



## THE BIDEN 100 DAYS

---

### THE WHITE HOUSE DAILY BRIEFINGS

---

Martha Joynt Kumar, *Director*  
*The White House Transition Project*

Shortly after coming into office, President Biden spoke of the commitment of his administration to hold regular press briefings at the White House. Until the Trump Administration, reporters could count on hearing from the presidential press secretary on a regular basis. During his tenure as president, though, such sessions faced an uncertain schedule and long periods of drought. In his appearance at the State Department on February 4<sup>th</sup>, President Biden said "... as part of our commitment to truth, transparency, accountability, ... we started on day one with daily briefings of the press from the White House." What happened to those briefings beginning on day two? During the first 100 days of the Biden Administration, Press Secretary Jennifer Psaki held daily sessions by herself and with key administration officials where they answered questions posed by assembled reporters. Counting all 100 days, President Biden answered at least one question from a reporter in 77 of those days. His surrogates, particularly Press Secretary Jennifer Psaki and select administration officials, elaborated on his remarks and provided further information in their briefings from the White House podium.

**Regular Briefings Return.** Presidents sometimes answer questions on the weekends as they travel to or from the White House, but press secretaries traditionally practice a five day work week. Counting out the 14 weekends (28 days) occurring during the hundred days, Press Secretary Jennifer Psaki held briefings at the White House podium 62 of the 72 weekdays. When President Biden was on the road, Psaki held four sessions on Air Force One and her deputy, Karine Jean-Pierre, held another three. Thus, out of 72 weekdays, there were daily press briefings 69 of those days.

White House COVID-19 requirements call for the number of reporters in the Briefing Room to be reduced from 49 to a socially distanced 14. The 14 represent news organizations that regularly cover the White House and are part of the press pool. The briefings have been similar in their length and the opportunities reporters in the room have to question the press secretary and visiting officials. The sessions where Psaki appeared alone to answer questions were usually no less than 45 minutes and sometimes more than that. Joint sessions ran well over an hour. The 27 joint sessions were occasions where she brought in a Cabinet secretary, a White House staff member, or an administration official. There were no restrictions on what questions a reporter can ask, such as limiting briefings by subject.

**Cabinet Members and Administration Officials Brief.** Cabinet members came in during the first hundred days to discuss aspects of their portfolios that were then in the news. Those secretaries are: Alejandro Mayorkas: Homeland Security; Denis McDonough: Veterans; Miguel Cardona: Education; Marcia Fudge: Housing and Urban Development; Marty Walsh: Labor; Gina Raimondo: Commerce; Jennifer Granholm: Energy; Peter Buttigieg: Transportation; Debra Haaland: Interior. White House officials coming to the Briefing Room podium headed units involved in current key presidential decisions. The officials included: Jake Sullivan: National Security Advisor; Susan Rice: director, Domestic Policy Council; Brian Deese: director, National Economic Council; John Kerry and Gina McCarthy: climate advisors; Cecilia Rouse: chair, Council of Economic Advisers; Jared Bernstein, member of the Council of Economic Advisers; Jeffrey Zients: director of the COVID-19 Response Team and Counselor to the President; Anthony Fauci: presidential medical adviser. Once officials spoke, reporters were provided time to question the visitors before they left and Psaki then gave her short update, which usually was no more than five minutes. She then took questions for another 20 or so minutes. Because the number of reporters was small, each reporter was called on with some getting in a second opportunity.

**Why Briefings Make a Difference.** What difference does it make if there are daily White House briefings? Presidents speak about their policy proposals, actions, and events yet in order to have an informed electorate, government officials need to provide further information to the public on these proposals and actions. Having regular briefings with knowledgeable administration officials provides the public with supporting information that supplements presidential remarks and statements. While members of Congress and the courts can demand answers, only news organizations ask questions from a position independent of government. Daily briefings where reporters

can pose whatever questions they want answers to, remind a President, his White House staff, and administration officials that they need to explain themselves. Briefings are useful to an administration as well as for news organizations. They are important for an administration both as an opportunity to explain their policies, but also as a way to inform those within in an administration of the president's thinking. Additionally, reporters' questions can also serve as an early warning system of what trouble there might be ahead for a president and his administration.

### WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

Begun in 1998, the White House Transition Project provides information about individual offices for staff coming into the White House to help streamline the process of transition from one administration to the next. A nonpartisan, nonprofit group, the WHTP brings together political science scholars who study the presidency and White House operations to write analytical pieces on relevant topics about presidential transitions, presidential appointments, and crisis management. Since its creation, it has participated in the 2001, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2017, and now the 2021. WHTP coordinates with government agencies and other non-profit groups, e.g., the US National Archives or the Partnership for Public Service. It also consults with foreign governments and organizations interested in improving governmental transitions, worldwide. See the project at <http://whitehousetransitionproject.org>

The White House Transition Project produces a number of materials, including:

- **WHITE HOUSE OFFICE ESSAYS:** Based on interviews with key personnel who have borne these unique responsibilities, including former White House Chiefs of Staff; Staff Secretaries; Counsels; Press Secretaries, etc. , WHTP produces briefing books for each of the critical White House offices. These briefs compile the best practices suggested by those who have carried out the duties of these office. With the permission of the interviewees, interviews are available on the National Archives website page dedicated to this project:
- **\*WHITE HOUSE ORGANIZATION CHARTS.** The charts cover administrations from Ronald Reagan to Barack Obama and help new White House staff understand what to expect when they arrive and how their offices changed over time or stayed the same.
- **\*TRANSITION ESSAYS.** These reports cover a number of topics suggested by White House staff, including analyses of the patterns of presidential appointments and the Senate confirmation process, White House and presidential working routine, and the patterns of presidential travel and crisis management. It also maintains ongoing reports on the patterns of interactions with reporters and the press in general as well as White House staffing.
- **\*INTERNATIONAL COMPONENT.** The WHTP consults with international governments and groups interested in transitions in their governments. In 2017 in conjunction with the Baker Institute, the WHTP hosted a conference with emerging Latin American leaders and in 2018 cosponsored a government transitions conference with the National Democratic Institute held in November 2018 in Montreal, Canada .

Earlier White House Transition Project funding has included grants from the Pew Charitable Trusts of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and The Moody Foundation of Galveston, Texas.