

Remarks During an Update on the Nation's Coronavirus Testing Strategy
September 28, 2020

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you. So beautiful out here. And thank you for joining us as we announce a massive and groundbreaking expansion in our testing capability of the—for the China virus. And as you know, it's already setting records, records like nobody has ever seen before.

Last week, we crossed a historic milestone when the United States conducted our 100 millionth test, far more than any other country, and not even close, actually. Second seems to be India with 1.5 billion people, and the numbers would be probably at least 50 million more tests by us. We've conducted more tests than the entire European Union and more than all of Latin America combined.

We're thrilled to be joined by Vice President Mike Pence; Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar; Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos—hi, Betsy; Administrator for the Centers for Medicine and Medicaid Services Seema Verma—Seema; and Admiral Giroir, who's done such an incredible job. Thank you, Admiral.

We're also joined by Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves. Had a tremendous victory. We're so proud of you. And as well by Abbott CEO Robert Ford. Robert, thank you very much. Great job.

Today I'm pleased to report that we're announcing our plan to distribute 150 million Abbott rapid, point-of-care tests in the coming weeks, very, very soon. This will be more than double the number of tests already performed. And here's our plan: Fifty million tests will go to protect the most vulnerable communities, which we've always promised to do, including 18 million for nursing homes; 15 million for assisted living facilities; 10 million for home, health, and hospice care agencies; and nearly 1 million for Historically Black Colleges and Universities and also Tribal nation colleges.

One hundred million rapid point-of-care tests will be given to States and territories to support efforts to reopen their economies and schools immediately and fast as they can. For example, the support my administration is providing would allow every State to, on a very regular basis, test every teacher who needs it. This continues our critical effort to use testing to protect high-risk communities.

These new Abbott rapid point-of-care tests are easy to use and return results within just minutes. You'll have a result at a maximum 15 minutes. Machine—no machine is required to process them. So, in the old days, when we just started this, you remember we'd go out, and we'd have to find these massive laboratories with tremendously expensive equipment. Now we're down to something that you'll see that is really from a different planet.

I would like to ask Admiral Giroir to come up and demonstrate how these tests are performed. You'll do this very nicely, I think. Good luck. Hope you don't test positive. *[Laughter]*

Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services for Health Brett P. Giroir. So thank you, Mr. President. As of today the Nation has performed over 111 million tests for the virus causing COVID. On 13 separate days, we have achieved tests over 1 million per day, and our average test numbers are now approximately 920,000 per day.

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

Mr. President, we just completed a briefing to the Governors and their State health officials from the Sit Room, and we heard words like "game changer" for their States. Thank you, Mr. President, for your leadership and support of all our efforts to defeat this virus.

The President. Thank you very much, Admiral. And let me ask you, Governor Reeves, do you agree? Would you like to say something?

Governor Tate Reeves of Mississippi. Well, thank you, Mr. President, for your leadership through this pandemic and through this crisis. This is—it was said by Republicans and Democrats alike earlier—this is a game changer.

[Gov. Reeves continued his remarks, concluding as follows.]

And I want to personally thank you on behalf of the residents of Mississippi for doing this, Mr. President. Thank you.

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you, Tate. Great job.

In a short period of time, my administration has built the most advanced testing system in the world. There's never been anything like this. When the pandemic struck, there were zero tests for the China virus, but we've marshaled all of America's resources to achieve these unparalleled capabilities.

We slashed redtape and approved emergency use authorizations for 243 type of tests. That's how many tests we have. I invoked the Defense Production Act and related authorities more than 100 times and distributed \$171 million to expand testing production.

We've done nearly twice as much testing per capita as France, Italy, and Germany, and over six times more testing per capita than South Korea. We've done far more than any other country, usually times two, three, four, five, or six. We've performed nearly 40 million more tests than India.

And by the end of next month, we will have over 100 million tests available in the market. More than half will be point-of-care tests—those are the quick ones, and they're really the ones that have the best impact—with the results in less than 15 minutes.

We've also prioritized resources for the most vulnerable, including nursing home residents. We delivered rapid testing devices to nearly 14,000 certified nursing homes.

We opened over 1,000 community testing sites in low-income communities. Nobody could have done this. We invested an unprecedented \$8 billion to help Tribal communities have the tests and resources they need to combat the virus.

