

Joe Biden: CNN Presidential Town Hall

07/21/21

8:01:09 p.m.

26 seconds

DON LEMON: We're going to get to the audience questions in just a moment, but I have a couple of questions I want to ask you because —

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: Sure.

LEMON: — you know the pandemic is a big concern for everyone —

BIDEN: Sure is.

LEMON: — really around the world, but especially around America. New cases are up three — you know, three times since last month, right? The pandemic is a big concern. Hospitalizations, death rising. So, you said last month that this — that the virus is in retreat. Do you still feel that way? Is that still the case?

(....)

8:02:35 p.m.

7 seconds

LEMON: But what do you — what do you say to people who are worried about a new round of restrictions and mask mandates and so forth?

(....)

8:03:50 p.m.

32 seconds

ANDREA GRANIERI [Democrat running for school board]: So, here in Hamilton County, the vaccination rate remains at about 50 percent and you talked about the virus that's spreading. Masks are seen less and less and, as you know, children under age 12 still are not eligible to be vaccinated. Schools are working with all of this information as they think about reopening next month. As a school employee and as a parent to children under age 12, what I — I am really concerned. What is your message to those parents, educators and school districts?

(....)

8:03:34 p.m.

LEMON: Well, let me ask you — let me follow up to that question and ask you when will children under 12 be able to get vaccinated?

BIDEN: Soon, I believe. Now, look. One of the things I committed to do when I got elected, I said —

LEMON: How soon is soon, Mr. President? Not to cut in.

BIDEN: Let me finish the question — the answer: soon in the sense that I do not tell any scientist what they should do.

(...)

8:07:06 p.m.
15 seconds

LEMON: Well, that means — you mean for the FDA?

BIDEN: For the FDA?

LEMON: Yeah.

BIDEN: The Federal Drug Administration.

LEMON: You — you said that you're talking to scientists. But what are they telling you, Mr. President?

BIDEN: What they're telling me is let us decide based on scientific data and how we proceed. Do it the way we would ordinarily do it.

(...)

8:09:10 p.m.
30 seconds

NICOLE BALDWIN [Republican]: I am a pediatrician who utilizes social media to educate about health and I am very concerned about the rise in misinformation from the anti-vaccine community that is eroding trust in lifesaving vaccines. Spread of this misinformation and declining vaccination rates could leave Americans vulnerable to vaccine preventable diseases in the future. So what I want to know is what is the White House doing to combat medical misinformation and to restore America's faith in science?

(...)

8:11:40 p.m.
25 seconds

BIDEN: If you notice, there's about, what, four or five states that have close to 45 percent or

whatever. Don't hold me to exact numbers.

LEMON: Lower than that even and my home state of Louisiana is 36 percent and I think there are other southern states.

BIDEN: No, but I mean of all the cases —

LEMON: Yeah, yeah.

BIDEN: — all the cases, a very overwhelming majority of those cases are in four or five states.

LEMON: Yeah.

BIDEN: And it's just not — there's nothing political about this. There's no blue or red.

(...)

8:12:30 p.m.

21 seconds

CHRISTIAN OLIVER [Democrat]: We required all of our guests and vendors to be vaccinated to ensure safety. We are African-American and in many of our communities, people are against the vaccine. A reason that stood out the most in regards to our guests is they don't see the vaccine being as safe as the CDC put — puts it out to be. How are you working towards convincing those in these communities that the vaccine is safe?

(...)

8:15:02 p.m.

33 seconds

LEMON: Can I ask you something, Mr. President? Because, you know — by the way, you got — I don't know if you heard that, you got applause when you corrected the I for the we. And we're talking about we. And I think that's —

BIDEN: It is we.

LEMON: — a commendable attribute to — to have. But even with my own family, just about to get with them — I haven't seen my mom in a year and a half except for two weeks ago. I haven't seen my family since the last time they visited me two summers ago. But even within my own family, here I am, on television, every night, there is ambivalence, there's misinformation, and there's also mistrust in the system. How do you fix that?

