

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With the President's Council of Advisers on Science and Technology and an Exchange With Reporters in San Francisco, California
September 27, 2023

The President. This is a 14-hour meeting. [Laughter]

Look, let me begin by saying that one of the things that disturbed me—being involved in elective office for a long time—is how, over the last 30 years, the Federal Government has paid less and less attention to investments in science and technology.

And we're in a situation where we used to have a significant portion of our GDP going into research and development. And it got down to .7 percent from 2 percent. We used to lead the world. And I don't know how we can be the safest, most secure, and healthiest nation in the world without significant investment in science and technology, and I mean that. And so you've all really stepped up.

And one of the things that I also—it doesn't directly relate today, but Arati and I talked a little bit about it earlier this morning—is that: What leaders say matter, in terms of people's confidence in things they're not sure about.

And one of those areas—you saw what happened with regard to the crisis—health crisis that we had that cost us—we lost well over a million people. And as time began to move on, you had more and more voices saying: "No, no, no. You don't need to get that shot. You don't need to be—get—you don't need to."

And we have a new strain of COVID now, and we have answers for it. But I just would urge those in public life and both political parties or no political party to be cautious about their—the sometimes inflammatory things you say about this, because people's lives are at stake.

And the last piece was, when I was Vice President, for a slightly different reason, I spent a lot of time going between rural areas and urban areas. And one of the things that we—you're going to talk about here is the health care workers reflecting the community. We need not only to have more focus on rural communities and rural hospitals in order to get the kind of care and attention they need, but we need to have people from those communities to be the ones who are trained and engaged in that effort. And I think that—again, Arati raised that with me this morning.

I can't tell you how certain I am that that is necessary, and I'm not a scientist. It matters. It matters who you go to and do you trust what they're doing. Do you think they know what they're talking about?

And so, Dr. Zuber, thank you. I'm really looking forward to this discussion. And this group represents some of the top minds in America. And that's, again, not hyperbole. That's a fact.

I've often said, America is the only nation in the world that can be defined by one word. I spent a lot of time with Xi Jinping when I was Vice President and subsequent to that. And he once asked me, on the Tibetan Plateau, could I define America for him? And I mean this sincerely—not a joke—I said: "Yes. One word: possibilities."

We've always believed that anything is possible if we set our mind to it. Possibilities.

And science and technology is allowing us to unlock the potential as a nation and meet the challenges of our time with some sense of urgency and purpose. I can't emphasize the word "urgency" too much.

I'd hate like hell if three generations from now—they look back on this period where we had the potential tools to explore and increase significantly our ability to help, and we somehow messed it up. No, no, I mean it sincerely. I'm sorry to talk so plainly, but I think that's what it gets down to in many cases.

So I'm looking forward to discussing actions that we're taking on two priorities: AI—artificial intelligence—and expanding high-quality health care for every American no matter where they're quartered, where they live, what their background is.

You know, as we just heard, AI has the potential to transform research, and I'm looking forward to learning much more today.

And, by the way, I'm not joking. My latest two trips around the world—and not figuratively; literally around the world—to meet with other world leaders, everyone—well, I wouldn't say "everyone." I can think of—I can't think of anybody who didn't, but I'm sure I will—there was some world leader who didn't ask me.

They wanted to talk about our leadership on artificial intelligence and what the meetings—what we—I've conducted already around tables similar to this with the 10, 12 major, major initiators with AI—and the vast differences exist among them in terms of what potential it has, what dangers there are.

And so, you know, I've been keen—I have a keen interest in AI and convened key experts on how to harness the power of artificial intelligence for good, while protecting people from the profound risk it also presents—we can't kid ourselves—the profound risk if we don't do it well.

And the United States is committed to that goal. And we're going to work with world leaders to achieve it, including British Prime Minister Sunak and others that I've been—they want to do more together with us.

And I want to thank—thanks to our administrations, 15 American technology companies have already begun to implement voluntary commitments to help ensure that AI technology is safe, secure, and trustworthy before it's released to the public. That includes extensive independent safety testing. That includes watermarking and identifying images that have been generated by AI.

