

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2021

Remarks on the COVID-19 Response and National Vaccination Efforts and an Exchange With Reporters

August 3, 2021

The President. Good afternoon.

Last week, I laid out what we need to do to beat the COVID-19 virus—pandemic and the challenges posed by the Delta variant.

This is a very different variant than what we've dealt with previously. It's highly transmissible, and it's causing a new wave of cases. It accounts for over 80 percent of all COVID-19 cases in the United States today. Experts tell us that we're going to see these cases rise in the weeks ahead, a largely preventable tragedy that will get worse before it gets better.

What's different about this surge from previous ones is, we have the tools to prevent this rise in cases from shutting down our businesses, our schools, our society as we saw—what happened last year. And while cases are on the rise, it's important to note we've not seen a comparable rise in hospitalizations or deaths in most areas of the country.

That's because 165 million Americans are fully vaccinated, including 80 percent of the most vulnerable Americans—our seniors. The best line of defense against the Delta—the virus is the vaccine. It's as simple as that. Period. The vaccine. I want to be crystal clear about what's happening in the country today: We have a pandemic of the unvaccinated.

Now, I know there's a lot of misinformation out there, so here are the facts: If you're vaccinated, you are highly unlikely to get COVID-19. And even if you do, the chances are you won't show any symptoms; and if you do, they'll most likely be very mild.

Vaccinated people almost never are hospitalized with COVID-19. In fact, according to one recent study, 95 percent of overall COVID-19 hospitalizations are among those not fully vaccinated. And the data shows that virtually all the cases, hospitalizations, and deaths due to COVID-19 are from the unvaccinated population.

Last month, a study showed that over 99 percent of COVID-19 deaths have among—have been among the unvaccinated people. Ninety-nine percent. That means, if you're unvaccinated, you are much more likely to, one, get COVID-19; two, get hospitalized; and, three, die if you get it.

This is a tragedy. People are dying and will die who don't have to die. The data is absolutely clear: As I've said, we have a pandemic of the unvaccinated.

Think of it this way: A hundred and ninety-one million Americans have gotten at least one shot, including 70 percent of adults over the age of 18. A hundred and sixty-five million Americans are fully vaccinated, but about ninety million Americans are eligible for vaccines and still haven't gotten their first shot.

You know, I think there's a clear link between the lowest vaccinated—I know—I don't think, actually—the lowest vaccinated States and the States with the highest case rates.

This past week, the most vaccinated State in America, Vermont, has seen just five new cases—five—per day of COVID-19 for every 100,000 people who live in that State. That means, on any given day, only 30 people in the entire State of Vermont got COVID-19. Nearby Maine, which has vaccinated almost 80 percent of their adults, has seen just six new cases per 100,000.

But the States with the lowest vaccination rates are seeing 10 to 20 times as many new cases per 100,000 people. It's moving like wildfire through the unvaccinated community. And it's heartbreaking, particularly because it's preventable.

That's why we're doing everything we can to get more people vaccinated. And we're seeing real results. In the past 2 weeks, we have seen a 55-percent increase in the average number of new people getting vaccinated every day. In the last 7 days alone, nearly 3 million Americans have gotten their first shot. That's the highest 7-day total in a month.

Importantly, over the past 2 weeks, the eight States with the highest current case rates have seen a doubling of the number of people newly vaccinated each day. The message is getting through, apparently.

Louisiana has seen a 212 percent increase in the average number of newly vaccinated people in that State per day, going from 3,600 to over 11,000 people vaccinated per day. Arkansas is up 99 percent. Mississippi is up 125 percent. Alabama is up 186 percent, going from 3,200 to 9,150 people vaccinated per day. This will make a big difference.

These are encouraging signs. We have to continue our aggressive efforts to vaccinate the unvaccinated. Last week, I announced additional steps to incentivize Americans to get vaccinated, including calling on States to offer \$100 for anyone willing to step up and get a vaccination shot. You know, and already Minnesota and New Mexico have done that. And North Carolina announced its hundred-day incentive—its \$100 incentive today.

Places that have offered the hundred thousand—the hundred thousand dollars—[*laughter*]
the hundred dollars—that'd be really good. I'd go back and get vaccinated three times. [*Laughter*]
But all kidding aside, offered the \$100 to get vaccination have seen an uptick of 25 percent of daily vaccination rates.

