

July 21, 2022

Via Email

Chris Licht
CNN Chief Executive Officer
Chris.Licht@turner.com

Via Overnight Mail

CNN Headquarters
1 CNN Center
Atlanta, GA 30303

David Vigilante
CNN Executive Vice President and
General Counsel
David.Vigilante@turner.com

RE: Notice of Intent to Bring Civil Action for Defamation

Pursuant to Florida Statute §770.01, this letter serves as formal notice of the false statements about President Donald J. Trump (“President Trump”) in numerous articles and televised transmissions published by Cable News Network, Inc. (“CNN”) including, but not limited to, those discussed below.

In accordance with Florida Statute § 770.02, CNN must publish a full and fair correction, apology, or retraction, in the same editions or corresponding issues of the website publication in which the aforementioned articles, transcripts, or broadcasts appeared and in as conspicuous a place and type as said original article, transcript or broadcast within ten (10) days from the date of service of this notice. Failure to publish such a correction, apology, or retraction will result in the filing of a lawsuit and damages being sought against you, CNN.

The 2016 Presidential Election

In November 2016, Americans participated in a spirited presidential election, pitting Hillary Rodham Clinton against President Trump. President Trump earned 306 electoral college votes compared to Clinton’s 227.¹

After the 2016 election, various members of the Democratic party² gave numerous televised statements claiming the 2016 election was illegitimate. This included suggestions

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/election/us2016/results>

² <https://twitter.com/ClayTravis/status/1540083271526236165?t=6UIZa64bWYKQC3TRysOk5A&s=09>

about Russian interference causing President Trump to win the election and regular referrals to President Trump being an “illegitimate” President.

CNN repeatedly allowed for assertions that President Trump was illegitimately elected to go largely unchallenged, including statements made by Hillary Clinton, Kamala Harris, Joe Biden, Jimmy Carter, Jerry Nadler, John Lewis, Dianne Feinstein, Marcia Fudge, and Debbie Wasserman Schultz.

The 2020 Presidential Election

On and around November 3, 2020, Americans participated in another hotly contested presidential election. As COVID-19 continued to cause infections and deaths across the country, election officials instituted unusual expansions of voting methods and periods. Voters were subjected to scalding advertisements and media personalities predicting calamities wedded to electing Joe Biden or reelecting President Donald Trump, depending on the speaker’s point of view.

Many Trump supporters went to bed the night of November 3, 2020, with high hopes for President Trump’s reelection, seeing leads for their candidate in several important states, such as Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Michigan. By the morning, media outlets were announcing a lead for Biden, with late-night tabulations turning the tide in the former Vice President’s favor.

By the following weekend, CNN announced that Biden had won the election and was already asserting that, “The President falsely claimed the election was being stolen from him as many mail in ballots, which were often counted after Election Day votes, landed in the column of his opponent.”³

For the ensuing two months, President Trump asserted that the election had been “rigged” against him, as he had predicted before the election when early voting and mail-in ballot usage were greatly expanded. Some administration officials and supporters rejected the idea, largely accepting that cheating had taken place but believing it could not have been of such scale as to make the President lose the battleground states. Dozens of lawsuits were filed across the country, with the majority ending up dismissed on procedural grounds. Lawyers for the President pursued a claim that an elaborate international conspiracy, coupled with a commonly used voting machine, were somehow responsible for President Biden’s win. Recounts and audits in various states continued into the middle of 2021.

³ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/07/politics/joe-biden-wins-us-presidential-election/index.html>

CNN’s reporting, both before the election as well as after the election, consistently fed a narrative that denounced President Trump’s legitimacy and competency. The reporting appears to be results-oriented, as betrayed in an undercover video: A CNN employee was filmed discussing the Defendant’s coverage of the 2020 presidential election.⁴ The employee boasted that CNN helped to defeat President Trump in the 2020 election and called the Defendant, his employer, “propaganda.” *Id.*: “Look at what we did, we got Trump out...I am 100% going to say it. And I 100% believe it that if it wasn’t for CNN, I don’t know that Trump would have got voted out.” *Id.*

CNN’s Rush to Label President Trump a Liar

Even as state tabulation audits and recounts began to take place, and long before they concluded in mid-2021, CNN began referring to President Trump as “lying.”⁵

Webster’s Dictionary defines a “lie” as an assertion of something known or believed by the speaker to be untrue with intent to deceive.⁶ The definition, then, is not limited to simply being wrong about an assertion; it instead requires the speaker to know he or she is speaking falsely and to specifically harbor an intent to mislead.

In this instance, President Trump’s comments are not lies: He subjectively believes that the results of the 2020 presidential election turned on fraudulent voting activity in several key states.

Furthermore, the repeated characterization of President Trump lying was distinctly at odds with CNN’s treatment of individuals claiming President Trump’s 2016 was “illegitimate” or based upon “Russian interference.”

CNN’s Branding of President Trump as a Liar Extends to Likening Him to Nazis and Communists

For the months and years that have followed the 2020 election, CNN took it upon itself to engage in a campaign of dissuasion – branding President Trump a liar, and one who subscribes to the notion of the “Big Lie.” As CNN repeatedly reminds its readers, that concept is linked to Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels and the Nazi-era idiom, “If you tell

⁴ <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/cnn-director-boasts-removing-trump-from-office-spreading-propaganda>

⁵ See e.g., <https://transcripts.cnn.com/show/cg/date/2020-11-30/segment/01>

⁶ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lie>

a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.”⁷ If the articles fail to overtly link Trump to Hitler—a particularly offensive slur for a man with Jewish members of his immediate family—they regularly draw comparisons between Trump and China’s Xi Jinping⁸. Reportedly, the term “Big Lie” has been uttered in the context of President Trump’s belief, more than 7,700 times on CNN since January of 2021.⁹

CNN’s Willful and Continued Usage of the “Big Lie” Characterization

On June 15, 2022, CNN’s new Chairman and CEO Chris Licht reportedly held a conference call with top CNN producers in which he expressed displeasure with the use of “Big Lie.” *Id.* Since then, CNN’s on-air personalities—including John King, Jake Tapper, John Avlon, Brianna Keilar, Don Lemon, and Jeffrey Toobin, among others—have continued to use the phrase in describing President Trump’s subjective state of mind despite an apparent admonition from their Chief Executive Officer. *Id.*

The Unique Treatment of President Trump’s Beliefs Versus Those Belonging to Other Public Figures

One of the clearest indicators of CNN’s malice is that unlike any other public figure, even those for which there have been specific determinations of dishonesty, it is President Trump to whom CNN’s employees comfortably and consistently attach the “liar” label. Below are just several examples of scenarios in which CNN possessed objective evidence of the declarant’s dishonesty yet never characterized the person as a liar or as utilizing the “Big Lie” propaganda technique.

Jussie Smollett

Under claimed circumstances, which almost immediately appeared implausible, actor Jussie Smollett proclaimed to be a victim of a hate crime perpetrated by mysterious men who wore “MAGA” hats and who laid in wait for him during a sub-zero Chicago night.

Smollett was charged with disorderly conduct offenses predicated upon the notion that his entire account was a hoax, *i.e.*, untrue. Smollett was convicted of crimes based upon his false report of the assault.

⁷ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/05/politics/trump-disinformation-strategy/index.html>

⁸ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/25/opinions/bi-lie-ben-ghiat/index.html>

⁹ <https://www.foxnews.com/media/cnn-stars-continue-using-big-lie-term-trump-flouting-new-boss-prefers-different-phrase>

When CNN reported the guilty jury verdict, it continued to treat the verdict as a mere allegation: “Actor Jussie Smollett was found guilty Thursday on five of six felony counts of disorderly conduct for making a false report to Chicago police that he was the victim of a hate crime in January 2019—an attack *prosecutors said he staged*.”¹⁰ “He was acquitted of making a false report to another Chicago detective weeks after the *alleged attack*.” *Id.* Despite a jury finding that Smollett lied to prosecutors, police and the public, CNN refused to call Smollett a “liar”¹¹ even after “. . . a jury found Jussie Smollett guilty of *falsely reporting* a hate crime.”¹² In further efforts to downplay the guilty verdict, CNN focused on how the criminal justice system treated Smollett unfairly.¹³ On an occasion in which a CNN commentator referred to Smollett as lying, the commentary ended with the gratuitous and defamatory comment directed at President Trump:

And, of course, despite all the evidence, Donald Trump’s Big Lie continues to be amplified, by right-wing media. In that sense, Donald Trump is the Jussie Smollett of American politics.¹⁴

Andrew McCabe

Andrew McCabe, a former FBI official under then-Director James Comey, was the subject of an Office of Inspector General (“OIG”) report that concluded McCabe lied on numerous occasions when questioned about his role in leaking sensitive information to the media.

Although the United States Attorney’s Office for the District of Columbia declined to prosecute the referred false statement case, there were objective and widely accepted findings by the OIG that McCabe had “lacked candor” and made five false statements. CNN never classified McCabe as lying or perpetuating a “Big Lie.”

¹⁰ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/09/us/jussie-smollett-trial-thursday-jury-deliberations/index.html>

¹¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/10/us/jussie-smollett-trial-guilty-next-steps/index.html>

¹² <https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/09/media/sean-hannity-jussie-smollett-reliable-sources/index.html>

¹³ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/11/opinions/jussie-smollett-guilty-verdict-meaning-bailey/index.html>; <https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/20/us/smollett-special-prosecutor-report/index.html>

¹⁴ <https://transcripts.cnn.com/show/nday/date/2021-12-10/segment/05>

CNN was not only incapable of calling McCabe a liar, it hired him as a contributor in August of 2019.

Stacey Abrams

When Stacey Abrams lost the Georgia governor’s race in November 2018, she claimed the election was stolen from her, a claim that she repeated in her 2019 State of the Union response:

In response to what I believe was a stolen election—I'm not saying they stole it from me, they stole it from the voters of Georgia. I cannot prove empirically that I would’ve won, but we will never know. And so what I demanded on November 16 was a fair fight because you see, voter suppression is as old as America.¹⁵

Abrams was interviewed on November 19, 2018, by then-CNN anchor Chris Cuomo about her election loss and challenges to election integrity. In her interview, she claimed “machines . . . were flipping names because of the antiquated nature of our machines. We had people who were purged from the rolls unlawfully... We had new citizens who were denied the right to register. We had thousands who were placed on hold.”¹⁶ Cuomo did not challenge these claims, but asked Abrams how her initiative, Fair Fight Georgia, would fix the problems identified. *Id.* Cuomo noted, “Anything that makes the process more fair, is good.” *Id.*

CNN has not referred to Stacy Abrams as lying or perpetuating a “Big Lie,” even in the absence of data supporting her claims of a rigged election. CNN recognized challenges to election integrity as credible when addressed through a different political lens.

Questions About Election Integrity Are Not Baseless

Well after the election process and associated litigation has died down, information continues to be gathered that suggests there were unusual problems with the 2020 election.

A CNN article from February 2022 reported on a recent CNN poll showing that 56% of Americans have little or no confidence in our elections, with “just 68% of

¹⁵ <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/03/politics/abrams-kemp-voter-suppression/index.html>

¹⁶ <https://transcripts.cnn.com/show/CPT/date/2018-11-19/segment/02>

democrats” expressing confidence and “41% of independents.”¹⁷ CNN’s Editor-at-Large ascribes this level of doubt to “the insidiousness of Trump’s big lie” and likens his claims to an ear worm “wheedling [its] way into the consciousness of the public.” *Id.* There is no room, of course, for any other explanation for public doubt of the election’s accuracy than nearly supernatural powers of President Trump to control minds.

The Heritage Foundation summarizes voting fraud cases from around the country, typically citing prosecutor press releases for the information.¹⁸ Just using 2021-22, the Heritage Foundation has documented voting fraud convictions in Arizona, California, Florida, Michigan, New Hampshire, Texas, Colorado, Kansas, Mississippi, Nevada, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia. This does not include pending cases, but simply cases in which criminal convictions have resulted from the prosecution. The Heritage Foundation’s Election Fraud Database contains 1,365 proven instances of election fraud, 1,173 criminal convictions, and 48 civil penalties. *Id.*

In June of 2022, the Texas Republican Party’s 2022 Platform & Resolutions Committee issued the following Resolution:

2020 Election: We believe that the 2020 election violated Article 1 and 2 of the US Constitution, that various secretaries of state illegally circumvented their state legislatures in conducting their elections in multiple ways, including by allowing ballots to be received after November 3, 2020. We believe that substantial election fraud in key metropolitan areas significantly affected the results in five key states in favor of Joseph Robinette Biden Jr. We reject the certified results of the 2020 Presidential election, and we hold that acting President Joseph Robinette Biden Jr. was not legitimately elected by the people of the United States. We strongly urge all Republicans to work to ensure election integrity and to show up to vote in November of 2022, bring your friends and family, volunteer for your local Republicans, and overwhelm any possible fraud.¹⁹

In addition, there is empirical support for President Trump’s view that voter fraud decided the 2020 presidential election. Researchers with the organization True the Vote evaluated and analyzed 10 trillion geo-tracking signals from cellphones that were captured

¹⁷ <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/02/11/politics/trump-big-lie-2020-election-poll/index.html>

¹⁸ <https://www.heritage.org/voterfraud-print/search>

¹⁹ <https://texasgop.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/6-Permanent-Platform-Committee-FINAL-REPORT-6-16-2022.pdf>

during the closing weeks of the 2020 general election campaign.²⁰ The researchers focused on the commercially marketed “pings” from mobile phones whose owners interacted with ballot drop boxes in five swing states. *Id.* These digital investigators then narrowed their search to people who approached 10 or more drop boxes and contemporaneously visited five or more pro-Biden nonprofits. *Id.* This investigation’s cameras capture one mule after another traveling from box to box to deposit successive fists full of ballots. *Id.* One mule in Atlanta slid ballots into 28 different collection bins. *Id.*

True the Vote discovered that, in the five states it analyzed, some 2,000 mules averaged 38 drop-box visits in the weeks before Election Day, and the organization estimates that these efforts resulted in the counting of 380,000 fraudulent ballots. *Id.* Coming from heavily Democrat areas, these almost certainly were overwhelmingly pro-Biden ballots.

In Arizona, 200 mules typically approached 20 boxes each. *Id.* Disqualifying these 20,000 unlawful ballots would evaporate Biden’s 10,457-vote win in Arizona. *Id.* In Arizona, Guillermina Fuentes, 66, a former San Luis mayor featured in 2000 Mules, and a second woman were indicted in 2020 on one count of ballot abuse, a practice commonly known as “ballot harvesting” that was made illegal under a 2016 state law. Fuentes pleaded guilty and is pending sentencing.²¹

In Georgia, 250 mules stopped at 24 boxes and inserted five ballots per encounter. *Id.* Rejecting these 30,000 illegal votes would eliminate Biden’s victory margin of 11,779. *Id.*

In Pennsylvania, 1,100 mules in Philadelphia alone encountered 50 boxes. *Id.* Vacating these 275,000 illegitimate votes would eradicate Biden’s 80,555-vote victory. *Id.*

On July 8, 2022, the Wisconsin Supreme Court invalidated the use of ballot drop boxes, holding that they are illegal under state law: “The illegality of these drop boxes weakens the people’s faith that the election produced an outcome reflective of their will. The Wisconsin voters, and all lawful voters, are injured when the institution charged with administering Wisconsin elections does not follow the law, leaving the results in question.” *Teigen v. Wis. Elections Comm’n*, No. 2022AP91 (Wis. Jul. 8, 2022). Note that Joe Biden narrowly won the state by just under 21,000 votes.

²⁰ 2000 Mules, (Dinesh D’Souza, 2022); <https://www.dailysignal.com/2022/04/29/film-2000-mules-offers-vivid-proof-of-voter-fraud/>

²¹ <https://apnews.com/article/arizona-presidential-elections-conspiracy-election-2020-government-and-politics-65a3f0f130905dd7151e5189e7242784>

True the Vote’s founder has said, “You don’t need a whole lot of fraud. You just need a little in the right places over time.”²²

Substantial numbers of Americans shared President Trump’s genuinely-held view that voter fraud affected the results of the 2020 election. More than six months after the 2020 election, 25% of Americans (including 53% of Republicans), believed Trump was still the “true president,” and 56% of Republicans believed that the 2020 election was rigged or due to voter fraud, demonstrating that a significant portion of the citizenry did not accept the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election.²³

According to a 2021 Monmouth University poll, approximately one third of Americans believe that Joe Biden’s 2020 electoral victory was due to widespread voter fraud—a number that has not budged since November 2020.²⁴

In April of 2021, a University of Massachusetts Amherst poll of 1,000 people across the United States found that 24% of respondents believe that Joe Biden’s electoral victory was “definitely not legitimate.”²⁵

The above-referenced numbers are nearly identical to the UMass Amherst Poll taken in December of 2021, in which 22% of respondents deemed Joe Biden’s electoral victory illegitimate and only 21% of Republicans viewed Joe Biden’s victory as legitimate.²⁶ When asked why Joe Biden’s electoral victory was illegitimate, 83% of the poll’s respondents cited election fraud. *Id.*

Other polls show that three in ten Americans (31%) believe that the 2020 election was stolen from Donald Trump, a number that has remained steady throughout 2021, in August (29%), June (30%) and March (29%).²⁷

²² <https://www.dailysignal.com/2022/04/29/film-2000-mules-offers-vivid-proof-of-voter-fraud/>

²³ <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2021-05/Ipsos%20Reuters%20Topline%20Write%20up-%20The%20Big%20Lie%20-%2017%20May%20thru%2019%20May%202021.pdf>

²⁴ https://www.monmouth.edu/polling-institute/reports/monmouthpoll_us_062121/

²⁵ <https://polsci.umass.edu/sites/default/files/UMass%20Amherst-WCVB%20Poll%20Biden%20100%20April21.pdf>

²⁶ <https://polsci.umass.edu/sites/default/files/UMass%20Amherst%20Poll%20January%206th%20Anniv%20Dec21.pdf>

²⁷ <https://www.prii.org/research/competing-visions-of-america-an-evolving-identity-or-a-culture-under-attack/>

Another survey found that 47 million American adults—nearly one in five—agree with the statement that “the 2020 election was stolen from Donald Trump and Joe Biden is an illegitimate president.”²⁸

With respect to Republicans polled, 55% believe Donald Trump lost the 2020 election due to illegal voting or election fraud,²⁹ and 35% of voters, including 60% of Republicans think the 2020 election should definitely or probably be overturned.³⁰

Last, in a national study conducted for CNN by SSRS, an independent research company, 37% of respondents believe that Joe Biden did not legitimately win enough votes to win the presidency and 56% are not at all confident that elections in America reflect the will of the people.³¹

President Trump harbors a *subjective belief* that he was unfairly deprived of a second term in office. This is particularly valid in the context of an incumbent president receiving over 74 million votes, a record number for any republican candidate in history.³² By refusing to acknowledge President Trump could be correct or that he could genuinely believe his contention is correct, CNN has willfully acted in disregard for the truth and has acted with reckless disregard for the truth. CNN’s relentless and willful campaign to brand President Trump a “liar” and purveyor of the “Big Lie” is defamatory in nature.

Defamatory Publications and Evidence of Malicious Intent

Without regard for President Trump’s genuine belief in his statements, CNN has published *numerous* articles characterizing him as a “liar” and the purveyor of the “Big Lie.”

²⁸ <https://theconversation.com/amp/21-million-americans-say-biden-is-illegitimate-and-trump-should-be-restored-by-violence-survey-finds-168359>

²⁹ <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/news-polls/majority-republicans-still-believe-2020-election-was-stolen-donald-trump>

³⁰ <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/trump-election-dobut-republican-voters-1248762/amp/>

³¹ <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/21202374-cnn-poll-on-democracy-januaryfebruary-2022>

³² See, for example, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10999685/Trump-complains-Biden-2020-win-mathematically-impossible-new-documentary-Unprecedented.html> for contemporaneous comments about the “mathematical impossibility” of losing to President Biden.

On June 29, 2022, CNN published, via CNN.com, an article under the headline “Another American woman just stood up to protect democracy from Trump.”³³ The “analysis” by Stephen Collinson of CNN published the following false and defamatory narrative:

...contrasted with Trump’s cowardice in failing to admit that he lost a fair election.

...

...to expose Trump’s lies and assault on American democracy...

...

...to Trump’s alternative reality of election fraud lies and revenge fantasies.

Id.

On March 29, 2022, CNN published, via CNN.com, an article under the headline “Trump’s January 6 plot appears darker and more dangerous by the day.”³⁴ The “analysis” by Stephen Collinson of CNN published the following false and defamatory narrative:

Former President Donald Trump’s attempt to steal the 2020 election . . . [was] on display at a lie-filled rally that underscored how his conspiracy to overturn the election—whether it is criminal or not—remains viscerally alive and able to damage future elections.

...

It’s also ironic that this threat to American democracy is being further exposed while Washington leads an international effort to save freedom in Ukraine, which is under much greater assault from Russian President Vladimir Putin, whom Trump still seems to hero worship.

...

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/29/politics/cassidy-hutchinson-democracy-trump/index.html> attached as Exhibit 1.

³⁴ <https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/29/politics/trump-2020-election-investigation-analysis/index.html> attached as Exhibit 2.

. . . a referendum on the lie that he won in 2020 and seeks to build a return to the White House on the same falsehoods that have drawn in millions of his supporters.

Id.

On February 11, 2022, CNN published an article written by Chris Cillizza, CNN Editor-at-Large, entitled “Here’s the terrible reality: Trump’s election lie is on the march” and with a link entitled “New poll suggests Trump 2020 election lie is working.”³⁵ The falsehoods within this article include the following:

In discussing poll numbers that support the President’s belief in prevalent election fraud, the Editor wrote, “That’s a stunning reversal in the course of 13 months. And it proves that—as unfortunate as this may be—*Donald Trump’s election lie is working.*” *Id.* (*emphasis added*)

The article goes on to assert, “*By now, you know about Trump’s big lie.* It’s that the 2020 election was somehow fraudulent” *Id.* (*emphasis added*)

Later, the Editor asserts, “*Trump’s lies about the election have long gained purchase within the base of the Republican Party.*” *Id.*

Finally, Cillizza claims:

This is the insidiousness of Trump's big lie. It's like an earworm—you may hate the song but you just keep finding yourself humming it in the shower. Trump has created a constant low-level buzz within the American electorate that something is wrong with the way we conduct elections. That he has no proof doesn't seem to matter; by sheer repetition, his false claims are wheedling their way into the consciousness of the public.

Id.

On February 6, 2022, CNN published, via CNN.com, an article under the headline “Trump’s growing recklessness is a ticking time bomb.”³⁶ The article by Michael D’Antonio published the following false and defamatory narrative:

³⁵ <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/11/politics/trump-big-lie-2020-election-poll/index.html> attached as Exhibit 3.

³⁶ <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/02/opinions/trump-pardon-jan-6-mass-protests-dantonio/index.html> attached as Exhibit 4.



Now, Trump is building on the big lie that there was widespread voter fraud in the 2020 elections and saying ‘our country and our elections are corrupt.’

...

It seems Trump’s lust for power knows no bounds

Id.

On February 2, 2022, CNN published ,via CNN.com, an article under the headline “This former Republican senator has a ridiculous reason for believing the Big Lie.”³⁷ The “analysis” by CNN Editor at Large Chris Cillizza published the following false and defamatory narrative:

. . . [W]e know for certain that there was not, in fact, widespread vote fraud in the 2020 election in Nevada - a state Biden won 50% to 48%.

...

[T]he former president’s false claim that the 2020 election was plagued by fraud.

Id.

On January 28, 2022, CNN published, via CNN.com, an article under the headline “Twitter says it has quit taking action against lies about the 2020 election.” The article by Daniel Dale published the following false and defamatory narrative:

Lies about the 2020 election, however, have never gone away

Former President Donald Trump continues to relentlessly repeat lies about the 2020 election.

...

[Trump] lies that the 2020 election was “rigged” and “stolen.”

³⁷ <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/02/politics/dean-heller-nevada-2020-election/index.html> attached as Exhibit 5.

Id.

On January 19, 2022, CNN published, via CNN.com, an article under the headline “The 2020 election wasn’t stolen. But Douglas Frank and his bogus equation claiming otherwise are still winning over audiences.”³⁸ The article by Sara Murray and Jeff Simon of CNN published the following false and defamatory narrative:

Frank is just one in an army of conspiracy theorists, inspired by former President Donald Trump’s election lies

Id.

On January 17, 2022, CNN published, via CNN.com, an article under the headline “Trump’s rhetoric about election fraud already cost Georgia Republicans. But they’re still tethered to him in 2022.”³⁹ The article by Sara Murray and Jeff Simon of CNN published the following false and defamatory narrative:

. . . even though there is no evidence of widespread fraud.

. . .

. . . as [President Trump] spread lie after lie that the election was stolen.

Id.

On January 16, 2022, CNN aired a television show entitled “State of the Union with Candy Crowley” that included host Jake Tapper making the following false and defamatory comments⁴⁰:

TAPPER: Over the weekend, while Martin Luther King III was in Arizona rallying to expand voting rights, *Donald Trump was*, the same day, in the same state, doing the exact opposite, *continuing to push his big lie*.
(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

³⁸ <https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/18/politics/douglas-frank-big-lie/index.html> attached as Exhibit 6.

³⁹ <https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/27/politics/georgia-republicans-trump-2022/index.html> attached as Exhibit 7.

⁴⁰ <https://transcripts.cnn.com/show/sotu/date/2022-01-16/segment/01> attached as Exhibit 8.



TRUMP: Last year, we had a rigged election, and the proof is all over the place.

They always talk about the big lie . They're the big lie .

(END VIDEO CLIP)

TAPPER: There is a reason Trump was in Arizona, to push the legislature to disenfranchise the state's voters based on all of *his deranged election lies*.

Id. (emphasis added)

On December 26, 2021, CNN published, via CNN.com, an article under the headline “Biden’s struggles shouldn’t eclipse GOP’s year of dangerous falsehoods.”⁴¹ The “analysis” by CNN’s John Harwood published the following false and defamatory narrative:

...Trump’s disfiguring pathologies

...

Egged on by Trump, leading Republicans have made affirming or acquiescing in his big lie that the 2020 election was stolen from him a threshold qualification.

Id.

On September 16, 2021, CNN published, via CNN.com, an article under the headline “Trump’s Big Lie is changing the face of American politics.”⁴² The article by CNN’s Stephen Collinson published the following false and defamatory narrative:

...tens of millions of Americans were seduced by Trump’s lies about election fraud

...his still-magnetic talent for spinning myths...

...that the President is able to reinvent the truth in plain sight, and get away with it.

⁴¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/26/politics/republicans-trump-2021-lies/index.html>
attached as Exhibit 9

⁴² <https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/16/politics/trump-big-lie-gop-election/index.html>
attached as Exhibit 10.

Id.

On October 28, 2021, CNN aired a television show including a conversation between CNN Anchor John Berman and CNN political analyst Maggie Haberman.⁴³ During this show, Berman made the following false and defamatory statements: “This morning, ‘The Wall Street Journal’ is under fire for publishing this letter written by former president, former President Trump, that is riddled with falsehoods and baseless conspiracy theories about the 2020 election.” *Id.* Before turning to Haberman for comment, Berman claimed, “To me, this is an example of mainstreaming, the inch by inch, of the *former president getting his lies into the mainstream.*” *Id.* (*emphasis added*)

On September 19, 2021, CNN televised a program including false and defamatory comments by CNN Host Pamela Brown in a conversation with Representative Adam Kinzinger (R-IL).⁴⁴ During this show, Brown stated, “Let’s start with some simple facts, shall we? Joe Biden won the 2020 presidential election, Donald Trump lost the 2020 presidential election. And here’s another one, but this one isn’t as easy to swallow. *Trump’s baseless big lie* about the election being stolen from him is actually winning.” *Id.* (*emphasis added*).

On September 16, 2021, CNN published, via CNN.com, an article under the headline “‘Incredibly dangerous’: Trump is trying to get Big Lie promoters chosen to run the 2024 election.”⁴⁵ The article by Daniel Dale published the following false and defamatory narrative:

...Trump backed Republicans who “supported his lies about the 2020 election...”

Id.

Dale felt compelled to add a parenthetical to the results of a CNN poll on the issue of 2020 election integrity, writing, “A CNN poll released on Wednesday found that 63% of all respondents (correctly) thought Biden had won enough votes to win the presidency - - but that only 21% of Republicans felt that way, compared to 97% of Democrats and 64% of independents. *Id.* Dale continued to add such parentheticals for the readers, noting

⁴³ <https://transcripts.cnn.com/show/nday/date/2021-10-28/segment/01> attached as Exhibit 11.

⁴⁴ <https://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2021/09/19/trump-big-lie-election-gop-leaders-brown-for-the-record-nr-vpx.cnn> attached as Exhibit 12.

⁴⁵ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/16/politics/trump-secretary-of-state-big-lie/index.html> attached as Exhibit 13.

“There was no scam and no such fraud” and “Again, there was no massive crime” in discussing the 2020 presidential election process. *Id.*

On September 15, 2021, CNN published, via CNN.com, an article under the headline “Donald Trump’s Mental Health becomes an issue again.”⁴⁶ The article by CNN Editor-at-Large Chris Cillizza published the following false and defamatory narrative:

[President Trump] *continued to push the Big Lie that the election was somehow stolen despite there being zero actual evidence to back up that belief.*

Id. (emphasis added)

On September 15, 2021, CNN published, via CNN.com, an article under the headline “The big lie is (unfortunately) winning...”⁴⁷ The article by CNN Editor-at-Large Chris Cillizza published the following false and defamatory narrative:

Unfortunately, in recent months, the Big Lie – that Trump somehow was defrauded out of the election—has gained increasing amounts of traction.

...

What those numbers make clear is that among Republicans, Donald Trump and the big lie he is telling are winning.

Id.

On September 13, 2021, CNN published, via CNN.com, an article under the headline “How believing the Big Lie has become central to being a Republican.” The article by CNN Editor-at-Large Chris Cillizza published the following false and defamatory narrative:

...that somehow the 2020 election was fraudulent and Trump actually won. That belief is directly rebutted by widely accepted facts about the 2020 election – most notably that there is ZERO evidence of widespread voter fraud. None.

...

⁴⁶ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/15/politics/donald-trump-mental-health-mark-milley/index.html> attached as Exhibit 14.

⁴⁷ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/15/politics/big-lie-republican-belief-trump/index.html> attached as Exhibit 15.



But it's also a wild conspiracy theory that Trump very much continues to push. And that much of the base of the party continues to believe because, well, Trump told them to believe it.

Id.

On July 23, 2021, CNN televised a program including false and defamatory comments by CNN Host Jim Acosta in a conversation with Arizona Secretary of State Katie Hobbs.⁴⁸ During this show, Acosta stated, “Former President Trump will be in Arizona this weekend to *peddle his baseless conspiracy theories* about voter fraud, his go-to excuse for losing the 2021 election.” *Id.* (emphasis added).

On July 16, 2021, CNN published, via CNN.com, an article under the headline “The real reason Trump keeps telling the big lie.” The article by Michael D’Antonio published the following false and defamatory narrative:

As such, Americans can expect him to continue to peddle the “Big Lie” about the 2020 election being stolen...”

...

...The Big Lie Keeps getting bigger

Id.

On July 12, 2021, CNN published, via CNN.com, an article under the headline “The Big Lie keeps getting bigger.”⁴⁹ The article by Paul LeBlanc published the following false and defamatory narrative:

Former President Donald Trump... delivered another avalanche of lies about the 2020 election...

He lied about election integrity...

He lied about big tech...

He lied about election officials...

He lied about the Justice Department...

⁴⁸ <http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/2107/23/sitroom.02.html> attached as Exhibit 16.

⁴⁹ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/12/politics/big-lie-what-matters/index.html> attached as Exhibit 17.