And to state the obvious: AI extends beyond health and security issues. I applaud the tentative resolution from the writers strike, for example, here—not here—in California, in Los Angeles, including insurances on how the use of AI will occur.

This fall, I'm going to take executive action, and my administration is going to continue to work with bipartisan legislation so America leads the way toward responsible AI innovation.

We're also taking action to ensure our loved ones have access to high-quality health care, starting with the PCAST release—report you released on strengthening patient safety. I made very brief reference to it at the beginning, but it is really, really critical.

And today I'm announcing major investments in patient safety from ARPA-H to develop antibiotics and to fight deadly drug-resistant bacteria and save lives. Think of that. We're talking about the potential for antibiotics to be used to deal with—anyway, it just—when I start reading your reports, I think to myself: "My, Lord, what an incredible era we're about to go through." But it has to be done well.

And so finding and implementing solutions to reduce medical errors and other problems for patients' experiences when hospitalized is going to improve health outcomes and protect our loved ones as well. And Joe Kiani knows a lot about that—has been working with it a long, long time.

My administration is committed to ensuring every American receives high-quality care they deserve in every community—urban, rural, suburban, Tribal—I—and it varies as to who—think about your—I say to the public who may be listening: Think about whether or not—who you go to and how much you trust that doc is going to impact on whether you follow the instructions. No, I mean it. It is a very basic human nature element. And that's why having people from, quote, "the neighborhood" makes a big difference, I think.

And so it's going to reduce medical errors and other problems patients face when they're hospitalized. And I believe it's going to improve outcomes and protect the people we love.

My administration is committed to ensuring every American receives high-quality care they deserve in every community, as I said. And ultimately, it's all about dignity. It's all about dignity.

The actions we take together are going to help protect people's health. They're going to promote innovation. And we're going to win the economic competition of the 21st century, in my humble opinion.

And I'll just say: If we have a Government shutdown, a lot of vital work in science and health could be impacted, from cancer research to food safety. So the American people need our Republican friends in the House of Representatives to do their job: fund the Government.

We've got a lot to discuss, so let's get this meeting started. I'd rather hear from you than me. Thank you.

Potential Lapse in Federal Government Appropriations

Q. Mr. President, do you think the Government shutdown is inevitable at this point? Over here, sir. Do you——

The President. I don't think anything is inevitable in politics.

Q. What can be done now to make—to make sure it doesn't happen?

The President. If I knew that, I would have done it already. [*Laughter*] Thank you.

Q. [*Inaudible*]—are being sued right now, accused of stealing property—[*inaudible*]—from America's cultural—[*inaudible*]. And Elon Musk is——

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:13 p.m. at the Fairmont San Francisco hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Office of Science and Technology Policy Director Arati Prabhakar, Frances H. Arnold, Linus Pauling Professor of Chemical Engineering, Bioengineering, and Biochemistry at the California Institute of Technology, and Maria T. Zuber, vice president for research and E.A. Griswold Professor of Geophysics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in their capacity as cochairs, and Joe Kiani, founder, chairman, and chief executive officer of Masimo, in his capacity as member, of the President's Council of Advisers on Science and Technology; and President Xi Jinping of China. A reporter referred to entrepreneur Elon R. Musk.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : President's Council of Advisers on Science and Technology, meeting with President in San Francisco, CA; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, San Francisco, CA.

Locations: San Francisco, CA.

Names: Kiani, Joe; Prabhakar, Arati; Sunak, Rishi; Xi Jinping; Zuber, Maria T.

Subjects: Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H); Artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies; California, President's visit; China, President; COVID-19 vaccines; Health insurance, access and availability; Office of Science and Technology Policy; President's

Council of Advisers on Science and Technology; Research and development; Rural health care access and infrastructure, improvement efforts; Science and technology, international cooperation; United Kingdom, Prime Minister.

DCPD Number: DCPD202300844.