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Remarks by President Biden in Press Conference | The White House

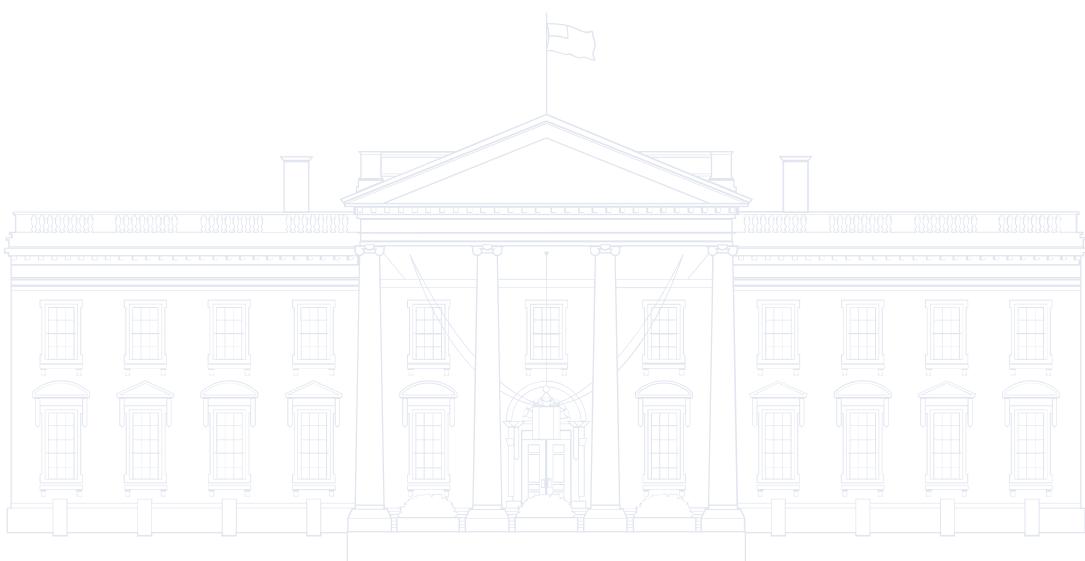
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East Room

4:02 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Hello, folks. Thanks for being here.

Well, good afternoon, everyone. Tomorrow will mark one year since I took office. It's been a year of challenges, but it's also been a year of enormous progress.

We went from 2 million people being vaccinated at the moment I was sworn in to 210 million Americans being fully vaccinated today.

We created 6 million new jobs — more jobs in one year than at any time before.

Unemployment dropped — the unemployment rate dropped to 3.9 percent.

Child poverty dropped by nearly 40 percent — the biggest drop ever in American history.

New business applications grew by 30 percent — the biggest increase ever.

And for the first time in a long time, this country's working people actually got a raise — actually got a raise. The people — the bottom 40 percent saw their income go up the most of all those that got a raise.

We cut health insurance premiums for millions of American families.

And we just made surprise medical bills illegal in this country. You know those bills you get that you don't expect — up to \$2,000 or \$5,000 — from a hospital, beyond what you thought you were going to have to owe because of the consultation you weren't told was going to cost that much? No more. They're now illegal.

Thanks to the American Rescue Plan and other actions we've taken, we've seen record job creation and record economic growth in the past year.

Now, thanks to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, we're about to make a record investment in rebuilding America to take us to be the number-one best infrastructure in the world. Well, now we're way below that.

We'll be creating better jobs for millions of people modernizing our roads, our bridges, our highways, our ports, our airports — everything from making clean water; lead — removing lead pipes that every American can turn on — every American can turn on a faucet and drink clean water — urban and rural and suburban communities.

It's going to make affordable high-speed Internet available to every American in urban, rural, and suburban areas. We've never done that before. Now we are. We're in the process of that getting that done.

Still, for all this progress, I know there's a lot of frustration and fatigue in this country.

And we know why: COVID-19. Omicron has now been challenging us in a way that — it's the new enemy.

But while it's cause for concern, it's not cause for panic.

We've been doing everything we can, learning and adapting as fast as we can, and preparing for a future beyond the pandemic.

While I know that after almost two years of physical, emotional, and psychological weight of this pandemic, and has — the impact it's had on everyone, for many of us, it's been too much to bear. We're in a very different place now, though.

We have the tools — vaccines, boosters, masks, tests, pills — to save lives and keep businesses and schools open.

Seventy-five percent of adults are fully vaccinated. We've gone from 90 million adults with no shots in arms last summer down

to 35 million with no shots as of today. And we're adding about 9 million more vaccinations each week.

We're going to stick with our vaccination efforts because vaccinations work. So, get vaccinated, please. And get your booster.

Look, we're also increasing testing. Should we have done more testing earlier? Yes. But we're doing more now. We've gone from zero at-home tests a year ago to 375 million tests on the market in just this month. If you buy a test at a store, your insurance will reimburse you.

On top of that, we're making 1 billion — 1 billion at-home tests available for you to order and be delivered to your home for free. Just visit COVIDTests.gov to know how to get that free test kit to your home.

In addition, there are 20,000 sites where you can get tested in person for free, now.

And now we have more treatments that people can — that — for people — to keep people out of the hospital than any other point in the pandemic, including lifesaving antiviral pills. We purchased 20 million of these new Pfizer pills — more than any country in the world.

The bottom line on COVID-19 is that we are in a better place than we've been and have been thus far, clearly better than a year ago. We're not going back — we're not going back to lockdowns. We're not going back to closing schools. Schools should stay open.

Because of the American Rescue Plan, we provided the states \$130 billion — \$130 billion to keep our students and educators safe and schools open: funding for ventilation systems in

schools, social distancing, hygiene for classrooms and the school buses. In addition, we've added another \$10 billion for COVID-19 tests to be able to be administered at schools.

And many states and school districts have spent this money very well. Unfortunately, some haven't.

I encourage the states and school districts that use the funding to protect our children and keep their schools open: Use it.

COVID-19 is not going to give up and accept things — you know, it's just — it's not going to go away immediately. But I'm not going to give up and accept things as they are now.

Some people may call what's happening now the "new normal." I call it a job not yet finished. It will get better. We're moving toward a time when COVID-19 won't disrupt our daily lives; where COVID 19 won't be a crisis but something to protect against and a threat [treat].

Look, we're not there yet, but we will get there.

Now, the second challenge we're facing are prices. COVID-19 has created a lot of economic complications, including rapid price increases across the world economy. People see it at the gas pumps, the grocery stores, and elsewhere.

So, here's what we're going to do:

A critical job in making sure that the elevated prices don't become entrenched rests with the Federal Reserve, which has a dual mandate: full employment and stable prices.

The Federal Reserve provided extraordinary support during the crisis for the previous year and a half.

Given the strength of our economy and the pace of recent price increases, it's appropriate, as the Federal Chairman, Chairman Powell — the Fed Chairman, Powell, has indicated — to

recalibrate the support that is now necessary.

I respect the Fed's — the Fed's independence. And I've nominated five superb individuals to serve on the Federal Board of Governors — men and women from a variety of ideological perspectives. They're eminently qualified, historically diverse, and have earned bipartisan praise. And I call on the United States Senate to confirm them without any further delay.

And here at the White House and for my friends in Congress, the best thing to tackle high prices is a more productive economy with greater capacity to deliver goods and services to the American people, and a growing economy where folks have more choices and more small businesses can compete and where more goods can get to market faster and cheaper.

I've laid out a three-part plan to do just that.

First, fix the supply chain. COVID-19 has had a global impact on the economy. When a factory shuts down in one part of the world, shipments to shops and homes and businesses all over the world are disrupted.

COVID-19 has compounded that many times over.

A couple of months ago, in this very room, we talked — we heard dire warnings about how these supply chain problems could create a real crisis around the holidays. So, we acted. We brought together business and labor, and that much-predicted crisis did not occur.

Ninety-nine percent of the packages were delivered on time, and shelves were stocked. And notwithstanding the recent storms that have impacted many parts of our country, the share of goods in stock at stores is 89 percent now, which is barely changed from the 91 percent before the pandemic.

I often see empty shelves being shown on television. Eighty-nine percent are full, which is only a few points below what it was before the pandemic.

But our work is not done. My infrastructure law will supercharge our effort, upgrading everything from roads and bridges to ports and airports, railways and transit, to make our economy move faster and reduce prices for families.

Second thing: My Build Back Better plan will address the biggest costs that working families face every day. No other plan will do more to lower the costs for American families. It cuts the cost of — for childcare.

Many families, including the people sitting in this room, if they have children and they're working full-time — many families pay up to \$14,000 a year for childcare in big cities, less than that in smaller ones. My plan cuts that in half.

That will not only be a gamechanger for so many families' budgets, but it will mean so much for the nearly 2 million women who — women who've left the workforce during the pandemic because of things like childcare.

My Build Back Better plan cuts the price of prescription drugs. So, insulin that today costs some people as much as \$1,000 a month will cost no more than \$35 a month.

It cuts the cost of eldercare. It lowers energy costs. And it will do all of this without raising a single penny in taxes on people making under \$400,000 a year or raising the deficit. In fact, my plan cuts the deficit and it boosts the economy by getting more people into the workforce.

That's why 17 Nobel prize winners for economics say it will ease long-term inflationary pressure.

The bottom line: If price increases are what you're worried about, the best answer is my Build Back Better plan.

Third thing we're going to do: promote competition.

Look, in too many industries, a handful of giant companies dominate the market in sectors like meat processing, railroads, shipping, and other areas.

This isn't a new issue. It's not been the reason we've have high inflation today. It's not the only reason. It's been happening for a decade.

