

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2021

Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a CNN Presidential Town Hall in Baltimore, Maryland

October 21, 2021

CNN Anchor Anderson Cooper. So, with that, I want to welcome the 46th President of the United States, President Joe Biden. How are you, sir? So there's a lot to get to tonight, and we've got a lot of great questions from our audience. We want to get into the details of what you're calling the Build Back Better plan.

Before we get into that though, I just want to know—there's been a lot of negotiating going on behind the scenes, as I'm sure you are very involved with. *[Laughter]* Are you close to a done deal?

The President's Legislative Agenda

The President. No problems. It's all done. *[Laughter]*

No, look, Anderson, we've been—I've probably spent, well, well over a hundred hours. This is a big deal. We're both have—we have two plans: one is the infrastructure plan—roads, highways, bridges, buses, trains, et cetera—and the other one is what I call the "care economy". It has a lot of money in there for environmental remediation as well as care economy. For example, you know, we want to get the economy moving, but millions of women can't go to work because they don't have any childcare. That kind of thing.

So there's a lot of pieces in there. There's a lot that people don't understand. And by the way, all of it's paid for, every single penny. It's not going to raise one single cent to the debt.

Mr. Cooper. We're going to get into a lot of those details. Just, though, are you close to a deal?

The President. I think so. You know, look, I've been—I was a Senator for 370 years. *[Laughter]* And I was never—I was relatively good at putting together deals.

Gun Control Legislation

Mr. Cooper. Is this the toughest deal you've worked on?

The President. No. No. I think banning assault weapons was the toughest deal I worked on—and succeeded.

Mr. Cooper. You're flying to Europe, I think, in 8 days.

The President. Yes.

The President's Economic Plan/Bipartisanship

Mr. Cooper. Do you think you'll have a deal by the time you get on Air Force One in 8 days?

The President. Well, look, you know, it's like my asking you, "Are you sure your next show is going to be a success?" Right? You know.

Mr. Cooper. Yes. *[Laughter]*

The President. Well, you're more confident than I am. *[Laughter]* Look—hey, look, it's all about compromise. You know, "compromise" has become a dirty word, but it's—bipartisanship and compromise still has to be possible.

When I ran for the Presidency, I said I'm running for three reasons: one, to restore the soul and decency in the country; two, to build the middle class and the working class so they were—we build from the middle out; and three, to actually unite the country. And everybody has been saying: "Well, that's crazy. You can't do it." If we can't eventually unite this country, we're in deep trouble.

Mr. Cooper. Bottom line: Do you think you will get a deal?

The President. I do think I'll get a deal.

Mr. Cooper. All right, let's get some—let's go to the audience. This is Nicholas Vaught. He's the coordinator at the Applied Liberal Studies Program at Morgan State University. He's a Democrat.

Nicholas, your question.

The President. Morgan State.

Child and Dependent Care Assistance/Child Tax Credit

Q. Morgan State.

The President. All right, man. I've spoken there.

Q. Yes. So my wife and I have two young boys, Arthur and Teddy. However, the cost of childcare is nearly double our mortgage. We want to have more children, but even though we earn a good salary now, childcare is so expensive. So how will this new infrastructure plan help middle class families pay for childcare?

The President. Well, let me ask you: Do you have—how old are your kids?

Q. Three and a half and six months old.

The President. God love you. *[Laughter]*

Well, look, there's two pieces. There's the childcare—having someone take care of your child while you are working, while you and your wife are working. Under this proposal I have, no one will have to pay—unless you're making more than—individually, you're each making—making over 300 grand—\$150,000 apiece.

Q. We're educators.

The President. Oh, good. *[Laughter]* And by the way, I'm married to one: Dr. Biden, right here.

So you will not have to pay more than 7 percent of your income for childcare—7 percent. And the way we do that is, we provide for the ability to have childcare centers funded. The money won't even go—you don't—the—figure your income; you get 7 percent with the total cost.

But there's another piece here: You now are qualified to be able to have a child tax credit. It used to be that when you—you know, when you—if you were—had enough money to pay significant taxes, you could write off 2,000 bucks for every child you had and reduce it from your taxes. But if you were making 60,000 bucks a year and you didn't have that much to write off, you didn't get anything.

Well, I call this a tax—break for middle-class people. If you're making in the \$150,000 range right now, you're in a situation where you can get, if you have a child under 7, \$350; if you have a child over 7, between 7 and 17, you can get \$300. And you get a direct payment. You can—the IRS sends you money.

Child Tax Credit

Mr. Cooper. The—Joe Manchin wants a work requirement with your enhanced tax credit for kids. Is that something you would support?

The President. No. Here's the deal: All these people are working anyway.

And by the way, you know, why should somebody who is not working and has—you know, makes—has a million-dollar trust fund, why should they get the benefit, and someone making 60 grand and not working, but staying home, why should they not get anything? I don't get that.

Mr. Cooper. You're also proposing, for the first time ever, Federal paid parental leave. And——

The President. Yes. That's a different issue. Yes.

Paid Family Leave

Mr. Cooper. Right. A different issue. Right. But this is—but this is in your proposal. How much time off would parents actually get under your proposal? Because at one point, you talked about 12 weeks. Now there's reports it's down to maybe 4 weeks.

The President. Yes, it is down to 4 weeks. And the reason it's down to 4 weeks is, I can't get 12 weeks. *[Laughter]*

And—but look, here's the deal, guys: How many people do you know—not a joke—or maybe yourself—have had a circumstance where you are working like the devil, you're making 7 bucks an hour, 15 bucks an hour, or 20 bucks an hour, and you have a child that's sick at home—or you have a mother or a father, husband and wife, son or daughter, and you need to stay home to help them?

We're one of the few industrial countries in the world that doesn't have paid leave—so that when you stay home to help that person, to take care of that person, you're still getting your pay. And it does not hurt the business at all. The business isn't paying for it; the Federal Government is paying for it. It's a little bit like, as I said, a tax cut for people who are not able to otherwise take care of their families.

And look, I'm looking out here, and a lot of you are part of that sandwich generation: You have young kids, and you have aging parents. And one of the things all the polling data shows, Anderson, is people are more concerned about taking care of the elderly, because they don't know what to do, than they are even their children.

Mr. Cooper. I want to talk about this. I want you to meet Vanessa Antrum from Bowie, Maryland. She's retired. She's a caregiver for her elderly parents.

The President. God love you.

Mr. Cooper. She's a Democrat. Vanessa, your question.

Medicare and Medicaid/Homecare and Eldercare Assistance

Q. Yes. Mr. President, my parents have been married for 73 years and both are dealing—*[applause]*. Yes. Both of them are dealing with dementia. My father, who was a veteran, is completely bedridden, and my mom is experiencing issues with walking.

I have found the process for me to provide care for them in my home very hard. They have worked all their life only for me to experience a lot of redtape to provide supports——

The President. Bingo.

Q. ——in a loving home environment. What is being done to support the elderly, especially for a middle class family like mine?

The President. Well, first of all—if my mom were here, she'd say you're a good daughter, number one.

Q. Yes. Thank you.

The President. Number two, I was in a situation like you, where I was making more money—I was making \$42,000 a year as a Senator at the time, although I was listed the poorest man in the Senate for 36 years, but—[*laughter*—I still made more money than most people because Senate salaries kept going up.

What happened was, my dad got sick, and he was in hospice, so Jill and I took my dad home, and we took care of him in our house. But we were lucky because we had the ability to have—I have a sister who is an angel and a brother who's a wonderful guy, and we all took turns in our house taking care of them.

But here's the deal: Right now, under Medicaid, there are 860,000—I think it's 860—don't hold me to the exact number, but it's over 800,000—who qualify for home health care aid for their parents, but there's no money there. There's no money there.

So what we do is, we provide the funding for Medicaid to allow you to be able to keep—if your parents had their home—keeping them in their home if you wanted, or get help in your home with homecare from professionals providing—helping you take care of them—helping you take care of them.

And in many cases where you're not taking care of them in your own home and they're staying—and they're staying in their home, you're going to be able to have the ability to have someone come in and make their meals for them. They don't have to be there 24/7.