...

Echoing Trump’s falsehoods...

Id.

On July 5, 2021, CNN published, via CNN.com, an article under the headline “Donald Trump just accidentally told the truth about his disinformation strategy.”⁵⁰ In this article, CNN’s Editor-at-Large Chris Cillizza likens President Trump to Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels. *Id.*

The author proclaims there is “zero evidence of any sort of widespread election fraud” but bemoans the fact that a Reuters/Ipsos national poll in May of 2021 showed over 6 in 10 Republicans agreeing with the statement that the election “was stolen from Donald Trump.” *Id.*

As part of CNN’s effort to portray President Trump as lying, the article ends with attribution to him of an attitude of “Truth (and its consequences) be damned.” *Id.*

On June 27, 2021, CNN published, via CNN.com, an article written by Eric Bradner titled “Trump’s big lie about 2020 results suffers legal and political blows in key swing states.”⁵¹ The article falsely calls Trump supporters “conspiracy-minded supporters” and alleges “[i]t was a bad week for the Big Lie – former President Donald Trump and his allies’ false claims that widespread fraud is to blame for his 2020 election loss.” *Id.*

With regard to the Arizona audit, the article quotes Donald Trump—“Everybody is anxiously awaiting the result!”—only to refer to it as a “another falsehood” and conclude that the audit is “deeply flawed” and therefore a “propaganda tool” used by Trump supporters. *Id.* As of mid-November of 2021, audits were still taking place.

On June 21, 2021, CNN published an article, via CNN.com, with the headline “1 in 3 Americans believe the ‘Big Lie.’”⁵² The article, written by Editor-at-large Chris Cillizza, notes that a national poll conducted by Monmouth University found that 32% of

⁵⁰ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/05/politics/trump-disinformation-strategy/index.html> attached as Exhibit 18.

⁵¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/27/politics/2020-election-falsehoods-voting/index.html> attached as Exhibit 19.

⁵² <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/21/politics/biden-voter-fraud-big-lie-monmouth-poll/index.html> attached as Exhibit 20.

respondents believe that Joe Biden only won the 2020 election due to voter fraud. The article then asserts a false and defamatory conclusory “fact” as follows:

Because it is a FACT that Biden won 81 million votes and 306 electoral votes. And it is a FACT that Donald Trump won 74 million votes and 232 electoral votes. It is a FACT that the results in all 50 states and the District of Columbia have long been certified. It is a FACT that there is zero evidence -- turned up by federal or state officials -- that any widespread electoral fraud occurred anywhere.

Id.

On June 5, 2021, CNN published an article, via CNN.com, written by Veronica Stracqualursi and others titled “Trump’s Chief of Staff Mark Meadows pushed DOJ to investigate baseless election fraud claims.”⁵³ The article published the following false and defamatory statements:

He sided with Trump’s disingenuous attacks against mail-in voting and fed his baseless claim that the election was stolen from him. . .

. . . Trump’s promotion of the lies about the 2020 election. . .

. . . Trump falsely claimed . . . widespread fraud.

Id.

On June 3, 2021, CNN published an article, via CNN.com, titled “Trump is more obsessed than ever with 2020 election and is brushing off allies who are telling him to move on.”⁵⁴ The article, written by Dana Bash, Veronica Stracqualursi, and Jim Acosta, alleges that “Trump’s obsession with 2020 has sharply divided the Republican Party, pitting those who embrace the ‘big lie’ against those who have debunked the former President’s falsehoods about the election – which has often led to them being punished or denounced.” *Id.* Any reference to Donald Trump’s opinions regarding the 2020 election are denounced as “false narratives,” “baseless theories,” and “lie(s).” *Id.* Such comments are false and defamatory.

⁵³ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/05/politics/mark-meadows-doj-2020-election-fraud/index.html> attached as Exhibit 21.

⁵⁴ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/03/politics/trump-mindset-2020-election-obsession/index.html> attached as Exhibit 22.

On June 2, 2021, CNN televised a program including false and defamatory comments by CNN Host Kate Bolduan.⁵⁵ During this show, Brown stated, “Republicans in more than a dozen states now have passed new laws that make it harder to vote. A movement fueled by Donald Trump’s *false claims of widespread election fraud, the baseless conspiracy theories* he pushed all last year and is still doing so today.” *Id.* (*emphasis added*).

On May 25, 2021, CNN published an article, via CNN.com, titled “A Majority of Republicans are living in a fantasy world built around the Big Lie,”⁵⁶ which was written by Chris Cillizza. The article cites a poll which found that 53% of Republicans believe Donald Trump is the “true” president while 56% of Republicans believe the 2020 election results were the result of illegal voting or election rigging. *Id.* These numbers, the article alleges, reflect “the Big lie pushed by Trump.” *Id.* Such comments are false and defamatory.

The article concludes by alleging that Donald Trump is “objectively wrong,” that “the Republican Party is currently organized around a lie” and “Trump is lying.” *Id.* These comments are false and defamatory.

On May 19, 2021, CNN published an article written by Zachary B. Wolf, via CNN.com, with the headline, “The 5 key elements of Trump’s big lie and how it came to be.”⁵⁷ The false and defamatory article alleges that Donald Trump “spent months spreading lies about the 2020 election, which he himself is now calling ‘THE BIG LIE’ as he continues to claim a massive conspiracy robbed him a second term.” *Id.* In explaining the origin of the term, “The Big Lie,” the article states “[i]t comes from Adolf Hitler. . . In *Mein Kampf*, he accused Jews of spreading lies about how the German army performed in World War I.” *Id.* The article concludes by stating that “Trump’s big lie worked” as evidenced by the polls showing that 55% of Republicans think Joe Biden won the 2020 election because of election rigging or fraud. *Id.* The “Big Lie” and other references to lying, as well as the effort to link President Trump to Nazism, are false and defamatory.

On May 5, 2021, CNN published, via CNN.com, an article written by Zachary B. Wolf with the headline “The big lie. The Covid misinformation. It all comes back to

⁵⁵ <https://transcripts.cnn.com/show/ath/date/2021-06-02/segment/01> attached as Exhibit 23.

⁵⁶ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/25/politics/big-lie-election-2020-poll/index.html> attached as Exhibit 24.

⁵⁷ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/19/politics/donald-trump-big-lie-explainer/index.html> attached as Exhibit 25.

Russia.”⁵⁸ The article is false and defamatory insofar as it alleges that “Trump, Russia and other actors generally seek to polarize the country by spreading false facts,” which are “not going to stop anytime soon” and “it will be impossible to undo the era of misinformation that got us all here.” *Id.*

On March 27, 2021, CNN published an opinion article, via CNN.com, written by Michael D’Antonio titled “Trump’s big lie could backfire in Georgia.”⁵⁹ The article is false and defamatory in that it accuses Donald Trump of “repeated falsehoods about being cheated” and alleges that Donald Trump’s “lies” have been effective, “especially when it comes to his insistence that the 2020 election was ‘stolen’ due to widespread fraud.” *Id.* That “lie,” the article asserts, “prompted Trump supporters to storm the Capitol on January 6.” *Id.* The article concludes by claiming that the Republican Party continues to push “Trump’s ‘big lie.’” *Id.*

On March 17, 2021, CNN published, via CNN.com, an analysis written by Stephen Collinson, with the headline, “New US intel report shows Russia, Trump and GOP acolytes have same goals.”⁶⁰ The article published the following false and defamatory narrative:

Moscow with its election meddling, Trump acolytes pushing false claims of voter fraud and his GOP supporters in the states now passing voter suppression laws share the same goal—the denigration of the US democratic system.

. . . readiness of former President’s men to use Russian misinformation in 2020. . .

. . . [Donald Trump] is using his sway over the party to force future Republican candidates to sign up to his big lie of widespread voter fraud.

From Trump’s lies about a stolen second term . . .

. . . false claims . . . by Trump.

Id.

⁵⁸ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/05/politics/what-matters-misinformation/index.html> attached as Exhibit 26.

⁵⁹ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/27/opinions/trump-big-lie-georgia-republicans-voting-restrictions-dantonio/index.html> attached as Exhibit 27.

⁶⁰ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/17/politics/trump-russia-elections/index.html> attached as Exhibit 28.

On February 20, 2021, CNN published an analysis, via CNN.com, with the headline “The ‘big lie’ on voter fraud is still with us.”⁶¹ The article was written by Zachary B. Wolf and alleges that there is “no evidence of widespread voter fraud in the 2020 election, despite what Florida resident Donald Trump says.” *Id.* That is a false and defamatory narrative.

On January 25, 2021, CNN published, via CNN.com, an opinion article titled “Trump’s big lie wouldn’t have worked without his thousands of little lies.”⁶² The article is written by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and alleges that “Donald Trump told a big lie loudly,” as well as the following false and defamatory statements:

This is Trump’s Big Lie,” a brazen falsehood with momentous consequences.

Trump, a leader of authoritarian intentions and tendencies, had disadvantages with respect to the foreign autocrats he so admires. He had no state media, like China's Xi Jinping. He could not rule by decree, like Hungary's Viktor Orbán. He had to govern and run for reelection in an open society with a relatively robust free press. Moreover, although he succeeded in making journalists into hate objects for many of his followers, he could not revoke or destroy the First Amendment.

So Trump took a different tack, unleashing a barrage of disinformation common in authoritarian states but without precedent in the history of the American presidency. He told more than 30,000 documented lies in public (30,573 was The Washington Post's final tally), on Twitter, at rallies and in interviews. If taken as an average, it would come out to 21 lies per day over his four-year term.

The Big Lie seemed convincing because Trump had been lying about American elections for years. He started drumming up suspicion about rigged elections in 2016, when it looked like he would lose to Hillary Clinton.

⁶¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/20/politics/what-matters-february-19/index.html> attached as Exhibit 29.

⁶² <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/25/opinions/big-lie-ben-ghiat/index.html> attached as Exhibit 30.

It's the authoritarian way. . . Each lie deserves our attention as we seek to combat the mass disinformation that threatens our democracy.

Id.

On January 15, 2021, CNN published, via CNN.com, an opinion article written by Joe Lockhart with the headline, “Call out Trump’s big lie.”⁶³ The article falsely alleges that Donald Trump “continued with the big lie,” emphasizing that “the election was stolen from him . . .” and “never backed down from the lie of a stolen election.” *Id.* Such comments are defamatory.

On January 11, 2021, CNN published an article and video, via CNN.com, by Brian Stelter with the headline “Experts warn that Trump’s ‘big lie’ will outlast his presidency.”⁶⁴ The article is false and defamatory in that it quotes the author of *On Tyranny*, Timothy Snyder, who stated that,

[W]e are now moving dangerously towards the territory of a big lie . . . the idea that Mr. Biden didn’t win the election is a big lie. It’s a big lie because you have to disbelieve all kinds of evidence to believe in it. It’s a big lie because you have to believe in a huge conspiracy in order to believe it. And it’s a big lie because, if you believe it, it demands you take radical action.

Id.

On November 30, 2020, CNN published, via CNN.com, an article and video by Brian Stelter with the headline, “Fire of falsehood. How Trump is trying to confuse the public about the election outcome.”⁶⁵ The article quotes Ron Brownstein, who referred to “Trump’s conspiracy theory about the ‘rigged’ election” and alleges that it “gets more and more fantastical and far-reaching. . . .” *Id.* Such comments are false and defamatory.

There are also references to opinions regarding potential 2020 election fraud as a “firehose of falsehoods,” “propaganda tactic(s),” “disinformation campaign” and “denialism.” *Id.* Last, the article quotes news anchor Eric Shawn, who stated that “there is no evidence to prove [voter fraud]” and that “[e]xperts say such claims are simply

⁶³ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/14/opinions/trumps-big-lie-impeachment-lockhart/index.html> attached as Exhibit 31.

⁶⁴ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/11/media/trump-lies-reliable-sources/index.html> attached as Exhibit 32.

⁶⁵ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/30/media/trump-election-confusion-reliable-sources/index.html> attached as Exhibit 33.

unsupported falsehoods that are not backed up by any facts.” *Id.* Such comments create a false and defamatory narrative.

On November 30, 2020, CNN televised the show, “The Lead with Jake Tapper.” A transcript of that show demonstrates that Mr. Tapper made the following false and defamatory comments:

Outgoing President Trump is continuing his baseless lies about the election...

...

Nonetheless, President Trump and his team to continue to push forward these lies,
...

As mentioned above, CNN is estimated to have used the “Big Lie” phrase or to characterize President Trump as lying roughly 7,700 times during broadcasted television shows and repeats of those shows. These defamatory comments have continued even after the new CEO of CNN apparently urged production teams to stop.

Accordingly, I hereby demand on behalf of President Donald Trump that CNN (1) immediately take down the false and defamatory publications, (2) immediately issue a full and fair retraction of the statements identified herein in as conspicuous a manner as they were originally published, and (3) immediately cease and desist from its continued use of “Big Lie” and “lying” when describing President Trump’s subjective belief regarding the integrity of the 2020 election.

Finally, this letter also serves as notice to you and to your affiliated entities, officers, directors, journalists, correspondents, editors, employees, agents, assignees, and other persons acting on behalf of or in concert with you (collectively, “you”) to preserve any and all evidence related in any way to the abovementioned accusations you made and any other accusations that you have published regarding President Trump (collectively, “your accusations against President Trump”). By this letter, you are hereby directed not to destroy, conceal, or alter any paper or electronic files, physical evidence, and/or other data relating in any way, no matter how remote, to your accusations against President Trump, and/or the circumstances leading to their dissemination, including, but not limited to: (1) all communications between you and any third party in any way related to your accusations against President Trump; (2) all sources for your accusations against President Trump; (3)

⁶⁶ <https://transcripts.cnn.com/show/cg/date/2020-11-30/segment/01> attached as Exhibit 34.



any and all documents and data referring to, reflecting, or relating to communications between you and any such third-parties and/or sources regarding your accusations against President Trump; and (4) any and all other documents in an way related to your accusations against President Trump.

I understand that many records and files are maintained electronically. However, this letter specifically requests that all paper and hard copy originals be maintained and preserved in their original format. By the same token, electronic documents and the storage media on which they reside may contain relevant, discoverable information beyond that which may be found in printed documents. Therefore, even where a paper copy exists and has been preserved, please preserve and maintain all electronically stored documents in their original native format, including all metadata. This preservation demand specifically encompasses any and all electronic documents, including but not limited to, all word-processed files, e-mails, spreadsheets, all databases, log files, and any other electronically stored and/or generated documents or files.

Sincerely,

 /s/

James M. Trusty
Ifrah Law, PLLC
1717 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20006

Exhibit 1

Another American woman just stood up to protect democracy from Trump

Analysis by [Stephen Collinson](#), CNN

Updated 10:58 AM ET, Wed June 29, 2022

(CNN) — A quintet of courageous American women are defending American democracy in its darkest hour, and effectively delivering a warning about the rage and tyranny that may await if [Donald Trump](#) gets back into the White House after 2024.

[A young ex-West Wing aide](#), [a Capitol Hill police officer](#), [two former Georgia election workers](#) and a [Republican scion](#) who chose truth over her party are writing their names in history as they star in the House select committee's probe into the January 6 insurrection and lay bare the ex-President's thuggery.

In [the latest show of bravery](#) that has emerged as a rare bright light in a 2020 election tale of violence, lies and deception, Cassidy Hutchinson, a 26-year-old former aide to White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, on Tuesday delivered [some of the most disturbing testimony yet](#) about Trump's unhinged behavior 17 months ago.

She said she had been told that [the ex-President had lunged](#) for his top Secret Service agent when the agent refused to have Trump driven to the Capitol riot scene, thought then-Vice President Mike Pence deserved to be hanged, said he knew his insurrectionists were armed but wanted them to march on Congress anyway and, in a separate incident in December 2020, left a White House wall dripping in ketchup after furiously flinging his lunch plate. (After the testimony, a Secret Service official familiar with the matter told CNN that Tony Ornato, then-White House deputy chief of staff, denies telling Hutchinson that the former President had grabbed the wheel or an agent on his detail.)



From left to right, Cassidy Hutchinson, Rep. Liz Cheney, Ruby Freeman, Wandrea "Shaye" Moss and Caroline Edwards.

Braving reprisals from Trump world -- amid new allegations that the ex-President's acolytes have intimidated witnesses -- Hutchinson's appearance contrasted with cronies who closed ranks to protect their old boss or Republicans who privately disdain him but stay quiet to save their political skins.

And her willingness to go before millions of worldwide viewers to tell the truth contrasted with Trump's cowardice in failing to admit that he lost a fair election.

Compelling testimony

Hutchinson joined a group of female witnesses who have delivered the bulk of the most compelling testimony in the committee's televised hearings, often at risk to their own safety and hopes of returning to normal life or careers.

They have debunked propaganda that January 6, 2021, was just a tourist day out, peeled the curtain back on Trump's conspiracy to steal the election, described the price of his victimization of those who stood in his way, and detailed the ravings of a President who lost his grip on reality on one of America's most painful days.

Capitol Hill Police Officer Caroline Edwards, who was knocked unconscious by Trump's rioters on January 6, described chilling scenes of hand-to-hand combat with Trump's gang and how she had slipped on the blood flowing underfoot.

Tuesday's snocking January 6 hearing

'This turned my life upside down': Former election worker testified in Jan 6 hearing 03:00

In one of [the most poignant moments](#) of the hearings so far, mother-and-daughter election workers Ruby Freeman and Wandrea "Shaye" Moss told how Trump's searing personal attacks and false claims that they were fixing vote counts in Georgia had ruined their lives and left them scared of going out. Moss said she had left her job as an election worker and most of the people she had worked with had done likewise.

Committee Vice Chair Liz Cheney, who had already sacrificed her fast climb to the top Republican leadership ranks in the House to expose Trump's lies and assault on American democracy, is expertly delivering a patriotic service that far outweighs any personal ambitions.

A number of men have also made powerful statements during the hearings -- including [Arizona House Speaker Rusty Bowers](#), a Republican who told of how he had chosen his oath to the Constitution over his preference that Trump win the election in rebuffing the ex-President's pressure to fix the vote. And Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger and top Georgia election official Gabriel Sterling reprised their already well-known and vital roles in stopping Trump's attempt to steal victory in the Peach State.

But many other witnesses, including members of Trump's legal and campaign teams and his family, long kept quiet about his assault on American democracy and unburdened themselves only under oath. Others, including Meadows and ex-White House counsel Pat Cipollone -- who, according to Hutchinson on Tuesday, had warned that staff could be charged with "every crime imaginable" if they let Trump go to Capitol Hill on January 6 -- are refusing to testify.

security adviser, Michael Flynn, was seen in taped testimony invoking his [Fifth Amendment rights](#) against self-incrimination when asked if he backed peaceful transfers of power.

If there was one moment that exemplifies the poisoned political priorities of those around Trump, it was Flynn's reply - forensically extracted by Cheney -- which followed a lengthy off-camera consultation with his attorney.

Related Article: January 6 committee rebukes the election lies some GOP candidates continue to run on

Democracy needs brave defenders

If American democracy is to survive one of its most serious challenges, it needs brave defenders. And again and again

the hearings are revealing profiles in courage that contrast with the craven behavior of those who still appease and boost Trump.

Tuesday's hearing, for instance, featured a January 6 television interview with House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy in which he condemned the riots. But only a few weeks later, the California Republican flew down to Trump's winter palace at Mar-a-Lago to rehabilitate his relationship with the former President and anchor the 2022 GOP election strategy to Trump's alternative reality of election fraud lies and revenge fantasies. McCarthy has since led the House Republican Conference's attempt to whitewash conduct by Trump, which is looking ever more seditious as he seeks the ex-President's blessing for his ambitions of becoming speaker.

McCarthy is far from the only Republican who finds it easier, or more politically profitable, to appease extremism than to confront it. His GOP House orbit is packed with members like Minority Whip Steve Scalise of Louisiana, Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio and Conference Chair Elise Stefanik of New York, who have misrepresented and slandered the work of the committee in an apparent quest to ride Trump's popularity with grassroots conservatives to power.

Unlike Hutchinson, they are not willing to taste Trump's wrath. The ex-President was quick to lambast the former White House aide, denying her claims and blasting her on his Truth Social platform as a phony and a leaker.

But Hutchinson had testified Tuesday that she faithfully worked to highlight what she saw as Trump's achievements in office but could finally take no more when he and Meadows were prepared to let democracy burn down around them.

She confessed that after watching the insurrection unfold from inside the West Wing, she had viewed Trump's attacks on Pence, who was presiding over the certification of President Joe Biden's election win, as "unpatriotic" and "un-American."

"We were watching the Capitol building get defaced over a lie," she said.

Cheney hailed Hutchinson.

"Our nation is preserved by those who abide by their oaths to our Constitution. Our nation is preserved by those who know the fundamental difference between right and wrong," the Wyoming Republican said.

"I want all Americans to know that what Miss Hutchinson has done today is not easy. The easy course is to hide from the spotlight, to refuse to come forward, to attempt to downplay or deny what happened."

Several of Hutchinson's former colleagues who have previously broken with Trump world told CNN they were concerned for her safety as Trump and his gang slime her.

Alyssa Farah Griffin, a former White House communications director for Trump who resigned in December 2020 as the then-President's plans to thwart the transition of power were gathering pace, contrasted Hutchinson's courage with the malfeasance of the pro-Trump Republicans.

"To the members of Congress who are afraid of the reelection, well, this woman is out there speaking at threat to her life. They should listen to that," said Farah Griffin, who's now a CNN political commentator.

Yet with Trump apparently pressing forward with his plans for a potential 2024 presidential campaign -- and with the incentive structure still in place for GOP candidates who want his blessing -- it is unlikely that Hutchinson's courage or that of her fellow witnesses will be the last stands required in the defense of US democracy.

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Exhibit 2

Trump's January 6 plot appears darker and more dangerous by the day

Analysis by [Stephen Collinson](#), CNN

Updated 8:55 AM ET, Tue March 29, 2022

(CNN) — [Former President Donald Trump's](#) attempt to steal the 2020 election is being revealed week-by-week to be deeper and broader than it initially appeared, sharpening the national dilemma of if and how he could ever be held to account.

Even as a federal judge commented Monday that Trump "[more likely than not](#)" sought to commit a crime to stay in office last year, the ex-President's attacks on democracy are intensifying. They were on display as recently as Saturday night in a lie-filled rally that underscored how his conspiracy to overturn the election -- whether it is criminal or not -- remains viscerally alive and able to damage future elections.

While much of the country has been transfixed by [Russia's brutal war in Ukraine](#), the House committee investigating the insurrection has been racing against the clock ticking down to its own likely demise if Republicans win back the House in November's midterms. It took another step on Monday toward holding two former Trump advisers to account by [advancing criminal contempt referrals](#).



Related Article: There's a lot of activity in the January 6 committee's investigation

On Tuesday, [The Washington Post](#) and [CBS News](#) reported that a gap of more than seven hours exists in the logs of phone calls placed to or from Trump on January 6 that were turned over to the House committee. CNN had [previously reported](#) that records were missing regarding the calls.

It's extraordinary that, more than 14 months on, new details of efforts by Trump and those around him to subvert [President Joe Biden's](#) victory are still emerging. It's also ironic that this threat to American democracy is being further exposed while Washington leads an international effort to save freedom in Ukraine, which is under much greater assault from Russian President Vladimir Putin, whom Trump still seems to hero worship.

Here at home, a flurry of new details in recent days about the ex-President's behavior justifies continued investigations into the worst attack on American democracy in decades. Those revelations also explain why pro-Trump Republicans were so keen to prevent the House select committee investigating January 6, 2021, from ever getting off the ground. And they inject a new political dimension into Trump's attempted comeback as he casts the 2022 midterm elections as a referendum on the lie that he won in 2020 and seeks to build a return to the White House on the same falsehoods that have drawn in millions of his supporters.

Trump 'more likely than not' attempted to obstruct Congress

In one development on Monday that alone encapsulated the stunning events of the last election still hanging over the country, a federal judge wrote that it was "more likely than not" that Trump "corruptly attempted to obstruct" Congress in its certification of Biden's election victory. [Judge David Carter's](#) comment came as he ruled that [emails from John Eastman](#), a conservative lawyer who helped craft Trump's false argument that the 2020 election was stolen, should be handed over to the committee.

Related Article: Judge: 'More likely than not' that Trump 'corruptly attempted' to block Congress from counting votes on January 6

committing a potential crime in office -- and one that put the entire US democratic system at risk. His comment re-focused attention on the debate within the House committee over whether to make what would be a historic criminal referral of Trump to the Justice Department. Such a move would present Attorney General Merrick Garland with the earthshaking decision of whether to prosecute an ex-President who is maneuvering with a \$100 million war chest in a potential bid to reclaim his job in 2024.

There could be few hotter political potatoes for an attorney general already facing political pressure to deal with Trump aides who are obstructing the committee.

Failing to pursue Trump in such circumstances would send a signal of impunity for presidents who seek to destroy American democratic institutions, even as Trump's supporters

who ransacked the US Capitol begin to be convicted and face prison terms for apparently acting on their political hero's wishes.

But moving against Trump would ensure that the dark history of the 2020 election continues to dominate American politics for years to come because it would offer the ex-President new material for his claims that he's persecuted by the political establishment. Tapping into that theme on Monday, Trump spokesman Taylor Budowich slammed Carter's ruling as "just another example of how the left is weaponizing every branch of government against President Trump."

But the panel hit back.

"The Court's opinion also includes a warning: that a failure to pursue accountability could set the stage for a repeat of January 6th," Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson, a Mississippi Democrat, and Vice Chair Liz Cheney, a Wyoming Republican, said in a statement on Monday.

"America must not allow what happened on that day to be minimized and cannot accept as normal these threats to our democracy," they said, clearly trying to emphasize the enduring relevance of the Capitol riot as the political clock races on.

Related Article: Donald Trump's legal problems aren't going away

Supreme Court dragged into the mire

Monday's developments rocked Washington as it was still coming to terms with the implications of [last week's revelations](#) that Virginia "Ginni" Thomas, wife of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, had aggressively tried to support Trump's attempts to cling to power in late 2020 and early 2021. There's no indication her husband was involved in attempts to subvert a legal election.

But the reputation of the Supreme Court relies on the assumption of impartiality and avoiding any appearance of ethical issues. This issue has now dragged the top bench directly into the aftermath of January 6, an outrage that is

Biden's Supreme Court pick, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, with [misleading claims she was soft on child pornography offenders](#), which could damage her reputation among some voters for years to come. Ironically, many of those same senators were among Trump's most fervent enablers and apologists when he tore at the rule of law in the White House.

Related Article: January 6 Committee will seek interview with Ginni Thomas, sources say

Multiple sources said Monday that the committee will [seek an interview with Ginni Thomas](#) over texts in its possession that show her pleading with then-White House chief of staff Mark Meadows to double down on efforts to block Biden's victory.

"We want to hear from everybody who has something to say," Rep. Jamie Raskin, a Maryland Democrat who serves on the committee, told CNN on Monday. "And she obviously

interacted frequently with the president's chief of staff and was actively involved with the effort to overturn the election. So, speaking as one member, I think it's important that we hear from her."

The Eastman angle

Carter delivered a fresh victory for the January 6 committee, which signaled on Monday it's moving ahead in its investigation.

In ordering the handover of 101 emails held by Eastman from around January 6, 2021, the judge revealed new details about the documents the House panel can receive -- including one that appears to be aiding Trump and Eastman's alleged conspiracy to obstruct Congress: a draft memo written for another Trump attorney, Rudy Giuliani, recommending that Vice President Mike Pence reject some states' electors during the January 6 congressional meeting.

Eastman was instrumental in crafting the plan for Pence to refuse to certify the election results in Congress based on false claims, disproven in court, that there had been massive fraud against Trump. Eastman "intends to comply with the court's order," his attorney Charles Burnham said.

But the Eastman angle is only one front on which the committee is pushing ahead. The ex-President's son-in-law and senior White House adviser, [Jared Kushner](#), is expected to voluntarily speak to the committee this week. And the committee voted Monday night to send to the full House a referral for criminal contempt regarding former Trump advisers Peter Navarro and Dan Scavino, both of whom rebuffed the panel.

Related Article: January 6 committee sends message to DOJ as it recommends criminal contempt charges for 2 more Trump advisers: Do your job

Assuming the full House supports the referral, it will again be up to Garland to decide whether to move toward prosecutions. While the Justice Department did open a case against former Trump political guru Steve Bannon, who goes to trial in the summer, it has yet to weigh in on a similar contempt case against Meadows, who may have a far stronger executive privilege ground for refusing to testify.

Garland's challenge shows that while the committee can make big symbolic moves, its capacity to force testimony may be limited ahead of its expected public hearings later this spring.

Rep. Zoe Lofgren of California warned: "This committee is doing its job. The Department of Justice needs to do theirs."

Rep. Elaine Luria of Virginia called on the department to act swiftly, and showed real frustration with Garland. "I will echo what my colleagues have already said, but more bluntly, Attorney General Garland, do your job -- so that we can do ours."

Such frustrations raise the question of the committee's broader impact. Millions of Americans who support the ex-President have already shown themselves willing to buy into denials of what happened on January 6, which have been advanced by Trump's GOP acolytes.

But even though the committee, which has interviewed hundreds of witnesses and appears to have a stark story to tell, cannot itself bring Trump to justice, it can influence public opinion with its final report and public hearings.

If it succeeds in capturing the attention of the American people, it will implicitly ask voters whether they have the stomach for more years of lies from an ex-President who clearly lost an election that he insists he won.

Katelyn Polantz, Annie Grayer, Whitney Wild and Zachary Cohen contributed to this report.

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Exhibit 3

Here's the terrible reality: Trump's election lie is on the

Analysis by [Chris Cillizza](#), CNN Editor-at-large

Updated 1:28 PM ET, Fri February 11, 2022



(CNN) — In the immediate aftermath of the January 6, 2021, riot at the US Capitol, CNN conducted a poll. Among the questions it asked was this one: "In general, how confident are you that elections in America today reflect the will of the people?"

At the time, 6 in 10 (59%) of people said they were either "very" or "somewhat" confident that elections reflect the will of the people.

[CNN's brand new national poll](#) asked that question again -- and got a VERY different result. Now, just 44% of Americans express confidence in the idea of free and fair elections, while 56% say they have little or no confidence in our elections.

That's a stunning reversal in the course of 13 months. And it proves that -- as unfortunate as this may be -- Donald Trump's election lie is working.

By now, you know about Trump's big lie. It's that the 2020 election was somehow fraudulent, that Trump actually beat Joe Biden, but that through widespread voter fraud the result didn't reflect the will of the people. That message has been a constant drumbeat for the former President since he left office.

"The ballot harvesting scam will go down as the biggest political scandal in history," [Trump said in a statement from his Save America PAC](#) earlier this week. "It is totally determinative, and the Democrats are doing everything they can to stop the news from coming out. Republicans must be strong and unified in order to save our Country." (Again, there is NO evidence of widespread voter fraud in any state or nationally.)



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As you might expect, the Trump base is most skeptical that American elections are an accurate reflection of who people want to win. Just 1 in 4 (26%) of self-identified Republicans say they have faith in US elections. That's similar to the 29% of White Americans without college degrees and the 25% of conservatives who say the same.

Among Republicans who say they think Biden's win was not legitimate, just 13% have confidence in US elections compared with 60% among those Republicans who say Biden did win legitimately.

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In a broad sense, none of that is new. Trump's lies about the election have long gained purchase within the base of the Republican Party.

What *is* new -- and should scare every single one of us -- is that groups who are not ardently pro-Trump have begun to doubt American elections too. Among Democrats, just 68% express confidence in elections. That number is just 41% among political independents. White Americans with college degrees? Just less than half (47%) say they have no or just a little faith in our elections. Four in ten (43%) of Black Americans say the same.

