



REMARKS

Remarks by President Trump, Vice President Pence, and Members of the Coronavirus Task Force in Press Briefing

— HEALTHCARE

Issued on: April 1, 2020



James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

5:35 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much everybody. Thank you. So, America continues to wage all-out war to defeat the virus — this horrible, horrible virus. You see how terrible it is, especially when you look at the numbers from yesterday. And we explained why we're extending our nationwide guidelines to slow the spread by 30 days.

Together, we have the power to save countless lives. We're attacking the virus on every front with social distancing, economic support for our workers, rapid medical intervention, and very serious innovation, and banning dangerous foreign travel that threatens the health of our people. And we did that early — far earlier than anyone would have thought and way ahead of anybody else.

In this time of need, I know that every American will do their patriotic duty and help us to achieve a total victory. As governments and nations focus on the coronavirus, there's a growing threat that cartels, criminals, terrorists, and other malign actors will try to exploit the situation for their own gain. And we must not let that happen. We will never let that happen.

Today, the United States is launching enhanced counter-narcotics operations in the Western Hemisphere to protect the American people from the deadly scourge of illegal narcotics. We must not let the drug cartels exploit the pandemic to threaten American lives.

In cooperation with the 22 partner nations, U.S. Southern Command will increase surveillance, disruption, and seizures of drug shipments and provide additional support for eradication efforts which are going on right now at a record pace. We're deploying additional Navy destroyers, combat ships, aircraft, and helicopters; Coast Guard cutters; and Air Force surveillance aircraft, doubling our capabilities in the region. Very importantly, our forces are fully equipped with personnel protective equipment, and we've taken additional safety measures to ensure our troops remain healthy.

Secretary Mark Esper, Attorney General Bill Barr, National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien will provide more details. In addition, I'm going to have General Milley, who has done an incredible job in so many ways, say a few words. And also with us: our Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Gilday, who you know — I think you know; and Commandant of the Coast Guard, Admiral Schultz. So I'm going to ask Mark to start and then we can go. And after that, we're going to take questions as it pertains to this. And then we'll go onto phase two, which is the virus itself. Okay?

Thank you, please. Mark.

SECRETARY ESPER: Well, thank you, Mr. President. And good afternoon, everyone. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today as we make this very important announcement. At a time when the nation and the Department of Defense are focused on protecting the American people from the spread of the coronavirus, we also remain vigilant to the many other threats our country faces.

Today, at the President's direction, the Department of Defense, in close cooperation with our interagency partners, began enhanced counter-narcotics operations in the Eastern Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. This initiative is part of the administration's whole-of-government

approach to combating the flow of illicit drugs into the United States and protecting the American people from their scourge.

I want to thank all of our partners in this effort, to include the United States Coast Guard, the Department of Homeland Security, the Drug Enforcement Agency, the Department of Justice, and members of the intelligence community for their tremendous support and cooperation.

To conduct these enhanced operations, the President has directed the deployment of additional ships, aircraft, and security forces to the United States Southern Command Area of Responsibility. Included in this force package are Navy destroyers and littoral combat ships, Coast Guard cutters, P-8 patrol aircraft, and elements of an Army Security Force Assistance Brigade. These additional forces will nearly double our capacity to conduct counter-narcotics operations in the region.

Additionally, 22 partner nations have joined us in this fight, bringing with them a variety of intelligence and operations capabilities needed to defeat these criminal organizations.

Last year alone, United States Southern Command's operations resulted in the seizure of over 280 metric tons of drugs, much of which was designated for shipment to America.

While this was an incredible achievement, there's much more work to be done. Transnational criminal organizations continue to threaten our security by smuggling cocaine, fentanyl, methamphetamines, and other narcotics across our borders. These drug traffickers put our communities — communities at risk and destroy lives. Every year, tens of thousands of Americans die from drug overdose and thousands more suffer the harmful effects of addiction.

Furthermore, corrupt actors, like the illegitimate Maduro regime in Venezuela, rely on the profits derived from the sale of narcotics to maintain their oppressive hold on power. The Venezuelan people continue to suffer tremendously due to Maduro's criminal control over the country.

Drug traffickers are seizing on this lawlessness by increasing their illicit activities. We must do more to prevent these drugs from arriving at our shores. These enhanced counter-narcotics operations that are now underway will further disrupt the flow of illicit drugs to America, deny our adversaries the financial resources they depend on, and build the capacity of our partner nations throughout the region.

I want to thank President Trump for his leadership and support to this critical mission. This is a particularly important time for this operation to begin, as nations around the world shift their focus inward to deal with the coronavirus pandemic, many criminal organizations are attempting to capitalize on this crisis. The enhanced operations we're announcing today will keep the pressure on these criminal groups and protect the American people from the devastation caused by the flow of illegal drugs into our country.

Mr. President, thank you for your leadership as we begin this important operation. While the men and women of the United States military work hard here at home to fight the coronavirus, we continue to take action around the world to defend our great country.

Thank you and I'd like to invite General Milley.

GENERAL MILLEY: Thank you, Secretary, for those words. And thank you, Mr. President, for your leadership. And I want to publicly thank Admiral Craig Faller, the Commander of the U.S. Southern Command out of Miami, for leading this operation, which is underway effective today; and also Admiral Gilday, the Chief of Naval Operations, and Admiral Schultz for their contributions to this from their services. There's thousands of sailors, Coast Guardsmen, soldiers, airmen, Marines involved in this operation.

We came upon some intelligence some time ago that the drug cartels, as a result of COVID-19, were going to try to take advantage of the situation and try to infiltrate additional drugs into our country. As we know, 70,000 Americans die on an average annual basis to drugs. That's unacceptable. We're at war with COVID-19, we're at war with terrorists, and we are at war with the drug cartels as well.

This is the United States military. You will not penetrate this country. You will not get past Jump Street. You're not going to come in here and kill additional Americans. And we will marshal whatever assets are required to prevent your entry into this country to kill Americans.

So, right now, the Navy has marshalled additional grey-hull ships from both PACOM and EUCOM and for the naval fleet at Norfolk. And they are set sail already and they are in the Caribbean right now. In addition to that, there's 10 Coast Guard cutters and there's Special Operations Forces and Security Force Assistance Brigades, along with Air Force reconnaissance aircraft.

The bottom line is: You're not going to get through. Now is not the time to try to penetrate the

United States with illegal drugs to kill Americans. We're the United States military and we will defend our country, regardless of the cost.

Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you, Secretary.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, General. Beautiful. Thank you. Bill.

ATTORNEY GENERAL BARR: Thank you, Mr. President, and thanks for your decisive leadership as we confront this unprecedented challenge posed by corona- — coronavirus. I'd like to thank you for your support for this important initiative and thank all of — the Secretary of Defense and all the services for taking on this — this important initiative.

Obviously, during this crisis, we're all focused above all else on COVID-19. But at the same time, our law enforcement and national security work must go forward, protecting the American people from the full array of threats.

For the Department of Justice, one of our highest priorities must remain destroying the Mexican cartels. Their trafficking is largely responsible for the deaths, as we all know now, of 70,000 Americans a year. And also the costs of this don't count the destroyed families, the destroyed lives, the draining of our national treasure as state budgets are crushed by the burden that this — this narcotic trafficking causes.

The President has made clear that we are in this fight against the cartels to win, and that we are not interested in half measures, and that the threat posed by the cartel is not just a law enforcement threat, but a national security threat as well.

And, in December, building on your success with the Mexican President in forging a cooperative relationship in the area of immigration, you asked me to go down and meet with the President López Obrador and our Mexican counterparts to see if we could also establish a more comprehensive and coordinated effort with the Mexicans in confronting the cartels. And we've had some successful visits and discussions, and currently have an array of activities underway against the cartels. And we anticipate, along with the Mexicans, that these are going to bear fruit in the months ahead.

But it quickly became clear that we can obtain the most immediate results, the best bang for the buck, where we increase the assets involved in interdiction on both the Pacific and Atlantic side of Mexico in the Central American countries. For years, the cartels have been using these sea routes to take the cocaine up from, principally, Colombia — now also out of Venezuela. And these sea routes on both coasts have become the primary means of bringing cocaine up to the United States.

Because of the superb work done by the Defense Department and our intelligence community, we know exactly, most of the time, where these traffickers are at sea. But we're significantly — have been up until now significantly limited in our ability to interdict because of the numbers of the assets we have deployed.

Prior today, this limitation meant we could only intercept a fraction of the traffickers that — and the various boats that were detected. This will now double our capacity, and we are talking about hundreds of tons of cocaine now — we're now in a position to seize.

So this is going to radically improve our interdiction efforts and put tremendous pressure, we think, on the cartels. And the effort that SOUTHCOM is undertaking is going to save lives by taking drugs off the street.

Last week, I announced the unsealing of charges of narco-terrorism, drug trafficking, and other crimes against the former Maduro regime — 16 members of that regime — and their involvement in trafficking of 250 metric tons a year. A lot of that comes by sea, as I discussed at that time.

But also, because of the pressure we're applying by our sea interdiction, they are trying to establish an air route out of Venezuela, up into Central America, which is one of the reasons we're trying to move firmly against that corrupt regime.

You know, this drug war has gone on for many decades. And at times in the past, we've had great success and great results. And at times, we've taken our eye off the ball — fortunately, not in this administration. And I'm grateful that you, Mr. President, have brought focus to this fight and the determination to use whatever tools are necessary to win the fight. The cartels have to be defeated, both for the people of this country and for the people of Mexico and Venezuela.

So I'd like to thank you again, Mr. President, Secretary Esper, for providing the wherewithal required to help win this war against the cartels and others who seek to send illicit drugs into our country.

And, with that, I'd like to introduce Ambassador O'Brien.

AMBASSADOR O'BRIEN: Thank you, General. Thank you, Mr. President. Today's action is another example of the bold leadership of President Trump and his commitment to protecting the homeland against threats that seek to destabilize the United States and our Western Hemisphere.

The uncontrolled flow of illegal drugs into the United States poisons our communities; fuels the dangerous epidemic — epidemic of addiction; and threatens the safety and security of all Americans.

The impressive U.S. Navy, Coast Guard, Army, Marine Corps, Air Force, and interagency operation will address a range of threats to our national security posed by narco-traffickers and narco-terrorists.

It will reduce illicit financial support for the drug traffic- — for drug trafficking that provides the corrupt Maduro regime in Venezuela and other bad actors with the funds necessary to conduct their malign activities.

Under President Trump's leadership, we will continue to execute our maximum pressure policy to counter the Maduro regime's malign activities, including drug trafficking. And this operation will help to choke off the funds that go to that corrupt regime.

Maduro, narco-terrorists, and criminals should make no mistake that even as we are working around the clock to fight the spread of coronavirus, we will continue to execute the President's counter-narcotics strategy.

