

Remarks at a White House Coronavirus Task Force Press Briefing
April 17, 2020

The President. Thank you. Thank you very much. I just had a great conversation with the leading faith leaders of our country. It went extremely well. We learned a lot. I learned a lot. And we're working on some things that are very interesting and very positive. I thank them all for being on the call.

And yesterday we unveiled detailed guidelines for America's Governors to initiate a phased, safe, and gradual reopening of America. That's what's happening. The guidelines provide Governors with the fact-driven and science-based metrics they will need to make the decisions that are right for their own particular State. To view the guidelines, you can go to the website at whitehouse.gov/openingamerica. So that's whitehouse.gov/openingamerica.

Treasury has sent out economic relief payments to more than 80 million Americans who have their direct deposit information on file with the IRS. And an incredible success it has been. If you have not received your check, please visit [IRS.gov/getmypayment](https://irs.gov/getmypayment). How about that one? [IRS.gov/getmypayment](https://irs.gov/getmypayment). That way, the IRS can get you your payment in days—and they've done a fantastic job, I have to say—and you won't have to wait for a check in the mail.

I have some very good news: We sent out 80 million deposits, and less than 1 percent had even little problems. A couple had minor glitches, but it's substantially less than 1 percent. So out of 80 million deposits, less than 1 percent. And that gets corrected immediately. So just please do as I say. You'll get that very quickly, very easily.

Today I'm also announcing that Secretary Perdue—who happens to be right next to me; handsome man—and the Department of Agriculture will be implementing a \$19 billion relief program for our great farmers and ranchers as they cope with the fallout of the global pandemic. Very honored to be doing this. Our farmers, ranchers—we have—these are great people, great Americans. Never complain. They never complain. They just do what they have to do.

The program will include direct payments to farmers as well as mass purchases of dairy, meat, and agricultural produce to get that food to the people in need. The USDA will receive another \$14 billion in July that will have funding to continue help our—helping. And this will help our farmers and our ranchers, and it's money well deserved. So not only were they targeted at one point by China—and that was over a period of time, and you saw that happening. And they never complain, but that worked out very well. Twelve billion dollars they got, and \$16 billion they got. And now it's \$19 billion.

And I'm just going to ask Secretary Perdue to explain exactly how we're going to handle it. Thank you.

Secretary of Agriculture George E. "Sonny" Perdue. Well, Mr. President, you may remember earlier this year, you tweeted a message to our farmers and ranchers that, no matter their circumstances, you pledged to stand behind them. And while none of us could ever have anticipated this type of pandemic that we're currently in, I think today's announcement is proof that you've put our—you have our farmers' backs and that you will continue to do what it takes to support them. And they are very grateful.

[At this point, Secretary Perdue continued his remarks, concluding as follows.]

I want to thank you, Mr. President, for your unwavering support. They want to thank you for your unwavering support for America's farmers and ranchers. And I want to commit to you, Mr.

President, and to the American people that USDA will do everything in our power to implement this program as quickly and as efficiently as possible to help our farmers, ranchers, producers, and consumers during this great time of need.

So thank you very much for having me here today. And God bless you, God bless America, and God bless American agriculture.

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Sonny. Fantastic job. Thank you, Sonny.

So our great Secretary of Agriculture was the Governor of Georgia for 8 years, and the only reason he isn't still there, frankly, is that he was term limited. And I said, "Let's get him for Agriculture." And you've done a fantastic job. We want to thank you very much. Eight years at Georgia. We really appreciate it. Great job.

Even as we prepare to rebuild our economy, America continues to wage an all-out medical war to defeat the invisible enemy. To date, we have conducted more than 3.78 million coronavirus tests, by far, the most of any country; it's not even close. In the hardest hit areas, such as New York and Louisiana, we've also tested more people per capita than South Korea, Singapore, and every other country.

The United States has the most robust, advanced, and accurate testing system anywhere in the world. As of yesterday, we have distributed nearly 660,000 Abbott IDs. Now, that's a—an incredible test. It's called the ID NOW point-of-care diagnostic test. And it's fantastic. It's a hot—it's the hot one. The problem with this business is, it's the hot one until about 2 days from now, because we do have a saliva test that just came out, and that can be self-administered, and it's said to be fantastic.

I want to thank Abbott Laboratories. They have been incredible. I want to thank Roche. They've likewise been incredible.

Over the last several days, we've seen a dramatic increase in the number of tests conducted by hospitals and academic institutions, which have now performed nearly 600,000 tests. There is a tremendous amount of unused capacity in the States available for Governors to tap. We have tremendous unused capability within those laboratories, and I hope the Governors are going to be able to use them. The Governors are responsible for testing, and I hope they're going to be able to use this tremendous amount of available capacity that we have.

It's up to 1 million additional tests per week—when you think of that. In the next few weeks, we'll be sending out 5.5 million testing swabs to the States. Swabs can be done easily by the Governors themselves. Mostly, it's cotton. It's not a big deal. You can get cotton easily. But if they can't get it, we will take care of it.

Yesterday the FDA announced a new collaboration with United Health Group, the Gates Foundation, Quantigen, and U.S. Cotton to greatly expand the supply of essential swabs, including a new polyester Q-tip-type swab for the coronavirus testing. All of these actions will help our testing capability continue to grow dramatically.