One element of rising Democratic angst could well be their worry that Republicans -- if empowered in the states -- will succeed in overturning future elections. Another could be concerns around the restrictive voting laws Republicans, often inspired by Trump, have pushed at the state level over the past year.

What this means for the future of our elections is, well, nothing good.

Numbers like this suggest that not only are Republicans unlikely to believe the results if their side loses in 2022 (and 2024), but a large chunk of independents and even a not-insignificant number of Democrats may feel the same way.

This is the insidiousness of Trump's big lie. It's like an earworm -- you may hate the song but you just keep finding yourself humming it in the shower. Trump has created a constant low-level buzz within the American electorate that something is wrong with the way we conduct elections. That he has no proof doesn't seem to matter; by sheer repetition, his false claims are wheedling their way into the consciousness of the public.



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Exhibit 4

Trump's growing recklessness is a ticking time bomb

Opinion by Michael D'Antonio

🕒 Updated 1:24 PM ET, Sun February 6, 2022



Opinion

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January 6 panel member: Trump 'absolutely' tampering with witnesses 00:50

Editor's Note: Michael D'Antonio is the author of the book *"Never Enough: Donald Trump and the Pursuit of Success"* and co-author, with Peter Eisner, of the book *"High Crimes: The Corruption, Impunity, and Impeachment of Donald Trump."* The opinions expressed in this commentary are his own. [View more opinion on CNN.](#)

(CNN) — Rep. Pete Aguilar of California, a Democrat who is a member of the House select committee investigating the January 6 attack, accused former President Donald Trump of [tampering with witnesses](#) by floating the possibility of pardoning those who took part in the insurrection.

Trump, who spoke of the potential pardons during a rally in Texas on Saturday, sank to new lows by [dangling the promise of impunity and calling for massive protests](#) if prosecutors investigating him and his business "do anything wrong or illegal."

It's clear that Trump is trying to rile up his followers while threatening to unleash them on anyone who stands in his way. His comments also reinforce his false narrative that those who took part in the January 6 attack were patriots who acted righteously to defend American democracy, rather than insurrectionists who sought to destroy it.

The House select committee, which is moving swiftly to obtain documents and testimony from members of Trump's inner circle, [could also be looking into possible witness tampering elsewhere](#). Last month, the House committee chairman Rep.

Bennie Thompson [issued a letter](#) to House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy requesting more information about his communications with Trump, noting the representative's changing comments on January 6 over time. (McCarthy said he would not cooperate with the request.)

While Trump may be lashing out in response to mounting pressure from the House select committee and the criminal



Opinion

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Related Article: When it comes to Rudy Giuliani and other Trump allies, the Jan. 6 committee needs to back up its words with action

ties his fate with many of theirs. If the arrests of [more than 700 people](#) who took part in January 6 led any of his supporters to think twice about following his lead, Trump's statements about issuing pardons was an assurance not to worry -- if they vote him into office once again in 2024. Indeed, Trump's rhetoric in Texas was [met with approval from his supporters](#), who cheered him on as he pledged to "take back the White House."

But his recent comments are a new low -- even for him. Trump saw how his previous call to action led to violence and death at the Capitol. On January 7, 2021, Trump had the sense to condemn [the "violence, lawlessness and mayhem."](#) Now, in calling for more mass protests, Trump is showing that he knows what could happen -- and doesn't care.

Upping the ante has always been Trump's method. With Trump indicating that he will run for president again in two years, there's no question our democracy is under threat.

"All of this is in keeping with authoritarian tradition," [noted Ruth Ben-Ghiat](#), a professor at New York University and an expert on authoritarian leaders. In The New York Times, Jeffrey Engel, the director of the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University, [echoed the alarm](#). "I actually think the American public is dramatically underplaying how significant and dangerous this is, because we cannot process the basic truth of what we are learning about President Trump's efforts -- which is we've never had a president before who fundamentally placed his own personal interests above the nation's."

Related Article: Trump's rally in Texas shows exactly why he's so dangerous

The basic truths include the discovery that Trump played an active role in discussions about [seizing voting machines](#) in key swing states, the New York Times reported. It is also clear that Trump pressured former Vice President Mike Pence to stop the certification of Joe Biden's election victory on January 6, 2021.

Now, Trump is building on the big lie that there was widespread voter fraud in the 2020 elections and saying "our country and our elections are corrupt" -- words no previous president, or former president, has likely ever uttered. It seems Trump's lust for power has no bounds -- and despite his failure to overturn the 2020 election results, he seems hellbent on damaging the foundations of our country in order to avoid accountability and seize power once again.

By calling for mass protests , Trump is giving his followers a directive in an attempt to intimidate authorities. This display of recklessness may also serve to intimidate potential Republican opponents. The enthusiasm of his base, not to mention the havoc they can unleash, is likely to give pause to those like Pence, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley who might have presidential aspirations of their own.



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Related Video: Republican voters react after Pence's Trump comments 02:56

or political strife, two impeachments and a bloody attack at the Capitol. Since these consequences weren't enough to stop Trump, we might conclude that legal prosecution is necessary. How he and his followers may respond is awful to contemplate.

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Exhibit 5

This former Republican senator has a ridiculous reason for believing the Big Lie

Analysis by [Chris Cillizza](#), CNN Editor-at-large

Updated 11:46 AM ET, Wed February 2, 2022



(CNN) — When Dean Heller served in the Senate, he was known, primarily, as a pragmatic moderate -- a fitting political profile for someone representing a swing state like Nevada.

Now, however, Heller is running for governor -- and he has decided to bow at the altar of Donald Trump.

On Tuesday, [Heller told a reporter for the Las Vegas Review Journal](#) that "he thinks Joe Biden is an illegitimate president." The Nevada independent followed up on that pronouncement; "Dean said that 71% of Republicans in Nevada believe Biden is an illegitimate President and that he is part of that 71%," [explained a spokesman for the campaign](#).

So, Heller, who wants to be the chief executive of one of our 50 states, believes that Joe Biden didn't win because, um, a lot of other [Republicans in the state think that?](#) (A spokesman later told the Review Journal that "he meant to say most Republicans in the state think Biden is an illegitimate president.")

I did some digging on the Interwebs and -- surprise surprise! -- couldn't find the poll that Heller's campaign referenced in which 7 in 10 Republicans say Biden didn't beat Donald Trump fair and square in 2020.

When I asked the campaign, they offered some conspiracy theories about the 2020 election but didn't produce the so-called poll.



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In each episode of his weekly YouTube show, Chris Cillizza will delve a little deeper into the surreal world of politics. [Click to subscribe!](#)

Last April, following a review of a complaint by the Nevada Republican Party, [Republican Secretary of State Barbara Cegavske announced](#) that "our investigation revealed that these allegations and others are based largely upon an incomplete assessment of voter registration records and lack of information concerning the processes by which these records are compiled and maintained." She added that the claims made by the state party "do not amount to evidentiary support for the contention that the 2020 general election was plagued by widespread voter fraud."

Why, then, is Heller repeating the Big Lie? Simple -- he is hoping for a Trump endorsement and knows that the only way that will happen is to parrot the former president's false claim that the 2020 election was plagued by fraud.

Heller has a lot of ground to make up with the Trumpian base of the party, as evidenced by the fact that [he was booed](#) at a recent Republican debate as he tried to position himself as the candidate closest to Trump in the crowded Republican primary.

The boos are likely a reflection of the rocky relationship the two men had when Heller was in the Senate. "What happened with Dean Heller is I tried for him, but my base did not believe him," Trump told The Nevada Independent in 2019. "They wouldn't go for him because Dean Heller was really hostile in my race." (In the wake of the release of the "[Access Hollywood](#)" tape in October 2016, Heller had said he was "[99 percent certain](#)" that he won't vote for Trump.)

Heller, then, knows he starts in a not-great place with Trump (and the party base). And that the only way to give himself a chance at a Trump endorsements is to insist -- contra facts -- that the election was somehow stolen from Trump. His campaign, however, should probably find a better explanation for Heller's position than citing polls.

It's not at all clear whether Heller can convince Trump that he has been transformed from a doubter to a true believer. What *is* clear is that Heller has flip-flopped mightily on Trump -- and done so for utterly transparent political reasons.

This story has been updated with additional comment from the Heller campaign.

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Exhibit 6

The 2020 election wasn't stolen. But Douglas Frank and his bogus equation claiming otherwise are still winning over audiences.

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Austin (CNN) — Douglas Frank, an Ohio math teacher, affixed his Texas flag print bow tie, led a booming rendition of the National Anthem and then walked a crowd through an absurd mathematical equation that he claimed proves [the 2020 election](#) was stolen.

"Just about every county in the country was hacked," Frank told the dozens of Texans huddled in a ballroom at a local country club on Sunday. When he finished speaking more than 90 minutes later, they gave him a standing ovation.

This is how [the big lie](#) that the 2020 election was stolen grows even bigger. More than a year later, there is no evidence of widespread fraud in the 2020 election. But Frank is still winning audiences with lawmakers, election officials and voters across the country.

Currently on leave from his teaching position, Frank has traveled to Texas and dozens of other states, claiming he uncovered an algorithm proving the 2020 election was stolen nationwide, even as his conclusions have been debunked by mathematicians and election experts.

"At the core of how our democracy works is that we have to trust election results," said Justin Grimmer, a political science professor at Stanford University. "Luckily, the theory is so crazy that I think only the people who really want to believe or really, really want to see some conspiracy in the world would be persuaded. But nevertheless, I think there's a real danger there."

Frank is just one in an army of conspiracy theorists, inspired by former President Donald Trump's election lies, who are dedicated to trying to convince others the 2020 election was corrupt. As of December, it was a belief shared by a third of Americans, who said Joe Biden was an illegitimate president, according to an [ABC News/Ipsos](#) poll.

In an interview with CNN, he stood by his flawed conclusions, remaining adamant in his belief that the elections are rigged -- regardless of the many experts who have disproven his claims.

"I know the elections are not real. I know the elections are being manipulated," Frank said in an interview with CNN. "Regardless of who wins. I just want 'em to be fair."

Conspiracy-minded 'super moms'

Across the country, Frank has connected with women he has dubbed "super moms." They are women who have embraced unfounded election conspiracy theories and are engaged in efforts to expose the nonexistent widespread fraud.

In New Hampshire, one of the women has pushed for a so-called forensic audit of her state's 2020 election results and has promoted efforts to ban voting machines and move to hand-count-only elections.

In Colorado, women have organized door-knocking campaigns to try to uncover phantom voters.

And in Pennsylvania, women have launched voter canvasses, pressured state GOP lawmakers to launch a 2020 election review and are now pushing to get rid of electronic voting machines across the state.

What elevates Frank above the everyday conspiracy theorist are his financial backing and his intensive travel schedule.

Critically, he has the backing of Mike Lindell. The My Pillow CEO is a deep-pocketed purveyor of election disinformation and [told CNBC](#) he has already spent \$25 million on his efforts to push election fraud claims.



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support his efforts. Still, Frank insisted he wasn't motivated by money or his newfound stardom among election deniers.

"My goal is to be able to pay my bills, and it's working," Frank said. "I've been able to do this a year now and my bank balance isn't getting smaller."

Debunking Frank's fraud claims

Before Frank arrives at a speaking gig, he creates an elaborate slideshow complete with county-by-county graphs. An animated public speaker, he offers a bit of his bio, flips through the graphs and describes how a "sixth order polynomial" equation demonstrates that the election was stolen.

"I was the perfect person in this world to discover this," Frank told state lawmakers at a stop in Colorado. "I have exactly the right skills. I love swimming in big data."

The equation may be better suited to math wonks, but Frank takes liberties in his presentation with snappy lines that succinctly -- and inaccurately -- describe his findings.

"America was stolen by an Excel spreadsheet," he told the crowd at a North Carolina event.

In Idaho, he explained his theory on phantom voters: "They are inflating our registration rolls, stuffing phantom ballots and then cleaning it up afterwards. It's that simple."

He has even absurdly claimed his discoveries could land Trump back in the Oval Office.

"I'd like the country to stand up and say, 'Wow, this thing was ripped off. Let's do a do-over or let's put Trump back in office,' " Frank said in an August interview on the Truth & Liberty livecast.

Grimmer, the Stanford University professor, said Frank has a way of wooing crowds with his professorial demeanor but that ultimately his conclusions are meaningless.

"I think this took my research group an afternoon. You uncover that there's no basis for this," said Grimmer, who looked at data for 42 states and found that Frank's assessments do not provide any evidence of voter fraud. "But if you're not someone who, like me, spends all day working on statistics and data, six order polynomials and nearly perfect correlations --- it sounds like he's uncovered something really impressive."

Frank uses the number of registered voters by age group and prior voter trends to predict voter turnout, then claims it is evidence of fraud when it aligns with actual voter turnout. Put another way: Frank's analysis finds that age groups with more people have more people who vote, which Frank then interprets as fraud, Grimmer said.

"Effectively, what he's doing is he's discovered that anything that you go out and measure in the world is closely related to itself," Grimmer said.

Aside from Frank's flawed interpretation of the math, there are extensive election security protocols in place that would prevent the kind of widespread hacking and phantom vote-stuffing that Frank has described.

"If you even change a period, a period in the election programming, it sends up a red flag that immediately stops the entire process until we can identify what would have triggered that red flag," said Isabel Longoria, the elections administrator for Harris County -- the most populous county in Texas and home to some 2.5 million voters.

In Harris County alone, election officials inspect thousands of voting machines -- repeatedly -- in the months leading up to elections.

"Six months out, we start checking all 13,000 pieces of voting equipment in Harris County, opening them up, do



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Election officials run accuracy tests on the machines under the watchful eyes of bipartisan observers. On Election Day, officials track the number of people showing up to vote and the number of ballots cast -- one of the many safeguards that would catch an election inflated by phantom voters, according to Longoria.

Longoria said she is required by law to update the voter rolls daily, and she noted that it would be effectively impossible for even a coordinated group to break in and inflate the voters rolls in each individual county.

"Breaking into multiple buildings, multiple systems in tandem, with not a single red flag going off in this incredibly sensitive system, all in unison, right? As you have all eyes on elections from every election staff," Longoria said.

Longoria revealed little frustration as she ran through the extensive checks and balances in the election system and debunked a wide range of conspiracy theories.

"I love answering these questions, and I love geeking out and getting all the details," she said. "My job is to make sure that you can feel, as a voter, good and secure about our system."

Spreading the big lie nationwide

When Lindell and Frank met with Alabama Secretary of State John Merrill on two occasions last year, Merrill said, it also didn't take much effort for him to discredit their wild election claims.

"Every time they gave us an example, we were able to refute what they showed us without even knowing what they were going to do when they arrived," said Merrill, who's a Republican.

Addresses they claimed were stocked with phantom voters turned out to be facilities like apartment complexes or assisted living facilities, where multiple people resided and were registered to vote.

"The information that they had been sharing with us could have been cleared up by doing a simple Google search of addresses," Merrill said.

Frank acknowledged that the Alabama presentation had been a "complete botch" and blamed it on a newly hired staffer working on his team.

To others, Frank's presentation is fuel for their baseless suspicions that President Joe Biden wasn't fairly elected.

"Some people say we know that other states are wrong, but we think Kentucky must be right," Kentucky state Sen. Adrienne Southworth said. "And I say, well, how do you know? And they have no idea. They just assume, and so I said, well, that's kind of the problem."

Southworth held an event featuring Frank and, after seeing his work, said she had come away more convinced that 2020 was problem-plagued.

"I think the whole world is on the edge right now of -- are we going to continue trusting the system?" Southworth said.

Kentucky was just one of the stops on Frank's nationwide tour.

In Missouri, a "voter fraud is real bootcamp" featured Frank and a state representative, with a flyer calling on county clerks to attend.

In Colorado, Frank met with Tina Peters, the Mesa County clerk now under investigation by the FBI and others for her alleged involvement in a security breach of the county's election system last year. Peters [has defended](#) her actions, claiming she conducted a backup of the voting system to preserve records.



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"We're going into each state -- clandestinely -- and I meet privately with legislators and secretaries of states and attorney generals," Frank said at an event in Dallas last year.

This week, in his return to Texas, Frank appeared with a handful of candidates running for everything from county offices to Congress. He urged the crowd not to buy into the idea that Texas is becoming a battleground state, insisting "they" -- Frank never identified who -- were stocking the state voter rolls.

"They're getting ready to switch you purple," Frank said. "Don't believe it. You're red."

After his pitch to Lone Star State voters, he sat down for his interview with CNN and defended his efforts to undermine confidence in America's elections.

"It'll be a constitutional crisis. It will be a crisis. It's going to happen. It's inevitable. It's going to happen. And I'm helping that happen. Yes," Frank said.

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Exhibit 7

Trump's rhetoric about election fraud already cost Georgia Republicans. But they're still tethered to him in 2022.

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Updated 9:08 PM ET, Thu January 27, 2022

Despite 2020 losses, Georgia GOP is all-in on Trump in 2022 07:40

Marietta, Georgia (CNN) — The Cobb County Republican Party headquarters is bustling on a weekday evening as the party gears up for a primary election that Chairwoman Salleigh Grubbs isn't entirely sure she can trust.

"Do I trust the process? It's a hard question. I trust the election process. Do I think that there are improvements that still need to be made? Yes, I do," Grubbs said in an interview with CNN.

Grubbs is one of the many GOP officials in Georgia still questioning the results of the 2020 election -- and dragging those doubts into 2022 -- even though there was no evidence of widespread fraud.

Republicans here are still reeling from a historic political smackdown. Fourteen months ago, Democrats [flipped the state blue](#) in a presidential race for the first time in nearly 30 years. It was a loss that sent then-President Donald Trump on a crusade to try to overturn the election results and undermine voter confidence, as he spread lie after lie that the election was stolen. It came with a cost. A year ago, Republicans [lost the state's two US Senate](#) seats in runoff elections.

The double-barreled losses might have come along with a reckoning for Republicans -- an acknowledgment that lying about the 2020 election being stolen diminished turnout and discouraged Republicans.

Instead, much of the party remains tightly bound to Trump, and his vendetta against the 2020 election. GOP state lawmakers used unfounded concerns about 2020 to pass a restrictive voting bill last year. This year, they have proposed measures to further chip away at voting access. The Republican-led legislature has also paved the way for local Republicans to exert more power over county election boards.

Salleigh Grubbs is the chairwoman of the Cobb County Republican Party.

Trump, meanwhile, is still working to build a party in his image. He recruited former Sen. David Perdue to embrace the 2020 election lies and challenge Gov. Brian Kemp in the Republican primary. And Trump has thrown his support behind Republican Rep. Jody Hice to take on [Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger](#) in the primary. Both Kemp and Raffensperger stood up to Trump's attempts to overthrow the 2020 election, while Hice and Perdue have crafted campaigns largely around fears about widespread election fraud that didn't exist.

There are some party leaders who don't see it as a winning strategy.

"I think it's a mistake to rehash the 2020 election again," said former GOP Sen. Saxby Chambliss, who represented Georgia for 20 years in the US House and Senate. "It's over. It's done. We lost," he told CNN in an interview this week.

Defending January 6 'Patriots'

Grubbs' doubts about the 2020 election were among the reasons she sought to lead the county party.

"I think that there's a big question mark there," Grubbs said about the 2020 results -- even though ballots were counted three times, each time showing Biden won the state. "There were many things that were not done properly, whether it was with a with a mal intent or whether it was through error."

Deeply held doubts about a fairly decided election fueled an insurrection on January 6, 2021. And while Grubbs condemned the violence that day, she and others at the Cobb

GOP planned a vigil this year on the one-year anniversary of the riot for the "Patriots" imprisoned in Washington, DC, according to [a copy of the invitation obtained by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#).

"It wasn't to glorify what happened on January the sixth," Grubbs said. "I want every single person who had a bad



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who were being held to be treated justly."

Related Article: A year after the insurrection, Republicans around the country still promote Trump's election lies

Grubbs [canceled the vigil](#) after a public backlash.

"The only thing that I could possibly change is the messaging because my heart is still in the right place," Grubbs said.

These days, Grubbs has poured her energy into preparing for 2022. Her county party has launched what she calls an "election perfection task force" and is aiming to recruit 500 to 600 poll watchers. Grubbs has encouraged those with concerns about 2020 to play a more active role in the midterms by helping to turn out voters or volunteering as poll watchers.

But after the Cobb County Republican Party censured Kemp last year, the former county party chairman, Jason Shepherd, said he isn't sure Grubbs can unify Republicans if a candidate Trump didn't endorse wins in the primary.

Former Sen. David Perdue, right, is challenging Gov. Brian Kemp in a GOP primary.

The censure "sends a message that we want to follow whoever Donald Trump tells us we need to follow. To me, that's the most disturbing part," Shepherd said, noting that the Republican Party stands for more than one man. He resigned from the party's leadership committee in protest after the censure resolution.

"By censuring Brian Kemp, the Cobb GOP has basically made it very hard to be able to go with a straight face and say, 'Oh, we now support Brian Kemp 110% because he is our nominee,'" Shepherd said.

Grubbs isn't allowed to pick sides in a primary but remains clearly dubious of the Republicans like Kemp and Raffensperger who oversaw the last presidential election. She acknowledged Republicans will have to find a way to unite if they hope to win in November.

2022 primary challengers focus on 2020

As Perdue took the stage at Georgia's Faith & Freedom Coalition event this week, he acknowledged the schism in the Republican Party and promised to back Kemp if the sitting governor wins the GOP primary. Then he took up Trump's favorite talking points.

"I want our elections to be secure," Perdue said at the event, piling on to his previous -- false -- claims that Kemp failed to oversee a secure election in 2020, ensuring Democrats won the presidential contest and the two Senate seats. "I'm embarrassed by what just happened here."

Perdue previously told [Axios](#) he would not have certified Georgia's election results in 2020 because he believed the election required further investigation.

Rather than nurse his wounds over the 2020 election quietly, Trump has remained livid with Republicans who refused to go along with his plans to upend the 2020 election results. He held a rally in Georgia last year to endorse his GOP primary picks and disparage Kemp and Raffensperger, who refused to take part in Trump's plot to upend the election results.

Hice, who joined Trump at the rally last year, has made 2020 the centerpiece of his campaign events and called on voters to "give Brad the boot" at a recent campaign stop.

"I, for one, do not believe that Brad Raffensperger has protected our election integrity in this state," Hice said at the campaign event. "He has absolutely trampled upon the sacredness of our votes."

The congressman has also pushed back against efforts to pass a federal voting rights bill by absurdly trying to co-opt the legacy of a civil rights icon.

"I'm convinced, quite frankly, that if Martin Luther King were alive today, he would be on the side of the Republicans on this issue -- voter integrity matters," Hice said in January appearance on Newsmax.

Chambliss: 'Let's move on'

For Chambliss, there's little to gain and a lot to lose by staying stuck in 2020.

"If I were on the ballot in 2022, I would not relitigate 2020 election issues," Chambliss said. "The Republican Party still stands for the basic principles of smaller government, more freedoms for individuals and lower taxes. That's what they ought to be talking about."

Chambliss followed the 2020 election closely and heard the complaints that something was amiss. But "when you looked at the facts on the ground, then there was just no facts to substantiate it," he said.

He warned Republicans, in an NPR interview more than a year ago, that Trump's attacks on the 2020 election could backfire and depress turnout in the runoffs.

"They had a lot of encouragement from the Trump camp to not come out and vote in the runoff," Chambliss told CNN. "And we can't have that in November 2022."

Former Sen. Saxby Chambliss doesn't want his party stuck in 2020.

This year, Democrats are facing national headwinds ahead of the midterms, including Biden's low approval rating, economic anxieties and pandemic fatigue. All of that should amount to a winning argument for Republicans, particularly on economic issues, as far as Chambliss is concerned.

He said he empathizes with voters who have been convinced by the lies about the 2020 election, but "realistically, it's done. And it's over," Chambliss said.

He's hopeful Republicans can let go of their grievances about the last election and efforts to challenge and undermine election results won't become the norm.

"Everybody ought to be able to vote, and their vote ought to be counted if they are a valid voter," Chambliss said. "On election night, we want to figure out who won and who lost and let's move on."

GOP exerts more control over election administration

At The Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda, executive director and voting rights advocate Helen Butler has her own concerns about 2022, mainly that Republicans are exerting more control over elections and making it tougher for people to vote.

Butler, who previously served on the Morgan County Board of Elections, was among [the Black Democrats booted](#) from election boards across the state. The Republican-led state legislature paved the way for six counties to overhaul their election boards, giving local Republicans more power to name nearly all of the board members. Previously, counties divvied up election board appointments by political party.

"If you're unhappy with the outcome of an election, this is a way that you can have total control of a process," Butler said. "One particular party gets to control it all. And they think that's fair. I don't think it's fair."

The shift in local election administration came as Republicans in the state also passed a restrictive voting law in 2021 that imposes new voter identification requirements for absentee ballots, limits the use and number of ballot drop boxes,

water. A new proposal this legislative session aims to eliminate ballot drop boxes altogether.

Butler said her organization will work to ensure voters are aware of the changes.

"We're going to tell them if you need to bring water if you need to bring snacks, do it. Come prepared," Butler said. "We're going to make sure everyone gets to exercise their right to vote."

Related Article: 2020 sore losers look to run the 2024 vote

But even she is eyeing the midterm elections with some skepticism.

"They are trying to make life more difficult for the election officials and the voters," Butler said. "In terms of midterm elections outcome, we will be watching."

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State of the Union

Interview With Rep. James Clyburn (D-SC); Interview With Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA); Interview With Rep. Michael McCaul (R-TX); Interview With U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy. Aired 9-10a ET

Aired January 16, 2022 - 09:00 ET

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[09:00:25]

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

JAKE TAPPER, CNN HOST (voice-over): Make or break? Democrats' election reform appears dead, despite amped-up pressure from president bide opinion

JOE BIDEN, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: Do you want to be on the side of Dr. King or George Wallace?

TAPPER: Do Democrats have a plan B to save the Biden agenda? I will speak to House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn and Republican Senator Bill Cassidy next.

And negative testing. The Biden administration announces a new testing plan that may not get people tests until after Omicron peaks.

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TAPPER: Is this too little, too late? The U.S. surgeon general, Dr. Vivek Murthy, joins me ahead.

Plus: drumbeat of war? Diplomatic efforts falter, as Russia seems increasingly likely to invade Ukraine. Are the U.S. and Russia entering a new Cold War. I will speak to the top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Congressman Michael McCaul, on that and the successful rescue of four hostages from a synagogue overnight in Texas.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

TAPPER: Hello. I'm Jake Tapper in Washington, where the state of our union is grateful.

Four hostages are free this morning after a nearly 11-hour standoff at the Congregation Beth Israel synagogue in Colleyville, Texas. The lone suspect is now dead.

In a statement, President Biden thanked law enforcement and decried anti-Semitism and the rise of extremism in America.

And, as the nation marks the birth this weekend of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., someone who fought to end hate and expand civil rights, the president and Democrats are facing the difficult reality that their hopes to pass sweeping election reform bills are all but dead.

Tuesday, the Senate will take up their legislation, but it is expected to fail without the support of any Republicans and the refusal by two Democratic senators to change the rules of the Senate to pass the bill with just 51 votes, as opposed to 60.

It will be a devastating blow for President Biden's agenda and also his political capital, after President Biden put the weight of his office and his reputation as a unifier behind the rules change, delivering a withering speech in Atlanta aimed at opponents of election reform and the filibuster change and going to Capitol Hill Thursday to rally his party and still failing to convince Senators Kyrsten Sinema and Joe Manchin, as well as perhaps other Democratic senators, to change the filibuster rules.

Joining me now, someone who has been fighting for election reform and voting rights his entire career, the House

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Majority Whip Clyburn, thanks so much for joining us.

Before we dive into the issues, tomorrow is Martin Luther King Jr. Day. What are you thinking about this weekend as one of the last prominent civil rights heroes from that era?

REP. JAMES CLYBURN (D-SC): Well, thank you very much for having me, Jake.

I spent a lot of time on yesterday, the actual birthday, reflecting on King's letter from the Birmingham city jail. That letter, I reread the letter every year. And I always get something out of it that I didn't see there before.

And I focused yesterday on his whole question of why we can't wait silent, all these questions that King left with us. He said to us in that letter something that is very, very, I would call it consequential today.

And that is this. Silence is consent. We have too much silence in the face of what's going on around us today. I remember corporations stepping up when Georgia was passing those draconian voter laws down there. All of a sudden now, they have gone silent.

And King told us in that letter that we are going to be made to repent, not just for the vitriolic words and deeds of bad people, but for the appalling silence of good people.

That's what I was thinking about all yesterday.

TAPPER: That's interesting, because Hillary Clinton tweeted a famous quote from that letter from the Birmingham jail.

And it was about the white moderate. Hillary Clinton tweeted: "Martin Luther King Jr. said -- quote -- 'I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exists for the purposes of establishing justice, and that, when they fail in this purpose, they become the dangerously structured dams that blow the flow of social progress'" -- unquote.

[09:05:04]

Then Hillary Clinton added -- quote -- "This is a subtweet."

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Senators Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema.

As you know, much of that letter is about how allies of the civil rights movement could be more problematic than enemies of the civil rights movement, the white moderate.

Do you agree with that comparison? And is that what's happening today in the U.S. Senate?

CLYBURN: I do believe -- agree with that. Today is Sunday.

And, remember, King was sitting in jail. He received a letter from eight white clergymen, who wrote him about their concern. They asked him to leave Birmingham. And they said that they thought his cause was right, but his timing was wrong.

And King said to them, time is neutral. Time can either be used destructively or constructively. And that's when he said that he was coming to the conclusion that the people of ill will in our society were making a much better use of time than the people of good will.

And so I would say that to my friends in the Senate now. People of ill will demonstrated on January 6 how effective they can use their time. Are we going to step up, the people of good will, and use our time more effectively?

That letter -- I always say, Jake, that, aside from the Bible, I do believe that that letter may be the most timeless document I have ever read.

TAPPER: So, President Biden went to Georgia this week to push for Sinema and Manchin and others to get rid of the filibuster in order to pass these two election reform bills.

And the president asked this question -- quote -- "Do you want to be on the side of Abraham Lincoln or Jefferson Davis?"

What do you say to Democrats who say that that went too far, to compare somebody who opposes changing the filibuster with a traitor who fought a war for slavery?

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Is it going too far to criminalize giving somebody a bottle of water standing in line trying to vote, standing in line for four or five hours? Is that going too far? Is it going too far to put in place mechanisms to nullify a vote when people have cast their votes? If you don't like the outcome, then you have got the power to nullify that? Is that going too far?

Everything we have seen coming out of Georgia violates the Constitution of the United States of America. And Alexander Hamilton told us in Federalist Papers Number 59 that, that we cannot leave federal elections and their results up to states. You will have 50 applications of what the law is.

So that is what's going too far. And so if anybody's going to focus on the speech and pay no attention to the actions, that violates biblical principles. It's their deeds that really matter, not the words.

And for us to focus on the president's words and not pay any attention to the deeds of those legislators in Texas, in Georgia, and 17 other states that passed 35, 34 laws that are draconian when it comes to voting, that's where our attention ought to be.

TAPPER: Now, Democrats Senators Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema both support the two election reform legislation bills. They just say they oppose sidestepping the filibuster.

I want you to take a listen to what Senator Sinema said during her floor speech this week.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

SEN. KYRSTEN SINEMA (D-AZ): Eliminating the 60-vote threshold will simply guarantee that we lose a critical tool that we need to safeguard our democracy from threats in the years to come.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

TAPPER: Her basic argument is that Republicans are going to take over the chamber at some point, and Democrats are going to need that filibuster.

Just last night, Donald Trump called for Republicans to pass stricter laws when it came to the election, voter I.D. restrictions, to ban drop boxes, stop no-excuse absentee voting.

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imposing even harsher voting restrictions?

CLYBURN: Look, no, she is not right about that.