We're working on a number of important national security priorities as we face this public health crisis. The United States will continue to combat disinformation and fake news about this virus. We will work with the world's largest oil producers to address volatility in global oil markets. We will always protect our servicemen and servicewomen around the world, including in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I want the American people to know that President Trump and Vice President Pence and their administration are working tirelessly every day to protect the health and well-being of Americans and respond to the coronavirus.

Our adversaries should take note however: This President has a clear-eyed focus on America's national security's — security interest. And let me be clear, it would be a mistake — a mistake with terrible consequences — for any adversary to attempt to do us harm during this health crisis — or ever, for that matter.

Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Okay. So do we have any questions on this? Because this group is going to go back to work. They're going to leave.

John, please.

Q A question either for you, Mr. President, or Secretary Esper. What has changed that is allowing these assets to be deployed now, whereas, as General Barr said, in the past, they were not available?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, for a long time, we've had a lot of drugs coming into our country. And it's not that it's increased, it's prob- — we've probably got it down a little bit, but it's still a tremendous number. Families are being ruined. Lives are being ruined. It's an incredible thing, especially as you're at this position. You would never believe it. I see things that nobody would believe. I see reports that nobody would believe.

So I met with the group behind me, all of them, and we said, "What do you think we can do?" And they think they can interdict. They think we can stop it before it gets to the shores. And they're coming from all over the place. And we have incredibly talented people.

So I think I'm going to let Mark just give a little bit of an answer to that. But we just want to see if we can stop a big — a good percentage of the drugs coming into our country.

SECRETARY ESPER: Sure thing. Thanks, Mr. President.

So, first of all, it's simply a matter of prioritization. The President has giving us very clear guidance on what's important to him and protecting the American people. And, as some of you know, I've began — I began a review months ago, looking at all of our different geographic combatant

commands and looking at where we can free up time, money, and resources to put in — into other endeavors.

In this case, we had scrutinized our inventory fairly closely. Chairman Milley did a great deal of work on this Admiral Gilday. And we felt that there was no risk to the fleet, to our operations to free up, in this case, naval ships. We also freed up aircraft and other assets to apply them to this presidential priority. And of course the Coast Guard did the same.

So it was a very good operation. We feel this is very important to the American people and completely in line with the President's direction.

Q And how long will you be able to keep up this operational tempo?

SECRETARY ESPER: Well, it depends. What we're going to do is we're going to run it for some matter of time. I'm not going to disclose how long that will be. And then we will assess it, and then we will make adjustments from there. We may increase. We may decrease. We may sustain as is. But this will be an assessment we will do as interagency team. We will report back to the President. And we'll take further guidance from there.

THE PRESIDENT: And, you know, we didn't do it for this reason, but it'll also have an impact on the virus because we have people trying to get in. So not only drugs, but now we have a new phenomena. And that's at least for the next hopefully short period of time — the virus. So we'll be able to have an effect on that too.

Please.

Q Yeah. Mr. President, could you expand on that a little bit? Because you tie it to COVID-19, saying that these drug cartels were taking advantage of the situation, of this pandemic.

THE PRESIDENT: That's right. They were.

Q How exactly —

THE PRESIDENT: Well, because we're focused on so many other parts of the country, and even parts of the world. And, all of a sudden, areas where we — we had it clamped down pretty tight —

in all fairness.

You know, the wall is up to about 160 miles already. And any areas where we have that wall, it's, for the most part, contiguous. We have fill-ins. But we're up to 161 miles exactly.

And any place where you have that wall, other than walking around it on the edges, it's stopping everybody cold. I mean, we're stopping — we're — nobody has seen anything like it. That's how good it works. And the other side knew it worked that well — everybody. Because everybody was for it five years ago. All of a sudden, they changed. It's having a tremendous impact.

But we are now focused on so many different things because of what's happened, because of this horrible — I say it's a horrible phenomena that now we've got to focus on drugs. And the drugs come in from different methods. And we have the best people at sea anywhere in the world, so we'll have a tremendous impact on drugs.

But one of the other things: We'll also have an impact, we think on the — on the virus.

Okay? Yeah. Please.

Q Ambassador O'Brien, did China underreport both the number of cases and the death toll from the coronavirus? And if that's the case, Mr. President, what does that mean for our relationship with China and your relationship with President Xi?

AMBASSADOR O'BRIEN: Well, number one, I think the President has a great relationship with President Xi. And we'd like to have a great relationship with China. Unfortunately, we are just not in a position to confirm any of the numbers that are coming out of China. There's no way to confirm any of those numbers.

There's lots of public reporting on whether the numbers are — are too low. You've got access to those reports that are coming out of the Chinese social media and — and some of the few reporters that are left in China. We just have no way to confirm any of those numbers. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: We really don't know. I mean, yeah — look, how do we know whether if they underreported or reported however they report?

But we had a great call the other night. We're working together on a lot of different things, including trade. They're buying a lot. They're spending a lot of money and they're giving it to our farmers. They're paying our farmers for the product. So, you know, we're going to — we're going to continue that along.

John. Yeah.

Q I have another one, sir. You tweeted earlier today that there was — you have uncovered intelligence that there is a sneak attack being planned against American troops, American assets in Iraq. Are we talking about Kata'ib Hezbollah again? Also —

THE PRESIDENT: I know what you're saying, but we just have information that they were planning something. And it's very good information. It was led by Iran — not necessarily Iran, but by groups supported by Iran. But that, to me, is Iran. And we're just saying, "Don't do it. Don't do it." It would be a very bad thing for them if they did it.

Q The last time they did do it in early March, at Camp Taji, there was a response from the military against Kata'ib Hezbollah and Kata'ib Hezbollah alone. Your tweets —

THE PRESIDENT: That was a very powerful response, by the way. That response knocked out five different places, but it also took out a lot of very bad people.

Q Your tweets seemed to suggest though that if it happens again, it may go up the food chain.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, that was a very big response. You know, we knocked out a lot. We looked — they hit one site; we hit five big ones and ammunition sites. You saw the — you saw what happened. And I won't say how many people were killed, but some bad people were killed. And a lot of them. That was a big response. But this response will be bigger if they do something.

Yeah. You had one. Please.

Q Yes. Thank you, Mr. President. Just going back to your conversation with President Xi, I'm wondering if you received an intelligence report that talked about the discrepancy in the numbers and if you addressed that with President Xi?

THE PRESIDENT: We have not received that. But their numbers seem to be a little bit on the light side. And I'm being nice when I say that, relative to what we witnessed and what was reported.

But we discussed that with him — not so much the numbers, as what they did and how they're doing. And we're in constant communication with — I mean, I would say the biggest communication is myself and President Xi. The relationship is very good.

We have — look, they're spending — they will be spending, when things even out — this is obviously a little bit of a hurdle, what's happened over the last month. But they'll be spending \$250 billion, buying our product: \$50 billion to the farmers alone, \$200 billion to other things. They never did that before. So we have a great trade deal. And we'd like to keep it, they'd like to keep it, and the relationship is good.

As to whether or not their numbers are accurate, I'm not an accountant from China.

Q Does this strain things at all, in terms of the trade deal?

THE PRESIDENT: No, because people just don't know. People don't know where did it come from. I think we all understand where it came from. And President Xi understands that. And we don't have to make a big deal out of it.

We didn't like the fact that they said it came from our soldiers. And they haven't pursued that. It was — and that was a mid-level person said that. That was not a high-level person, so I assume. I will always assume the best. I'll assume the high-level people didn't know about it. It was a foolish statement.

So, look, the relationship with China is a good one, and my relationship with him is, you know, really good.

Please.

Q Can I follow up just on that point on Chinese propaganda that you mentioned, as well as Ambassador O'Brien? So in the past several weeks, China has been shipping PPEs — you know, masks.

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah.

Q They've either been selling or donating everywhere — Africa, Europe, Italy, Russia — and really pushing this narrative that they're taking on a global leadership role in the crisis. So what are your thoughts on that? And is there any plan for the administration to take on that role?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't mind if they want it. Yeah. I view that as a positive, if they're helping other countries. We have 151 countries right now that are under siege by the virus. Under siege. Some are doing really badly. You know, they don't know about social distancing. These are countries that aren't highly sophisticated. They don't have great communication with the rest of the world. I mean, they don't know the things that we're doing and that some others are able to do.

And if China can help them, I'm all for it. I'm for all of us helping everybody. We're soon going to have more ventilators than we need. We're building thousands of ventilators right now. Now, it takes a period of time to build them. And again, nobody could have known a thing like this could happen. We're building thousands. We will fairly soon be at a point where we have far more than we can use, even after we stockpile for some future catastrophe, which we hope doesn't happen.

We're going to be distributing them — the extras — around the world. We'll go to Italy, we'll go to France. It will go to Spain, which is, you know, very hard hit.

Q Just to follow up on that note: Is there any truth on reporting that your administration is stopping shipment of USAID stockpiles of PPEs abroad?

THE PRESIDENT: No. No, truth whatsoever.

Q So your administration is not —

THE PRESIDENT: No, we want — I would love China and other countries, if they have additional supplies, medical supplies, to give to other countries. A hundred and fifty-one — 151 —

Q So at this time, the U.S. is still shipping to USAID?

THE PRESIDENT: Why would I stop that? Wouldn't that be terrible to stop it?

Q No, I mean, is the U.S. stopping shipment of our own stockpile, through USAID, to other countries?

THE PRESIDENT: No. Whatever we have, whatever we've committed to, we commit. But we also need a lot for ourselves, so we're very focused on that until we get over this. So obviously, we're not going to be shipping too much until — now, we do have excess of certain things, and we don't have enough of others.

I just had a great talk today with the — Doug McMillon, from Walmart. And I gave him a very, very big order to — for gowns, for protective gear for the doctors, for the nurses, for everything. And he's actually very excited about it. He's the biggest purchaser of this kind of thing. I mean, of anything probably in the world. And he is very excited about it.

And he said, "What size?" I said, "It's almost unlimited." When you look at these hospitals, the amount that they order, you almost say, "How could they possibly use so much, whether it's masks or the protective gear?" But we are supplying a tremendous amount, and we just ordered a lot from Walmart. And he's taken this on personally. And I said, "Let it go ship — let it be shipped not to a warehouse, directly to the side of the hospital or wherever they need it," because we save a lot of time when we do that.

So Walmart, in addition to many other companies and people, is now involved at the highest level.

Please.

Q The announcements that were made today are aimed at curbing the flow of narcotics into the country. Are you concerned that we're possibly losing ground on the drug crisis while we're combatting —

THE PRESIDENT: No, I don't think we're losing ground, but we don't want to lose ground. That's why we're doing it. I don't want to lose ground. That's a big fight.

I've seen many families where they're wiped out because they lost a son or a daughter, or a husband or a wife, or whatever — or all of them. And we don't want to lose ground. And we are heavily focused on the virus. Very heavily focused. And with this, we have never — after this goes

into effect, which essentially is now, we will never have been so focused on drugs coming into our country as we are right now.

