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Remarks at the Virtual Summit for Democracy Closing Session and an Exchange With Reporters

December 10, 2021

The President. Thank you, everyone, for participating in the Summit for Democracy and for renewing our dedication to the shared values that are the root of our national and international strength.

In the lead-up to this gathering, over the last 2 days, we've heard government leaders, as well as democratic reformers from every region of the world, talk about the challenges democracy is facing and the opportunities for its renewal. We've facilitated conversations and connections among mayors around the globe—from Mesa, Arizona, to Mannheim, Germany—and other leaders who are on the frontlines of demonstrating the power of democracy through local governments—governance.

We've shone a spotlight on the importance of protecting media freedom and how advancing the status of women and girls is an investment in the success for our democracies. And we've focused on the need to empower human rights defenders and make sure technological and—technology enables so much of our lives that is used to advance democracies to lift people up, not to hold them down. We've heard the concerns of young people who have had a greater stake in the future than anyone else—and they've made that clear—about what matters to them most and how important it is to make sure their voices are included in our democracies.

And though each of our nations faces unique challenges and many of the specific circumstances are different, the threat we face and the solutions we seek have a common antecedent. This is not a struggle of any one facing it alone; it's all of us. And the commitments we've made to ourselves, to our own people, to one another will not only strengthen our own democracies by pushing back against autocracies fighting corruption and promoting human rights for all people, this is going to help seed the fertile ground for democracy to bloom around the world.

And I'm so encouraged by the energy and the enthusiasm we've seen to rally people around the world in support of our shared democratic values. As just one example, in advance of the summit, the Presidents of Panama, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic formed, quote, an "alliance to strengthen democratic institutions," end of quote, to cooperate—to cooperate—on transparency, human rights, economic development, and strengthening democracy throughout the region.

This is the sort of inspiring commitment and partnerships that I hope we'll see more of as we undertake this issue in the next year of action. And I hope that each of our countries are going to measure the results of our efforts so that we can report back on our progress at a second Summit of—for Democracy next year, when I hope to welcome each of you in person.

For the—for our part, as I said yesterday, the United States is committed to strengthening our democracy at home and to working with parties around the world—around the globe to prove that democracies can deliver for people on issues that matter most to them.

Here at home, that means working to make real the full promise of America, including by enacting both the Freedom To Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. Because what's true around the world is also true in the United States: The sacred right to vote, to vote freely, the right to have your vote counted, is the threshold liberty for democracy—for every

democracy. With it, anything is possible. Without it, virtually nothing is possible. So we have to come together and get it done, and we will.

The United States is also going to continue our efforts to beat the pandemic, working with the World Health Organization, COVAX, and other partners to save lives, vaccinate the world against COVID–19, and advance health security for everyone.

We're leveraging our democratic partnerships, like the G–7 and the Quad, to amplify our shared capacity to produce and to deliver vaccines and to help get shots in arms for everyone, everywhere. We're taking on climate crisis—the climate crisis with a seriousness and urgency, responding to the moral—with moral clarity we're seeing coming from young people around the world. And we're affirming the democratic values that are at the heart of our international system and which have been the foundational elements of—for decades—of global growth and prosperity.

And we're committed—we're committed—to working with all who share those values to shape the rules of the road that are going to govern our progress in the 21st century, including on issues of cybersecurity and emerging technologies, so that future generations continue to reap the benefits of liberty and democracy, as we have.

And the final message I want to impart as we close out this Summit for Democracy is that we know how hard the work is that's going to be ahead of us, but we also know we are up to the challenge. Because I've said before, and as this gathering has demonstrated, the democratic world is everywhere.

Autocracies can never extinguish the ember of liberty that burns in the hearts of people around the world, in every portion of the world. It knows no borders. It speaks every language. It lives in anticorruption activists, human rights defenders, journalists, peaceful protesters on the frontlines of this struggle all around the world. And it lives in town council meetings, union elections, daily small acts that occur around the globe whenever people come together to solve problems and to bridge differences, and in all the ways civil society empowers individuals to have a direct say in the issues that impact on their lives, impact on them personally.

And so defending democracy demands a whole-of-society effort. It requires all of us. The leaders of governments, we have a responsibility to listen to our citizens, to strengthen the guardrails of democracy, and to drive reforms that are going to make transparent, accountable governments—governance more resilient against the buffering and—the buffeting forces of autocracy and those who want—and the naked pursuit of power ahead of the public good.

You know, we have to work together with the private sector to combat corruption, to build more equitable economies where more people can share in the benefits. We have to empower our citizens to hold accountable—to hold all of us accountable to the highest ideals and to make sure our actions align with our words.

And as we close out the first gathering, let's together reaffirm our determination that the future will belong to those who embrace human dignity, not those who trample it; who unleash the potential of their people, not those who stifle it; and who give their people the ability to breathe free, not those who seek to suffocate their people with an iron hand.

You know, as the great Irish poet Seamus Heaney once wrote:

. . . once in a lifetime,
The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up,
And hope and history rhyme.

That tidal wave doesn't come out of nowhere. It doesn't happen by accident. It happens because people unleash the irresistible power of their dreams and their determination.

Democracy is what makes it possible for hope and history to rhyme. And today, hope and history lie in our hands. So let's raise up our ambitions and rise up to meet the challenges together.

Thank you, and I look forward to following through in the next year on all of the commitments that we're making individually. Thank you.