We just got around the filibuster to raise the debt limit. Why? Because we don't want to put the full faith and credit of the United States at risk.

[09:10:00]

No one has asked her to eliminate the filibuster. The filibuster is there for all of these issues that may be policy issues.

But when it comes to the Constitution of the United States of America, no one person sitting downtown in a spa ought to be able to pick up the telephone and say you are going to put a hold on my ability to vote. And that's what is going on here.

So, I would wish they would stop that foolishness, because, if we do not protect the vote with everything that we have got, we will not have a country to protect going forward.

I don't know where we got the notion from that this democracy is here to stay no matter how we conduct ourselves. Our job when we took the oath, when we took the oath of office to protect this country from all enemies, foreign and domestic.

There are some domestic enemies that showed up January 6. And they didn't stop there. They're still going on. And you hear it when the president tweets out or whatever he said about getting rid of people's convenient voting places, saying to paraplegics that you -- we can't make it convenient for you to vote, saying to a 90-year-old you got to stand in line four and five hours to vote, and if anybody gives you a glass of water, they will be put in jail.

That's Third World stuff. And we had better be careful.

TAPPER: Democratic Congressman Ruben Gallego of Arizona is not ruling out a primary challenge against Senator Sinema in 2024.

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CLYBURN: Well, I'm not -- I'm going to stay out of that.

I know Ruben. I like Ruben. We work together very closely on these kinds of issues in the House. And I have really been supporting his reelection. I -- he hasn't said to me that he is going to run for the United States Senate.

I have been supporting him for reelection to the House of Representatives, but we will see what happens. He's a good guy.

TAPPER: Quickly, before we go, sir, is -- are the election reform bills dead, do you think?

CLYBURN: No, I don't.

They may be on life support, but, you know, John Lewis and others did not give up after the '64 Civil Rights Act. That's why he got the '65 Voting Rights Act.

So, I want to tell everybody, we're not giving up. We're going to fight. And we plan to win, because the people of good will are going to break their silence and help us win this battle.

TAPPER: Majority Whip Jim Clyburn, I hope you have a peaceful and meaningful Martin Luther King Day tomorrow.

Thank you so much for joining us.

CLYBURN: Thank you very much for having me.

TAPPER: President Biden's words this week outraged a lot of Republicans.

One of them, Louisiana Senator Bill Cassidy, joins me to respond next.

And staggering new COVID numbers this week, but is the Omicron wave starting to peak? The surgeon general joins me ahead.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

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TAPPER: Welcome back to STATE OF THE UNION. I'm Jake Tapper.

On Tuesday, Senate Democrats plan to take up the election reform bills they say are needed to protect American democracy, but they will fail, those bills, because the legislation is opposed by every Republican senator.

And two Democrats joined them in not wanting to change the filibuster rules.

Joining us now to talk about why is Republican Senator Bill Cassidy of Louisiana.

Senator, thanks for joining us.

So, President Biden held a rally in Georgia this week urging senators to pass Democrats' election reform legislation and to change the filibuster rules to allow them to do so. Take a listen.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

BIDEN: So, I ask every elected official in America: How do you want to be remembered?

Do you want to be the -- on the side of Dr. King or George Wallace? Do you want to be on the side of John Lewis or Bull Connor? Do you want to be on the side of Abraham Lincoln or Jefferson Davis?

(END VIDEO CLIP)

TAPPER: You just heard Congressman Clyburn say that those remarks, in his view, do not go too far. He argued that the real focus should be on what he believes are the discriminatory election laws being passed in places like Georgia, not on Biden's words.

What do you think?

SEN. BILL CASSIDY (R-LA): Most of what Representative -- in all due respect, most of what Representative Clyburn said was wrong or misleading. If these laws are constitutional, they will be struck down. He's

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You can still give water to the people working at the poll. They can distribute it.

There are several other things he said that are misleading. And so did President Biden. Now, if you're trying to call the United States of America to unity, trying to get us to where we will come to common ground, you don't end up spreading things that are untrue or, frankly, lies.

And that's why people think we need the filibuster. Otherwise, you're just totally rolled by somebody who's willing to sacrifice truth to pursue their agenda.

TAPPER: The Senate is going to take up the Democrats' election reform bills this week.

A key part, one of them is the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, which would restore provisions of the landmark 1965 Voting Rights Act that protect against discriminatory state election laws.

When the Senate reauthorized that law just a decade ago, it passed 98- 0. Why don't Republicans, including yourself, support restoring those -- the Voting Rights Act now?

[09:20:00]

CASSIDY: So, the Supreme Court decided, the Supreme Court decided that the conditions in 1965 are different than they are now.

Imagine that. We have had an African-American elected president of the United States, an African-American elected to the vice presidency, an African-American elected to the Senate in South Carolina. Now, if anyone can't see that circumstances have changed, they're just not believing they're lying eyes.

The reality is, is that, in Louisiana, we have the highest percent of African-American officials in the nation. We have had a white mayor of a predominantly black city and a black mayor of a predominantly white city. There's been incredible progress in our country.

There's more to do, absolutely. We need safeguards. But to argue we are still the same as we were in 1965 is to deny facts that are clearly before us.

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exist?

Voting rights activists will point to, for example, the state of Texas moved to ban drive-through and 24-hour early voting, which were heavily used by minority voters in '22 (sic), to limit the number of drop boxes to just one per county. In Georgia, where the Atlanta region went from having more than 100 drop boxes to just 23, and where there's strict new I.D. requirements for absentee ballots, that disproportionately impacts minority voters.

And, beyond that, there were some of the pieces of legislation that were parts of that -- those voting reform packages in Texas and Georgia, that did not ultimately pass, but seemed to really have ill intent at their root, for example, banning Sunday voting, which would have disproportionately affected Souls to the Polls movements by black churches to go from church to get people to vote.

It ultimately didn't become law, but that really alarmed a lot of people at what the intent might have been.

CASSIDY: I don't know what to say. This proves the system works.

My gosh, now Georgia has two days of Sunday voting that is optional, that you can do it. And, by the way, there were no drop boxes before the pandemic. There were none. And now we still have drop boxes. So, an accommodation made for a pandemic are going to continue in the future, when, theoretically, the pandemic is over.

And shall I point out that Georgia has more early voting days than does Delaware or New York by far. They have no-excuse absentee voting. So, when Representative Clyburn says a 90-year-old woman has to stand in line for four hours, in Georgia, she doesn't. I think, in Delaware, she might have to, or New York.

So maybe we need to start looking at the blue states, which have not been nearly so reactive and supportive of voting, as opposed to a state like Georgia, which clearly has, relative to them.

TAPPER: This push by Democrats in the Senate comes as legislatures in dozens of states are taking steps to restrict voting in many cases, and with Republicans invoking the big lie that the election was stolen as justification.

Just to be clear, so our viewers know, you have said that Joe Biden won the election fair and square, and that you have called the big lie the big lie.

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(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

DONALD TRUMP, FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: You have to be a lot sharper the next time when it comes to counting the vote.

There is a famous statement. Sometimes, the vote counter is more important than the candidate. And we can't let that ever, ever happen again. They have to get tougher and smarter.

(END VIDEO CLIP) TAPPER: We know what he means by tougher and smarter, right?

So I get you don't support the Democrats' legislation. Let's talk about another path forward. What do you support in order to secure our elections to make sure that there isn't any fraud, but also they're free and safe and that the efforts to disenfranchise that we saw in 2020 are not successful?

CASSIDY: First, I think we are seeing the success of state and local government in protecting the election.

They have been doing it for over 200 years. We also have seen that the federal courts were incredibly active in making sure that suits were heard in a timely fashion and challenges were considered. And, by the way, they ruled in the right direction every time. And these were Trump-appointed judges in many cases.

The other thing to point out is that election supervisors, the folks that former President Trump are speaking about electing, they don't count the vote. It's not some back room where you can either toss it out or keep it.

It's a public process in which both sides are represented, and there's votes counted. So those that think there's a back room, and you vote for the counter, it's just not true.

Lastly, I can imagine a campaign slogan: Vote for me. I'm going to cheat in the election.

We should not underestimate the American people. The American people are not going to vote for a cheat. If someone says I'm voting because I want to flip an election, they're going to lose their election.

[09:25:03]

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gone into. Those ill intents didn't pass. Indeed, as I pointed out in Georgia, they have more permissive laws than Delaware and New York.

TAPPER: Lastly, sir, I do want to ask you about COVID, which is, half of the residents of your home state of Louisiana are still unvaccinated.

Now, I understand you don't support vaccine mandates. What do you propose instead? How can we ever get out of this pandemic if millions of people throughout the country, including Louisiana, continue to refuse to get the vaccine?

CASSIDY: A couple of things.

I do not support federal vaccine mandates. That's never been the case before. On a state and local level of business and a school, they have a right to do so. The federal government never has before. And I oppose that, number one. Number two, we should acknowledge -- the medical literature does -- previous infection grants immunity. So, when we speak of statistics, let's also include those who have been previously infected. Now, they may not get -- they may not -- they may still be infected with Omicron, but they're not going to go to the hospital.

And, by the way, we also have to acknowledge that someone who's elderly and vaccinated is at greater risk of death from Omicron than someone who is younger and not vaccinated. So, if we're honest with the American people, I think they will start responding a little bit better.

Lastly, this whole kind of testing short -- shortage of tests, the administration's lost focus. That's not something you deliver just in time. It is something you have a big warehouse. Whenever you need it, you shove it out, but you immediately refill it.

And the administration needs to get Warp Speed back going, warehouse fulls of labs, and just begin to have statistics that are meaningful to the American people, as opposed to those which they think are trying to -- trying to roll them.

TAPPER: All right, Senator Cassidy, thanks so much.

I do want to note that, while previous infection does provide some protection against another infection, vaccines,

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CASSIDY: I don't know that. I don't know that.

TAPPER: Well, that's according to the...

CASSIDY: The medical literature suggests that...

TAPPER: OK.

CASSIDY: Yes, the medical literature suggests that previous infection is quite -- can be quite as effective as a vaccine.

TAPPER: All right, I have seen CDC studies that suggest otherwise.

But, Senator Cassidy, Dr. Cassidy, thanks so much for your time today. We appreciate it.

CASSIDY: Thank you.

TAPPER: Is the U.S. about to enter a new Cold War with Russia? And is there anything President Biden can do to stop it?

The top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Congressman Michael McCaul, is here next.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[09:32:03]

TAPPER: Welcome back to STATE OF THE UNION. I'm Jake Tapper.

International tensions on high this weekend, after a report you heard first on CNN that Russia may be working to fabricate a reason to invade neighboring Ukraine, a false flag, that news after a series of high-level meetings with top U.S. officials did not appear to dissuade Russia from a potential invasion.

And now the big question for the U.S., how should President Biden respond if Russia actually acts and invades

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Joining us now, the top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Congressman Michael McCaul of Texas.

Congressman, thanks for joining us.

(CROSSTALK)

TAPPER: I do want to first get your reaction to the situation yesterday in your home state of Texas, where a gunman, an anti-Semite apparently, held four Jews hostage at a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, outside Fort Worth.

The FBI has not released the name of the suspect. He demanded that the U.S. free Aafia Siddiqui. She's a Pakistan neuroscientist convicted of attacking American troops. She's in jail not far from Fort Worth.

That's a frequent cause for Islamic terrorists worldwide, the freeing of this woman? Have you seen any evidence that what happened at the synagogue in Texas yesterday was part of any sort of larger international plot?

REP. MICHAEL MCCAUL (R-TX): Well, the hostage-taker did -- first of all, this is a disturbing case that demonstrates that anti-Semitism is unfortunately alive and well.

I think they chose this synagogue because she, Siddiqui, the Lady al Qaeda, they call her, is being detained in a Fort Worth prison facility.

To answer your question, I know the FBI has now fanned their investigation out to London and Tel Aviv. So this has now turned into an international investigation. So there's something more here. And the fact he's calling for Lady al Qaeda's release from prison has been, as you said, in the jihadist world kind of a cause celebre.

And so I think we're going to find out a lot more in the next 24, 48 hours. He is British. I wouldn't be surprised if he's Pakistani, just like Siddiqui. And we need to get to the bottom of this.

We haven't seen one of these radicalized attacks in a few years now, and it is disturbing to see it raise its ugly head again.

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Let's turn back to Russia and the United States. Talks between the two countries continued -- concluded this week without any resolution to the tension over what seems an imminent Russian invasion of Ukraine. A top U.S. official warned -- quote -- "The drumbeat of war is sounding loud."

What do you think, if anything, more that Joe Biden and American allies can do to prevent a Russian invasion of Ukraine, or do you think it's inevitable at this point?

MCCAUL: Well, I think the key here is deterrence. If Putin sees deterrence coming back from the United States and our NATO allies, he may second-guess his calculation to invade Ukraine.

Now, Ukraine is the breadbasket of Russia. Putin wants to restore the glory of the old Soviet empire. He's been wanting to do this for quite some time. He invaded Crimea right next to -- with a land bridge. He would like the Port of Odessa to control the Black Sea.

[09:35:15]

But I'm not seeing a lot of deterrence. I'm seeing some tough rhetoric, but not a lot of action. I would recommend -- I talked to Deputy Secretary Wendy Sherman prior to her negotiations -- that you have to put things on the table like sanctions. You have to talk about more arms sales, weapon sales to Ukraine.

And this Nord Stream 2, the idea that the president waived congressionally mandatory sanctions on Putin's pipeline, I don't know how that's in the national interests of the United States. And it just emboldened and empowered Putin to start completing his pipeline.

And I think, most importantly, Jake, as you and I talked about Afghanistan over the summer, last summer, I think people, our foreign adversaries, like Putin, President Xi in China, the ayatollah, and Kim Jong-un, all view that as a moment of weakness.

So we are not projecting strength, as Reagan talked about, but, rather, projecting weakness, which, historically, going back to Hitler and Chamberlain, always invites aggression.

TAPPER: Yes.

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TAPPER: Russian President Putin previously warned of a complete rupture of U.S.-Russia ties if the Biden administration were to retaliate against any military action they take against Ukraine.

Russia has also hinted they could take more direct action against the U.S., whether through cyberattacks on the U.S., by taking steps to move nuclear weapons closer to North America.

Is that just bluster? Or do you think that is a real threat from Putin?

MCCAUL: I think it's a real threat. They put this -- they have a cyberattack on the Ukrainian government Web page basically saying, be afraid and expect the worst. That's pretty straightforward. And the false flag operation that you talked about, I do credit the

administration for calling that to the international community's attention, false flag being known to have killers go in and have a hoax-like operation against their own troops, then justifying an invasion into Ukraine.

Jake, I have seen the plans in the classified space as well. They're very specific, the most specific I have ever seen with Ukraine, and they're very aggressive in the timetable.

I think you're going to see this play out very quickly. And rather than -- rather than threatening after an invasion takes place, we ought to be providing deterrence before an invasion takes place. That's my biggest criticism of the administration.

TAPPER: Do you think we are in a new Cold War with Russia?

MCCAUL: I do. I do, because I think Putin, again, smells weakness here. He knows, if he's ever going to invade Ukraine, now's the time. I hope he doesn't make that miscalculation.

But the fact is, if he does invade Ukraine, what is the United States, what is our commander in chief prepared to do to stop it? I'm not seeing a lot of details or action that could deter him from that critical step.

This would be the largest invasion in Europe since World War II. That's how big of a deal this is.

TAPPER: Before you go, sir, the Beijing Olympics begin in just a few weeks.

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human rights abuses. You have called for the Games to be moved. You also support the Biden administration's diplomatic boycott. No government officials are going to go there, though American athletes are going to be allowed to participate and compete.

Do you think it's a mistake for NBC to even air these Olympics, given the human rights record of China? Does that still give China the propaganda win that it so desperately wants?

MCCAUL: Yes, I mean, it does give them the propaganda victory.

I would hope that a corporate responsibility would come into play here and point out the abuses, human rights violations taking place in the Xinjiang province, where the Chinese commit genocide.

My bill passed the House almost unanimously condemning the CCP for what is taking place, and that is genocide in China. And I would hope that the networks would actually have some responsibility and call attention to that. I think the athletes may actually start talking about this.

I did agree with the boycott diplomatically. I asked that IOC move the Olympics. That is not going to happen. I don't think we should punish the athletes. But I do think the athletes are going to stand up in solidarity, hopefully, against these human rights violations.

And I hope they take home the gold too and, just like Jesse Owens showed Hitler the Aryan nation was not superior, show the Chinese that we're going to take on the gold, and not them.

TAPPER: All right, Congressman McCaul, good to see you, sir. Thank you so much. Appreciate it.

[09:40:00]

Oh, and happy birthday and happy 60 there to you.

The Biden administration has a new plan for Americans to get rapid COVID tests, but will they come in enough time to combat the Omicron wave?

We will talk to the surgeon general next.

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(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

TAPPER: Welcome back to STATE OF THE UNION. I'm Jake Tapper.

Daily COVID cases in the United States are topping 800,000 for the first time, and the Biden administration is rolling out a new plan to try to help Americans track down rapid COVID tests.

But is that new push coming too late?

Joining me now, the U.S. surgeon general, Dr. Vivek Murthy.

[09:45:00]

Dr. Murthy, thanks so much for joining us.

So, case numbers have soared past 800,000 cases per day for the first time today. Hospitalizations are the highest they have ever been. Are we at the peak of this surge right now, do you think? Or, if not, when do you think we should expect the peak to come?

MURTHY: Well, Jake, this is a very difficult time during this surge. We are seeing high case numbers and hospitalization rates, as you mentioned. And we're also seeing strain in many of our hospitals around the country.

But the good news is that there are parts of the country, New York, in particular, and other parts of the Northeast, where we are starting to see a plateau and, in some cases, an early decline in cases. The challenge is that nothing -- the entire country is not moving at the same pace.

The Omicron wave started later in other parts of the country. So we shouldn't expect a national peak in the next coming days. The next few weeks will be tough.

But, Jake, this is also why it's so important that we are surging resources to hospitals that are struggling. It's why it's so important that we all double down on precautions that we're taking, because one thing that we're learning during this surge is that our vaccines are still working very well to keep people out of the hospital and to save their

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It's why we want everyone to get vaccinated, to get boosted as soon as they can.

TAPPER: One of the big challenges about containing the pandemic is that there are not enough tests right now.

Take a listen to what then president-elect Joe Biden said about testing in December 2020.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

BIDEN: We need to scale up testing, so anyone who needs one can get a test.

After 10 months of the pandemic, we still don't have enough testing. It's a travesty.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

TAPPER: Now, testing has been scaled up, but it is not the case that everybody who wants a test can get a test. We're still not where we need to be.

If not having a test -- enough tests then was a travesty, is it a travesty now?

MURTHY: Well, Jake, testing certainly has been an area of focus.

And you heard the president just a few weeks ago say that we have made tremendous progress on testing over the last year, but that we had more work to do to make sure that the increased demand and the surge really in demand that we saw with Omicron can be met.

But it's important here, Jake, that we also step back and look at the broader picture. Earlier in 2021, the administration use the DPA and an investment of billions of dollars to expand the manufacturing capacity for tests. That, in combination with rigorous work around expanding testing production, led to a quadrupling of supply in testing in the fall.

But, when Omicron came, it created an extraordinary rise in demand that created shortages, not just in the U.S., but in other countries as well. And that's why we have had to take additional measures. We have a billion tests that will become available to people that they can order through the Web site starting January 19.

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yesterday, people will be able to get coverage, private insurance coverage, for up to eight tests per person per month that they order.

So, all of these together will help us close the gap in testing and make sure that everyone does, in fact, have a test who needs it.

TAPPER: But it does seem like the state of testing is not yet acceptable.

A new study out from Kaiser this week showed that, out of almost 500 searches for at-home coronavirus tests at online retailers just last week, tests were only available 43 times. That's just 9 percent of the time.

We're nearly two years into this pandemic. President Biden has been in office for almost a full year. Would you agree it's not yet at an acceptable level?

MURTHY: Well, Jake, as the president said, we certainly have more we need to do on testing.

And that's a message that is very clear from him to the public, to his team, that we need to pull every lever possible. It's why you have seen so many additional spigots opened, if you will, when it comes to testing and why that supply will continue to increase in the months ahead.

But what we can't also allow, Jake, is for us to lose sight of the broader picture. In addition to testing, there are other tools that are so important that people are aware of. We have more therapeutics this month that are available than at any other month during the pandemic because of early investments in treatments that were made.

We have now oral and intravenous tests. We have more people vaccinated now than at any other point, more than 200 million fully vaccinated, and millions more who are boosted. So we -- these are the tools that are going to help keep people safe.

We have got to make sure people know about them and they double down on these tools during this Omicron wave.

TAPPER: So, you just talked about how many people are fully vaccinated.

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would have to acknowledge that only 24 percent of the U.S. population is fully vaccinated. But that's the truth. And that's why we're seeing packed hospitals and one million cases per day."

Why hasn't the Biden administration reclassified fully vaccinated to include the booster?

[09:50:03]

MURTHY: Well, Jake, what the CDC has said is that, to be up to date on your vaccinations, you need to have your primary series, plus the booster.

And that is the key message to the public, is that we need everyone to be up to date. It is absolutely right that we need to get more people boosted in this country. It's why I and many others, clinicians inside and outside of government, have been urging people across the country to get boosted as quickly as possible.

Here's what we see, though, in the data. We see that, if you have had your primary series -- that's your two shots and Moderna or your shot of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine -- that you still have decent protection against hospitalization and death.

But you increase that protection even more and increase your protection against all infection by getting that booster shot. So, to anyone out there who hasn't gotten boosted yet, if you're at your five-month mark after your primary series of Johnson -- of Moderna or Pfizer, get boosted. If you're two months post Johnson & Johnson, please get boosted as soon as you can.

TAPPER: All right, Dr. Vivek Murthy, thank you so much for your time today.

MURTHY: Thanks so much, Jake. Good to be with you.

TAPPER: Did a man in a Viking helmet and a speedo almost overthrow our democracy?

We will take a look at that claim and the real threat next.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

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TAPPER: Over the weekend, while Martin Luther King III was in Arizona rallying to expand voting rights, Donald Trump was, the same day, in the same state, doing the exact opposite, continuing to push his big lie.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

TRUMP: Last year, we had a rigged election, and the proof is all over the place.

They always talk about the big lie. They're the big lie.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

TAPPER: There is a reason Trump was in Arizona, to push the legislature to disenfranchise the state's voters based on all of his deranged election lies.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

TRUMP: Hopefully, the attorney general and your state legislatures will be smart and fair and decisive and let the world know what the hell happened in Arizona. (END VIDEO CLIP)

TAPPER: Steve Bannon says this is part of a nationwide effort to hurt Biden going into the midterms.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

STEVE BANNON, FORMER WHITE HOUSE CHIEF STRATEGIST: Decertify Biden electors in Arizona, in Wisconsin, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, in the great state of Georgia. Those four states, we are going to decertify all those electors.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

TAPPER: Of course, there is no way in the Constitution to actually do that.

And, of course, this is not just about 2020 or 2022. Trump the day before delivered a message to a county Republican Party in Pennsylvania. Pay attention to this part.

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TRUMP: You have to be a lot sharper the next time when it comes to counting the vote.

There is a famous statement. Sometimes, the vote counter is more important than the candidate. And we can't let that ever, ever happen again. They have to get tougher and smarter.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

TAPPER: Democrats are very focused right now on Capitol Hill about beating back Republican efforts at the state level that make it tougher to vote.

And while it's true many of those efforts are predicated on Trump's big lie, the focus of the seditious conspiracy we all witnessed was more focused on the counting, not the casting of the votes, because, when Trump says -- quote -- "We have to be a lot sharper the next time when it comes to counting the vote" -- unquote -- it's pretty clear he means stop counting the votes when he's up, and, when Democrats are in the lead, vote counters need to find votes for him, as he instructed Georgia Republican Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to do.

(BEGIN AUDIO CLIP)

TRUMP: There's nothing wrong with saying that you've recalculated.

I just want to find 11,780 votes, which is one more than we have.

(END AUDIO CLIP)

TAPPER: Now, this plan to put loyalists in key positions where they can do this for him is going on right now, with Trump-backed candidates for governor, secretary of state and more in key states. And there are also more organic lower-level efforts as well for adherents of the big lie to slip into key posts.

Edward McAlanis of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, was running for local judge of elections until his campaign hit something of a snag. He was charged with four offenses related to his role in the January 6 attack on the Capitol. He entered into a plea deal.

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Senator Marco Rubio, Republican of Florida a few days ago condemned the events of January 6 as a terrible thing that never should have happened, but he also suggested the anniversary was getting too much attention. And he seemed to downplay its seriousness.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

SEN. MARCO RUBIO (R-FL): You're not going to convince at least more -- most normal and sane people that our government last year was almost overthrown by a guy wearing a Viking hat and speedos.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

TAPPER: Senator Rubio was correct. Our government was not almost overthrown by a guy wearing a Viking hat and speedos.

It was almost overthrown by armed, violent extremists, 11 of whom have now been charged with seditious conspiracy, and by others in the Trump administration and in positions of power throughout the country seeking to invalidate election results, based on the wild lies of an unhinged team of conspiracy theories, and by MAGA media that spread those lies, and by more than 140 House and Senate Republicans who voted to disenfranchise all the voters of Arizona and Pennsylvania.

And make no mistake, the conspiracy could have worked, and it might work next time. Pay attention to who they're lining up to count the votes. And, on this Martin Luther King Day weekend, think about whose votes they don't want to count.

Thanks for spending your Sunday morning with us.

"FAREED ZAKARIA GPS" starts next.

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Exhibit 9

Biden's struggles shouldn't eclipse GOP's year of dangerous falsehoods

Analysis by [John Harwood](#), CNN

Updated 8:05 AM ET, Sun December 26, 2021

≡ **CNN** politics

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Pro-Donald Trump protesters gather in front of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. A pro-Trump mob stormed the Capitol that day, breaking windows and clashing with police officers. Trump supporters had gathered to protest the ratification of Joe Biden's Electoral College victory.

(CNN) — America's running political conversation defaults to the sitting president. Today, Joe Biden's [legislative struggles](#), [pandemic management](#) and [weak approval rating](#) drown out most everything else.

But in 2021, the performance of his partisan adversaries mattered at least as much to the nation's future. And in Washington and state capitals alike, Republicans have compiled a record of dishonesty and aggression that threatens American democracy itself.

The [January 6 insurrection](#), incited by then-President Donald Trump to overturn his election defeat, offered them a different path. Deadly violence that endangered their own lives gave Republican lawmakers the strongest possible justification for separating themselves from Trump's disfiguring pathologies.

For a moment, they did. Shaken congressional leaders condemned him and returned to the vandalized capital to affirm Biden's victory.

The moment passed.

Those same Republican leaders later [scuttled a proposed bipartisan investigation](#). GOP legislators in battleground states

curbed voting procedures and changed election administration to help future losers succeed where Trump had failed in thwarting the popular will.

"Until recently, when I got up in the morning it didn't occur to me that American democracy might be in the balance," observed Richard Haass, a high-ranking national security aide to two Republican administrations who has quit the GOP. "It's

Related Article: State legislators gear up to pass a 'tidal wave' of voting restrictions ahead of crucial 2022 midterms

Narrowly, the crisis stems from Trump's 2016 rise on false promises to the minority of voters most aggrieved by the cultural and economic changes reshaping 21st-century America. But its roots extend back to the decades-old Republican strategy of harvesting support from conservative White opponents of the 1960s civil rights revolution.

Those voters -- disproportionately Southern, less educated, rural, evangelical -- now represent the white-hot core of the Trump-era GOP.

"When you think about the DNA of the current Republican Party being built around racial resentment, it's only one small step," said Robert P. Jones, an opinion analyst who's the CEO and founder of Public Religion Research Institute. "The very idea that some citizens ought to have a privileged place in the eyes of the law is, at its heart, anti-democratic."

Unlike earlier Republican campaigns, Trump barely masked his race-based appeals. He consistently stoked anxiety over lost power and primacy among the shrinking ranks of White conservative Christians.

Related Article: Analysis: There's nothing more frightening in America today than an angry White man

"Having alienated college-educated suburban voters, many consequential Republicans decided their best bet is to keep their contracting coalition in a state of constant agitation and fear, combatants in a never-ending culture war," [Peter Wehner](#), a former aide to President George W. Bush, wrote earlier this year. "Right now, the Republican Party is a grave

threat to American democracy."

Trump has long expressed admiration for authoritarian strongmen. Fox News star [Tucker Carlson in August staged his program in Hungary](#), the east European nation scholars call an exemplar of eroding democracy.

"There are two key metrics: how do they deal with violence, and do they accept election results," said Harvard professor Daniel Ziblatt, co-author of the book "How Democracies Die." On both counts, Republicans have crept toward authoritarianism.

Trump and elected allies turned to praising the January 6 mob and minimizing its lawless violence; some brandish guns on social media or in campaign ads. One congressman circulated a [photoshopped anime video](#) that appeared to depict the murder of a Democratic colleague. (He later said he doesn't "espouse violence or harm towards any member of

Related Article: Analysis: Why it's now 'American identity, stupid' in US politics

Congress" and that the video "symbolizes the battle for the soul of America.")

In a recent [Public Religion Research Institute survey](#), 30% of Republicans agreed that "true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country." In a differently

worded [American Enterprise Institute poll question](#) last January, 60% of White evangelical Christians agreed that "The traditional American way of life is disappearing so fast that we may have to use force to save it."



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was seen from him a threshold qualification in the 2022 GOP primary race for Georgia governor, [ex-Gov. David Perdue](#) distinguishes himself from incumbent Brian Kemp by saying he would not have certified Biden's 2020 Georgia win.

Deteriorating political conditions for Democrats have positioned Republicans to win control of Congress next year without extra help. But having lost the popular vote in seven of the last eight presidential elections, they're not taking chances.

A cadre of anti-Trump Republicans see glimpses of hope in their effort to change the party from within. Barbara Comstock, a former House member and congressional staffer, cites the [Virginia gubernatorial victory in November of private-equity executive Glenn Youngkin](#), who accepted Trump's endorsement but eschewed his raw tactics.

"Has it been a discouraging year? Yes," Comstock allowed. "But I do feel new leaders will step up."

Related Article: Vilified by Trump, Liz Cheney explores her political future with backing from GOP elders

"It's important to wrench the party back to its senses," added Kori Schake, a former Bush aide who directs foreign policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute. "I do think it's possible. I'm still a Republican, standing squarely behind [Liz Cheney](#)."

Invoking the Wyoming Republican congresswoman, daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, only underscores the enormousness of the challenge. House Republicans ousted her as conference chair after she emphatically [rejected Trump's election lies](#). She and Rep. Adam Kinzinger of Illinois have become lone voices seeking to hold Trump and insurrectionist allies accountable and affirm America's 245-year-old democratic experiment.

"How we address January 6 is the moral test of our generation," Cheney declared recently. In 2021, her party failed it.

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Exhibit 10

Trump's Big Lie is changing the face of American politics

Analysis by [Stephen Collinson](#), CNN

Updated 9:43 AM ET, Thu September 16, 2021



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(CNN) — The [Big Lie](#) is already tainting the 2022 and 2024 elections.

Relentless efforts by former President Donald Trump and his true believers in politics and the media have convinced millions of Americans that Joe Biden is a fraudulent President who seized power in a stolen election.

This deep-seated suspicion of last November's vote, which threatens to corrode the foundation of US democracy, mirrors the message adopted by the ex-President months before he [clearly lost a free and fair election to Biden](#).

It has immediate political implications -- the lie that the last election was a fix is already shaping the terrain in which candidates, especially Republicans, are running in midterm elections in 2022. And the widespread belief that Trump was cheated out of power is building the [former President a 2024 platform](#) to mount a GOP presidential primary bid if he wishes.

