

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2021

Remarks Announcing the National Strategy on COVID–19 and an Exchange With Reporters

January 21, 2021

The President. Hey, Doctor, how are you?

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Anthony S. Fauci. Mr. President, how are you?

The President. You're going to be doing a lot of talking to me, that's why.

Vice President Kamala D. Harris. Dr. Fauci, nice to see you.

Director Fauci. Nice to see you.

The President. Good afternoon. Before I begin with today's announcement, let me take a few moments to thank all the law enforcement folks for all they did, the military personnel, from all across the Federal, State, and local agencies that secured yesterday's Inaugural activities. And a special thanks to the members of the National Guard from around the country. It was an unprecedented situation; hopefully, it will never have to be renewed again. And everyone handled it with the most professionalism and duty and honor that could be expected. The President—as President, as Commander in Chief, I always respect and revere their service and that of their families.

But now, to today's announcement: Vice President Harris and I were joined by members of our COVID–19 team—response team—and Dr. Tony Fauci, our chief COVID medical adviser; Xavier Becerra—excuse me—our nominee for Secretary of Health and Human Services; Dr. Vivek Murthy, our nominee for Surgeon General; Dr. Rochelle Walensky—she's going to be the Director for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith, who will be leading our equity work in the COVID response; and Jeff Zients and Natalie Quillian, who are managing this whole effort.

Yesterday, during my Inaugural Address, I offered a salient prayer and a silent prayer—it was both salient and silent. I thought it was important that people understand what had happened, that we all pay tribute to the—our prayers for those 400,000 Americans who have lost their lives in this pandemic.

On Tuesday, Jill and I, and Kamala and Doug, we stood at the Reflecting Pool in front of the Lincoln Memorial and joined Americans all across the country to remember those 400,000 moms and dads, husbands and wives, children—sons, daughters. And I said at that moment that to heal, we must remember. To heal, we must remember. It's important to do that as a Nation. But we must also act, though, not just remember.

Yet, for the past year, we couldn't rely on the Federal Government to act with the urgency and focus and coordination we needed. And we have seen the tragic cost of that failure: 3,000 to 4,000 deaths per day. To date, more than 24 million Americans—24 million Americans—have been infected. To put that in context, America makes up 4 percent of the world's population, but 25 percent of the world's confirmed COVID–19 cases and nearly 20 percent of all the COVID–19 deaths, when we have 4 percent of the world's population.

The pandemically—the pandemic, excuse me, has disproportionately impacted on Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans, who are about four times as likely to be hospitalized and nearly three times more likely to die from the COVID–19 pandemic than White Americans.

Hospitals are out of beds. Businesses are closed for good. Schools are caught in between. And while the vaccines provide so much hope, the rollout has been a dismal failure thus far.

So I understand the despair and frustration of so many Americans and how they're feeling. I understand why many Governors, mayors, county officials, Tribal leaders feel like they're left on their own without a clear national plan to get them through the crisis.

Let me be very clear: Things are going to continue to get worse before they get better. The memorial we held 2 nights ago will not be our last one, unfortunately. The death toll will likely top 500,000 next month, and the cases will continue to mount. We didn't get into this mess overnight, and it's going to take months for us to turn things around.

But let me be equally clear: We will get through this. We will defeat this pandemic. And to a nation waiting for action, let me be the clearest on this point: Help is on the way.

Today—today—I am unveiling a national strategy on COVID-19 and executive actions to beat this pandemic. This plan reflects the ideas I set forward during the campaign and further refined over the past 3 months. It consists of my transition teams, the Task Force, Tony Fauci and the team here today, and other experts, who put this plan together.

Our national strategy is comprehensive. It's based on science, not politics. It's based on truth, not denial. And it's detailed. You can review this entire plan—this entire plan—by going to [whitehouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov). It is so detailed. It is over a hundred—it's 198 pages, and it's complete detail on what we're going to do.

Our plan starts with mounting an aggressive, safe, and effective vaccination campaign to meet our goal of administering 100 million shots in our first hundred days in office. We're on day one. This will be one of the greatest operational challenges our Nation has ever undertaken, and I'm committed to getting it done. We're committed to getting it done.

And I explained—as I explained last week, we'll move Heaven and Earth to get more people vaccinated for free and create more places for them to get vaccinated, to mobilize more medical teams to get shots in people's arms, and to increase vaccine supply and get it out the door as fast as possible.

Yesterday we got started. We directed the Federal Emergency Management Agency—FEMA—to start standing up the first federally supported community vaccination centers, with the goal of standing up 100 centers within the next month. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will launch the Federal pharmacy program to make vaccines available to communities and their local pharmacies beginning early—within—I think by the 7th or 8th of February, but in very early February.

We'll also task the Department of Health and Human Services to prepare and expand the pool of medical professionals who can administer the vaccine—who can administer the vaccine—and to ensure we have enough vaccinators—the people doing the vaccines—to meet the Nation's needs and quickly.