So we're helping people, even with swabs. We get ventilators. We're now the king of ventilators. We have hundreds of thousands under construction. We don't need them ourselves. The Governors are in great shape. If we do, we have a great stockpile that we'll immediately send to the State in need. But we've handled that situation incredibly well. I hope people understand it. I wish the media would get the word out. What we've done in ventilators is amazing, because they're big, expensive, and highly complex.

We're speaking to other countries. I spoke to the President of Mexico today—a great gentleman—and I told him that we are going to be helping him out with ventilators, helping

Mexico out. And we'll be helping some other countries too. We have a lot of very high-level, high-quality ventilators. And they're here, and they're also being manufactured as we speak.

Following the announcement of our reopening guidelines, there have been some very partisan voices in the media and in politics who have spread false and misleading information about our testing capacity—it's totally false and misleading—demonstrating a complete failure to understand the enormous scope of the testing capabilities that we've brought on line. And we started, really, from ground zero. We started from really being very, very outdated and obsolete as a country, from the past.

And I will say this: If they didn't understand it, it's just really—unfortunately, I hate to say this, because we've been getting along very well, but it would be false reporting, because they understand the capability. And it's going to be up to the States to use that capability. The States have local points where they can go—a Governor can call the mayors, and the mayors can call representatives, and everybody—everything is perfect. And that's the way it should work and always should work.

We'll help New York and all of the other States get even better on their testing. We have to get even better. And some people think a little bit differently. There are areas where you have vast amounts of area where you have very few people and almost no people are infected. And those places will be looked upon differently by different Governors. And I think you're going to have a lot of news coming out about that over the next few days. I think certain States are going to come on line, and they're going to start the early stages of the puzzle that we're putting together. And it's going to be together sooner rather than later. A lot of really incredible things are happening.

And at some point in the not-too-distant future, we're going to have our country back. And it's going to be, I think, really—with what we're doing on stimulus, and helping people keep their businesses together and their lives together and their jobs, it's going to be better than ever before. I hope so. I really do.

The current conversation is reminiscent of what happened on ventilators—you remember that—when requests were made far beyond what was objectively needed. We were hearing from a certain State, and we were hearing from a lot that they needed far more ventilators. In one case, they wanted 40,000 ventilators—40,000. It turned out that they had plenty, and they had a number of about 7- or 8,000, and that was plenty. We supplied them with a lot. But that was the right number; and we got it just about right. And if they did need more, we're ready to give more, but I think the surge seems to be over.

And there are a lot of Governors just doing a great job. And they're working with us, but we're all working together.

The research and development that we've done at the Federal level has been absolutely incredible. The media will be accepting of these figures when they get to see the end result. I think they're going to see it, and I think they're already seeing it. That includes not only ventilators, but beds. We've built, in most cases, far more than they even needed, but we wanted to err on the side of caution.

This is what the Governors wanted. They wanted a certain amount in Louisiana. I spoke with the Governor; I had a long talk with him. And I said, "Do you think you'll need that final hospital?" And they actually didn't need it. We built a lot of beds. So I appreciate it, from the Governor.

And we saved—building a hospital in New York, we did a—I think, just a spectacular job at the Javits Center. And even sending the ship up became—we brought it into COVID, but they

didn't really need it. It didn't get much use, but it was there and ready. It wasn't supposed to be used for that purpose; we changed it into that purpose. And it was there: ready, willing, and able. Same with Javits, but they didn't quite need the rooms that we—the beds that we—we produced.

So we produced almost 2,900 beds, and I think I'd rather tell you that we were overprepared that we were—than we were underprepared. And that was a good-faith effort by New York, I have to say that. A very good faith effort. But it's nice that we didn't need that, instead of needing it. It was not very occupied, but it was ready to go. It's still there should something happen, but I think they have it under very good control.

As you'll hear from our experts today, we've already built sufficient testing capacity nationwide for States to begin their reopenings. And I think you'll be hearing a lot about reopenings in the coming weeks and months. Most excitingly, in the coming weeks, I think you're going to see some very, very dramatic steps taken and very safely. We're putting safety first. We may be opening, but we're putting safety first.

And when you look at the numbers, when you look at the possible number of death—deaths at 2.2 million people—and it could have very well been that. It could have been more. Frankly, I've been looking at numbers where it could have been higher than that—2.2 million people dying. If you figure we lost 500,000, maybe 600,000 in the Civil War—2.2 million people.

A minimum, if we did nothing, would have been 1.6 [million].* If you cut that in half, you're talking about 800,000, 900,000, a million people dying. But we did a lot of work, and the people of this country were incredible, I have to say. And I think we're heading to the other category, and that would be if we did work and if it was successful, they had between 100,000 and 220,000 to 240,000 on the upside. And I think we'll be substantially, hopefully, below the hundred number. And I think, right now, we're heading at probably around 60-, maybe 65,000.

And one is too many. I always say it: One is too many. This is a horrible thing that happened to our country. This is a horrible thing that happened to 184 countries all over the world. This is a horrible thing, and there was no reason for it. It should never, ever happen again.

In a few minutes, you'll be hearing from Dr. Redfield, Dr. Fauci, Dr. Birx, and Admiral Giroir to explain these facts in really great detail.

Earlier this week, the FDA authorized two new antibody tests—which is very exciting—that will determine if someone has been previously infected with the virus, bringing the total to four authorized antibody tests already. This will help us assess the number of cases that have been asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic and support our efforts to get Americans back to work by showing us who might have developed the wonderful, beautiful immunity.