Longer term, the fact that tens of millions of Americans were seduced by Trump's lies about election fraud poses grave questions about the future of America's democratic political architecture itself. Ultimately, if a large minority of the population no longer has faith in rule by the people for the people, how long can that system survive? And if the will of millions of people is no longer expressed through voting, what other outlets are there? Already, the January 6 insurrection has shown what happens when aggrieved groups -- in this case incited by a massive lie -- take matters into their own hands.

Trump's great success in creating his own version of a new truth about the election and his still-magnetic talent for spinning myths into which his supporters can buy is revealed in [a new CNN poll](#) released Wednesday.

The survey finds that 36% of Americans don't think Biden legitimately got sufficient votes to win last November. On the one hand, that means a handy majority does believe Biden won fair and square. On the other, however, a restive one-third minority in a nation of 330 million can be a powerful and destructive force. Among Republicans, 78% believe Biden did not win the election and 54% believe that there is solid evidence to support such a view, according to the poll, even though no evidence exists and multiple courts and states and the US Congress certified a victory that Trump's Justice Department said was untainted by significant fraud. Among Republicans who say Trump should be the leader of the party, 88% believe Biden lost the election. And in a sign that many Americans think that the ex-President's efforts are causing more permanent damage, 51% say it is likely that elected officials in the US will successfully overturn the results of a future election because their party did not win.

Paradoxically, Republicans are more likely to say that democracy is under attack than Democrats. That is despite the fact that any fair reading of the last few years shows that Trump has repeatedly battered the pillars of the democratic political system. The twice-impeached ex-President abused power repeatedly, politicized the Justice Department and sided with tyrants rather than democratic leaders. When it was the will of the people that he be ejected from office, he tried to stay, came close to staging a coup and trashed the election that ended his presidency.

Such is the power of Trump -- and the conservative media propaganda machine that created an alternative reality for his followers -- that the President is able to reinvent the truth in plain sight, and get away with it. The former President effectively writes the script.

"I am not the one trying to undermine American democracy, I'm the one trying to save it. Please remember that," Trump said at a rally in Arizona in June that itself [highlighted a sham audit](#) orchestrated by Republicans of 2020

election votes in crucial Maricopa County that helped Biden win the state.

'Democracy is not a football'

Most Americans don't spend much time pondering democracy and constitutional guardrails -- a subject that has become an obsession for Beltway media and lawmakers in the Trump era. The cost of health care, the pandemic,



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problems are harder to solve if the faith of the people in their political systems falls. And the daily erosion of democratic standards -- thanks to Trump's lies and the actions of his Republican enablers on Capitol Hill -- can reach critical mass over time. The experiences of other nations -- in Eastern Europe, for instance -- that have seen democracy tarnished is that incremental damage adds up, and it becomes obvious only at a point when it is impossible to reverse.

[California Gov. Gavin Newsom](#), fresh off his defeat of the recall effort that critics saw as the epitome of an undemocratic exercise, reflected on how political freedoms need to be protected from the likes of Trump, who had said the California election was "rigged" before the returns had even come in. The Democratic governor reached for a message that might be the building blocks of a broader attempt by his party to push back against the extremism of some Republicans.

"Democracy is not a football. You don't throw it around," Newsom said Tuesday night. "It's more like a, I don't know, antique vase. You can drop it and smash it in a million different pieces."

Trump is poised to reap the fruits of his own anti-democratic campaign. His lock on the party grassroots appears to give him a prohibitive advantage in the next presidential primary campaign if he decides to run. It's easy to imagine a presidential debate when Trump forces rivals to buy into his own false conceit that the 2020 election was stolen from him. There is no political incentive for any GOP rising star to get on the wrong side of Trump. Some, like the third-ranking Republican in the House, Rep. Elise Stefanik of New York, have already made the choice between the truth and their own skyrocketing careers, which can prosper in Trump's shadow.

Republicans who have challenged the ex-President and pointed out the reality of his authoritarian impulses, however, like ex-Sen. Jeff Flake of Arizona or Wyoming's Rep. Liz Cheney, [whom Stefanik ousted](#) as conference chair, find that their political prospects darken.

The next presidential election is three years away and the political winds can change. And it's possible that GOP voters will tire of Trump's antics and seek a fresh face. Perhaps Trump's increasingly extreme position on election fraud would be counterproductive in a national election -- and create more momentum against him than it currently gives him in his own party.

Some anti-Trump Republicans, like Rep. Adam Kinzinger of Illinois, believe it happened already.

"I don't know the answer besides come out and keep saying -- 'ladies and gentlemen, you know, Donald Trump lost, not because the election was stolen, but because he ran an election focused on firing up only the most extreme element of the Republican Party and he turned off swing voters that typically used to vote Republican,'" Kinzinger said on CNN's "New Day" on Thursday.

Democracy on trial in the midterms

But there can be little doubt that the former President's assaults on democracy are helping to keep him politically relevant, and his capacity to create a false narrative in which he won is a tangible sign of his power.

Before the next presidential election, the impact of the Big Lie is already being felt in the run-up to the congressional and gubernatorial elections next year. Many of those races will be fought under conditions set by new voting laws passed by conservative legislatures that often discriminate against minority voters and are inspired by Trump's Big Lie. If the California recall election is any guide, Trump acolytes will go into the midterms warning that any Democratic victories, especially where mail-in voting is heavily used, will be fraudulent even though Republicans are predicted to do well.

The former President has also worked hard, using the carrot of his valuable endorsement, to ensure that GOP



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He has, for instance, [endorsed Alabama's Rep. Mo Brooks](#), who is running for Senate and was a speaker at the infamous January 6 rally in Washington that incited the US Capitol insurrection. Last week, the former President endorsed Michigan state Rep. Steve Carra, who is mounting a primary challenge to Rep. Fred Upton, one of [10 House Republicans who voted to impeach Trump](#) over the mob attack on Congress earlier this year. In another of his many endorsements countrywide, Trump this week backed Kristina Karamo, a Republican running for secretary of state in the Wolverine State, praising her as "strong on Crime, including the massive Crime of Election Fraud." It was a move that underscored how, alongside the ideological gulfs between Republicans and Democrats, there is a new divide -- between political hopefuls who support democracy and those prepared to deny it.

It is a new dimension in American politics that has shocked many people who have been involved in it for years, and it is drawing grim historical analogies.

"I think about ... those democracies that were lost in the middle part, the early part of the 20th century where democracy was not adequately defended and authoritarian regimes rose," former Obama administration Attorney General Eric Holder told CNN's Wolf Blitzer on "The Situation Room" on Tuesday.

"And it wasn't because democracy was unpopular. You know, democracy was strong. But the reality is the defense of democracy was weak, and we cannot allow that to happen in this country."



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New Day

Biden Delays Departure in Effort to Save Agenda; 'Rust' Assistant Director Admits Failure to Fully Check Gun; WSJ Slammed for Publishing Trump Letter Full of Falsehoods. Aired 6-6:30a ET

Aired October 28, 2021 - 06:00 ET

THIS IS A RUSH TRANSCRIPT. THIS COPY MAY NOT BE IN ITS FINAL FORM AND MAY BE UPDATED.

JOHN BERMAN, CNN ANCHOR: Good morning to our viewers here in the United States and all around the world. It is Thursday, October 28. I'm John Berman alongside Brianna Keilar.

[05:59:50]

And breaking this morning, rescue mission. It's all happening right now or not happening, which could be the biggest risk for President Biden. What a morning it is for him.

In the next few hours, the president will either be declaring victory on a deal on his social agenda or explaining why he couldn't bring Democrats together to pass a plan yet. A plan designed to help millions of kids, parents, seniors, and students in this country.

As we sit here, we genuinely don't know which way this is headed. We don't know exactly what's in the plan. We don't know exactly how they will pay for it.

We do know the president delayed his entire trip to Europe by a few hours so he can race to the Capitol this

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BRIANNA KEILAR, CNN ANCHOR: A source says the purpose is to convince progressives to pass the infrastructure bill that they have been holding up as leverage for the social spending plan.

And doing that may be harder now that another progressive priority, paid family leave, appears to have been gutted. This is one more concession to Senator Joe Manchin. And in the words of one Democratic colleague, people are pissed.

Last night the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus said this on CNN about the president's effort.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

REP. PRAMILA JAYAPAL (D-WA): Here's the thing. If there isn't a deal, which is what I'm still hearing, that we don't have agreement of Senator Manchin and Senator Sinema on a framework, even on a framework, much less on legislative text, then I'm not sure what the president is going to present to us. (END VIDEO CLIP)

KEILAR: CNN's Jeremy Diamond is live at the White House. The president very concerned here, Jeremy.

JEREMY DIAMOND, CNN WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT: No doubt about it. With no deal on the table yet, President Biden delaying that trip to Europe by a few hours.

He was slated to leave this morning. Instead, he'll leave in the early afternoon, only after first heading to Capitol Hill for one of these last-ditch efforts to try and convince progressives, it appears, to vote for that infrastructure bill.

But there is still no framework deal, even if that were to be enough for progressives, though they are still insisting that they want to see both of these bills move through the House at the same time.

And amid all of this, progressives losing out, as you just said, on one of those major priorities, with this paid family and medical leave expected to be scrapped from the reconciliation bill altogether because of opposition from Senator Joe Manchin, who explained why here. Listen.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

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going insolvent, I can't explain that. It doesn't make sense to me.

I want to work with everyone as long as we can start paying for things. That's all. I can't put this burden on my grandchildren. I've got 10 grandchildren. And I'll be -- I just can't do it.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

DIAMOND: And beyond that issue of paid family leave, there is a mountain of issues that has still yet to be resolved. Everything from Medicare drug price negotiations, to this question of whether they're going to expand Medicare coverage to cover dental, vision and hearing.

Even the revenue sources, how exactly they're going to pay for this. So it's hard to see how they can cobble together a deal in the hours before President Biden leaves.

But clearly, the White House wants to make a full-court press. And finally, just before he leaves, we will hear from him in the East Room, deal or no deal, perhaps a recognition here at the White House that, given this full-court press at the last minute, they're going to have to explain to the public exactly what's going on before the president heads abroad -- Brianna.

KEILAR: Certainly will. Jeremy Diamond, live for us from the White House, thank you.

And let's talk about this more with Democratic Congresswoman Debbie Dingell of Michigan. She is co-chair of the House Democratic Policy and Communications Committee.

Paid family leave, Congresswoman, gone from the bill?

REP. DEBBIE DINGELL (D-MI): Brianna, I think you had a very good report previously to my joining you about not what's clear, what's in and out.

I've been hearing for three days it's in. Four weeks, it's in, it's out. I know two United States senators who I have nothing but the utmost respect for are Patty Murray, who is not a progressive. She's just the -- I mean, she is. I mean, I think -- I hate these labels by the way. But she is a woman that's working very hard. And Senator Kirsten Gillibrand are working very hard with Joe Manchin. They're friends. They respect him. To put paid leave on. And

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So I think one of the -- one of the challenges is this morning when the president is expected to come to our Democratic caucus at 9 a.m., is nobody knows. And I'm not even sure the speaker knows what's in the bill, what's - what the revenue sources are going to be.

It has been in agreement. The revenue sources in this bill will cover all -- will cover all of the new programs. This will not add to the debt.

Now we need to know what's going to be in the bill. And there are -- you know, first of all, I want to say everybody wants to call this total chaos. People are divided. We're united on our values. We all know failure is not an option. And they're -- we've got to work together. We've got to figure it out.

[06:05:06]

What we do get in this bill is going to make the difference in a lot of people's lives. And we cannot fail, to not get something passed.

But there have been two senators who've had way too much control, and you've got a House of 435 members, 220 Democrats, who want to have their say, want to know what's in it, and aren't going to vote for something that they don't know what's in it.

KEILAR: Well, but are they going to vote for it without paid family leave in it? You heard our report. People are pissed. People in your party.

DINGELL: Look, I'm going to -- I've been trying to say this a long time. And there are things that I'm going to keep fighting for. I mean, you know, I use Medicare for all, universal health care as an example.

My father-in-law was the first person to introduce it. He introduced it right after he authored Social Security. It took us 25 years to get Medicare.

Then we got the Children's Health Insurance Program. We got the Affordable Care Act. Life sometimes goes -- you keep making progress, moving forward. I

believe I'm here so that, ultimately, every American has health care coverage.

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I don't know what's going to happen on paid leave. I think there are a lot of us that feel very strongly. We're only one of six countries in the world that doesn't have it. The average paid leave in -- for women globally is 29 weeks. For men, I think it's 16. Maternity leave is 16 weeks.

KEILAR: But Joe Manchin seems pretty clear that this isn't going to be in the bill. He has said the country can't become an entitlement society. He has said the budget reconciliation, which is this process where you only need 51 Democrats in the Senate, which is the only way you can pass anything right now, that this isn't the way to do it. What do you say to that?

DINGELL: Well, what I say to it is I'm going to keep talking to him, on probably maternity leave. I'm going to keep talking to him.

But, you know, there are two secret weapons that are over in the Senate working him right now, Senator Patty Murray and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand. If you ever have those two intensely on either side of you, trying to work. And Joe does respect his colleagues over there.

And, you know, legislation is the art of compromise. That compromise isn't a dirty word. You bring everybody to the table. You listen to their perspectives. You've heard the old Will Rogers saying, which I think is probably more in play than I've ever heard it. People with weak stomachs shouldn't watch sausage, or laws, being made.

I don't think I've quite seen the sausage making this difficult, but this, you know, making you sick to your stomach. But we're not done. We don't know what's in it. Let's hear what the president says.

KEILAR: OK. I hear you saying and I heard others saying you don't know what's in it, which seems to be a way to assuage concerns of people who are upset about paid family leave being gone from it, saying it's not necessarily gone. But look, it seems like the ship is sailing on this.

Is that a poison -- What does Joe Manchin need to know? Is that a poison pill in the House for Democrats, if it's not in there?

DINGELL: You -- you all want to keep making a poison pill. We are going to have to land this plane. At some point, we've got to see what's in the president's -- I hope he's going to come talk to us, tell us what's in there.

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know what's in it.

And by the way, it's the combination of the bipartisan bill and the Build Back Better bill, which is the vision that the president laid out when he ran for president. And that's what he told he was going to deliver to the American people. So we need both of these bills.

KEILAR: Sure, but this is -- but this is a tough one for many Democrats to take. That in a pandemic where we have seen watched people incentivized to go to work. And during a time where Democrats have promised that, hey, even if you're not going to have 12 weeks of paid maternity leave, women, you're going to have four to foot in the door. You know, are you saying that progressives will need to, if this is not in the bill, they're going to need to suck it up?

DINGELL: I'm telling you we need to know what's there. We need to know what the total package is. I think failure -- I mean, honestly, failure is not an option. We can't lose all of it.

But we don't have to agree to vote on things until we know what's in there and it's a package that people can support. So you're not going to make a decision on just one thing. We talked about why it does matter. Really. To be only one of six countries worldwide that doesn't offer this? It's a reflection on this. It doesn't make it in a communal (ph) society.

KEILAR: Can you vote for it without paid family leave?

DINGELL: I have not. I'm an undecided person right now, because I do not know what is in that bill. And I've made it very clear to people that both aren't here at this hour. But when it comes to Capitol Hill, you know, people do need to tell people what's actually in it. I don't know --

[06:10:09]

KEILAR: But can it pass without paid family -- can it pass without paid family leave in it?

DINGELL: I think that it could. But it depends upon what else is in that bill. And he needs to talk to all the members of the caucus.

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country.

The people are -- It doesn't matter if you're Republican or Democrat. Eighty percent of the American people want that piece in this bill.

KEILAR: Congresswoman, look, we know things are a little bit muddy this morning. We're looking forward to see -- to see what comes out of this meeting, quite frankly, between the president and congressional Democrats. Thank you so much, Congresswoman Debbie Dingell.

DINGELL: Thank you.

BERMAN: The congresswoman speaks her mind. I mean, she doesn't hold back about how she's feeling. When she says she's never seen the sausage making quite this painful, quite this difficult, and it's making her sick to her stomach that tells you something. I mean, people are criticized for focusing too much on process. She says the process here is making her sick to her stomach.

KEILAR: I also think that there's a lot of anxiety with Democrats. A number of Democrats looking at what Joe Manchin is doing. I do think that this cut is something that cuts more deeply, and I think hurts them a little more and makes this a little -- more difficult for them to say, Hey, yes, this is something that we're going to champion.

BERMAN: And I told people at the top, we don't know what's going to happen this morning. We don't. Neither does Debbie Dingell. What's the president going to show up at Capitol Hill with? Is he going to have the details that she's looking for, for what's in the bill? We've got to wait and see. This is going to be a busy morning.

Also developing this morning, the assistant director of the film "Rust" says that he didn't check all of the rounds loaded into the gun before handing it to Alec Baldwin.

And we are now hearing from investigators that it was a bullet fired from the gun. As to whether anyone might be held criminally responsible, here's what the Santa Fe district attorney told CNN's Josh Campbell.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MARY CARMACK-ALTWIES, SANTA FE DISTRICT ATTORNEY: It's a terrible tragedy. We don't know how

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(END VIDEO CLIP)

BERMAN: All right. Joining us now, CNN legal analyst and criminal defense attorney, Joey Jackson, as well as CNN legal analyst and former New York City homicide prosecutor, Paul Callan.

Joe, we heard -- Joey, we heard that the D.A. there say that how those live rounds got in the chamber, that will be the linchpin to this investigation. Why and for whom? For which people involved here? I'm talking about criminal culpability.

JOEY JACKSON, CNN LEGAL ANALYST: Good morning. Good to see you. Good to see you, Brianna.

Look, the bottom line here is that it has to matter. That's significant. When you have a set like this, and we know the history. Apparently, there were people who were very concerned with respect to the safety, the lack of protocols being followed. You have guns everywhere, apparently with live ammunition, et cetera. You have people taking shooting practice and other things.

Your job specifically is to ensure that, when a gun is used, it is a cold gun. What does that mean? It means it does not have the capability to fire. To the extent that that is your job and your responsibility and you don't do it to the letter, and the reality is as a result of your conduct, the person you just referred to, something happens like a death, then you have to look and evaluate the distinction between civil liability, which is monetary damages for something that's careless, and whether or not it escalates to the level of criminality.

Now, whether that does escalate for the individual who's in charge, and there needs to be -- and I'll sum up very quickly -- a chain of custody. Where was the gun? Who secures the gun? Where does it go when it gets from one container to the other? When it gets on set, where do you place it? Does anyone else have access to it?

When you hand it to a particular actor, have you looked and assessed and ensured?

And so in the event that you acted in a negligent way, then unfortunately, that's a criminal act. That's a law, involuntary manslaughter. You act without due caution, and circumcision [SIC], then liability criminally can attach.

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(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

CARMACK-ALTWIES: Our standard for involuntary manslaughter, which is our lowest level of homicide, whether it's intentional or unintentional, is a willful disregard for the safety of others. And that key word is "willful." So that almost equates to a reckless standard, which is -- which is higher than negligence.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BERMAN: OK. Willful disregard. What does that mean, Joey -- I keep saying Joey. What does that mean, Paul, for the person who put the bullet in the chamber, and also the person or persons who were supposed to check and make sure that it wasn't there?

[06:15:09]

PAUL CALLAN, CNN LEGAL ANALYST: Well, you know, I think we heard from the sheriff and we heard from the district attorney who the potential people being looked at, in terms of a criminal indictment, are in this case.

Of course, you have to start out with Alec Baldwin. I don't happen to think that he's going to get indicted. But the district attorney said something that was very telling yesterday. She said handling a gun is like dealing with a live snake. All right?

Now, if you're dealing with a live snake, you're going to be very careful about how you handle the snake.

Baldwin heard that the gun was a cold gun, meaning it had no live ammunition in it, but he didn't really go beyond that, in terms of checking the gun. And he did something else from what we're hearing. He was doing what

one report is a cross draw, practicing a cross draw, which is reaching down into a holster like this and coming across, and the gun then discharged, killing Ms. Hutchins.

Now, the question about the discharge of the gun is, you never point a gun at another human being. That cross draw may have exposed cast members who were in that entire range of motions.

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Baldwin.

Now, for Hall, who passed the gun -- Halls, who passed the gun to him, different standard there. Because the question is, he was on the firearms safety end of things. And it was his job to make sure that Baldwin was getting a gun that had no live ammo.

And the armorer in the case becomes the other potential target in the case. And, you know, the sheriff kept talking about the key to this case is who put live ammunition in the gun? And the armorer, she's the person in charge of checking those guns every day, securing those guns, as Joey said. And, obviously, that was not done.

The standard is, did you do something without due care and circumspection? And if you did that, and you killed somebody else, that fits the standards of involuntary manslaughter. And the question is, will it rise to that level? It's a really close call here, but it wouldn't surprise me to see criminal charges come against some of these individuals.

KEILAR: It seems like there are so many layers here where things went wrong. From there being live ammunition on the set to the fact that we've learned that cast members were plinking. They were just shooting beer cans. To the fact that it seems like did the armorer check the gun? Did the A.D. check the gun? You know, does the actor? Maybe the actor doesn't.

But as a producer or anyone in an oversight role who may be aware that there are problems, there have been accidental discharges, what responsibility did they have to do something about this? Is there a point where there's accountability that is so diffuse that actually there isn't even any accountability?

JACKSON: A great question, Brianna. I don't see that. I think that people have particular roles to play, and those roles are significant. And any job that people have, we reasonably rely upon others to do it effectively. It doesn't matter what you do.

There comes a point in time, however, where you have to pinpoint the dynamics of who is specifically responsible? So no, I don't think they're at the liability is broad basis to everything on the show. Should everyone have each other's backs at all times? Of course.

CALLAN: But the question, I think, is were they running this whole thing on a shoestring? Were there enough people devoted to safety on the set? The armorer, for instance. She's on her second job. She's 24 years old.

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the movie gave it credibility. But she's only 24 years old.

There are a lot of guns around. There's a lot of scenes involving the discharge of firearms. And she's in charge of this.

She probably, it looks to me like they were understaffed. And if they were understaffed, who's responsible for that "Rust" Productions LLC is the corporation that was running the operation.

But Alec Baldwin got a producer credit on this. You know, kind of the idea for the movie went back to him and the screenwriter. Will they say that he has some responsibility because of his producer role to ensure that --

(CROSSTALK)

CALLAN: -- to do with safety on the set?

JACKSON: Brianna's point, though, is that it's so diffuse. Right? Doesn't everyone have responsibility?

And I tend to believe that they're going to pinpoint those who are specifically responsible.

KEILAR: But they can tease now (ph).

JACKSON: But absolutely, that has to be the case.

The last point, John, Brianna, and that's this. I think as a result of this, obviously, you see the sheriff's investigation. I think they'll be, of course, on the show. It's on pause. Investigation as to how they should do things better. The industry itself will take a look at what they do.

And I wouldn't be surprised if there are not legislative efforts to look at safety on all sets moving forward throughout the country.

BERMAN: Joey, Paul, thank you both very much.

[06:20:05]

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plan. As that's going on, a hugely important economic report due out this morning. We will bring you the numbers live.

KEILAR: Plus, a dangerous and scary moment at a right-wing conference when an audience member asks about killing people over false election fraud claims.

And China is issuing another stark warning to the U.S. overnight about Taiwan. We have a brand-new exclusive interview with Taiwan's president ahead.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

BERMAN: This morning "The Wall Street Journal" is under fire for publishing this letter written by the former president, former President Trump, that is riddled with falsehoods and baseless conspiracy theories about the 2020 election.

[06:25:04]

Joining us now is Maggie Haberman, CNN political analyst, Washington correspondent for "The New York Times."

Maggie, a very smart person told me not long ago that this letter written by the former president contains things that have all been fact-checked by "The Wall Street Journal" itself. Yet, the "Journal" publishes this letter from Trump, which contains all kinds of wild things in there.

To me, this is an example of the mainstreaming, the inch by inch, of the former president getting his lies into the mainstream.

MAGGIE HABERMAN, CNN POLITICAL ANALYST: He found a way to platform himself, right? I mean, he's off Twitter. He is not on most news programs, you know, with the exception of a couple of FOX, he has generally been relegated to things like OANN and so forth . And so he found a way, by writing a letter to the editor, to get it into the public.

Now, most people would say a former president having to do this kind of thing seems desperate. He doesn't care.

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But to your original point, these are claims that "The Wall Street Journal" reporters, and they're very good reporter in that newsroom, have fact checked and have talked about the fact that they're not true. And yet here they are, just being run in a way that, if an average reader stuff wrote in, they couldn't get this stuff in, most likely.

But Trump is very able and always has been, to use news processes against news outlets. And that's what he's doing here.

KEILAR: Because it doesn't matter that he's reduced to this. He doesn't care.

HABERMAN: No.

KEILAR: He doesn't have shame about it. And it's effective and gets out there for people.

HABERMAN: Yes. Look, we're talking about it, right? I mean, it was talked about on Twitter all day yesterday. Yes, it was still talked about, and this is not true. But people will still hear the details of his false claims. And that still leaves some kind of an imprint. And if you do this -- one of the things that he uses -- and I don't actually think this got enough attention during his presidency and certainly not during the 2016 campaign. One of the -- one of his methods is repetition. And he knows he's doing it. And so -- and he does -- he will say the same thing over and over and and over over again, because he knows that at a certain point, it does sink in.

And yes, there is a desire to treat him as if, you know, he literally has no idea what he's doing. He actually often, on this stuff, does know what he's doing. And this is an example.

BERMAN: Repetition is incredibly effective, as he has shown over time.

John Eastman, who was the lawyer behind the scenes who drafted a blueprint to overturn the results of the election, how Mike Pence could do it, if he chose to on January 6, he was caught up with by this activist who made a video. And I want to play what John Eastman said in that video. Listen.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: All of your legal reasoning is totally solid.

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UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: I mean like, you know, just supporting a supporter, like why do you think that Mike Pence didn't do it?

EASTMAN: Well, because Mike Pence is an establishment guy at the end of the day. In fact, all the establishment Republicans in D.C. bought into this very myopic view that Trump was destroying the Republican Party. And what Trump was doing is destroying the inside the Beltway Republican Party and reviving the Republican Party in the hinterland. Right?

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BERMAN: Again, this was a Democratic activist who posed as a Trump supporter to get Eastman to talk right there. Eastman talking about this in ways that are different than other ways he talks about this. When he says, I wasn't saying Pence should do this. I was just saying he could.

HABERMAN: Yes, look, there's a separate issue about people posing as something other than they already are to get people talking on tape. Putting that aside, what he says here is very different than what he said to "The National Review." I'd like to know if he said more than that, and I don't know if he did.

But certainly, based on those comments, he's explaining why Mike Pence wouldn't go along with a plan that he said elsewhere he wasn't seriously posing.

And this has been one of the issues since Bob Woodward and Bob Costa's book came out, "Peril," which detailed this memo. Now, look, Eastman was saying a lot of that stuff publicly. But it was

just on paper. And the reason it's important was on paper, was that they had tried suggesting, Eastman and, you know, people around Trump had tried suggesting, we're not really saying overturn it. We're just saying you can send it back to the states. That was their second plan.

The first plan was overturn it. And that wasn't going to work, because there were not alternate slates of electors. Eastman has offered various, you know, explanations at this point. And so that's what makes the memo, frankly, more important.

KEILAR: An alarming moment that I wanted to get your perspective on. This was at an Idaho event for a

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(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: We're living under corporate and medical fascism. This is tyranny. When do we get to use the guns? No, and I'm not -- that's not a joke. I'm not saying it like that. I mean, literally, where's the line? How many elections are they going to steal before we kill these people?

CHARLIE KIRK, RIGHT-WING ACTIVIST: So no. NO, hold on. No, stop. Hold on. Now I'm going to denounce that, and I'm going to tell you why. Because you're playing into all your plans. And they're trying to make you do this. What I'm saying is that we have a very fragile balance right now in our current time where we must.

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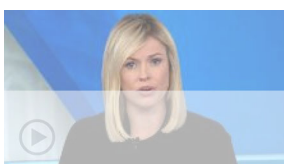
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Exhibit 12

'Deafening silence': Pamela Brown calls out GOP on Trump's Big Lie

CNN's Pamela Brown says that GOP leaders who stay silent on former President Donald Trump's Big Lie about the 2020 election are spreading his message even further. [Source: CNN](#)



'Deafening silence': Pamela Brown calls out GOP on Trump's Big Lie



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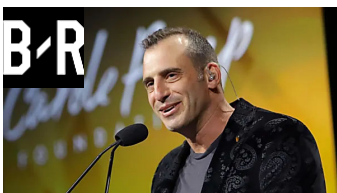
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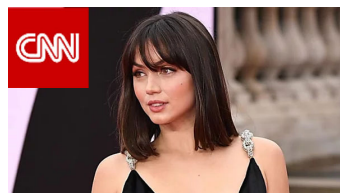
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Exhibit 13

Facts First

'Incredibly dangerous': Trump is trying to get Big Lie promoters chosen to run the 2024 election

By [Daniel Dale](#)

Updated 1:58 PM ET, Thu September 16, 2021



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Reality Check: GOP using Trump's playbook in California recall 04:04

Washington (CNN) — Swing state by swing state, former President Donald Trump is trying to get people who tried to overturn the 2020 election chosen to be in charge of the 2024 election.

Trump's [Monday endorsement](#) of state Rep. Mark Finchem for Arizona secretary of state is the latest in a series of announcements that has alarmed independent elections experts. Trump has now backed Republicans who supported his lies about the 2020 election for the job of top elections official in three crucial battlegrounds -- [Arizona](#), [Michigan](#) and [Georgia](#) -- where the current elections chiefs opposed his efforts to reverse his 2020 defeat.

If people who have sought to undermine the 2020 election are running things in 2024, when Trump [might be a candidate again](#), experts and many Democrats fear that attempts to subvert the will of the voters stand a much greater chance of success.

"It is incredibly dangerous to support people for office who do not accept the legitimacy of the 2020 election. It suggests that they might be willing to bend or break the rules when it comes to running elections and counting votes in the future," said [Rick Hasen](#), a professor of law and political science and co-director of the Fair Elections

and Free Speech Center at the University of California, Irvine. "Someone who claims falsely that the 2020 election was stolen from Trump lacks credibility and cannot be trusted to run a fair election."

Finchem, who has also [promoted QAnon conspiracy theories](#), has been an especially [aggressive promoter](#) of the lies that the 2020 election was stolen from Trump and [rife with "rampant" fraud](#).

Finchem attended the January 6 "Stop the Steal" rally in Washington and was [photographed](#) outside the US Capitol that day (he denies any involvement in the riot there). And nearly eight months after President Joe Biden's inauguration, he continues to [urge](#) Arizona legislators to somehow overturn Biden's victory in the state.

The problem for the country isn't only that prominent Republicans are supporting the lie that the election was stolen but that many everyday party voters are insisting that their candidates support such lies. A [CNN poll](#) released on Wednesday found that 63% of all respondents (correctly) thought Biden had won enough votes to win the presidency -- but that only 21% of Republicans felt that way, compared to 97% of Democrats and 64% of independents.

Colorado Secretary of State Jena Griswold, who chairs the Democratic Association of Secretaries of State political action committee and is herself up for re-election in 2022, said in a Tuesday interview with CNN that "there's an extreme amount of concern" about the Republican secretary of state candidates who have [promoted the "Big Lie" about the 2020 election](#).

[Twenty-six states](#) have elections for secretary of state in 2022. In addition to the three states in which Trump has endorsed so far, there is a key secretary race in Nevada, where Trump lost narrowly in both 2016 and 2020, and another in Minnesota, where he lost narrowly in 2016. And there is a secretary race in Ohio, where Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown [is expected to try](#) to hold on to his seat in 2024.

While a secretary's authority varies from state to state, many of them have power over critical elections processes - from [who gets sent an application for a mail-in ballot](#) to [whose names are deleted from the registration rolls](#) to [how many ballot drop boxes are permitted](#) to [which voting technology is used](#) to the [certification of the results](#).