But over time, it has reduced competition; squeezed out small businesses and farmers, ranchers; and increased the price for consumers.

We end up with an industry like the meat-processing industry where four big companies dominate the markets, pay ranchers less for their cattle they grow, charge consumers more for beef — hamburger meat, whatever they're buying. Prices are up.

Look, I'm a capitalist. But capitalism without competition is not capitalism, it's exploitation.

So I signed an executive order to tackle unfair competition in our economy, and we're going to continue to enforce it, along with working with Congress where we can.

I'll close with this: We have faced some of the biggest challenges that we've ever faced in this country these past few years — challenges to our public health, challenges to our economy. But we're getting through it.

And not only are we getting through it, we're laying the foundation for a future where America wins the 21st century by creating jobs at a record pace. Now we need to get inflation

under control.

We have developed ex- — an extraordinarily effective booster shots and antiviral pills. Now we need to finish the job to get COVID-19 under control.

I've long said it's never been a good bet to bet against the American people or America. I believe that more than ever today.

We've seen the grit and determination of the American people this past year. But the best days of this country are still ahead of us, not behind us.

Now I'm happy to take questions.

Yes.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. I know some of my colleagues will get into some specific issues, but I wanted to zoom out on your first year in office.

Inflation is up. Your signature domestic legislation is stalled in Congress. In a few hours from now, the Senate — an effort in the Senate to deal with voting rights and voting — voting reform legislation is going to fail. COVID-19 is taking the lives of 1,500 Americans every day. And the nation's divisions are just as raw as they were a year ago. Did you overpromise to the American public what you could achieve in your first year in office? And how do you plan to course-correct going forward?

THE PRESIDENT: Why are you such an optimist? (Laughter.)

Look, I didn't overpromise, but I have probably outperformed what anybody thought would happen. The fact of the matter is that we're in a situation where we have made enormous progress. You mentioned the number of deaths from COVID; well, it was three times that not long ago. It's coming down.

Everything is changing. It's getting better.

Look, I didn't overpromise, but I think if you take a look at what we've been able to do, you'd have to acknowledge we made enormous progress.

But one of the things that I think is something that — one thing I haven't been able to do so far is get my Republican friends to get in the game of making things better in this country. For example, I was reading the other day — and I — I wrote the quote down so I don't misquote him — a quote from Senator Sununu, when he decided that he wasn't going to — excuse me, Governor Sununu — when he decided he wasn't going to run for the Senate in New Hampshire.

Here's what he said: "They were all, for the most..." — quote — "They were all, for the most part, content with the speed at which they weren't doing anything. It was very clear that we just had to hold the line for two years. Okay, so I'm just going to be a roadblock for the next two years? That's not what I do," Sununu said.

He went on to say, "It bothered me that they were okay with that." And then he goes on to say, "I said, okay, so we're not going to get stuff done if we win the White House back" — "if we win the White House back." "Why didn't [we] do [anything] in 2017 and 2018?"

And then, he said — how did the Republicans Sununu spoke to answer the challenge? He said, "Crickets. Yeah, crickets. They had no answer."

I did not anticipate that there'd be such a stalwart effort to make sure that the most important thing was that President Biden didn't get anything done. Think about this: What are Republicans for? What are they for? Name me one thing

they're for.

And so, the problem here is that I think what happens — what I have to do, and the change in tactic, if you will: I have to make clear to the American people what we are for. We've passed a lot. We've passed a lot of things that people don't even understand what's all that's in it, understandably.

Remember when we passed the Affordable Care Act and everybody thought that — you know, and it really was getting pummeled and beaten? And it wasn't until after you're out of office, and that next campaign when — that off-year campaign. And I went into a whole — I wasn't in office anymore. We were in a whole bunch of districts campaigning for Democrats in Republican districts who said they wanted to do away with — with healthcare, with Obamacare.

And I started pointing out that if you did that, preexisting conditions would no longer be covered. And they said, "Huh? We didn't know that. We didn't know that." And guess what? We won over 38 seats because we explained to the people exactly what, in fact, had passed.

And one of the things that I remember saying — and I'll end this — I remember saying to President Obama, when he passed the Affordable Care Act — I said, "You ought to take a victory lap." And he said, "There's so many things going on, we have don't have time to take a victory lap."

As a consequence, no one knew what the detail of the legislation was. They don't know a lot of the detail of what we passed. So, the difference is, I'm going to be out on the road a lot, making the case around the country, with my colleagues who are up for reelection and others, making the case of what we did do and what we want to do, what we need to do.

And so, I don't think I've overpromised at all. And I'm going to stay on this track.

You know, one of the things that I remember — and I'll end this with — I was talking with, you know, Jim Clyburn, who was a great help to me in the campaign in South Carolina. And Jim said — and when he would endorse me — and there was a clip on television the last couple days of Jim. And it said that we want to make things accessible and affordable for all Americans. That's healthcare, that's education, that's prescription drugs, that's making sure you have access — access to all the things that everybody else has. We can afford to do that. We can't afford not to do it.

So, I tell my Republican friends: Here I come. This is going to be about "what are you for" — "what are you for" — and lay out what we're for.

Mary Bruce, ABC.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. You mentioned your Republican colleagues. But right now, your top two legislative priorities — your social spending package and voting rights legislation — are stalled, blocked by your own party, after months of negotiation.

You are only guaranteed control of Washington for one more year before the midterms. Do you need to be more realistic and scale down these priorities in order to get something passed?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I don't think so. When you say "more realistic," I think it's extremely realistic to say to people, because — let me back up. You all really know the politics in this country, and your networks and others. You've spent a lot of time, which I'm glad you do, polling this data, determining where the — what the American people's attitudes are, et cetera.

The American people overwhelmingly agree with me on prescription drugs. They overwhelmingly agree with me on the cost of education. They overwhelmingly agree with me on early education. They overhel- — and go on the list — on — on childcare.

And so, we just have to make the case what we're for and what the other team is not for.

Look, we knew all along that a lot of this was going to be an uphill fight. And one of the ways to do this is to make sure we make the contrast as clear as we can.

And one of the things that I think is — we're going to have to do is just make the case. I don't think there's anything unrealistic about what we're asking. I'm not trying to — I'm not asking for castles in the sky; I'm asking for practical things the American people have been asking for for a long time — a long time. And I think we can get it done.

Q You say, though, that you're not going to scale down any of these priorities. But, so far, that strategy isn't working. You haven't been able to get some of these big legislative ticket items done.

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, I got two real big ones done. Better than any president has ever gotten in the first year. (Laughs.)

Q But currently, Mr. President, your spending package, voting rights legislation, they're not going anywhere.

THE PRESIDENT: That's true.

Q So, is there anything that you are confident you can get signed into law before the midterm elections?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I'm confident we can get pieces — big chunks of the Build Back Better law signed into law.

And I'm confident that we can take the case to the American people that the people they should be voting for — who are going to oversee whether your elections, in fact, are legit or not — should not be those who are being put up by the Republicans to det- — to determine that they're going to be able to change the outcome of the election.

So whether or not we can actually get election — and by the way, I haven't given up. We haven't finished the vote yet on what's going on — on the — on voting rights and the John Lewis bill and others.

But so, look, this is — I've been engaged a long time in public policy. And I don't know many things that have been done in one fell swoop. And so, I think the be- — the most important thing to do is try to inform — not educate — inform the public of what's at stake, in stark terms, and let them make judgments and let them know who's for them and who's

again [against] them, who's there and who's not there, and make that the case. And that's what I'm going to be spending my time doing in this off-year election.

Q And just very quickly, you mentioned Republicans and reaching out to them. Some Republicans who may be open to major changes on voting rights — for instance, like Mitt Romney — he says he never even received a phone call from this White House. Why not?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I like Mitt — look, Mitt Romney is a straight guy. He's — and one of the things that we're doing, I was trying to make sure we got everybody on the same page in my party on this score. And I didn't call many Republicans at all.

The fact is that there — I do think that Mitt is a serious guy. I think we can get things done. I think — I predict to you they'll

get something done on the electoral reform side of this.

But rather than judge what's going to get done and not get done, all I can say is I'm going to continue to make the case why it's so important to not turn the electoral process over to political persons who are set up deliberately to change the outcome of elections.

The — Allison Harris, please.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. Speaking of voting rights legislation, if this isn't passed, do you still believe the upcoming election will be fairly conducted and its results will be legitimate?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, it all depends on whether or not we're able to make the case to the American people that some of this is being set up to try to alter the outcome of the election. And it's one thing — look, maybe I'm just being too much of an optimist. Remember how we thought not that many people were going to show up to vote in the middle of a pandemic? We had the highest voter turnout in the history of the United States of America.

Well, I think if, in fact — no matter how hard they make it for minorities to vote, I think you're going to see them willing to stand in line and — and defy the attempt to keep them from being able to vote. I think you're going to see the people who they're trying to keep from being able to show up, showing up and making the sacrifice that needs to make in order to change the law back to what it should be.

And — but it's going to be difficult. I make no bones about that. It's going to be difficult. But we're not there yet. We've not run out of options yet. And we'll see how this moves.

Q And on Omicron and education, teachers are in result in some — in revolt in so many places. Parents are at odds over

closing schools and remote learning. You say we're not going to go back to closing schools — you said that just moments ago — yet they're closing in some areas. What do you say to those teachers and principals and parents about school closings? And what can your administration do to help make up for learning loss for students?

THE PRESIDENT: First of all, I'd put in perspective the question you asked. Very few schools are closing. Over 95 percent are still open.

So, you all phrase the questions when people — I don't think it's deliberate on your part, but you phrase the question — if anyone watches this on television — "My God, there must be — all those schools must be closing. What are we going to do?"