We also announced that small and medium-sized businesses will be fully reimbursed for offering paid time off for their employees to get vaccinated and for them to take a child or a parent to get vaccinated.

And I announced some tough, sometimes unpopular steps to keep people safe and our economy strong. All Federal workers must report their vaccination status or be subject to strict requirements. Any Federal worker who does not attest to their vaccination status or is not vaccinated will be required to mask no matter where they work, test once to twice a week, socially distance, and generally will not be allowed to travel for work.

I directed my administration to take steps to apply similar standards to all Federal contractors. If you want to do business with the Federal Government, get your workers vaccinated.

And I also directed the Pentagon to look at adding COVID-19 to the list of vaccinations that are required for our troops, because others are required. I approved the Department of Veterans Affairs to require doctors, nurses, and other health care workers who care for our veterans to be vaccinated.

And the good news is that now many are following the Federal Government's lead. In the past several days, States and local officials have come out to impose similar vaccination mandates.

And the private sector is stepping up as well. Even Fox has vaccination requirements. I want to thank Walmart, Google, Netflix, Disney, Tyson Foods for their recent actions requiring vaccination for employees. Look, I know this isn't easy, but I will have their backs and the backs of other private and public sector leaders if they take such steps.

But others have declined to step up. I find it disappointing. And worst of all, some State officials are passing laws or signing orders that forbid people from doing the right thing. As of now, seven States not only ban mask mandates, but also ban them in their school districts, even for young children who cannot get vaccinated. Some States have even banned businesses and universities from requiring workers and students to be masked or vaccinated.

And the most extreme of those measures is like the one in Texas that say State universities or community colleges could be fined if it allows a teacher to ask her unvaccinated students to wear a mask.

What are we doing? COVID-19 is a national challenge, and we must come together—we have to come together—all of us together, as a country, to solve it.

Make no mistake: The—the excuse me—the escalation of cases is particularly concentrated in States with low vaccination rates. Just two States, Florida and Texas, account for one third of all new COVID-19 cases in the entire country. Just two States.

Look, we need leadership from everyone. And if some Governors aren't willing to do the right thing to beat this pandemic, then they should allow businesses and universities who want to do the right thing to be able to do it. I say to these Governors, "Please, help." But if you aren't going to help, at least get out of the way of the people who are trying to do the right thing. Use your power to save lives.

I've made it our first and top priority to have a vaccine available for every single American from the day I got elected. That was my priority. And let me be clear: We have a supply for every single American, and that will never change.

At the same time, it's also in our national interest to share some of our vaccines with the world, which gets me to the second thing I want to discuss today. From the beginning of my Presidency, I've been very clear eyed that we need to attack this virus globally, not just at home, because it's in America's self-interest to do so.

The virus knows no boundaries. You can't build a wall high enough to keep it out. There is no wall high enough or ocean wide enough to keep us safe from a vaccination in other—from the COVID-19 in other countries.

In fact, just like the original virus that caused COVID-19, the Delta variant came from abroad. As long as the virus continues to rage outside the United States, potentially more dangerous variants could arrive at our shores again.

And we know that COVID-19 in other countries stifles economic growth, disrupts supply chains, risks instability and weakness of governments. And as we've seen in the United States, the key to growing economies is to vaccinate people. So just as the American economy is recovering, it's in all of our interests to have global—the global economy begin to recover as well.

This is about our values. We value inherent dignity of all people—the inherent dignity of everyone. In times of trouble, Americans reach out to offer a helping hand. That's who we are. And I've said before: In this fight against COVID-19, the United States is committed to be the arsenal of vaccines, just as we were the arsenal of democracy during World War II.

And we're backing up that commitment. We have contributed more than any other nation to COVAX, the collective global efforts delivering COVID-19 vaccines across the world. We have supported manufacturing efforts abroad through our partnerships with Japan, India, Australia, known as "the Quad."

During my trip to Europe in June, I announced that the United States would purchase a groundbreaking 500 million doses of Pfizer and then donate them—those doses—nearly—to

nearly a hundred low- and middle-income countries who don't have the vaccine. Those doses will start to ship at the end of this month. We also announced that we'd donate 80 million doses of our own vaccine to supply the world, which has already begun.

And today I have an important update. We've already exceeded 80 million doses that have been—gone out. As of today, the United States has shipped over 110 million doses of U.S. vaccines to 65 countries that are among the hardest hit in the world. Let me say it again: As of today, we have shipped over 110 million doses to 65 nations.