Griswold said that, if "anti-democracy" candidates are elected, "you could imagine a secretary of state refusing to certify election results," spreading lies to influence the agenda of state legislators, even posing an "insider threat" to election security. For the country to function, Griswold said, it is essential to have state elections chiefs who "believe in democracy and believe in facts."

Three Trump endorsements

There are numerous Republicans running for secretary of state positions, some of them without a history of incendiary public remarks. But in Trump's endorsements so far, beginning with his backing of Georgia congressman [Jody Hice](#) over incumbent [Republican Brad Raffensperger](#), the former president has picked three candidates who have been outspoken in spreading false claims about what happened in 2020 and have tried to get the results invalidated.

Trump, whose endorsements [typically carry great weight](#) in Republican primaries, has made no secret of why he has been drawn to these candidates. Among other praise, Trump's endorsement of Finchem cited the candidate's "incredibly powerful stance on the massive Voter Fraud that took place in the 2020 Presidential Election Scam." (There was no scam and no such fraud.) His [endorsement](#) of Michigan Republican activist Kristina Karamo last week said, among other things, that "she is strong on Crime, including the massive Crime of Election Fraud." (Again, there was no massive crime.)

After CNN told Finchem on Tuesday that we were writing about Trump's endorsements of secretary of state candidates who have promoted election lies, including him, he responded that he would not comment in detail because CNN is "predisposed to a narrative that is built on denying facts." (On Twitter, he referred to this reporter as a "#FakeNews snake.")

Karamo's campaign and Hice's campaign did not respond to requests for comment.

Arizona rivals

Secretary of state races usually get much less attention than other races on midterm ballots. But Griswold, the Colorado secretary, said the events surrounding the 2020 election have increased the profile of the office, not only among voters but donors. She said the Democratic secretary of state PAC she chairs is having its "best fundraising cycle ever."

The race for the Arizona secretary of state post, which is being vacated by Democratic gubernatorial candidate Katie Hobbs, will be one of the most closely watched in the country, Arizona, which Biden won by just 0.2



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Finchem faces serious competition for the Republican nomination. One candidate, state Sen. Michelle Ugenti-Rita, has been a leading proponent of additional restrictions on Arizona voting since before the 2020 election. Another candidate, state Rep. Shawna Bolick, put forward a bill early this year that sought to let the state legislature to reject the will of state voters in presidential elections.

Bolick's bill, which was not passed, proposed to allow Arizona legislators revoke the secretary of state's certification of the results at "any time" until the presidential inauguration. And Bolick launched her own secretary of state bid with a statement in which she claimed a majority of voters "now believe cheating likely affected the outcome of the 2020 election" -- without making clear that this is not at all true.

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Exhibit 14

BREAKING NEWS

Ivana Trump, ex-wife of former President Trump, dies at age 73

THE POINT
WITH CHRIS CILLIZZA

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Donald Trump's mental health becomes an issue again

Analysis by [Chris Cillizza](#), CNN Editor-at-large
Updated 10:06 PM ET, Wed September 15, 2021

(CNN) — Here's a fact you may have missed amid all of the coverage of the allegations and revelations in the new book by Bob Woodward and Robert Costa: The top general *in the country* believed that President Donald Trump was in significant enough mental decline that he took countermeasures to ensure Trump didn't start a war with China on his way out the door.

Yes, that actually happened, according to "Peril." [Here's the relevant passage:](#)

"Woodward and Costa write that [Joint Chief Chairman Mark] Milley, deeply shaken by the assault, 'was certain that Trump had gone into a serious mental decline in the aftermath of the election, with Trump now all but manic, screaming at officials and constructing his own alternate reality about endless election conspiracies.'

"Milley worried that Trump could 'go rogue,' the authors write.

"'You never know what a president's trigger point is,' Milley told his senior staff," according to the book.

Think about that for a minute. Milley, the top military adviser to the president, a man who undoubtedly spent considerable time with Trump in this period of time, believed that he was in "serious mental decline" triggered by his election loss.

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And here's the thing: Milley wasn't the only person who noticed a change in Trump's behavior in the wake of the election. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, a loyal ally of the President, felt the same way. [Again, the Woodward/Costa book sheds light here:](#)

"The book details a private call McCarthy had with Trump the night before Biden's inauguration. According to Woodward and Costa, McCarthy told Trump, 'I don't know what's happened to you in the last two months. ... You're not the same as you were for the last four years.'

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"McCarthy then repeatedly pleaded with Trump to call Biden.

"You've done good things and you want that to be your legacy. Call Joe Biden," McCarthy said, according to the authors.

"Do it for me," the GOP leader continued. "You've got to call him. Call Joe Biden."

So, not only the top general in the country but also one of the two top Republicans in Congress -- and a Trump ALLY -- believed that the election had changed something in Trump. And, at least in the case of Milley, believed that Trump's mental health had declined to the point where he needed to intercede with China so that a war didn't get started by an unhinged Trump.

That is, in retrospect, terrifying. Because it's not as though Trump has been the picture of consistency and normal mental behavior for the bulk of his first term. Quite the opposite. But that Milley and McCarthy believed that things had worsened in the final months of his presidency suggests that we may well have been closer to a catastrophe than anyone even thought. (And there were plenty of people -- particularly after January 6 -- that believed the potential for more disastrous outcomes was very real!)

But, it's more than terrifying in retrospect. Because Donald Trump isn't gone. Not even close.

"I said this many, many times on the campaign trail: we may have defeated Trump, but Trumpism is not dead in this country," said California Gov. Gavin Newsom [in his victory speech](#) on Tuesday night.

That is not a partisan statement. It is a fact.

Trump has a) never conceded the 2020 election to President Joe Biden and b) continued to push the Big Lie that the election was somehow stolen despite there being zero actual evidence to back up that belief.

As recently as Monday night, Trump was using the same blueprint to sow doubts about the California recall.

"Does anybody really believe the California Recall Election isn't rigged?," [Trump asked in a statement sent from his Save America PAC](#). "Millions and millions of Mail-In Ballots will make this just another giant Election Scam, no different, but less blatant, than the 2020 Presidential Election Scam!"

This is not, then, a story about the mental health concerns about a former President. Rather it is about the mental health concerns leading officials have expressed about a man who is, without question, the leader of the Republican Party and the current 2024 front-runner to be the GOP nominee.

Which should concern all of us.



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Exhibit 15

BREAKING NEWS

Ivana Trump, ex-wife of former President Trump, dies at age 73

THE POINT
WITH CHRIS CILLIZZA

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The Big Lie is (unfortunately) winningAnalysis by [Chris Cillizza](#), CNN Editor-at-large

Updated 6:50 PM ET, Wed September 15, 2021

(CNN) — It is 100% true that Joe Biden won the 2020 election. And that Donald Trump lost it.

Unfortunately, in recent months, the Big Lie -- that Trump somehow was defrauded out of the election -- has gained increasing amounts of traction, [according to a new CNN poll](#).

In January, 59% said they have confidence that elections in this country reflect the will of the people, while 40% said they lacked that confidence.

Today? A majority of Americans -- 52% -- say they do not have confidence that elections reflect the will of the people, while 48% say they do.

That's a significant swing in less than a year, in the exact wrong direction. And it's primarily fueled by Republicans, 76%(!) of whom say they had just a little or no confidence in elections reflecting the will of the people.

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That's hardly the only data point in the poll that suggests Trump's Big Lie is working.

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While 63% of all respondents said that Biden "legitimately won enough votes to win the presidency," the story was very, very different among Republicans.

Among that group, 78% said that Biden did not win enough votes to legitimately win the election. That's right: 8 in 10 Republicans think that Biden didn't win the election.

Which, well, wow. What those numbers make clear is that among Republicans, Donald Trump and the Big Lie he is telling are winning. Winning is a relative term, of course. Because building a political party around a lie is the quickest way to destroy a political party.

The Point: The Trump fever didn't break after the 2020 election. In fact, it's running hotter than ever.

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THE SITUATION ROOM

"Blaming" the Unvaccinated; Biden Admin Officials Shift to a More Urgent Tone as COVID-19 Surges Among Unvaccinated Americans; Trump Ally Tom Barrack Strikes \$250 Million Bail Deal With Prosecutors After They Called Him a "Serious Flight Risk;" At Least 1 Suspect at Large, 2 Wounded After Shooting Outside DC Restaurants; Trump Going to Arizona to Peddle His False Election Claims. Aired 6-7pm ET

Aired July 23, 2021 - 18:00 ET

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[18:00:00]

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

JIM ACOSTA, CNN HOST: The White House strikes a more urgent tone as the rapid spread of the Delta virus sweeps across the country. Even some Republican governors are sounding the alarm with one saying it's time to start blaming the unvaccinated.

Also, tonight Trump ally Tom Barrack is getting out of jail after prosecutors called him a serious flight risk. We're breaking down his \$250 million bail deal.

And Democrats are vowing to get to the truth of the insurrection as the January 6 committee prepares for its first hearing next week. Will the GOP congressman help the panel get more bipartisan credibility?

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you're in the Situation Room.

We begin this hour with growing alarm at the White House over the Delta various assault on the unvaccinated. Let's go to our Chief White House Correspondent Kaitlan Collins. Kaitlan, new CDC data is giving the administration even more reason to be concerned tonight.

KAITLAN COLLINS, CNN WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT: Yeah, Jim, because they're watching as this Delta variant is what's fueling these outbreaks that you're seeing across the nation with half of the nation still not vaccinated. And now this new data from the CDC shows that the daily average of people becoming fully vaccinated is at the lowest point than it's been since January when those vaccinations really were getting started and people could actually start getting in line for the vaccine. And this is something Jim that is not just causing concern here at the White House, but also for leaders nationwide.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

COLLINS: A new sense of urgency in the White House tonight as the U.S. enters a troubling phase of the pandemic with officials, nationwide, voicing concern. JEN PSAKI, WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY: We understand the frustration of leaders out there and public voices, who are trying to say the right thing, save people in their communities.

COLLINS: More than half the nation remains unvaccinated allowing the highly contagious Delta variant to spread like wildfire.

PSAKI: We're the first to say and we have long said that that's not enough. We need to ensure more people and more communities are vaccinated.

COLLINS: President Biden and his top aides are worried the gains they've made are being erased while issuing blunt warnings from the White House podium to the millions who remain unvaccinated.

PSAKI: Other communities where there's 40%, 50% or otherwise, that's not just a health issue, it's a huge health issue. It's an economic issue.

COLLINS: New cases, hospitalizations and deaths are a fraction of what they were before vaccinations. But the

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the unvaccinated.

Officials say the current surge from Delta could have been avoided with one health official telling CNN we are seeing the consequences of what we've been warning about. It's serious and it's spreading faster than was anticipated.

Booster shots aren't currently recommended by the FDA. But the U.S. government has now purchased an additional 200 million doses of Pfizer's vaccine, just in case.

PSAKI: Here's the bottom line. We've always prepared for every scenario. We don't know if we'll need a booster shot.

COLLINS: Republican governors are now outright pleading with their residents to get the shot.

GOV. JIM JUSTICE, (R) WEST VIRGINIA: You've got to get vaccinated now. And so all I would say is this Delta thing is coming.

GOV. MARK PARSON, (R) MISSOURI: Unvaccinated Missourians are the primary target of this new COVID-19 strain.

COLLINS: Alabama, one of the hardest hit and now the least vaccinated state in the U.S. Only 33.9% of residents are fully vaccinated as cases are double what they were a week ago. Alabama's Republican governor says she knows who to blame.

GOV. KAY IVEY (R-AL): The new cases in COVID are because of unvaccinated folks.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: What is it going to take to get people to get shots in arms?

IVEY: I don't know, you tell me. Those folks have common sense. But it's time to start blaming the unvaccinated folks, not the regular folks. It's the unvaccinated folks that let me stay.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

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people to get the vaccine, for the first time, people who have so far have been hesitant and get it. They say that they are seeing in areas where there are high case rates, places like Alabama, a few other states, they are saying vaccinations have an uptick there, even if it is a gradual one.

ACOSTA: All right. Kaitlan Collins thanks for that report.

Now to Los Angeles where the county health director is raising a red flag about breakthrough COVID cases, she says about 20% of new infections in the county are among vaccinated residents. Our National Correspondent Nick Watt is in Los Angeles. Nick, this is a concerning headline, but there's an important context here. Give us the latest?

[18:05:00]

NICK WATT, CNN NATIONAL CORRESPONDENT: Yeah. Well, Jim, the headline is this that in June more than 800 fully vaccinated people here in Los Angeles tested positive for COVID-19. Health officials say the number in July could be even higher, and they are pointing at the Delta variant, calling it a game changer. That's all the scary stuff. Here is the context. Among those fully vaccinated people who tested positive, very, very few were hospitalized most mild or asymptomatic. So that is the good news.

And the scary headline really kind of masks the real headline here, which is what Kaitlan was just talking about, and it's the Delta variant spread amongst the unvaccinated.

Here in Los Angeles highest case rates they've seen in months and the vast majority of those people catching the virus are unvaccinated. So what are they doing about it? Well, like elsewhere in the country, they are encouraging more people to get the vaccine and also here in Los Angeles, the mask mandate is back indoors, even if you're vaccinated, you are supposed to wear a mask.

Now, some law enforcement are saying that they weren't enforced that. But that is the message from health officials. And they use this analogy to explain why, they say think of this pandemic as a weather event, heavy rain. So your umbrella is your vaccine that keeps you pretty safe until the winds pick up and the rain gets even heavier. That's the Delta barrier. Then you are going to need a raincoat as well. And that is your mask. They want to stifle this Delta variant as quickly as they possibly can here and across the country. Jim?

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Let's bring in our pandemic experts, Dr. Paul Offit. He is a member of the FDA Vaccines Advisory Committee and Director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and Dr. Leana Wen, is a CNN Medical Analyst and Emergency Room Physician and the former Baltimore City Health Commissioner.

Dr. Offit, let me start with you first, you just heard from the governor of Alabama Kay Ivey, who said it's time to start blaming unvaccinated folks who are, "letting us down." I know people don't like pointing fingers and laying blame and that sort of thing. What do you think of that message?

DR. PAUL OFFIT, DIRECTOR, VACCINE EDUCATION CENTER, CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL OF PHILADELPHIA: That's exactly the right message. The reason that this virus continues to spread, continues to cause people to suffer and be hospitalized and die and frankly, continues to mutate with the possibility of making an even more contagious variant, or a variant that resists immunity induced by natural infection is because a critical percentage of this population is unvaccinated. I mean, we talked about booster dosing or other things. This is the problem, we need to vaccinate people who are unvaccinated at or if not, this is going to continue to spread and continue to cause harm.

ACOSTA: And we've shown these great maps from our excellent graphics team showing a high vaccination rates in the United States in the northeast in the Midwest. That's where you're seeing lots of people fully vaccinated and then lay that other map on screen. It shows where these coronavirus cases are spiking. They're in largely unvaccinated areas. The correlation is as simple as that. Dr. Leana Wen, you have pointed out, though, that the great unknown right now is whether vaccinated people can transmit the coronavirus to others. How does that key question impact how we think about, what it means to be vaccinated? I mean, it's obviously better to be vaccinated we just saw those two maps.

DR. LEANA WEN, EMERGENCY ROOM PHYSICIAN: Absolutely. And I think we should absolutely be emphasizing the importance of the vaccines while also giving a bit more nuance than say, if you're vaccinated, you're protected. Well, let's talk about what you're protected against. We know that vaccines protect you extremely well against severe illness. So you're very, very unlikely to end up in a hospital or to die once you're vaccinated. That's the purpose of the vaccine, to keep you from ending up with severely ill.

At this rate, though, we also know that there is a chance that you could get mild infection. We don't know exactly what the number is because the CDC inexplicably stopped tracking these mild breakthrough infections. But the critical question also is, if you are infected, is there a chance that you could then spread the infection to others,

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fully vaccinated, that reduces the viral load, but isn't enough to prevent you from transmitting it to others. I think this is one of the reasons why you see many public health experts still wearing masks indoors, if we are around people who we don't know are vaccinated or not because we want to use an abundance of caution with so much unknown about the Delta variant.

ACOSTA: Right, we don't want to catch it, spread it to others, even unknowingly, even though we've been on beer vaccinated. That's a great nuance to point out.

Dr. Offit, new information though from Israel's Ministry of Health suggests the effectiveness of the Pfizer vaccine against coronavirus is down to 39%. Though the vaccine does offer 91.4% protection against severe illness, what should the takeaway be from that new information? I suppose it's a bit of what Dr. Wen was saying. And that is, you know, one of the points of getting the vaccine is that you don't get seriously ill.

[18:10:18]

OFFIT: Right. And that's -- that, to me is the most important point, as Dr. Wen said. I mean, this vaccine, in turn -- if in terms of protecting against the Delta variant protects against severe critical disease, keeps you out of the hospital, keeps you out of the morgue, that's what you want. It is less effective, though, at preventing, you know, mild or asymptomatic or even low moderate infection. So for that reason, I think it's important also, as we move forward, especially into the winter to wear mask.

And I think Dr. Wen made a point that really should be emphasized, which is the first virus that came out of China the so called D614G variant, which swept across Europe and the United States killing hundreds of millions of people. It was -- it eventually what -- that was replaced by the Alpha variant. The Alpha variant was, you shed 10 times more virus than the first variant. That's why it was more contagious. This is 100 times more than the Alpha variant. I mean, that's how contagious.

Therefore, you don't need to have very long contact with people to get infected. And it also means that you -- because it's more contagious, you have to have a higher percentage of the population that's vaccinated.

ACOSTA: And Dr. Wen, the Delta variant is leading to significant increases in the number of fully vaccinated people testing positive for the virus. Does the administration, do you think, need to do a better job of addressing the concerns of vaccinated people? Because I suppose there are a lot of people at home who are vaccinated. I have

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WEN: Right. And I think the administration needs to first acknowledge that breakthrough infections do happen, and acknowledging that does not undermine trust in the vaccine. I mean, that's like saying, if you are wearing a seatbelt, and yet you still have an automobile accident that seatbelts don't work. No, it means that if there are reckless drivers around you, the seatbelt can protect you a little bit. But ultimately, they're still reckless drivers. And that's the issue. And so I think in this case, we should be emphasizing that the vaccines do work to prevent you from having severe illness, but that breakthrough infections can happen and what the CDC really needs to do is to start giving us the answers to what is the rate of breakthrough infections? Is it one in 1000? Or is it one in 10? Or is it one in two? I mean, we really literally don't know what is the rate of breakthrough infections, and the likelihood of that breakthrough infection ending up in a chain of transmission to others.

ACOSTA: And the important point is we call them breakthrough infections, but if you're vaccinated, it is very likely you will not get seriously ill or end up in the morgue, as Dr. Offit just put it.

Dr. Wen, Dr. Offit, thank you so much for that several analysis, we appreciate it, hope it makes a difference.

And just ahead, the terms of Tom Barrack's \$250 million bail deal, might the Trump ally be considering a plea deal, next. You're in The Situation.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[18:17:19]

ACOSTA: Tonight, a billionaire Trump ally has cut a deal to get out of jail, Tom Barrack, striking a \$250 million bail agreement with prosecutors who had called him a serious flight risk.

Let's bring in CNN Senior Legal Affairs Correspondent, Paula Reid. Paula, tell us more about this bail deal. This is an extraordinary amount of money.

PAULA REID, CNN SENIOR LEGAL AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT: It is an extraordinary amount of money. It's a quarter of a billion dollars. But prosecutors agreed to this deal that will allow Barrack to remain free ahead of his expected trial.

But this is quite a shift. Just a few days ago, federal prosecutors were arguing he's a significant flight risk. They

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lawyers money can buy. And they have been solely focused, Jim, on getting their client out of jail.

Remember, he's in California, but this case is being charged in New York. So their goal is to keep their 74 year old billionaire client off of the notorious Con Air, right the plane that the U.S. Marshals used to transport people, and it appears that they have been successful.

Now some people have asked me, does this deal mean that he's cooperating or signaled that he will cooperate against the former president? My sources say no, at this time, there's no indication that he's going to cooperate in any state or federal case.

ACOSTA: All right. Paula, CNN reported that prosecutors had enough evidence to charge Barrack last year. I understand members of Congress are not happy about that, they want an investigation into how this happened. Tell us about that?

REID: That's right. Well, me and some of our colleagues we reported earlier this week, the federal prosecutors believe they had enough evidence to charge Barrack last year, and this was well in advance of that deadline that prosecutors have where they're encouraged not to bring any politically sensitive cases too close to an election. They say this was taken care of before that, but he was attorney at the time in Brooklyn, Richard Donoghue. He didn't appear to support this case. Neither did his boss U.S. then Attorney General, Bill Barr. He wasn't a big fan of these foreign lobbying cases. And what's not clear is if Donoghue did anything to intentionally stall this case, or if the prosecutors working on it said look, we don't want to bring this if it's not going to have the support of the boss or the boss' boss. And now these Democratic lawmakers following this CNN reporting, they're calling on the Justice Department inspector general to investigate.

ACOSTA: All right, we'll see if they get any answers. Paula, stay with us as we bring in Dave Aronberg, the State Attorney in Palm Beach County, Florida.

Dave, you have some experience with billionaires who get into hot water I suppose from time to time. What do you make of this \$250 million bail deal? I guess it's good to be a billionaire.

DAVE ARONBERG, STATE ATTORNEY, PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA: It sure is, in life and in the court system. But keep in mind, he is 74 years old. So that mitigates him as a flight risk, although he does have a lot of money, he's got a private plane and he's got extensive ties to the Middle East, including special ties to the

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[18:20:15]

So you can see why prosecutors would have been concerned. But here's something the fact that prosecutors reached a deal with someone who has a clear flight risk, that often does mean that they think they could flip the defendant or at least cut a plea deal with them.

Now, we don't know, as Paula said, if that's happening in this case, but it does lead to some speculation and rightly so.

ACOSTA: And you just alluded to this, giving up his passport, getting fitted with a GPS monitor. This has to all be sinking in right now. Does Barrack still have time to consider flipping and cooperating? Or would he have done that before posting this massive bail amount?

ARONBERG: Oh, no, every day that he's facing 10 years in prison for violation of Section 951 makes them think about flipping at 74 years old, that could amount to a life sentence.

Now remember, this is not a FARA case, Foreign Agent Registration Act, a lot of people reported on that, that's a lesser crime. That's punishable by up to five years in prison. And that's for failure to register as a lobbyist for a foreign entity. When you're talking about what Barrack is being charged with. It's under Section 951. It's far more serious. It's -- the crime of working directly with a foreign government. It's also a crime referred to by some as espionage light. It's what Maria Butina was charged with, the Russian spy.

And so this is really serious for Barrack. And, you know, the UAE he used him as their own pseudo ambassador, because he was so well connected. They even asked him to develop a special 100 day policy proposal. And that goes beyond just lobbying. And then one other thing, he was so dumb to lie to federal investigators, and now they hit him with lying and obstruction of justice, that can add on many more years and also help prove the other charges because why would you lie unless you are guilty.

ACOSTA: Yes. All the allegations of lying to investigators, that's not going to sit well, that is something that they are going to take very seriously?

REID: They're going to take it very seriously. And again, this is someone with the best lawyers money can buy. He has unlimited resources to defend himself against this case, which is part of why he doesn't really have to

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and allegedly trying to obstruct this investigation.

ACOSTA: We've seen liars go to jail before it. Dave Aronberg, Paula Reid, thanks so much for those insights as always.

And coming up after a tumultuous week, what should we look for when the House Select Committee starts taking testimony and its capitol riot investigation? That's next.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[18:27:15]

ACOSTA: The countdown is on to the first testimony before the January 6 committee just four days from now. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is looking to bolster the panel's bipartisan standing before Tuesday's hearing following a Republican boycott.

CNN Congressional Correspondent, Ryan Nobles has the latest on that. Ryan, what's the status of Pelosi search to add Republicans to the committee? It sounds like it might happen but you just haven't seen it yet?

RYAN NOBLES, CNN CONGRESSIONAL CORRESPONDENT: Yeah, and Jim, the speaker not tipping her hand as to her plans even late on Friday afternoon, just a couple of days before this hearing took place. She just sent a letter to all of her colleagues setting the stage for what this committee will do when they begin their work next Tuesday. And in part, that letter reads, "The committee established the key priority to begin with the testimony of patriots who served and sacrificed on that dark day. Each is a hero, and each will bring powerful testimony about the truth of that day." And it's no doubt the clear effort here by the Democrats that are running this select committee that they want to establish exactly what happened on that day, the truth of what went on here on January 6, by hearing directly from these frontline officers, from the Capitol Police Department, from the Metropolitan Police Department who were beat up and attacked by this riot.

And, of course, Jim, the big question becomes, though, who will be those asking the questions on that day, we know that there are eight members already established. Seven of them are Democrats just one right now is Republican that being Liz Cheney, but we know that the speaker is actively considering adding more Republican voices to that conversation among them, Adam Kinzinger, the Republican from Illinois, who's been of course a big

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serve in an advisory capacity. She had former Virginia Congressman Denver Riggleman here on Capitol Hill yesterday and is in conversations with him.

At this point, though, Pelosi has not made that formal step of inviting Kinzinger, Riggleman and perhaps others to join the panel in official capacity. We'll have to see if that announcement comes over the weekend. But Jim, we are now closing out on just a couple of days before that hearing begins. And it's clear that no matter what Pelosi and House Democrats are ready to move forward, with or without Republican help, Jim.

ACOSTA: It's coming. That's right, Ryan Nobles. Thank you so much.

And joining me now, Congressman Jason Crow, a Democrat who serves on the House Intelligence and Armed Services Committees. Congressman, thanks so much for being with us. You thought you'd have to fight your way out of the House Chamber on January 6. What do you hope people can take away from this first select committee hearing with testimony from these four officers who put their lives on the line that day?

[18:30:03]

REP. JASON CROW, (D) INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE: Yeah, hi, Jim, thanks for having me. I did feel like I would have to fight my way out. Like many of us who are trapped in the House gallery that day. We made calls to our loved ones, to our family we didn't know what was going to happen. I haven't felt that way since I was an Army Ranger in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The bottom line is we're going to do our duty, we're going to do what we need to do to protect the American people against this growing violent extremist movement, to make sure that this does not happen again, because voters cast their votes, and had to have those votes certified as we have, for hundreds of years in this democracy. This insurrection tried to prevent that certification from happening. It failed to do that, although it did slow it down. We're going to make sure that never happens again. And we have a duty to those officers over 140, who were brutally beaten, one who lost his life as a result of his injuries, one who later took his life after the event. We have an obligation to them and their families to find the truth, to hold those responsible, accountable, and to make sure that we fix this.

ACOSTA: And Congressman, one of the officers who will testify Tuesday is expected to say January 6, was worse than anything he experienced serving in Iraq. You also served in Iraq and Afghanistan. How does that resonate

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CROW: Yeah, it certainly resonates because I got back into combat mode, frankly, that day, you know, I never thought -- when I took the uniform off, I never thought I would be back into that mindset. And frankly, I'm kind of resentful, and still dealing with the emotions around that. And I put my uniform off. I've since become a parent, a father, you know, a veteran's advocate, a member of Congress, thought that I've left that life behind me. But that day, my mind was thrust back into that mode, I had to go back there, a place where I never thought I would have to go again, thinking about finding my way out. I, at one point thought about asking an officer for his firearm, because I knew that I could use it and do what was necessary to protect me and my colleagues if it came to that.

So that was a very difficult place to be. And I'm still kind of working through that. But that's what happened. That's the truth. This was not just another day. This is not just another tour, despite the fact that some people want to sweep this under the rug. It was a brutal, dark day. It was an insurrection and attack against our democracy, as well as against members of Congress and police officers and the staff of the Capitol.

ACOSTA: And we can see in this video right now, the Congressman Jim Himes tweeted out, put out, there's you right there, there you are, right there. You know, hiding, taking cover and wondering what to do next with other fellow lawmakers. It just must have been a harrowing situation. I can understand why it's staying with you to this day. But let me ask you, Congressman, Adam Kinzinger, on -- one of your colleagues on the Republican side, has privately said, we understand he would serve on this Select Committee, if he's asked, do you think the speaker should offer that position on the Committee?

CROW: Well, I'm not going to, you know, say who should and shouldn't be on the committee. I have a lot of respect for Adam Kinzinger. He's a serious person. He's somebody that I think takes his oath seriously. Now, to be clear, I don't agree with him on politics all the time, or even most of the time. But I do think he has somebody who takes his oath seriously, that would take his obligations to the Constitution in the country seriously. And, you know, this is a committee that needs serious people, because it's serious work. This is not a game. This is not a political circus. We're not going to allow it to become a political circus, because the American people deserve better. And I'm confident that the speaker will choose people that will be disciplined, that will be clear eyed, there'll be focused on the task at hand and discharge the obligations of this office and their oath to do right by the American people and those officers.

ACOSTA: All right, we'll be watching next week to see how this hearing plays out. And Congressman Jason Crow we appreciate your insights as always. We know you'll be watching it and have more to say about it next week. Thanks again. CROW: Thanks, Jim.

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Just ahead, the stadium was mostly empty, or the pandemic hasn't gone away. But the Olympics officially open today. We'll go live in Tokyo, next.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[18:38:16]

ACOSTA: Tokyo Olympic Games are officially underway about 950 VIPs were on hand to witness the opening ceremonies. But the huge stadium was mostly empty. Spectators were not allowed because of the coronavirus pandemic. And we're joined now by CNN Sports Analyst Christine Brennan. She's a Columnist for USA Today and CNN Chief Medical Correspondent, Dr. Sanjay Gupta. They're both in Tokyo.

And I know you guys are dealing with a lot just reporting from over there. So thank you so much for what you're doing.

Sanjay, you attended the opening ceremony as a doctor, a journalist, but also one of the very few people able to take in the start of the Olympic Games in person. Tell us about that experience. What was it like?

DR. SANJAY GUPTA, CNN CHIEF MEDICAL CORRESPONDENT: Well, you know, I mean, as you've heard so many times over this past week, it was it was strange. It was it was weird in many ways. It was magnificent for the event itself. And that Olympic Stadium, that National Stadium, which they've built, is a really majestic place.

Jim, I got to tell you, but you know, it's this tale of two cities, you have the excitement of the Olympics, and you have the anxiety of the population. People in Japan pretty much said, hey, look, stay home. We're in a state of emergency, watch this thing on your television. When I was outside, there were tons of protests. And it was very loud people on the streets.

I want to show you this video, Jim, that I just took on my phone as I was walking in. So going from the streets where there's lots of protests, lots of noise, camera on the corner and there's just basically, that's it. It's totally quiet I don't know if you can make that out.

ACOSTA: Sure I can.

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there, walked in and there was nobody to tell you where to sit. Because there was, you know, there's nobody sitting in those seats. There's no vendors. There's no swag. There's no shouting. It was really, really quiet.

[18:40:09] The stadium itself, magnificent, I mean this -- you can just see the future potential of what they have built there. But on that night last night, there just wasn't a lot going on.

ACOSTA: Oh, it's just so eerie, you look at that video. Christine Brennan, you covered every opening ceremony since 1984. How do these games feel to you? This is just stunning word. Sanjay was showing us a few moments ago. I mean, you could almost hear the crickets?

CHRISTINE BRENNAN, CNN SPORTS ANALYST: Well, you could and there were so few people, Sanjay, I can't believe we didn't bump into each other. But yes, it was the most unique and unusual of the 19 that I've covered going back, Jim, to LA in 1984. And it really was fitting for Olympics, is trying to go on in the middle of a global pandemic. You know, there was -- the hope that this would be, the thing we've moved becoming out of the pandemic, that things would be getting better when they push the Olympics back a year. And instead, we're right smack dab in the middle of it. And I think it reflected it, it was somber, it was sad. It was reflective. And I'm afraid that's going to be the story of these games.

