

## **Remarks on Efforts To Protect Communities From Extreme Heat**

*July 27, 2023*

*The President.* Good afternoon.

We're here today with the mayors of Phoenix and San Antonio and senior members of my administration to talk about the existential threat of climate change. And it is a threat. We're going to outline steps we're taking to help communities who, right this minute, as both the mayors can tell you, are facing a real crisis in their cities.

We'll talk about steps we're taking to help people get through this tough time, and we're also going to talk about steps we're taking to help communities prepare, plan, and recover, and make our Nation more resilient in future heat waves. And there will be more.

I don't think anybody can deny the impact of the climate change anymore. There used to be a time when I first got here, a lot of people said, "Oh, it's not a problem." Well, I don't know anybody—well, I shouldn't say that—I don't know anybody who honestly believes climate change is not a serious problem.

Just take a look at the historic floods in Vermont and California earlier this year. Droughts and hurricanes that are growing more frequent and intense. Wildfires spreading a smoky haze for thousands of miles, worsening air quality. And record temperatures—and I mean record—are now affecting more than 100 million Americans.

Puerto Rico reached a 125-degree heat index last month. San Antonio hit an alltime heat index high of 117 last month. Phoenix has been over 110 degrees for 27 straight days.

And with El Niño and the short-term warming of the ocean that exacerbates the effects of climate change, making forecasts even hotter in the coming months.

Ocean temperatures near Miami are like stepping in a hot tub. They just topped 100 degrees—100 degrees—and they're hitting record highs around the world. And that's more like, as I said, jumping in a hot tub than jumping in an ocean to ride a wave.

Most people don't realize: For years, heat has been the—now, I have to admit I didn't know it either. I thought it—I knew it was tough, but the number-one weather-related killer is heat. The number-one weather-related killer is heat. Six hundred people die annually from its effects, more than from floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes in America combined. And even those places that are used to extreme heat have never seen it as hot as it is now for as long as it's been.

Even those who deny that we're in the midst of a climate crisis can't deny the impact that extreme heat is having on Americans. Americans like an elderly woman in Phoenix who fell out of her wheelchair and, after 5 minutes on the ground, had third-degree burns. Third-degree burns.

Or the firefighter who's—already has to lug over 45 pounds of gear through smoke and flame, which is incredibly hot. The job is even harder and more dangerous to do in record heat.

For the farmworkers who have to harvest crops in the dead of night to avoid the high temperatures. Or farmers who risk losing everything they've planted for the year.

Or the construction workers who literally risk their lives working all day in blazing heat and, in some places, don't even have the right to take a water break. That's outrageous. That is outrageous—anybody who says that—does that.

Folks, we really want to pretend these things are normal?

Experts say extreme heat is already costing America \$100 billion a year. And it hits our most vulnerable the hardest: seniors, people experiencing homelessness who have nowhere to turn, disadvantaged communities that are the least able to recover from climate disasters.

And it's threatening farms, fisheries, forests that so many families depend on to make a living.

But none of this is inevitable. From day one of my administration, we've taken unprecedented action to combat the climate crisis that's causing this. We're using a law I got passed the first day in office—first month in office—called the American Rescue Plan, to help States and cities promote energy efficiency, reduce flooding, and open cooling centers.

We're delivering over \$20 billion from the bipartisan infrastructure law to upgrade the electric grid to withstand stronger storms and heat waves so we don't cause more fires.

Look, last year I signed the Inflation Reduction Act, the most significant climate investment ever anywhere in the world. Meanwhile, FEMA has been on the ground responding to those unprecedented weather emergencies in real time. And I've traveled an awful lot in that helicopter with you all across the country and—to see the devastation that occurs, the kind of wildfires and other—and drought and the like.

We've launched a place you can go, [heat.gov](https://heat.gov)—go online to [heat.gov](https://heat.gov)—to share lifesaving information that you may need to know about.

Last year, my Department of Labor created the first-ever national program to protect workers from heat stress. Since then, we've conducted 2,600 heat-related inspections at workplaces nationwide to protect the health and safety of the workers on the job so they are being taken care of.

Today I'm announcing additional steps to help States and cities deal with the consequences of extreme heat.

First, I've asked Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su to issue a Heat Hazard Alert. It clarifies that workers have a Federal heat-related—have Federal heat-related protections. We should be protecting workers from hazardous conditions, and we will. And those States where they do not, I'm going to be calling them out, where they refuse to protect these workers in this awful heat.

Second, the Acting Secretary of Labor will work with her team to intensify enforcement, increasing inspections in high-risk industries like construction and agriculture.

