

**TRANSCRIPT OF PRESIDENT BIDEN
PRESS CONFERENCE**

THURSDAY, MARCH 25, 2021

BIDEN:

Good afternoon. Before I take questions, I wanna make--give you a progress report to the nation on--on--where we stand 65 days into office here on vaccinations and a few other top priorities for the American people.

First, on vaccinations. On December 8th, I indicated that I hoped to get 100 million shots in people's arms in my first 100 days. We met that goal last week by day 58, 42 days ahead of schedule. Now today I'm setting a second goal, and that is we will by my 100th day in office have administered 200 million shots in people's arms. That's right, 200 million shots in 100 days.

I--I know it's ambitious, twice our original goal. But no other country in the world has even come close, not even close to what we are doing. I believe we can do it. And today we made a historic investment in reaching the hardest hit and the most vulnerable communities, the highest risk communities at--as a consequence of the virus by investing an additional \$10 billion in being able to reach them.

I also set a goal before I took office of getting a majority of schools in K through 8 fully open in the first 100 days. Now, thanks to the enormous amount of work done by our administration, educators, parents, local state education officials and leaders, a recent Department of Education survey shows that nearly half of the K through 8 schools are open now full time, five days a week for in person learning. Not yet a majority, but we're really close and I believe in the 35 days left to go we'll meet that goal as well.

As of yesterday, more than 100 million payments of \$1,400 have gone into people's bank accounts. That's real money in people's pockets, bringing relief instantly almost. And millions more will be getting their money very soon.

One final note, since we passed the American Rescue Plan we're starting to see new signs of hope in our economy. Since it was passed, a majority--a majority of economic forecasters have significantly increased their projections on the economic growth that's going to take place this year.

They're now projecting it will exceed 6 percent--a 6 percent growth in GDP. And just this morning, we learned that the number of people filing for weekly unemployment insurance fell by nearly 100,000 persons. That's the first time in a year the number's fallen below the pre-pandemic high. So there are still too many Americans out of work, too many families hurting, and I still have a lot of work to do.

But I can say to you, the American people, help is here and hope is on the way. Now I'll be happy to take your questions.

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Zeke, Associated Press.

QUESTION:

Thank you, Mr. President. You mentioned your progress on COVID-19, I'd like to ask you about some of the other issues facing your presidency. One of the defining challenges you face in the coming months is how to deliver on your promise to Americans on issues like immigration reform and gun control, voting rights, climate change. All of those right now are facing stiff united opposition from Republicans on Capitol Hill.

How far are you willing to go to achieve those promises that you made to the American people?

BIDEN:

Well I'm gonna--look, when--when I took office I decided that it was a fairly basic, simple proposition. And that is I got elected to solve problems. And the most urgent problem facing the American people, I stated from the outset, was COVID-19 and the economic dislocation for millions and millions of Americans. And so that's why I put all my focus in the beginning--there are a lot of problems--but all my focus on dealing with those particular problems.

And the other problems we're talking about, from immigration to guns and the other things you mentioned are long term problems. They've been around a long time. And what we're gonna be able to do, God willing, is now begin one at a time to focus on those as well. And whether it's immigration or guns or a number of other problems that face the country.

But the fundamental problem is getting people some peace of mind so they can go to bed at night and not stare at the ceiling wondering whether they lost their health insurance, whether they're gonna lose a family member, whether they're gonna be in a position where they're not gonna be--they're gonna lose their home because they can't pay their mortgage or the millions of people who are gonna get thrown out of their homes because of the inability to--to pay their rent.

So we're--we're gonna move on these one at a time, try to do as many simultaneous as we can. But that's the reason why I focused as I have. And here's the deal. I think my Republican colleagues are gonna have to determine whether or not we want to work together or they're decide that the way in which they want to proceed is to--is to just decide to divide the country, continue the politics of division.

But I'm not gonna do that. I'm just gonna move forward and take these things as they come.

QUESTION:

And just a--to follow up, Mr. President. Can your presidency be a success if you can't make progress on those four challenges, climate change, immigration reform, gun control, voting rights?

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BIDEN:

Well I plan on making progress on all of them, but that's gonna be for the American people to decide. I think, you know, I--I doubt whether--maybe you did, maybe others did. I--I--I thought--many of you thought there was no possibility of my getting the--the plan I got passed passed without any Republican votes. Pretty big deal. Got passed. Growing the economy. People's lives are changing. So let's see what happens.

All I know, I've been hired to solve problems. To solve problems. Not create division.

Okay, how about Yamiche.

QUESTION:

Thanks so much, Mr. President. You've said over and over again that immigrants shouldn't come to this country right now, this isn't the time to come. That message is not being received. Instead, the perception of you that got you elected as a moral, decent man is the reason why a lot of immigrants are coming to this country and entrusting you with unaccompanied minors.

How do you resolve that tension? And how are you choosing which families can stay and which can--can go, given the fact that even though with Title 42 there are some families that are staying? And is there a timeline for when we won't be seeing these overcrowded facilities with--run by CPB when it comes to unaccompanied minors?

