



Tamara Keith and Laura Barrón-López on Biden's strategy in Ukraine, Supreme Court hearings

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NPR's Tamara Keith and Laura Barrón-López of POLITICO join Judy Woodruff to discuss the latest political news, including confirmation hearings for Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson to the U.S. Supreme Court and President Biden's focus on uniting allies on a strategy to mitigate the conflict in Ukraine.

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- **Judy Woodruff:**

As the Senate Judiciary Committee launches the confirmation hearings for Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson to the U.S. Supreme Court, President Biden is focused on uniting allies on a strategy to mitigate the conflict in Ukraine.

Here to break down what's at stake is Tamara Keith of NPR and Laura Barron-Lopez of Politico.

And we welcome both of you to the program. Amy Walter is away.

We're particularly glad to have you, Laura.

So, so much to talk about in the news, as we were just suggesting. And I know you heard, Tam, earlier, the conversation with the ambassador for Poland.

President Biden headed to Europe this week, meeting with NATO, then going to Poland. What are White House expectations for this trip?

- **Tamara Keith, National Public Radio:**

They are expecting that there will be deliverables, though they aren't telling us what they will deliver.

But when a president makes a trip, there's a lot of groundwork laid out in advance. So, the secretary of defense was already there at NATO. They're all — there's been a lot in the works already, so that, when President Biden goes, when these meetings between the leaders take place, when it's over, they will have something to announce.

We don't know what it is yet. But they will have something to announce.

But just — the experts I talk to say just the sheer act of President Biden going to Europe — Brussels is a 17-hour drive from the border with Ukraine. The president going to

Warsaw, Poland, going to Poland, which is right there on the border, where all of these refugees are, to make a statement — he makes a statement simply by being there.

- **Judy Woodruff:**

Right.

And it also raises expectations by his being there, Laura, doesn't it?

- **Laura Barron-Lopez, Politico:**

It does.

A number of refugee resettlement organizations that I have been speaking to have said that they really hope that some of the deliverables are said and are made public when he's there in Poland, such as expediting the refugee process for Ukrainians who have family here, family reunification, as well as also potentially non-Ukrainians who fled first to Ukraine, and then now have to flee again, given the crisis.

So they're really looking to see the administration, which he can do without Congress, use the Refugee Resettlement Act to open the U.S. to a lot of refugees. And, right now, they're disappointed that it hasn't been done so far, but they're hoping that this trip starts to move the administration in that process.

- **Judy Woodruff:**

Just as a kind of footnote to this, the president's been the recipient of criticism from Republicans, yes, united, in that the United States is doing — is supporting Ukraine, but they're saying it could have been more, it could have been sooner.

Tam, how much of that is noise and how much does the White House worry about that?

- **Tamara Keith:**

Well, and there are Democrats who said it could have been more and could have been sooner.

- **Judy Woodruff:**

True.

- **Tamara Keith:**

There were Democrats and Republicans alike who said that they wanted the administration to put forward sanctions on Russia before Russia did anything, when Russia was building up troops along the Ukrainian border.

But, ultimately, President Biden has made this choice, and this trip is all about highlighting that choice, this choice of moving in lockstep with the allies, with NATO, with the European Union, even at times when that makes him seem like he is behind the curve, when it makes him seem, based on American public opinion, and certainly congressional opinion, that he's a little bit behind.

- **Judy Woodruff:**

I want to turn to the Ketanji Brown Jackson Supreme Court hearings, Laura.

It was only opening statements today. We haven't heard the senators press her on some of the questions. We did hear them raised, but we didn't hear them pressed.

What is it that the — we expect to come from this politically for the White House? How much does it matter to them that these hearings go well? It's expected she's going to win confirmation.

- **Laura Barron-Lopez:**

It is, right, which she can with just Democratic support.

But the administration would like to see some Republicans vote to confirm her. It looks as though Senator Susan Collins is someone who could very well do that. But, that being said, the White House ahead of these hearings, has tried to get ahead of that attack from Republicans that she is soft on crime by stating her personal relationship, members of her family who were in law enforcement.

She's been endorsed by the largest organization that represents chiefs of police, some 30,000 chiefs of police. They have endorsed her. One thing, I think, that's important about her the context of her record, particularly the public defender experience that she has, is that no one on the Supreme Court has ever been a public defender.

The closest was Thurgood Marshall, who had experience as a criminal defense lawyer. But, other than that, she would be the first. And one thing that I have seen, even libertarian think tank Cato Institute mention is that they think that diversity on the court could be important because of the continued erosion of the Sixth Amendment.

That means the fact that more and more in the modern judicial system, people are not getting trial — jury trials. That has disappeared a lot in the modern judicial system, and that someone like her may seek to balance out those changes.

- **Judy Woodruff:**

How much does it matter, Tam, that they get some bipartisan support here?

- **Tamara Keith:**

I don't know how much it really matters.

In terms of — I mean, it matters to the White House because the White House likes to tell this story about how bipartisanship is possible. And the president tells that story. Whenever he possibly can, he talks about it.

But in terms of her confirmation, obviously, it doesn't need to be bipartisan. In terms of the modern age of the confirmation process, where they went nuclear a few years ago, and, ever since then, it's been pretty darn partisan, and the age of a judicial nominee getting 60 or 70 votes or even more, it just — it looks like it's over, that there has become this real ideological divide over the courts, and where the Senate has essentially decided that the president doesn't really get his prerogative, or that they aren't going to put a rubber stamp on it.

- **Judy Woodruff:**

I mean, it's a process. We begin to feel like we have seen this movie before when we watch these confirmation hearings.

- **Laura Barron-Lopez:**

It is.

I mean, and to Tamara's point, she can be confirmed without Republicans. Of course, President Biden is still trying to have a lot of conversations with Republicans. He's called Susan Collins at least three times since Justice Stephen Breyer said that he was going to retire. So, of course, the White House is making an effort for that.

But the likelihood of her getting more than one Republican vote is really slim.

- **Judy Woodruff:**

One other thing I wanted to ask you both about is we lost, over the weekend, the longest serving Republican member of the House.

Laura, I think you told us you covered him on Capitol Hill, Don Young, 88 years old, longtime serving member from Alaska. Tell us a little about him.

- **Laura Barron-Lopez:**

Yes.

Well, Congressman Young was the dean of the House, one of the oldest members actually across both chambers to serve that long. And so he was known for his chairmanships of the Natural Resources Committee. He was big on the Infrastructure and Transportation Committee.

And one thing, notably, that Biden, as well as others have highlighted in his passing is his — him fighting aggressively for Alaska in terms of earmarks, which were a thing earlier on in his career. Then they went away for decades. They returned again recently. And so, most recently, voting for Biden's bipartisan infrastructure package — he was only one of 13 Republicans to do that.

- **Judy Woodruff:**

Earmarks, of course, being projects that land in one state or another. The bridge to nowhere was one of the famous ones.

(CROSSTALK)

- **Laura Barron-Lopez:**

Yes, right.

- **Judy Woodruff:**

Well, may he rest in peace, Don Young.

Thank you both, Laura Barron-Lopez, for joining us, Tamara Keith. Thank you.

- **Tamara Keith:**

Thank you.

- **Laura Barron-Lopez:**

Thank you.