So there's a lot of things we're doing. In addition to the process, we're going to be able to train up those homecare workers who are usually minority women, women of color, as well as immigrants. And they have the capacity to learn more as they go along, to move to the point where they can become practical nurses and things like that.

So it's—it makes a lot of sense, and it's cheaper—cheaper—than it is to not do it.

Medicare and Medicaid Expansion Efforts/Senator Joseph A. Manchin III

Mr. Cooper. One of the other things that Democrats are looking to do is to expand Medicare to include dental, vision, and hearing as well. Given all the negotiations that are going on, will all three of those still be covered?

The President. That's a reach. And the reason why it's a reach—it's not—I think it's a good idea, and it's not that costly in relative terms, especially if we allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices.

But here's the thing: Mr. Manchin is—is opposed to that, as is—I think Senator Sinema is as well.

Mr. Cooper. Opposed to all of them?

The President. Opposed to all three. Because they don't want—he says he doesn't want to further burden Medicare so that—because it will run out of its ability to maintain itself in x number of years. There's ways to fix that, but he's not interested in that part either. [*Laughter*]

But look, Joe—Joe is not a bad guy. He's a friend. And he's always, at the end of the day, come around and voted for it.

But here's the point: We're in a situation now where if you are in a circumstance that you're not able to provide—let me cut to the chase; I'm taking too long. [*Laughter*]

One of the things we were able to do in the meantime is—the most expensive of these things would be dental. Okay? Now, we're talking about—and I don't have a deal on it yet—maybe getting an \$800 voucher from Medicare for dental work that you may need.

And the hearing is a very important thing because—as Kyrsten Sinema, who supports this, points out—hearing is directly related to dementia. When you can't hear, you have a problem, and it impacts on dementia.

So we're able to, I—and it's cheaper to be able to take care of the hearing. But I think I've been able to take care of that without changing Medicare, because what's happening is, now you have these hearing aid companies; you no longer are going to have to go to the doctor and spend 5 grand and get an appointment—you can go buy at Walgreens, and buy over-the-counter hearing aids.

So—the harder one, though, is we—we haven't gotten a consensus yet on how to deal with seeing, glasses. And—but that's—so "it's not done yet" is the answer.

Mr. Cooper. All right. I want to get another question in. This is Ben Frederick. Ben is a realtor, a lifelong resident of Baltimore. He's an independent. Serves on the Maryland Multi-Housing Association.

The President. By the way, Ben, the Bidens all hail from Baltimore, beginning in 1850. *[Laughter]* I don't know how the hell they kicked me out, but I'm—*[laughter]*.

Mr. Cooper. Ben, what's your question?

Tax Code Reform/Corporate Tax Rate

Q. IRS data shows that the top 5 percent of income earners pays 60 percent of the income taxes in this country. I hear you repeatedly say that the wealthy are not paying their fair share of income taxes. What is the percentage of income that you believe is fair?

The President. Well, I think what's fair is that—this present Tax Code, the highest tax rate is 35 percent, number one. Okay?

Number two, you're in a circumstance where corporate America is not paying their fair share. And I come from the corporate State of the world: Delaware. More corporations in Delaware than every other State in the union combined. Okay?

Now, here's the deal though: You have 55 corporations, for example, in the United States of America making over \$40 billion don't pay a cent. Not a single little red cent.

Now, I don't care—I'm a capitalist. I hope you can be a millionaire or a billionaire. I—not a problem. But at least pay your fair share. Chip in a little bit.

And so——

Corporate Tax Rate

Mr. Cooper. Well, let me—let me follow up, because Kyrsten Sinema, who you mentioned—Senator Sinema is opposed to any tax rate hikes for corporations and for high earners. Speaker Pelosi suggested today she could accept that.

The question is: A, would you accept that—no rate hikes—tax rate hikes for corporations or high earners? And if so, how would you pay for this plan otherwise?

The President. Because you don't have—look, here's the deal: The tax rate—the corporate tax rate was 35 points-something—37 percent. Barack and I thought it should come down. We thought it should come down to 28 percent.

In the process, it came down to 21 percent under Trump, which even the corporate leaders—and you know if you're in real estate—major real estate. Ask them. They know they should be paying a little more than 21 percent. Because the idea that if you're a schoolteacher and a firefighter, you're paying at a higher tax rate than they are, as a percentage of your taxes.

But here's the deal: I believe that we can do the—we can pay for this whole thing—I have it written on a card here, but I won't bore you with the detail. But, for example, if you in fact made sure that you paid a minimum 15 percent—minimum 15 percent—if you're paying nothing—minimum 15—that's almost—that's over almost \$400 billion over 10 years.

Tax Code Reform

Mr. Cooper. So you would be willing to go along with what Senator Sinema and, it seems like, Speaker Pelosi is willing to consider: no tax hike for corporations or for high-earning individuals?

The President. Here's what I'm willing to do: I'm willing to make sure that we pay for everything without anyone making less than \$400,000 paying a single cent more in taxes. That's my objective.

And so there's ways to do that. For example—you covered it on your show—the minimum international tax at 15 percent.

Mr. Cooper. But no rate—actual rate hikes?

The President's Economic Agenda

The President. No. No. I don't think we're going to be able to get to vote. Look—[laughter]—when you're in the United States Senate and you're a President of the United States and you have 50 Democrats, every one is a President. [Laughter] Every single one. So you've got to work things out.

But where I am is, I'm hearing now—I'll turn on the news, and I'll hear that "Biden's caved on such and"—look, Biden has a simple proposition. Biden is going to get—all the elements of these two bills have profound impact on economic growth; reduce, not increase, inflation; don't add a penny to the debt; as well as grow the economy. According—I have 17 Nobel laureates in economics sent me a letter recently saying that my proposals would actually reduce inflation, diminish inflation.

But here's the point. The point of it all is that I'm prepared—I can't think of anything that was consequential in changing the circumstance for the middle class and working class in America that came as a consequence of a single piece of legislation.

I've got a portrait of Roosevelt in my office. Okay? Social Security is not anything like it is today when he passed it. It evolved. It moved. It grew.

So I'm prepared to do the things that can get done now that can begin to change the lives of ordinary Americans to give them a fighting chance and come back and try to get others later.

Mr. Cooper. Let's talk about another one of those things. This is Sondra Guttman, an English professor at Loyola University, also a Democrat.

Sondra, what's your question?

The President. And by the way, you've got another English professor who teaches writing here. [Laughter]

Global Competitiveness/Early Childhood Education

Q. Thank you for taking my question, Mr. President. We've heard in the news that the proposal for 2 years of free community college may be cut from your economic package. An educated citizenry is absolutely crucial to solving complex problems like climate change and the systematic inequities in this country. We hope that this is not cut from the package, but if it is, what can you do to ensure that all Americans can get the education that they need to face these issues?

The President. Well, first of all, Professor, you made a very profound point, and I'm not—I'm not being sarcastic—and that is—and Jill uses a slightly different phrase: "Any country that outeducates us will outcompete us." Any country that outeducates will—outeducates will outcompete us.

You have the vast majority—of the 37 major countries in the world—economies—we rank 35 in our investment in education. We're in a situation where if you think about it, when we—what caused us to move ahead and dominate the 20th century: In the late 1900s—in the early 1900s, late 1890s, we came up—we said, 12 years of free education. That was revolutionary at the time. I mean, seriously.

Now, if we were sitting down today and saying, "Oh, we've got to put together an education system," raise your hand if anybody thinks 12 years is enough to compete in the 21st century? So that's why what I propose is: free child—free school—free school for every 3- and 4-year-old in America, no matter what their background.

All the data shows that no matter what home they come from, they increase exponentially their prospects of succeeding all the way through 12 years of school. You all—you know all the statistics.