BIDEN:

Well look, I guess I should be flattered people are coming because I'm the nice guy, that's the reason why it's happening, that I'm a decent man or however it's phrased that, you know, that's why they're coming because they know Biden's a good guy. Truth of the matter is, nothing has changed. As many people came--28 percent increase in children to the border in my administration, 31 percent in the last year of--in 2019 before the pandemic in the Trump administration.

It happens every single solitary year. There is a significant increase in the number of people coming to the border in the winter months of January, February, March. It happens every year. In addition to that, there is a--an--nobody--and by the way, does anybody suggest that there was a 31 percent increase under Trump because he was a nice guy and he was doing good things at the border? That's not the reason they're coming.

The reason they're coming is that it's the time they can travel with the least likelihood of not dying on the way because of the heat in the desert, number one. Number two, they're coming because of the circumstances in country, in country. The way to deal with this problem, and I started to deal with it back when I was a United States senator--I mean, as vice president--putting together a bipartisan plan of over \$700 million to deal with the root causes of why people are leaving. What did Trump do? He eliminated that funding. He didn't use it. He didn't do it.

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And in addition to that, what he did, he dismantled all the elements that exist to deal with what had been a problem and--and has been--continued to be a problem for a long time. He in fact shut down the--the number of beds available. He did not fund HHS to get people to get the children out of those--those Border Patrol facilities where they should not be and not--

BIDEN:

--supposed to be more than a few days, a little while, but he dismantled all of that. So, what we're doing now is attempting to rebuild, rebuild the system that can accommodate the--the--what is happening today. And I'd like to think it's because I'm a nice guy, but it's not. It's because of what's happened every year.

Let me say one of the thing on this. If you take a look at the number of people who are coming, the vast majority, the overwhelming majority of people coming to the border and crossing are being sent back, are being sent back.

Thousands, tens of thousands of people who are--who are over 18 years of age and single people one of time coming have been sent back, sent home. We're sending back the vast majority of the families that are coming. We're trying to work out now with Mexico their willingness to take more of those families back, but we--that's what's happening. They're not getting across the border.

And those who are coming across the border who are unaccompanied children, we're moving rapidly to try to put in place what was dismantled, as I said. For example, of all the children who are coming across the border, over 70 percent are either 16 or 17 years old. We're not talking about people ripping babies from mother's arms or a little three-year-old standing on the border. Less than--I think it's 1.5 percent fall in the category of the very young.

So, what we're doing is we're providing for the space, again, to be able to get these kids out of the Border Patrol facilities, which no child, no one should be in any longer than 72 hours. And today I went to--for example, I used all the resources available to me, went to the Defense Department and--and the secretary of Defense has just made available Fort Bliss, 5,000 beds be immediately available, 5,000 beds on the Texas border.

So, we're building back up the capacity that should have been maintained and built upon that Trump dismantled. It's going to take time. And the other thing we're doing, I might add--am I giving you too long and answer, because if you don't want the detail--

QUESTION:
--(OFF-MIC)

BIDEN:

No, no. But, I mean, I--I don't know how much detail you want about immigration. Maybe I'll stop there and--here.

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QUESTION:

My--my follow-up question is, one, if you could talk a little bit about which families, why they're being allowed to stay, what--the families that are being allowed to stay, why they're being allowed to stay.

And in addition to that, when it comes to the filibuster, which is what Zeke with asking about, there is--immigration is--is a big issue, of course, when--related to the filibuster, but there's also Republicans who are passing bill after bill trying to restrict voting rights.

Chuck Schumer is calling it an--an existential threat to democracy. Why not back a filibuster rule that at least gets around issues, including voting rights or immigration? Jim Clyburn, someone of course you know very well, has backed the idea of a filibuster rule when it comes to civil rights and voting rights.

BIDEN:

Well, look, I'm going to deal with all those problems. The question is the priorities as they come in land on my plate. Let's go to the first question you asked, the--the first of the second questions that you asked, and that is what about dealing with families. Why are not--some not going back?

Because Mexico is refusing to take them back. They're saying they won't take them back, not all of them. We're in negotiations with the president of Mexico. I think we're going to see that change. They should all be going back, I'll be going back. The only people we're not going to let sitting there on the other side of the Rio Grande by themselves with no help our children.

And what we're doing there is an important point to understand. I know you understand it. I don't mean to say that way, an important point to focus on. The vast majority of people under the age of 18 coming to the United States, with a telephone number on the--on a wristband or come with a telephone number in their pocket in the United States, mother, father, a close relative, a grandma or grandpa.

What was happening before is it's taking literally for weeks and weeks and maybe even months before anybody'd pick up the phone and call to see if there really was someone there. Well, we've set up a system now where, within 24 hours, there's a phone call made as that person--that child crosses the border, and then a verification system being put in place as--as of today to determine quickly whether or not that is a trafficker being called for that is actually a mom, dad, and/or a close relative.

They're establishing that right off the bat. If it in fact is mom or dad, dad says, to take the extreme case, "I got a birth certificate." Then guess what? We're getting that kid directly to that parent immediately. And so, that's going to reduce significantly--there's two ways to reduce child populations and circumstances that are not acceptable, like being held at a Border Patrol station.