Ultimate victory in this war will be made possible by America's scientific brilliance. There is nothing like us. There is nobody like us. Not even close. I wish I could tell you stories—what other countries, even powerful countries, say to me—the leaders. They say it quietly, and they say it off the record, but they have great respect for what we can do.

And our country is at a point—a few weeks ago, think of it—4 or 5 weeks ago, we were at a level that nobody had ever attained: the best job numbers we've ever had, the best economy we've ever had. Every company virtually was doing better business than ever before. The stock market was at alltime highs.

And then one day, they said, "You've got to close it up." And we did the right thing. We saved maybe millions of lives by doing it the way we did it. But we're paying a price, but that price is very unimportant compared to the number of lives we're talking about.

* White House correction.

The NIH and others are conducting clinical trials of 35 different therapies and treatments—therapies being so exciting to me, because that's really like—if something happens, you're going to get better reasonably quickly and without such a horrible deal, as some people have to go through.

To that end, today NIH announced that it is launching a public-private partnership with more than a dozen biopharmaceutical companies. They're—HHS, FDA, CDC, and the European Medicines Agency, they're all working together. We're working together with a lot of other countries.

The partnership will marshal and coordinate the vast resources, knowledge, assets, and authorities of more than a dozen organizations and agencies to accelerate development of the most promising therapies and vaccines. The vaccines are coming along really, really well. Johnson & Johnson is very well advanced.

The one thing is, they have to—we're having great, great success, but we have to test them, and it takes a long period of time. It takes probably over a year, unfortunately. But therapies likewise are coming along very, very well. Therapies are immediate. When we get that, that will be a big day.

We're also equipping our medical warriors on the frontlines. In total, we have the Project Airbridge—and the airbridge has been incredible—the National Strategic Stockpile, and every other channel the Federal Government has deployed. If you think about this: 44.5 million N95 masks, nearly 524 million gloves, 63.5 million surgical masks, and more than 10 million gowns. And we have 500 million masks coming in very soon, between manufacturing and orders—500 million masks.

The last few months have been among the most challenging times in the history of our nation. This invisible enemy is tough and it's smart and it's vicious. But every day, we're getting closer to the future that we all have been waiting for. I talk about the light at the end of the tunnel; we are getting very, very close to seeing that light shine very brightly at the end of that tunnel.

And it's happening, and I want to thank everybody in the room. I want to thank—I actually want to thank some of the media. We've had some fair coverage—some really fair coverage—and I appreciate it.

What I'm going to do is, I'm going to introduce our great Vice President, Mike Pence, and he's going to take over for a little while. I'm going to leave, and I'm coming right back, and we'll take some questions. They're going to go over our tremendous testing capabilities. And again, I'll be right back.

Thank you. Thank you very much.

[The President left the briefing room, and the briefing continued with remarks by Vice President Michael R. Pence, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Anthony S. Fauci, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Robert R. Redfield, Jr., White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator Deborah L. Birx, and Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services for Health Brett P. Giroir. Their remarks included a slide presentation detailing efforts to expand coronavirus testing capacity. The President then rejoined the briefing as follows.]

Vice President Pence. But in the midst of that, all these great experts, working with all these great facilities, are going to continue to use that great American ingenuity to scale and increase the availability of testing for States to be able to implement as they move closer and closer to that day the President speaks of often, where we reopen America and put all of America back to work.

Mr. President.

The President. He did well? They all did well? I think. I'll bet they did.

Please, go ahead.

Q. Mr. President, thank you. Earlier today Jay Inslee said that your tweets, encouraging liberation——

The President. Who said this?

Protests Against State Stay-at-Home Orders/Virginia/Gun Rights

Q. Jay Inslee said your tweets encouraging liberation in Michigan, Minnesota, Virginia, were fomenting rebellion. I'm wondering how that squares with the sober and methodical guidance that you issued yesterday in terms of reopening.

The President. Well, I think we do have a sobering guidance, but I think some things are too tough. And if you look at some of the States you just mentioned, it's too tough. Not only relative to this, but what they've done in Virginia with respect to the Second Amendment is just a horrible thing. They did a horrible thing—the Governor. And he's a Governor under a cloud, to start off with.

So when you see what he said about the Second Amendment, when you see what other States have done, no, I think I feel very comfortable.

Go ahead.

Protests Against State Stay-at-Home Orders/Gun Rights/Virginia

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Just to be clear, when you talk about these States—Michigan, Minnesota, Virginia—do you think that they should lift their stay-at-home orders? Or can you talk——

The President. No, but I think elements of what they've done are too much. I mean, it's just too much.

Q. Which elements?

The President. You know the elements——

Q. You cited Second Amendment.

The President. ——because I've already said. But certainly, Second Amendment, and Second Amendment having to do with the State of Virginia. What they've done in Virginia is just incredible.

Okay. Please.

Protests Against State Stay-at-Home Orders

Q. Sir, are you concerned, though, that people coming out in protest are going to spread COVID to other people? They're congregating in ways that health experts have said they should not.

The President. No, these are people expressing their views. I see where they are, and I see the way they're working. They seem to be very responsible people to me, but it's—you know, they've been treated a little bit rough.

Please, in the back.

Coronavirus Prevalence Rates

Q. Thanks, Mr. President. I'm curious about some more of the dynamics we might see as the country begins reopening——

The President. Yes.