And remember, as that wall gets bigger, that really helps us a lot. It really helps us a lot.

Yeah, please.

Q Is the Mexican government or any other Latin American government working in conjunction with this operation to help with that drug —

THE PRESIDENT: Many of the governments are, and Mexico, in particular, is. And Mexico, right now, has — we have 27,000 Mexican soldiers on our southern border, keeping people out of our country. And we're — very few people are coming into our country right now.

And as we complete, again, the wall, in addition to the 27,000 soldiers, it's — it's a very — it's a very tough place to come into. When I — when I took over, people were coming in and they were bringing whatever they wanted. They were bringing drugs of any type, and now it's very hard for them. And it will get harder and harder.

But the President of Mexico is a great guy who's really helped us a lot: 27,000 soldiers — 27,000 Mexican soldiers.

And you remember when I first took over, they had all of the caravans coming up with 10,000, 15,000 people in the caravans. They were marching through Mexico. That's not happening anymore.

Please, in the back.

Q Mr. President, are narco militants such as the FARC 57th Front out of Colombia or the Maduro regime — do you know if they're working in conjunction with the Mexican cartels? Is there any intelligence indicating that?

THE PRESIDENT: I cannot tell you that. I can — I know the answer to that. I believe I do. But I cannot tell you that. We have information that would lead us to believe something very powerfully, but I cannot tell you the answer to that.

Yeah, please. Jeff.

Q Mr. President, have U.S. forces in Iraq taken any precautions because of this particular attack?

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah, sure. Sure.

Q And have you —

THE PRESIDENT: They're taking precautions, and we are watching it very closely. And if something bad happens, it's going to be very painful for the other side.

Q Have you been in touch with the Iraqi government about this?

THE PRESIDENT: They know about it, yeah. They know about it.

Q Are they offering additional protection or anything?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we'll see. We'll see what happens. But, you know, we're down to a small force now. Over the years since I got — we've been bringing smaller and smaller. And we're down right now to a small number, but we have very powerful airpower there. We have the big base, and — which will — you know, I mean, nobody can get near it. Nobody can even get near that. But we've really, largely, left. You know, we've taken tremendous amounts out and we've deployed them elsewhere, including bringing some back home.

Q And do you think tweeting about it will help prevent that from happening —

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah, I think it's — it's not tweeting.

Q — or perhaps give them a heads up?

THE PRESIDENT: It's called "social media." It's social media. It gets out. I have, you know, hundreds of millions of people. Number one on Facebook. Did you know I was number one on Facebook? I mean, I just found out I'm number one on Facebook. I thought that was very nice for whatever it means.

No, it represents something. And when I can explain to people: Just don't do it. You know, it's going to be bad if you do it. It's going to be really bad. And they don't need to do it. They have enough problems. Iran has enough problems without doing that.

But we've been pulling back very substantially over the last year, in Iraq. And so, you know, that's the way it is.

Q You said, before, you don't want to give the enemy — whoever that is in this case — a heads up. Do you feel like maybe you did?

THE PRESIDENT: No. I'm just giving them a warning. It's not a heads up. I'm giving them a warning. There's a big difference. I'm saying: If you do anything to hurt our troops they're going to — they're going to pay a price.

No, they did last time, you know, as per the question. They did last time. We didn't make a big deal out of it, but we hit very, very hard five massive, major ammunition sites, and a lot of people went with it. A lot of bad people. A lot of enemy went with it. And we didn't want to make a big deal out of it, but they paid a big price. They'll pay a much bigger price this time if they do anything.

Q Mr. President, now that we have Admiral Gilday here, perhaps we could ask a question about what the plans are for the Roosevelt, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: Sure.

ADMIRAL GILDAY: In terms of the Roosevelt, we're making great progress in terms of testing and also moving — moving people off the ship. So, in the past day or so, we've moved over 1,000. That number will increase to more than 2,700 by Friday as we continue to increase the testing as well and fly those samples off. So we're getting after it pretty — pretty quickly.

Q And will the ship remain fully operational?

ADMIRAL GILDAY: It is fully operational now.

Q And it will remain so?

ADMIRAL GILDAY: It will remain so.

Q Can I ask a follow-up to that? What protocols are you putting in place to help mitigate the spread of coronavirus among servicemen and women who live and work in close quarters?

ADMIRAL GILDAY: Across the fleet, before we have any ships getting underway for training exercises, for deployments, they're spending — those sailors are spending 14 days in quarantine before they get underway. We've increased the amount of testing equipment, as well as physicians onboard our ship at sea. So we've taken additional steps since the beginning of the COVID crisis.

THE PRESIDENT: And not too many people are going to be getting off at various ports anymore. Right?

I think we —

ADMIRAL GILDAY: Correct.

THE PRESIDENT: We probably have decided on that. Okay?

Q You mean civilians?

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. No — military people, from the ships.

SECRETARY ESPER: I want to add one — I'd like to add one thing to that. There seems to be this narrative out there that we should just shut down the entire United States military and address the problem that way. That's not feasible. We have a mission. Our mission is to protect the United States of America and our people. And so we live and work in cramped quarters, whether it's an aircraft carrier, a submarine, a tank, a bomber. It's the nature of our business.

But the chain of command has very clear guidance. And I'm confident between the commanding officers and the senior non-commissioned officers, that they're taking every reasonable precaution to make sure we practice, as best we can, social distancing, sanitizing environments, et cetera, consistent with that mission. And that's what I trust Admiral Gilday, Acting Secretary Modly, and all the other service chiefs and service leaders to do. And I'm confident we'll do that. Because keep in mind, we have a job to do and we will continue to do it: defend the United States of America.

Q Mr. President, you mentioned the stockpile earlier. The Washington Post reported today that the U.S. stockpile is nearly depleted of PPE. Is that the case?

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah.

Q And if so —

THE PRESIDENT: It is —

Q — how are you planning to mitigate that?

THE PRESIDENT: — because we're sending it directly to hospitals. We don't want it to come to the stockpile because then we have to take it after it arrives and bring it to various states and hospitals.

One of the things — and again, we asked the state to do this as much as possible — many of the states have people that — whether it's that or clothing; they make clothing — lots of clothing in many of the different states. We said, "See if you can get it directly from those manufacturers. Make a deal." We'll use the Purchase Act, if we have to, on them. If they won't — by the way, so many people are — the spirit is incredible, what they're doing.

But we've asked states where they have large manufacturers of different types of equipment to use those local factories, those local plants, and have it made directly. Ship it right into the hospitals.

We're shipping things right in. We have, as you know, almost 10,000 ventilators, which we need for flexibility. It's a lot. It sounds like a lot, but it's not. Because, as you see on the board from yesterday, as this scourge, as this plague, as this virus moves — it moves very fast — and we don't know yet whether we're going to need it in Louisiana, in New York, you know, wherever it may be. So we're ready for it. We're totally ready for it.

We're going to be shipping out — we've already agreed to ship out over 1,000 today to different sites, different locations. But we have to have the flexibility of moving the ventilators to where — to where the virus is going. And we'll be able to see that — you know, we'll be able to see that from charts a couple of days in advance.

So right now we have a nice pile of ventilators. We have a lot more coming in. We have a lot of — I think we have 11 companies that are making ventilators right now. Very good companies. And they're making them — you know about Ford, you know about General Motors, but we have a lot of companies making the ventilators right now.

So now, the question is — you know, when you make one, it doesn't get made in 15 minutes. It's not — a mask can go quickly; a ventilator takes time to build. It's very, very — as we discussed, it's complex, it's big, it's expensive — you know, et cetera. But we'll be able to move. We have great flexibility.

John?

Q I was just going to say, sir, do you want to move on to solely coronavirus or stick with the military —

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah, I think if — does anybody have any other questions for this great group of brilliant people?

Yes, please.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. A question for Secretary Esper. Is — the military personnel has been fanned out across the country to help combat the virus. Is there any chance that they're planning to see, at some point, having military personnel treat or see COVID-19 patients?

SECRETARY ESPER: Well, excuse me. As you know, we have the hospital ships currently deployed — one in LA and one in New York City. So they are — they will be — they could be treating patients as they come in. We're taking precautionary measures to screen them beforehand to make sure that they're not — they're not exposed, if you will.

Same with the military hospitals that we are — we're deploying, certainly, again, to New York, Seattle, and other places. But the one thing we got to be careful of where we're — where we're — is that these are deployable assets; they are unique. So if we want to retain the ability to deploy military doctors, expeditionary military hospitals around the country, we got to preserve and protect them as — as best we can.

That said, we remain completely available to assist as need be, as directed by FEMA, as the Vice President and the President asks us. That's what we commit to do to the American people to help safeguard them and protect them through this through this virus.

Q So as part of that, they — will they be seeing coronavirus patients or will they strictly be seeing other patients and helping (inaudible)?

SECRETARY ESPER: They could have called upon — I think the best use for them is — based on their training and how they're structured and organized — is for trauma. We can take the load off of hospitals with regard to their trauma patients, thereby freeing up rooms and other doctors, particularly doctors who are, you know, respiratory nurses or doctors who deal with infectious disease to treat those type of patients.

So I think it's the best use of our resources. But again, if push comes to shove, we're prepared to do what we have to assist the American people, at the same time preserving the medical capability we need to support our operations and deployed forces abroad.

THE PRESIDENT: And we're looking at doing two additional brand-new hospital ships because these ships have really — I mean, they really struck a blow — a very positive blow for what they're doing going into Los Angeles, going into New York.

So we're looking very seriously at building two additional ships of about the same size.

Q Building two new ones or deploying two new ones?

THE PRESIDENT: It'll either be — well, building. But we're looking at building either two new ones or doing the renovation of another large ship. But this has really worked out well. So, probably two brand-new ones.

Q Just to follow up —

Q So, Mr. President — Mr. President —

THE PRESIDENT: Is this concerning the gentlemen, or do you want them —

Q Yeah. No. No.

THE PRESIDENT: You don't want them to get back to work and capture all those bad people?

Q A follow-up, Mr. President or Mr. Secretary.

THE PRESIDENT: Go ahead. Sure. Go ahead.

Q I know that Secretary Wilkie has said he's on standby, waiting to hear if VA hospitals need to be opened — the doors need to be opened to civilians.

THE PRESIDENT: True.

Q Are you talking about that?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, we are.

Q Could we see that happen? How soon would that happen?

THE PRESIDENT: In fact, certain hospitals — yeah, certain hosp- — it can move very quickly. He's a very capable man. We're ready to move very quickly. As an example, in Louisiana, they have a very big hospital, so we're looking to move very quickly if we need them. You know, hopefully we won't need them.

Q When will you make that decision? Do you think we'll need that soon?