(...)

8:17:54 p.m.
28 seconds

LEMON: Part of it is — don't you think that part of it is that young people, especially those 30 — maybe 30, 40 and under, they feel like they're invincible. They haven't faced mortality.

BIDEN: Isn't it amazing we're saying 40 is younger.

LEMON: But —

BIDEN: It's hard to say, isn't it?

LEMON: — it is, but for them, you know, at first, the vacc — at first, the virus wasn't affecting them as much.

BIDEN: Yes.

LEMON: And so, they may feel that they're invincible and now that this delta variant is affecting them, maybe they'll have a come to Jesus of some sort. I —

(.....)

8:20:09 p.m.
22 seconds

DANIELLE LIPPI [Republican]: So my question is the economy is picking up significantly as it reopens from the pandemic. Are you concerned about the higher inflation prices, especially as we see gasoline, automotive, and food prices increase rapidly? What is your administration doing to help prevent the economy from overheating such as the poor and middle class are not hurt by the higher prices of goods in the long run?

(....)

8:22:43 p.m.
10 seconds

LEMON: So, you seem pretty confident that — that inflation is temporary, but if — if pumping all of this money into the economy, couldn't that add to —

BIDEN: No. Look, here's the deal.

(....)

8:24:12 p.m.
50 seconds

BIDEN: And by the way, I want to say, I'm in this territory. You know, there's — Portman is a good man. Portman is a congressman from this area. I talked to him before — and I really mean it. He's a decent, honorable man. He and I are working on trying to get this infrastructure bill.

LEMON: But you're — you're talking about Senator Rob Portman of Ohio. Can I —

BIDEN: Yeah, I'm sorry. I thought that I knew that. No, I apologize

LEMON: — no, but since you — you mentioned that infrastructure — the Biden infrastructure deal failed, the procedural vote today, right?

BIDEN: But no. But —

LEMON: In the Senate today.

BIDEN: Yeah, it did, but that's irrelevant.

LEMON: Go on. Okay. In the Senate, negotiators said that they need more time.

BIDEN: Yeah.

BIDEN: Okay. So then — but — they expect to vote again on Monday. But how much time do you think they need to get this done?

(...)

8:35:34 p.m.
3 seconds

LEMON: You think it's going to move forward in the Senate on Monday?

(...)

8:25:59 p.m.
3 seconds

LEMON: We're going to talk about that bridge in just a moment. We have —

(...)

8:27:04 p.m.
28 seconds

CINDY PEEBLE [Democrat]: I am dismayed at how often Democratic plans for stabilizing the economy or shoring up new strains of the virus are held hostage by the utopian need to gain

bipartisan support. It appears at every turn the Democratic plan is weakened and still secures zero Republican votes. Sometimes the opposition is just wrong and working to get them to agree with you is fruitless. Why is the strategy to abandon the need for bipartisanship not the right answer?

(...)

8:29:13 p.m.

22 seconds

LEMON: Well, let's talk a little bit more about bipartisanship. You know the Republicans removed all their picks today for the January 6th committee — the select committee. Nancy Pelosi rejected two of them. The first thing I want to ask you is what's your reaction to that? But number two, if Republicans and Democrats can't come together — right — to investigate the biggest attack on our Capitol in 200 years, what makes you think they can come together on anything?

(...)

8:30:15 p.m.

10 seconds

LEMON: But what you can do — what they can do is try to change the narrative and say, well, why wasn't Nancy Pelosi prepared? Why weren't the Democrats prepared for that to happen?

(...)

8:38:09 p.m.

6 minutes and 25 seconds

JOHN LANNI [Republican]: We employ hundreds of hard-working team members throughout the state of Ohio and throughout the country. And we're looking to hire more every day as we try to restart our restaurant business. The entire industry, amongst other industries, continue to struggle to find employees. How do you and the Biden administration plan to incentivize those who haven't returned to work yet? Hiring is our top priority right now.