This work builds on the national standard that the Labor Department is already developing for workforce and workplace heat-safety rules.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Forest Service will award more than \$1 billion in grants to help cities and towns plant trees that in the long term will help repel the heat and expand access to green spaces so families have a place to go to cool off and to bring down the temperature in cities.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development is providing billions to communities to make buildings more efficient and to make more heat—make them more heat-resistant, opening cooling centers in—for residential areas and in the cities that the communities can go to to be safe.

The Department of the Interior is using infrastructure funding to expand water storage capacity in the Western States to deal with the impacts of future droughts that are made every—all this more extreme—this heat—this extreme heat more consequential.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is launching a new partnership with universities and impact communities to improve the Nation's weather forecasts and its accuracy

so Americans everywhere can be better prepared when they—when—and they can better predict what the heat is going to be in that community with the weather.

In all my "Investing in America" agenda, we provided a record \$50 billion for climate resiliency to restore wetlands, manage wildfires, help Americans in every State withstand extreme heat.

But our MAGA extremists in Congress are trying to undo all this progress. Not a single one of them—not a single Republican voted—voted for the Inflation Reduction Act, which had all this money for climate, which provides funding to combat climate change. And now many of them are trying to repeal those provisions, but we're not going to let that happen.

Part of the reason we're here today is to get the word out so State and local governments know these resources are available and uses them. I want the American people to know help is here and we're going to make it available to anyone who needs it.

Follow guidance from the local leaders and public safety officials when you hear it in your cities and towns and States. Stay indoors if you're vulnerable. Be careful on hot pavement. Know the signs of heat stroke, like headache, nausea, dizziness. And always have water with you. That sounds silly, but always have a bottle of water with you when you're outside.

Check on loved ones and neighbors who may not have air conditioning, and check on them on a regular basis. Or go to the mall or community centers or movie theaters or libraries where there is air conditioning when you don't have that air conditioning at home.

Take advantage of local cooling centers. Hundreds are being built. They're there for everyone, and they save lives. It matters.

Now I'm going to turn it over to the mayor of Phoenix, who's on the frontlines of dealing with extreme heat.

And fire away, Mayor. We're anxious to hear what you have to say.

*[At this point, Mayor Kate S. Gallego of Phoenix, AZ, spoke via videoconference as follows.]*

*Mayor Gallego* Thank you so much, President Biden. Thank you for convening us today to talk about something near and dear to my heart and on so many of our minds: extreme heat.

We really appreciate your leadership on climate change with legislation such as the Inflation Reduction Act that will be the most important in a generation.

Phoenix is known for heat. We are often called the Valley of the Sun. We have relentless summer heat followed by beautiful months of weather. But right now this summer has really been unprecedented. And you've spoken about some of the challenges we have faced here in Phoenix. It's taking a real toll on our community.

We feel like we are very much on the frontlines of climate change.

*The President.* You are.

*Mayor Gallego.* I've tried to make—and it's—man, you can feel it outside today. We have—I've tried to make it my mission to adapt to this trend, to stay ever innovative, and ensure we aren't falling behind on heat resilience.

We're working to outinnovate climate change, but we need to work together to make sure all of us are on deck to address it. We need a whole-of-Government approach. Phoenix is the first in the Nation to have a permanent publicly funded heat office. They love the data that NOAA and your Federal Government is putting out to help us.

Our emergency personnel and heat-ready volunteers are working diligently to keep residents safe through targeted outreach on heat safety, park trail closures, and timely responses to help our most vulnerable.

The heat is a challenge for folks who don't have access to adequate AC or who are outdoors most of the day, so a large part of our efforts is getting residents inside as much as possible. We do it in a variety of ways through cooling centers located across the country—the county, mobile cooling units, respite centers, and encouraging hydration at one of our many water stations.

We also recognize that many families need assistance to make their air conditioners more effective or need Federal aid with their energy bills. And Federal dollars have just been crucial in supporting families' abilities to make their homes safer and more comfortable.

The Department of Energy's Weatherization Assistance Program makes homes more energy efficient, lowering energy bills for the long haul, reducing overload on the grid, and making homes more comfortable in intense heat.

Paired with the incredible incentives in the Inflation Reduction Act for residential solar, this can make an enormous impact for families. And Mayor Nirenberg, who's joining us, has been a real leader and a model for mayors in how to communicate all the good things that are in the IRA to our residents.

The HHS Low-Income Household Energy Assistance Program, LIHEAP, has been crucial for low-income families to help with energy bills. Even when the heat is over, many of our families may see their largest ever energy bill in their mailboxes.

And we're among the many warm-weather communities asking for balanced consideration of how these formulas are structured. Expanding these solutions would have immediate impact for families.

We are also using ARPA dollars to address heat. And we are looking forward to applying for the funding for trees, which could really go a long way in making our communities more comfortable, that you have secured in the Inflation Reduction Act.

We deal with this heat on an annual basis. So we've been focused on preparedness from day one and really trying to prepare for what is, for us, a long-term emergency.