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One is to get them to the place where they have a relative and set a date as to when a hearing can be held. A second way to do it is put them in a--a Health and Human Services facility that we're occupying now, both licensed beds around the country that are--exist as well as, for example, federal resources like Fort Bliss to get them safely in a place where they can be taken care of while their fate is determined.

QUESTION:
(OFF-MIC) filibuster.

BIDEN:

The filibuster, so filibuster. You know, with regard to the filibuster, I believe we should go back to a position of the filibuster that existed just when I came to the United States Senate 120 years ago. And that is that used to be required for the filibuster, and I--I had a card on it because I was going to give you the statistics, but you probably know them, that it used to be that the--that--well, from between 1917 and 1971 the filibuster existed, there were a total of 58 motions to break a filibuster that whole time.

Last year alone, there were five times that many. So, it's being abused in a gigantic way. For example, it used to be you had to stand there and talk and talk and talk and talk until you collapsed. And guess what? People got tired of talking and tired of collapsing. Filibusters broke down and we were able to break the filibuster and get a quorum and vote.

So, I strongly support moving in that direction in addition to having an open mind about dealing with certain things that are--are just elemental to the functioning of our democracy like the right to vote, like the basic right to vote. We've amended the filibuster in the past, but here's the deal. As you observed, I'm a fairly practical guy. I want to get things done. I want to get them done consistent with what we promised the American people.

In order to do that in a 50-50 Senate, we've got to get to the place where I get 50 votes so that the vice president of the United States can break the tie, or I get 51 votes without her. And so, I'm going to say something outrageous. I have never been particularly poor at calculating how to get things done in the United States Senate.

So, the best way to get something done if you--if you hold it near and dear to you that you like to be able to--anyway, I've--we're--we're going to get a lot done. And if we have to, if there's complete lockdown and chaos as a consequence of the filibuster, then we'll have to go beyond what I'm talking about.

Okay, hang on. Sorry. Oh, Sing Ming, Ms. Kim?

QUESTION:

Thank you, Mr. President. To follow up on the filibuster, so do you believe it should take 60 votes to end a filibuster on legislation or 51?

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BIDEN:

If we could end up with 51, we'd have no problem. You're going to have to--the existing rule, it's going to be hard to get a parliamentary ruling that allows 50 votes to end the filibuster, the--the existence of a filibuster. But it's not my expertise on what the parliamentary rules and how to get there are, but our preoccupation with the filibuster is totally legitimate. But in the meantime, we got a lot we can do while we're talking about what we're going to do about the filibuster.

Let me get here. Okay, Cecilia Vega?

QUESTION:

I'd like to circle back to immigration, please. You--you just listed the reasons that people are coming, talking about in-country problems, saying that it happens every year. You blamed the last administration. Sir, I just got back last night from a reporting trip to the border, where I met nine-year-old Joecel, who walked here from Honduras by himself along with another little boy. He had that--

BIDEN:

--Astounding--

QUESTION:

--phone number on it. And we were able to call his family. His mother says that she sent her son to this country because she believes that you are not deporting unaccompanied minors like her son. That's why she sent him alone from Honduras.

So, sir, you blamed the last administration but is your messaging in saying that these children are and will be allowed to stay in this country and work their way through this process encouraging families like Joecel to come?

BIDEN:

Well look, the idea that I'm gonna say--which I would never do--if an unaccompanied child ends up at the border we're just gonna let him starve to death and stay on the other side, no previous administration did that either except Trump. I'm not gonna do it. I'm not gonna do it. That's why I've asked the vice president of the United States yesterday to be the lead person on dealing with focusing on the fundamental reasons why people leave Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador in the first place.

It's because of earthquakes, floods. It's because of lack of food. It's because of gang violence. It's because of a whole range of things that when I was vice president had the same obligation to deal with unaccompanied children. I was able to get it slowed up significantly by working with the

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heads of state of those communities to do things like in one of the major cities, the reason people were leaving is they couldn't walk the street because they were getting--their kids were getting beat up or shot or gang violence.

Well, what I was able to do was not give money to the head of state, because so many are corrupt. But I was able to say okay, you need lighting in the streets to change things? I'll put the lighting in. We got a contractor. We got the type of lighting. We paid directly to the contractor, did not go through the government. And violent crime significantly was reduced in that city. Fewer people sought to leave.

When this hurricane occurred, the two hurricanes, instead of us going down and helping in a major way so that people would not have a reason to want to leave in the first place because they didn't have housing or water or sustenance, we did nothing. We're gonna do a lot in our administration. We're gonna be spending that \$700 plus million a year to change the life and circumstances of why people leave in the first place.

That mother did not sit around with--on--on the kitchen table and say, you know, I've got a great idea. Why I'm gonna make sure my son get taken care of is I'm gonna put a--how old was he? Or she?

QUESTION:

He's--he's nine. I also met a 10 year old.

BIDEN:

A--a--a nine-year-old. I'm gonna send him on a thousand-mile journey across a desert and up to the United States because I know Joe Biden's a nice guy and he'll take care of him. What a desperate act to have to take. The circumstances must be horrible. So we can do something about that.

