported today about identifying some of the Chinese state-sponsored hackers who are behind an alleged NSA — co-opting an alleged NSA backdoor in products from Juniper Networks, which has obviously been known about for quite a few years. What are the administration's policies around the use of backdoors? And what are the guidelines, if any, about NSA's ability to insert backdoors into U.S. tech companies' products?

MS. NEUBERGER: As you know, that's been — as you noted, that's been an old story that's been reported, and I think we've continuously noted that there isn't substantiation for it.

Focusing on supply chain for a moment: The supply chain and the — the need to ensure that software is as secure as possible is something that's absolutely a priority of this administration.

I think you saw, in the President's executive order, he mandated putting in place certain steps to ensure secure supply chains for products, and those are rolling out.

Indeed, as well, I think you saw several of the announcements that came out of the summit last week.

So, we're absolutely committed to working with technology companies to ensure that their products are as secure as needed to face the attacks of today.

MS. PSAKI: We'll do Monica, and then right in the back, and then we'll have to wrap it up.

Q So, there was a spike in ransomware attacks earlier in the summer. That seems to have slowed down slightly. To what do you attribute that?

And then you did mention there wasn't something specific that caused you to come and bring out this morning. But in terms of Labor Day, is there anything different about it that you would like to highlight, given we haven't seen these kinds of warnings before the Fourth of July or anything else more recently?

MS. NEUBERGER: Two really good questions. First, we've noted the decrease in ransomware. And we think it's an important step in — in reducing the risk to Americans. There could be a host of reasons for it. So, we're noting that trend, and we hope that that trend continues.

And with regard to the change in why we're here today, I think it reflects the administration's focus on cyber threats and the recognition that we play a role in all of that.

Yes, there are attackers, but they're leveraging vulnerabilities across the networks that we have. We continue to see successful attacks occurring against vulnerabilities for which there are patches, so we want to use the opportunity of this pressroom and the attention that it gets to ask Americans, to ask organizations to do the steps they need to do to be safe online, even as the government focuses on its efforts — and you've heard our counter ransomware strategy, working with countries around the world, focusing on the illicit use of cryptocurrency, and pursuing and disrupting ransomware networks around the world.

So, it's — this really represents the focus we're putting on this issue and the need — and the highlight we're saying to Americans to do what they need to do, in partnership with the government, to be safe online.

MS. PSAKI: Last one, in the back.

Q If you're a small company just trying to check yourself when it comes to ransomware attacks, what is the weakest link attackers will try to exploit? Just a small company — mom-and-pop shop — you're worried about getting an attack.

MS. NEUBERGER: Really great question. I would say two things. One is: Make sure your leadership and IT staff have deployed multifactor authentication and have a strong password.

Q So the password (inaudible)?

MS. NEUBERGER: Really, a strong password.

Q Okay.

MS. NEUBERGER: And then, of course, patching the software that's most important.

Q Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead. Last one.

Q I wanted to ask what you and your team are doing heading into the weekend — whether it's here at the White House, through NSC, or at CISA. Do you have certain staff on call this weekend? Do you have certain preparations that you're making on your end in addition to the advice you're giving to the public?

MS. NEUBERGER: Great question. So, first, we pulled together the intelligence community to ensure that we were tracking any and all threats, and to ensure that they're highly alert for anything related to that.

Second, we, of course, brought together agencies across the government, including key ones like FBI and CISA, to ensure that they were fully postured and fully prepared to be on staff and noting any early signs of any incidents so we could rapidly jump on them and respond to them.

And, finally, is this: calling on Americans, organizations to do the steps they need to do to be as safe as possible in advance of what may be an increased threat, as we've seen in history — for the reasons I noted — during the holiday weekend.

MS. PSAKI: Thank you so much.

MS. NEUBERGER: Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: We will see you again, I'm certain.

MS. NEUBERGER: Thank you, Jen.

MS. PSAKI: Thank you for taking the time.

Okay, a couple of things for you at the top. Obviously, the President spoke to our ongoing work to help the people in the Gulf Coast and also in the Northeast and also out West as we're going through a range of natural disasters across the country.

I just wanted to call out a few things:

In Louisiana, Disaster Survivor Assistance teams arrived today to support cooling stations in the city of New Orleans and St. John the Baptist Parish, where heat advisories are in effect and many residents remain without power.