THE PRESIDENT: We're going to find out pretty soon. We're only going to know when — at the time it happens. We prepare for the worst. We are preparing for the worst. Unfortunately, that's the way we have to look at it.

Q Just to follow up on the purpose of these naval ships, you mentioned something about, you know, treating trauma patients. And I'm just curious: What about things like, you know, giving birth? Would mothers be expected, in New York, for example —

THE PRESIDENT: Well, as I understand, they're not doing that on the ship. That's the one thing they're not doing, outside of the COVID-19. They're not doing that. The birth of a baby — not being done on the ships.

Q Can I have a follow-up question with Attorney General Barr, please? This has to do with the visa restrictions on immigrant doctors. Is the administration considering easing the restrictions or waiving restrictions for doctors with J-1 or H-1B visas so they can help other doctors during this crisis?

ATTORNEY GENERAL BARR: Actually, the immigration laws are no longer under the administration of the Department of Justice and I haven't been participating in any of those discussions.

Q Well, what about you, Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: Good. Any other questions? Please, go ahead.

Q Can you respond to that question, Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: One more. One more for this group I have right here please.

Q To Secretary Esper: The WHO — this is on the topic of coronavirus in Iran. The WHO confirms that Iran is vastly underreporting its coronavirus cases — not just cases, but fatalities. According to on-the-ground estimates, that might be as high as fifteen and a half thousand deaths. Thirty-two commanders in the military in Iran are now confirmed either in dire condition or dead. You have 8 percent of the parliament now down with coronavirus. So is Iran's soundings of aggressions today that President Trump just tweeted about — do you think, strategically, is that a bluff on their part, or is this a sign of very clear desperation? Where are you, strategically, on that?

SECRETARY ESPER: Well, first and foremost, we empathize for the Iranian people. I mean, they clearly have been hit hard. As you know, I — I think the President has spoken about it, certainly Secretary Pompeo. We've offered assistance, we've offered medical supplies, et cetera. They've refused that. I — I think if the Iranian regime put more interest, in terms of taking care of their people in the context of this virus, they would be better served.

Instead, the Iranian regime continues to want to spread its malign activities throughout the region. They want to continue to send out the Quds Force and others to — to cause problems throughout the region. We know that, in one way, shape, or form, they're resourcing, directing, approving, of whatever operations for Shia militia groups in Iraq that are targeting American forces.

So, I think at the end of the day, again, I feel deep concern for the Iranian people. The important thing is that the Iranian government should focus on them and stop this malign behavior that they've been conducting now for over 40 years. I think the entire region, and certainly the Iranian people, would be better off for it.

THE PRESIDENT: And I happen to think they want to make a deal; they just don't know, really, how to start. And they've been given some bad advice by former Secretary Kerry. It's some very bad advice.

Q Is it a bluff on their part, do you think?

THE PRESIDENT: And I really think they want to make a deal — which is the Logan Act, but we'd have to look at the Logan Act. All you have to do is take a look. I think they've been given very bad advice by Secretary Kerry. I think that — I think they're dying to make a deal.

Look, their country is in trouble. Their economics are shot. They're in — they've got a lot of bad things going. I think they'd like to make a deal. They can get it settled very quickly.

No nuclear weapons. No nuclear weapons.

Q Do you feel like you're — would you be in a position to —

THE PRESIDENT: They can't have nuclear weapons. It's very simple.

Okay, let's let these folks get back to work. Is that okay? Thank you all very much.

So, as we deploy our service members to combat both threats abroad, invisible enemy at home, earlier today I spoke to our nation's incredible warriors and military families. Spent a long time on the phone with thousands and thousands of families that were hooked in.

In order to stop the spread of the virus, some of these families have delayed planned moves to their next duty station. And in other cases, military families are also waiting longer to welcome home their heroes from deployment. There's a tremendous burden to bear. And the families have been involved with us for so long, and they are incredible. Without the families, they couldn't be the great service members that they turned out to be, and they understand that.

And I must say, protecting our military families is our top priority. So they understand what they're — what's happening with respect to the virus — and they understand it well. They've been fantastic.

As Commander-in-Chief, I'm deeply grateful for our service members, their spouses, and their children, whose love, devotion, and sacrifice keeps America strong.

To make, procure, and deliver crucial medical supplies to our doctors, nurses, and healthcare workers, my administration is leveraging the might of American manufacturing, supply chains, and innovators across the industry and across every industry. And I just told you about Walmart and I could tell you about many more. Hanes is making protective gear and masks, and we're making tremendous amounts of product. There's never been anything like it.

At the same time, I tell the governors, "Get it yourself, if you can, from your local companies and your local warehouses and factories. If you can do that, you should do that."

Because of the actions that we've taken under the Defense Production Act, manufacturers and suppliers are sharing with FEMA and HHS their planned orders and allocations to states and to hospitals all over the region. This enables FEMA and HHS to work closely with states, local governments, and private sector to allocate critical resources to highly impacted areas.

Working together, we're entirely focused on getting materials to the right place at the right time. So we want it to go directly to a hospital or directly to a certain state location, and ideally, not even hit the states' warehouses. If we can avoid the warehouses, it's even better because they go directly into a hospital.

And one example of that is Ohio — the great state of Ohio. Senator Rob Portman called today and he asked for some help, and got us — did a tremendous job, along with Mike DeWine, the great governor of Ohio, to facilitate a donation of 2.2 million gowns. 2.2 million gowns. Think of what

that is: 2.2 million to the Strategic National Stockpile from Ohio-based Cardinal Health. Cardinal Health, we appreciate it. And they're making much more than that and different types of things.

We're profoundly grateful for their contribution to protect the lives and safety of our healthcare professionals. Cardinal has been working with us very well.

FEMA and HHS formed a historic partnership with the private sector called "Project Airbridge" to bring supplies from other countries to the United States, including gloves, gowns, goggles, and masks. These supplies will soon be distributed around the country. We have large cargo planes coming in from various parts of the world.

Every day, new planeloads are landing in cities such as New York, Miami, Chicago, Los Angeles. Additional flights have been scheduled, and we're adding more and more. And they're actually coming in ahead of schedule. A lot of these flights are coming in with a lot of material ahead of schedule. The amount of usage, the amount of need, is something that nobody has ever seen before. We are getting so much, but no matter how much we get, they seem to use it up very quickly.

More than 17,000 National Guard personnel have now been activated all across our country. On Tuesday, the Vice President sent a letter to the governors, calling on them to have plans in place to use the National Guard to move medical supplies from warehouses to hospitals.

So, a lot of times, we'll deliver supplies to a warehouse in a state — someplace in New York or in New Jersey or in Connecticut or wherever it may be — and they're having difficulty getting it moved. So what we're doing, if we don't bring it directly to the hospital, is we've authorized — it was a special authorization — the National Guard to go into that facility and to move it for the state.

So the National Guard is moving a lot of this equipment and medical supplies into a hospital or into an area where it's needed by the state.

As I said yesterday, difficult days are ahead for our nation. We're going to have a couple of weeks, starting pretty much now, but especially a few days from now, that are going to be horrific. But even in the most challenging of times, Americans do not despair. We do not give in to fear. We pull together, we persevere, and we overcome, and we win.

This week, every American heart is joined with the people of New York as they continue to bear the brunt of the pandemic. To every New Yorker: Please know that we are by your side. I love New York. And every day, we will be with you.

And it could very well be that others take over from New York. There are some areas, some hotspots in other states that are really exploding. Some, like Louisiana, were very late. And then, all of a sudden, it was like an explosion.

In confronting this deadly plague, America is armed with capabilities never dreamed of in past centuries. If you look at 1917, the pandemic, it was something. It ravaged parts of this country but ravaged Europe. Ravaged. They say 75- to 100 million — some people say 50- to 75 million people died. Think of that. And that was a long time ago, over 100 years ago. Very, very — many books written about the 1917, 1918 pandemic.

Our doctors are pouring over the virus genetic code, designing potential therapies and vaccines. Our planes are airlifting supplies from every corner of the Earth. We're watching other countries and they're watching us to see whether or not — and who's going to be the first to come up with a cure or a remedy of some kind or even a help, if it can help — and of course, a vaccine. We're looking very strongly for a vaccine. Johnson & Johnson is doing well, and other companies are doing very well.

But our most powerful asset, our greatest weapon in this effort is the spirit of our people. And we want to keep away, keep a distance. Keep away. If you don't get it — it solves a lot of problems. If you don't get it — and you can't get it if you keep the distance.

American spirit is unyielding, unwavering, and unbreakable. It's incredible. I've never seen anything like it — the way the people have pulled together, the unity of this country.

So, together, we're going to win this war, and the sooner we do, the sooner we can begin to rebuild. And we're ready to rebound and return to normal lives. We went from the best economy in the history of the world, the best economy that this country has ever seen — the best employment numbers we've ever had; 160 million people working, almost; 160 million — to a point where the professionals came to me and they say, "Sir, you're going to have to shut the country down." I said, "What does that mean?" They said, "Sir, you're going to have to shut it down."

And we're going to build it up, and I think we're going to build it up fast. I think we're going to have a tremendous rebound. There's a great energy and a great pent-up demand.

And as you know, phase three was terrific, and phase four — what passed in Congress — and phase four, if that happens, will be great. I already proposed a — paying almost zero interest on bonds, and I proposed a \$2 trillion infrastructure plan, which would not only fix our roads and highways and bridges and tunnels and other things, but will also do something very good. It's called "jobs."

I'm also asking that restaurants and entertainment facilities go back to the old deductibility from corporations where corporations can buy, because otherwise a lot of these restaurants are going to have a hard time reopening. It takes a long time. And they're going to have a hard time reopening. So we're asking for going back to deductibility, where corporations can buy and corporations can go out to lunch, and they pay and they get a deduction on what they eat, they get a deduction on the bill, and same with the entertainment. It's going to bring a lot of people back. I think it'll open up the restaurant business.

People forget that, years ago, they had that. And when they got rid of it, when they ended it for whatever reason — but they ended it — many, many restaurants went out of business, many entertainment-type facilities went out of business. And now is a great time to bring it back. It was — it was a terrible time for that business after they ended it. But this is a great time to bring it back. It'll keep our restaurants going. In fact, I think the restaurant business will be actually bigger and better than it is right now. So we're also talking about that.

And now what we'll do is we'll take some questions. And I see Mike is back with some of the folks. That's great. Dr. Fauci. And we will — oh, how are you? Thank you, Deborah.

So we'll take some questions, and we make progress day by day.

Please.

Q Mr. President, yesterday you were talking about a friend you had who is in a coma.

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah.

Q I'm sorry to hear your friend is going through that. But you said, "This is no flu." There's still some people who kind of think of this as the flu, and over the past month, you've compared it to the flu sometimes, saying, "Treat it like the flu" or, you know, "Treat it how we handle the flu."