Ninety-five percent are still open, number one. Number two, the idea that parents don't think it's important for their children to be in school, and teachers know it as well — that's why we made sure that we had the ability to provide the funding through the Recovery Act — through the act that we — the first act we passed — to be able to make sure schools were able to be safe.

So, we have new ventilation systems available for them. We have — the way they handle — they scrub down laboratories and — I mean, the lavatories kids go to, to go to the bathroom — cafeterias, buses, et cetera. That — all that money is there. There's billions of dollars made available. That's there.

Not every school district has used it as well as it should be used. But it's there. And so, in addition to that, there is now another \$10 billion for testing of students in the schools.

So I — I think, as time goes on, it's much more likely you're going to see that number go back up from 95 percent, back up

to 98, 99 percent.

But the — the outfit of the individuals of the district that says “We’re not going to be open” is always going to get — and I’m not being critical of any of you — it’s always going to get front page. It’s always going to be the top of the news. But let’s put it in perspective: 95 — as high as 98 percent of the schools in America are open, functioning, and capable doing the job.

How about Jen Epstein, Bloomberg?

Q Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you. Your top foreign policy advisors have warned that Russia is now ready to attack Ukraine. But there’s still little unity among European allies about what a package of sanctions against Moscow would look like. If the U.S. and NATO aren’t willing to put troops on the line to defend Ukraine and American allies can’t agree on a sanctions package, hasn’t the U.S. and the West lost nearly all of its leverage over Vladimir Putin?

And given how ineffective sanctions have been in deterring Putin in the past, why should the threat of new sanctions give him pause?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, because he’s never seen sanctions like the ones I promised will be imposed if he moves, number one.

Number two, we’re in a situation where Vladimir Putin is about to — we’ve had very frank discussions, Vladimir Putin and I. And the idea that NATO is not going to be united, I don’t buy. I’ve spoken to every major NATO leader. We’ve had the NATO-Russian summit. We’ve had other — the OSCE has met, et cetera.

And so, I think what you’re going to see is that Russia will be held accountable if it invades. And it depends on what it does.

It's one thing if it's a minor incursion and then we end up having a fight about what to do and not do, et cetera.

But if they actually do what they're capable of doing with the forces amassed on the border, it is going to be a disaster for Russia if they further ingra- — invade Ukraine, and that our allies and partners are ready to impose severe costs and significant harm on Russia and the Russian economy.

And, you know, we're going to fortify our NATO Allies, I told him, on the eastern flank — if, in fact, he does invade. We're going to — I've already shipped over \$600 million worth of sophisticated equipment, defensive equipment to the Ukrainians.

The cost of going into Ukraine, in terms of physical loss of life, for the Russians, they'll — they'll be able to prevail over time, but it's going to be heavy, it's going to be real, and it's going to be consequential.

In addition to that, Putin has — you know, has a stark choice: He — either de-escalation or diplomacy; confrontation or the consequences.

And, look, I think you're going to see — for example, everybody talks about how Russia has control over the energy supply that Europe absorbs. Well, guess what? That — that money that they earn from that makes about 45 percent of the economy. I don't see that as a one-way street. They go ahead and cut it off — it's like my mother used to say: "You bite your nose off to spite your face." It's not like they have all these wonderful choices out there.

I spoke with the Prime Minister of Finland. And, you know, we're talking about concern on the part of Finland and Sweden about what Russia is doing. The last thing that Russia needs is

Finland deciding to change its status. They didn't say they're going to do that, but they're talking about what, in fact, is going on and how outrageous Russia is being.

We're finding ourselves in a position where I believe you will see that there'll be severe economic consequences. For example, anything that involves dollar denominations, if they make — if they invade, they're going to pay; they're not going — their banks will not be able to deal in dollars.

So there's — a lot is going to happen.

But here's the thing: My conversation with Putin — and we've been — how can we say it? We have no problem understanding one another. He has no problem understanding me, nor me him. And the direct conversations where I pointed out — I said, "You know, you've occupied, before, other countries. But the price has been extremely high. How long? You can go in and, over time, at great loss and economic loss, go in and occupy Ukraine. But how many years? One? Three? Five? Ten? What is that going to take? What toll does that take?" It's real. It's consequential.

So, this is not all just a cakewalk for Russia.

Militarily, they have overwhelming superiority, and on — as it relates to Ukraine. But they'll pay a stiff price — immediately, near term, medium term, and long term — if they do it.

Umm — I'm sorry. Okay. David Sanger, New York Times.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. I wanted to follow up on your answer there about Russia and Ukraine. When you were in Geneva in June, you said to us, about President Putin, "I think the last thing...he wants now is a Cold War."

Now, since then, of course, you've seen him gather these troops

— 100,000 troops — around Ukraine. Your Secretary of State said today he thought he could invade at any moment. You've seen the cyberattacks. And you've seen the demand that he have a sphere of influence in which you would withdraw all American troops and nuclear weapons from what used to be the Soviet bloc.

So, I'm wondering if you still think that the last thing he wants is a Cold War. And has your view of him changed in the past few months? And if it has and he does invade, would your posture be to really move back to the kind of containment policy that you saw so often when you were still in the Senate?

THE PRESIDENT: The answer is that I think he still does not want any full-blown war, number one.

Number two, do I think he'll test the West, test the United States and NATO as significantly as he can? Yes, I think he will. But I think he'll pay a serious and dear price for it that he doesn't think now will cost him what it's going to cost him. And I think he will regret having done it.

Now, whether or not — I think that — how can I say this in a public forum? I think that he is dealing with what I believe he thinks is the most tragic thing that's happened to Mother Russia — in that the Berlin Wall came down, the Empire has been lost, the Near Abroad is gone, et cetera. The Soviet Union has been split.

But think about what he has. He has eight time zones, a burning tundra that will not freeze again naturally, a situation where he has a lot of oil and gas, but he is trying to find his place in the world between China and the West.

And so, I'm not so sure that he has — David, I'm not so sure he has — is certain what he's going to do. My guess is he will

move in. He has to do something.

And, by the way, I've indicated to him — the two things he said to me that he wants guarantees of it: One is, Ukraine will never be part of NATO. And two, that NATO, or the — there will not be strategic weapons stationed in Ukraine. Well, we could work out something on the second piece (inaudible) what he does along the Russian line as well — or the Russian border, in the European area of Russia.

On the first piece, we have a number of treaties internationally and in Europe that suggest that you get to choose who you want to be with. But the likelihood that Ukraine is going to join NATO in the near term is not very likely, based on much more work they have to do in terms of democracy and a few other things going on there, and whether or not the major allies in the West would vote to bring Ukraine in right now.

So there's room to work if he wants to do that. But I think, as usual, he's going to — well, I probably shouldn't go any further. But I think it will hurt him badly.

Q Mr. President, it sounds like you're offering some way out here — some off-ramp. And it sounds like what it is, is — at least in the informal assurance — that NATO is not going to take in Ukraine anytime in the next few decades. And it sounds like you're saying we would never put nuclear weapons there. He also wants us to move all of our nuclear weapons out of Europe and not have troops rotating through the old Soviet Bloc.

Do you think there's space for there as well?

THE PRESIDENT: No. No, there's not space for that. We won't permanently station. But the idea we're not going to — we're going to actually increase troop presence in Poland, in Romania, et cetera, if in fact he moves because we have a

sacred obligation in Article 5 to defend those countries. They are part of NATO. We don't have that obligation relative to Ukraine, although we have great concern about what happens in Ukraine.

Thank you.

Maureen, USA Today.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. I wanted to follow up on your comment on Build Back Better and also ask you a question about the pandemic.

You said that you're confident you can pass "big chunks" of Build Back Better this year. Does that wording mean that you are thinking about — you're looking at breaking the package up into individual portions?

And then, on the pandemic: Now that the Supreme Court has blocked the vaccination-or-test rule for larger businesses, are you reconsidering whether to require vaccines for domestic flights as a way to boost vaccination rates?

THE PRESIDENT: No, look, first of all, on the last part of the question: The Supreme Court decision, I think, was a mistake. But you still see thousands and thousands of people who work for major corporations having to be tested as a consequence of the decision made by the corporation and not by the standard I set that is there. I think you'll see that increase, not decrease — number one.

What was the first part of your question?

Q On your comment that you made that you're confident —

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q — that major chunks of Build Back Better —

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q — can pass. Are you breaking it up? Does that mean —

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. Well, it's clear to me that — that we're going to have to probably break it up. I think that we can get — and I've been talking to a number of my colleagues on the Hill — I think it's clear that we would be able to get support for the — for the 500-plus billion dollars for energy and the environmental issues that are there — number one.

Number two, I know that the two people who've opposed, on the Democratic side at least, support a number of the things that are in there. For example, Joe Manchin strongly supports early education, three and four years of age. Strongly supports that.

There is strong support for, I think, a number of the way in which to pay for these — pay for this proposal.

So, I think there is — and I'm not going to — I'm not going to negotiate against myself as to what should and shouldn't be in it, but I think we can break the package up, get as much as we can now, and come back and fight for the rest later.

Ken, the Wall Street Journal. Ken Thomas.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. I wanted to ask you about the economy. As you said earlier, Americans are feeling the squeeze —

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah.

Q — of inflation. Oil prices have been at about a seven-year high recently. How long should Americans expect to face higher prices when they're at the grocery store or when they're at the gas pump? Is this something that they're going to see into the summer, into next fall?

And separately, you know, you talk about the importance of the

Fed, but isn't that an acknowledgment that you're limited in what you can do if you — if you're relying on the Fed to make decisions and you're unable to get a Build Back Better proposal through, aren't you simply limited in what you can do to deal with inflation?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, look, as you know, Ken, the inflation has everything to do with the supply chain. And I think what you're seeing is that we've been able to make progress on speeding up the access to materials. For example, one third of the co- — of the increase in cost of living is the cost of automobiles.