Inflation/Build Back Better Act/Gasoline Prices

Q. President Biden, inflation just hit nearly—[*inaudible*].

[*At this point, music played over the audio feed. The music stopped as the President responded to the reporter's question.*]

The President. [*Inaudible*]—peak of the crisis, and I think you'll see it change sooner than—quicker than—more rapidly than it will take than most people think.

Every other aspect of the economy is racing ahead. It's doing incredibly well. We've never had this kind of growth in 60 years. But inflation is affecting people's lives.

But if you take a look at it, if you—if we were—if and when, God willing, we get the Build Back Better proposal—if you look at what—what's inflation all about for people? They're paying more for things they need than they had to pay before. That's the bottom line.

Now, if they're paying considerably less for childcare, considerably less for health care, considerably less for insulin, considerably less—and go down the list—of being able to take care of their parents—all of the things that are in the Build Back Better plan—the reason why people think it's going to—economists think it's going to, in fact, diminish the impact on inflation is because it's reducing costs for ordinary people. Reducing costs for ordinary people.

So I think it's—but in the meantime, in order to get that up and running—and we don't have a single Republican willing to support it yet. In order to get that up and running, it's going to be focused all on the downside. The downside is, prices have gone up because of supply chain concerns.

We've worked as—hard on the supply chain concerns. I think you're going to see—you've already begun to see, and you're going to see over the next couple months oil prices, gas prices—prices of gas pump come down.

You know, the biggest—one of the—a third of the increase in inflation is used automobiles. So, I mean, it is a real problem, but the point is that has to do with supply chain as well, but it also has to do with the fact that not everybody is looking for a used automobile. But those who are, they're paying higher prices because there's fewer of them because of COVID and what was sold out and the like.

So I think it's—it really is—it's a real bump in the road. It does affect families. When you walk in the grocery store and you're paying more for whatever you're purchasing, it matters. It matters to people when you're paying more for gas, although in some States, we've got the price down below 3 bucks a gallon. But the point is: It's not gone down quickly enough. But I think it will.

[*Several reporters shouted questions at once.*]

The President. Wait. Wait, wait, wait. What's the follow-up? I'm sorry.

Senator Joseph A. Manchin III/Build Back Better Act/Inflation

Q. Can you get Senator Manchin on board—with the inflation numbers this high—with the Build Back Better bill?

The President. Well, I don't know the answer to that. I'm going to be talking to him beginning of the week. And I think, if you look at what most people are saying—most of the economists are saying: This Build Back Better bill is not going to increase inflation, it will diminish inflation. It has a negative impact on inflation, not a—it doesn't raise inflation.

But that's hard for people to think about right now because inflation is up, and there's a direct correlation in most people's mind: "Well, why is there inflation? Well, Government's spending money." Well, that's not the reason for the inflation.

The reason for the inflation is that we have a supply chain problem that is really severe and it's causing a significant increase in prices in things that, in fact, are hard to get access to. Because, at the bottom—the bottom of it all is COVID. COVID has had a serious impact on the ability to produce a whole lot of necessary products, particularly those imported from the Pacific and other places.

I'll take your question and stop.

Supreme Court Decision in Whole Woman's Health v. Jackson/Former Senator Robert J. Dole

Q. Mr. President, what's your response to the Supreme Court leaving the Texas abortion law in place? And what specifically are you going to do?

The President. Well, my problem is, I haven't seen—I just got back—I just walked here from delivering Bob Dole's eulogy, so I haven't seen the report. I will take a look at what the Supreme Court said. I don't know what it said. I don't know what it said because the last 3 hours I've been involved with Bob Dole's eulogy and funeral. And—but I will—I will have a comment.

Q. Providers will sue if the law remains intact.

The President. Well, I don't—I'm not going to comment on something I don't know yet, but I will comment.

Thank you all so very much.

Q. Mr. President, Julian Assange?

Q. Mr. President——

Q. Are you going to move forward with extraditing Julian Assange?

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:57 p.m. from the South Court Auditorium of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to President Laurentino Cortizo Cohen of Panama; President Carlos Alvarado Quesada of Costa Rica; and President Luis Abinader of the Dominican Republic. He also referred to H.R. 5376. A reporter referred to Julian P. Assange, founder, WikiLeaks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democracy, Summit for, closing session, virtual remarks; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Abinader, Luis; Alvarado Quesada, Carlos; Cortizo Cohen, Laurentino; Manchin, Joseph A., III.

Subjects: Asia : Quadrilateral Security Dialogue; Civil rights : Freedom of press; Civil rights : Voting rights; Civil rights : Women's rights and gender equality; Commerce, international : Global supply chain disruptions, efforts to address; Commerce, international : Group of Seven (G–7) nations; Coronavirus pandemic, international cooperation efforts; Costa Rica, President; Diseases : Coronavirus, domestic prevention efforts; Dominican Republic, President; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Inflation; Energy : Gasoline, oil, and natural gas costs; Environment : Climate change; Foreign policy, U.S. : Civil and human rights, promotion efforts; Foreign policy, U.S. : Corruption, efforts to combat; Foreign policy, U.S. : Cybersecurity, international cooperation; Foreign policy, U.S. : Democratization; Government organization and employees : Accountability and transparency, strengthening efforts; Health and medical care : Abortion; Health and medical care : Affordability and costs; Health and medical care : Prescription drugs, affordability and costs; Labor issues : Unions :: Labor movement and organized labor; Legislation, proposed : Build Back Better Act; Panama, President; White House Summit for Democracy; World Health Organization.

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