Q. ——as you put it, kind of like a "puzzle." So as you've mentioned, we have States where we're already seeing their curves begin to flatten, but then there are others, like Florida or more rural parts of the country, where they aren't projected to peak for weeks or even months.

So can you talk a little bit about some of the difficulties that those later peaking States might face; if they need to stay locked down for longer, even as other places around them are starting to open back up?

The President. Well, we're seeing great numbers in almost every State. We're seeing big drops. We're really seeing—in terms of beds—the numbers we have to look at are the beds—the beds being occupied. People going—which is essentially people going in. That means that you have fewer people that are sick; fewer people that feel they have to go to a hospital. And those numbers are dropping really precipitously. So I think that—we're just seeing a lot of good signs.

Now, a place like New York, New Jersey, and certain parts of Louisiana—Louisiana has been incredible lately when you look at that drop. That drop has really been great. Michigan has had a hard time, but it's starting to do well.

So I just think—Illinois is another one. You know, you look at some of the numbers. But everyone is dropping, and they're dropping rather quickly. We don't have any hotspot that's developed where, all of a sudden, you say, "Well"—other than we did have a meatpacking plant or two where, incredibly, we had some—you saw the number was rather incredible. It took place in that plant. People could ask about that. I wonder who owned that company. That was a weird situation. But, generally speaking, it's been very good. The numbers have been really improving greatly.

Please, in the back.

Coronavirus Outbreak in China

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. U.S. intelligence is saying this week that the coronavirus likely came from a level 4 lab in Wuhan. There's also another report that the NIH, under the Obama administration, in 2015 gave that lab \$3.7 million in a grant. Why would the U.S. give a grant like that to China?

The President. The Obama administration gave them a grant of \$3.7 million? I've been hearing about that. And we've instructed that if any grants are going to that area—we're looking at it, literally, about an hour ago, and also early in the morning. We will end that grant very quickly.

But it was granted quite a while ago. They were granted a substantial amount of money. We're going to look at it and take a look. But I understand it was a number of years ago, right?

Q. So you are—[inaudible]?

The President. When did you hear—when did you hear it was—the grant was made?

Q. Twenty-fifteen.

The President. Twenty-fifteen? Who was President then? I wonder.

Q. When, when——

The President. Okay. Yes, ma'am.

Federal Aid to Small Businesses

Q. Mr. President, we know negotiations are underway for the next round of funding for small businesses.

The President. Yes.

Q. If tens of billions of dollars went in a matter of days the first time, will this next relief package be enough?

The President. Well, I think it will certainly—it's going to get us to a point that's going to be rather beautiful. We think that that will be the point—and it could be they want more, but maybe at a certain point, we're going to stop.

It's been a tremendous success. It's been executed flawlessly. SBA has done a very good job. But the banks have done a great job, whether it was Bank of America or Wells Fargo. The community banks have been incredible. I think we had over 4,000 community banks. A lot of people didn't know you had that many banks. But 4,000 community banks, they gave the money out. It's so organized, and it's been such a great program.

And so, essentially, we're waiting for \$250 billion; the Democrats are refusing to do it. This is money that essentially is going to the workers. It's going to keep these companies whole—the restaurants and a lot of great companies.

And it's a small amount of money relative to what it represents, because it represents small businesses; it represents them staying in business. And you know, when you look at it—people don't know—small businesses represent approximately 50 percent of the power of our business enterprises. It's not all the big, monster businesses that you read about every day. It's all of these small businesses when added.

It's something that should be approved by the Democrats. The Republicans want it badly, and the people want it very badly.

Q. If I could just follow up on that——

The President. Sure.

Q. ——nearly 10 percent of the loans that were given out were for \$5 million, but some small-business owners say they can't even get a loan for \$100,000. Is that acceptable?

The President. Well, they would—no. They would get that, but they have to approve it—nobody knew it was going to be this successful. Don't forget, when you say the money is gone, it's been a tremendous success as a program.

People are—they really want it. And some people won't be able to get their—keep their business open unless they get that money. It's been a tremendous success. It's been executed flawlessly. It's been—I mean, with few exceptions, it's really been good. And I think the Democrats are going to do it.

Look, Nancy Pelosi—she's away on vacation or something, and she should come back. She should come back and get this done. I don't know why she's not coming back. The fact is, she's not doing her job, and there's nothing unusual about that for her.

Go ahead.

Economic Stimulus Legislation/Tax Relief

Q. And Leader McCarthy said they're now considering also adding more funding for hospitals included in this.

The President. So they are thinking about hospitals, and hospitals——

Q. Did you okay that compromise?

The President. Well, hospitals are a good thing. Hospitals have been decimated by this. You know, they've given up their business—which is good, because they did the right thing—in order to take care of the COVID-19.

And, no, hospitals—I'm with that all the way, if they want to add hospitals. We could also add it into phase four, if we do a phase four. Phase four would be, hopefully, infrastructure.

A lot of people are talking about the best thing we could do for this country would be the payroll tax cut that I've been suggesting. A lot of Democrats like it, believe it or not. The payroll tax cut.

And Art Laffer, who's tremendous—he's a tremendous—in fact, he recently got the Presidential Medal of Freedom—economist. He was with Ronald Reagan, and he's been—he looks like he's 25 years old, but I think he might be a little bit older than that. He looks so great. But Art Laffer said the single best thing you can do is the payroll tax cut. And I would just about agree with that, and I'd like to see that.