According to the United Nations, this is more than the donations of all 24 countries that have donated any vaccine to other countries, including China and Russia—all those nations combined. These vaccine donations from America are free. We're not selling them.

There are no demands, no conditions, no coercion attached. And there is no favoritism and no strings attached. We're doing this to save lives and to end this pandemic. That's it. In fact, we're donating vaccines to countries that have real issues—we have real issues with.

And we'll continue to give tens of millions of the doses away across the summer and work to increase U.S. manufacturing and manufacturing of vaccines around the world as well.

And it's not just vaccines. We are continuing to provide countries with—in need—with more testing, protective equipment, and personnel to stem the surge of the virus. We've done it in India and elsewhere.

Let me close with this. I've said before: In the race for the 21st century between democracies and autocracies, we need to prove that democracies can deliver.

And the democracies of the world are looking to America to lead again in two ways: first, to demonstrate we can control this virus at home; and second, to show we can help address it around the world.

Vaccinate America and help vaccinate the world, that's how we're about to beat this thing. We're always going to have enough doses for every American who wants one. Our work in donating vaccines to the world is about America following through on our promises and delivering what we say we'll deliver.

It's showing how American science and technology, American businesses and academia, and our Government can all work together. Above all, it's proving democracies can deliver and, yet again, that America is back leading the world—not by the example of our power, but by the power of our example.

We still have a lot of work to do. So if you're unvaccinated, please, please, please get the shot.

But just don't take it from me. Just read the news. Listen to the voices of the unvaccinated patients in the hospital. They are spending [sending]* the most powerful message to their families and everyone around the world—a powerful message to everybody. As they're lying in bed, many dying from COVID-19, they're asking, "Doc, can I get the vaccine?" The doctors have to look them in the eye and say: "No, sorry. It's too late."

Right now too many people are dying or watching a loved one dying and saying, "If I just got vaccinated. If I just"—folks, this is isn't about politics. The virus doesn't care if you're a Democrat or a Republican. This is about life and death. Life and death.

I can't say it any more plainly than this: The vaccine saves lives, and it could save yours or your child's.

* White House correction.

You know, I know we can do this. We're the United States of America. We're prepared like never before. We have the tools and the resources to save lives at home and around the world.

This is who we are. This is what we do. This is why there's no nation like us on Earth.

God bless you all, and may God protect our troops.

And I'll take a few questions.

Q. Mr. President——

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo of New York

Q. Mr. President, I have a question for you on coronavirus, but first I'd like to start with the news of the day, given, back in March, you said that if the investigation confirmed the allegations against Governor Cuomo, then he should resign. So will you now call on him to resign, given the investigators said the 11 women were credible?

The President. I stand by that statement.

Q. Are you now calling on him to resign?

The President. Yes.

Q. And if he doesn't resign, do you believe he should be impeached and removed from office?

The President. Let's take one thing at a time here. I think he should resign.

Q. Do you think——

The President. I understand that the State legislature may decide to impeach. I don't know that for a fact; I've not read all that data.

Q. And he's using a photo of you embracing him in his self-defense to say that these are commonplace kind of embraces that he made in the allegations against him. Do you condone that?

The President. Look, I'm not going to flyspeck this. I'm sure there are some embraces that were totally innocent, but apparently, the attorney general decided there were things that weren't.

Eviction Moratorium/Centers of Disease Control and Prevention

Q. And on coronavirus, if I could ask you a question about the evictions.

The President. [Laughter] Why don't you come up and take the platform?

Q. [Laughter] No, thank you. On the evictions and the moratorium that lapsed on Saturday night: What is your strategy to prevent potentially millions of people from being evicted from their homes, given what we are told your administration is considering—a targeted moratorium—is likely to face legal challenges?

The President. Any call for a moratorium based on the Supreme Court recent decision is likely to face obstacles. I've indicated to the CDC I'd like them to look at other alternatives than the one that is in power—in existence, which the Court has declared they're not going to allow to continue. And the CDC will have something to announce to you in the next hour to 2 hours.

Q. Thank you.

Global Coronavirus Vaccine Distribution/U.S. Contribution to Global Vaccination Effort

Q. President Biden, on overseas coronavirus vaccines: Should other high-income countries follow the lead of the United States and increase donations to low- and middle-income countries?