So what changed your thinking on that or your language on that?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the severity. I think also in looking at the way the contagion — it is so contagious. Nobody has ever seen anything like this, where large groups of people, all of a sudden, just by being in the presence of somebody, have it. The flu has never been like that. And there is — flu is contagious but nothing like we've ever seen here.

Also, the violence of it. If it hits the right person — and you know what those stats are — if it hits the right person, that person is in deep trouble. And my friend was the right person.

Q When you heard about that with your friend, was that a turning point in your thinking, to some extent?

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah, well, not a turning point. No. Before that, I knew how — because I'm seeing numbers and I'm seeing statistics that are, you know, not exactly very good.

So — but — but it hit him very hard. He's strong — a very strong kind of a guy. But he's older. He's heavier. And he's sort of central casting for what we're talking about, and it hit him very hard. I've never seen anything like it.

Yeah, John?

Q Mr. President — and maybe this is a question as well for Dr. Birx or Dr. Fauci: Senator Lindsey Graham tweeted last night — and we checked today — that there are still flights that are running between hotspots like New York and Detroit, New Orleans as well. A number of flights were completed today.

Senator Graham's point is if you're going to declare mitigation, should it not be full mitigation —

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah.

Q — and you stop people from traveling to these hotspots?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we're thinking about doing that. At the same time, we just — you know, to start these airlines and to start this whole thing over again is very tough, John. It's very tough. And you have them going, in some cases, from hotspot to hotspot. If you notice, they're usually hotspot to hotspot. Very few flights. New York to Miami.

And — but we're thinking — we're certainly looking at it. But once you do that, you really are — you really are clamping down on an industry that is desperately needed.

Q But how do you make that calculation as to whether or not you keep the industry afloat —

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we're going to —

Q — or you risk spreading contagion?

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah. That is a calculation that we're looking at right now. We're looking at it very strongly.

Please.

Q So let me follow up to that, Mr. President. Not every governor has issued a stay-at-home-order. All of you have made it very clear how important it is to stay home; that we are in a dire situation here. And that's how you stop the spread, is staying home.

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah. Sure.

Q Why not take the power out of the hands of the governors and you just issue a stay-at-home order for every state in this country?

THE PRESIDENT: Because states are different. States are different. And I understand that the governor of Florida — great governor, Ron DeSantis — issued one today. And that's good. That's great. But there are some states that are different. There are some states that don't have much of a problem.

Q What makes them different?

THE PRESIDENT: There are some — well, they don't have the problem. They don't have thousands of people that are positive, or thousands of people that even think they might have it — or hundreds of people, in some cases.

So you have to look — you have to look at states. You have to give a little bit of flexibility. I mean, if a state in the Midwest, or if Alaska, as an example, doesn't have a problem, it's awfully tough to say, "Close it down." So we have to have a little bit of flexibility.

Look, we're helping governors. We're really here to help governors. They're the frontline of attack, and that includes in purchasing, by the way. We're here and we're backing them up. And there's never been a backup like we've given them. We've given them billions of dollars' worth of things — medical supplies and ventilators; thousands and thousands of ventilators. We have thousands under construction right now. We have thousands ready to go in case they need it. There's never been anything like this.

I mean, we've — they've done really — the people have done incredibly. We're building hospitals all over the country. We're building hospitals right now at a rate that has never even been contemplated before. They're mobile hospitals, but they're really not mobile. I mean, they're incredible structures. But we're building many hospitals: Louisiana, New Jersey, New York. We just finished a massive hospital complex. And we also have medical centers built in New York. I mean, we're building hospitals at the rate that this country has never done before. And hopefully it's all going to work out.

Q A follow-up on DeSantis, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: Please, go ahead.

Q Yes, Mr. President. I just want to make sure we're clear. On the planes, are you looking at just curtailing routes between certain hotspots, or is it broadly?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we're looking at the whole thing, because we're getting into a position now where we want to do that. We have to do that. And so we're looking at the whole thing.

Yes.

Q You wouldn't —

THE PRESIDENT: And we may have — we may have some recommendations.

Q And my second question on economics. Just with oil — oil prices are very low.

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah.

Q The Saudis have increased production. I know that you've spoken about liking low oil prices, but then there's also the industry aspect.

THE PRESIDENT: It's like, from 1950, these oil prices. And that's when they had big dollars — big, beautiful dollars.

Q So do you — do you advocate cuts? Do you advocate cuts to production? Do you —

THE PRESIDENT: Well, look, we have a great oil industry, and the oil industry is being ravaged. And, as you know, Russia — and I spoke to President Putin; we had a great call. Russia, Saudi Arabia — I spoke with the Crown Prince; we had a great call. But I think that they will work it out over the next few days. If you ask me, I think it's just — it's too simple not to be able to. They both know what they have to do. So I think — I have confidence in both that they'll be able to work it out.

But it's — it has ravaged an industry worldwide, not here. I mean, worldwide, the oil industry has been ravaged. So there was a lot of oil production to start off with. And then, on top of it, it got hit with the virus, and business went down 35, 40 percent. So that business is a tough one. And, you know, they have ships all over the sea. I told you yesterday — all over the sea. Massive tankers that they're using for storage. They go out and they just sit there. There's no place to go. They have massive amounts.

Now, gasoline is going to be 99 cents a gallon and less. You know that. That's already starting. It's popping up. Ninety-nine cents. So that's like giving a massive tax cut to people of our country. When we try and get the airlines going if — if fuel is costing much less, it helps with getting the airlines, which is always a tough business. Always has been a tough business.

But with that being said, look, I want to get that industry back where it was. We were doing records in that industry also. We want to get it back to where it was.

So I think that Saudi Arabia, Russia, they're negotiating. They're talking. And I think they'll come up with something.

I'm going to meet with the oil companies on Friday. I'm going to meet with independent oil producers also on Friday or Saturday, maybe Sunday. But we're having a lot of meetings on it. I think I know what to do to solve it. But if — if they're unable to solve it, then I think I know what to do to solve it.

Q Can you give us a glimpse of what direction —

THE PRESIDENT: We won't mention it now, but it's tough. I think I know what to do to solve it. We don't want to lose our great oil companies. You know, we're the number one producer of oil in the world. And a month ago, when you said that, it was great. Today, when you say it, it's not so meaningful.

But I do believe there's a way that that can be solved or pretty well solved. And I'd rather not do that. I think that Russia and Saudi Arabia, at some point, are going to make a deal in the not-too-distant future because it's very bad for Russia. It's very bad for Saudi Arabia. It's very bad. I mean, it's bad for both, so I think they're going to make a deal.

You know, the free market is a wonderful thing. It's amazing how it can work. But I think they're going to make a deal.

Yeah. Yeah, please. In the back.

Q Mr. President, a couple of questions. One for you, one for Mr. Wolf, if possible. Over 5 million immigrants in this country do pay taxes through their ID numbers, yet they will not receive any money in their stimulus package. And no undocumented immigrant will receive any aid from the government during this crisis. How do you suppose they survive during the COVID-19?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, you know, you're saying "undocumented," meaning they came in illegally. And a lot of people would say we have a lot of citizens right now that won't be working. So, what are you going to do? It's a tough thing. It's a very terrible — it's a very sad question, I must be

honest with you. But they came in illegally. And we have a lot of people that are citizens of our country that won't be able to have jobs.

Now, I do think once we get rid of the virus, I think we're going to have a boom economy. I think it's going to go up rather quickly. Maybe very quickly. And maybe slowly. But it's going to go up, and it'll all come back. And I think it's actually going to come back stronger than what it was because of the stimulus.

But it's a — it's a really sad situation, and we are working on it. I will tell you — I'm not going to give you a hard and fast answer because I just want to tell you, it's something I think about and it's something we're working on.

Please.

Q Can I ask a question of Mr. Wolf?

THE PRESIDENT: Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Mr. President. A question for Dr. Fauci. Looking beyond, when we're on the other side of this curve, are we looking at living with some sort of social distancing guidelines essentially until there's treatment or a vaccine? For example, people looking forward to the summer talk about, you know, going to baseball games, going to concerts. We have political conventions over the summer. Are things like that possible or safe without a vaccine or a treatment in place?

DR. FAUCI: Yeah, I think if we get to the part of the curve that Dr. Birx showed yesterday when it goes down to essentially no new cases, no deaths at a period of time, I think it makes sense that you're going to have to relax social distancing.

The one thing we hopefully would have in place, and I believe we will have in place, is a much more robust system to be able to identify someone who's infected, isolate them, and then do contact tracing. Because if you have a really good program of containment that prevents you from ever having to get into mitigation — we're in mitigation right now. That's what the social and physical distancing is.

The ultimate — the ultimate solution to a virus that might keep coming back would be a vaccine. In fact, I was on the weekly conference call with the WHO-sponsored group of all the health leaders in the world who are dealing with this. And we all came to the agreement that we may have cycling with another season. We'll be much better prepared. We likely will have interventions. But the ultimate game changer in this will be a vaccine, the same way a vaccine for other diseases, that were scourges in the past, that now we don't even worry.

THE PRESIDENT: And, Tony, how are they — how are they doing with the vaccines, Tony?

DR. FAUCI: I mean, the vaccine is — is, as I said, it's on target. We're still in phase one. There were three doses that we had to test. We've been through the first two doses. We're on the highest dose now.

When we get that data — it'll take a few months to get the data to feel confident to go to the phase two. And then a few months from now, we'll be in phase two. And I think we're right on target for the year to a year and a half.

Q And do you mind me asking: You and Dr. Birx, have either of you received threats of any kind? Or have you been given a security detail, given that you've been out here every day on camera, speaking?

DR. FAUCI: Well, I mean, I — anything that has to do with security detail, I'd have to have you refer that question to the Inspector General of HHS rather than my answer that.

Q Can I follow up on testing, Dr. Fauci?

THE PRESIDENT: He doesn't need security. Everybody loves him. Besides, they'd be in big trouble if they ever attacked.

You know, he was a great basketball player. Did anybody know that? He was a little on the short side for the NBA, but he was talented. And he — he won a game. I read the story. He won a game that was unwinnable against a great team. And his whole team said, "We can't beat this team." And he went in and they won the game. Right? That was a couple of years ago, but —

DR. FAUCI: Yeah, a few years ago.

THE PRESIDENT: The head never changes. (Laughs.) The attitude never changes.

Q Could I — could I ask Dr. Fauci —

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, please.

Q — because I know he loves being up behind the podium so much.

THE PRESIDENT: He does. (Laughter.)

Q Like pulling teeth; like going to the dentist.

I don't want to hit you with everything that's coming along, but a lot of people who are watching television today heard from a researcher named Dr. Jacob Glanville who's come up with a potential antibody therapy that he has given to USAMRIID. Just wanting to know if you know anything about this; what you might be able to tell people at home about it who have seen it.