FEMA also announced today a new policy, this morning, to reduce barriers that have long prevented many disaster survivors, particularly Black Americans, from receiving disaster assistance by expanding the types of legal documentation for homeowners and renters to prove ownership or occupancy. This has been a big barrier in the past, and it was something we worked hard to address proactively.

Also, finally, to help disaster survivors — and I've talked about this a bit, but just to give you an update — register for federal assistance, mobile emergency response support assets are deployed to support Louisiana and Mississippi.

Now, as of today, roughly 50,000 households in Louisiana have already received a one-time payment of \$500 from FEMA to support critical needs. And as the President noted, FEMA has awarded more than \$77 million to help disaster survivors.

Also this week, as part of our efforts to engage with communities that are hesitant about COVID-19 vaccines, White House Senior Policy Advisor for COVID-19 Equity Dr. Cameron Webb has held community confidence visits to encourage vaccinations in cities across the South, including Columbia, Jacksonville, Columbus, and Mobile.

The community confidence visits aim to take a systematic approach to community conversations about COVID-19 and the vaccines that focus on the interrelatedness between COVID-19 and longstanding social determinants of health, including housing, education, mental health, and food insecurity.

We've been really encouraged by how receptive people have been to these conversations and, more broadly, encouraged that more people continue to get vaccinated, including nearly 2 million in the past — to date — people in the past two days — a strong start to the month.

And I know there's a COVID briefing that starts in about 40 minutes, and you can learn more there.

Go ahead, Josh.

Q Wonderful. Thanks, Jen. Two subject areas, both legal. With regard to the Texas abortion law, President Biden has a Supreme Court Commission, with a report due by October 6th. Did the President or anyone in the administration reach out to members of the commission in the wake of what happened? And does the President have any new thoughts on the structure of the Court?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, I would say you're correct that there is ongoing work that the Court Commission is doing. Their work is — and just to remind you all of what their focus is — there's about 30 members of this Court Commission. They're from diverse backgrounds and diverse views. And they're going to examine a range of questions about the future of the

Court, including term limits, including court expansion, and the — and in addition — and several additional topics.

We have not — not to my awareness have we reached out to the commission. It's important they do their work on the timeline that was designated and that they examine, from a broad and diverse viewpoint, all of these questions. But the President looks forward to reviewing their work when it's completed.

Q And the President doesn't have any new thoughts on the structure of the Court?

MS. PSAKI: He's waiting for the conclusion of this report — looks forward to reviewing it, seeing where they come out.

Q And then secondly, on the new pharma bankruptcy, does the administration believe the settlement gave sufficient justice to the victims of the opioid crisis?

MS. PSAKI: It's a great question, Josh. I want to speak to our team and see if we can get you a more specific comment on that.

Go ahead.

Q On the Texas law, what avenues are available to you in the short term for reacting to this law? We saw the President's statement. He directed the Gender Policy Council to do some things. What — what do you envision happening here?

MS. PSAKI: Well, Steve, that's exactly what the President directed his team to look into — to be able to answer that question. Obviously, we're under — we're about 12 hours, or less than that, since this ruling.

And what the President made clear in his statement this morning is that the impact of last night's decision should be immediate and requires an immediate process.

So, yes, he's asked the Gender Policy Council because he feels it's important for there to be a point of — point of contact — or a point person, I should say, at a senior level in the White House.

But most importantly, he's also directed them to work with the legal team here at the White House, the Department of Justice, the Health — the Department of Health and Human Services to determine what, if any, steps can be taken here to protect a woman's right to choose and access to healthcare for women in Texas.

Q Were you surprised by this ruling?

MS. PSAKI: We can never predict rulings, I will say, Steve. We certainly know the makeup of the court. But again, we try to stay out of the business of making predictions.

Q And just one thing on Afghanistan: Do you see any possibility for a limited easing of the freeze in Afghan assets to prevent the collapse of that country's banking sector?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would say, first — and let me give you just kind of an overview of, kind of, what some of the considerations and good questions are.

Q It's part of the economic leverage you have over them, right?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah. Yes. But no one should assess that we are considering — currently considering an easing of sanctions on the Taliban. That is not under — that is not actively being discussed or pursued.