The statistics go that if you come from a home where there's no books in the home and a single mom or a single dad, they don't—they're not well educated, they don't talk a lot, the kid from the middle class—average middle class home versus that home will go to school having heard 1 million more words spoken than the child who didn't. A gigantic disadvantage. So——

Community College/Federal Postsecondary Education Assistance

Mr. Cooper. Mr. President, the question was on—the—on community colleges——

The President. No, I know. I——

Mr. Cooper. ——which was a big campaign promise that you made. You talked about that a lot on——

The President. Oh, I——

Mr. Cooper. ——the campaign trail.

The President. Yes, and I'm going to get it done. And if I don't, I'll be sleeping alone for a long time. *[Laughter]*

But here's the deal: So far, Mr. Manchin and one other person has indicated they will not support free community college. So what I've—what I think we can get done is, we can significantly increase the amount of money by 500 bucks a payment for Pell grants. And Pell grants are available, and they can apply for up to 30 percent of the cost of community college and/or—and/or—college, help tuition.

So it's not going to get us there. It's not going to get us the whole thing, but it is a start.

I'm convinced—absolutely, positively convinced that we're going to be able to—and, by the way, we have in the law—in the legislation, money for community colleges that deal with——

dealing with apprenticeships, dealing with teaching people particular skills that are not getting—will not get you a 2-year degree, but will teach you the skill.

So I think we can get all of that done this time out. But I promise you—I guarantee you, we're going to get free community college in the next several years, I mean, across the board.

Mr. Cooper. What was that conversation when you realized you weren't able—going to be able to get it in this bill at this time, and you had dinner with Dr. Biden that night, what was that conversation like? *[Laughter]* How did you break that news?

Community College/Global Competitiveness

The President. Well, the White House has a lot of bedrooms. *[Laughter]* And she went like this. *[Laughter]*

[At this point, the President pointed his finger.]

"Down the hall."

Mr. Cooper. All right.

The President. No, look, it really makes a gigantic difference. And think of this: You have more countries in the world with—having—providing college—I mean, providing professional education beyond 12 years. We rank like, I think it's—don't hold me to the number—I think it's 16 or 17 in the world—the United States of America, for God's sake.

Mr. Cooper. I want——

The President. This is about putting us in the game.

Mr. Cooper. This is John Meche. He's a doctoral candidate at Morgan State University and an independent. John, welcome. What's your question?

The President. Where—where are you?

Mr. Cooper. Morgan State.

Q. Morgan State.

The President. I know all these Morgan men, man.

I've spoken there a couple times. And by the way, the guy who runs my operation is a—anyway—*[laughter]*—I keep talking about Delaware State, but they keep saying about Morgan State, you know?

Infrastructure and Jobs Legislation/Education and Family Assistance Legislation

Q. Morgan State. President Biden, I had so much faith in your election win, but based on history, the bipartisan efforts of the Democratic Party are held hostage by rogue moderates and Republicans. Why not do like the Republicans and usher through the Democratic agenda?

The President. Well, two reasons. If you notice, the Republicans haven't passed a single, solitary thing. Zero. So, ushering through their agenda—their agenda right now is just "stop Biden." Although, I shouldn't make it so personal. "Stop my administration"—that's what the agenda is. It's much easier to stop something than to start something.

And look, what we did is, when I wrote—I'm going to back up just a second. I apologize. I wrote—I personally—during the campaign, before I got elected, I wrote the infrastructure bill relating to what we do to highways and all that kind of thing. Hard—hard data. And I wrote the—what they call—what's now called the "care economy" piece and has a gigantic piece of environmental pieces in it too.

And I went before the joint session of Congress, and I laid out exactly what I was for. And so, I made it clear what I was for. Initially what happened was, I got no support for anything from our Republican friends. And then they said, "Maybe we can work out a bipartisan deal on infrastructure." And we did. We worked on it. It didn't give me everything I wanted. It didn't have as much money in there for the environment, although it has tens of billions of dollars in there, but didn't have what I wanted in it. But we made a bipartisan deal.

Now, what's coming along is this reconciliation—they call it a fancy word—for the other pieces that have the childcare pieces, have the economy that relates to allowing people to—women to go back to work. It has about \$450 billion for environmental remediation and so on.

And that's the one that is the issue.

Senator Kyrsten L. Sinema/The President's Economic Agenda

Mr. Cooper. Well, let me—let me ask you—just getting to his question: You—we've talked a lot about Senator Manchin and Senator Sinema. You seem relatively confident you can kind of get Senator Manchin on board.

You—there's a lot of Democrats in the House and Senate who are confused about where Senator Sinema actually stands on things. And I know she's been negotiating directly with you and the White House. What is your read on her?

And I—obviously, you need her to remain positive in your direction, so I don't know what you're going to say. *[Laughter]* But what is your read on her?

The President. No, seriously.

Mr. Cooper. Do you know where she stands?

The President. First of all, she's smart as the devil, number one. Number two, she's very supportive of the environmental agenda in my legislation—very supportive. She's supportive of all—almost all the things I mentioned, relating to everything from family care to all those issues.

Where she's not supportive is she says she will not raise a single penny in taxes on the corporate side and/or on wealthy people. Period. And so that's where it sort of breaks down, and there's a few other issues it breaks down on.

But what we're trying to do is reach a point here where I'm able to present to the Senate—they're able to vote on—and the House—a serious, serious piece of legislation that changes the dynamic for working class folks in America and middle class folks, and begins to have the very wealthy and corporations just begin to pay their fair share—not a lot.

How we get there—we're down to four or five issues, which I'm not going to negotiate on national television, as you might guess.

Mr. Cooper. We'd be interested——

The President. No, no, no.

Mr. Cooper. ——in hearing them, if you want. *[Laughter]*

The President. No, no, no. I know. But, all kidding aside, I think we can get there.

Mr. Cooper. You talked about the environmental piece. You said Senator Sinema is on board with that. Certainly, Senator Manchin is not. It gets to our next question.

This is from Kobi Khong. He's originally from Anaheim, California. He's a sophomore class president at Johns Hopkins University, a Democrat.

Kobi, what's your question?

The President. Mr. President. [Laughter]

Climate Change/Paris Agreement

Q. One of the largest issues that people have trouble comprehending the severity of is climate change. Many legislators and politicians today are lenient, as they won't have to live with the future effects. Without the legislative support for the climate aspects of your budget proposal and the earth rapidly approaching the Paris Agreement's 1.5 degrees limit, what other backup plans do you have to ensure a future for the next generations?

The President. Well, that's—[applause]. Mr. President, you've got it right. The existential threat to humanity is climate change. And when President Trump pulled out of the Paris accord—which, when I was with the Obama administration, we helped negotiate—the agreement was that we could not—if we reached beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius increase in temperature, we're gone. Not a joke. Not a joke.

And so we decided that—he pulled out. First thing I committed to do is rejoin that accord, number one. But number two—number two: What you have to do, is you look at—there's multiple ways in which we can deal with climate. I'm going off to COP26 in Scotland, and—in, I don't know, I guess it's 2 weeks or a week. I can't—I'm losing track of time.

And I'm presenting a commitment to the world that we will, in fact, get to net-zero emissions on electric power by 2035 and net-zero emissions across the board by 2050 or before. But we have to do so much between now and 2030 to demonstrate what we're going to—that we're going to do.

So let me give you a couple examples.

Climate Measures in the Budget Reconciliation Package/Senator Joseph A. Manchin III/Energy Efficiency and Weatherization

Mr. Cooper. Can I—let me just follow up, though, very quickly on that, because the key climate provision that was in the Build Back Better plan, as you call it—the Clean Electricity Performance Program—that's been dropped now from this spending bill. Reported——

The President. No, it hasn't.

Mr. Cooper. It has not?

The President. No, it hasn't—look——

Mr. Cooper. But Senator Manchin is opposed to that.

The President. He's opposed to it. But here's the deal: That is only one of well over—well over a trillion dollars' worth of expenditures for climate change. It's \$150 billion. It's important.

And what it says is that if in fact the utility doesn't pull back and continue to reduce the amount of carbon that they emit, that what will happen is they will end up paying a penalty. And so there's a penalty incurred.

Joe Manchin's argument is: Look, we still have coal in my State. You're going to eliminate it eventually. We know it's going away. We know it's going to be gone. But don't rush it so fast that my people don't have anything to do.