The exuberance from the athletes, you saw them coming, jumping in and whatever running around, that was nice to see. But overall, most of those athletes got the heck out of there as quickly as possible. There was a lot of mingling going on, and that clearly was not social distancing. And they got those athletes out there on buses back to the village as quickly as possible.

ACOSTA: I'm sure they did. And Sanjay 110 COVID-19 cases have been linked to the 2020 games so far. What is your sense on the ground? Are these mitigation efforts working?

GUPTA: I want to be, you know, fair here, Jim. And I've talked to lots of people about this, including the Chief Medical Adviser to the IOC about this. I mean, these numbers obviously, are concerning and they've been going up, as you know. I think one thing that they have sort of really emphasized is the testing that they're doing within the village. I mean, it's very hard to maintain a bubble, as we have talked about, I mean, you got 1000s of people coming from all over the world. So the idea of a bubble, like they did with the NBA, I think is just is really next to impossible. But the testing does make a difference and the tracing. So the biggest thing that they're looking for is to see if there's evidence of any of these, you know, mostly breakthrough infections that we're talking about,

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signal to them that they need to start pulling things back within the Olympic Village itself. They haven't seen that.

So these exposures, these positive numbers that we're seeing, probably reflect exposures that happened before they got to the village.

ACOSTA: Oh, interesting.

GUPTA: We'll see, we'll trace these numbers over the next couple of weeks. But that's sort of their working theory right now. And they are testing a lot every day. People are getting tested in the village.

ACOSTA: And Christine, how are the athletes responding to the measures in place right now?

BRENNAN: Oh, they know, this is what they have to do, Jim. They are so thankful for the opportunity to be here. It's a very different perspective than what we think they have, instead of focusing on the negatives or focusing on the fact that they're even having this chance at all and they're willing to go run the gauntlet of COVID tests to be able to do it.

The U.S. Olympic team has 100 unvaccinated athletes, almost 105 vaccinated athletes. I was working on that story yesterday asking the questions of the USOPC that stunning when you think about it, 100 of them who chose not to get vaccinated, as I said, nearly 196 197, 198 we're not quite sure of the number of the 613 American athletes here talk about being bad and bad guests. You know, you're coming to Japan, you're around your teammates, the contact tracing possibilities. It's really quite a story that so many American athletes chose not to be vaccinated coming into a country. That is the very definition of a COVID hotspot.

ACOSTA: Yeah, and we appreciate what you guys are doing to get to the games and cover the games for us. Christine Brennan and Dr. Sanjay Gupta, thanks as always, we appreciate it.

And coming up, the gun violence epidemic, it's a popular restaurant road here in D.C. and the police chief here in Washington says he's mad as hell. Detail is here.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[18:48:45]

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outside some popular D.C. restaurants last night, prompting diners to take cover.

As you may have heard, I was there when it happened. Grabbed my phone and took some video as I got a scary taste of what too many people have been experiencing in this country in all kinds of neighborhoods.

Our Brian Todd has more on this troubling summer of shootings.

Brian, seems like I witnessed last night are playing out every night and day across the U.S., isn't that right?

BRIAN TODD, CNN CORRESPONDENT: They really are, Jim. And today, even the White House press secretary weighed in on the latest violence here in D.C., saying that Washington is one of those cities getting federal help in its attempt to fight gun violence.

You know, we began at Nationals Park where gunfire had erupted. We ended here at the scene of increased police presence, the scene of another firing at a public venue.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

TODD (voice-over): Rapid fire give up shots. This video recorded by CNN's Jim Acosta shows people in a popular dining and bar area in D.C. scrambling for cover as two people are shot and wounded on the street. A witness said it all unfolded in about a minute.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: The guns are shooting like all over.

[18:50:01]

You could see it hitting the ground. It was semiautomatics. It sounded like a war zone.

TODD: D.C.'s police chief says at least one of those injured appeared to be targeted in Thursday's shooting.

His frustration with the gun violence in his city palpable today.

CHIEF ROBERT CONTEE, WASHINGTON, D.C. METROPOLITAN POLICE: People are really mad as hell

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TODD: This comes on the heels of another shooting at a very public venue in Washington. Gunfire between two vehicles that injured three people just outside Nationals Park in the middle of a game between the Washington Nationals and San Diego Padres.

(GUNFIRE)

TODD: Panic stricken fans scrambled toward concourses and dugouts, thinking it was a mass shooting in the stadium. In other recent shootings in Washington and Philadelphia, a 6-year-old girl on a scooter and a 1-year-old boy was randomly struck by gunfire.

Tonight, America's summer of gun violence shows no signs of waning. So far this year, New York, Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area have seen a rise in homicides from the same point last year. Chicago and D.C. are about on pace with where they were last year. City officials and crime analysts cite many reasons.

JEFFREY IAN ROSS, CRIMINOLOGIST, UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE: We are seeing more people paying attention to these acts of violence in public. We're seeing more people outside because of the lifting of restrictions connected to the pandemic. People are dining at restaurants at outdoor eating establishments and so that's likely to be places where shooters may show up.

TODD: But D.C. Police Chief Robert Contee also cites a clogged court system allowing more dangerous people on the street.

CONTEE: Let's think about the individuals we locked up in 2020 during COVID that have not been through a judicial process. Where do you think those individuals are today? They're out in community. They're out in community right now, individuals that have been locked up for violent crime. Individuals who have been locked up with firearms, they're in our communities today. TODD: Illegal gun trafficking in the cities is a cited reason for the

continuing violence. The Justice Department launching strike forces based in several major cities to disrupt those trafficking networks. One of their biggest challenges, tracking so-called ghost guns.

ROSS: They are sort of self-manufactured guns or they have identifications have been removed, filed off. They're very difficult to trace.

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TODD: Criminologist Jeffrey Ian Ross says of those gun trafficking task forces being set up by the Justice Department that we should not expect them to bring big declines in gun violence anytime soon. He says those unit take a lot of time to work their sources, gather intelligence, share intelligence and then move on it. He says they might start to bring some results in six months, maybe a year, maybe as long as 18 months -- Jim.

ACOSTA: All right. Brian Todd, thank you very much for that report.

Coming up next, Donald Trump prepares to take his big lie to Arizona. We'll get a fact check from Arizona's secretary of state.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[18:57:27]

ACOSTA: Former President Trump will be in Arizona this weekend to peddle his baseless conspiracy theories about voter fraud, his go-to excuse for losing the 2021 election.

We're joined by the Arizona Secretary of State Katie Hobbs. She oversaw last year's voting and now is seeking the Democratic nomination for Arizona governor.

Secretary, thanks so much.

How dangerous is it for Donald Trump to be coming to your state tomorrow, do you think?

KATIE HOBBS (D), ARIZONA SECRETARY OF STATE: Well, it is dangerous. I'm glad you pointed that out.

But the bottom line is it doesn't matter what he says or does, nothing is going to change the outcome of the 2020 election. But it also doesn't change how dangerous this is.

The bottom line is that Arizonians are tired of being led by conspiracy theorists. They don't support this fake audit and they're ready for leaders who are going to put those partisan games aside and deal with real issues.

That's why I'm running for governor and folks can join me at [KatieHobbs.org](https://www.katiehobbs.org).

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moment ago.

But "The Washington Post" reports former President Trump's political PAC hasn't put any money towards that effort. What does that tell you?

HOBBS: Well, I think that what we don't know is who is actually putting money towards this. They've been using this as a fundraising mechanism. Don't know where the money is coming from, don't know where it's going and how much there is. And that is, you know, if this is a post-election audit that's legitimate should have transparency in that regard. And what this really seems to be is a tool for someone to continue to raise money off of.

ACOSTA: And so, what is your message to Donald Trump ahead of this rally? Don't come?

HOBBS: Well, I mean, like most grownups, take your loss and accept it and move on. I mean, this is -- nothing that's going on here is going to change the outcome and really, this is nothing more than being a sore loser.

ACOSTA: And what do you think is going to be the outcome in your state after this audit is complete? Are you going to have to go around and educate people about, you know, how this was just a phony baloney exercise?

HOBBS: Well, we've been doing that all along. It's been clear from day one the folks running this exercise don't know what they're doing. It is so fraught with errors and problems that there is really no way they could come up with a legitimate outcome or result.

And at this point, who knows how long it's going to go on because as I mentioned, they continue to fund raise off of it, and, you know, we don't know what it's going to wrap up.

ACOSTA: All right. Well, we hope it wraps up soon and they end this and move on with their lives.

Katie Hobbs, thanks so much. We appreciate it.

I'm Jim Acosta. I'll see you tomorrow afternoon at 3:00 p.m. Eastern on "CNN NEWSROOM". Thanks for watching all weeklong.

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Exhibit 17

BREAKING NEWS

Ivana Trump, ex-wife of former President Trump, dies at age 73



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The Big Lie keeps getting bigger

Analysis by [Paul LeBlanc](#)

Updated 10:46 AM ET, Mon July 12, 2021

A version of this story appeared in CNN's What Matters newsletter. To get it in your inbox, sign up for free [here](#).

(CNN) — Former President [Donald Trump](#) on Sunday delivered another avalanche of lies about the 2020 election in a disturbing [preview of where Republican energy is parked](#) ahead of [next year's midterms](#).

Speaking to an enthusiastic crowd at the Conservative Political Action Conference, Trump peddled the same falsehoods that sparked the deadly Capitol insurrection and set off a GOP-led clampdown on voting rights nationwide.

- He lied about election integrity. "We were doing so well until the rigged election happened to come along."
- He lied about about big tech. "The big tech giants worked together to suppress and diminish news coverage that was negative for Joe Biden."
- He lied about election officials. "This was an election where the person that counts the votes was far more important than the candidate."
- He lied about the Justice Department. "They failed to call out the late night ballot stuffing that took place in Georgia."

But the Big Lie has big buy-in. At a gathering branded as "America UnCanceled," Donald Trump Jr. warmed up the crowd on Friday night with quick-witted condemnations of cancel culture and digs at President Joe Biden's son Hunter. But the biggest applause line wasn't even his own. During his speech, an attendee bellowed "Trump won!" eliciting a standing ovation and setting off a round of "Trump" chants.

The refusal to move on has consequences. Echoing Trump's falsehoods, state lawmakers have enacted nearly 30 laws since the 2020 election that restrict ballot access, according to a tally by the Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University School of Law. [Read more here](#).

Texas Republicans want to be next. GOP lawmakers in the state are mounting another [push for restrictive voting laws](#) during a 30-day special legislative session that Gov. Greg Abbott says he wants to see focused in part on "election integrity."

Felony voting back in the spotlight. A Texas man who told CNN he waited for "over six hours" at a polling center in Houston to participate in Super Tuesday last year was [arrested and charged with two felony counts of illegal voting](#). He now faces up to 40 years in prison if convicted.

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Exhibit 18

BREAKING NEWS

Ivana Trump, ex-wife of former President Trump, dies at age 73



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Donald Trump just accidentally told the truth about his disinformation strategy

Analysis by [Chris Cillizza](#), CNN Editor-at-large

Updated 6:52 PM ET, Mon July 5, 2021

(CNN) — If you listen to him long enough -- no easy chore -- Donald Trump will tell you all his secrets.

Witness [this line from his July 3 speech](#) in Sarasota, Florida:

"If you say it enough and keep saying it, they'll start to believe you."

Trump was [talking](#) about alleged disinformation directed at him and other Republicans. But WOW does that quote explain everything you need to know about his approach to the presidency and life.

(Sidebar: One can only hope that Trump was unaware that his quote was a near-replication of [this infamous line](#) from Nazi Joseph Goebbels: "If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.")

Trump has spent a lifetime -- in business and politics -- repeating exaggerations, half-truths and outright lies to make himself look good.

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The books he wrote prior to politics are littered with quotes extolling the virtues of making up a reality and then repeating it until people start to believe it.

"I play to people's fantasies," [he wrote in "The Art of the Deal."](#) "People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular. I call it truthful hyperbole."

"If you admit defeat, then you will be defeated," Trump wrote in ["Think Big."](#)

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In each episode of his weekly YouTube show, Chris Cillizza will delve a little deeper into the surreal world of politics. [Click to subscribe!](#)

Once he came into the presidency, Trump, unsurprisingly, kept it up.

"Don't believe the crap you see from these people, the fake news," [Trump told a VFW group in 2018.](#) "What you're seeing and what you're reading is not what's happening."

Unfortunately, Trump's blueprint works.

Take the 2020 election. Despite zero evidence of any sort of widespread election fraud, a majority (53%) of Republicans said in a [Reuters/Ipsos national poll in late May](#) that President Joe Biden's victory was "the result of illegal voting or election rigging." More than 6 in 10 Republicans (61%) agreed with the statement that the election "was stolen from Donald Trump."

Siloed in news bubbles and social groups that sync up entirely with their own views and "facts," a large chunk of Republican voters have been convinced that the election was somehow stolen -- largely because, well, Trump told them it was.

To take advantage of trust people put in you -- as well as their narrow news diet -- is, of course, deeply irresponsible. And the opposite of what it means to be a leader.

But for Trump, "winning" is the only goal -- and the single measure by which he wants to be judged. Truth (and its consequences) be damned.

The Point: Trump's willingness to mislead people solely for his own purposes may well be the most dangerous attribute of a man with lots and lots of them.

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Exhibit 19

BREAKING NEWS

Ivana Trump, an ex-wife of former President Trump, dies at 73

Trump's big lie about 2020 results suffers legal and



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By [Eric Bradner](#), CNN

Updated 11:24 AM ET, Sun June 27, 2021

(CNN) — It was a bad week for [the Big Lie](#) -- [former President Donald Trump](#) and his allies' false claims that widespread fraud is to blame for his 2020 election loss.

In one battleground state, Republican senators issued a report that eviscerated Trump's lies about voter fraud. In another, [a judge undercut Trump's supporters' hopes](#) to examine nearly 150,000 mail-in ballots. And one of Trump's closest allies, Rudy Giuliani, was [suspended from practicing law](#) in New York.

Trump and his conspiracy-minded supporters have eagerly been anticipating the conclusion of the problem-plagued audit of Maricopa County's results in Arizona, but regardless of its final report, it will have no impact on the 2020 election results, as the election was already certified. Trump repeated his election lies at [a rally in Ohio Saturday night](#), but last week's blows underscored the reality that their options to continue contesting the 2020 election are narrowing.

In Michigan, the Republican-led state Senate Oversight Committee said in [a report](#) released Wednesday that there was "no evidence of widespread or systematic fraud" in the state's 2020 election. The report included a stinging condemnation of the lies about voter fraud pushed by Trump and his supporters.

"Our clear finding is that citizens should be confident the results represent the true results of the ballots cast by the people of Michigan," the committee, chaired by Republican state Sen. Ed McBroom, said in its report. "The Committee strongly recommends citizens use a critical eye and ear toward those who have pushed demonstrably false theories for their own personal gain."

Then, in Georgia on Thursday, a judge dismissed most of a lawsuit that claimed fraudulent mail-in ballots had been cast in Fulton County, the state's largest county, in last year's election -- a blow to the pro-Trump plaintiffs' bid to conduct an in-person examination of nearly 150,000 mail-in ballots with high-powered microscopes.

The judge dismissed seven of the lawsuit's nine claims against Fulton County officials, only allowing the plaintiffs' request for digital images of the ballots under the state's open records law to move forward. Biden won the state by 12,000 votes, and Georgia officials have already audited the 2020 results three times, including a hand recount.

"Last year, I told President Trump and others who push the Big Lie to 'put up or shut up.' It's been six months and no proof of wrongdoing has been produced. Enough is enough -- this whole circus must end," Robb Pitts, the chairman of the Fulton County Board of Commissioners, said in a statement.

The same day, Giuliani, who had been Trump's personal lawyer and one of Trump's closest allies in advancing lies about the 2020 election, was [suspended from practicing law](#) in New York state by an appellate court that found he made "demonstrably false and misleading statements" about the 2020 election.

In a ruling released following disciplinary proceedings, the court concluded that "there is uncontroverted evidence" that Giuliani, the former Manhattan US attorney, "communicated demonstrably false and misleading statements to courts, lawmakers and the public at large in his capacity as lawyer for former President Donald J. Trump and the Trump campaign in connection with Trump's failed effort at reelection in 2020."

Giuliani's "conduct immediately threatens the public interest and warrants interim suspension from the practice of law," the court wrote.

Trump has railed against the actions that challenge his lies about the 2020 election. He attacked his political opponents on Saturday in front of an Ohio crowd that chanted "Trump won" and issued statements last week riven with more falsehoods.

Targeting Michigan's McBroom and state Senate Republican leader Mike Shirkey, he included both senators'



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In another statement, he complained about the Justice Department's Georgia lawsuit: "Actually, it should be the other way around! The PEOPLE of Georgia should SUE the State, and their elected officials, for running a CORRUPT AND RIGGED 2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION—and for trying to suppress the VOTE of the AMERICAN PEOPLE in Georgia."

Of Giuliani, he said: "Can you believe that New York wants to strip Rudy Giuliani, a great American Patriot, of his law license because he has been fighting what has already been proven to be a Fraudulent Election?"

Arizona audit wrapping up

Another important moment could come when the results of the so-called audit ordered up by state Senate Republicans and conducted by Cyber Ninjas -- a Florida-based company with no experience auditing elections, led by a chief executive who had advanced Trump's lies about voter fraud on social media -- are released.

The Twitter account for the audit tweeted Friday night that "paper examination and counting are finished today." And the individual hand count which looked at two races, the 2020 presidential and US Senate contest, finished days ago, according to Arizona audit spokesman Randy Pullen.

But the Arizona Senate Republicans have not stated when their report will be released.

"Everybody is anxiously awaiting the result!" Trump said in a Wednesday statement.

That, though, was another falsehood.

Trump's most ardent supporters are awaiting the report on the audit's findings -- which is likely to be delivered first to state Senate Republicans, who would then determine how to release it.

However, experts in conducting and auditing elections and observers of Arizona's proceedings have repeatedly said that the Cyber Ninjas' methods are deeply flawed and could easily introduce errors into its final tallies. Those problems have made the audit's findings more likely to be used as a propaganda tool by Trump's supporters than a document that is taken seriously outside the "Stop the Steal" movement -- a rallying cry adopted by Trump and his supporters.

Arizona Secretary of State Katie Hobbs, a Democrat who is running for governor, has maintained a list of problems that observers on the floor of the Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Phoenix have noticed.

Among the recent updates: "insecure cybersecurity practices" used by Cyber Ninjas; misplaced ballots; and auditors writing directly on the original labels on Maricopa County's ballot boxes, which Hobbs' document notes "violates the agreements and questions the reliability and integrity of all the county records."

Justice Department targets Georgia law

The legal battles and audits are only one front of the ongoing fight over the 2020 election. In Republican-led states, including Florida, Georgia and Iowa, GOP lawmakers and governors have already enacted new laws that will make voting more difficult. Republican lawmakers in Michigan, Arizona, Texas and other states are also advancing restrictive voting measures.

President Joe Biden's Justice Department said Friday it is [suing the state of Georgia](#) over its new restrictive voting law.




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Republicans had cast the measure as necessary to boost confidence in elections after the 2020 election and Trump's repeated and unsubstantiated claims of fraud, but Democrats in the state have called the new law voter suppression and likened it to Jim Crow-era voting laws.

"These legislative actions occurred at a time when the Black population in Georgia continues to steadily increase and after a historic election that saw record voter turnout across the state, particularly for absentee voting, which Black voters are now more likely to use than White voters," Justice Department Civil Rights Division leader Kristen Clarke said in a news conference. "Our complaint challenges several provisions of SB 202 on the grounds that they were adopted with the intent to deny or abridge, Black citizens, equal access to the political process."

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, a Republican, issued a defiant statement in response to the department's announcement, calling the lawsuit "born out of the lies and misinformation the Biden administration has pushed against Georgia's Election Integrity Act from the start."

Kemp accused the administration of "weaponizing the US Department of Justice to carry out their far-left agenda that undermines election integrity and empowers federal government overreach in our democracy."

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Exhibit 20

BREAKING NEWS

Ivana Trump, an ex-wife of former President Trump, dies at 73



1 in 3 Americans believe the 'Big Lie'

Analysis by [Chris Cillizza](#), CNN Editor-at-large
Updated 6:56 PM ET, Mon June 21, 2021

(CNN) — "Some men you just can't reach."

That famous line from the movie "[Cool World](#)" kept echoing in my head as I pored through a [new national poll](#)



Here's why: 32% of respondents in that poll said that President Joe Biden only won the 2020 election "due to voter fraud."

Which is stunning -- but not the worst part of the poll.

Guess what percentage said that Biden won only because of election fraud in the November 2020 Monmouth poll? Answer: 32%.

What about in the January 2021 Monmouth poll? 32%.

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CNN's Chris Cillizza cuts through the political spin and tells you what you need to know.

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And how about the March 2021 Monmouth poll? Yup -- 32%.

The consistency of belief that Biden won solely because of fraud speaks to the fact that one-third of the country simply cannot be reached by facts -- no matter how often they are presented by the mainstream media.

Because it is a **FACT** that Biden won 81 million votes and 306 electoral votes. And it is a **FACT** that Donald Trump won 74 million votes and 232 electoral votes. It is a **FACT** that the the results in all 50 states and the District of Columbia have long been certified. It is a **FACT** that there is zero evidence -- turned up by federal or state officials - that any widespread electoral fraud occurred anywhere.



THE POINT -- NOW ON YOUTUBE!

In each episode of his weekly YouTube show, Chris Cillizza will delve a little deeper into the surreal world of politics. Click to subscribe!

Why, then, do nearly one-third of Americans simply ignore or not believe these facts -- despite an abundance of evidence that makes their truth plain? Two reasons, mainly:

1) Conservative media -- Fox News, Newsmax, OANM, talk radio -- simply doesn't acknowledge these facts. (There



2) The hatred and mistrust of the mainstream media -- fueled by Trump -- within the Republican base means that if CNN says the sky is blue, the GOP base will argue until their last breath that it is green.

Whatever the reason, what we are witnessing here is a remarkable abnegation of fact. A sacrifice of the truth at the altar of partisanship. A direct -- and ongoing -- threat to democracy.

The Point: If you believe January 6 was an isolated incident that could never happen again, go back and read this from the top. One-third of our fellow Americans believe the election was stolen from the rightful winner -- and refuse to acknowledge facts that directly undermine that fantasy. That's a recipe for disaster.



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Exhibit 21

BREAKING NEWS

Ivana Trump, an ex-wife of former President Trump, dies at 73



By [Veronica Stracqualursi](#), [Daniella Diaz](#), [Marshall Cohen](#) and [Manu Raju](#),

CNN

Updated 10:22 PM ET, Sat June 5, 2021

(CNN) — Mark Meadows, former [President Donald Trump's](#) White House chief of staff, pushed the Department of Justice in his boss' last weeks in office to investigate baseless conspiracy theories and fraud claims about the 2020 presidential election, according to documents obtained by CNN.

The [New York Times](#) was the first to report about the documents Saturday.

Meadows sent five emails in late December and early January to then-acting Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen asking him to look into election fraud claims in Georgia and New Mexico and other debunked theories that Trump had won the election, according to emails obtained by CNN.

The emails from Meadows add to the flagrant attempts Trump made to pressure the Justice Department to overturn his election loss, an extraordinary overreach to compel the department to take partisan political action for his personal benefit. There is no evidence of widespread election fraud that would overturn the 2020 election results, and it is extremely inappropriate for White House officials to direct the DOJ to investigate specific political matters, as Meadows apparently did.

The emails were uncovered this year as part of a Senate Judiciary Committee investigation into whether Justice Department officials were involved in efforts to reverse Trump's election loss, according to the [New York Times](#).

Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, told CNN in a statement that the "new evidence underscores the depths of the White House's efforts to co-opt the department and influence the electoral vote certification. This is a five alarm fire for our democracy."

He added: "I will demand all evidence of Trump's efforts to weaponize DOJ in his election subversion scheme. Our democracy cannot bend to the deception of Donald Trump's Big Lie."

A spokesperson for Meadows said Trump's former chief of staff would not be commenting on the matter.

Rosen did not immediately respond to a request from the Times for comment. CNN was not able to reach Rosen immediately for comment.

There is no indication in the emails that Rosen agreed to launch any investigations. Rosen has said there wasn't widespread fraud in 2020, and news reports say he resisted pressure from Trump and others to get involved in overturning the election.

In the one of the emails he sent Rosen, Meadows pressed the Justice Department to look into a baseless allegation that signature match anomalies in Atlanta were enough to overturn Joe Biden's victory and flip the results for Trump, the Times reported, as well as a list of unproven allegations about potential election wrongdoing in New Mexico.

Meadows also asked Rosen to investigate an unfounded conspiracy theory, known as "Italygate," which claims people in Italy had used military technology and satellites to remotely switch votes for Trump to Biden on US voting machines. One of the emails appeared to indicate that Rosen had declined to set up a meeting between the FBI and a man who was promoting the Italy conspiracy theory in online videos.

A former Republican congressman from North Carolina, Meadows [resigned from Congress](#) in 2020 to be Trump's fourth chief of staff. He sided with Trump's disingenuous attacks against mail-in voting and fed his baseless claim

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Online conspiracy theories and Trump's promotion of the lies about the 2020 election fueled a group of his supporters to violently attack the US Capitol building on January 6 in an attempt to block Congress from certifying Biden's election win.

The Senate Judiciary Committee investigation is one of three probes into the previous administration's efforts to overturn the 2020 election results in Trump's final days in office, the Times reported. The House Oversight Committee and the Justice Department's inspector general are also investigating, according to the Times.

The Times [reported in January](#) that Trump had pressured Rosen from the onset of his role as acting attorney general to appoint special counsels to investigate baseless claims that the election's integrity had been widely compromised, and specifically to probe Dominion Voting Systems, which Trump falsely claimed had perpetuated widespread fraud. Trump also plotted to fire Rosen and replace him with a Justice Department lawyer who would then seek to use the department to undo Georgia's presidential election results, the paper reported.

Trump also pushed the Department of Justice to directly ask the Supreme Court to invalidate Biden's election win, the [Wall Street Journal reported in January](#). The DOJ didn't do what Trump wanted and didn't support a longshot lawsuit from Republican attorneys general that unsuccessfully tried to nullify Biden's victory.

This story has been updated with additional reporting.

CNN's Caroline Kelly contributed to this report.

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Exhibit 22

BREAKING NEWS

Ivana Trump, an ex-wife of former President Trump, dies at 73

Trump is more obsessed than ever with 2020 election



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By [Dana Bash](#), [Veronica Stracqualursi](#) and [Jim Acosta](#), CNN

Updated 7:09 PM ET, Thu June 3, 2021

(CNN) — Donald Trump is more obsessed than ever with the [2020 election and pushing his lie](#) that there was widespread fraud that led to his defeat, according to several former advisers and allies still close to the former Republican President.

Some of the people around Trump are telling him that he should move on from fighting over the campaign and instead focus on policies. But the former President is most focused on the people encouraging him to continue drawing attention to the issue.

Trump is listening to "the bottom of the bottom of the crazies in the barrel," one former adviser told CNN.

Trump's obsession with 2020 has sharply divided the Republican Party, pitting those who embrace the "big lie" against those who have debunked the former President's falsehoods about the election -- which has often led to them being punished or denounced. More broadly, his attempts to undermine the legitimacy of the results threatens American democracy and has already led [some of his GOP supporters](#) to openly question the integrity of the US electoral process.

Trump continues to tout partisan-led efforts like the so-called [audit of Maricopa County ballots in Arizona](#), which will not change the outcome of the results in the state that Joe Biden carried by more than 10,000 votes.

Trump has been asking advisers in recent weeks if he could somehow reassume the presidency this year after listening to farfetched suggestions from conservative commentators and allies, a well-placed source familiar with the conversations confirmed to CNN.

"What do you think of this theory," Trump has asked people close to him, the source said, adding that advisers have attempted to persuade the former President that there is zero chance he will return to power this year.

"People have told him that it's not true," the source said.

The source went on to say it's unlikely Trump now believes he could be reinstated as president, following his conversations with his advisers.

"I don't think he thinks in his heart of hearts that it's going to happen," the source said.

However, the source said it appears Trump continues to hold on to the hope he could return to power through some other means, outside of the election process.

"It's very dangerous," the source said.

[The Washington Post](#) reported Wednesday that Trump is "increasingly consumed" with the idea that the partisan ballot reviews in Arizona and other states could prove that he won the 2020 election and has recently suggested to some allies that the audit results could put him back in the White House.

Far-right personalities, such as MyPillow founder Mike Lindell, have claimed Trump could somehow be reinstated as president, if state election audits could upend the 2020 results.

Lindell, who takes credit for the idea of Trump's reinstatement, confirmed to CNN that he has spoken with the former President in recent weeks.

According to Lindell, Trump called the pillow salesman after an appearance on "Jimmy Kimmel Live!"



Since leaving office, Trump, who remains the most influential

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- [Texas Dems celebrate blocking restrictive voting bill, but warn of future threat to voting access](#)
- [Asian Americans emerged as an important voting bloc in 2020. Activists fear new restrictions could silence them](#)
- [Voting rights bills remain imperiled in Congress. Here are the differences among them](#)

has been banned from social media platforms Twitter and Facebook. He plans to reemerge to address the North Carolina Republican Party's state convention this weekend.

But instead of focusing on helping his party make gains in 2022, Trump has taken to recounting his grievances and debunked claims about 2020. In his televised interviews with right-wing media outlets, Trump has continued to tease a potential White House bid in 2024 but also play into false beliefs from some of his supporters that he'll be reinstated as president.

The false narratives about the 2020 election stoked Trump supporters to storm the US Capitol on January 6 and are now [creating concern on Capitol Hill](#) that they could incite further violence.

QAnon conspiracy theorists and Trump-supporting online forums have promoted the dangerous suggestion that a military coup like the one in Myanmar should occur in the US so Trump can be reinstated as president in the coming months.

At an event in Dallas last Sunday, Michael Flynn, Trump's former national security adviser, [appeared to support a Myanmar-style coup](#) but later claimed he hadn't endorsed any such action.

Flynn's lawyer Sidney Powell, who repeatedly pushed baseless theories about the 2020 election, also appeared at the event and said Trump should be "simply reinstated" and that a "new inauguration day is set."

This story has been updated with additional reporting.

CNN's Jamie Gangel and Donie O'Sullivan contributed to this report.

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At This Hour

Biden Promises to "Fight Like Heck" Against GOP Voting Laws; White House: Russian Hackers Likely Attacked World's Largest Meat Supplier; Israeli Opposition Parties Face Midnight Deadline to Form Government. Aired 11-11:30a ET

Aired June 02, 2021 - 11:00 ET

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[11:00:33]

KATE BOLDUAN, CNN ANCHOR: Hello, everyone. I'm Kate Bolduan.

Here are the top things that we're watching AT THIS HOUR:

Democracy is under assault. President Biden vowing to fight back against Republican efforts to make it harder to vote. Now, the vice president is in charge.

A tale of two pandemics. Progress in America across the board, but that is not the case around the world. So what will the U.S. do to help?

And help wanted. Restaurants across the country wrestling with a shortage of workers. Celebrity chef Tom Colicchio weighs in on this growing crisis, ahead.

(MUSIC)

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AT THIS HOUR, President Biden is vowing to, in his words, fight like heck to protect voting rights in the United States. Republicans in more than a dozen states now have passed new laws that make it harder to vote. A movement fueled by Donald Trump's false claims of widespread election fraud, the baseless conspiracy theories he pushed all last year and is still doing so today.