DR. FAUCI: You know, John, I don't know specifically this individual what they're doing, but I can tell you there's a lot of activity that is centered around a passive transfer of antibodies in the form of convalescent plasma, one. The number is to get immune globulin that you precipitate out of the plasma, and another is monoclonal antibody.

It's based on the same principle of if you have a protective antibody, passive transfer that could provide not only protection, prophylactically, but also treatment. This is an old concept. In fact, immunology was born decades and decades and decades ago with the concept of giving passive transfer of serum to an individual to protect them from an infection.

So it's — I wouldn't be surprised if he and a number of other people are pursuing this. It's the right thing to do.

Q Can I follow up on antibody testing please, Dr. Fauci? At what point can we, as a country, expect there to be a widespread antibody testing so we know exactly what we're dealing with here, as well as other questions such as, you know, when can people, who are deemed to be healthy, donate blood, for example?

DR. FAUCI: Okay. So when you talk about antibody testing, there are a couple of things that you want to do. You want to find out if someone has been infected and whether or not they're going to ultimately wind up being protected.

Antibody testing right now is not the first thing on our priority. It's something that we need to do is testing to see if someone is infected.

It is very important, ultimately, to be able to get a feel for what the penetrance of the infection was in society for a number of reasons. You get a better feel of what the impact has been, but also you get a better feel of what the herd immunity would be.

So I can foresee, in the future, that when we get the facility, which we'll have for sure — I mean, ultimately, you can get a test that could do this reasonably easy — and do the kind of what we call SIRO surveillance study; this is very analogous — Dr. Birx and I were talking about that a lot. And that is: Back in the day, when she and I were both doing the HIV/AIDS issues back when we first discovered the virus in '83 and we had an antibody test in 1985, we found out by SIRO surveillance representative in different populations that we were dealing with the tip of the iceberg when we saw individuals who were the ones who actually got infected. It gave us a really good feel for how many people are infected, how many are doing well, and how many are getting ill.

I foresee that we'll have that same sort of information, which will be important information. But right now, that's not our immediate problem.

Q I know it's not your priority but can you give a sense of whether it will happen this year —

THE PRESIDENT: Deborah — yes — yes, go ahead.

DR. BIRX: Let me just follow up with that because I think, as I discussed before, we had great — I just want to thank all the epidemiologists and the scientists out there who worked with us over the last four weeks on models. They really — many came forward and really supported us.

Right now we're in talks with a whole series of universities. We have the most brilliant scientists in the world in our universities in state after state. Some of them public health universities, some of them basic science. All of them have received NIH grants for HIV or other development of assays in the past.

I've talked to a lot of them over the last few days to really ask them to develop these simple ELISA tests that could be used rapidly in their healthcare centers. Because immediately, with a — it's easy to do; we've all developed ELISAs — so in a day or two after development, they could screen their entire hospital. I think that would be very reassuring to the healthcare workers who have been on the front line. We worry about them every day.

And so I really called on every university in every state to develop ELISAs. You can buy the antigens and the controls online and really work to test entire healthcare communities in your states and support them that way.

At the same time, we worked on, in Sub-Saharan Africa, what we call dried blood spots. So we're looking at: Could you use that in a community while we work on the point-of-care test, where you just dot blood onto this paper and then that can go into the lab and be analyzed. That would allow us to look in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities immediately.

And then, finally, we've reached out to the developers of the rapid test — the ones who developed it for malaria, the ones that developed them for HIV; it's exactly the same concept and process — to ask them to rapidly develop these tests because I think we owe it to the frontline healthcare providers not only to provide them RNA tests, but many of them have been on the front line now for four weeks; may have become exposed. We now know there's asymptomatic.

And I think really being able to tell them — the peace of mind that would come from knowing you already were infected, you have antibody, you're safe from reinfection, 99.9 percent of the time. And so this, I think, would be very reassuring to our frontline healthcare workers. And our universities can do that by Friday.

So I'm putting that challenge out to them, to really work on that and do that. That's what we did in the early days. We had ELISAs up and running within days of having the antigen. And so this is what's really possible. So we're not waiting. We're asking for help now.

Q So, potentially, this could happen soon, even within this month, if people take up that challenge?

DR. BIRX: It could happen soon, within this month, if the universities help us. Absolutely.

Q Dr. Birx —

Q Mr. President, on Florida —

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah, please.

Q Governor DeSantis says that he spoke with you before issuing his stay-at-home order.

THE PRESIDENT: He did. He spoke to me this morning.

Q He has some loopholes in that for —

THE PRESIDENT: That, I don't know. He spoke to me this morning.

Q — for religious events, for example.

THE PRESIDENT: He knows what to do. Very good judgment.

Q Large religious groups can meet together. That doesn't really —

THE PRESIDENT: Who can — who can?

Q Religious groups. Like churches can meet.

THE PRESIDENT: I didn't speak to him about it, but he did speak to me this morning. We talked about it. Please.

Q But your model has full mitigation, sir. Does that go against your model? Because that's not full mitigation.

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know. I'd have to look at what he did.

Q Back to the healthcare workers on the frontlines, following up with Dr. Birx, as well. Hazard pay: You have said you have wanted that for the healthcare workers on the frontlines. I know Secretary Mnuchin has mentioned something about that, possibly in the fourth level of the stimulus package.

THE PRESIDENT: I like it. I like it.

Q But can you make it happen now? Do we have to wait for a fourth stimulus?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think it's something we're discussing in terms of bonus or bonus pay. It doesn't have to be called "hazard pay." It can be called —

Q Could it happen now?

THE PRESIDENT: Hey, look, I watch those people go into hospitals that — I know; I talked about one of them, right? But I watched them walk into those hospitals, and they walk in — men, women, young, middle aged, not so many older ones. And I watch — I watched them. They're almost like — and I think I can take the word "almost" out. They're like warriors. They're going in.

People are cheering. Where there's a building across the street, the people are screaming, they're clapping, they're — they're like heroes.

Q There's murals going up. The Empire State Building lit up at the top.

THE PRESIDENT: No, no, I will tell you, I think it's incredible.

Q What can you tell them?

THE PRESIDENT: They're like — they're like warriors. They're like soldiers. And we're going to — we're going to be doing something for them. So whether it's bonus — because, you know, we're hopefully going to be over this relatively quickly. It's going to be vicious for a period of time, but hopefully we're going to be over this.

Q And soon?

THE PRESIDENT: You have a lot of questions today. Look at you. Do you know this young lady behind you?

Q I've never met her before in my life, sir. (Laughter.)

Q We're practicing social distancing.

THE PRESIDENT: That's good. That's a good idea.

Q It makes our marriage strong.

THE PRESIDENT: That's good for a marriage. Right.

Q There are a lot of people who are worried about getting sick, and do they end up in a hospital. People who are uninsured, and will they be crushed by medical bills. You were considering, last month — it was last month already, in March — reopening the Healthcare.gov exchanges. There has been a determination not to do that. Could you tell us what the rationale was behind that decision —

THE PRESIDENT: I'll tell you. Mike?

Q — and what — what do you have as an alternative?

THE PRESIDENT: Okay. They took that up under the task force, and maybe, Mike, you want to say a few word about this — words about that?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, thank you, Mr. President. And what I can tell you is that the President has made a priority, from the outset of our task force work, to make sure every American knows that they can have a coronavirus and they don't have to worry about the cost.

We were very inspired as well, because of the President's engagement with the leading health insurance companies in the country that now — so far, two of the top health insurance companies in America have announced that they're not only willing to waive co-pays on testing, and now testing is fully covered because of the bill the President signed for every American.

Q But about people who don't have insurance?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: But also, that these two insurance companies have waived co-pays on all coronavirus treatment. And I can assure you that as Congress and the President and the

administration begin to discuss the next piece of legislation, we're going to make sure that Americans have those costs compensated and covered.

Our priority right now is ensuring that every American takes the "30 Days to Slow the Spread" to heart. The best thing we can do for one another, for our family's health, for the most vulnerable among us, is practice those mitigation strategies that the President outlined yesterday for the next 30 days.

We're dealing with testing to make sure that every American can have a test that needs one.

We're dealing — we're dealing with supplies, and we're making great progress in building personal protective equipment and ensuring that ventilators are available, particularly for the communities most impacted.

But the American people can be confident that as we move into this, we're going to make sure that our healthcare workers are properly compensated for their extraordinary and courageous work. And we'll make sure that the financial burden on those who end up contracting the coronavirus and dealing with its most serious symptoms also can deal with those issues and deal with those costs.

Q Understood, Mr. Vice President. But there will be people who don't have insurance who get sick before any of these mitigation efforts are put into place. And without opening the healthcare exchanges, where can they find insurance? The people who aren't insured by these companies that are covering the cost of the co-pay, where can people go now to get health insurance if they get sick — before they sick?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, all across America, we have Medicaid for underprivileged Americans. And at the President's direction, the Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services has given unprecedented waivers for states to expand coverage for coronavirus testing and treatment. We've also extended waivers for Medicare administration to make sure that people have access to that coverage.

But we're going to continue to bring opportunities to the President. The traditional systems of Medicaid, in particular, for the uninsured in America —

Q Could you expand that to cover middle-class people?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, the — I think what we're seeing health insurance companies do today, John, is really inspiring. I mean, one of the things —

Q But, again, Mr. Vice President —

THE VICE PRESIDENT: One of the things that's characterized —

Q I'm sorry to belabor a point, but that's for people who —

THE VICE PRESIDENT: — the President's approach here —

Q That's for people who already have insurance.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, one of the things that has animated and characterized the President's approach is the way he's engaged American businesses to step up and do their part.

And as the President said many times, we're — we're inspired by the spirit of American businesses. I was at distribution center for Walmart today in Southern Virginia, and I saw the way this company that, literally, has already hired thousands of people — these workers are coming to work, the truck drivers are coming to work, farmers are working in the field. Grocery stores made a commitment to the President, a month ago, that no grocery store in America would close down. The food supply is strong. We're getting food on the table of every American.

But it's because the President went to these leaders and said, "We need you to step up and do your part." We engaged health insurance executives early on in this process to waive — to waive co-pays on coronavirus testing.

And because of the engagement — and, frankly, because of that, that patriotic and compassionate spirit that's being reflected — we've already seen two of the largest insurance companies in the country announce that they're going to be providing full coverage, free of charge, for coronavirus treatment.

I fully expect, I think as the President does too, that we'll see more of that for people that have insurance. And we'll continue to provide flexibility for Medicaid, for people that don't have insurance. And we'll make sure that Medicare has the flexibility to meet this moment for seniors —

when we remember that seniors with underlying health conditions are the most vulnerable to serious outcomes from the coronavirus.

But we'll get through this using the full weight of the federal government and the full strength of the American economy.

THE PRESIDENT: John, I think this: I think it's a very fair question though, and it's something we're really going to look at because it doesn't seem fair. If you have it, you have a big advantage. And at certain income level you do.