I'm not sure that we're going to get that, but I think that's something that could be done. It's simple. It's really good for both the company that employs these people and for the people that are employed. So we're going to see whether that happens or not. The payroll—I put it out there—the payroll tax cut would be a tremendous incentive for this country.

Steve [Steve A. Holland, Reuters].

Coronavirus Mortality Statistics in China

Q. China now says its coronavirus death toll in Wuhan is 50-percent higher.

The President. Yes.

Q. It went up to about 4,000. Does that sound like a credible number to you?

The President. Well, you know, when I listen to the press every night saying we have the most, we don't have the most in the world—deaths. The most in the world has to be China. It's a massive country. It's gone through a tremendous problem with this. A tremendous problem. And they must have the most.

So today I saw they announced that, essentially, they're doubling up on the numbers. And that's only in Wuhan; they're not talking about outside of Wuhan. So it is what it is, Steve. It is what it is. What a sad state of affairs.

Coronavirus Outbreak in China

Q. The investigation into whether the virus escaped from this lab in Wuhan, how active is that? And when do expect to hear from—[inaudible]?

The President. Well, we're looking at that. A lot of people are looking at it. It seems to make sense. They talk about a certain kind of bat, but that bat wasn't in that area. If you can believe this, that's what they're down to now, is bats. But that bat is not in that area. That bat wasn't sold at that wet zone. It wasn't sold there. That bat is 40 miles away. So a lot of strange things are happening, but there is a lot of investigation going on and we're going to find out.

All I can say is, wherever it came from—it came from China—in whatever form, 184 countries now are suffering because of it. And it's too bad, isn't it? And it could have been solved very easily. When it was just starting, it could have been solved really very easily.

Yes. Please. In the back.

Economic Stimulus Payments

Q. Thank you, sir. So, about the 80 million payments that have gone out——

The President. Yes.

Q. ——that you mentioned, you said that less than 1 percent have had snafus, but that could be 800,000 snafus. So we've also seen reports of——

The President. Well, I'm just saying it's less than 1 percent, and the snafus are very minor. And they're——and they were fixed.

Q. They're not—you're not talking about——

The President. No. Excuse me.

Q. ——massive numbers of dead people who have received checks——

The President. No, they were—they were——80 million payments——

Q. I mean, that could be—that could be tens of millions of people.

The President. ——went out over a period of a few days. And they caught certain mistakes that they made, but this is a tiny amount of mistakes. I can tell you mistakes were made in Government where wrong countries were signed, okay?

Eighty million—this has been a tremendous success. And any mistake that was made, they've been caught. And it's less than 1 percent. That's a very good percentage. I can tell you, for Government——

Q. If how——

The President. ——I mean, how about—how about the Obama website? The Obamacare website, where they spent \$5 billion on building a website that you could have built for peanuts.

Okay.

Q. If money went out to deceased people, is the Government going to get that back?

The President. Yes. Anything—anything that was sent out—it's like, sometimes, you send a check to somebody wrong. Sometimes, people are listed, they die, and they get a check. That can happen.

You're talking about—I guess the number is about 80 million people. Yes, sure. We'll get that back. Everything we're going to get back. But it's a tiny amount. They've done a fantastic job. This was done in a matter of a few days.

Yes.

Resumption of Presidential Campaign Rallies

Q. Your campaign said today that they are planning on resuming rallies before the election. Is there a timeline that you're looking at? Would it be restricted to certain States? Have you thought about how that would work?

The President. Well, I hope we can do rallies. It's great for the country. It's great spirit. It's great for a lot of things. It's a—for me, it's a tremendous way of getting the word out.

If you look at our success rate, we've had tremendous success. We win where we have rallies, including endorsements of candidates. Our success rate is, I think, unparalleled. There's nothing like it.

So I certainly hope we can have rallies. We'll find out. I don't like the rallies where we're sitting like you're sitting. I mean, you've got many reporters outside trying to get into this room. And I come in, I'm looking at this room, and I see all this—it loses a lot of flavor. [Laughter] It loses, to me, a lot of flavor.

But I hope we're going to have rallies. I think they're going to be bigger than ever.

I will say this: The rallies that we were having—until we had to stop, with regard to the problem that we had here—the rallies were bigger than they were—I think even substantially bigger. We'd go into the biggest arena, and we'd turn away 20-, 30,000 people sometimes. In one case, I think they said, in New Jersey, we had 175,000 people show up for an arena that holds 9,000 people. And they showed up. And the reporters even reported that. That was almost shocking to me.

But I hope we can resume rallies because I think they're an important part of politics, actually.

Yes.

Resumption of Economic and Commercial Activity/Stock Market

Q. Mr. President, under your reopening plan, some workers can go back to work in phase one, but schools cannot reopen until phase two. Many parents don't have an option to work from home. So how can you get businesses back up and running as long as schools are closed?

The President. Well, I think the businesses are going to. And I think now we've given the businesses a real jolt. A real positive jolt. They're able to keep their employees. You know, without the employees—if the employees leave that area, if they leave—you know, who knows where they're going—or if they get another job maybe someplace else, you're not going to have the same business.

So we gave them money to hold their employees. They're going to do that. We hope we can do \$250 billion more. It's absolutely so inexpensive compared to what it represents. And we hope that's going to happen.