The reason automobiles have skyrocketed in price is because of the lack of computer chips. So we have the capacity, and we're going to do everything in our power to do it to become self-reliant on the computer chips that we need in order to be able to produce more automobiles. That's underway.

We've already passed, within the context of another bill, money for that in the — in the House of Representatives. It's before the House of Representatives now. But I think there's a way we can move to — if we can move to get, for example, that one thing done, it can make a big difference in terms of the cost of — the total cost of living.

Now, with regard to the whole issue of energy prices, that gets a little more complicated. But you saw what happened when I was able to convince everyone from — including China, India — a number of other countries — to agree with us to go into their version of the — of their petroleum reserve to release more into the market so that — that brought down the price about 12, 15 cents a gallon in some places, some places more.

There's going to be — there's going to be a reckoning along the

line here as to whether or not we're going to continue to see oil prices continue to go up in ways that are going up now, relative to what is going to — what impact that's going to have on the producers.

And so, it's going to be hard. I think that's the place where most middle-class people, working-class people get hit the most. They pull up to a pump and, all of a sudden, instead of paying \$2.40 a gallon, they're paying \$5.00 a gallon. And that's going to be really difficult.

But — so we're going to continue to work on trying to increase oil supplies that are available. And I think there's ways in which we can be of some value added in terms of the price of gas — natural gas and the like — to take the burden off of European countries that are now totally dependent on Russia. But it's going to be hard. It's going to be very hard.

But I think that we have to deal with — for example, like I said, you have a circumstance where people are paying more for a pound of hamburger meat than they ever paid. Well, one of the reasons for that is you don't have that many folks out there that are ones that are — we've got the Big Four controlling it all.

And so you're going to see, more and more, we're going to move on this competition piece to allow more and more smaller operations to come in and be able to engage in providing — buying and providing the access to much cheaper meat than — than exists now. But it's going to be a haul.

Now, and as you — I assume the reason you said if I can't get Build Back Better is it relates to what those 17 Nobel laureate economists said: that if, in fact, we could pass it, it would actually lower the impact on inflation, reduce inflation over time, et cetera.

So, there's a lot we have to do. It's not going to be easy, but I think we can get it done. But it's going to be painful for a lot of people in the meantime. That's why the single best way — the single best way to take the burden off middle-class and working-class folks is to pass the Build Back Better piece that are things that they're paying a lot of money for it now.

If you get to trade off higher gas as — you're putting up with a higher price of hamburgers and gas, versus whether or not you're going to have to — you're going to be able to pay for education and/or childcare and the like, I think most people would make the trade. Their bottom line would be better in middle-class households.

But it's going to be hard. And it's going to take a lot of work.

Q If I may follow, sir: You mentioned China. Do you think the time has come to begin lifting some of the tariffs on Chinese imports? Or is there a need for China to make due on some of its commitments in the Phase One agreement? Some business groups would like you to begin raising — lifting up those tariffs on China.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I know that, and that's why my Trade Rep is working on that right now. The answer is uncertain. It's uncertain.

I'd like to be able to be in a position where I can say they're meeting the commitments, or more of their commitments, and be able to lift some of it. But we're not there yet.

Nancy, CBS.

Q Thank you so much, Mr. President. This afternoon, the Senate Minority Leader, Mitch McConnell, said that the midterms elections are going to be a report card on your progress on inflation, border security, and standing up to

Russia. Do you think that that's a fair way to look at it? And if so, how do you think that report card looks right now?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the report card is going to look pretty good, if that's where we're at. But look, the idea that — Mitch has been very clear he's going to do anything to prevent Biden from being a success.

And I get on with Mitch. I actually like Mitch McConnell. We like one another. But he has one straightforward objective: make sure that there's nothing I do that makes me look good in the mind — in his mind with the public at large. And that's okay. I'm a big boy. I've been here before.

But the fact is that I think that the — I'm happy to debate and have a referendum on how I handle the economy, whether or not I've made progress on when — look, again — how can I — I'm taking too long answering your questions. I apologize.

I think that the fundamental question is: What's Mitch for? What's he for on immigration? What's he for? What's he proposing to make anything better? What's he for dealing with Russia that's different than I'm proposing and many of his Republican friends or his colleagues are supporting as well? What's he for on these things? What are they for?

So, everything is a choice — a choice.

I think they — look, I've laid out a proposal on immigration that if we passed it, we'd be in a totally different place right now. But we're not there because we don't have a single Republican vote. My buddy John McCain is gone.

So, I mean, it's just — it's going to take time. And again, I go back to — I go back to Governor Sununu's quote.

How long — I mean — a rhetorical question. I don't — I know

this is not fair to ask the press a question; I'm not asking you. But think about — did you ever think that one man out of office could intimidate an entire party where they're unwilling to take any vote contrary to what he thinks should be taken for fear of being defeated in a primary?

I've had five Republican senators talk to me, "bump into me" — quote, unquote — or sit with me, who've told me that they agree with whatever I'm talking about for them to do. "But, Joe, if I do it, I'm going to get defeated in a primary."

We got to break that. That's got to change.

And I doubt — you're all — I'm not be- — it sounds like I'm being solicitous — you're all bright as hell, well informed — more informed than any group of people in America. But did any of you think that you'd get to a point where not a single Republican would diverge on a major issue? Not one?

Anyway.

Q Can you tell us who those five Republican senators are?

THE PRESIDENT: Sure. No. (Laughs.) Are you kidding me?

I maintain confidentiality.

Q On voting rights —

THE PRESIDENT: But I'm sure you've spoken to some.

(Laughs.)

Q On voting rights, sir —

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q At your first press conference, 10 months ago, I asked you if there was anything you could do beyond legislation to protect voting rights. And at that time, you said, "Yes, but I'm not going to lay out a strategy before you and the world now." Now that legislation appears to be hopelessly stalled, can you now lay out

your strategy to protect voting rights?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I'm not prepared to do that in detail, in terms of the executive orders I may be able to engage in and other things I can do. But one of — the things we have done: We have significantly beefed up a number of enforcers in the Justice Department, who are there to challenge these unconstitutional efforts, in our view — unconstitutional efforts on the part of the Republicans to stack the election and subvert the outcome.

We have begun to organize in ways that we didn't before in communities beyond the civil rights community to make the case to the rest of American people what's about to happen, what will happen if, in fact, these things move forward.

If I had talked to you — not you; I'm using "you" in a total sense.

If I had talked to the public about the whole idea of subversion of elections by deciding who the electors are after the fact, I think people would've looked at me like, "Whoa."

I mean, I caught — taught constitutional law for 20 years — a three-credit course on the separation of powers. And — on Saturday mornings, when I was a senator. And I never thought we'd get into a place where — where we were talking about being able to actually —

What they tried to do this last time out is send different electors to the state legislative bodies to represent who won the election, saying that I didn't win but a Republican candidate won.

I doubt that anybody thought that would ever happen in America in the 21st century, but it's happening.

And so, I think — I guess what I'm saying is, Nancy — is that I think there are a number of things we can do, but I also think we

will be able to get significant pieces of the legislation — if we don't get it all now — to build to get it so that we get a big chunk of the John Lewis legislation, as well as the fair elections (inaudible).

Q Sir, on COVID, if you don't mind: You touted the number of Americans who are now fully vaccinated with two shots. But even some of your own medical advisors say that people aren't fully protected unless they have that third shot —

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah.

Q — a booster. Why hasn't this White House changed the definition of "fully vaccinated" to include that third booster shot? Is it because the numbers of fully vaccinated Americans would suddenly look a lot less impressive?

THE PRESIDENT: No, it's not that at all. It's just — it's just — this has become clearer and clearer, and every time I speak of it, I say: If you've been vaccinated, get your booster shot.

Everybody get the booster shot. It's the ob- — the optimum protection you could have. You're protected very well with two shots, if it's the Pfizer — anyway, you're protected. But you are better protected with the booster shot.

Q But you won't change the definition right now?

THE PRESIDENT: I'm following what the — the answer is, yes. Get the booster shot. It's all part of the same thing. You're better protected.

Okay. Alex Alper, Reuters.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. I wanted to follow up briefly on a question asked by Bloomberg. You said that Russia would be "held accountable if it invades" and "it depends on what it does"; "it's one thing if it's a minor incursion and... we end up having to

fight about what to do and what not to do.”

Are you saying that a minor incursion by Russia into Ukrainian territory would not lead to the sanctions that you have threatened? Or are you effectively giving Putin permission to make a small incursion into the country?

THE PRESIDENT: (Laughs.) Good question. That's how it did sound like, didn't it?

The most important thing to do: Big nations can't bluff, number one.

And number two, the idea that we would do anything to split NATO, which would be a — have a profound impact on one of — I think prominent impact — on one of Putin's objectives is to weaken NATO — would be a big mistake.

So, the question is: If it's a — something significantly short of a significant invasion — or not even significant, just major military forces coming across — for example, it's one thing to determine that if they continue to use cyber efforts, well, we can respond the same way, with cyber.

They have FSB people in Ukraine now trying to undermine the solidarity within Ukraine about Russia and to try to promote Russian interest. But it's very important that we keep everyone in NATO on the same page. And that's what I'm spending a lot of time doing. And there are differences. There are differences in NATO as to what countries are willing to do depending on what happens — the degree to which they're able to go.

And I want to be clear with you: The serious imposition of sanctions relative to dollar transactions and other things are things that are going to have a negative impact on the United States, as well as a negative impact on the economies of

Europe as well, and a devastating impact on Russia. And so, I got to make sure everybody is on the same page as we move along.