I think it's one of the greatest answers I've ever heard, because Mike was able to speak for five minutes and not even touch your question.

Q No.

THE PRESIDENT: So, I said — I said, that's what you call a great professional.

But let me just tell you, you really are — it's really a fair question and it's something we're looking at.

Q Well, I think — I mean, just in terms of a fair question or not, I always endeavor to ask fair questions — but this is a huge worry —

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah, I know.

Q — for people in this country who are in that donut hole —

THE PRESIDENT: We'll look.

Q — where they don't have — they don't have commercial insurance, they don't qualify for Medicaid.

THE PRESIDENT: Right.

Q What do they do?

THE PRESIDENT: They're a certain group. And it's a pretty big group. We're looking at it.

Q I mean, we spent the entire 2000 election talking about the donut hole, and it's still there.

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah. We are — I haven't been up there yet though, you know. The other people have been talking about it.

Q No, I mean, this was 2000.

THE PRESIDENT: And they haven't spoken —

Q This was 20 years ago, we were talking about it.

THE PRESIDENT: But they're thinking about it. They're talking about it.

Q Gore v. Bush — it was all about the donut hole.

THE PRESIDENT: I know, but they're talking about it in 2020 election, too. And nobody has gotten to it. Nobody has talked about at all.

Q Can you get to it, Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: I think we will, yeah. I think we're going to get to it. I think we're going to get to it. I don't think the other group will get to it. They haven't even spoken about it. And it's a big group of people.

Q So are you committing that there is something you're going do for —

THE PRESIDENT: No, I'm not committing. But it's something we're going to look at.

Q — for the uninsured, for —

THE PRESIDENT: I can't commit. I have to get approval from it. I have thing called "Congress." But it's something we're going to look at. And we have been looking at it.

Q But in the —

THE PRESIDENT: Go ahead.

Q You mentioned, in this next congressional bill, the next — the, sort of, phase four, you would like to see something put in there for the uninsured?

THE PRESIDENT: If there is a phase four, but we're certainly looking at certain things. We want to help restaurants, entertainment. And we want to help — because it's jobs. Not that restaurants — it's jobs; tremendous amounts of jobs. So we're looking at that. We're looking at infrastructure.

I mean, we — think of it: We will have spent \$8 trillion. And, you know, it's way back. We're way pulled back. But we will have spent \$8 trillion in the Middle East, and yet our roads are in bad shape; our bridges, our tunnels in bad shape.

And we're going to be the talk of the world again soon. But we want 2 trillion. We will have spent in the Middle East — and all we got out of it was death and cost. But all we got out of it was death. Millions of people. You have to look at the other side too. Millions and millions of people killed. Our great soldiers — thousands killed; so many wounded, hurt. And yet, when we want to go and fix a road someplace, we want to do what we want to do in our country — no, it's time that we spend money on our country. That's what we're going to do.

It's time that we start spending on our roads and our bridges and our schools, and all of the things that we're supposed to be spending on. And people are finally getting used to it. And you could look at all of what we've done in the Middle East, way back in so many different places — way back in other countries too, by the way.

And I've gone to other countries that are very rich. I said, "I'm sorry, you're going to have to reimburse us for our costs." They don't even want to — know what I'm talking about. It takes them 20 minutes to figure it out, because nobody has ever asked them to do that. And they're doing it. They're doing it. And they have no choice. They have to do it.

So, it's time that we start spending on the USA.

Okay, please.

Q Mr. President, this is a question for the Vice President. On March 9th, you said 1 million tests had been delivered and another 4 million would be delivered by the end of the week. That clearly did not happen. What happened with those projections? What went wrong?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I think the test kits were delivered, according to HHS. But the difference is between receiving a test and the ability to rapidly produce a result of that test. And frankly, because of the public-private partnership that the President initiated, now more than a month ago, with our massive commercial laboratories across the country, our team was reported today that we're now doing more than 100,000 tests a day. More than 1.2 million tests have been performed.

States have established drive-through sites all across the country. In fact, states have been so successful with the community-based and drive-through testing that we're working to transition over completely all of the federal work on drive-through testing and — and have the states completely manage that process. But —

Q But you're saying 4 million tests were delivered by the end of that week?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: HHS was very busy, from early in the year, delivering test kits around the country. But the difference was, as the President said many times, we had an antiquated system where a state laboratory or CDC only had the capacity to process 40 to 60 tests a day.

Now, with the commercial labs, literally, those labs are processing tens of thousands of tests every day. And so while we're continuing to distribute test kits around the country, now because of the partnership with — with companies like Roche and Quest and LabCorp, the American people are seeing the results of those tests more rapidly than at any point in the past. And we expect that will continue to expand.

But the exciting news this weekend about Abbott Laboratories having a 15-minute test to prove is going to put us in a position, we believe, down the road, to get to where Dr. Fauci and Dr. Birx want us to be for many of the states that don't yet have significant outbreak. There's some 19 states where we don't have significant outbreak, but we want to be doing the kind of surveillance testing in those states that will allow us, early on, to identify people with the coronavirus, do what the experts call contact tracing, and ensure that, in that state, we don't have — we don't have an outbreak of the coronavirus. So —

THE PRESIDENT: And many countries all over the world want to know whether or not they can use, especially, our new test that we — that was just developed by Abbott, which is almost instantaneous, which is going to be great.

And remember this: We inherited — the word is we inherited bad tests. We really inherited bad tests. These are horrible tests. And it was broken. It was all broken. And we fixed it. And we're doing millions of tests. Sometimes, we send out a test and it's not used. In many cases, it wasn't used. But we worked with the states and the testing has been pretty amazing, especially considering the fact that we inherited a very broken system.

Jeff?

Q Hi, Mr. President. Just to follow up on something you said before: Are you considering a temporary ban on all domestic flights?

THE PRESIDENT: I am looking at hotspots. I am looking where flights are going into hotspots. Some of those — some of those flights I didn't like from the beginning. But closing up every single flight on every single airline, that's a very — very, very rough decision, but we are thinking about hotspots, where you go from spot to spot, both hot. And we'll let you know fairly soon.

Q And what about rail travel?

THE PRESIDENT: A similar thing. We have trains going back and forth. And people don't think of trains, but we do a lot of transportation business. It's a very big decision to do that. And we're pretty late in the process from the standpoint that this is starting — you're going to start seeing — I think, over the next couple of weeks, you're going to start to see us hit a top and start coming down.

So we'll make those decisions. Those are very, very — those are very, very big decisions, from the standpoint of — of the future of our country, in a way — in the future of our country.

We have to get our country back, we have to start moving again, we have to start working again. Now, they're doing tests on airlines — very strong tests — for getting on, getting off. They're doing tests on trains — getting on, getting off. But when you start closing up entire transportation systems and then opening them up, that's a very tough thing to do.

Please, go ahead.

Q There continues to be a lot of public confusion about the use of masks. What is the way —

THE PRESIDENT: Re-use. I love the sterilization of the mask. So, Ohio company — you can sterilize a — the N95. You can — you can sterilize that mask for up to 20 times. Think of that: up to 20 times. We're throwing them out and they're very expensive masks. They're throwing them out.

And I kept saying — one of the first questions I asked to Dr. Fauci, I said, "Why aren't they sterilizing or cleaning the mask?" Because I didn't — you know, it wasn't my thing exactly when we first heard about this. Nobody else knew it either.

And now we have a company and, I guess, a number of companies — one in Ohio, a great one — that makes equipment where you can sterilize a mask up to 20 times, which is fantastic.

Okay?

Q But what about you or me? What — what about the public? Should we be wearing masks out? We've heard lots of different recommendations.

THE PRESIDENT: I — I don't believe — look, this is a big things. A lot of people don't like it. Some people don't like it because you're taking it away from the medical professional. Some people don't like it for other reasons. I don't see where it hurts. And it doesn't have to be a mask; it can be a scarf. A scarf is highly recommended by the professionals.

I don't see where it hurts. I think if — frankly, if people wanted to do it — we don't want to do anything that's going to take masks. You're talking about a tremendous amount of masks when you do that. We don't want to take them away from our medical professionals, but I certainly don't see it hurting.

But what I do see people doing now is using scarves. And I think, in a certain way, depending on the fabric — I think, in a certain way, a scarf is better. It's actually better.

Yeah, please. You didn't — you didn't get — go ahead.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. I wanted to ask you about social distancing and how it applies to religious organizations.

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah.

Q Some churches, as you know, have continued to hold services, even though you have advised people that they need to practice social distancing. There was a pastor of a mega church in Florida over the weekend who held services that were — that were attended by several hundred people.

So my question to you is: Should pastors be holding services in the middle of this pandemic? And, even if they do, should Americans be going to church?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, my biggest disappointment is that churches can't meet in a time of need. You know, this is really a great time for churches to be together, for people to get together on a Sunday or whenever — any day and meet. And yet, if you do that, if you do it close, you're really giving this invisible enemy a very big advantage.

So, it's — it's the biggest — I think the single biggest disappointment is you can't — one of the reasons I said, "Wouldn't it be great just to — to pick a date?" As you know, I called it "aspirational" — an aspirational date would be Easter. And I will tell you, it's a — it's very, very disappointing. But again, you get too close, and if somebody is sick, you're going to probably catch it. So you have to be very careful.

Q Should they cancel or —

Q So yeah, just real — real quickly. Joe Biden's campaign came out with a statement today —

THE PRESIDENT: Sleepy Joe.

Q — saying that Biden — Biden would be open —

THE PRESIDENT: Did he write the statement or did some PR person write it?

Q As far as I know, the campaign was wide awake, sir, and he — they sent out a statement —

THE PRESIDENT: Good. For a change.

Q — that Joe Biden would be open to having a phone call with you to talk about the coronavirus pandemic.

THE PRESIDENT: That's okay. Sure.

Q Would you take his call?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, absolutely. I'd like to —

Q You would talk to him about it?

THE PRESIDENT: I'd like to speak to him. Sure. I'd like to — I'd be — he should be able to —

Q How do you think you could work together?

THE PRESIDENT: I — I always found him to be a nice guy. I don't know him very well, frankly, but I think he's probably a nice guy. No, if he'd like to call, I'd absolutely take his call. Okay? You could tell him. All right?

Q But you have talked about the failings of the Obama administration and leaving you with empty shelves and no plans. They have said you got —

THE PRESIDENT: Well — and no ammunition. And maybe no ammunition.

Q They have said you got rid of the Pandemic Office in the National Security Council.

THE PRESIDENT: We didn't do that. That turned out to be a false story. Now you're starting to go —

Q No, no, no, no, no. I'm just —

THE PRESIDENT: What? Are you working for CNN?

Q I'm pointing out — I'm pointing out what they have said and what you have said. That's all.

THE PRESIDENT: I thought you were with Fox. Fox isn't so easy either, don't kid yourself.