In addition to this effort, our administration will be asking Congress to fund—for the funds to grow the public health workforce. We also are going to take immediate steps to partner with Governors, mayors, and other local officials, who we've been talking to all along, who are on the frontlines of this fight.

We directed FEMA to establish a COVID response liaison for each State, which means every State will have a point person at the Federal level to maximize cooperation between the Federal Government and the States. And where it falls short, to be made known about it—to be made known immediately.

This is a model we used to respond to hurricanes—Hurricane Sandy, which I was deeply involved with. And in just a few moments, I'm going to sign a declaration to immediately begin reimbursing States 100 percent for the use of their national guards to help COVID relief efforts, something Democrats and Republican Governors alike have called for.

But the brutal truth is: It's going to take months before we can get the majority of Americans vaccinated. So while we increase vaccinations, we're going to take steps necessary now to slow the spread of the disease as well.

One of our 100-day challenges is asking the American people to mask up for the first 100 days—the next 99 days. The masks have become a partisan issue, unfortunately, but it's a patriotic act. But for a few months, to wear a mask—no vaccines—the fact is that they're the single best thing we can do. They're even more important than the vaccines—because they take time to work.

And if we do this as Americans, the experts say, by wearing a mask from now until April, we'd save more than 50,000 lives going forward. Fifty thousand lives. So I'm asking every American to mask up for the next hundred days.

Yesterday I signed an executive action that requires masks and social distancing on Federal property. Today we'll be signing an additional executive action to extend masking requirements on interstate travel, like on trains, planes, and buses. And in light of the new COVID variants that we're—you're learning about, we are instituting now a new measure for individuals flying into the United States from other countries.

In addition to wearing masks, everyone flying to the United States from another country will need to test before they get on that plane, before they depart, and quarantine when they arrive in America.

Our national plan launches a full-scale wartime effort to address the supply shortages by ramping up production and protective equipment—syringes, needles—you name it. And when I say "wartime," people kind of look at me, like, "Wartime?" Well, as I said last night, 400,000 Americans have died. That's more than have died in all of World War II. Four hundred thousand. And this is a wartime undertaking.

Today I'm signing an executive action to use the Defense Production Act and all other available authorities to direct all Federal agencies and private industry to accelerate the making of everything that's needed to protect, test, vaccinate, and take care of our people. We're—we've already identified suppliers, and we're working with them on—to move a plan forward.

Now, look, our strategy includes a plan to safely reopen schools and businesses, while protecting our workers. Today we're directing the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services to immediately provide schools and communities with clear guidance and resources to safely reopen the schools and childcare centers.

We're putting—and by the way, when you do that, think of all of the people who can get back to work, who will be able to get back to work—all the mothers and single fathers that are staying home, taking care of their children.

We're going to put the full force of the Federal Government behind expanding testing by launching a COVID-19 Pandemic Testing Board. This effort will ensure that we get testing to where it is needed and where it's needed most, helping schools and businesses reopen safely, and protecting the most vulnerable, like those who live in long-term care facilities.

And for the millions of workers—many of whom are people of color, immigrants, and low-wage workers—who continue to put their lives on the line to keep this country going through the

pandemic, I am calling for the enforcement of more stringent worker safety standards so that you are better protected from this virus while you have to continue to work to protect the rest of us.

Our plan also protects those most at risk and works for everyone of all races and in urban and rural communities alike.

Today I'm formalizing the Health Equity Task Force that we announced in the transition, led by the brilliant Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith, who ensures that—is going to ensure that equality is at the core of every decision we make. That includes addressing vaccine hesitancy and building trust in communities, as well as fighting disinformation campaigns that are already underway.

Above all, our plan is to restore public trust. We will make sure that science and public experts—scientists and public health experts will speak directly to you. That's why you're going to be hearing a lot more from Dr. Fauci again—and not from the President, but from the real genuine experts and scientists.

We're going to make sure they work free from political interference, and that they make decisions strictly based on science and health care alone—science and health alone, not what the political consequences are.

Vice President Harris and I and our entire administration will always be honest and transparent with you about both the good news and the bad. We will level with you when we make a mistake. We'll straight up say what happened. And I said at the outset: The honest truth is we're still in a dark winter of this pandemic. It's going to get worse before it gets better. It's going to take many months to get where we need to be.

Progress from our plan will take time to measure, as people getting infected today—they don't show up in case counts for weeks, and those who perish from the disease die weeks after their exposure. Despite the best intentions, we're going to face setbacks, which I will always explain to you.

But I also know: We can do this if we come together. That's why, ultimately, our plan is based on unity and all of us acting as one Nation. It requires families and neighbors looking out for one another; health care providers, and businesses, and civic and religious and civil rights organizations, and unions all relying together on a common purpose, with urgency and purpose and resolve.