We have not reduced sanctions pressure on the Taliban leaders or the significant restrictions on their access to the international financial system. And we will judge — and we want to make clear — this very clear: We are going to judge the Taliban by their actions and we will stay in close coordination with the international community on any steps that we take moving forward.

Now, at the same time, we also want to ensure there is assistance to the Afghan people — humanitarian assistance and other assistance — to keep them afloat and make sure they have — we provide that from the international community at this point in time.

So there have been steps that have been taken in coordin- — including issuing an OFAC license that allows this humanitarian assistance to go through. That, of course, is not through the Taliban; that is through outside organizations. And that's something we're working to be big contributors to.

Go ahead, Jeff.

Q Back to the commission for one second. The President obviously served for a long time as Chairman of the Judiciary Committee; he's been in this town longer than most anyone. What is he looking for from a commission to offer him that he would not have for this? And what do you say to critics who say he's simply punting this to them to avoid making a yes-or-no decision if he thinks the Court should or should not be expanded?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would say to critics — or we would say to critics: Yes, the President has a long history of working on judicial issues as the former Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, and he takes the role of institutions in our nation's history, including the Supreme Court, quite seriously.

That's one of the reasons why this court was put together and construction in the way it — I mean, this commission, I should say — was put together and constructed in the way it was, which is with a diverse set of viewpoints, a diverse set of expertise.

And he asked them to look at a broad set of questions, wanted to give them time to do that work and come out of that with some — with some viewpoints. But he wants to leave them space to do exactly that.

And I think the fact that he named a commission with a diverse set of viewpoints reflects his strong, you know, commitment to preserving institutions, but also taking a fresh look at things that need to change if needed.

Q Is he misleading supporters of “expanding the Court,” though, by allowing his commission to do its work? I mean, the reality is: This would take a legislative change. It’s something he couldn’t change on his own. Why doesn’t he just come out and say how difficult this would be?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think it’s clear it’s difficult. But the President’s view on the expansion of courts has not changed. He also wants this group — this commission to take a close look at a range of issues, not just court expansion, which is an important question for them exam- — to examine, but term limits and a range of questions that are — the commission is looking at.

I will also note, though, Jeff, that in the President’s statement today, he also made very clear — and in pretty strong terms — his viewpoints on the ruling of the Supreme Court in this case. And rulings like that do raise concerns — not just for the President, but for people out there in the country — about how the Court is operating.

And I’ll just note what he said, you know: ” For the majority to do this without a hearing, without the benefit of an opinion from a court below, and without due consideration of the issues, insults the rule of law and...rights of all Americans to seek redress from our courts.”

That is, of course, of concern not just to him, but it should be to all Americans who watched the ruling this morning.

Q On Afghanistan, really quickly, if I can: Are there updates on the 100 to 200 Americans who — American citizens who work in the country or are still in the country? Do you believe they still are? Or what’s the latest on the diplomatic mission?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I know my colleague at the State Department is briefing right about now and will be — give a more in-depth update on this.

But what he said yesterday, and I will just echo, is it closer to 100. We’re in close touch from the State Department, from our diplomatic officials, with all of these individuals, working in close coordination with them to determine how they can leave the country, if they’ve left the country.

There have been reports, as I think many of you have seen or reported yourself, about charter flights. If I can just make a — speak to that for a moment, because I know it's been a popular question.

We — there have been some confusion about this. We don't — do not have personnel on the ground, nor do we have air assets in the country to — and we don't control the airspace. So, anyone who's suggesting we are preventing these flights, that's not accurate. We don't — we couldn't prevent a charter flight from taking off.

But what is important for people to understand is where we have some concern. And that is the fact that we're — we do not have reliable means to confirm the basic details of charter flights, including who may be organizing them, the number of American citizens, and other priorities groups on board, the accuracy of the rest of the manifest and where the plane may land, what security protocols are taking in — they're taking into place.

So, just to kind of give you an example here, these charter flights are landing on U.S. military bases, and we have to be very careful. And I think it's understandable we have concern about flights that — where we don't have that level of information and understanding about the manifests, what the protocols are that are taking — that are underway.

