

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2021*

**Remarks Prior to a White House COVID–19 Response Team's Video Conference With Members of the National Governors Association and an Exchange With Reporters**

*December 27, 2021*

*The President.* A lot of Govs. We ready?

*White House COVID–19 Response Coordinator Jeffrey D. Zients.* We are ready. Governors, can you hear me okay?

Welcome, Mr. President. This is actually the 40th time we've convened this group of Governors, and we're—in addition, we're in constant one-on-one contact with the Governors and their teams.

*The President.* That's more times than I've seen you. [*Laughter*]

*Coordinator Zients.* Their leadership on the ground—they are on the frontline, as you know—has been essential to the progress we've made so far.

I'm going to turn to Governor Hutchinson, who has done an outstanding job as chair of the National Governors Association, leading this group and ensuring we're all working together every step of the way.

Over to you, Governor Hutchinson.

*Governor W. Asa Hutchinson II of Arkansas.* Thank you, Jeff. And I want to thank all of the White House team for being such great support to the Governors.

[*At this point, Gov. Hutchinson continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

But I want to say, personally, I've enjoyed working with you when I was in Congress, as head of the DEA. And I appreciate your leadership. And thank you so much for giving us the time today to hear from us, but also so that we can hear from you personally about the challenge that we face.

So, Mr. President, the microphone is yours. Thank you, President Biden.

*The President.* Asa—thank you very much, Asa. Look, there is no Federal solution. This gets solved at a State level. I'm looking at Governor Sununu on the board here. He talks about that a lot.

And then it ultimately gets down to where the rubber meets the road, and that's where the patient is in need of help or preventing the need for help.

Look, Gov, thank you for what you're doing. Thank you for the National Governors Association and Vice Chair Murphy across the river. All's well in New Jersey, I assume, Gov. And—

*Governor Philip D. Murphy of New Jersey.* Amen, Mr. President. [*Laughter*]

*The President.* —and here today, Democrats and Republicans.

We've discussed the rising COVID cases, especially coming out of the holidays. And as I said last week, Omicron is a source of concern, but it should not be a source of panic. If you're fully vaccinated and you get your booster shot and—you're highly protected. If you're

unvaccinated, you're at a high risk of getting severely ill from COVID-19, being hospitalized, and in rare cases, even dying.

And this is not like March of 2020, the beginning of the pandemic. We're prepared, and we know what it takes to save lives, protect people, and keep schools and businesses open. We just have to stay focused and continue to work together.

My message to the Governors is simple: If you need something, say something, and we're going to have your back in any way we can.

Last week, we took steps to bolster support for you with, number one, more capacity to get shots in arms, with more places, more vaccinators, more times for folks to get vaccinated or get a booster shot. And we've added appointments for booster shots, adding hours, getting more convenient to get a booster every day.

The second thing we're doing is more testing. Seeing how tough it was for some folks to get a test this weekend shows that we have more work to do, and we're doing it.

First, let's talk about how we got here. When I took office 10 months into—we were 10 months into the pandemic and, even so, we had no—zero—over-the-counter home tests in the United States. None. And if you wanted to get one—to get a test, you had to go to a clinic or a drugstore to have someone give you the test. And that was—there were very few places to go.

So we got to work. We quadrupled the number of pharmacies offering free tests, and there are now more than 20,000 places where you can get tested for free. At many locations, you can book an appointment online in advance to minimize your wait. We've worked with Google so you can now search "COVID tests near me" on Google to find a location.

And now, I know the lines have gotten very long in some States. That's why I ordered FEMA to set up pop-up sites in places with high demand to shorten the wait. We stood up six new sites in New York City in 5 days, and there are more coming.

For over-the-counter, at-home tests, as I said, there were none when we took office. None. Now we have eight on the market. And just 3 days ago, another test was cleared. We went from no over-the-counter tests in January to 46 million in October, 100 million in November, and almost 200 million in December.

But it's not enough. It's clearly not enough. If I had—if we had known, we would have gone harder, quicker if we could have.

Because of steps we have been taking to increase the number of authorized tests, we're now able to purchase 500 million at-home rapid tests to be sent to the American people for free when they request it. And we're going to continue to use the Defense Production Act to produce as many tests as possible.

And starting in 2 weeks, private insurance will reimburse you for the cost of at-home tests. We're providing access to free tests for folks who don't have insurance. But we have to do more. We have to do better, and we will.

The third point I'd like to make is: more support for your hospitals. On hospitalizations, let me start with this: Because we have had so many vaccinated and boosted, we're not seeing hospitalization rise as sharply as we did in March of 2020 or even this past fall. Americans—America had made progress. Things are better.

But we do know that with a rise in cases, we still have tens of millions of unvaccinated people, and we're seeing hospitalizations rise. It means our hospitals in some places are going to get overrun, but in terms of equipment—both in terms of equipment and staff. That's why we

stockpiled and prepositioned millions of gowns, gloves, masks, and ventilators. We're mobilizing an additional 1,000 military doctors and nurses and medics to help staff hospitals.

FEMA is deploying hundreds of ambulances and EMS crews to transport patients. We've already deployed emergency response teams in Colorado, Michigan, Minnesota, Vermont, New Hampshire, and New Mexico. We're ready to provide more hospital beds as well.

The bottom line is, we want to assure the American people that we're prepared. We know what it takes. And as a—as this group of bipartisan Governors has shown, we're going to get through it by working together.

I want to thank the Governors for their partnership, and I mean that sincerely.

With that, I'd like to turn it back over to Jeff. And I understand you guys may have some questions.

Jeff.

*Coordinator Zients.* Good. I think we're going to clear the press first. Just give us a minute, Governors, while we—

#### *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Recommended Quarantine Period for Coronavirus*

*Q.* Mr. President, do you support the minimizing of the quarantine period from 10 days to 5 as the airline groups have recommended?

*The President.* I listen to my medical team. When I get a recommendation, I follow it.

*Q.* Do we need a vaccine mandate for domestic air travel, sir?

*Q.* Why not make testing free, Mr. President?

*Q.* Do we need a vaccine mandate for air travel, sir?

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:33 a.m. from the South Court Auditorium of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Christopher T. Sununu of New Hampshire.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : White House COVID-19 Response Team, video conference with members of the National Governors Association; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

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