But I think—I really think—look, you see it with the stock market. The market was up seven or eight hundred points today. And if you would have told me that we would have a virus, the likes of which this world has not seen since 1917—which was the Spanish flu, where anywhere from 75 to 100 million people were killed—and that we'd have a stock market that's not far below its alltime high—and it's starting to get a little low. You know, then you had 1,000-point increase and a 1,200-point increase.

So now we have a stock market that's at a point where it's not very far away from where it was. And we've gone through a closed—literally, a closed country.

Remember this also—I mean, we have had a closed economy. We had the best economy anywhere in the world by far. We had the best economy we've ever had. And remember this: The dollar is very strong. And dollars—strong dollars are overall very good, but it does cause problems. It's harder to sell outside of the country, et cetera, et cetera. It's a little harder for manufacturers. Sometimes it's a lot harder.

Everybody wants to invest in our country. Everybody wants—and you know, we're paying almost zero in interest. Like, in some cases, zero. We've never had that before. People want the safety of our country. But if you would have told me that a market was where it is today—and today we had almost, I guess, more than a 700-point increase, and we're at a point which is, you know, it's not what it was, but it's not that far off—I would have told you that's got to be an impossibility. The reason that is, is because there is a great pent-up demand.

This country is going to come back, and it's going to come back strong. We have to get rid of the virus. We've got to open up our country. We're going to open it up in quadrants. We're going to open it up in States. Some of the States should get together, and they should work on their own borders and everything, because you don't want to have people pouring through the border of a State that isn't infected, and you have people coming perhaps outside.

That's one of the reasons I was asking Tony, 2 days ago, about masks. Well, why in Wyoming or Montana would they have to wear masks? Their numbers are very good. The reason is, if somebody comes from outside—you know, which is very severe. But it's, again—and it's going to be up to them. It's a recommendation, but we'll see.

But if you were to tell me how well we're doing after we went through the worst event of its kind since 1917, it's pretty amazing.

A question? Please.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

Efforts To Reopen Schools

Q. The question, Mr. President, about childcare, though: Millions of Americans aren't sure how they can go back to work if schools are closed. Where—how can they have their kids taken care of?

The President. The schools will be open too. Very soon.

Q. Is your Government considering something—

The President. Yes.

Q. —in addition to helping employees stay employed—

The President. I think it's—yes.

Q. —to help them take care of their kids?

The President. It's a good question. I think the schools are going to be open soon. I think a lot of Governors are already talking about schools being opened. And we do have to take care of our seniors, because we've learned a lot about this disease. We've learned—call it a disease. We've learned a lot about this plague. And we have to take care of our seniors. We're going to take care of a lot of people.

But I think the schools are going to be open sooner rather than later. And I understand and I've spoken—some Governors are already talking about—thinking about getting the schools opened. I have a young boy who goes to school. I'd like to see him go to school. As good as home is, it's very nice, but we'd like to see him go to school.

Please.

Virginia/Gun Rights

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. I'd agree with that point. [*Laughter*] I would like to know about some of these areas that you would like to open up, some of these quadrants. You singled out Virginia, Michigan. They don't have a decline in cases yet, yet you tweeted out today that you'd like to "liberate" them.

The President. Well, they're going to have soon, but they're very, very, very—what they've done is very powerful, in terms of—I think—you know, you could get the same result out of doing a little bit less. What they've done to some people is very unfair.

In Virginia, I'm going above and beyond what we're talking about with this horrible plague. They want to take their guns away. Okay? They want to take their guns away. That's the Second Amendment. That's Virginia. You have a Governor who really—I guess he should be under siege; he seems not to be. If he were a Republican, he'd be under siege. But he seems to have escaped something that was pretty bad, including what he said about birth, including what he said about many different things.

But he wants to take—if you take a look at what's going on in Virginia, they want to take away Second Amendment rights. And that's what they want to do. So when you talk about "liberate" or if you talk about a liberation, you could certainly look at Virginia as one.

Go ahead. Anybody else?

Q. Mr. President——

The President. Steve.

Resumption of Economic and Commercial Activity

Q. Which States are ready to reopen, in your mind, and how soon?

The President. Well, I don't want to go—I want to leave—the Governors make that decision. We're watching very closely. If we see something happening bad that we think is wrong, we're going to come down very strong on that. Very, very strong.

The Federal Government has a lot to say. We have a lot to say, beyond what anyone understands. And we think—and I've gotten to know many of the Governors, many Democrats too. It's Republicans and—I knew the Republicans. I knew some of the Democrats, but I got to know a lot of them. I think it's going to be in the hands of a lot of good people. I think a lot of good people are looking at this, and they want to do what's right, Steve.

The President's Travel Schedule/Deployment of the Naval Hospital Ship USS Comfort/New York City

Q. And the Vice President is traveling soon, I think tomorrow to Colorado. When are you going to be in a position to travel again?

The President. Well, they'd rather not have me travel. I think I've been in the White House, I don't know, for months. I don't know what it is, but it's for months—other than I did leave to say goodbye to our beautiful ship. Right? The *Comfort*. The—as it left Virginia. When it got out of dry dock—it got out of maintenance very early. It was supposed to be there for 4 weeks; it was there for a few days, literally. We got it up to New York.

I mean, they didn't need it like—well, I wouldn't say "we hoped." I'm glad they didn't need it. They didn't need it; that was a good thing. They didn't need the convention center—2,500 beds or, depending on your definition, 2,900. We ultimately converted it to COVID—the Army Corps of Engineers and FEMA. The job they did was incredible.