There's also a question — there are active — there continue to be active ISIS-K threats, and there's also a question of where these flights go, where they land. We know ISIS-K has a keen interest in attacks against aviation targets and our personnel on the ground in our airport — in our military bases. And these are among the risks that we take into account.

Go ahead.

Q Just a few here. Most of them Texas-related questions I'm going to ask.

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q I'm just — we're curious: What advice would the President give to a woman in Texas right now who wants or needs to get an abortion at this point?

MS. PSAKI: What the — what the President would convey to any woman who is trying to get an abortion, seek an abortion, be able to — to employ her constitutional right to — to seek healthcare, and healthcare that is enshrined in and allowed by federal law — what he would convey to them? I don't think he's going to be giving medical advice, A; that's not the role of any president, he would say.

But I would say he would convey to them: "I have asked my team — I've asked my team to use every lever at their disposal to ensure you have this right, to ensure you have access, to ensure that you can have the ability to — to seek medical care in the way that every woman should have the right to across the country." And he has made that a priority.

Q And this request of DOJ and HHS for "what more can we do," is the understanding or the expectation that they will actually come back with specific ideas? Or is it possible that they determine there really isn't much beyond making sure somebody takes this to the Supreme Court? Because the federal government can't be subject to a civil suit in Texas, but there are other things, potentially, the federal government would be able to do.

MS. PSAKI: The President has every hope, expectation that the leaders of agencies across the government who have capacity will seek every way they can, every means they can to protect a woman's right to choose in Texas.

I can't preview for you. I don't know yet what they will come back with.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. On the Texas law, has the President been in touch with Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Schumer in the past two days about their efforts to pass legislation protecting abortion rights?

MS. PSAKI: He does intend to talk with them about this. I — so I can't — I can't tell you exactly when that will be, but he has every intention to do that.

I will note that Speaker Pelosi also put out a statement about the intention to bring up the codification of Roe up for a vote, which is something the President certainly supports and would be eager to sign into law.

Q Okay. And one more. Does the administration have a message for industry and private businesses that have operations in Texas? Would the President and the White House support a boycott of sorts against Texas?

MS. PSAKI: That's not a call we're making from here. What our effort and what the focus of the federal government is, is to look for every resource, every lever at our disposal to ensure women in Texas have the ability to seek healthcare.

Q And following up on the Texas law, why does the President support abortion when his own Catholic faith teaches abortion is morally wrong?

MS. PSAKI: Well, he believes that it's a woman's right, it's a woman's body, and it's her choice.

Q Why does the President — who does he believe, then, should look out for the unborn child?

MS. PSAKI: He believes that it's up to a woman to make those decisions and up to a woman to make those decisions with her doctor.

I know you've never faced those choices, nor have you ever been pregnant. But for women out there who have faced those choices —

Q Well —

MS. PSAKI: — this is an incredibly difficult thing. The President believes their rights should be respected.

Q And what's his message to —

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

I think we've got to move on.

Q — pro-life groups that support this law without (inaudible) —

MS. PSAKI: I think we have to move on. You've had plenty of time today.

Q I know you like to be a wise guy and throw some — (inaudible.)

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q How many green card holders and SIV applicants remain in Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: Let me give you — well, let me give you, first — and I'll get to your question, but it reminds me I wanted to give you guys an update on one piece that was asked yesterday, which is how many people have come into the country. And this is something that DHS will be providing regular updates on, but just to give you an understanding of the breakdown, and then I will come back to your question, Jacqui, I promise.

First, between August 17th and August 31st, of the breakdown of people who have come into the country: 31,170 — -107, I'm sorry — people have arrived in the United States as a part of Operation Allies Welcome; 4,446 are U.S. citizens, 14 percent of them; 2,785, or 9 percent, are U.S. lawful permanent residents; 23,876, or 77 percent — this is the statistic I gave yesterday, which I then later butchered in the briefing — are other Afghans at risk, including SIV and other visa holders, SIV applicants, p-1 and p-2 referrals, and others. Note that this group includes a small number of third-country nationals that were also evacuated and processed.

We will give updates on that. That's obviously the data as of just a couple of days ago.

In terms of your question — which is a very good one, Jacqui — in terms of how many people are in the country now, there are people who are eligible, and we may not even know they're eligible yet. Right? It is very hard to define those numbers. That is something that certainly the State Department, in coordination with the Department of Homeland Security, are going to be assessing what we think the population is and how we can work with this

population to ensure that we help individuals who want to leave and want to depart the country to depart.