I think we will, if there's something that is — that — where there's Russian forces crossing the border, killing Ukrainian fighters, et cetera — I think that changes everything. But it depends on what he does, as to the exact — to what extent we're going to be able to get total unity on the Rus- — on the NATO front.

Q If I may ask a quick one on Iran, I just wanted to get your sense of whether the Vienna talks are making any progress, if you still think it's possible to reach a deal for both sides to resume compliance with the Iran nuclear deal, or if it's time to give up on that. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: I'll do it in reverse. It's not time to give up. There is some progress being made. The P5+1 is on the same page. But it remains to be seen.

Okay. Kristen, NBC.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. Very quickly on Russia — I do have a number of domestic policy issues, but I'm — on Russia very quickly: It seemed like you said that you have assessed, you feel as though he will move in. Has this administration, have you determined whether President Putin plans to invade or move into Ukraine, as you've said?

THE PRESIDENT: Look, the only thing I'm confident of is that decision is totally, solely, completely a Putin decision. Nobody else is going to make that decision; no one else is going to impact that decision. He's making that decision.

And I suspect it matters which side of the bed he gets up on in

the morning as to exactly what he's going to do. And I think it is not irrational, if he wanted to, to talk about dealing with strategic doctrine and dealing with force structures in Europe and in — in the European parts of Russia.

But I don't know if he's decided he wants to do that or not. So far, in the three meetings we've had — OSCE and —anyway — have not produced anything because the impression I get from my Secretary of State, my National Security Advisor, and my other senior officials that are doing these meetings is that there's a question of whether the people they're talking to know what he's going to do.

So, the answer is — but based on a number of criteria as to what he could do — for example, for him to move in and occupy the whole country, particularly from the north, from Belarus, it's — he's going to have to wait a little bit until the ground is frozen so he can cross.

To move in a direction where he wants to talk about what's going — we — we have — we're continuing to provide for defense capacities to the — to the Ukrainians. We're talking about what's going on in both the Baltic and the Black Sea, et cetera. There's a whole range of things that I'm sure he's trying to calculate how quickly he can do what he wants to do and what does he want to do.

But I — he's not — he's an informed individual. And I'm sure — I'm not sure — I believe he's calculating what the immediate, short-term, and the near-term, and the long-term consequences of Russia will be. And I don't think he's made up his mind yet.

Q I want to ask you about your domestic agenda. You've gotten a lot of questions about voting rights, Mr. President. But I want to ask you about Black voters — one of your most loyal

constituencies.

THE PRESIDENT: Yep.

Q I was in Congressman Clyburn's district yesterday in South Carolina. You opened this news conference talking about him. I spoke to a number of Black voters who fought to get you elected, and now they feel as though you are not fighting hard enough for them and their priorities. And they told me they see this push on voting rights more as a last-minute PR push than it is a legitimate effort to get legislation passed.

So what do you say to these Black voters who say that you do not have their backs, as you promised on the campaign trail?

THE PRESIDENT: I've had their back. I've had their back my entire career. I've never not had their back. And I started on the voting rights issues long, long ago. That's what got me involved in politics in the first place.

And I think part of the problem is — look, there's — there's significant disagreement in every community on whether or not the timing of assertions made by people has been in a most timely way. So I'm sure that there are those who are saying that, "Why didn't Biden push the John Lewis bill as hard as he pushed it the last month? Why didn't he push it six months ago as hard as he did now?"

The fact is that there is — there's a timing that is not of one's own choice; it's somewhat dictated by events that are happening in country and around the world as to what the focus is.

But part of the problem is, as well: I have not been out in the community nearly enough. I've been here an awful lot. I find myself in a situation where I don't get a chance to look people in

the eye, because of both COVID and things that are happening in Washington, to be able to go out and do the things that I've always been able to do pretty well: connect with people, let them take a measure of my sincerity, let them take a measure of who I am.

For example — I mean, as I pointed out in South Carolina, you know, last time, when I was chairman of the Judiciary Committee, I got the Voting Rights Act extended for 25 years, and I got Strom Thurmond to vote for it. That's what I've been doing my whole career. And so, the idea that I — that I didn't either anticipate or because I didn't speak to it as fervently as they want me to earlier.

In the meantime, I was spending a lot of time — spent hours and hours and hours talking with my colleagues on the Democratic side, trying to get them to agree that if, in fact, this occurred, if this push continued, that they would be there for John Lewis and — anyway.

So — but I think that's — that's a problem that is my own making by not communicating as much as I should have. Yet, you find that when you deal with members of the Black Caucus and others in the United States Congress, I still have very close working relationships.

So it's like every community. I'm sure that there are those in the community, in — I'm a — I'm a big labor guy. I'm sure there's people in labor saying, "Why haven't they been able to do A, B, C, or D?"

So, it's just going to take a little bit of time.

Q You put your — you put Vice President Harris in charge of voting rights. Are you satisfied with her work on this issue? And can you guarantee — do you commit that she will be your

running mate in 2024, provided that you run again?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes and yes.

Q Okay. You don't care to expand?

THE PRESIDENT: Pardon me?

Q Do you care to expand —

THE PRESIDENT: No, there's no need to.

Q — on voting?

THE PRESIDENT: I mean, I asked the — he — she is going to be my running mate — number one. And number two, I did put her in charge. I think she's doing a good job.

Q Let me ask you — big picture: Particularly when you think about voting rights and the struggles you've had to unify your own party around voting rights, unity was one of your key campaign promises. In fact, in your inaugural address, you said your "whole soul" was in "bringing America together, uniting our people..." People heard the speech that you gave on voting rights in Georgia recently in which you described those who are opposed to you to George Wallace and Jefferson Davis, and some people took exception to that.

What do you say to those who are offended by your speech? And is this country more unified than it was when you first took office?

THE PRESIDENT: Number one: Anybody who listened to the speech — I did not say that they were going to be a George Wallace or a Bull Connor. I said we're going to have a decision in history that is going to be marked just like it was then. You either voted on the side — that didn't make you a George Wallace or didn't make you a Bull Connor. But if you did not

vote for the Voting Rights Act back then, you were voting with those who agreed with Connor, those who agreed with — with

—
And so — and I think Mitch did a real good job of making it sound like I was attacking them. If you've noticed, I haven't attacked anybody publicly — any senator, any — any congressman publicly. And my disagreements with them have been made to them — communicated to them privately or in person with them.

My desire still is — look, I underestimated one very important thing: I never thought that the Republicans — like, for example, I said — they got very upset — I said there are 16 members of the present United States Senate who voted to extend the Voting Rights Act.

Now, they got very offended by that. That wasn't an accusation; I was just stating a fact. What has changed? What happened? What happened? Why is there not a single Republican — not one? That's not the Republican Party.

Q But, Mr. President —

THE PRESIDENT: So, that's not an attack.

Q — is the country more unif- — is the country more unified than when you first took office?

THE PRESIDENT: The answer is: Based on some of the stuff we've got done, I'd say yes, but it's not nearly unified as it should be.

Look, I still contend — and I know you'll have a right to judge me by this — I still contend that unless you can reach consensus in a democracy, you cannot sustain the democracy.

And so this is a real test — whether or not my — my — my

counterpart in China is right or not when he says autocracies are the only thing that could prevail because democracies take too long to make decisions and countries are too divided.

I believe we're going through one of those inflection points in history that occurs every several generations or even more than that — even more time than that, where things are changing almost regardless of any particular policy.

The world is changing in big ways. We're going to see — you've heard me say this before — we're going to see more change in the next 10 years than we saw in the last 50 years because of technology, because of fundamental alterations and alliances that are occurring not because of any one individual, just because of the nature of things.

And so I think you're going to see an awful lot of transition. And the question is: Can we keep up with it? Can we maintain the democratic institutions that we have, not just here but around the world, to be able to generate democratic consensus of how to proceed?

It's going to be hard. It's going to be hard, but it requires — it requires leadership to do it. And I'm not giving up on the prospect of being able to do that.

Thank you.

Q Mr. President, thank you, sir. There are deep questions among Americans about the competence of government, from the messy rollout of 5G this week, to the Afghanistan withdraw, to testing on COVID. What have you done to restore Americans' faith in the competence of government? And are you satisfied by the view of the competence of your government?

THE PRESIDENT: Look, let's take Afghanistan. I know you all

would like to focus on that, which is legitimate.

We were spending a trillion dollars a week — I mean, a billion dollars a week in Afghanistan for 20 years.

Raise your hand if you think anyone was going to be able to unify Afghanistan under one single government. It's been the graveyard of empires for a solid reason: It is not susceptible to unity, number one.

So, the question was: Do I continue to spend that much money per week in the state of Afghanistan, knowing that the idea that being able to succeed — other than sending more body bags back home — is highly, highly unusual?

My dad used to have an expression. He'd say, "Son, if everything is equally important to you, nothing is important to you."

There was no way to get out of Afghanistan, after 20 years, easily. Not possible no matter when you did it. And I make no apologies for what I did.

I have a great concern for the women and men who were blown up on the line at the airport by a terrorist attack against them. But the military will acknowledge — and I think you will, who know a lot about foreign policy — that had we stayed and I had not pull those troops out, we would be asked to put somewhere between 20- and 50,000 more troops back in.

Because the only reason more Americans weren't being killed — and others — is because the last president signed an agreement to get out by May the 1st, and so everything was copacetic.

Had we not gotten out — and the acknowledgement is we'd be putting a lot more forces in. You know, am I — do I feel badly

what's happening to — as a consequence of the incompetence of the Taliban? Yes, I do.