The President. I think those countries that have been able to cover their population and have the ability to provide either dollars and/or vaccine for the 100 or so poor nations that need help should do so. We had that discussion at the G-7. A number of those countries said they were going to do that. Some have followed through.

The point I was making is, though, I've kept the commitment—we've kept the commitment—that we would do what we said, which is more than all the rest of the countries combined thus far.

Coronavirus Prevention Efforts

Q. Mr. President, do you believe that Governor DeSantis and Governor Abbott are personally making decisions that are harming their own citizens?

The President. I believe the results of their decisions are not good for their constituents. And it's clear to me and to most of the medical experts that the decisions being made, like not allowing mask mandates in school and the like, are bad health policy—bad health policy.

Mexico-U.S. Border Security/Unaccompanied Minors at the Southern Border

Q. Mr. President, I have a question about something that you just said.

The President. I'm sure you do.

Q. [Laughter] Thank you. You just said there is no wall high enough and no ocean wide enough to protect us from the virus. So what is the thinking behind letting untested and unvaccinated migrants cross the southern border into U.S. cities in record numbers?

The President. There is—what we're doing—we have not withdrawn the order that is sometimes critical—criticized—saying that unvaccinated people should be—go back across the border.

But unaccompanied children is a different story, because there's—that's the most humane thing to do is to test them and to treat them and not send them back alone.

Q. And the follow-up would be that——

Q. Mr. President——

Q. Mr. President——

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo of New York

Q. Mr. President, have you spoken with Governor Cuomo today?

The President. I have not.

Coronavirus Vaccine Verification Requirements

Q. And then, one other question on the virus. You just said we have to continue our aggressive efforts to get the unvaccinated vaccinated. Other countries have found a lot of success in requiring vaccines in public places. New York City just announced today that they'll require vaccines for restaurants and gyms. Do you think more cities and States should institute rules like that?

The President. I do.

Q. And are you going to publicly call on them? Should they institute a vaccine passport-type system, or it's up to each city and State to figure that out on their own?

The President. I'm sorry. What did you say?

Q. Do you think that they should institute a vaccine passport-type system or some sort of verification to use public spaces?

The President. I don't think they need to do that. I think they just need to give the authority of those restaurants or businesses to say, "In order to come in, you have to give proof that you've been vaccinated or you can't come in."

I'll take a couple more questions.

Q. Mr. President——

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo of New York

Q. Mr. President can I ask you about news of the day, one more on Governor Cuomo? You're calling for him to resign now. My question is: Do you think he should be prosecuted? And what is your message to the women who have now accused him of sexually harassing them and abusing them?

The President. Look, what I said was: If the investigation of the attorney general concluded that the allegations were correct, that—back in March—that I would recommend he resign. That's what I'm doing today. I've not read the report. I don't know the detail of it. All I know is the end result.

Q. So, Mr. President——

Q. A follow-up on COVID, sir——

Legal Restrictions on the Eviction Moratorium/Federal Assistance to State and Local Governments

Q. Mr. President, a question on COVID, if I could, really quickly. It's the eviction moratorium. Can you explain a little bit more why it took so long to have a possible eviction moratorium be put into place? There was—there are people—this expired on Saturday. I'm wondering—there are folks who are saying it took too long for this to happen.

The President. Well, look, the Court's made it clear that the existing moratorium was not constitutional; it wouldn't stand. And they made that clear back in, I guess, July 15 or July 18.

In the meantime, what I've been pushing for and calling for is we have billions of dollars that were given to States to provide for rent and utilities for those people who can't afford to stay in their homes because they can't—an apartment—they can't pay their rent. And so we're urging them to distribute those funds to the landlords. I believe that would take care of the vast majority of what needs to be done to keep people in their—in their home—in their apartments now.

And so that's what we're working on. Some States have done it, and some communities have, but they have not. The money is there. It's not—we don't have to send it out. It's been sent out to the States and counties—billions of dollars—for the express purpose of providing for back-rent and rent for the people who are in the middle of this crisis. And that's there; that's what we're pushing now. And we've been pushing that. That's the immediate thing to do.

I'll take one more question.

Q. Mr. President, Mr. President——

Q. Mr. President——

U.S. Delegation to Brazil/Global Coronavirus Vaccine Distribution/U.S. Contribution to Global Vaccination Effort

Q. Mr. President, thank you so much. There was an expectation that you would be announcing new vaccines to the world today—a new—other than the ones you promised. Are you ready to send more vaccines to the world?