Some of those people may be eligible for a range of our programs — SIV programs, p-1/p-2 programs. Some of them may not, but they still want — may want to depart the country.

Now, as I noted yesterday, and I've noted several times, everybody who wants to leave Afghanistan and come to the United States will not be able to and will not be eligible, and we don't want to set the expectation that will be the case. But what we want to do is try to assess and try to do extensive outreach through — outreach through diplomatic channels to see how many people there are, what programs they might be eligible for.

Q Thank you. And then I wanted to get to the Taliban and questions of whether it's keeping its promise for amnesty.

There was some reporting from the BBC — some color from that story. Since the Taliban came to power, one man said they haven't stopped killing. A few days ago, this person said they killed 12 members of special forces in Kandahar, 3 soldiers in Jalalabad as well. The Taliban took them out of their homes and shot them.

Given this kind of reporting that we're hearing, is it possible that our reliance on the Taliban to keep their word, in terms of our evacuation, is misplaced — with going back on things like the amnesty promise?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first, I don't have any confirmation of those details. I'm not questioning the BBC's reporting. I just don't have any confirmation of them from the U.S. government. I would certainly point you to the Department of Defense and others who might have additional details.

But what I would note here, Jacqui, is no one is saying, from the federal government — no one — the President, the Secretary of Defense, no one from the intelligence community — that the Taliban are good actors. Right? We are not saying that. That is one of the reasons we

are being so clear that we are not rushing to recognition. We will be watching clearly. We have a range of leverage at our disposal, including access to the global marketplace.

And, of course, we will be assessing. It's, of course, based on how they treat individuals in the country, how they treat women, whether they let people who want to leave the country leave. All of those are factors that we will be assessing.

But I don't have any confirmation of that specific reporting.

Go ahead.

Q Jen, yesterday, you said you were going to check on the specifics. So, just to be clear, the President does support the Women's Health Protection Act?

MS. PSAKI: We are looking at a range of options in Congress, including that — the Women's Health Protection Act — but I don't have an assessment at this point in time about that piece of legislation.

Q Got it. And will there be a point person for this whole-of-government approach, like with voting rights or with immigration? And if not, why not?

MS. PSAKI: The President has conveyed clearly in his statement he'd ask the Gender Policy Council co-chairs to oversee this effort.

Q And what's the timeline on that policy council?

MS. PSAKI: In what — I'm not —

Q In terms of when they might — will they have a deadline to get back to him or when they may produce a report.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I wouldn't look at it as producing a report. They are going to be coordinating all of the leverage and all of the efforts and policy options across the government. And they — the President asked — wants them to act as quickly as possible. So,

it's not a means of "100 days and then we'll get a report." It's, "Let's see what our options are, and let's act on them."

Go ahead.

Q If I could just try to drill down on that: The President did say an immediate response is required. I know you said you're not in a position to preview any, but what does the White House see as its — as the federal responsibility here? I mean, you're talking about the possibility of involving the Justice Department, HHS. In Oklahoma, there are clinics that are saying, "You know, okay, we are offering the service. Come here." Is that something that the federal government could do: provide transportation for women outside the state of Texas?

MS. PSAKI: These are all great questions. And I would note that it wasn't just the Department of Justice that the President referenced in his statement, on purpose, right? Because the Department of Health and Human Services has a range of resources, funding, programs that they can look at and potentially deploy.

And, yes, it is urgent. The President wants them to look at these programs now and come back and see what's possible. But it has been less than a day here, and I just want the experts and the policy experts to be able to assess what's possible, and then we will get back to you and make sure you all know exactly what our options look like.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks so much. There are some concerns about the recent drone strikes and the possibility of more. Some groups, like the ACLU, as well as some former Obama officials, feel this is an indicator that the forever wars are not over if drone strikes continue. Can you address those concerns and speak to whether these drone strikes mean an extension of the war?

MS. PSAKI: The strikes that killed ISIS-K terrorists?

Q And the possibility of more. I mean, President Biden yesterday said that this is not over.

MS. PSAKI: Well, if anybody wants to convey they don't think that we should kill ISIS-K terrorists and kill the people who killed 13 members of our military, then the President is happy to have that debate.