That's what the vice president's going to be doing, what I did when President Obama asked me to come and deal. I was in--I was in Turkey at the time. He said, you gotta come home and take care of this.

So we put together a plan and it had an impact. And so the question here is whether how we go ahead and do this. What we do. There's no easy answer.

QUESTION:

Quick follow if I may. Do you wanna see these unaccompanied minors staying in this--this country or should they be deported eventually?

BIDEN:

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Well, the judgment has to be made whether or not--in--in this young man's case he has a mom at home. There's a overwhelming reason why he'd be put in a plane and flown back to his mom.

QUESTION:

A final follow, sir. You mentioned circumstances that must be horrific. The Customs and Border Protection Facility in Donna, Texas, I was there, is at 1,556 percent capacity--

BIDEN:

--Yep--

QUESTION:

--right now with mostly unaccompanied minors. There are kids that are sleeping on floors. They are packed into these pods. I've spoken to lawyers who say that they--some of these children have not seen the sun in days. What's your reaction re--what is your reaction to these images that have come out from that particular facility? Is what's happening inside acceptable to you? And when is this going to be fixed?

BIDEN:

I--I--that's a serious question, right? Is it acceptable to me. Come on. That's why we're gonna be moving 1,000 of those kids out quickly. That's why I got Fort Bliss opened up. That's why I've been working from the moment this started to happen to try to find additional access for children to be able to safely--not just children but particularly children--to be able to safely be housed while we follow through on the rest of what's happening.

That is totally unacceptable. Ken.

QUESTION:

Thank you, Mr. President. I wanted to ask you about Afghanistan. You face a May 1st deadline for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from that country. As a candidate in Foreign Affairs you wrote that it is past time to end these forever wars. Can you commit to the American people that by May 2nd the U.S. will no longer have forces in Afghanistan?

BIDEN:

The answer is that it's gonna be hard to meet the May 1 deadline just in terms of tactical reasons, hard to get those troops out. So what we've been doing, what I've been doing, and what Secretary Blinken has been doing has been we've been meeting with our allies, those other nations that have NATO allies who have troops in Afghanistan as well. And--and if we leave we're gonna do so in a safe and orderly way.

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We're in consultation, I said, with our allies and partners in how to proceed. And Secretary Blinken is meeting in Brussels this week with our NATO allies, particularly those who have forces there. And General Austin is--just met with Kayani and I'm waiting for the briefing on that. He is the--the--the--the leader quote in Afghanistan in Kabul. And there's a U.N. led process that's beginning shortly on how to mechanically get people--how--how to end this war.

But it is not my intention to stay there for a long time. But the question is how and on what circumstances do we meet that agreement that was made by President Trump to leave under a deal that looks like it's not being able to be worked out to begin with? Ho--how--how's that done? But we are not staying a long time.

QUESTION:

But you just said intend to leave. Do you think it's possible that we--

BIDEN:

--We will leave. The question is when we leave.

QUESTION:

Do you--sorry. Do you believe, though, it's possible we could have troops there next year?

BIDEN:

I--I--I can't picture that being the case. Okay, Kristen.

QUESTION:

Thank you very much, Mr. President. Given the conditions that were just laid out at the migrant facilities at the U.S. border, will you commit to allowing journalists to have access to the facilities that are overcrowded moving forward?

BIDEN:

I will commit when my plan very shortly is underway to let you have access to not just them but the other facilities as well.

QUESTION:

How soon will journalists be able to have access to the facilities? We've obviously been allowed to be inside one. But we haven't seen the facilities in which children are packed together to really give the American people a chance to see that. Will you commit to transparency on this issue--

BIDEN:

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--I will commit to transparency. And as soon as I am in a position to be able to implement what we're doing right now. The--one of the reasons I haven't gone down--I--all--my--my chief folks have gone down is I don't wanna become the issue. I don't wanna be, you know, bringing all the Secret Service and everybody wi--with me to get in the way.

So this is being set up and you'll have full access to everything once we get this thing moving.

QUESTION:

Okay. And just to be clear, how soon will that be, Mr. President?

BIDEN:

I don't know, to be clear.

QUESTION:

Okay. And do you bear responsibility for everything that's happening at the border now? I hear you talking a lot about the past administration. You decided to roll back some of those policies. Did you move too quickly to roll back--

BIDEN:

--To--to roll back what? I'm sorry--

QUESTION:

--Some of the policies. Did you move too quickly to roll back some of the executive orders of your predecessor?

BIDEN:

First of all, all the policies that were underway were not helping at all. Did not slow up the amount of immigration. And there's many people coming. And rolling back the policies of separating children from their--fro--fro--from their mothers, I make no apology for that. Rolling back the policies of--of remain in Mexico sitting on the edge of the Rio Grande in a muddy circumstance with not enough to eat in a ma--I make no apologies for that. I make no apologies for ending programs that did not exist before Trump became--

BIDEN:

--president that have an incredibly negative impact on the law, international law, as well as on human dignity. And so I make no apologies for that.