BIDEN: Well, two things, one, if you notice, we kept you open. We spent billions of dollars to make sure restaurants could stay open and — and a lot of people who now work as waiters and waitresses decided that they don't want to do that anymore because there's other opportunities at higher wages because there's a lot of openings now in jobs and people are beginning to move. Beginning to move. There's some evidence that maintaining the ability to continue to not have your — have to pay your rent so you don't get thrown out and being able to provide for unemployment insurance has kept people from going back to work. There's no — not much distinction between not going back to work in a restaurant and not going back to work at a factory. So people are looking to change opportunities, change what they're doing. My — my deceased wife's father-in-law was a restaurateur up in Syracuse, New York. By the way, he tried

to convince — he had a restaurant that was in a town called Auburn, about 20,000 people. It was a flagship 24-hour a day restaurant that — and he offered it to me which I would have been making five times what I would in law school to try to keep me in Syracuse. But I spent too many times at home — in his home, hearing a phone call, “the cook didn't come in? He's in a fight with his wife? What? What's going on?” So —

LEMON: Exactly.

BIDEN: — I would — God love you, doing what you do. But all kidding aside, I think it really is a matter of people deciding now that they have opportunities to do other things and there's a shortage of employees, people looking to make more money and to bargain. And so, I think your business and the tourist business is really going to be in a bind for a little while and one of the things — we're ending all of those things keeping people from going back to work, et cetera. It'll be interesting to see what happens, but my gut tells me, my gut tells me that part of it relates to, you know, you can make a good salary as a waiter or waitress. One of my sister-in-laws — ah — five sisters makes a very good salary. She works in Atlantic City, that's where she's — she's from, but there's a lot of people who are looking to change their — their occupation, I think. But I could be wrong.

LEMON: Let me ask you because John is looking to hire people. He's got 39 restaurants across the country.

BIDEN: Yes.

LEMON: Is there anything you can do to help him out? I mean, he's — he's got to get people in.

BIDEN: John, first of all, the thing we did to help John and the Johns out is provide billions of dollars to make sure they could stay open, number one. So you all contributed to making sure John could stay in business. [APPLAUSE] And we should. We should have done that, as we did for other industries. But secondly, John, my guess is that people being \$7, \$8 an hour plus tips, that's — I think, John, you're going to be finding 15 bucks an hour or more now. And — but you may pay that already. You may pay that already.

LEMON: Well, let me — let me ask you because everywhere I go, there isn't pretty much a shop in my town, a restaurant or whatever where there isn't a for hire sign. We — we're trying to check into the hotel. They couldn't get the rooms cleaned fast enough because they can't find staff. You mentioned something. You said we're going to end the things that may be keeping people back. Are — you think that's the unemployment benefits expanded? =

BIDEN: Well, well, that was already [INAUDIBLE]. I don't think it did much. It's argued that because the extended unemployment benefits kept people — they'd rather stay home and not work then go to work.

LEMON: You don't think it did that?

BIDEN: I — I see no evidence it had any serious evidence on it. But you can argue it. Let's assume it did. It's coming to an end. So, it's not like we're in a situation where if — if — if that was it and it ends, then we're going to see — John's going to have no problem, but what I think has happened, folks, is, look, if you make less than 15 — I'm not saying, John, your folks made less than \$15 — that means the tips are good, people make a lot more than what — what the minimum wage — what the wage is being paid, put tips on top. But, folks, look, here's the deal. Think about it. You know, if you have — for example, I want to be able to — one of my programs is make sure that we have four more years of school that's free, two years for three-year-olds and four-year-olds because it's demonstrated that increases significantly success and community college. Well, those folks are not likely to want to go and be waiters. Nothing wrong with being a waiter or waitress. My family's been engaged in that business. Lastly, if you make less than 15 bucks an hour working 40 hours a week, you're living below the poverty level. You're living below the poverty level.