And it's important to remember that as younger and healthier people return to work, and as we massively increase testing capacity, we will identify more cases and asymptomatic individuals in low-risk populations. This should not cause undue alarm. The total number of cases is not the full metric of success. Hospitalization capacity and mortality rates are far more instructive metrics.

As we do more tests, you're going to have automatically more cases. We are relentlessly focused on protecting the vulnerable while enabling healthy Americans to go back to work. We can do both as Florida, Arizona, and other States have recently shown. Over the last 8 weeks, hospitalizations have declined by 48 percent, and they've just reached the lowest point since March. That's a long time ago.

Due to advances in treatment, the fatality rate has fallen 85 percent since April. Our excess mortality has been considerably lower than comparable countries. Excess mortality compares total deaths during a pandemic to what we would be expected in a normal year. This is a critical

measurement because it includes undetected China virus deaths, along with deaths resulting from lockdowns. And lockdowns can be very harmful, and we have too many States that are locked down right now. The Governors are—nobody knows what the Governors are doing, actually.

Europe has experienced a 50-percent greater excess mortality rate during the virus than the U.S., and their economic contraction has been far more severe. Under Operation Warp Speed, my administration is on track to deliver a safe and effective vaccine in record time. We're doing very well with the vaccines, as most of you know.

Four vaccines are now in the final stage of trials. The day the vaccine is approved by the FDA, we'll begin distributing it within 24 hours with hundreds of millions of doses to follow very quickly. We're all set to go. We're all ready. And logistically, we're—we have the military lined up, and some incredible people are just waiting to have it.

Over 100 million doses will be available before the end of the year. We will defeat the virus, and we will end the pandemic. And next year will be one of the greatest years in our history, and we think it's going to be a very exciting period of time.

With that, I'd like to ask Mike to say a few words, because you just left a Task Force meeting. Vice President Mike Pence.

Vice President Michael R. Pence. Thank you, Mr. President. This is a historic day. And other than the day that I believe will come soon, that America produces the first safe and effective vaccine, what's announced today with the distribution of 150 million rapid point-of-care tests all across America, it's a testament to your leadership, Mr. President; it's a testament to this great team that you've assembled from Secretary Azar, Admiral Giroir, and others; it's a testament to the partnership that we forged with Governors, like Governor Reeves, all across America.

[Vice President Pence continued his remarks, concluding as follows.]

So, Mr. President, with thanks to our industry partners, thanks to this team, but thanks to you for your strong leadership, I hope for that day. And the American people can be confident we will not rest, we will not relent, until we put this coronavirus in the past.

The President. Thank you very much, Mike.

Scott Atlas, would you say a few words, please, as to how we're doing and where you see us going? Please.

White House COVID-19 Pandemic Adviser Scott W. Atlas. Okay, thank you, Mr. President. And I also want to echo the congratulations to the team, the Task Force, Admiral Giroir, in particular, who's worked very hard on the testing.

This is a remarkable day, because we have state-of-the-art testing. This is not the typical point-of-care test, even; this is new. This is—does not require any kind of machine. It's very rapid. And this is not one of those deep swab things that people are reluctant to use. So I think we're really making an advance here to do what testing is supposed to do, and that's to save lives.

As the Vice President mentioned, we know that there are areas of the country that have more cases. This is to be expected with more social mingling. And the testing—but particularly protecting the vulnerable—is the key here. We have not seen hospital overcrowding. We're doubling down now with testing to protect vulnerable people not just inside nursing homes, but in residential settings and senior daycare centers.

This is a remarkable advance. And I anticipate that as this virus—as we get toward the end of this pandemic—and the vaccine is being developed as quickly as it has been—America will be in a different position. And there really should be—as I've said many times, the fear is not the

issue here. We really have a handle on what's going on. We know what to anticipate, and there's remarkable advances being made as we see today.

Thank you very much.

The President. Well, thank you very much. Tremendous progress is being made. And I say, and I'll say it all the time: We're rounding the corner. And, very importantly, vaccines are coming, but we're rounding the corner regardless. But vaccines are coming, and they're coming fast. We have four great companies already, and it's going to be added to very rapidly. They're in final stages of testing. And from what we're hearing, the results are going to be very extraordinary.

So thank you very much. I appreciate it. And thank you very much. Great job by Abbott. Right from the beginning, great job Abbott.

Thank you. Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:43 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.

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