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QUESTION:

If I could just ask you about foreign policy, Mr. President. Overnight, we learned that North Korea tested two ballistic missiles. What, if any, actions will you take and what is your red line on North Korea?

BIDEN:

Let me say that number one, UN Resolution 1718 was violated by those particular missiles that were tested, number one. We're consulting with our allies and partners and there will be responses if they choose to escalate. We will respond accordingly.

But, I'm also prepared for some form of diplomacy, but it has to be conditioned upon the end result of denuclearization. So, that's what we're doing right now, consulting with our allies.

QUESTION:

Just very quick follow up--

BIDEN:

--You only got another hour now, okay?

QUESTION:

Diplomacy, can you define what you mean and former President Obama warned the incoming President Trump that North Korea was the top foreign policy issue that he was watching. Is that how you assess the crisis in North Korea?

BIDEN:

Yes.

Okay, hang on a second here. Kristen. Nancy CBS.

QUESTION:

Thank you very much, Mr. President. I want to go back to voting rights and as Yamiche mentioned, Republican legislators across the country are working to pass bills that would restrict voting, particularly Democrats' fear, impacting minority voters and young voters, the very people who helped to get you elected in November.

Are you worried that if you don't manage to pass voting rights legislation, that your party is going to lose seats and possibly lose control of the House and the Senate in 2022?

BIDEN:

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What I'm worried about is how un-American this whole initiative is. It's sick. It's sick, deciding, in some states, that you cannot bring water to people standing in line, waiting to vote, deciding that you're going to end voting at 5:00 when working people are just getting off work, deciding that there will be no absentee ballots under the most rigid circumstances.

It's all designed--and I'm going to spend my time doing three things. One, trying to figure out how to pass legislation passed by the House, number one. Number two, educating the American public. The Republican voters I know find this despicable, Republican voters, the folks out in the--outside this White House. I'm not talking about the elected officials. I'm talking about voters, voters.

And, so I'm convinced that we'll be able to stop this because it is the most pernicious thing. This makes Jim Crow look like Jim Eagle. I mean, this is gigantic what they're trying to do and it cannot be sustained. I'll do everything in my power, along with my friends in the House and the Senate, to keep that from--from becoming the law.

QUESTION:

Is there anything else you can do about it besides passing legislation?

BIDEN:

The answer is yes, but I'm not going to lay out a strategy in front of the whole world and you now.

QUESTION:

Then on a related note, have you decided whether you are going to run for re-election in 2024? You haven't set up a re-election campaign yet, as your predecessor had by this time.

(LAUGHTER)

BIDEN:

My predecessor need to--needed to. My predecessor, oh God I miss him.

No, the answer is yes. My plan is to run for re-election. That's my expectation.

QUESTION:

And, then on one other note, on bipartisanship. Your old friend, Mitch McConnell, says you have only spoken to each other once since you took office and that you have moved far left since taking office. Do you see it the same way he does? Have you rejected bipartisanship?

BIDEN:

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No, I haven't at all. I've been meeting--when's the last time a president invited the opposite party down, at least a half a dozen times, to talk about issues, everything from how we work--I'm--we're working with a group of 20 members of the Senate right now and House on how we reestablish our ability to make computer chips, how we get ahead of the game, how we can work together. We're working together on a bunch of things.

But, look, I know Mitch well. Mitch knows me well. I would expect Mitch to say exactly what he said. But, this is a matter of making sure that I would like Republican--elected Republican support, but what I know I have now is I have electoral support from Republican voters. Republican voters agree with what I'm doing and so unless Mitch says the last thing I did is--the last piece of legislation is so far left, well then he ought to take a look at his party. Over 50 percent of them must be over that edge as well because they support what I did.

Okay, where am I here? Let me see. Kaitlin?

QUESTION:

Thank you very much, Mr. President. I have a question for you, but first, I'd like to follow up on a question from Yamiche and that's on the filibuster.

BIDEN:

--That counts as a question but go ahead.

QUESTION:

Okay, I'll make it quick. It's a quick question.

BIDEN:

No, no, you're good.

QUESTION:

Regarding the filibuster, at John Lewis's funeral, President Barack Obama said he believed the filibuster was relic of the Jim Crow era. Do you agree?

BIDEN:

Yes.

QUESTION:

If not, why not abolish it if it's a relic of the Jim Crow era?

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BIDEN:

Successful electoral politics is the art of the possible. Let's figure out how we can get this done and move in the direction of significantly changing the abuse of even the filibuster rule first. It's been abused from the time it came into being by an extreme way in the last 20 years. Let's deal with the abuse first.

QUESTION:

It sounds like you're moving closer to eliminating the filibuster. Is that correct?

BIDEN:

I answered your question.

QUESTION:

You also just made some news by saying that you are going to run for re-election.

BIDEN:

--I said that is my expectation.

QUESTION:

So, is that a yes that you are running for re-election?

BIDEN:

Look, I don't know where you guys come from, man. I've never been able to travel. I'm a great respecter of fate. I've never been able to plan four and a half, three and a half years ahead for certain.

QUESTION:

And, if you do--if you do run, will Vice President Harris be on your ticket?