I think that's not what we should be doing, but the fact of the matter is, we can take that \$150 billion, add it to the \$320 billion that's in the—in the law now that he's prepared to support for tax incentives—tax incentives—to have people act in a way that they're going to be able to do the things that need to be do from—for example, if you're—if you've got windows that are the, you

know, the wind is blowing through, you get an incentive to put new windows in your home. You get—you—help get it paid.

We're going to significantly reduce the amount—the cost of solar panels on your roof. We're going to continually—and, for example, there's new battery technologies that are being—I went out in Silicon Valley; there's a battery that's about that wide and about that thick. If you have solar power, you put that in your basement and the sun doesn't shine for 7 days, you still have all the power you need.

Energy Grid Improvement Efforts/Climate Resilience Measures

Mr. Cooper. But the concession has been agreed to for Senator Manchin——

The President. No, no, no.

Mr. Cooper. ——about coal in his State.

The President. No, no——

Mr. Cooper. Is that true?

The President. Nothing has been formally agreed to. The concession has been—the negotiation is: I've been saying to Joe: "Look, I'll take—if we don't do it in terms of the electric grid piece, what we'll do is—give me that \$150 billion. I'm going to add it to be able to do other things that allow me to do things that don't directly affect the electric grid in the way that there's a penalty, but allow me to spend the money to set new technologies in place."

Mr. Cooper. Okay.

The President. For example, we can save significant amounts of money and, as a consequence of that, significant amounts of energy, if in fact we are able to put the high-tension wires underground. It costs a hell of a lot more to do it. It creates real good jobs; it creates a hell of a lot more to do it. But, in fact, it would do a lot to keep things from happening that are dangerous. Half the forest fires out West are those towers coming down, setting fires, et cetera.

So there's a lot of things Joe is open to my convincing him that I can use it to increase environmental progress without it being that particular deal.

Mr. Cooper. We're going to take a quick break. When we get back, we got a lot more questions for President Biden.

[There was a commercial break.]

Mr. Cooper. And welcome back. We are live at a CNN town hall event in Baltimore, Maryland, with President Joe Biden.

Coronavirus Pandemic Effects on the Labor Market/Coronavirus Vaccination Efforts/Morale of the Country

So, before we get to our next question, I want to just bring up the current labor market shortages. Millions of jobs are unfilled, businesses are struggling to meet demand. Is there anything you can do to either encourage people to go back to work or make jobs more attractive that they want to go back to work?

The President. Yes, so, first——

Mr. Cooper. Is there a role for the Federal Government?

The President. First of all, we've created more jobs in the first 8 months of my Administration than any President in American history—total number of jobs created.

But the problem for the people not going back to work is twofold. Number one, they're reluctant to go back to work because they're afraid of COVID, many of them. So they don't want to go back, and they don't want to be exposed to either the customers, because they're not required to wear masks or not required to have shots, or they don't want to go back because they're not sure of the people waiting on them and they—at the table, or the people coming up in the food market. So a lot of it has to do with COVID. Number one.

Number two—and that's why, you know, we were able to go from—when I first got elected—when I first was elected, there were only 2 million people who had COVID shots in the United States of America—had the vaccine. Now we got 190 million, because I went out and bought everything I could do—and buy in sight, and it worked.

But here's the deal: The second thing—the second thing that has happened, Anderson, is that people are now using this as an opportunity to say, "Wait a minute, do I want to go back to that \$7-an-hour job?"

I won't name the particular restaurant chain, but they found out when they—they couldn't hire anybody. When they found out, they started to pay 20 bucks an hour, everybody wanted to go back to work. Not a joke.

So what you see is, wages are actually up for those who are working, because for the first time in a long time, employees are able to bargain. "You're the boss? You want me to work for you? What are you going to pay me? How are you going to do it?" I'm not being facetious.

The third thing that's out there is, there's a circumstance that exists where people are really worried about what they're going to do—I mean, how can I say this?

How many people do you know—and maybe some in this audience—who, because of what you've been through—a loss of a husband, wife, brother, mother, father, son, whatever—or you've had something that's really impacted you with COVID that you really find yourself just down? I mean just down. And so, there's a lot of people who are just down. They're not sure how to get back in the game. They're not sure whether they want to get back in the game.

Think of this: If you're graduating from Morgan State, okay? Right? Well, guess what? You didn't have those great dances the last 4 years that you'd had before you went out at Morgan. No, I'm not joking. Graduated from high school, you don't have your prom, you don't have your graduation, you don't have the thing—all the things that matter to people that go into things they look forward to. So a lot of it has to do with us getting back on our feet and getting back on our feet in terms of our attitudes about what the future looks like for us.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Cooper. What do you say to someone who's down? Because——

The President. What I say——

Mr. Cooper. ——there's a lot of people watching tonight who are.

The President. Well, there are. And I tell you what: There's plenty of help. Look, being down, having some problem in terms of needing some—some advice—if you have a broken spirit, it's no different than a broken arm. You shouldn't be ashamed of it. You should seek the help. There's a lot of people who can help.

And—but I really mean it.

Mr. Cooper. Yes.

The President. I don't—I'm not saying that's the whole problem, but I'm saying it is an element in terms of attitude about people—what they want to—look, how often I get asked the

question: "What's Christmas going to be like? How about Thanksgiving? Is it going to be okay? I mean, what's going to happen? I mean, how will I be able to buy gifts for my kids?" How—there's a lot of anxiety people have.

Mr. Cooper. Yes. I want to ask a question along the lines of concern about Christmas and holidays and the supply chain.

Anna Hirsch is here, a student at Loyola University, who is originally from Connecticut. She's a Democrat. Anna, what's your question?

The President. Hello, Anna.

Global Supply Chain Disruptions

Q. President Biden, growing up in a small town, I've been surrounded by small-business owners, including my mom who owns her own interior design business. With the current supply chain crisis, small businesses are in jeopardy of not being able to get products that they need—

The President. They are.

Q. —because priority is given to large businesses. Does your administration have any policies or plans in place to aid the current supply chain problem and/or to help small businesses that are affected by this?

The President. Yes on both. Here—but you have it exactly right. We have a significant supply chain problem.

In the Obama-Biden administration, all of American business—and it made sense—it was "just on time." You wanted to make sure that you didn't waste any money and/or time between producing whatever you're producing and having it done. You didn't—so that's how you saved money. You didn't buy the material 6 months ahead of time and then keep it in your inventory and then move it. It was on time.

Now, that's a big problem. You can't—people can't do it. They want to get out ahead. What I've recently done—and people said—doubted we could get it done. I was able to go to the private ports—40 percent of all products coming into the United States of America on the West Coast go through Los Angeles and—oh, what am I doing here?

Mr. Cooper. Is it Long Beach or—

The President. Long Beach. Thank you.

And I know both the mayors. So I went to them, and I said, "What can we do?" So I met with—and they're privately owned, these ports—these two. So I met with the business people. I met with all their major customers—the Walmarts of the world and all the rest. There are like 70 ships waiting out there unable to get unloaded.

So I—and because—not always—the longshoremen don't always get along with the business folks in there. I got—I have a relationship with them. And I brought them together, and I said: "You've got to be open 24/7." No port there was open—open 5 days a week, 40 hours a week. 24/7—they've all agreed to it. They've agreed to it.

National Guard/Port Infrastructure Improvements

Mr. Cooper. Would you consider the National Guard to help with the supply chain issue?

The President. Yes, absolutely, positively, I would do that. But in addition to that, what you've got to do is, you've got to get these ships in and unloaded.

And one of the things in my infrastructure plan: There's \$16 billion for port expansion. We have to be able to move things along. Because what's happening is, when we—a product your mother may need for interior design, in terms of drapery or colors or something, that is imported from somewhere else. Well, guess what? A lot of these places, particularly in South Asia, are closing down because of COVID. The businesses are just flat closing. They're——

Global Supply Chain Disruptions

Mr. Cooper. So would you consider the National Guard for trucking? For—because there's a lot of problems——

The President. Yes.