But that's a sign that they're making progress in New York. If you look at that, you know, we built it. It was ready. It's there now. It's ready. We converted it to COVID—it wasn't supposed to be for that—at the request, frankly, our side. Then, ultimately, we converted it, but there is much less demand. That's such a good thing. I mean, I'm not complaining about that. I think it's a great—that means New York is making progress.

Vice President Pence's Travel to Colorado/Social Distancing/Resumption of Commercial and Economic Activity

Q. Is it important to you that the Vice President is going tomorrow?

The President. He's going to Colorado?

Vice President Pence. The Air Force Academy.

The President. I think he's going to the Air Force to make the commencement, right?

Vice President Pence. Yes, sir.

The President. Oh, I think it's great. I think it's great. If he's going to make the commencement—I hear they're going to have a very spread-out crowd.

Vice President Pence. Yes, sir.

The President. They're going to be—I will say, they are going to be, socially, very good. They're going to be very far apart. That'll be very interesting. I think I'm going to watch that one. No, they're going to be—they're going to have a good spread, a good distance apart. I spoke to Mike about it.

No, I think, making the commencement speech—I'm doing it at West Point, which I look forward to. I did it last year at Air Force, I did it at Annapolis, I did it at the Coast Guard Academy, and I'm doing it at West Point. And I assume they're—they've got it, and I understand they'll have distancing. They'll have some big distance, and so it will be very different than it ever looked.

Do I like the look? No, I don't. And eventually, next year, they'll have a commencement which will be like it's been, like when people like this—our great Admiral, who has done such a great job. When he graduated from where he graduated—me too—we were nice and tight. And that's going to happen again.

I don't want people to think that this going to be like this forever. But, for a period of time, we're going to have to keep it that way. That includes baseball games and football games and other things. But eventually, as this virus goes away, it's going to be better and better. Director, it's going to be better and better. And we're going to get our lives back to the way they were.

You know, one thing that bothers me: A couple of restaurateurs called, and they said, I mean: "Sir, I barely made a living with 150 seats. Now, if I do what they want me to do, I'll be down to 25 seats, and I can't"—I said, "Yes, but you're not going to be there forever." And he didn't really know that. He thought that they were going to take 150 seats, move it down to 25 to 50 seats, depending on the way he laid it out.

I said: "Don't worry about it. Eventually, you're going to be back to the scene that you used to have, which was"—look, I could tell you about—and I'm not going to do it, because I didn't want to bring it up—but I could tell you about events that took place. And I said things like, "You'll never do that again" or "You'll never do this again" or—I don't even want to mention the events. I don't want to mention what you're supposed to be doing because—and you know one of them was so horrible.

I said, "A certain industry will be out of business—never happen again." Two weeks later, it was like nothing ever happened. Hopefully, we get rid of this. We have tremendous talent up here and all over, including Governors, including local governments, State governments. I look forward to the time, to me, when we can really normalize. But normalizing is being back to where we were.

Yes, please. Go ahead.

China-U.S. Trade/China's Coronavirus Response

Q. Mr. President, some of your allies are calling for China to be stripped as host of the 2022 Olympics. I'm wondering what you make of that? Is that something that you would consider or—

The President. So I just made a deal with China where they're going to put in \$250 billion of product. They're going to be buying \$250—50; from 40 to \$50 billion in farm. I want to see what's happening with China. I want to see how they're doing on it: Are they fulfilling the deal, the transaction?

We have a lot of discussions going on with China. Let me just put it this way: I'm not happy, okay? I'm not happy. And I spoke to them. And this could have been shut down a long time ago. They knew it. And we couldn't get in. And, in all fairness, World Health couldn't get in, and that's why I wish they took a different stance. They took a very pathetic stance and a very weak stance. But they say they couldn't get in.

But ultimately, they got in; they got in much sooner than anybody, but they didn't report what was happening. They didn't report what was happening inside of China. No, I'm not happy with China.

Yes, please.

Q. Mr. President, I wanted to ask Dr. Fauci: Could you address these suggestions or concerns that this virus was somehow manmade, possibly came out of a laboratory in China?

The President. Want to go?

Q. You studied this virus. What are the prospects of that?

Director Fauci. Yes. There was a study recently that we can make available to you, where a group of highly qualified evolutionary virologists looked at the sequences there and the sequences in bats as they evolve. And the mutations that it took to get to the point where it is now is totally consistent with a jump of a species from an animal to a human. So, I mean, the paper will be available—I don't have the authors right now, but we can make that available to you.

Federal Coronavirus Response/Coronavirus Mortality Projections/Resumption of Economic and Commercial Activity

Q. Just one follow-up, sir, on the protest that you—that we've seen of people wanting the economies open. Does that concern you though, as a health expert, when you see folks congregate? And are you worried if that's encouraged?

Director Fauci. Well, I mean, I'm looking at it from a public health standpoint. I certainly could understand the frustration of people, but my main role in the Task Force is to make recommendations to protect the health and the safety of the American people. And I would hope that people understand that that's the reason why we're doing what we're doing, and hopefully, we'll put an end to this.

Q. [Inaudible]

The President. And I will say this: I'm very, very satisfied with the decision we made, listening to experts, listening to my gut, the feeling of the Vice President, and really many others. When we put it all together, I'm very—look, if we didn't do what we did at the time, we could have lost more than 2 million people. I really believe that.