BIDEN:

I would fully expect that to be the case. She's doing a great job. She's a great partner. She's a great partner.

QUESTION:

And do you believe you'll be running against former President Trump?

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BIDEN:

Oh, come on. I don't even think about--I don't--I have no idea. I have no idea if there will be a Republican Party, do you? I know you don't have to answer my question, but I mean, you know, do you? I mean, look, this is--the way I view things, I've become a great respecter of fate in my life.

I set a goal of this in front of me to get things done for the people I care most about, which are hardworking, decent American people of getting really--having stuck to them. I want to change the paradigm. I want to change the paradigm.

We start to reward work, not just wealth. I want to change the paradigm. If you notice--don't you find it kind of interesting that my republican friends were worried about that the cost and the taxes that had to be had, if there is any tax to be had as they talk about it, and dealing with the--the act that we just passed, which puts money in people's pockets, ordinary people? Did you hear them complain when they passed close to a \$2 trillion Trump tax cut, 83 percent going to the top 1 percent? Did you hear them talk about that at all?

I love the fact that they found this whole idea of concern about the federal budget. It's kind of amazing. When the federal budget is saving people's lives, they don't think it's such a good idea. When the federal budget is feathering the nest of the wealthiest Americans, 90 of the Fortune 500 companies making billions of dollars, not paying a cent in taxes, reducing taxes to a point that people who are making--you know, if you're a husband and wife, schoolteacher and a cop, you're paying at a higher rate than the average person making \$1 billion a year is.

Something's wrong, their newfound concern. I'm concerned--look, I meant what I said when I ran--and a lot of you still think I'm wrong, and I respect that. I said I'm running for three reasons: to restore the soul dignity, honor, honesty, transparency to the American political system. Two, to rebuild the backbone of this country.

BIDEN:

The middle class, hardworking people and people struggling to get in the middle class. They built America and unions built them.

The third reason I said was running was to unite the country. And generically speaking, all of you said, no, you can do that. Well, I've not been able to unite the Congress, but I've been uniting the country based on the polling data. We have to come together. We have to.

So, from my perspective, you know, it's a--to me, it's--it's about just, you know, getting out there, putting one foot in front of the other and just trying to make things better for people, just hard-working people, people that get up every morning and just want to figure out how to put food on the table for their kids, be able to have a little bit of breathing room, being able to have a--make sure that they go to bed not staring at the ceiling like my dad did whenever they--since he didn't have health insurance, what happens if mom gets sick or he got sick. Those are basic things, basic things.

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And I'm of the view that the vast majority of people, including registered Republicans by and large, share that--that--that same--the same view, that same sense of what is--you know, what's appropriate.

Justin? Justin Sink, Bloomberg?

QUESTION:

Thanks, Mr. President. I wanted ask about your relationship with China now you been on office for a couple months. There was obviously the meeting in Alaska that was a little theatrical, and there is the continued human rights abuses.

So, today I'm wondering are you more likely than you were when you came into office to maintain tariffs on China? Are you considering banning imports of forced labor products? And would you consider cutting off U.S. investment or Chinese access to international payment systems?

BIDEN:

Well, looks, they're each specifically legitimate questions, but they only touch a smidgen of what the relationship with China really is about. I've known Xi Jinping for a long time. Allegedly, by the time I had left office as vice president, I had spent more time with Xi Jinping than any world leader had because President Obama and the Chinese President Hu and decided we should get to know one another since it was inappropriate for the president of the United States to spend time with the vice president of another country, but it was obvious he was going to become the new leader of China.

So, I spent hours upon hours with him alone with an interpreter, my interpreter and his, going into great detail. It was very, very straightforward. He doesn't have a democratic with a small D bone in his body, but he's a smart, smart guy. He's one of the guys like Putin who thinks that autocracy is the wave of the future. Democracy can't function in an ever--in an ever complex world.

So, when I was elected and he called to congratulate me, I think to the surprise of the China experts who were his people on the call as well as mine listening, we had a two hour conversation, for two hours. And we made several things clear to one another. I made it clear to him again what I told him in person on several occasions, that we're not looking for confrontation, although we know there will be steep, steep competition.

Two, that we'll have strong competition but we'll insist that China play by the international rules, fair competition, fair practices, fair trade. Thirdly, in order to compete effectively, I indicated that we're going to deal with China effectively, and we're going to need three things to do that I'm telling our people. First, we're going to invest in American workers and American science.

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I said that all through the campaign. I say it again. And we're--and I'm setting up my administration to be able to do that, which is that, you know, back in the '60s, we use to invest a little over 2 percent of our entire--entire GDP in pure research and investment in science. Today it's 0.7 percent. I'm going to change that. We're going to change that. The future lies in who can in fact own the future as it relates to technology, quantum computing, a whole range of things including in the medical fields.

And so, what I'm going to do is make sure we invest closer to 2 percent. One of the reasons why I've set up the--the PBAB (PH), the President's Board with Scientists and the like again, is we're going to invest in medical research, cancer, Alzheimer's, diabetes, the things--industries of the future, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, biotech, and we're going to make real investments. China is out investing us by a long shot because their plan is down that future.