But I feel badly also about the fistulas that are taking place in the Eastern Congo. I feel badly about a whole range of things around the world — that we can't solve every problem.

And so I don't view that as a competence issue.

The issue of whether or not there's competence, in terms of whether or not we're dealing with 5G or not: We don't deal with 5G.

The fact is that you had two enterprises — two private enterprises — that had one promoting 5G and the other one are airlines. They're private enterprises. They have government regulation, admittedly.

And so, what I've done is pushed as hard as I can to have 5G folks hold up and abide by what was being requested by the airlines until they could more modernize over the years so that 5G would not interfere with the potential of the landing. So, any tower — any 5G tower within a certain number of miles from the airport should not be operative.

And that's — and so I understand. But anything that happens that's consequential is viewed as the government's responsibility. I get that.

Am I satisfied with the way in which we have dealt with COVID and all the things that — that go along with it? Yeah, I am satisfied. I think we've done remarkably well.

You know, the idea that —

Q On testing, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: On testing, we've done — we should have done it quicker, but we've done remarkable since then. What

we have is: We have more testing going on than anywhere in the world. And we're going to continue to increase that.

Did we have it at the moment exactly when we should have moved, and could we have moved a month earlier? Yeah, we could have. But with everything else that was going on, I don't view that as somehow a mark of incompetence.

Look, think of what we did on COVID. When — when we were pushing on

AstraZeneca [Pfizer] to provide more vaccines — well, guess what? They didn't have the machinery to be able to do it. So I physically went to Michigan, stood there in a factory with the head of the — of AstraZeneca [Pfizer], and said, "We'll provide the machinery for you. This is what we'll do. We'll help you do it so that you can produce this vaccine more rapidly." I think that's pretty hands-on stuff.

We also said, right now, when people — the hospitalizations are — are overrunning hospitals and you have docs and nurses out because of COVID — they have COVID — we put thousands of people back in those hospitals. Look at all the mari- — all the military personnel we have there, first responders.

Nobody has ever organized — nobody has ever organized a strategic operation to get as many shots in arms by opening clinics and keeping — and being able to get so many people vaccinated.

What I'm doing now is not just getting significant amounts of vaccines to the rest of the world, but they now need — the mechanical way is how they get shots in arms. So we're providing them the know-how to do that.

Now, should everybody in America know that? No, they don't necessarily know that; they're just trying to figure how to put

three squares on the table and stay safe.

But — so I — I do think the place where I was a little disappointed — I wish we could have written it differently — is when we did the legislation to provide the funding for COVID and the money we provided for the states to be able to deal with keeping schools open.

Some of them didn't do a very good job. Some are still holding the money. I don't have the authority to do anything about that. I think that's not particularly competent. There's things that could and should have been done, that could have moved faster.

So I — I understand the frustration. You know, I remember — I think it was — I forget which Cabinet member was saying to Barack Obama — something was going on, and he said, "Well, you can be sure, Mr. President, of the millions of employees you have out there, somebody is screwing up right now. Somebody is screwing up."

So, it's — you know, it's just a — but I think you have to look at things that we used to look at it on balance. What is the trajectory of the country? Is it moving in the right direction now?

I don't know how we can say it's not. I understand the overwhelming frustration, fear, and concern with regard to inflation and COVID. I get it. But the idea — if I told you, when we started, I told you what I'm going to do — "The first year, I'm going to create over 600 — or 6 million jobs. I'm going to get unemployment down to 3.9 percent. I'm going to generate..." — and I named it all, you'd look at me like, "You're nuts." Maybe I'm wrong.

Q Sir, there's never been a President, at least in our recent memory, with this much Washington experience as you have

entered this office with, but yet, after we sit here for more than an hour, I'm not sure I've heard you say if you would do anything differently in the second year of your term. Do you plan to do anything differently? It could be —

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah, look, the thing I have to do —

Q — are you satisfied with your team here at the White House, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: I'm satisfied with the team.

There's three things I'm going to do differently now that I will — now that I've gotten the critical crises out of the way, in the sense of it moving — knowing exactly where we're going.

Number one, I'm going to get out of this place more often. I'm going to go out and talk to the public. I'm going to do public fora. I'm going to interface with them. I'm going to make the case of what we've already done, why it's important, and what we'll do if — what will happen if they support what else I want to do.

Number two, I'm bringing in more and more — now that I have time — I mean, literally, like you, it's — I'm not complaining. It's, you know, 12, 14 hours a day. No complaints. I really mean that sincerely.

But now that certain of the big chunks have been put in place and we know the direction, I'm also going to be out there seeking the — more advice of experts outside, from academia, to editorial writers, to think tanks. And I'm bringing them in, just like I did early on, bringing in presidential historians to get their perspective on what we should be doing. Seeking more input, more information, more constructive criticism about what I should and shouldn't be doing.

And the third thing I'm going to be doing a lot more of is being in a situation where I am able to bring — I'm going to be deeply involved in the off- — these off-year elections. We're going to be raising a lot of money. We're going to be out there making sure that we're helping all of those candidates.

And scores of them have already asked me to come in and campaign with them, to go out and make the case in plain, simple language as to what it is we've done, what we want to do, and why we think it's important.

(Cross-talk by reporters.)

How — how many more hours am I doing this? I'm happy to stick around.

(Cross-talk by reporters.)

You always ask me the nicest questions.

Q All right, I got a whole binder full.

THE PRESIDENT: I know you do.

Q All right —

THE PRESIDENT: None of them make a lot of sense to me, but I —

Q Well, let's — let's try —

THE PRESIDENT: Fire away. Come on.

Q A new year.

Why are you trying so hard in your first year to pull the country so far to the left?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I'm not. I don't know what you consider to be too far to the left if, in fact, we're talking about making sure that we had the money for COVID, making sure we

had the money to put together the Bipartisan Infrastructure, and making sure we were able to provide for those things that, in fact, would significantly reduce the burden on the working-class people but make them — they have to continue to work hard. I don't know how that is pointed to the left.

If you may recall, I — you guys have been trying to convince me that I am Bernie Sanders. I'm not. I like him, but I'm not Bernie Sanders. I'm not a socialist. I'm a mainstream Democrat, and I have been. And mainstream Democrats have overwhelmingly — if you notice, the 48 of the 50 Republi- — Democrats supported me in the Senate on virtually everything I've asked.

Yes, sir.

Q Thank you, sir. I just wanted to clarify: A moment ago, you were asked whether or not you believed that we would have free and fair elections in 2022 if some of these state legislatures reformed their voting protocols. You said that it depends. Do you — do you think that they would in any way be illegitimate?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, yeah, I think it easily could be — be illegitimate.

Imagine — imagine if, in fact, Trump has succeeded in convincing Pence to not count the votes.

Q Well, I —

THE PRESIDENT: Imagine if —

Go on.

Q In regard to 2022, sir — the midterm elections.

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, 2022. I mean, imagine if those attempts to say that the count was not legit. "You have to recount it and we're not going to count — we're going to discard the following

votes.”

I mean, sure, but — I’m not going to say it’s going to be legit. It’s — the increase and the prospect of being illegitimate is in direct proportion to us not being able to get these — these reforms passed.

But I don’t think you’re going to see — you’re not going to see me and I don’t think you’re going to see the Democratic Party give up on — coming back and assuming that the attempt fails today.

Q And then, one more, sir. You know, you campaigned and you ran on a return to civility. And I know that you dispute the characterization that you called folks who would oppose those voting bills as being “Bull Connor” or “George Wallace,” but you said that they would be sort of in the same camp.

THE PRESIDENT: No, I didn’t say that. Look what I said. Go back and read what I said and tell me if you think I called anyone who voted on the side of the position taken by Bull Connor that they were Bull Connor.

Q And —

THE PRESIDENT: That is an interesting reading of English. You — I assume you got into journalism because you liked to write.

Q So did you expect that that would work with Senators Manchin or Sinema — that argument?

THE PRESIDENT: No, here’s the thing: There’s certain things that are so consequential you have to speak from your heart as well as your head.

I was speaking out forcefully on what I think to be at stake. That’s what it is.

And, by the way, no one — no one forgets who was on the side of King or — versus on — or Bull Connor. No one not — does not. The history books will note it.

And what — I was making the case, “Don’t think this is a freebie. You don’t get to vote this way, and then somehow it goes away. This will be — stick with you the rest of your career and long after you’re gone.”

Q And, Mr. President, if —

(Cross-talk by reporters.)

THE PRESIDENT: Folks, I’m —

Q Sir, what does the new normal look like?

THE PRESIDENT: Okay. Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Hang on, guys. We’ve only gone an hour and 20 minutes. I’ll keep going.

But I’m — but I’m going to go — let me get — let get something straight here: How long are you guys ready to go? You want to go for another hour or two?

Q Yes.

Q Until we all get called on, sir.

Q Until we all get a chance.

THE PRESIDENT: Okay. I’m going to go — I’ll tell you what, folks: I am going to go another 20 minutes, until a quarter of. Okay?

Yes, sir.

Q Thank you, President Biden. President Biden, on the — thank you. On — I’ll wait for the microphone.

President Biden, on the —

THE PRESIDENT: I want to thank my Communications staff for their great help here. (Laughter.)

Q Well, President Biden, on the coronavirus, we're tragically approaching nearly 1 million Americans who died. And I'd like to ask you why it is during your three-and-a-half-hour virtual summit in November with the Chinese President you didn't press for transparency and also whether that has anything to do with your son's involvement in an investment firm controlled by Chinese state-owned entities.

THE PRESIDENT: The answer is that we did — I did raise the question of transparency. I spent a lot of time with him. And he — the fact is that they're just not — they're just not being transparent.