Go ahead.

Q Can I ask —

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q — another question on refugees? Thank you.

Some groups are anticipating about 50,000 Afghans coming to the United States. Can you — is that an estimate that you're able to confirm? And is there anything more that you can share on what status they will arrive? Will most of them have humanitarian parole — SIVs, P1/P2s?

And how will that — those numbers be applied to the refugee cap? Will they be part of the 125,000 that's been committed to, or in addition?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. These are all really good questions that are being discussed by the team as we speak. But let me try to answer what I can answer at this point in time.

So, right now, the U.S. military bases — they confirmed, about two days ago, that they had about 20,000 people. That may have — number may have gone down now, so I would certainly encourage you to ask them for an updated number if that's of interest. They are working towards space for about 50,000.

Now, there are people who come to this country — American citizens and others — who have family members who may not go to those military base — U.S. citizens, of course — who may not go to those bases. And those bases are meant to be temporary regardless.

In terms of what classification — so, as you know, there are different classifications people have come into the country under from Afghanistan: the SIV — the Special Immigrant Visa Program; P1, P2 programs. Some have come in through parolee programs.

And, yes, we are having discussions about, over the long term, what this looks like. Right now, refugees who come in as refugee status would be under the refugee cap, but beyond that, I have to let the policy process see itself through. It's a good question.

Go ahead.

Q On the 125,000, do you know that? I apologize.

MS. PSAKI: Oh, sorry, about whether — say that one more time. What was the question?

Q The 125,000 —

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q — will it be in addition to the committed refugee cap of 125,000, or will it be just the 50,000 — or whatever the number is? Does it fall with —

MS. PSAKI: Well, 50,000 — a lot of those people are Special Immigrant Visa applicants — right? — or through other programs. So that wouldn't be under a refugee cap.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you. Reproductive rights activists have noted that President Biden seems reluctant to use the word — the specific word “abortion,” although he did use it in his statement today, in the statement you put out yesterday. Can you explain his seeming reluctance to use that word? And was it a deliberate messaging strategy or choice to use it this week in relation to the Texas law?

MS. PSAKI: I have to say, as somebody who strongly supports a woman's right to choose — myself; as somebody who spent time working with groups like Planned Parenthood, amazing groups like that — that I think the most important value people should look at is what the President does in his actions and what he fights for.

And I don't think I'm going to have any other assessment beyond that.

Go ahead.

Q The President said today — talking about the hurricane — that the climate crisis is here, and then he went on to talk about the wildfires and —

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q — the flooding. Is anything in the recent — that recent string of weather events changed his view on how aggressive the administration needs to be on carbon reduction in its policy?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think it's reaffirmed, as you heard the President reference today, his commitment to getting his Build Back Better agenda passed — which has a huge — huge focus on addressing the climate crisis and taking a number of steps, including creating more — investing in resiliency for infrastructure, as you know; also setting ambitious goals and taking policy steps to reach those.

So, I think it really reaffirms more the policies he's already proposed that will take huge steps forward in helping to address the climate crisis. I'd note that also even Senator — Senator Cassidy fro- — also noted the need to invest in infrastructure and how these recent events reiterate that.

Q And on the Build Back Better, would the President sign a version of that passed by the House and Senate that does not fully fund his carbon reduction agenda?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I'm not going to negotiate from here, obviously, but the President put those proposals in the package because he feels they are vitally important to addressing the climate crisis. And the climate crisis is one of four crises he's identified from the beginning as being central to the issues he's going to address as President.

I will say that, you know, as people look to the next couple of weeks of the very expansive legislative agenda that we are going to all be undertaking together, what the President is quite focused on is, yes, of course, steps — the investments that will help cut costs for the American people in a range of ways, whether it's the Child Tax Credit, making childcare less expensive, making college more affordable.

But he is equally as focused on the tax — the — making wealthiest Americans and corporations pay more because he thinks that's fair, and he thinks that's — that is how we can deliver on equality in this country. And that can also pay for a lot of these important policy initiatives.

Go ahead.

Q Are there any more details about the President's trip to Louisiana tomorrow?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. They are still being finalized, which is not out of the norm, but let me tell you what I know at this point in time.