The third--the second thing we're going to do is we're going to reestablish our alliances. And I've been very clear with it. It's not anti-Chinese. And we--we've talked about it. I want to make sure that--for example, later today after this, as a matter of fact shortly after this, which is fine. We've been going close to an hour.

I was--I'm--I'm happy to--I can go--go longer. But one of the things that I'm going to be doing, I'm going to be speaking with 27 heads of state in Europe, and very shortly. I think within the next hour or so. I don't know the exact time.

And earlier this month, and apparently got the Chinese attention, that's not why did it, I met with our allies and--how we're going to hold China accountable in the region, Australia, India, Japan, the United States, the so-called Quad, because we have to have democracies working together. Before too long, I'm going to have--I'm going to invite an alliance of democracies to come here to discuss the future.

And so, we're going to make it clear that, in order to deal with these things, we are going to hold China accountable to follow the rules, to follow the rules, whether it relates to the South China Sea or the North China Sea or the agreement made on Taiwan or a whole range of other things.

And the third thing and the thing that I--I admire about dealing with Xi is he understands--he makes no pretense about not understanding what I'm saying anymore than I do him. I pointed out to him no leader can be sustained in his position or her position unless they represent the values of the country. And I said as--and Mr. President, as I've told you before, Americans value the notion of freedom. America values human rights.

We don't always live up to our expectations, but it's a value system. We are founded on the principle. And as long as you and your country continues to so blatantly violate human rights, we're going to continue in an unrelenting way to call it to the attention of the world and make it clear, make it clear what's happening. And he understood that.

I made it clear that no American president--at least one did, but no American president ever backed down from speaking out of what's happening to the Uyghurs, what's happening in Hong Kong, what's happening in--in-country. That's who we are. The moment a president walks away

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from that, as a last one did, is the moment we begin to lose our legitimacy around the world. It's who we are.

So, I see stiff competition with China. China has an overall goal--and I don't criticize them for the goal, but they have an overall goal to become the leading country in the world, the wealthiest country in the world, and the most powerful country in the world. That's not going to happen on my watch because the United States is going to continue to grow and expand.

QUESTION:

All right. Just to follow-up on the meeting of democracies, is that where you expect in a multilateral way to make these decisions about sanctions or--or--

BIDEN:

--No, that's not where we are making a decision. That's where I make sure we're all on the same page call on the same page. Look, I predict to you, your children or grandchildren are going to be doing their doctoral thesis on the issue of who succeeded, autocracy or democracy, because that is what is at stake, not just with China. Look around the world.

We're in the midst of a fourth Industrial Revolution of enormous consequence. Will there be middle-class? How will people adjust to these significant changes in science and technology?

BIDEN:

The environment, how will they do that? And our democracy's equipped because all the people get to speak to compete. It is clear, absolutely clear that most of the scholars I dealt with at Penn agree with me around the country that this is a battle between the--the utility of democracies in the 21st century and autocracies.

If you notice you don't have Russia talking about communism anymore. It's about an autocracy. Demand decisions made by a leader of a country. That's what's at stake here. We gotta prove democracy works.

QUESTION:

And Mr. President, sorry. I know you haven't had a chance to address the tragedies in Georgia and Colorado. You had said to stay tuned for actions that you might take on gun control. Wondering if you've made a decision either about sending the manufacturer liability bill that you had promised on day one to Capitol Hill or executive actions like going after ghost guns or giving money to cities and states to--to battle gun control.

BIDEN:

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All of the above. It's a matter of timing. As you've all observed, successful presidents better than me have been successful in a large part because they know how to time what they're doing. Order it, decide on priorities, what needs to be done. The next major initiative is, and I'll be announcing it Friday in Pittsburgh in detail, is to rebuild the infrastructure both physical and technological infrastructure of this country so that we can compete and create significant numbers of really good paying jobs.

Really good paying jobs. And some of you have been around long enough to know that used to be a great Republican goal initiative. I still think the majority of the American people don't like the fact that we are now ranked, what, 85th in the world in infrastructure. I mean, look, the future rests on whether or not we have the best airports that are--can accommodate air travel, ports that you can get in and out of quickly so businesses decide.

Some of you--when you're--if you were ever local reporters and you found your governor or mayor trying to attract business to your community, what's the first thing the business asks? What's the closest access--access to an interstate highway? How far am I from a--freight rail? Is the water--is the water available. Is there enough water available for me to conduct my business? All the things that relate to infrastructure.

We have somewhere I--I--I--I asked the staff to write it down for me and they did. Not for this but for a--a longer discussion. We have somewhere in terms of infrastructure we have--we rank 13th globally in infrastructure. China's investing three times more in infrastructure than the United States is. Bridges, more than one third of our bridges, 231,000 of them need repairs. Some are physical safety risks or preservation work.

One in five miles of our highways and major roads are in poor condition. That's 186,000 miles of highway. Aviation, 20 percent of all flights--20 percent of all flights weren't on time, resulting in 1.5 million hours lost in production. Six to 10 million homes in America still have lead pipes servicing their water lines. We have over 100,000 well heads that are not capped, leaking methane.