Q You raised this: transparency on the coronavirus origins?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q And — you did, during the virtual summit?

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah.

Q Is there a reason your press staff was unaware of that? And what did you say to the Chinese President?

THE PRESIDENT: Well — and they weren't with me the entire time. Look, I made it clear that I thought that China had an obligation to be more forthcoming on exactly what the source of the virus was and where it came from.

Yes.

Q Mr. President, I would like to ask you about foreign policy: One of the first priority that you declared when you came to office was to end the war in Yemen — the catastrophic war in Yemen. You appointed a special envoy.

Today, one of your allies — the United Arab Emirates — is asking your administration to put back the Houthi rebels or militias back on the terror list. Are you going to do that?

And how are you going to end the war in Yemen, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: The answer is: It's under consideration. And ending the war in Yemen takes the two parties to be involved to do it. And it's going to be very difficult.

Yes.

Q Thank you very much for this honor. James Rosen with Newsmax. I'd like to — I'd like to raise a delicate subject but with utmost respect for your life accomplishments and the high office you hold: A poll released, this morning, by Politico/Morning Consult found 49 percent of registered voters disagreeing with the statement, "Joe Biden is mentally fit."

THE PRESIDENT: (Laughs.) Well —

Q Not even a majority of Democrats who responded strongly affirmed that statement.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I'll let you all make the judgment whether they're correct. Thank you.

Q Well, so, the question I have for you, sir, before — if you'd let me finish — is: Why do you suppose such large segments of the American electorate have come to harbor such profound concerns about your cognitive fitness? Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: I have no idea.

Yes, sir.

Q Thanks, Mr. President. I appreciate it. I wanted to sort of address — or ask about a tension that has sort of been in this — in this press conference on unifying the country, because you

campaigned on two things. One of them is being able to accomplish big things, and the other is the ability to unify the country. And even today, you've talked about sort of a different posture with Republicans. And I — I wonder if you still think it's possible to do both of those things?

THE PRESIDENT: We have to. We have to. And let me — I'm not — as long as I hold public office, I'm going to continue to attempt to do both things.

Q One more follow-up. Last — around this time last year when you were campaigning in Georgia, I think one of the things you told people was, "The power is literally in your hands." You know, if voters give Democrats the House and the Senate and the presidency that all these big things can get accomplished. And, you know, we've seen stalemate. We've seen things being stymied. Why should folks believe you this time around?

THE PRESIDENT: Can you think of any other President that has done as much in one year? Name one for me.

Q I'm asking you. I mean —

THE PRESIDENT: I'm serious. You guys talk about how nothing has happened. I don't think there's been much on any incoming President's plate that's been a bigger menu than the plate I had given to me. I'm not complaining. I knew that running in.

And the fact of the matter is, we got an awful lot done — an awful lot done, and there's more to get done.

But, look, let's — let me ask you a rhetorical question.

No, I won't. Anyway. (Laughter.)

Thank you.

Q (Inaudible.)

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Do I need the — the —

(White House aide trips.)

THE PRESIDENT: Be careful. Don't get hurt, man.

Q No, no, I'm — I'm going to take care.

Mr. President, thank you. Sebastian Smith from AFP. Another question on Ukraine. Ukraine borders four NATO member countries. How concerned are you? Are you concerned that a real conflagration in Ukraine — if the Russians really go in there — that it could suck in NATO countries that are on the border and you end up with an actual NATO-Russia confrontation of some kind?

And, secondly, are you entertaining the thought of a summit with Vladimir Putin as a way to perhaps try and put this whole thing to bed, address their concerns, and negotiate a way out of this?

THE PRESIDENT: The last part — to the last question, yes. When we talked about whether or not we'd (inaudible) the three meetings we talked about. And we talked about: We would go from there, if there was reason to, to go to a summit. We talked about a summit as being before the Ukraine item came up in terms of strategic doctrine and what the strategic relationship would be. So, I still think that is a possibility, number one.

Number two, I am very concerned. I'm very concerned that this could end up being — look, the only war that's worse than one that's intended is one that's unintended. And what I'm concerned about is this could get out of hand — very easily get

out of hand because of what you said: the borders of the — of Ukraine and what Russia may or may not do.

I am hoping that Vladimir Putin understands that he is — short of a full-blown nuclear war, he's not in a very good position to dominate the world. And so, I don't think he thinks that, but it is a concern. And that's why we have to be very careful about how we move forward and make it clear to him that there are prices to pay that could, in fact, cost his country an awful lot.

But I — of course, you have to be concerned when you have, you know, a nuclear power invade — this has — if he invades — it hasn't happened since World War Two. This will be the most consequential thing that's happened in the world, in terms of war and peace, since World War Two.

Q Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you. Nearly two years have passed since the beginning of the global coronavirus outbreak. And you again today acknowledged that Americans are frustrated and they're tired. Based on your conversations with your health advisors, what type of restrictions do you imagine being on Americans this time next year? And what does the new normal look like for social gatherings and travel to you?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, the answer is: I hope the new normal will be that we don't have — still have 30-some million people not vaccinated. I hope the new normal is people have seen — and what their own interest is — and have taken advantage of — of what we have available to us.

Number two, with the pill that is prob- — that appears to be as

efficacious as it seems to be — that you're going to be able to deal with this virus in a way that, after the fact, you have the ability to make sure you don't get sel- — you don't get very sick.

Number three, I would hope that what happens is, the rest of the world does what I'm doing and provides significant amounts of the vaccine to the rest of the world. Because it's not sufficient that we just have this country not have the virus or be able to control the virus, but that — you can't build a wall high enough to keep a new variant out.

So, it requires — one of the things that I want to do and we're contemplating — figuring out how to do — not — we are contemplating how to get done — and that is: How do we move in a direction where the world itself is vaccinated?

It's not enough just to vaccinate 340 million — fully vaccinate 340 million people in the United States. That's not enough. It's not enough to do it here. We have to do it, and we have to do a lot more than we're doing now.

And that's why we have continued to keep the commitment of providing vaccines and available cures for the rest of the world as well.

Q And if I could, sir — and I should have said this before: Francesca Chambers, McClatchy — how do you plan to win back moderates and independents who cast a ballot for you in 2020 but, polls indicate, aren't happy with the way you're doing your job now?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't believe the polls.

Q Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, why don't you just go down the row there.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. To follow up on some of the questions about the vaccination program — you've given dozens of speeches this year urging Americans to get vaccinated. You've talked to reluctant Republicans. You've said it's people's patriotic duty.

There have been very few mentions of the fact that young children under the age of five still, in the third year of this pandemic in this country, don't have access to the vaccine. Can you speak to frustrated parents a little bit about why that continues to be the case and when that might change?

THE PRESIDENT: Because the science hasn't reached a point where they're convinced that, in fact, it is safe. So that's what they're doing now. You could have asked me that — I got asked that question about three months ago, about people between the ages of, you know, 7 and 12. Well, they finally — they've got to the point where they felt secure in the number of tests they had done and the tests they had run that it was safe. So it will come. It will come. But I can't — I'm not a scientist; I can't tell you when. But it is really very important that we get to that — that next piece.

Q Just one more follow-up on Build Back Better: When you said it's going to likely be broken up into chunks — you mentioned that the climate pieces seem to have broad support, you mentioned Senator Manchin is a supporter of early childcare — you left out the Child Tax Credit. And I wonder if it's fair to read between the lines and assume that that is a piece, given Senator Manchin's opposition to it, that the extension of that is likely one of those components that may have to wait until sometime down the line.

THE PRESIDENT: There's two really big components that I feel strongly about that I'm not sure I can get in the package: one is

the Child Care Tax Credit and the other is help for cost of community colleges. They are massive things that I've run on, I care a great deal about, and I'm going to keep coming back at in whatever fora I get to be able to try to get chunks or all of that done.

Yes, sir. Next man — next to your left.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. My name is Pedro Rojas. I'm with Univision National News. This is actually my first press conference here. It is good to meet you in person.

THE PRESIDENT: We always have long press conferences like this. (Laughter.)

Q Awesome. Awesome.

I got a couple of questions for you. Number one, you said that you want to convey your message by getting out there in the country. I wonder if you're planning on traveling also to South America and other countries in the Western Hemisphere, given the fact that China has gained a lot of influence in the region? And the second question is: What would be your message for residents in this country that are struggling every time they go to the gas station, every time they go to the grocery store and see the prices going high in the pharmacy? I happen to come from South Texas. What I saw a lot of — a lot of people struggling financially in the last few months. And so I think you — I wonder what is the message you want to spread to them?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I try to express — I've asked — I've tried to answer that seven different ways today about how to deal with inflation. But let me answer the first question.

I've spent a lot of time in South America and in Latin America. When I was Vice President, I spent the bulk of my eight years basically in Europe and/or in Latin America. I'm in contact with

the leaders of the countries in South America, and we're working closely with making sure that we do everything — for example, with the — to deal with helping the countries in question, particularly those in Central America, to be able to help them with their ability to deal with the inter- — People don't sit around in Guatemala and say, "I got a great idea: Let's sell everything we have, give the money to a — to a coyote, take us across a terribly dangerous trip up through Central America and up through Mexico, and drop us — sneak us across the border, drop us in the desert. Won't that be fun?"

People leave because they have real problems. And one of the things that I've done, when I was a Vice President, and got support with — although I don't have much Republican support anymore — is provide billions of dollars to be able to say to those countries, "Why are people leaving? And how are you going to reform your own system?" And that's what we've worked on a long time. It still needs a lot more work. And we're focusing on that.

I also believe — I've spent a lot of time talking about and dealing with policy having to do with Maduro, who is little more than a dictator right now, and the same thing in Chile and Af- — not the same thing, but with Chile, as well as Argentina.