You mentioned how many lives are lost to heat, and that's a real focus for us. We would love it if Congress would give you the ability to declare heat a disaster. We think that could really save additional aid, and that would even more multiply the impact of FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance and Building Resistant—Resilience Infrastructure—the BRIC programs, which are a good start to building long-term solutions, such as energy redundancy for cooling centers.

So we feel like there are a lot of great tools. And I appreciate you helping communities across the country just make sure they're aware of the great ways the Federal Government is partnering. We're looking forward to working with you to become even more effective.

Thank you.

*The President.* Well, Kate, thank you very much.

Look, you've established the Office of Heat Response and Mitigation. And sometimes—I think those of us in Government do this all the time: We think everybody knows what all these titles and all these acronyms mean. But can you give me—share some examples of the work and the outreach that you're doing in the community to try to let people know what's available and how you can help? I mean, what kinds of thing—because I find that's the difficult thing to do sometimes.

*Mayor Gallego.* Absolutely. We're getting better every year, and we learn every year. We're trying to get out and share maps of where all the cooling centers are to deliver cooling kits.

You mentioned checking on loved ones. We have a formal program called "Cool Callers" at the city of Phoenix——

*The President.* Good for you.

*Mayor Gallego.* ——where we can—you can register your family members or if you know you might need a check during the heat of the summer. And we would love for more people to sign up to be checked on.

It's a—the volunteers have been amazing. We've had thousands of engagement. And just having that permanent office has given us a place for people to go both with ideas and when they want to volunteer. And we've been able to use some of your Federal programs, including trying to find new ways to build housing indoors so that our construction workers are safer.

So we appreciate the partnership. It's made our heat office more effective.

*The President.* Well, it's not going to alleviate it right—the heat problem right now, but we also have a number of programs to do everything from allow people to have the ability to get help to literally paint their roofs white, to change the—their windows and doors, to get tax credits for doing it so heat doesn't—so air conditioning doesn't escape, to be able—there's a whole bunch of programs that are out there that, as we get through the heat wave, that we're—well, as we get by this worst part, that we're able to invest in the communities to keep it from happening as badly next time it occurs.

And so I'm looking forward to working with you, and I thank you for your leadership.

Mr. Mayor, how are you doing, man?

[*Mayor Ronald A. Nirenberg of San Antonio, TX, spoke via videoconference as follows.*]

*Mayor Nirenberg.* Doing great, Mr. President.

*The President.* I hope the air I hope the air conditioning is working. [*Laughter*]

*Mayor Nirenberg.* So far, so good, Mr. President. It's great to be here with you and your team and with Mayor Gallego.

And I first want to start by thanking you, Mr. President, for the invitation today and want to extend my sincerest gratitude for your administration for the wealth of the support that San Antonio communities garnered through extensive and substantive investments in our housing stock—affordable housing stock, our workforce training efforts, as well as sustainable physical infrastructure.

But today we are here to talk about what has become a dangerous heat wave across large swaths of the southern part of our country, including here in Texas. To that end, San Antonio is certainly thankful for a President who's willing to tackle this urgent crisis in an equitable manner.

The bipartisan infrastructure law and the Inflation Reduction Act's commitment to the Justice40 climate initiative is also reflected on our local San Antonio Climate Ready Plan, as 75 percent of San Antonio's population are communities of color disproportionately impacted by decades of local inaction.

*The President.* Yes.

*Mayor Nirenberg.* But times are changing, thankfully. Sustainability and green energy are no longer four-letter words in the State of Texas. We will——

*The President.* At least among most of you Texans—at least among most Texans. [Laughter]

*Mayor Nirenberg.* Well, I'm happy to say that——

*The President.* I'm not——

*Mayor Nirenberg.* ——here in San Antonio, we've taken leadership. And——

*The President.* You have.

*Mayor Nirenberg.* ——and in 2028, we will end the use of coal in San Antonio, which is nearly 40 years ahead of schedule.

And in large part because of you, Mr. President, San Antonio will launch its first-ever Advanced Rapid Transit line, bona fide mass transit for the city of San Antonio, a service that will only include low- or no-emission vehicles.

And so, as San Antonio works towards greener development in transit, we're also doing our policy work. Our—we changed our development code last year to require 240-volt level 2 chargers in all new single-family homes. We're also providing incentives for those chargers in multifamily residences.

And also having the Nation's largest municipally owned utility, San Antonio has now become the fifth largest solar producer in the United States and tops in Texas——

*The President.* Congratulations on that, by the way. Congratulations.

*Mayor Nirenberg.* Thank you very much. We're going to reach for number one in the country. We're number one in Texas, but we're not going to stop.

However, these initiatives are just—are not just happening in San Antonio. I'm pleased to report mayors are united in Texas as well. Communities across Texas have committed themselves to being greener, more equitable, and literally cooler, as nearly every major Texas city now has a long-term climate or emissions reduction strategy.

