

Remarks Prior to a Meeting on the Cancer Moonshot Initiative

September 13, 2023

The President. Well, last year, Jill and I reignited the Cancer Moonshot and—to end cancer as we know it and to even cure some cancers in the process. And so it's not just personal, but it's about what's possible.

Almost everywhere we go, whether it's meeting with folks at local events or meeting with world leaders, beating cancer brings people together no matter where you are. And that's why the Cancer Moonshot was part of our unity agenda in—for this administration.

The goal was to mobilize a whole-of-country effort to cut American cancer rates—deaths in half in the next 25 years—or sooner, God willing—and to boost support for patients and families in the process.

When we launched this as—when I launched this as Vice President, I literally traveled to every major cancer institute in the world. And one thing that struck me most was how siloed each of these were, how little sharing of information occurred.

And so I—that's why I wanted to make sure that we have a full Governmentwide effort on the first-ever Cabinet—Cancer Cabinet. One of the great things that my President at the time I was Vice President did was give me authority to task anyone within the Cabinet to begin to work on coordinating on the cancer effort.

And so we came up with this Cancer Cabinet to break down the silos and unleash every possible asset that was within our power. And that includes the department most folks may not think first of.

For example, I remembered talking with Bill, and I said I wanted to have NASA involved. And they looked at me—"NASA?" Well, they've forgotten more about radiation than most hospitals try to know. And they've made—can make real contributions. Or the Department of Defense, the Department of Energy have immense supercomputing capabilities.

And we made some important progress. We've secured \$2.5 billion in bipartisan funding for—from Congress to establish what I've long called ARPA-H, which is the Advanced Research Project Agency for Health—not just defense, but for health—and drive breakthroughs in prevention, diagnosis, and treatment for cancer and for other diseases, not just cancer.

And so this was in addition to the \$7.3 billion in funding we secured from the National Cancer—for the National Cancer Institute this year alone.

We signed the PACT Act into law, one of the most significant laws ever to help veterans exposed to toxic materials and provide benefits for them and their families if they didn't come home.

We passed the Inflation Reduction Act, which will cap total out-of-pocket prescription drug costs for seniors on Medicare at \$2,000 a year, including expensive cancer drugs that would cost \$10-, \$12-, \$14,000 a year.

We beat Big Pharma, giving Medicare the ability to negotiate prescription drug prices for cancer, as well as other diseases. And we're securing commitments from companies, nonprofits, and patient groups to increase screening, prevent exposure to toxic substances, deliver new research innovations, and help patients navigate the diagnosis. Everybody needs a navigator. When you hear that word "cancer," it's like—it's just—anyway.

It's also creating a national network to accelerate clinical trials and ensure that each—we reach the historical underserved communities—historically. And there is a lot of underserved communities.

As a matter of fact, when they—my work on trying to move on the environment and global warming, there is a lot of fenceline communities that we're cleaning up. But that's why I committed that 40 percent of all the savings were going to go to those communities.

In the next few weeks, ARPA-H will award \$250 million for cancer-related research and innovation projects. We're helping people quit smoking, the single largest driver of cancer deaths in America still. And we're modernizing our cancer research system, breaking down silos so new data is available to as many experts across the country as possible.

The bottom line is, the Cancer Moonshot today embodies America as a nation of possibilities. During the campaign, I was asked: What's the one thing I would do if I were President? What—if I could just do one thing. I said, "I'd cure cancer," not because it's the most frightening thing that exists out there. But we used to think we could handle anything, and cancer—we sort of gave up on the notion that we could cure cancer.

Everything we've ever put our mind to we've been able to do. And I was trying to make the point that it's essential that we keep that spirit and keep that sense. And I said, "Beating cancer," because we can, because I wanted to inject a sense of optimism in what we can do as a country.

But there is still a lot more work to do. And that—that's focusing today on—that's why we're here today, to coordinate as much as we can, find out the progress we're making among the Cancer Cabinet.

And with that, I'll turn it over to Jill.

The First Lady. You did good things, Joe. [Laughter]

The President. Thank you. [Laughter]

The First Lady. Thank you, Mr. President. [Laughter]

On my second full day as First Lady, I visited a health center here in DC to highlight a program that helps people navigate their cancer journey. And since then, as part of the Biden Cancer Moonshot, I've participated in more than 40 engagements and visited almost a dozen States.

And I've seen world-class cancer hospitals, community health centers, and clinics on Tribal lands. I've worked with sports leagues and advocates, businesses and media, and I've joined Republicans and Democrats who are helping lead this work in their communities. Because this isn't, as you all know, a red issue or a blue issue; it's a human one.

And earlier this year in New Orleans, Senator Cassidy and I saw how funding from the National Cancer Institute is changing lives in Louisiana, helping nurses enroll patients in remote areas in clinical trials.

Two weeks ago in Madison, Senator Baldwin and I toured a lab working to transform how we screen for cancer. It was really pretty fascinating. And we spoke with advocates and providers about how the Federal funding the President called for in his budget would help more Wisconsin women get screened for breast and cervical cancer.

And later this week, I'll be visiting Emory University, where researchers just received the first award through ARPA-H so they can fight incurable cancers.

I've met with patients and families and health care workers and researchers to hear what's working and what isn't. And when I brought their stories back to the White House, the President listened.

Last year, I visited a small health clinic in a Tribal Nation outside of Tucson, Arizona. The people we met spoke about their struggle to find funding to meet their needs of their community, where so many are touched by cancer, as you all know.

So the President got to work. And in his budget, he proposed over \$100 million for the Indian Health Service to provide more cancer prevention, screening, and support services for Native communities.

Everywhere I go, my focus is on the patient experience. And what I've heard again and again is that we need, as Joe was talking about, patient navigation programs and that these programs need more support. Because, as we all know, everybody in this room, cancer is daunting and complex.

And when someone who knows the system is by your side every step of the way, it changes everything. Navigators lead to better outcomes for patients. But since navigators aren't generally paid for by insurance, most medical practices can't afford to provide them.

So the President expanded the number of grants for these programs. And he worked with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to propose a new rule that, when finalized, will allow Medicare to pay for patient navigation services.

We're also working with the private sector to find ways to bring these services to more people. And this fall, we will convene industry leaders here at the White House.

Of all the things cancer steals from us, time is the cruelest: the days spent in treatment or recovering from surgery, anniversaries and holidays missed, pages of photo albums unfilled.

We can't afford to wait another minute for better solutions, better treatments, better cures. And that's why we're all here. And that's why I'm asking you to lean in just a little bit more, to push your staffs just a little harder, for all the families touched by cancer across the country that are in a race against time. This is the urgency of now.

For Joe and for me, this is the mission of our lives. And I look forward to hearing from all of you about the ways I can help advance and lift up your work.

So, together, I know we are going to end cancer as we know it. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former President Barack Obama; and Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration C. William Nelson.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Cancer Moonshot initiative, meeting.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Biden, Jill T.; Nelson, C. William; Obama, Barack.

Subjects: Bipartisanship; Cancer research, prevention, and treatment; Department of Health and Human Services, Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health; Medicare and Medicaid programs; Prescription drug costs, reduction efforts.

DCPD Number: DCPD202300781.