Mr. Cooper. ——with not enough truck drivers right now.

The President. Yes. But here's—and that's why what we're doing now——

Mr. Cooper. Do you have a timetable for that?

The President. Well, I had a timetable to—first of all, I want to get the ports up and running, and get the railroads and the rail heads and the trucks in port ready to move. Because I've gotten Walmart and others that say, "We're going to move stuff off of the port, into our warehouses."——which they weren't doing.

Mr. Cooper. So are you—but you're actually talking about having National Guardsmen and women——

The President. The answer is——

Mr. Cooper. ——driving trucks?

The President. The answer is: Yes, if we can't move the——increase the number of truckers, which we're in the process of doing.

Mr. Cooper. Okay.

The President. If we did at this moment, we're not—but the whole point is: We've got to get the small business as well, because the big guys are in trouble. And a lot of the product that your mother makes, the product she—the things she does in her interior design building, the material she buys from the larger outfits. I assume; I don't know that.

I shouldn't—but my whole point is: Small businesses need the help badly. Small businesses make up 60 percent of all the revenue coming from business out there.

Mr. Cooper. I want to bring in Linda Harris. She's from Elkridge, Maryland. She's a software project manager, Democrat. Linda, what's your question?

Q. Hey, President Biden.

The President. Hey.

Economic Stimulus Payments

Q. My middle-class family of four lives on a pretty tight budget. My husband and I both work full-time at well-paying jobs, but we still struggle some months to make the ends meet. With rising gas prices and utility prices and grocery prices, we're feeling our discretionary income get squeezed and reduced. What plans does the administration have to help ease this kind of current crunch we're feeling?

The President. Well, there's a number of things that have already been done. And it's hard—and people don't think about—the American Rescue Plan has provided for an awful lot—the \$1.9 billion we passed right at—right after I got elected.

So what you got is, you got that—that \$1,400 check in the mail, and you got a lot of things that help ameliorate some of the concerns and costs, because we knew what we were coming into. We knew we had inherited the wind, and things were going to get worse before they got better.

But in terms of being able to have what my dad used to say, "a little breathing room," just a little—my dad busted his neck. He didn't have a good-paying job. My dad was a well-read, high school-educated guy who thought his greatest sin in the world was he didn't get to go to college.

And—but my dad was one of those guys that worked like hell, would come home for dinner, and then he'd go back and finish up work and close the shop. He—and the whole point of it was that all we want to give—all he'd talk about is, "Joey, all I need is just a little breathing room, a little space—a little space."

Inflation/Gasoline Prices

Mr. Cooper. Let me—let me ask you about that, just in terms of inflation, because you had told us at a town hall, I think it was in July, that the—this was just near-term inflation. The Wall Street Journal recently talked to like 67 financial experts who said that they saw high inflation going all the way—or deep into 2022. Do you think it's going to last for a while?

The President. I don't think so. I don't think it will last if—depending what we do. If we stay exactly where we are, yes. If we don't make these investments, yes.

Mr. Cooper. What about gas prices? Because some States——

The President. Gas price——

Mr. Cooper. ——are seeing——

The President. Gas prices relate to a foreign policy initiative that is about something that goes beyond the cost of gas. And we're about \$3.30 a gallon most places now, when it's up from—when it was down in the single digits. I mean—single—a dollar-plus. And that's because of the supply being withheld by OPEC.

And so there's a lot of negotiation that is—there's a lot of Middle Eastern folks who want to talk to me. I'm not sure I'm going to talk to them. But the point is, it's about gas production. There's things we can do, in the meantime, though.

Mr. Cooper. Do you think there's a—I mean, do you see a—do you have a timeline for gas prices of when you think they may start coming down?

Gasoline Prices/Home Heating Assistance/Renewable Energy/Automobile Industry/Strategic Petroleum Reserve

The President. My guess is, you'll start to see gas prices come down as we get by—going into the winter—I mean, excuse me, into next year, in 2022. I don't see anything that's going to happen in the meantime that's going to significantly reduce gas prices.

But, for example, for natural gas to heat your homes as winter is coming, there's a lot—what people don't realize: We put in billions of dollars in what they call LIHEAP. LIHEAP is the provision whereby you're able to get funding from the Federal Government based upon your need to heat your home, and it is subsidized in a significant way. And there's billions of dollars we have passed in the legislation I got passed in March of this year, because we anticipated that would be a problem as well.

But the answer ultimately is—"ultimately" meaning the next 3 or 4 years—is investing in renewable energy. What I was able to do—no, I—and, by the way, I really—I'm not—I'm not being—I mean, I'm being literal when I say this: What I was able to do when I ran—and you remember, Anderson, because I was on your show a couple times, and the issue was whether or not I could ever get the labor unions to support my environmental programs.

And I went out, and I went to the IBEW and, as well, to the autoworkers, and I laid out my plan. They fully embraced it. Why? Because—and I spent time at General Motors and other companies, and I got General Motors—I didn't get them—General Motors decided, after a long time spent talking to me—they were suing California because they had a higher standard—mileage standard.

Mr. Cooper. Right.

The President. They dropped the suit and agreed that they would be 50-percent electric vehicles by 2030—by 2030. And now you have all three—all three major manufacturers—saying the same thing.

So what will happen is, you're going to see a dramatic drop—a dramatic drop in what's going to happen in terms of gas prices as we go into the next 2 or 3 years. Even if we're not able to break the monopoly price—they're keeping it up because—anyway.

So there's—there—but I don't—I must tell you, I don't have a near-term answer. There's two things I could do: I could go in the petroleum reserve and take out and probably reduce the price of gas maybe 18 cents or so a gallon. It's still going to be above 3 bucks.

And one of the things that I refuse to have happen, because I didn't want anybody—I made a commitment: If you pass the stuff I'm talking about, not—not one single penny in tax would go against anybody making less than 400 grand.

And so, if you notice, this is—these highway bills are not paid for by gas tax. They're paid for by direct expenditures in other areas. So the average person doesn't have to pay more.

But it's going to be hard. It's going to be hard. There's a possibility to be able to bring it down. Depends on—little bit on Saudi Arabia and a few other things that are in the offing.

Mr. Cooper. Let me take a quick break. We'll have more from President Joe Biden.

[There was a commercial break.]

Mr. Cooper. And welcome back to our CNN town hall with President Joe Biden. Got a lot more questions to get to.

I want to introduce Neijma Donner, a professor and social worker at the University of Maryland, Baltimore. She's an independent and mother of two young boys. We're going to be talking about COVID.

Neijma, what's your question?

Coronavirus Vaccines for Young Children/National Vaccination Efforts

Q. Thank you for taking my question, President. When will the vaccines for young children be ready? And how accessible will they be once released?

The President. I believe—and I want to make it clear: Unlike past administrations, science will dictate this. I'm not telling anyone at NIH—[*applause*]. No, I really mean it.

But I do ask my COVID team what the expectations are. The expectations are, it will be ready in the near term—meaning weeks, not—not months and months. Okay? That's number one.

Number two, there are over 800,000 sites right now that exist in America where you can go get a vaccine. And you're going to be able to do that with your children, particularly—we're going to try to work it out to deal with childcare centers—make it available there—as well as your pediatricians and the—you know, and the docs—and finding places where you can do it. Some places are talking about doing at—you know, in churches on the weekend and that kind of thing.

So there'll be plenty of places to be able to get the vaccine when—if and when it is approved.

And it's likely to be approved. I spent a lot of time with the team on these things. And it's likely to be approved and what—whether it's Moderna or whether it's Pfizer or whether it's J&J, it's going to be approved. And it will be a much smaller dose, basically the same dose, but a smaller dose. And they're doing a lot of tests on it right now.

And those of you who have children or brothers or sisters who are between—you know, who are in that age category above 12, get the vaccine for them. Get the vaccine. Get it now.

Mr. Cooper. Let me ask you—Mr. President—Mr. President——

The President. By the way, there's two famous guys in this audience here. I just noticed. [Laughter] Ben Cardin—and Chris Van Hollen. And the mayor! Holy mackerel.