So, look, I made a speech a while ago, when I was Vice President, saying that if we were smart, we have an opportunity to make the Western Hemisphere a united — not united — a democratic hemisphere. And we were moving in the right direction under our — under the last administration — the Obama-Biden administration.

But so much damage was done as a consequence of the foreign policy decisions the last president made in Latin America,

Central America, and South America that we now have — when I call for a summit of the democracies — I called that, and a number of nations showed up for this Summit of Democracy — what is it that's going to allow us to generate — we've actually had a reduction in the number of democracies in the world. And it seems to me there's nothing more important.

We used to talk about, when I was a kid in college, about “America’s backyard.” It’s not America’s backyard. Everything south of the Mexican border is America’s front yard. And we’re equal people. We don’t dictate what happens in any other part of that — of this continent or the South American continent. We have to work very hard on it.

But the trouble is: We’re having great difficulty making up for the mistakes that were made the last four years, and it’s going to take some time.

Yes. Gentleman in the back. And then I’ll go to this side, okay?

Q Thank you, Mr. President. Alexander Nazaryan, Yahoo News. And thank you for holding this press conference. I hope there’s more of them.

THE PRESIDENT: Anytime you have an extra three hours, we can do it. (Laughter.)

Q We’ll stay for a couple more.

You said you were surprised by Republican obstruction of your agenda. But didn’t the GOP take exactly the same tactic when you were Vice President to Barack Obama? So why did you think they would treat you any differently than they treated him?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, they weren’t nearly as obstructionist as they are now, number one. They stated that, but you had a number of Republicans we worked with closely, from John McCain — I mean, a number of Republicans we

worked closely with. Even, back in those days, Lindsey Graham.

And so the difference here is there seems to be a desire to work — and I didn't say "my" agenda; I'm saying, what are they for? What — what is their agenda? They had an agenda back in the administration when — the eight years we were president and vice president, but I don't know what their agenda is now. What is it?

The American public is outraged about the tax structure we have in America. What are they proposing to do about it? Anything? Have you heard anything? I mean, anything. I haven't heard anything.

The American public is outraged about the fact that we're the — the state of the environment — the vast majority of the public. What have they done to do anything to ameliorate the climate change that's occurring, other than to deny it exists?

So, what I'm saying is the difference between then and now is not only the announcement that was made: "Anything to stop Barack Obama." I get that part. But what eventually happened? We were able to get some things done. We were able to work through some things. On the stuff that was really consequential, in terms of ideologically divisive, it was a real fight.

But so — but I don't think there's a time when I — I mean, I wonder what would be the Republican platform right now. What do you think? What do you think their position on taxes are? What do you think their position on — on human rights is? What do you think their position is on whether or not we should — on what we should do about the cost of prescription drugs? What do you think?

I mean, I just — I, honest to God, don't know what they're for, yet I know a lot of these senators and congressmen, and I know they do have things they want to support, whether they're things I want or not. But you don't hear much about that.

And every once in a while, when you hear something where there's a consensus — it's important, but a small item, and it doesn't get much coverage at all where it occurs. I'm not meaning "coverage." I mean, there's not much discussion about it.

So I just think it's a different — and I don't know that no matter how strongly one supports, as a Republican, and/or supports the president — the former president of the United States — I don't know how we can't look at what happened on January 6th and think, "That's — that's a problem. That's a real problem."

Q One more question, Mr. President. There's been a —

THE PRESIDENT: By the way, it's a quarter of, guys, so I'm going to do this — just let's — if you manage to make easy questions, then I'll give you quick answers.

Q There's an increasing concern, I think among some Democrats, that even if schools do continue to open — and I get that most of them are now open — Republicans will weaponize this narrative of you — of you and other leading Democrats allowing them to stay closed in the midterms next year and that — you know, obviously, that issue has a lot of traction with suburban parents, as I think you saw in Virginia —

THE PRESIDENT: What do you mean "allowing"? I'm confused by the question. I'm sorry.

Q Well, that — could school reopenings or closures become a potent midterm issue for Republicans to win back the suburbs?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, I think it could be, but I hope to God that they're — that — look, maybe I'm kidding myself, but as time goes on, the voter who is just trying to figure out, as I said, how to take care of their family, put three squares on the table, stay safe, able to pay their mortgage or their rent, et cetera, has — is becoming much more informed on the motives of some of the political players and some of the — and the political parties. And I think that they are not going to be as susceptible to believing some of the outlandish things that have been said and continue to be said.

You know, every — every president, not necessarily in the first 12 months, but every president in the first couple of years — almost every president, excuse me, of the last presidents — at least four of them — have had polling numbers that are 44 percent favorable.

So, it's this idea that — but you all — not you all — but now it is, "Well, Biden is at — one poll showed him at 33 percent. The average is 44 — 44, 45 percent. One polled him at 49 percent."

I mean, the idea that — the American public are trying to sift their way through what's real and what's fake. And I don't think as — I've never seen a time when the political coverage — the choice of what political coverage a voter looks to has as much impact on as what they believe; they go to get reinforced in their views, whether it's MSNBC or whether it's Fox or whatever.

I mean — and one of the things I find fascinating that's happening — and you all are dealing with it every day — and it will impact on how things move — is that a lot of the speculation in the polling data shows that the — that the cables are heading south; they're losing viewership. You know?

Well, Fox is okay for a while, but it's not gated. And a lot of the

rest are predicted to be not very much in the mix in the next four to five years. I don't know whether that's true or not.

But I do know that we have sort of put everybody in — put themselves in certain alleys. And they've decided that, you know, how many people who watch MSNBC also watch Fox, other than a politician trying to find out what's going on in both places? How many people —

Again, I'm no expert in any of this. But the fact is, I think you have to acknowledge that what gets covered now is necessarily a little bit different than what gets covered in the past.

I've had a couple — well, I shouldn't get into this.

But the nature not — the nature of the way things get covered — and this is my observation over the years I've been involved in public life — changed. And it's changed because of everything from a thing called the Internet. It's changed because of the way in which we have self-identified perspectives based on what channel you turn on, what — what network you look at — not network, but what cable you look at. And it's — it's never quite been like that.

Anyway.

Q On behalf of the Correspondents' Association, thank you very much for —

THE PRESIDENT: And then I'll go to you.

Q — for standing for our questions. We hope the public has found it as enlightening as those of us in the room have.

I want to ask you, sir, about one of the —

THE PRESIDENT: You mean, I can still stand? It's amazing.

Q Right. We appreciate it. We very much do.

So, the question I want to ask you gets to accountability, sir, on one of the top public concerns, of course, which is the coronavirus and the government's response to it.

Whether it's confusion over what style of mask to wear, when to test, how to test, where to test — you know, the public is confused, sir, and you see that in the drop-off in the polling on this question.

Why did you tell Jeff that you were satisfied with your team? Why are you not willing to make or interested in making any changes, either at the CDC or other agencies, given the fact that the messages have been so confusing?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, the messages, to the extent they've been confusing, is because the scientists — they're learning more. They're learning more about what's needed and what's not needed.

And so, the fact is that the one piece that has gotten a lot of attention is the communications capacity of the CDC.

Well, she came along and said, "Look, I'm not a..." — I mean, "I'm a scientist. And I'm learning. I'm learning how to deal with stating what is the case that we've observed."

But, look, I think that it's a little bit like saying — when we went through the whole issue of how to deal with polio and the polio shots, what was said in the beginning was, "Oh, no, it's changed a little bit. We moved this way and that way."

Or when we dealt with anything else.

I mean, it's — this was a brand new virus, a brand-new phenomenon. Some of it was deadly, other was more communicable.

This is this is an unfolding story. It's the nature of the way

diseases spread. We're going to learn about it in a lot of other areas, not just COVID-19.

And so, I think — you know, I look at it this way: Think about how astounding it was within the timeframe that it took to be able to come up with a vaccine. You used to write about that. Pretty amazing how rapidly they came up with a vaccine that saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

Did everything get right? No.

And, by the way, the idea whether we — anyway. I'm talking too much.

Q Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, ma'am.

Q I have two really simple questions. I promise. You campaigned on canceling \$10,000 in student loans. Do you still plan to do so, and when?

And then, my second question is: Now that you've clarified the Bull Connor comments, do you plan to reach out to Republicans like Mitt Romney to talk about reforming the Electoral Count Act?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I'm happy to speak out. I've — I've met with — I've talked to Mitt on other occasions.

And, by the way, I reached out to the Minority Leader as well at the time that he made his speech.

And so, I have no reluctance to reach out to any Republican and anyone who — and I've made it clear.

Look, I've now had the opportunity to travel because of funerals and eulogies I've made and attended — and congressmen and senators who have come along with me. I don't — don't hold

me to the number, but somewhere between 20 and 25 senators and congresspersons have traveled with me.

And I find you should get the list of them and ask what — how we, you know, sat for the two, three, four, five hours that we've flown together — sit back in the — in that conference table and talk to them, ask them questions; they ask me questions. I learned a heck of a lot.

But as President, you don't quite have that ability to do that as often as I'd like to be able to do it.

And one of the things that I do think that has been made clear to me — speaking of polling — is the public doesn't want me to be the "President Senator." They want me to be the President and let senators be senators.

And so, if I've made — and I've made many mistakes, I'm sure. If I made a mistake, I'm used to negotiating to get things done, and I've been, in the past, relatively successful at it in the United States Senate, even as Vice President. But I think that role as President is — is a different role.

Folks, it is now almost 6:00. With all due respect, I'm going to see you at the next conference. Okay? Thank you.

5:53 P.M. EST

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