So, the President will travel to New Orleans to survey storm damage from the hurricane. He'll meet with state and local leaders. I would expect that will include the governor and the mayor from impacted communities. And beyond that, we're still finalizing all the details, which we'll hopefully have more later tonight on.

Q And, on the Texas abortion law, how worried — or is the administration worried at all that this will enable other state legislatures to pass similar bills?

MS. PSAKI: Of course, we're worried. Of course, we're worried that other states where there is — where there is a movement and an effort to prevent women from having access to healthcare will copycat the steps by the Texas — that happened in Texas. Now, that is one of the reasons why the President thinks it's so urgent and why he has asked his team to act as quickly as possible to see what our options are.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. On Afghanistan, the Taliban says China will be their main partner and, kind of, financial lifeline. Does that weaken America's leverage over the group to change its behavior, especially given the geographic closeness between China and Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would first say that — as the President has said many times, so let me repeat — there are few countries that wanted us to stay in Afghanistan more than China and

Russia, because it would have tied up our own resources and tied up our own U.S. military and tied up our own financial assets and options.

What the — our leverage over the Taliban is, is a range of of — of things. I mean, one is, of course, access to the global marketplace, which is not just China; it is a range of money that is in the Federal — that is in the New York Federal Reserve, that — that is — was the Afghan government's money that they currently don't have access to. It is working with a coalition of 100 countries around the world that have signed this statement on what their expectations are of the Taliban. It's working with the U.N. Security Council.

So, the world is united in what they expect the Taliban to do, which is allow people who want to depart the country to depart, and China has to decide where they are in that effort.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q Just to the eviction moratorium — or lack thereof of an eviction moratorium: I'm curious what specifically the administration is doing to help those states who seem to be having issues doling out these billions of dollars —

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q — available for renters and landlords beyond the — you know, telling them to speed it up.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I promise you we're not just telling them to speed it up. We are telling them to speed it up, but we are not stopping there.

One of the steps we've taken — and we've outlined — we've announced a few steps over the course of the last few weeks — is working to cut bureaucratic red tape from here. So that includes making it easier for landlords and tenants to apply for this assistance and ensuring that that is not an incredibly difficult process.

We've also worked with individual states to determine what are the holdup in their processes. And some of the bureaucratic steps in places where we've eased the red tape has expedited the funding going out in states, so we've seen successes on that front.

What's important to note here is that the funding exists in states across the country to essentially do the federal eviction moratorium, even though the Supreme Court has ruled as they ruled — because states can do it on an individual basis.

So, what we're really including states to — what we're really encouraging states to do is put in place eviction moratoriums statewide, or take any steps they can sta- — take across the state to make it harder for people to kick tenants out of their homes during this time.

And we can get you a rundown of that too. I'm looking for all the pieces.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you. A Taliban spokesman told an Australian news network that the 41 Australians who died in the war in Afghanistan died in vain.

During this time, the Australian government found out about the withdrawal date change through media reporting. We weren't included on the list from Secretary of State Antony Blinken of countries called on the final day — August 31. Does the Taliban have a point?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not sure I understand your question.

Q We have sacrificed a lot for this alliance and — including the lives of 41 Australians — and we've been left, seemingly, out of the loop during this withdrawal process. There hasn't been high-level communication with the Australian government during this time. So —

MS. PSAKI: I don't think that's true. I don't think that we have not engaged with the Australian government. We have worked with our partners around the world to evacuate individuals from a range of countries around the world who need evacuating from the country.

I would say — and the President would say, if he were standing here — those 41 Australians did not die in vain, and we are incredibly grateful for their partnership. We're incredibly grateful for their support over the course of a 20-year war. And Australia remains a pivotal partner to the United States.

But I would be very shocked if we had not been in touch with and engaged with — so what I was asking you for clarification on was question about the 31st and a call on the 31st. I'm not sure what that would be a reference to.

Q Sure. That would be on the speech that Antony Blinken, the Secretary of State, gave at the withdrawal — at the end of the —

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q — conflict — the last flight. He listed through all these different countries that he called at the end of that, and Australia wasn't on the list.