Q Mr. President, I — this is not about — this is not about Fox or CNN.

THE PRESIDENT: Look, John, let me tell you something. You know that's a false story.

Q This is just about statements that —

THE PRESIDENT: What you just said is a false story.

Q I'm just saying that they have —

THE PRESIDENT: This doctor knows it better than anybody.

Q I'm just saying they have accused you of that.

THE PRESIDENT: No, but you shouldn't be repeating a story that you know is false.

All right, who — who's next? Please go ahead, in the back. You didn't get any.

Q You talked about Iran and Iran is struggling with the virus —

THE PRESIDENT: It's very sad what's happening in Iran.

Q — and a broken economy. Under which conditions would you consider suspending U.S. sanctions?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, look, we have to talk to them. I think we could work out a deal with Iran very quickly. All they have to do is call. I just think that, you know, they're proud people, and the leadership is proud. They're proud like all of us. We're proud. You people are proud. They're having a hard time picking up the phone, or they're having a hard time setting up the meeting, but they could fix their country pretty easily.

And we don't want hostility, but if they are hostile to us, they're going to regret it like they've never regretted anything before, as per today's statement. But all they have to do is call or have

somebody call. You know, there are channels where we can deal very easily.

Again, I think that John Kerry did a tremendous disservice. I think he violated the Logan Act, 100 percent. That's what I think. And I think it made it tough for them, because they were dealing with them for years. It was a terrible deal. All of that money — \$150 billion, plus cash. Plus cash? Planeloads of cash for a deal that was no good. And it was short-term. Essentially, it was a short-term deal. Who makes a deal for that kind of money?

And \$1.8 billion in cash. I don't even know what that would look like. That would be — this room would have to be filled up five times with hundred-dollar bills, okay? Who — who makes a deal like this? And then, on top of it, the deal is no good.

All right, how about one or two more?

Q Mr. President, Seattle police have reported a surge in calls about domestic violence. A number of groups have raised concerns —

THE PRESIDENT: About Mexican violence?

Q Domestic violence.

THE PRESIDENT: Oh.

Q A number of groups have raised concerns that the longer people are stuck at home, the more domestic violence cases there are going to be. Do you share those concerns? And what is being done to (inaudible)?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, it could be. It's another cost of — of not getting our country working. I mean, people are — now some people are getting along great. I've also had the oppo- — the exact opposite question. People — families are coming together. They're actually coming together. They haven't talked for a long time and, now, all of a sudden, they're talking again; they're loving each other.

So I've heard that too, but I've also have heard domestic violence much — you know, at a higher level. And drug use, because of — in this case, they lose their jobs. They had a great job, they had a

great life, they have a great family. All of a sudden, a husband is told that he doesn't have a job anymore and he's got no money. And that brings drugs into it, that brings suicide into it. It's a terrible thing. We have to get our country going again. We did the right thing.

Q But on domestic violence —

THE PRESIDENT: We had no choice. We did the right thing. Other countries tried to use the herd — or the herd mentality. It's just, you know, something that doesn't work. If you look at — I mean, just to say, I heard Sweden gave it a shot, and they went — they saw things that were really frightening and they went immediately to shutting down the country. We did the right thing and we did it early. We did it early. And we stopped other people from coming into our country early.

But — but, no, that's a cost. That's a — I've been talking about that. People will say, "What are you talking about?" But you will have — you'll have that, you'll have domestic violence, you have violence, you'll have suicide, you'll have drug addiction. A lot of people are going to be lost.

We want to get this open as soon as we can. I mean, I'll be the happiest person — so will you, everyone in this room — happy when we get the word that this is the time. And we have our common sense, and they'll give me a decision or they'll be making certain statements and I'll — I think I'll know how to interpret those statements very well. I'll be with Mike. I'll be with the task force. I'll be with a lot of very talented people, including the two people onstage with us.

But, I look forward — that'll be a great day. That'll be a great day.

All right. How about one more, please?

Q Mr. President, can I ask a question of Mr. Wolf? Can I ask a question for —

THE PRESIDENT: Sure.

Q — Secretary Wolf?

THE PRESIDENT: Chad, please.

Q What is the current contingency plan in ICE detention centers where cases of COVID-19 are already popping up? Some people have been released. Is there a contingency plan? And would you release most vulnerable people like children and the elder?

ACTING SECRETARY WOLF: Well, ICE looks at — on a case-by-case basis, even well before COVID — on looking at certain detention facilities and determining on a case-by-case basis if they need — do need to release individuals. And when we do that, we obviously put them on alternatives to detention as well.

In the case of COVID, we're looking at vulnerable populations. And again, ICE is doing that in conjunction with CDC and other medical professionals. You know, in some cases, we do need to do that for the health and safety and the wellbeing of those detainees. But again, that's a case-by-case basis. We're not going to make any blanket statement that we're going to release individuals of whole groups at a time.

So it's really important, and I've said it twice now. It's really a case-by-case basis, determining the health of that particular population or detainee, the facility they're in. Different facilities have different capabilities, whether it's an ICE-owned facility, or it's a contractor-owned facility. And so we're certainly doing that. We're doing that today. We've done — been doing that for the past several weeks.

Q Can you say how many have been released?

THE PRESIDENT: While you're up, could you talk about how tight that southern border is right now?

ACTING SECRETARY WOLF: Absolutely. We have — we continue to build miles of the wall every day. We're up to over 150, I believe. We're continuing to build new — new miles of wall. And a lot of folks ask about a replacement wall or new miles. And it's a new capability on our southwest border that we haven't had before.

And so whether you talk to the agents — the Border Patrol agents — they like that capability. They like that impedance and denial that it provides them. And it provides the ability for those agents to focus elsewhere on parts of the border that are very difficult to patrol so we can use our resources in a different way.

And so we see a lot of benefits from the border wall system. And again that includes not only the physical infrastructure, but the cameras, the roads, the lighting, the fiber-optic cables.

And we're looking forward and we're still well on our track — well on our mark to meet 400 — 450 miles by the end of the calendar year.

Q Mr. Wolf, can I get one more question from you while you're here? There's been concern among farmers about being able to get enough migrant labor to keep the food supply moving as we go into the harvest season. What are you doing to address that?

ACTING SECRETARY WOLF: Well, at the direction of the Vice President and the task force, we are looking at a number of different options with the H-2A workers that you mentioned, on how do we either extend the validity of their visa or looking at a couple of different options. Nothing to announce here today.

But again, at the direction of the President and the Vice President, we're looking at a very — a variety of different options that I think we will have soon and it will be very beneficial.

Q What about waiving visa restrictions for —

THE PRESIDENT: But I am glad you asked that question because we want the farmers — they've had this for years. We want the farmers to be able to get the people that have been working those farms for years or we're not going to have farms. So they're going to come in and they're going to be given a certain pass. And we're going to check them very, very closely, especially over the next month.

Because remember, after a month or so — I think once this passes, we're not going to have to be, hopefully, worried too much about the virus.

But we want them to come in. We're not closing the border so that we can't get any of those people to come in. They've been there for years and years, and I've given the commitment to the farmers: They're going to continue to come. Or we're not going to have any farmers. Okay?

Yeah. One more question.

Q What about waiving visa restrictions for immigrant doctors?

THE PRESIDENT: Who are you with, by the way?

Q I am with Voice of America.

THE PRESIDENT: Boy. Amazing.

Q So what about waiving these restrictions on immigrant doctors?

THE PRESIDENT: Okay. Who else, please?

Q In less than 24 hours, sir, two ships will arrive at Port Everglades with people who are infected with corona- —

THE PRESIDENT: We're looking at the two ships. Yeah, we have —

Q Should they be let in?

THE PRESIDENT: We have Canada notified. A lot of Canadians, a lot of British on the ship. And they're coming to take the people that are on the ship back to their homeland. Canada is coming. The UK is coming. And we have a lot of — and we have Americans. We have some people that are quite sick and we're taking care of — that I'm speaking with the governor about that a lot.

And it's a tough situation. It's a tough situation. You know, I — you can understand. You have people that are sick on those ships, and states don't want to take. They have enough problems right now. They don't want to take them, but we have to, from a humane standpoint. We don't have a choice. It's like, I don't want to do that, but we have to. People are dying.

Q So they will be let into the country?

THE PRESIDENT: We're going to do something. We're going to do something. At a minimum, we're sending medical teams onboard the ships. We're taking the Canadians off and giving them to Canadian authorities. They're going to bring them back home. The same thing with the UK.

But we have to help the people. They're — they're in big trouble no matter where — no matter where they're from. Happen to be Americans — largely Americans. But whether they were or not — I mean, they're dying. So we have to do something.

Q So they'll be treated here —

THE PRESIDENT: And — and the governor knows that too.

Q — before being sent on?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we're sending a lot of them home. Yeah, we're sending a lot of them home to their countries, but we'll be doing something and we'll be announcing it. You'll see what we're doing.

But we're also putting medical staff onto the ships so that we can — we have to take care of the people.

Q At the risk of getting chewed out again —

THE PRESIDENT: No, you won't get chewed out. You know that.

Q Mr. President, there is a — the IRS is requiring people who don't normally file income tax to file a simple income tax return in order to get their \$1,200 check. Is that the way it's going to be or is there something you can do to (inaudible)?

THE PRESIDENT: I had heard that. Now, I don't know. Do you know that answer, Mike?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: We're looking into it, Mr. President.

Q The IRS issued some guidance.

THE PRESIDENT: It sounds like it. Yeah, I mean, we'll get —

Q It's not in the bill, but it's —

THE PRESIDENT: We can get back — yeah, it's being — it's a process that they're working on. We'll get back to you as soon as we find out.

All right, one more, please.

Q Mr. President, you spoke with President Bolsonaro of Brazil today —

THE PRESIDENT: I did. I spoke to him. Of course.

Q — at least according to his Twitter.

THE PRESIDENT: He's great. He's a great guy and he's doing a wonderful job.

Q But he's still meeting with his supporters.

THE PRESIDENT: From Brazil. Spoke to him this morning.

Q He's hugging them. So what is your assessment —

THE PRESIDENT: And just a very complimentary call. He's working very hard. He's got a problem with a virus — got a big problem. And he's — we talked about it today at length. We had a call this morning. And Brazil is shut down, as you know. They weren't going to shut it down, but they had to. So Brazil is shut down.

The world is shut down. Nobody has ever seen anything like this. The entire world is shut down.

You go from having the most powerful economy in the world, and from other countries that are doing well, to being everything is shut down. It's very sad, but we're going to get it going. And we're going to be stronger than ever. I really believe that. We're going to be stronger. We're going to have a big bounce — a very big bounce when this has gone.

And I just want to thank the American people. I want to thank these great professionals. And I want to thank the media, because really, for the most part, that media has been very fair.

Thank you very much, everybody.

Q Thank you, Mr. President.

END

7:18 P.M. EDT