Mr. Cooper. Mr.——

The President. This is a busman's holiday for you guys, having to come here. [Laughter] But thank you.

Coronavirus Vaccine Mandates

Mr. Cooper. Mr. President, let me ask you a follow-up about that. As many as one in three emergency responders in some cities like Chicago, Los Angeles, right here in Baltimore, are refusing to comply with city vaccine mandates.

I'm wondering where you stand on that. Should police officers, emergency responders be mandated to get vaccines? And if not, should they be—stay at home or let go?

The President. Yes and yes.

And by the way—[applause]. By the way, I waited until July to talk about mandating, because I tried everything else possible. The mandates are working. All the stuff about people leaving and people getting—you have—you have everyone from United Airlines to Spirit—all these airlines. They're—we're not going to get all—96, 97 percent of the people have gotten the vaccine.

All the talk about all these folks who are going to leave the military if they were mandated—not true. You've got about a 90-something percent vaccination rate.

I mean, so there's a—the idea is that—look, the two things that concern me—one, are those who just tried to make this a political issue. "Freedom. I have the freedom to kill you with my COVID." [Laughter] No, I mean, come on. "Freedom." [Laughter] Number one.

Number two—the second one is that, you know, the gross misinformation that's out there. Like what they're saying about my buddy Colin Powell—and he was my friend—who passed away. "Colin Powell was vaccinated, and he still died." Well, he knew he had serious underlying conditions. And it would be difficult—he clearly would have been gone earlier had he not gotten the vaccine, had he not gotten the shots.

But my generic point is: There's so much misinformation. And you know what I find fascinating? I turn on Fox to find out how popular I am. [Laughter] Well, I——

Fox News/Coronavirus Vaccine Mandates

Mr. Cooper. How are you doing there?

The President. I'm doing very well. *[Laughter]* I think I'm at 3 percent favorable. But—*[laughter]*.

But all kidding aside, one of the things I find: Do you realize they mandate vaccinations?

Mr. Cooper. At Fox headquarters.

The President. Yes. I find that mildly fascinating.

Mr. Cooper. You find that mildly fascinating? *[Laughter]*

The President. Mildly fascinating.

Mr. Cooper. I want to bring in—*[laughter]*—Thaddeus Price from—*[applause]*. This is Thaddeus Price from Randallstown, Maryland. He's a program coordinator at Morgan State University and a Democrat.

Thaddeus, welcome.

The President's Legislative Agenda/Police Reform/Voting Rights Legislation

Q. Good evening, Mr. President. You received overwhelming support from the Black community, and rightfully so. Rightfully so. But now many of us are disheartened——

The President. Yes.

Q. ——as we watch a Congress fail to support police reform. We watch our voting rights vanish before our very eyes.

Mr. President, my question is: What will you do over the next 3 years to rectify these atrocities, secure our democracy, and ensure that freedoms and liberties that all Americans should be entitled to?

The President. First of all, you've stated the proposition accurately, in my view. I did get overwhelming support from the African American community. Only folks in Maryland understand Delaware is the eighth largest Black population in America, as a percent of population. It's been the source of my support. The only folks that helped me more than Black men are Black women.

And I tell you what my greatest regret is: My greatest regret is I have these—had these three major pieces of legislation that are going to change the circumstances for working class folks and African Americans as well, that I've been busting my neck trying to pass. But what it's done is prevented me from getting deeply up to my ears—which I'm going to do once this is done—in dealing with police brutality, dealing with the whole notion of: What are we going to do about voting rights? It's the greatest assault on voting rights in the history of the United States—for real—since the Civil War.

Q. Yes. Yes, sir.

The President. And you know, for example: When I was in the chairman—when I was chairman of the Judiciary Committee, I thought I had done something really important. And I was able to get passed and extended the Voting Rights Act for 25 years and get everyone on that committee, including the southern—the Senator from South Carolina and others, to vote for it. I thought we had moved.

The point I'm making is this: We're at a terrible place right now. And so, when this gets done—and in the meantime, here's what I've done: I have the authority to deal with Federal law enforcement.

So Federal law enforcement, I've—we've issued mandates: no chokeholds, number one; make sure that we're going to be able to do—have no no-knock warrants; in a position where we're going to be able to see to it that we are able to go look at—and we're doing it in four cities right now—patterns of abuse and patterns of misconduct of police departments; making sure that we have access to police records, in terms of what's happening in—so there's a lot I've been able to do by Executive order, in essence.

Use of the Filibuster in the Senate/Talking Requirement for the Filibuster/Public Debt Limit

Mr. Cooper. Let me ask you, on voting rights: If it is as important to you as you say, I think there's a lot of Democrats who look at the filibuster and would like to see it changed, even if it was just on this one case. Why do you oppose that?

The President. By the way, I think they make a very good point.

Here's the deal: If in fact I get myself into, at this moment, the debate on the filibuster, I lose three—at least three votes right now to get what I have to get done on the economic side of the equation—the foreign policy side of the equation.

So what I have said—you're shaking your head no, but let me tell you something, Jack: It's the truth. [*Laughter*] Number one.

Number two. Number two, what I have proposed in the meantime is—it used to be the filibuster. The way it worked—and we have 10 times as many—more than that—times the filibuster has been used since 1978. It used to be you had to stand on the floor and exhaust everything you had, and you—when—and when you gave up the floor and someone else sought the floor, they had to talk until they finished. You're only allowed to do it a second time. After that, it's over; you vote—somebody moves for the vote. I propose we bring that back now, immediately.

But I also think we're going to have to move to the point where we fundamentally alter the filibuster. The idea that, for example, my Republican friends say that we're going to default on the national debt because they're going to filibuster that and we need 10 Republicans to support us is the most bizarre thing I ever heard.

I think you're going to see an—if they—gets pulled again, I think you'll see an awful lot of Democrats being ready to say: "Not me. I'm not doing that again. We're going to end the filibuster."

But it still is difficult to end the filibuster, beyond that. That's another issue. But——

Use of the Filibuster in the Senate/Public Debt Limit

Mr. Cooper. But are you saying once you get this current agenda passed on spending and social programs that you would be open to fundamentally altering the filibuster or——

The President. I am open to——

Mr. Cooper. ——doing away with it?

The President. ——fundamentally altering——

Mr. Cooper. Or doing away with it?

The President. Well, that remains to be seen, exactly what that means, in terms of "fundamentally altering" it, whether or not we just end the filibuster straight up.

There are certain things that are just sacred rights. One's a sacred obligation that we never are going to renege on a debt. We're the only nation in the world—we have never, ever reneged on a single debt.

Voting Rights Legislation

Mr. Cooper. But when it comes to voting rights, do you——

The President. Voting rights is equally as consequential.

Mr. Cooper. When it comes to voting rights—just so I'm clear, though—you would entertain the notion of doing away with the filibuster on that one issue? Is that correct?

The President. And maybe more.

Mr. Cooper. And maybe other issues?

Okay, let's—just a short time ago, the full House voted to hold—to hold former Trump ally, Steve Bannon—current Trump ally as well—[laughter]—in criminal contempt of Congress.

House Select Committee To Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol/Independence of the Department of Justice

A week ago, you said the Department of Justice should prosecute those who defied subpoenas from the January 6 committee. Was that appropriate for you to weigh in on?

The President. No, the way I said it was not appropriate. I said—they asked me would I—do I think that he—they should be prosecuted for denying the—for not showing up at the committee. And I said, "Yes."

Now that—when I've made a commitment—the—one of the things I was committed to do when I ran was reestablish the reputation and integrity of the Justice Department. It has become the most—it was corrupted under the last administration.

I should have chosen my words more wisely. I did not, have not, and will not pick up the phone and call the Attorney General and tell him what he should or should not do in terms of who he should prosecute.

But I answered the question honestly. And I think that a—anyone who does not respond to that kind of—question from the—from the—a legitimate committee in the House of Representatives or the United States Senate should be held accountable.

So that's as much as I can say without coming and looking like I'm telling the—I have yet to talk to the Attorney General about anything——

Mr. Cooper. The Attorney General put out a statement saying that they would make the decision on their own.