It requires reasserting our global leadership, which is why I took an action yesterday for the United States to rejoin the World Health Organization and to reestablish our Global Pandemic Office in the National Security Council.

It requires Congress coming together to provide the necessary funding in the COVID-relief package and the American Rescue Plan that I will soon be sending to the Congress. I know these bold, practical steps will not come cheaply, but failing to do so will cost us so much more dearly. I look forward to working with Members of both parties in the Congress. We're in a national emergency, and it's time we treat it like one—together, with a national plan, as the United States of America.

As I said yesterday in my Inaugural Address, there are moments in history when more is asked of a particular generation, more is asked of us as Americans than other times. We are in that moment now. History is going to measure whether we were up to the task. I believe we are. The American people have given so much already, but I believe they're ready to set big goals and pursue them with courage, conviction, and honesty because the health of the Nation is literally at stake. It's not hyperbole.

I'm convinced the American people are ready, as well, to spare no effort, no expense to get this done. What could be more important? The more people we vaccinate and the faster we do it,

the sooner we can put this pandemic behind us and the sooner we can build our economy back and build it back better and get back to our lives and to our loved ones.

We can do this. We can do this if we stand together as fellow Americans, as the—and as the United States of America.

So God bless those lost souls in this pandemic and their families, all they've left behind. May God bless all of you on the frontlines who define the best of who we are as Americans.

Thank you very much. Now I'm going to go over to this desk and sign these executive actions. But again, this is the plan. This is the plan. You can go online and get it. I know it's a lot of heavy reading, but it's all laid out in stark detail here.

Thank you.

This Executive order I'm signing is strengthening the supply chain.

[At this point, the President signed an Executive order titled "Sustainable Public Health Supply Chain."]

This next one is keeping workers safe, how to do that.

[The President signed an Executive order titled "Protecting Worker Health and Safety."]

This next one is ensuring equitable response.

[The President signed an Executive order titled "Ensuring an Equitable Pandemic Response and Recovery."]

I guess I should take these out this way, huh? The pens are going to pop on me. *[Laughter]* Can you give me a hand here? There you go.

This next one is what I referenced about traveling to America. This is the promoting safe travel.

[The President signed an Executive order titled "Promoting COVID-19 Safety in Domestic and International Travel."]

This next one is setting up the Pandemic Testing Board.

[The President signed an Executive order titled "Establishing the COVID-19 Pandemic Testing Board and Ensuring a Sustainable Public Health Workforce for COVID-19 and Other Biological Threats." An aide then retrieved the signed document.]

Thank you. This next one is studying the safe schools initiative.

[The President signed an Executive order titled "Supporting the Reopening and Continuing Operation of Schools and Early Childhood Education Providers."]

This next one is dictating the COVID data that has to be maintained and recorded.

[The President signed an Executive order titled "Ensuring a Data-Driven Response to COVID-19 and Future High-Consequence Public Health Threats."]

The next one is making sure that the National Guard and FEMA support is available.

[The President signed a memorandum to extend Federal support to Governors' use of the National Guard to respond to COVID-19 and to increase reimbursement and other assistance provided to States.]

The next one relates to expanding access to care and treatment for COVID-19.

[The President signed an Executive order titled "Improving and Expanding Access to Care and Treatments for COVID-19."]

And the last one is our global response directive.

[The President signed a national security directive on United States global leadership to strengthen the international COVID-19 response and to advance global health security and biological preparedness.]

Coronavirus Vaccination Efforts

Q. Mr. President, you set the goal at 100 million vaccines in your first hundred days. Is that high enough? Shouldn't you set the bar higher? That's basically where the U.S. is right now.

The President. When I announced it, you all said, "It's not possible." Come on, give me a break, man, will you? But it's a good start. One hundred million. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:47 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Counselor to the President Jeffrey D. Zients, in his capacity as White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator; Deputy Coordinator Natalie Quillian; and Douglas C. Emhoff, husband of Vice President Harris.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : COVID-19 National Strategy; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Becerra, Xavier; Biden, Jill T.; Emhoff, Douglas C.; Fauci, Anthony S.; Harris, Kamala D.; Murthy, Vivek H.; Nunez-Smith, Marcella; Quillian, Natalie; Walensky, Rochelle; Zients, Jeffrey D.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : National Guard; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Defense Production Act of 1950, executive authorities; Diseases : Coronavirus, domestic prevention efforts; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Schools, efforts to reopen; Health and Human Services, Department of : National Institutes of Health; Health and Human Services, Department of: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Health and medical care : Medical equipment and supplies; Homeland Security, Department of : Emergency Management Agency, Federal; Law enforcement and crime : Law enforcement officers, service and dedication; Law enforcement and crime : Nationwide civil unrest and violence; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Counselor; White House Office : Security Council, National; White House Office : Vice President; World Health Organization.

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