MS. PSAKI: I can certainly ask the State Department when their most recent diplomatic conversations were with Australian leaders, but I know that we are in close touch, in close coordination, and that Australia is an incredibly vital partner, not just in — over the last several years in the war in Afghanistan, but a range — on a range of important global issues.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Jen. I wanted to follow up on Jeff's question. We know that commission is not tasked with providing specific recommendations to the President out of that review, and he's already said that he is not a fan of court packing. So, realistically, what kind of changes can we expect to come once that review is complete? Is the President committed to addressing the court system in a significant way?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the President wants to take a look at what the court reform group advises on. And, yes, they're not coming out with, "These are the seven steps that we are recommending." It's a diverse group with diverse opinions, and he felt that was important, given this is a vital institution in our nation's history.

So, I can't predict for you; I don't — we — I don't know where he's going to land. I'm going to leave the space for the President to determine that.

Go ahead, in the back.

Q A couple of follow-ups. First, I wanted to ask about the answer that you gave to Franco about the ongoing drone strikes in Afghanistan, because the President talked about, in his recent remarks, that this was kind of a new chapter. And you've talked from the podium there about sort of meeting these threats now where they are outside of Afghanistan.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q So, if these drone strikes do continue, the concern from the international community is these are extrajudicial killings, there are civilian casualties often. I mean, how is this sort of the new era? It seems almost like business as usual.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think it's — the context of the President's remarks was not "Drone strikes are the new era." It is "We need to meet threats where they are and ensure we're taking steps to address them in coordination with the global community, of course."

I will say that the United States takes the threat of civilian casualties incredibly seriously. We do everything we can to prevent civilian casualties; that will continue.

I know there have been very good questions about the strike over the — that happened over the weekend, which — and there is an investigation into that. There's been a range of reporting, but the investigation needs to play out and conclude before we speak to that.

But I would say what the President is referencing is there are a range of countries around the world we don't have a military presence on the ground but we can still prevent terrorist groups from metastasizing and posing threats to not just the United States but to our partners and countries around the world. And there's a range of tools and tactics. So, that's what he was conveying.

Q Jen, may I follow up?

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

Q Just one last question — oh, sorry.

MS. PSAKI: Oh, go ahead.

Q Apologies. One more follow-up —

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

Q — on Steve Holland's question this time. You kind of updated us on how you're sort of encouraging the international leaders to get the money flowing into Afghanistan again.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q And as these aid groups are warning of a humanitarian crisis, given the fact — and this is, again, referencing the President's remarks — there's been \$2 trillion spent there, what's being done to ensure that all this money that's spent, whether it was in the past or in the future, is actually getting to the people that need it and not just corporations that have profited off of people's misery for so long?

MS. PSAKI: Absolutely. One, I would say he signed this OFAC license because he wants humanitarian groups that we know we can rely on to be able to have access to provide this assistance. And that was a step we took to ensure that.

One of the pieces we've talked about a bit in here is the importance of getting airports functioning — right? — not just at HKIA, but in regional airports, because that's how this humanitarian assistance is going to be delivered to people across Afghanistan.

So, that's another area where he's quite focused, and the Secretary of State and our government is quite focused.

Q May I follow up, Jen?

Q Thanks, Jen.

Q Two more foreign questions. First of all, on Afghanistan, what is the administration's position on the National Resistance Front led by Ahmad Massoud? And is the U.S. talking to or assisting them in — or in any way supporting them in reaching their goals?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything to read out in terms of engagements with them. I'd point you to the State Department.

Q Secondly, as you know, Climate Envoy Kerry is in China right now to talk about climate change.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

Q China's Foreign Minister has said, quote, if the U.S. want progress on climate — forgive me, sorry, quote starts here —

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

Q — “Stop regarding China as a threat and as an adversary.” End quote. Does the administration see China as an adversary in this regard? And are you willing to meet them in the middle to make progress on climate change?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the United States sees China as a country where we have disagreements, and we also have areas where we can work together. And that's what complicated diplomatic relationships look like. And certainly, our relationship with China falls into that category.

Thanks, everyone, so much.

Q Jen — Jen, on drone strikes, there was a —

MS. PSAKI: I don't think I'm going to have anything new to what I already — already answered on that. But we'll see you all tomorrow.

Thanks, everyone.

Q Have a good trip.

MS. PSAKI: Thank you.

2:53 P.M. EDT