The President. And they will.

Mr. Cooper. Yes.

The President. I guarantee that.

Executive Privilege/House Select Committee To Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol

Mr. Cooper. You've decided not to exert executive privilege to shield the former President in the House's investigation into January 6. Why? What were you——

The President. Well, again, I'm leaving that to them to tell me what—and I didn't—it's not a blanket "I will not release the information." It's, I'm asking them to take a look at what is legitimate—what would legitimately fall in the position that future Presidents' authority would be compromised by that, and what is. I don't think there's much legitimacy in the claim.

So that's being looked at right now.

Mr. Cooper. We're going to take another quick break. We'll have more with President Joe Biden.

[*There was a commercial break.*]

Mr. Cooper. And welcome back to our CNN town hall with President Joe Biden. We're taking questions from the audience on a range of topics.

I want to bring in Megan Crawford from Towson, Maryland. She's a law student at the University of Baltimore and a Republican.

Megan, welcome.

Immigration Policy/Unaccompanied Minors at the Southern U.S. Border Addressing the Root Causes of Migration

Q. Throughout your campaign, you've criticized former President Trump for his treatment of illegal immigrants and the southern border. Given that it's nearly been a year into your campaign, why haven't you been to the southern border of our country? And why did your stance on allowing immigrants suddenly revert to Trump-era policies?

The President. Well, they're legitimate questions. Number one, the "remain in Mexico" policy, which I oppose, the Court said I had to maintain it. So we're repealing it. That's one of the reasons why we haven't changed it.

We have made a gigantic change—there were over 5,000 children—children—in the custody of the Border Patrol. There are now 504. We are making more progress than you think.

And we have a circumstance where one of the things that is going to bear fruit, I believe, is: I put together a program when I was a Senator, and the Vice President is helping—helping initiate it now, where we provide for funding to change the circumstances on the ground in the countries in Central America.

For example, you're in a circumstance where, you know, people don't just sit around their—
their hand-hewn table and say: "I've got a great idea: Let's sell everything we have, give it to coyote, let them take us across the border, drop us in a desert—a place they don't want us. Won't that be fun?"

People do it because they're desperate. They're desperate. And what I've been trying to do—and I'm trying to do in this legislation, as well—is get funding so we have funding for immigration officers to be able to hear cases immediately of whether or not they justify having asylum granted to them.

Coronavirus Pandemic Impact on Immigration Policy/Unaccompanied Minors at the Southern U.S. Border/U.S. Provision of Coronavirus Vaccines

Mr. Cooper. Mr. President——

The President. We don't have that.

Mr. Cooper. You have kept in place, under a public health authority known as title 42——

The President. Yes.

Mr. Cooper. ——which is a Trump-era policy, which allows immediate or very quick return to people who crossed over the border based on COVID protocols.

The President. Yes. And that is—we've maintained that because of the extent of the—of the—continued extent of COVID in those countries from which people are coming. It's very, very high. And so we've maintained the policy.

We are not sending back children. We send back adults, and we send back—large families. But we don't send back children in that circumstance.

And so that's why I have a proposal to provide for over a billion doses of COVID vaccine to the rest of the world, including a significant portion to Latin and Central America.

Mr. Cooper. Do you have plans to visit the southern border?

The President's Travel Schedule/U.S. Border Policy

The President. I've been there before, and I haven't—I mean, I know it well. I guess I should go down. But the whole point of it is: I haven't had a whole hell of lot of time to get down. I've been spending time going around looking at the \$900 billion worth of damage done by hurricanes and floods and weather and traveling around the world.

But I plan on—now, my wife, Jill, has been down. She's been on both sides of the river. She's seen the circumstances there. She's looked into those places. You notice you're not seeing a lot of pictures of kids lying on top of one another with—you know, with, you know, looks like tarps on top of them.

We've been able to deal that—we've been able to significantly increase funding through the HHS—Health and Human Services—to provide shelter for these kids and people. But there's much more to be done.

And I realize—I—think it is—it's the thing that concerns me the most about being able to get control of it. Because I've got to, number one, get enough funding to provide for immediate determination of whether or not someone that is, in fact, legitimately claiming a right to stay in the country because of legitimate fears. And if it's purely for economic reasons to get in line, but not get in the country.

So what we're doing is bringing a lot of folks who are coming in, and they're doing ankle bracelets instead of people being sent back, depending on whether or not their claim appears to be legitimate.

Police Reform Efforts in Minneapolis, Minnesota/Law Enforcement Best Practices/Community-Oriented Policing Practices

Mr. Cooper. Let me ask you about two other issues in the news. In less than 2 weeks, Minneapolis voters are going to decide whether or not to replace the police department in Minneapolis with what they would call a "Public Safety Department." What do you think of that?

The President. Well, it depends what they mean by that. Look, I—grew up in a neighborhood——

Mr. Cooper. They said the Public Safety Department would be—have a more comprehensive public health approach to the delivery of functions of public safety and could include licensed peace officers, police officers.

The President. Well, could. I think you need police officers. I think we need police officers to protect us. I think they have to be under certain changed circumstances. But I think we have to provide for them more opportunity—I call for more money for police to go to community policing, as well as dealing with additional help for psychologists and others working with police departments.

Mr. Cooper. You've never been a fan of defunding police.

The President. No, I haven't. I've never supported. But I've been a fan—of controlling police and making sure they're held accountable. That's a—they're two different issues.

And one of the things—look, when we had community policing, initially in the late nineties, violent crime dropped significantly—significantly. And the reason it did is because we had significant number of police. What I did: I eliminated the LEAA funding—Law Enforcement Assistance Act—and I put in place the proposal that required community policing.

What that meant was: If you were all—it's going to take a second, but it's important. [Laughter] If your—what that meant, if your city had authorized a police force of 100 people, you could not take the money for community policing and fire 50 people and rehire 50 so now I just had the Federal Government paying for half and you didn't increase the number of police.

You had to increase the number of police beyond your—whatever. So I remember my son Beau was the chief law enforcement officer of the State of Delaware as attorney general of the State of Delaware. And he used to do what I did.

He'd go down the east side where you can find the best basketball in the city. You know, every town has those places. And he'd sit there on the bench with my son—my grandson Hunter, who's now 16, who was then 5, sitting the bench, and he'd get to know these guys.

And he'd walk over and he'd knock on the window of the police car that was sitting there—the cop not getting out of the car—and say, "Get the hell out of the car and meet these folks." "No."

I'll give you one example: What we required initially was every police—every community policeman—there were two assigned—they were assigned in groups of two—they had to know the neighborhood.

I remember getting a call, as you—you've been to Delaware; you go down that road as you're heading down to the train station, Martin Luther King Boulevard. There was a woman who lived in one of those apartments in the second floor that sort of had an outcroppings—a Victorian kind of—it was a two-story place.

And what—but the cops made sure they had—she had their phone number. So, when a drug deal was going down, she'd pick up the phone on call and say to that police officer with a cell phone that the drug deal is going down, knowing that she would never be fingered, knowing that she would never be the one told it happened. And so crime began to drop.

They had to know who owned the local liquor store. They had to know and walk in and shake hands with the local minister. They had to know—that's community policing.

Mr. Cooper. Let me try to get in a couple other questions——

The President. I'm sorry.

Mr. Cooper. ——from our audience.

The President. Ask easy ones.

Status of Public Monuments, Memorials, and Statues

Mr. Cooper. But before we do, just another quick news question: New York City is removing a statue of Thomas Jefferson from its legislative chamber because of Jefferson's history as a slave holder. Do you support that decision?

The President. Well, I think that's up to the locality to decide what they want to do on that. Look, there's—there's a lot of—there's a lot of people who have no social redeeming value, historically. And there's others who have made serious mistakes in they—in terms of what—what exists now in terms of what we should be talking about, but have done an awful lot.