LEMON: Well, I want to continue on and talk about — this has to do with infrastructure because you got applause when you mentioned the bridge earlier and Todd —

BIDEN: Your congressman wants that bridge too.

LEMON: — Todd Michael is here. He's a union electrician and a Democrat. He has a question about something a lot of people in Cincinnati are concerned about. Todd, take it away.

TODD MICHAEL [Democrat]: As Mr. Lemon said, you have already touched on the subject of my question. The two most recent Presidents — past Presidents have both campaigned using this region's Interstate 75 bridge, the Brent Spence Bridge that crosses the Ohio River as backdrops with a promise of an infrastructure bill that would help with a replacement. President Biden, is it possible to bring Congress together to build a bridge that does not just benefit this region but the entire I-75 corridor from Michigan to Florida?

(...)

8:46:44 p.m.
31 seconds

CORY MARCUM [Democrat?]: So my question is last week regarding the GOP's efforts to restrict voting rights, you said those efforts were, “the most dangerous threat to voting in the integrity of free and fair elections in our history.” While you have condemned these attacks, you and congressional members of your party have done little to actually stop these assaults. If these efforts are really the most dangerous in our history, isn't it logical to get rid of the filibuster so we can protect our democracy and secure the right to vote?

(...)

8:49:08 p.m.
48 seconds

LEMON: But let me — let me talk to you about that because —

BIDEN: Let me finish my answer because I'd tell you what I would do, I would go back to that where you have to maintain the floor. You have to stand there and talk and hold the floor. You can't just say it now.

LEMON: — I understand that. But what difference does that make if you hold the floor for a day or a year, what difference does it make? Here's the thing for me. You talked about people and this is important for people who look like me. [APPLAUSE] My grandmother would sit around when I was a kid, 5th grade, had a 5th grade education. I learned that she couldn't read when I was doing my homework. She would tell me stories about people asking her to count the number of jelly beans in the jar.

BIDEN: Yeah.

LEMON: — or the soap in — so why is protecting the filibuster, is that more important than protecting voting rights, especially for people who fought and died for that?

(...)

8:51:06 p.m.
18 seconds

LEMON: But isn't that the only way you're going to get it done right now?

BIDEN: No, I don't believe that. I think we can get that done.

LEMON: If you — if you — you agree with the former President, he has called — as you called him, your old boss, that it is a relic of Jim Crow.

BIDEN: It is.

LEMON: If it's a relic of Jim Crow, it's been used to fight against civil rights legislation historically. Why protect it?

(...)

8:52:53 p.m.
25 seconds

ANDREA SOLIS CANTOS [Democrat]: So gun violence has been on the rise across the country and as a recent student and young professional living in Over-the-Rhine, I've seen this first-hand. Gun violence has taken the lives of so many young students and young people. I'm tired and I want to see change that's going to make our cities like Cincinnati safer, so how will you address gun violence from a federal point of view to actually bring about change and make our local

cities safer?

(...)

9:00:26 p.m.

10 seconds

LEMON: You said we need more police — right — Your words. So then how do you respond to Republicans who try to paint you and your party as anti-police?

(...)

9:01:08 p.m.

3 seconds

LEMON: What about defunding the police, though? Because there's — there's defunding the police.

(.....)

9:02:43 p.m.

53 seconds

LEMON: You said it's tough right now. You said police are up against — well, they're up against the narrative that, you know, the country is anti-police, Democrats are anti-police, Joe Biden is anti-police. And then you have —

BIDEN: They aren't saying Joe Biden is anti-police. Cops are not saying that about Joe Biden. They know me, period.

LEMON: Go on.

BIDEN: They're not saying it. Republicans are saying it on the far — I'm not going to — anyway.

LEMON: No, I want you to talk about this because it's an important narrative.

BIDEN: No, look —

LEMON: There's no more important issue, I think, right now than safety. You can — you can rebuild a home. You can, you know, get a lot of things back, but, Mr. President, you cannot get back a life. And if —

BIDEN: That's exactly right.