What are we doing? And by the way, we can put as many pipefitters and miners (INAUDIBLE) to work capping those wells at the same price that they would charge to dig those wells. So I--I--I just find it frustrating--frustrating to talk about.

Last point I'll make in the infrastructure--and I apologize for spending more time on it--but is that if you think about it, it's the place where we will be able to significantly increase American productivity. At the same time providing really good jobs for people. But we can't build back to what they used to be; we have to build the environment--global warming's already done significant damage.

The roads that used to be above the water level didn't have to worry about where the drainage ditch was. Now you gotta rebuild 'em three feet higher. Cause it's not gonna go back to what it was before, only get worse unless we stop it. There's so much we can do.

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Look at all the schools in America. Most of you live in the Washington area now. But in your hometowns, I don't know where you're all from. How many schools where the kids can't drink the water out of the fountain? How many schools are still in the position where there's asbestos? How many schools in America we're sending our kids to don't have adequate ventilation? How many school buildings, office complexes are wasting billions of barrels of oil over time because they can't hold in the heat or the air conditioning cause it's--leaks through the windows that are so porous in the connections.

It's amazing. So there's so much we can do that's good stuff. Makes people healthier and creates good jobs.

And I think that--I got one more question here and it--Janet from Univision.

QUESTION:

Thank you, Mr. President. We too have been reporting at the border. And just like Cecelia we've run into a pair of siblings who came in on Monday, were detained by CBP, had the phone number for their mother who lives in the U.S. and we have contacted the mother. That's the only way they know her kids are here, because CBP today, Thursday, has not contacted their mother. So when can we expect your promise of things getting better with contacting and expedience in--

BIDEN:

--Well they are getting better--

QUESTION:

--The process--

BIDEN:

--But they're gonna get real--they'll get a whole hell of a lot better real quick or we're gonna hear some people leaving. Okay? We can get this done. We're gonna get it done. I had a long meeting with the entire team and several cabinet level officers the other night. We're gonna be moving within the next--within the next week over 100,000--I mean a--a--a thousand people out of the Border Patrol into safe, secure beds and--and facilities.

We're gonna significantly ramp up. We're already out there contacting everyone from getting some of the employees at HHS--there's a lot of them--doing other things and move them into making those calls. We're in the--we're in the process of rearranging and providing for the personnel needed to get that done. But I admire the fact that you were down there, you're making the calls yourself. It's real.

The next thing that has to happen though, as you well know, has to happen--there have to be some certitude that this actually mom, dad, or whomever. And there's ways to do that. There's ways to do that a little bit like determining whether or not you got the right code for your credit

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card. You know? What--what--what--what--what was your dog's name kind of thing. I'm being a bit facetious, but not really. And also seeking harder data from DNA to--to birth certificates, which takes longer.

So I wanna do this as--as quickly as humanly possible and as safely as possible.

QUESTION:

As you well know, treating the root causes--causes in Latin America doesn't change things over night. How do you realistically and physically keep these families from coming to the U.S. when things will not get better in their countries right away?

BIDEN:

Well, I--I--I can't guarantee that. But I know, you know, that whole thing. The journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step. You know as well as I do, you cover it. You have ser-- it's not like somebody's sitting in a hand-hewn table in Guatemala--I mean, in--in--somewhere in Mexico or in--and Guadalupe's saying I got a great idea, let's sell everything we have, give it to a coyote, have him take our kids across the border into a desert where they don't speak the language. Won't that be fun? Let's go. That's not how it happens. People don't want to leave.

When my great grandfather got in a coffin ship in the Irish Sea, the expectation was--was he was going to live long enough on that ship to get to the United States of America. But they left because of what the Brits have been doing. They were in real, real trouble. They didn't want to leave, but they had no choice.

So if you got--we can't--I can't guarantee we're going to solve everything, but I can guarantee we can make everything better. We can make it better. We can change the lives of so many people.

And the other thing I want to point out to you, and I hope you point out, I realize it's much more heart-wrenching, and it is, to deal with a five and six and seven-year-olds. But you went down there, and you saw the vast majority of these children, seventy percent are 16 years old, 17 years old and mostly males. It doesn't make it--that doesn't make a good, bad or indifferent. But the idea that we have tens of thousands of kids in these God-awful facilities that are really little babies crying all night. There's some that's true. That's why you've got to act.

And yesterday, I asked my team, both the director of the two agencies as well as others. I asked them what would they, in fact--and I asked their opinion because they're the experts, but I said focus on the most vulnerable immediately. But there's no reason why in the next month, as people cross the border, that phone call can't be made in the first 48 hours and began.

QUESTION:

If I may ask one last question. Have you had any talks with Senate Republicans who are threatening this administration with not considering the immigration legislation that was passed in the House until the situation at the border has been resolved now?

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BIDEN:

No, because I know they have to posture for a while. They sort of got to get it out of their system.

(LAUGHTER)

This is a--but I--I'm ready to work with any Republican who wants to help solve the problem or make--make the situation better.

But folks, I'm going. Thank you very, very much. I appreciate it. Thank you.