And there is a delegation from the White House going to Brazil tomorrow. Are they bringing more vaccines? Are they announcing more vaccines to Brazil?

The President. No—are they announcing more vaccines overall?

Q. Overall. And then, to Brazil—for the delegation coming to Brazil tomorrow—will you be bringing vaccines?

The President. The answer is: I don't know whether the delegation going physically has vaccines with them. We have provided vaccines to——

Q. Well, no. Are they bringing the announcement? Are they announcing there?

The President. Well, no, there's a need for several billion doses around the world. We have committed to over a half a billion doses. And we're trying to provide for more and provide for the capacity of countries like India to be able to produce the vaccine themselves. And we're helping them do that. That's what we're doing now.

And we're trying to—we're—and by the way, it's free. We're not charging anybody anything. And we're trying to do as much as we possibly can.

Thank you all very much.

Q. Sir, a quick one on COVID, sir, what else is on the table——

Q. [*Inaudible*]—on the Government?

Legal Restrictions on the Eviction Moratorium/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Federal Assistance to State and Local Governments

Q. Mr. President, we're learning that your administration is about to announce a new partial eviction moratorium, COVID related. Can you tell us any more about that? And are you sure it's going to pass Supreme Court muster?

The President. The answer is twofold. One, I've sought out constitutional scholars to determine what is the best possibility that would come from executive action, or the CDC's judgment, what could they do that was most likely to pass muster, constitutionally.

The bulk of the constitutional scholarship says that it's not likely to pass constitutional muster. Number one. But there are several key scholars who think that it may and it's worth the effort. But the present—you could not—the Court has already ruled on the present eviction moratorium.

So I think what you're going to see, and I—look, I want to make it clear: I told you I would not tell the Justice Department or the medical experts, the scientists what they should say or do. So I don't want to get ahead.

The CDC has to make the—I asked the CDC to go back and consider other options that may be available to them. You're going to hear from them what those other options are.

I have been informed they're about to make a judgment as to potential other options. Whether that option will pass constitutional measure with this administration, I can't tell you. I don't know. There are a few scholars who say it will, and others who say it's not likely to.

But, at a minimum, by the time it gets litigated, it will probably give some additional time while we're getting that \$45 billion out to people who are, in fact, behind in the rent and don't

have the money. That's why it was passed in the act that we passed in the beginning of my administration, and it went to the States.

We were under the impression that the States were moving this money out relatively rapidly. So, for example, if I'm in an apartment—if you're in an apartment, and you're behind on 4 or 5 months' rent, and let's say your rent is \$2,000 a month—I'm just making this up out of the blue—and you're behind, you need \$10,000 to catch up. Hardly anybody has that \$10,000. But there is money that the States have that can give to the landlord that \$10,000, to the back-rent.

The future rent, it's unlikely—at least the hope is, since they have been made whole to that point—that they'd be inclined—because the economy is growing—inclined not to throw someone out in the street; keep that person—no guarantee—keep that person in the apartment, keep these kids in the same school district, and count on being able to have the opportunity for that person to be able, who may now be employed, to pay their rent.

But, in the meantime, I've asked, isn't there any safety valve we can put in? And it's the one I explained to you. Again, CDC will announce that and the details of exactly how it works. I'm not telling—I told them I want them to take a look. I didn't tell them what they had to do.

And my hope is, it's going to be a new moratorium that in some way—and I'm not going to announce it now; I'll let them announce it—in some way covers close to 90 percent of the American people who are renters. And so that's all I can tell you now.

Thank you very much.

Q. Why not a hundred percent? What's the difference?

The President. Because it's a—[*laughter*]. Let them explain that to you. Okay? I don't want to get too far ahead.

Thank you.

Q. Mr. President, is COVAX doing enough to get shots in arms?

Coronavirus Prevention Efforts

Q. Why not call Governor DeSantis, Mr. President?

The President. [*Laughter*] To say "happy birthday"? What? I mean——

Q. To deliver the message that you seem to be delivering today about "get out of the way."

The President. He knows the message. He knows the message. We had a little discussion when I was down there. He knows the message.

Q. What did he say to you in that discussion?

The President. [*Laughter*] See you all later.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:29 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to New York State Attorney General Letitia James; Gov. Ronald D. DeSantis of Florida; and Gov. Gregory W. Abbott of Texas.

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