LEMON: — and if police aren't doing their jobs, that increases —

BIDEN: No, if police aren't doing their job they should be held accountable, they should be fired if they're not doing their jobs. They should — I — I make no excuses for that.

(...)

9:05:12 p.m.
31 seconds

LYNN MILLER [Democrat]: Mr. President, the opioid crisis continues and in this part of the country it remains a huge problem. While the overprescription of opiates is part of that problem, the drugs available in the black market are a growing issue as many of these contain fentanyl. That took the life of our son. How can your administration combat the issue of illegal opiates, many of which our young people buy online? Someone should bear responsibility for delivering death through the mail.

(...)

9:07:12 p.m.
33 seconds

LEMON: Mr. President, I believe there's no better way to speak about this —

BIDEN: I'm sorry —

LEMON: — than from experience. I don't think there's probably a family in this room who hasn't been affected by addiction. You've been very open about your son Hunter's problem with addiction. This is personal for you. Listen, I've dealt with it in my own family. Every family deals with it, but this is personal for you.

BIDEN: Yes. And I'm so damn proud of my son. My son just wrote a book about how he overcame being addicted, and he did it, and he's doing it and he is in good shape, thank God.

(...)

9:09:31 p.m.
9 seconds

LEMON: I think it's — I think addiction and mental health issues have to be dealt with just as you break your arm and go to the doctor. We should be able to talk to —

BIDEN: I agree.

LEMON: — there should be — there shouldn't be a stigma about it.

(...)

9:09:48 p.m.
16 seconds

MADEENA NOLAN [Democrat]: Vice President Harris said to Guatemalans don't come. Recently, you have indicated you are in favor of refugees coming to this country. Could you please explain your administration's basic stance on immigration?

(...)

9:11:50 p.m.
13 seconds

LEMON: I want to talk to you about DACA. I've got two questions on immigration, quick questions I want to ask you about because just last week, there was a federal judge who ruled the program unlawful blocked it from accepting new applications. What do you say to DREAMers who are really worried about their futures here in the United States?

(...)

9:13:19 p.m.
13 seconds

LEMON: Mr. President, you've been the big guy for six months now in the White House. Can you take us behind the scenes, something that was extraordinary or unusual that happened that stands out to you?

(...)

9:15:53 p.m.
29 seconds

BIDEN: And by the way the first time I walked down the stairs and they played *Hail to the Chief*, I wondered, where is he? Oh, man. Where is he? Now, you think I'm kidding? I'm not kidding. You know, I mean —

LEMON: It's a great tune, isn't it?

BIDEN: — it's a great tune but I — you know, you feel a little self-conscious. But you think I'm kidding. I'm not. But I am — I am not at all self-conscious about the power that goes with the office as relates to resolving issues.

(...)

9:17:40 p.m.
31 seconds

BIDEN: But the living conditions, I mean it's such a great, great honor to live in the White House. But, quite frankly, I kid the Vice President like one day Barack came over to Nav — NavOps — called Naval Operations, the Vice President's residence which is on about, I guess, 80, 90 acres and it's a beautiful, beautiful spot and there's a fence around the whole property.

LEMON: I bet you miss that, don't you?

BIDEN: I do. And Barack came over and he said this is great. And I said — I'll tell you, I said trade you only if the power goes with it.

(...)

9:19:32 p.m.

33 seconds

LEMON: Well, Mr. President — Mr. President, here's the deal. Mr. President, here's the deal. I'm the last guy that gets to ask you questions tonight.

BIDEN: Uh-oh.

LEMON: Yeah. And then I get to leave. Thank you. I appreciate it.

BIDEN: Appreciate it.

LEMON: We're so glad that you guys are here, that you got to ask questions of the President of the United States. Thank you so much. Thank you to our audience — everyone for being here, taking questions. Of course, thanks to the President of the United States. We want to thank Mount Saint Joseph's University, right here in Cincinnati, Ohio, right — [CHEERS AND APPLAUSE] — for housing us.