So, working with our partners at the White House, with you and your team, I'm confident that the State best known for oil and gas production can help lead the way to a greener tomorrow.

So thank you again to your entire team, Mr. President, for your efforts to help us realize a better tomorrow for us, for our children, and for our grandchildren.

*The President.* Well, Ron, thank you. And I'm not being solicitous when I say this: You know, most people don't realize that Texas is one of the States that has the most significant—its energy is most significantly supplied by wind and solar, in Texas—in Texas.

And I know there are some in your State that want to change—turn that around. But it's working, and it's moving in a big way. And it's cheaper. It's cheaper.

*Mayor Nirenberg.* And it saved our necks in this heat wave too, by the way.

*The President.* Well, I think so. For real. I mean, look, most people have—grew up in families like I did, where you've just got to worry about one day to the next and getting enough food on the table. I mean, not poor but you know, just taking care of business, making sure your kids are okay.

But I—the change that's taking place in Texas as it relates to dealing with the generation of energy is really magnificent. I mean, it's really incredible.

And I'm sure that—anyway, I won't—I shouldn't get into all that. But the fact is—you know, while your long-term plans take shape, what are you doing in the near term to protect your residents from the heat wave?

*Mayor Nirenberg.* Well, I certainly appreciate that question and very much appreciate the actions that you're taking today, Mr. President, through the Department of Labor.

As you know, Texas cities are in a battle with the State for local control. But we're going to do everything possible to protect our most vulnerable workers, especially those outdoor workers, for basic things like being able to access water breaks.

*The President.* Yes.

*Mayor Nirenberg.* San Antonio also is the first—taking a page from Mayor Gallego's book, we're the first major city in Texas to pilot a citywide cool pavement initiative.

I'm also pleased to report that, next week, city council will vote to allocate an additional \$4 million for tree planting, for mitigating our urban heat island effect.

And for the most immediate needs right now during this heat island—or during this heat wave—we have 80 cooling centers located all around the city—pools, splash pads, libraries, et cetera. And we're offering free transportation to any resident who needs to get located into one of those indoor cooling centers.

And for our homeless population, we are conducting extensive outreach to make sure that we can get them into cool places and nobody is out there in the elements.

*The President.* Well, thank you. And look, don't hesitate to call us direct. For real.

I mean, there's so much—no, I really mean it. There's so much out there that we can do. And we've funded an awful lot of this.

For example, the idea that you can't have mandatory water breaks when you're working on a construction? Hell, when I played football, if you had a coach who, during the spring—during summer practice, didn't provide water, you know, on a regular basis, he got in trouble or got fired. I mean, what are we doing here? What's going on with some of this stuff?

Both of you are—totally different place. But people just need to know where to go and what to do. And we're going to provide a lot of help across the board. And I'm looking forward to working with both of you.

For example, we should—on the international effort, we've got a commitment to, you know, plant a billion trees over the next several years worldwide. I mean, there's a reason why—anyway, you guys get it. And—but we've got to get through this crisis in the near term, and we've got to keep people safe.

And I really appreciate it. Because, look, I think talking to you both—people make judgments about whether you have a heart or not, whether you really are—whether it's just rote, you're telling them, or you care.

I mean this sincerely; you guys know this. Well, you both care, and it comes across. And so people are more inclined to say, "Okay, I'll take a chance on maybe going to that center, or maybe I'll take a chance on doing A, B, C, or D."

People are reluctant. And what you're both doing substantively, what we're going to be able to help you do more substantively, but what you're doing and the way you're doing it, I really admire you for doing it. I really mean it.

So thank you, thank you, thank you. Appreciate it.

And I want to thank my team for the work they're doing too to combat extreme heat and other historic weather emergencies we're seeing all across the country.

We are making progress. But as we've heard today, we have a lot more work to do.

I look forward to working with not just—just this two—these two wonderful mayors, but officials all across on the frontlines and local officials. Local officials are where the rubber meets the road, no pun intended. It's—really matters.

We're committed to getting you what you need to keep your community safe, because no one knows what you need more for your communities than you guys. And so thank you, thank you, thank you.

And I mean it: Don't hesitate to contact any of the departments standing behind me. We have some of the funds. We're working—going to get more. And I think we can make a difference.

So thank you both. And as my mother would say, "God love you."

Thanks. See you all.

*Q.* Mr. President, are you—[inaudible]—pardoning your son? [Inaudible]—pardon for your son?

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:06 p.m. in the South Court Auditorium of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. Joining the President in the South Court Auditorium were Acting Secretary of Labor Julie A. Su, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Richard W. Spinrad, and Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Deanne Bennett Criswell. Assistant to the President for Homeland Security Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall and Director of the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs Thomas J. Perez also attended.

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