And so the very thing—for example, I just spoke at the Martin Luther King dedication. And I pointed out that we're right across from the Lincoln Memorial. Well, you know, and—and you talked about—and then the Jefferson Memorial. And what—what are we doing? I talked about how they said: "We're unique in all the world, as a nation. We're the only nation founded on an idea. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men and women are created equal, endowed by"—no nation has ever been founded on an idea. Have we ever lived up to it? No.

Mr. Cooper. Let me bring—

The President. But it's a pretty big idea that somebody wrote that down and got the rest of the country to agree to it. So it depends. It depends. And it's—

Mr. Cooper. Let me bring—let me bring in Glenn Niblo, a student at Loyola University, originally from Connecticut. He's a Republican. Glenn, welcome.

Q. Hi.

The President. Where in Connecticut are you from?

Q. Greenwich.

The President. That's great.

China-U.S. Relations/Taiwan

Q. China just tested a hypersonic missile. What will you do to keep up with them militarily? And can you vow to protect Taiwan?

The President. Yes and yes. We are—militarily, China, Russia, and the rest of the world knows we have the most powerful military in the history of the world. Don't worry about whether we're going to—they're going to be more powerful. What you do have to worry about is whether or not they're going to engage in activities that will put them in a position where there—they may make a serious mistake.

And so I have had—I have spoken and spent more time with Xi Jinping than any other world leader has. That's why you have—you know, you hear people saying, "Biden wants to start a new cold war with China." I don't want a cold war with China. I just want to make China understand that we are not going to step back. We are not going to change any of our views.

Mr. Cooper. So are you saying that the United States would come to Taiwan's defense if—

The President. Yes.

Mr. Cooper. —China attacked?

The President. Yes, we have a commitment to do that.

Mr. Cooper. All right. We're going to—we're going to take another quick break. We got more questions from the audience. We'll be right back.

[*There was a commercial break.*]

Death of Former Secretary of State General Colin L. Powell

Mr. Cooper. And welcome back. We are live with President Joe Biden, here in the city of Baltimore.

Just in the few minutes we have left: The country lost—and I know you lost somebody who you considered close friend, General Colin Powell. What's something about him that people didn't know?

The President. He had enormous integrity; they knew that. But he's one of the few serious, serious players I've dealt with over these years who, when he made a mistake, he acknowledges it. He said, "I acknowledge—I was wrong about it."

Mr. Cooper. That's rare these days.

The President. No, it's rare. It's been rare—it's rare in human nature for someone in a powerful position to say they are wrong. They are wrong. "I made a mistake." That's a hard thing to do. And I've had to do it about a half a dozen times lately. *[Laughter]* But all kidding aside—and the second thing about him was he had a lot of serious—he had real compassion. You know, his—well, I'll tell you afterwards, but—because we only have a few minutes.

He and I went out to the Secret Service racetrack. He had a brandnew Corvette his family bought—his kids bought him. And I have a '67 327/350, and we raced. We raced. *[Laughter]*

And you know—you know, the only reason—no, I'm serious. It was on Jay Leno. Check it out. Jay Leno live. He's—he's a hell of a guy.

Mr. Cooper. Who won?

The President. Well, I won only because he was worried I was going to crash into him. *[Laughter]* Because I don't have positraction, so I was burning rubber the whole way out there, and I could see him going, "Whoa." *[Laughter]*

Mr. Cooper. All right. So just—my final question is: You famously—at the signing ceremony, I think it was, for Obamacare, you famously leaned in to the then-President, and—I'm not going to say a direct quote, but—*[Laughter]*—off-mike, you said, "This is a big effing deal." *[Laughter]*

And I'm wondering: The Build Back Better plan—is it a bigger effing deal than that? *[Laughter]*

The President. Sixty seconds. We got in the car to go over to the—the Department of Education after we did that.

Mr. Cooper. Oh, I thought you were talking about drag racing still. *[Laughter]*

The President. No, no. He got in the car, and he was laughing like hell. I said, "What's so damn funny?" And he told me.

I whispered in his ear—this way. I looked to see where it was. I said, "I'm going to—and this is a big deal." And I didn't realize the guy behind me was really lipreading. You can see it. *[Laughter]* No, I'm serious.

The answer is: Yes, this is bigger. No, it is bigger because—not—not because what he did wasn't enormous. He broke the ice. Enormous.

But part of what I have in here is, we also increased access to the Affordable Care Act, and we reduced the price an average of 60 bucks a month for anyone who's in the Affordable Care Act. Plus, on top of that, we have another 300 billion dollars' worth of health care ever—in it.

So it's—I would say this is a bigger darn deal.

Mr. Cooper. Mr. President, thank you very much. Appreciate your time.

The President. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8 p.m. at the Baltimore Center Stage. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Eric M. Garcetti of Los Angeles, CA; Mayor Robert Garcia of Long Beach, CA; Sens. Benjamin L. Cardin and Sen. Christopher Van Hollen; Mayor Brandon M. Scott of Baltimore, MD; President Xi Jinping of China; and Jay Leno, former host, NBC's "The Tonight Show". He also referred to his sister Valerie Biden Owens; and H.R. 3684. Mr. Cooper referred to former White House Chief Strategist Stephen K. Bannon.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : CNN Presidential town hall and question-and-answer session in Baltimore, MD.

Locations: Baltimore, MD.

Names: Biden, Jill T.; Biden, R. Hunter, II; Cardin, Benjamin L.; Cooper, Anderson; Garcetti, Eric M.; Garcia, Robert; Garland, Merrick B.; Harris, Kamala D.; Hirsch, Anna; Leno, Jay; Manchin, Joseph A., III; Obama, Barack; Owens, Valerie Biden; Powell, Colin L.; Scott, Brandon M.; Sinema, Kyrsten L.; Trump, Donald J.; Van Hollen, Christopher, Jr.; Vaught, Nicholas; Xi Jinping.

Subjects: Budget, Federal : Public debt limit; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Strengthening efforts; Business and industry : Small businesses, promotion efforts; Children and youth : Childcare, affordability and costs; China : President; Civil rights : Voting rights; CNN, Presidential town hall and question-and-answer session in Baltimore, MD; Commerce, international : Global supply chain disruptions, efforts to address; Congress : Bipartisanship; Congress : House of Representatives :: Select Committee To Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol; Congress : Senate :: Filibuster; Coronavirus pandemic, international cooperation efforts; Deaths : Powell, former Secretary of State Colin L.; Diseases : Coronavirus, domestic prevention efforts; Economy, national : Household income and wages; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Early childhood education programs; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Postsecondary education :: Community colleges; Education : Vocational and technical education programs; Elections : 2020 Presidential and congressional elections; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: Promotion efforts; Energy : Coal and clean coal technologies; Energy : Energy efficiency and weatherization, homes and buildings; Energy : Gasoline, oil, and natural gas costs; Energy : Home heating assistance; Energy : Infrastructure and grid improvements; Energy : Solar and wind energy; Environment : Carbon emissions, reduction efforts; Environment : Climate change; Environment : Paris Agreement; Environment : Quality and improvement efforts; Environment : United Nations Climate Change Conference; Government organization and employees : Accountability and transparency, strengthening efforts; Health and Human Services, Department of : National Institutes of Health; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Health and medical care : Home health care; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Health and medical care : Mental health programs and services; Health and medical care : Prescription drugs, affordability and costs; Health and medical care : Research and development; Immigration and naturalization : Refugees; Immigration and naturalization : Unaccompanied alien children at Mexico-U.S. border, response to influx; Infrastructure, national improvement efforts; Justice, Department of : Attorney General; Labor issues : Paid family and sick leave; Law enforcement and crime : Community-oriented policing, strengthening efforts; Law enforcement and crime : Policing best practices, improvement efforts;

Legislation, proposed : Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act; Maryland : President's visits; Monuments, memorials, and statutes, status of public display; Natural disasters : Response and recovery efforts; Presidency, U.S. : Executive privilege; Social Security and retirement : Social Security program; Taxation : Child tax credit; Taxation : Corporate tax rates; Taxation : Tax Code, reform; Transportation : Electric vehicles and charging infrastructure, improvement efforts; United Nations : Framework Convention on Climate Change; White House Office : Vice President.

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