I could show you charts of other places that gave it a shot, and they're not doing well. And I would show it to you right now; I don't want to embarrass anybody. But they gave that a shot. That's an automatic. I mean, everybody would say, "Let's do that"—until they sit down and start thinking. And we could have lost more than 2 million people. We could have lost more than 2

million. It could have been much more than that, by the way. We have one that says from 1.6 to 2.2, but it could have really been more than that. But I looked at one in particular—one country in particular—that is using the herd mentality, and not working out very well.

Now, with all of that being said, we have to get back to work. We've—we'll be crossing lines very soon, in many cases. In some cases, we're well on the way down. In other cases, we're right at the top and heading down. We're heading in the right direction.

I saw some numbers from New Jersey, which was having a very tough time. It started—he's doing a terrific job, the Governor—Phil—Phil Murphy. Starting to get some really good signs. I looked at some of the New York numbers. They're starting to get—they've been devastated, obviously, but some really good things are starting to happen.

So, if we would have done something different—first of all, it would have—it would not have been sustainable. You would have had people—they would have been furious at you and me and everybody up here. They—it would not have been sustainable. Because you look at some of the hospitals—as an example, a certain hospital right near where I grew up in Queens—and you had body bags all over the floor of that hospital. You know the one I'm talking about. All over the floor of the hospital.

Now, multiply that times 12 or 15, because that's the kind of numbers you're talking about—12 or 15. And it would not have been a lot—there would have been an insurrection. Nobody would have understood that.

Whereas, right now, nobody can be blamed, and there is no blame. We're all in a situation that was caused—that should have been solved long ago. It could have been solved probably very easily—look, it was a tough enemy—but probably very easily if a certain country did what they should have done. And we're just starting to learn those facts. But what we did was the right thing. What we did was the right thing.

With that being said, we want to get back, and we want to—we're going to be opening up States. They're being opened by very capable people. It's also point of sale, as they say, in a different business. It's the point—they'll be able to look at that—you know, where the testing is taking place. We're going to help them with the testing. We've developed some tremendous tests over the last little while. And we're going to work with the States, and we're going to help them. But they know every inch of land in their States.

I watched the Governor of Arkansas, Asa. You saw that. He—I thought he was terrific. I watched the Governor of Oklahoma over the weekend being interviewed. He was terrific. They've done it a little bit differently. And they've done it tight, and they've done it strong, and they were very prepared, and they have more beds than they needed, and that's a good thing. But I've seen some very, very good things. And I think you're going to have some very positive events taking place over a very short period of time.

And I think, with that, we'll see you tomorrow. But really, this has been a situation where a lot of great people have been involved and a lot of great decisions have been made.

Thank you all very much. Thank you.

Q. Can I have one last question for you?

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:22 p.m. in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Andrés Manuel López Obrador of Mexico; Gov. John Bel Edwards of Louisiana; Gov. Ralph S. Northam of Virginia; Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi; Arthur B. Laffer, chief executive officer, founder, and chairman, Laffer Associates; Gov. W. Asa Hutchinson II of Arkansas; and Gov. Kevin Stitt of Oklahoma.

Reporters referred to Gov. Jay R. Inslee of Washington; and House Minority Leader Kevin O. McCarthy. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary included the entire briefing.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : White House Coronavirus Task Force Press briefings.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Birx, Deborah L.; Edwards, John Bel; Fauci, Anthony S.; Giroir, Brett P.; Hutchinson, W. Asa, II; Laffer, Arthur B.; López Obrador, Andrés Manuel; Murphy, Philip D.; Northam, Ralph S.; Obama, Barack; Pelosi, Nancy; Pence, Michael R.; Perdue, George E. "Sonny"; Redfield, Robert R.; Stitt, J. Kevin; Trump, Barron W.

Subjects: Abbott Laboratories; Agriculture : Farm subsidies; Agriculture, Department of : Secretary; Air Force, Department of the : U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, CO; Arkansas : Governor; Army, Department of the : U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Business and industry : Small businesses, promotion efforts; China : Coronavirus outbreak; China : Trade with U.S.; China : U.S. assistance; China : U.S. tariff structure, strengthening efforts; Civil rights : Firearm rights; Civil rights : Freedom of speech; Colorado : U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs; Communications : News media :: Accuracy and fairness; Communications : News media :: Presidential interviews; Congress : House of Representatives :: Speaker; Diseases : Coronavirus, domestic prevention efforts; Diseases : Coronavirus, domestic protection efforts; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : School closures due to coronavirus concerns; Elections : 2020 Presidential and congressional elections; Health and Human Services, Department of : Assistant Secretaries :: Health; Health and Human Services, Department of : Food and Drug Administration; Health and Human Services, Department of : National Institutes of Health; Health and Human Services, Department of : Strategic National Stockpile; Health and Human Services, Department of: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Health and medical care : Experimental drugs and therapies; Health and medical care : Health care workers, service and dedication; Health and medical care : Medical equipment and supplies; Health and medical care : Research and development; Homeland Security, Department of : Emergency Management Agency, Federal; Louisiana : Governor; Mexico : President; Mexico : U.S. assistance; Navy, Department of the : Naval hospital ships, deployment; New Jersey : Governor; Oklahoma : Governor; Small Business Administration; Taxation : Tax relief; Treasury, Department of the : Revenue Service, Internal; Virginia : Governor; White House Coronavirus Task Force; White House Office : Coronavirus Response Coordinator; White House Office : Vice President; World Health Organization.

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