President Biden has now tapped Vice President Kamala Harris to lead the effort to better protect voting rights, a task that seems harder than ever right now.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JOE BIDEN, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: This sacred right is under assault with incredible intensity like I've never seen, intensity and aggressiveness that we've not seen in a long, long time. It's simply un-American

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BOLDUAN: CNN's John Harwood is joining me now from the White House for more on this.

John, what is Kamala Harris going to do with this new task?

JOHN HARWOOD, CNN WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT: Well, in theory, she's got an ability to get a lot done, Kate. She is a -- has a big platform as vice president. She is a former senator with relationships in that body, which is where the voting rights legislation is stalled, a former attorney general and popular throughout the Democratic Party.

However, this is an extremely difficult assignment. One thing she can do is try to generate public pressure on the states that are attempting to constrain voting rights. We've seen in some cases, like in the state of Georgia, massive public pressure had an effect of somewhat moderating some of the provisions of those bills that they -- that bill that they enacted. A second thing she can try to do is move the Senate.

Now, to pass voting rights protections, it would take ten Republican votes. The chances of her getting ten Republican votes for that purpose are pretty much zero because Republicans today view it as critical to their survival to make it harder for non-white Americans to vote because they see that vote going strongly in the other

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She could, in theory, try to move Joe Manchin to set aside the filibuster at least for this purpose. But Joe Manchin said he doesn't want to do that. He could change his mind but opposed at this moment.

Which suggests, Kate, that the ultimate step for Vice President Harris would be in 2022 to try to rally voters to overcome obstacles to voting. We've seen in the past that when people believe their right to vote is being threatened, that motivates them to vote more. So, there's no guarantee that these Republican efforts are going to work at suppressing votes. And for Vice President Harris, that may be where she can have the greatest impact.

BOLDUAN: Yeah. John Harwood, thank you.

On Capitol Hill, pressure is growing on Democrats in Congress to take action as John was just talking about to counter this continued attack on voting rights that we're seeing in so many states. Pressure coming from outside Washington and from within.

Just yesterday, President Biden called out two moderate Democrats, Senators Manchin and Sinema for being roadblocks to voting rights protections.

CNN's Manu Raju joining me from the Hill.

Manu, he didn't call them out by name, but the message seemed pretty clear. I mean, how are the comments from President Biden landing over there today?

MANU RAJU, CNN CHIEF CONGRESSIONAL CORRESPONDENT: Well, Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema's office both are declining to comment on this. Right now, the Senate is on recess. What the president said is also not accurate. He accused those two

senators of voting more with Republicans than with Democrats when, in fact, they vote overwhelmingly with Democrats, but do break with Democrats on some key issues, namely whether or not to gut the Senate's filibuster rule which right now requires 60 votes to overcome legislation. But if they were to buckle and cave, along with a handful of others who are opposed to killing the filibuster rules, they could do it along straight party lines, which presumably is one reason why the president said this yesterday, calling them out, but not mentioning them by name.

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(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

BIDEN: I hear all the folks on TV saying, why doesn't Biden get this done? Well, because Biden only has the majority of effectively four votes in the House and a tie in the Senate, with two members of the Senate who vote more with my Republican friends.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

RAJU: Now, this is all going to come to a head later this month. Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer announce he plans to move forward on the Democrats bill to overhaul campaign finance laws. He wants to bring that to the floor June 21st, that week. That would require 60 votes to even begin debate. And, you know, the 60 votes are just simply not there because Republicans refused to go along with it. And Joe Manchin itself is opposed to the Democrats' bill on this. He's proposing a narrower change that would restore how the Supreme Court shut down the Voting Rights Act in 2013. But even that, Kate, lacks 60 votes.

So, despite the pressure from the White House, getting legislation through the president's desk extremely grim at this moment -- Kate.

BOLDUAN: I mean, something has got to give, because you're laying it out perfectly, Manu, and where it stands right now. Good to see you. Thank you so much.

Joining me right now for more on this is CNN political director David Chalian.

David, I want to read how CNN's Stephen Collinson kind of put it really quite eloquently this morning about the attack on voting rights across America and what we're looking at today. He said the mechanisms of American institutions that barely survive Trump's attempt to illegally stay in power are still being manipulated by Republicans to make the country less Democratic.

Manu laid out kind of the politics in terms of the Senate and math. But what is your gut check on Congress getting any voting rights protections passed?

DAVID CHALIAN, CNN POLITICAL DIRECTOR: Yeah, we should note our colleague, Stephen Collinson is always eloquent. I'm glad you --

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BOLDUAN: It's just that one time. No, just kidding.

CHALIAN: No, I think the lay of the land is pretty clear at the moment, which is that as Joe Biden has acknowledged publicly, the votes aren't there yet for this big For the People Act, Kate.

But there are two pieces of voting-related legislation. This is where I think you're going to start to see the conversation head. There's the John Lewis Voting Rights Act. This is the sort of restoration of pieces of the Voting Rights Act that were struck down by the Supreme Court several years ago in a landmark case. This deals with localities and states getting preclearance through the Justice Department for how they conduct their elections. And the Supreme Court basically said there needs to be sort of an overriding legislation for that to be able to continue.

So Congress is working on that, and I think you can see a path of a potential compromise that involves getting that piece of legislation, more narrow, but important no doubt, through. The larger bill dealing with campaign finance and redistricting and gerrymandered districts, this is a full-out partisan brawl. So, I think there's zero hope for Democrats to get any kind of Republicans on board which is why when you see the president say he's going to fight like heck, that includes apparently needling some of his fellow Democrats.

BOLDUAN: I was going to ask you, I mean, do you know why he's calling out Manchin and Sinema when he knows he needs them on this, and so many other of his priorities, I don't think we've seen signs this public pressure has worked, especially on Manchin yet.

CHALIAN: Yeah, I also don't know that we know that Joe Biden who served for 36 years in that body, is eager to get rid of the legislative filibuster himself quite frankly.

But here is why I think you see him doing what he did yesterday, and as Manu rightly pointed out, inaccurately so

BOLDUAN: Right.

CHALIAN: I mean, those senators do actually vote more with the Democrats. But what I think you see him doing is this is what I mean when I say I'm going to fight like heck, I'm willing to even rib and take on my fellow Democrats to try to move this really important piece of business through the Congress.

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BOLDUAN: Yeah, but use an accurate example, like it falls completely flat when you're not using an accurate example. I want to ask you kind of about what is happening above and behind and

below in the backdrop against what this conversation, which is we have now reporting from Maggie Haberman of "The New York Times", reporting that Donald Trump has been telling a number of people that he's been in contact with, that he expects he's going reinstated as president by August. Now, this is the exact language that incited January 6th.

And this isn't just anyone. This is the former president who is still in control of the Republican Party.

[11:10:04]

How dangerous is this?

CHALIAN: Yeah, your two points of context there, Kate, are really key. I always struggle with this.

BOLDUAN: I do, too.

CHALIAN: Should we talk about something that former President Trump says that's completely absurd. He can't be reinstated. That is a complete, deliberate misinformation kind of thing.

But as you noted, it is exactly that kind of deliberate misinformation that we've seen a real life example of how dangerous it can be, on January 6th with an insurrection on the Capitol, an insurrection against our very democracy. So, it needs to be called out, as absurd a statement as that is.

And you are right that it is the context, this broader, just attack on our democracy from, you know, a large swath of the Republican Party where Donald Trump still has a lot of sway.

BOLDUAN: It's like a slow moving train wreck that you're watching. You can see each of these states taking on these battles. You can see the pressure from Donald Trump, and it just continues to slow roll and wave across the country that we're watching play out, right up towards 2022 and 2024.

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CHALIAN: You, too. Take care.

BOLDUAN: Coming up for us, Russian hackers strike again, attacking the world's largest meat supply. So, what will the Biden administration do about this?

Plus, coronavirus is still raging around the world, though, as things are vastly improving here in America. And the pressure is on the White House right now to do more to help.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[11:15:54]

BOLDUAN: Developing at this hour, the White House says a Russian criminal gang is likely responsible for another massive cyberattack. The latest victim, JBS Foods, the world's largest meatpacking facility.

CNN's Alex Marquardt is following this for us. He joins us now.

Alex, what are you learning this morning first on the extent of the hack?

ALEXANDER MARQUARDT, CNN SENIOR NATIONAL SECURITY CORRESPONDENT: Well, there's good news and there's bad news, Kate.

The good news is that JBS says that most of its operations are coming online. The bad news is this is yet another example of a part of critical American infrastructure that is vulnerable to the hackers, that can easily be taken offline and severely disrupt American society. So, what we're hearing from JBS is the vast majority of their operations will be back up today.

This comes after all of their meat packing facilities were taken offline here in the United States, after all their beef production was shut down here in the United States and their operations in Australia were also impacted.

We know that the Biden administration has set up an interagency team to coordinate and monitor the fallout of this. President Biden, I'm told by White House official, has directed his administration to do what they can to mitigate any sort of impact on supply and on prices. And the FBI is investigating this.

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statement.

They say: As this and other recent incidents demonstrate, the threat of ransomware continues to be severe. Ransomware can affect any organization in any sector of the economy.

Just as a reminder, Kate, ransomware is when hackers take control of a company's or entity's IT system, their networks. And then they simply ask for money in return.

We don't know what the ransom was in this case or whether JBS paid a ransom. But, you know, we have seen this happen very recently. We saw this with the Colonial Pipeline attack a couple weeks ago. They paid a ransom more than \$4 million.

And the Biden administration has reached out to Russia, they say, to crack down on these criminals. We should note these are not government hackers, as far as we know, as far as the Biden administration is saying, but the Biden administration clearly feels that Russia has control or some level of control over these hackers, and this is the latest string in a series of very significant attacks from different kinds of Russian hackers -- Kate.

BOLDUAN: And, Alex, paying the ransom, it's become -- it's a difficult thing. The Biden administration, especially after the Colonial Pipeline situation, they acknowledged that it's a real challenge and some of these companies are targeted because they have insurance policies that just make it easier, they're more inclined to pay these ransoms.

MARQUARDT: Yeah. It's not just big rich companies. I mean, there are -- we've seen hospitals, school districts getting targeted. We've seen school districts getting targeted. I mean, like school districts can't necessarily afford that kind of ransom and then you end up seeing data released online.

But, yeah, it is -- it is a hugely lucrative move for cyber criminals. I was just talking to cybersecurity expert who says that cyber criminals have ditched other kinds of tactics and come over to ransomware side because it is so easy. So, this is going to be a major problem -- it is already a major problem, but it's going to be a major question for countries and companies to try to grapple with and to try to figure out.

It's understandable companies want their operations back up online, but governments don't want to see these ransomware attackers getting paid and fueling this industry.

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American life and globally.

MARQUARDT: That's right, yeah.

BOLDUAN: Alex, thank you. Much more to come there.

Turning now to Israel where a seismic political shift may be just hours away. Opposition parties have until midnight local time, 5:00 p.m. Eastern, to form a new unity government. It could bring an end to Benjamin Netanyahu's 12-year run as the country's longest serving prime minister.

CNN's Hadas Gold is live in Jerusalem with the latest.

Hadas, what are you hearing this evening?

[11:20:01]

HADAS GOLD, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Well, we could be seeing the beginning of the end of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's run, as you said, as the longest serving prime minister. The opposition parties have until midnight to present to the Israeli president and say they have been able to form a governing coalition. A source close to the negotiations telling CNN that significant progress was made overnight and nearly everything is done, but they're still hammering away at some of the details, ministerial positions, and we still have not heard that official announcement.

But, Kate, even if that announcement does come before midnight, it's not a done deal, because then the government needs to be presented to the Israeli Knesset, to the parliament, for a confidential and that can be done within seven days. In Israeli politics, Kate, seven days could be an eternity. And that could give Prime Minister Netanyahu and his allies time to try to get a few defectors away from the coalition, just a few them, could cause the coalition to crumble.

But even if this coalition does get sworn in and we do get a new prime minister who is expected to be right wing leader Naftali Bennett, it will be a very unique unity government made up of the far left Meretz party to the Naftal Bennett's right wing party. Naftali Bennett as prime minister, he would be even further right wing than Benjamin Netanyahu which will be interesting for the United States. But his government, the people who sit with him, will

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So, it's hard to see what kind of progress they'll be able to make on other issues such as, of course, relations with Palestinians, settlers in the West Bank, and so forth. So, it could be a very fragile government from the beginning, but it will be without a doubt a historic moment, the end of Prime Minister Netanyahu's run as the longest serving prime minister.

But, again, you can never say never in Israeli politics. Things could change quickly within the next few hours. And then, of course, even if they do make this announcement, even if it is presented to the president, it still has to go through the vote in the Israeli parliament in the Knesset. And so, we still maybe days away before this new government is sworn in -- Kate.

BOLDAUN: So interesting and the ripple effects, enormous. Thank you so much, Hadas. Really appreciate it.

Coming up for us, the pandemic is a global crisis, of course, but maybe one with a solution coming straight out of America. We're going to discuss what the U.S. needs to do if we're going to end this pandemic for good.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[11:27:10]

BOLDUAN: Soon, President Biden will be laying out a new challenge to America. A White House official telling CNN Biden will declare June, this month, to be a national month of action, to get more people vaccinated by July 4th. So, right now, nearly 52 percent of American adults are fully vaccinated. Almost 63 percent have received at least one COVID-19 shot. That's according to the CDC. That is great progress.

But the president has set a goal last month to reach 70 percent by Independence Day. Can the U.S. get there? What difference will that make?

Joining me right now is Dr. Chris Parnell, a preventative medicine and public health physician.

It's good to see you again, Doctor.

DR. CHRIS PARNELL, AMERICAN COLLEGE OF PREVENTIVE MEDICINE FELLOW: It's good to see you

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difference do you think it makes to reach that marker?

PERNELL: Kate, I think it's very important that we continue to lead with equity. That is the only way that we're going to reach that goal as a nation.

If you look at where we have unvaccinated populations, unfortunately, that's predominantly in black and brown communities, that's in poorer communities and that's in rural communities. We need to have a block-by-block, neighborhood-by-neighborhood attack, plan of approach where we know who the influencers are, who the credible and trusted messages are and how to best get vaccinations into arms.

BOLDUAN: What -- at this point, what do you think we need to reach the 70 percent marker? There kind of quite a while ago, a concept of there being a specific point that we would reach herd immunity. What does 70 percent mean to you?

PERNELL: It's not magical. When we give estimates around what proportion of the population needs to get vaccinated, we're giving that number because that's when we'll see a precipitous decline in new cases and infections. That's when we'll see a drop in hospitalizations, and that's when we'll see a drop in deaths. We're seeing that across the nation and I don't want to lessen or downplay the progress that were made.

But we're also seeing amongst unvaccinated folks like whether in Maine, or Washington, or even Colorado, that those persons have equivalent rates of infection and even hospitalizations that we were seeing back in the peak in January or even as recently as two to three months ago.

So, population and community immunity is important, but it's not a final destination. It's a process.

BOLDUAN: That's a good way of putting it.

You know, beyond the United States, there are really only a handful of countries that are even close to vaccinating the majority of their populations. We can show everyone just -- we take a look at this map, that will give you a good depiction of the state of things. I mean, how much of a problem is this map to the United States? No matter how well we're doing on our own.

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Exhibit 24

BREAKING NEWS

Ivana Trump, an ex-wife of former President Trump, dies at 73

THE POINT
WITH CHRIS CILLIZZA

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A majority of Republicans are living in a fantasy world built around the Big Lie

Analysis by [Chris Cillizza](#), CNN Editor-at-large

Updated 9:58 AM ET, Tue May 25, 2021



(CNN) — In order to have a functioning democracy in America, we need to have the two major political parties willing to agree on a basic set of facts -- starting with who won the 2020 election.

According to a [new national poll from Reuters/Ipsos](#), we don't have that. Consider these data points:

* Fully 53% of Republicans in the poll said that Donald Trump was the "true" president while 47% said Joe Biden, who is the actual president.

* Another 56% of Republicans say that the results of the 2020 election were "the result of illegal voting or election rigging."

* More than 6 in 10 GOPers either "strongly" (39%) or "somewhat" (22%) agreed with the statement that the 2020 election "was stolen from Donald Trump."

Those numbers are remarkable. Scary. Depressing. And reflective of the fact that the Big Lie pushed by Trump and his allies -- and aided and abetted by the silence of the vast majority of Republican leaders -- has taken significant root in the Republican Party.

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Trump has kept up the drumbeat of falsehoods -- feeding the lie.



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In each episode of his weekly YouTube show, Chris Cillizza will delve a little deeper into the surreal world of politics. [Click to subscribe!](#)

"Why aren't Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and Republicans doing anything about what went on in the 2020 Election," [he asked on Monday](#). "How can the Democrats be allowed to get away with this? It will go down as the Crime of the Century!"

To which Republicans -- as they have for months and months -- said nothing. Because they are afraid of Trump and their own base. And have prioritized their own political interests -- Kevin McCarthy wants to be speaker, for example -- over the broader interests of the party and the country.

Now, before we go any further, let's just take a minute to note that there is clear and demonstrable evidence that directly contradicts what a majority of Republican say they believe about the 2020 election.

"To date, we have not seen fraud on a scale that could have effected a different outcome in the election," [said Trump administration Attorney General Bill Barr](#) late last year. The man who succeeded Barr in the job -- acting Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen -- [said the same in testimony to Congress earlier this month](#). "During my tenure, DOJ maintained the position publicly announced previously that the Department had been presented with no evidence of widespread voter fraud at a scale sufficient to change the outcome of the 2020 election," he said.

Trump and his legal team [filed dozens of cases](#) -- in state and federal courts -- alleging widespread voter fraud. They won not a *single* significant victory. The Supreme Court [rejected a suit to overturn the Pennsylvania results](#) and a [broader effort led by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton](#) that aimed to invalidate votes in several key swing states that went for Biden.

Against all of these facts are Trump's random musings -- and a group of party leaders unwilling to acknowledge that he is, objectively, wrong.

The unwillingness by Republicans to stand up on principle -- and to put their own personal political interests aside -- has created an environment in which more than half of their voters believe the Big Lie. And with Trump making no move to step off the national scene, you can bet that these voters will get plenty more rhetoric to fuel their false beliefs in the coming months and years.



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This cowardice will have clear consequences not just for the Republican Party but for the country as a whole. And sets up a scenario for 2024 that could make the 2020 election and its aftermath look like a walk in the park.




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Exhibit 25

BREAKING NEWS

Ivana Trump, an ex-wife of former President Trump, dies at 73



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The 5 key elements of Trump's Big Lie and how it came to be

Analysis by [Zachary B. Wolf](#), CNN

Updated 7:17 PM ET, Wed May 19, 2021

(CNN) — Former [President Donald Trump](#) has spent months spreading lies about the 2020 election, which he himself is now calling "THE BIG LIE" as he continues to claim that a massive conspiracy robbed him of a second term.

The result is that many Republicans now question the election results -- and the lie has taken on a life of its own.

In Washington, congressional Republicans who recently ousted [Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney](#) from the party's leadership over her decision to call Trump out for his lies mostly united Wednesday against [a review of the January 6 Capitol insurrection](#) those lies helped incite.

Trump's allies in Arizona are undertaking [a sketchy, circus-like review of 2020 ballots in Maricopa County](#), even though local officials -- themselves Republicans -- are openly objecting to the process, which comes months after the state's election was certified by its Republican governor. (Trump allies are now pushing for a similar review in Georgia, where Republican officials also certified [President Joe Biden's](#) victory.)

[Read CNN's fact checks on 2020 disinformation here](#)

In key states around the country, [more restrictive election laws](#) are being enacted, ostensibly to guard against fraud that did not happen.

I went back to CNN's fact checks and historical warnings to put together this guide to the Big Lie and its various elements.

Where did the term "the Big Lie" come from?

It comes from Adolf Hitler, actually. In *Mein Kampf*, he accused Jews of spreading lies about how the German army performed in World War I.

The historian Zachary Jonathan Jacobson [wrote about it in The Washington Post](#) a few years ago:

Adolf Hitler first defined the Big Lie as a deviant tool wielded by Viennese Jews to discredit the Germans' deportment in World War I. Yet, in tragically ironic fashion, it was Hitler and his Nazi regime that actually employed the mendacious strategy. In an effort to rewrite history and blame European Jews for Germany's defeat in World War I, Hitler and his propaganda minister accused them of profiting from the war, consorting with foreign powers and "war shirking" (avoiding conscription). Jews, Hitler contended, were the weak underbelly of the Weimer state that exposed the loyal and true German population to catastrophic collapse. To sell this narrative, Joseph

Goebbels insisted "all effective propaganda must be limited to a very few points and must harp on these in slogans until the last member of the public understands."

Why did people start using that term to describe the 2020 election?

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Here's Joe Lockhart, a Democratic communications specialist and CNN commentator, [writing about it in January](#).

And historian Timothy Snyder, author of "On Tyranny," used it in the wake of the January 6 insurrection. "The idea that Mr. Biden didn't win the election is a big lie," [he told CNN's Brian Stelter](#). "It's a big lie because you have to disbelieve all kinds of evidence to believe in it. It's a big lie because you have to believe in a huge conspiracy in order to believe it. And it's a big lie because, if you believe it, it demands you take radical action. So this is one way we have really moved forwards towards authoritarianism and away from democracy. It's coming to a peak right now."

How did Trump come to adopt the term?

This is another irony.

There have long been warnings about Trump's lies. That Jacobson story in the Post is from 2018. Trump [falsely claimed after the 2016 election](#), which he won, that millions of people had illegally voted for his opponent, Hillary Clinton. Leading up to the 2020 election, Trump again routinely asserted that voting in the US would be rigged against him, and afterward, when he denied his loss, critics began using the term "the Big Lie" to describe his rejection of the factual world.

Trump, master propagandist, has since seized the term from his critics and now routinely uses it to claim it is he who is the victim of untruths and conspiracies. "The Fraudulent Presidential Election of 2020 will be, from this day forth, known as THE BIG LIE!" he said in a statement issued by his PAC on May 3.

Since then, Trump's use of it to claim his own persecution has arguably eclipsed its use to warn about his lies as a form of propaganda.

What are the elements of Trump's big lie?

1. The election was stolen because it's not possible Trump didn't win.

In Trump's telling, the big lie is that the election was stolen from him. A lie as massive as the stealing of an election with hundreds of millions of voters requires a bunch of smaller lies Trump's used to sow doubt about the election.

CNN's Facts First team has been writing about Trump's specific election lies for many months, first leading up to the election, which he falsely claimed was rigged, and after he lost, when he falsely claimed it had been stolen in a variety of ways, all of which have been disproved. Look at [this fact check from Daniel Dale](#), which addresses these crazy quotes, none of which are accurate:

- "... millions of ballots that have been altered by Democrats, only for Democrats."
- "All of the mechanical 'glitches' that took place on Election Night were really THEM getting caught trying to steal votes."

- "700,000 ballots were not allowed to be viewed in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh which means, based on our great Constitution, we win the State of Pennsylvania!"

In every key state he lost, Trump has pushed an explanation, sowing doubt without actually proving anything.

In Georgia, he claimed, there were [suitcases of ballots](#), the state [didn't verify signatures](#), there was general [mass cheating](#), [military ballots went missing](#).

That's just Georgia



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[than voters](#), [Detroit had more votes than voters](#) ... when you view it in totality, it feels desperate.

Some of the smaller lies require some more explanation, such as Trump's idea that he won with "legal votes" and that [illegal votes led to Biden's win](#). In clear human errors, [he saw vote theft](#).

2. There was a massive technological conspiracy to rig the election.

A key element of Trump's system of lies is that the voting equipment and software company Dominion Voting Systems was biased against him, had "bum equipment" and helped rig the election.

Dominion has since sued Trump campaign lawyers and Fox News and accused other Trump allies of spreading falsehoods. When mail-in ballots Trump had discouraged were counted and Democrats gained ground after the early hours of election night, he saw a conspiracy: "[surprise ballot dumps!](#)" and "finding votes!"

This notion was revived in the Arizona audit, where Trump this past weekend seized on the idea that an election database had been deleted. The auditors hired by the state GOP acknowledged on Tuesday that it had not been.

3. Theories and wild claims pushed on the internet find their way into lawsuits and are then pushed by Trump.

[Here's one example](#). Viral video from footage Fulton County, Georgia, led to allegations there were suitcases of votes smuggled in to be counted. This video was mentioned in a lawsuit brought by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton and pushed by Trump. Officials in Georgia -- Republicans! -- investigated the claim and found the suspected suitcases were ballot bins and the video captured normal processes. The lawsuit brought by the Texas attorney general was ultimately thrown out by the US Supreme Court, a court which, by the way, has a conservative majority and three justices appointed by Trump.

Another example, from just this past week, is when Republican lawmakers in Arizona fed that false allegation that an election database had been deleted. It wasn't deleted, as a Republican election official made clear -- but not until after the allegation had been pushed to close followers of the conspiracy theories.

4. Investigators are biased, too.

Just as recounts that found no change to the election results were labeled by Trump as frauds and hoaxes, a review of the January 6 insurrection launched after his election lies can only be slanted. Trump turned hard on a bipartisan agreement to investigate the insurrection.

"Republicans must get much tougher and much smarter, and stop being used by the Radical Left. Hopefully, Mitch McConnell and Kevin McCarthy are listening!" he said in a statement.

5. Trump supporters questioning the results are just being good citizens.

In the growing case of collective amnesia many Republican lawmakers are developing about the January 6 insurrection, there's the idea that the people who stormed the Capitol were just concerned and wanting to be heard. Similarly, the lawmakers who voted to throw out the election results were just channeling the concerns of voters who think the process might be flawed, despite the lack of evidence there was any actual fraud.

McConnell and McCarthy, who as Senate and House minority leaders are the two top Republicans at the federal level, had both been critical of Trump's false claims on the election and had previously criticized the insurrection in strong terms.

But now that it's clear many Republicans are willing to tolerate, and potentially believe, Trump's lies, McConnell and McCarthy are finding ways to support his views. Both, for instance, [turned against the agreement struck for a January 6 commission](#), which many Republicans had, at least in principle, supported.




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There is no room for rejecting Trump's Big Lie, as Republicans who do so are ostracized by the party leadership.

Trump's big lie worked

The sham audit in Arizona continues, although behind closed doors, unlike the open counts and recounts of ballots the first time. A similar "forensic review" of ballots in Georgia is being pushed by allies of the former President.

Polls suggest a majority of Republicans -- 55% in an April Reuters poll -- think Biden's victory was the result of illegal voting or rigging.

"What is perfectly clear," [wrote CNN's Harry Enten after examining the data](#), "is that Republicans' lack of faith in our current election infrastructure is a direct result of Trump's historic efforts to undermine the legitimacy of the 2020 results."

This story has been updated to reflect Wednesday's House vote on a January 6 commission.




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Exhibit 26

BREAKING NEWS

Ivana Trump, an ex-wife of former President Trump, dies at 73



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The big lie. The Covid misinformation. It all comes back to Russia.

Analysis by [Zachary B. Wolf](#), CNN

Updated 6:29 PM ET, Wed May 5, 2021



US President Donald Trump (L) and Russian President Vladimir Putin arrive for a meeting in Helsinki, Finland, on July 16, 2018.

A version of this story appeared in CNN's What Matters newsletter. To get it in your inbox, sign up for free [here](#).

(CNN) — We can't really ever know all the truth, but we are still learning new facts about how former [President Donald Trump's](#) campaigns and administration warped perception.

While Trump can't spread misinformation on Twitter (ever again) or Facebook ([at least for the next six months, we learned Wednesday](#)), we're starting to get a clearer sense of the line between misinformation in 2016, misinformation in 2020 and how it might look now that the majority of the GOP has decided to mainline misinformation going forward.

The 2016 version of misinformation came from Russia. Did Trump's 2016 campaign interact with Russians and did those Russians send information back to the Kremlin? Yes. The Treasury Department made the revelation

of Russia's 2016 interference in April, announcing new sanctions for Russia's attempted election meddling in 2020.

Read more about that revelation, [buried in a Treasury release here](#).

Key line [from CNN's Marshall Cohen in April](#):

It has long been suspected but never explicitly stated by the US government that Konstantin Kilimnik passed internal Trump campaign data from former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort to Russian intelligence.



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Back to whether Trump's actions may have been criminal. We were led by then-Attorney General William Barr to believe that they were not. But a remarkable critique by a federal judge this week and her decision that the Department of Justice must publicly release a highly redacted memo prepared for Barr makes it seem like the fix was in; Trump couldn't be charged no matter what. Everything else stemmed from that. Barr slow-walked the release of the Mueller report and tried to blunt its effect after already deciding it would not allege criminal wrongdoing.

Read more about the Judge Amy Berman Jackson's decision [here](#).

Key line [from CNN's Jeremy Herb on Wednesday](#):

Jackson concluded that the redacted memo showed that it was drafted even though the decision not to prosecute Trump had already been settled, suggesting Barr misled lawmakers and the public about the decision not to charge Trump with obstruction of justice. The opinion included emails showing that Justice Department officials were drafting the memo on obstruction at the same time as the four-page letter Barr sent to Congress summarizing Mueller's findings.

"The review of the document reveals that the Attorney General was not then engaged in making a decision about whether the President should be charged with obstruction of justice; the fact that he would not be prosecuted was a given," Jackson wrote.

Adjacent to Russia's interference in 2016 is Trump's attempt to dig up dirt on Joe Biden ahead of 2020. Despite Trump's impeachment, we may still learn from the active federal investigation into what exactly Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani was doing for Trump in Ukraine and elsewhere.

Where the lies spread. Facebook, the simmering pot of misinformation from all sorts of sources on all sorts of topics, announced Wednesday that a specially convened board would punt for six months on whether to permanently bar Trump from the service.

Trump, Russia and other actors generally seek to polarize the country by spreading false facts.

That's not going to stop anytime soon, regardless of what Facebook does to Trump or how many [Russian misinformation efforts it takes down](#). The misinformation spreads to Covid, to vaccines, everywhere.

Related: [Trump is banned from Facebook. Trumpism is everywhere on it](#)

Learning from misinformation. I asked CNN's Katelyn Polantz, who has covered the Mueller report and the Ukraine scandal for CNN, for her takeaway on the long tail of these stories. She drew a line from the Russian misinformation of 2016 to Trump's misinformation during his presidency and about his election loss.

"If we think about what's happening now, and we think about the sweep of history, one of the biggest lessons from the Mueller findings is, THIS is how disinformation works. The Russians did it so effectively in 2016 by harnessing social media to divide Americans and sway them toward Trump. US political voices, Trump included, embraced that type of propaganda and discourse and used the same tactics in 2020. Who needs Russia to do the social media trolling anymore when Trump and his supporters have taken up the task?"

Counterargument on misinformation: I enjoyed this CNN Opinion post from Christopher Bail, a professor at Duke who [argues the problem is not social media platforms and misinformation, it's polarization](#). I'd like to believe we're overly concerned about misinformation because as a journalist I'm also always very concerned when people push the idea of cutting down on speech, even if it's wrong.

Key line from Bail:

Most people don't care very much about politics, and those that do usually have very strong views that are difficult



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Though we might like to think that Facebook, Twitter or other platforms could simply tweak some code to save us from our current predicament, these studies hint at a much more unsettling truth: the root cause of political polarization on our platforms is us. And it's not going away until we find a way to solve it.

I can't entirely buy into Bail's argument since it feels like conservative partisan media, either taking cues from Trump or giving them to him, is actively pushing misinformation,

... [about the election results](#) ...

... [about Covid](#) ...

turning everything into a partisan issue.

We can't move on from misinformation. President Biden clearly wants to move on from the Trump era, which is probably the healthiest attitude. But it ignores the fact that misinformation is affecting policy, leading Republicans to excise people like Rep. Liz Cheney from their leadership and to push more restrictive voting laws in key states, and, arguably, affecting how some governors have treated Covid restrictions.

There's also, crucially, the effect the Russian meddling and Trump's Ukraine fishing expedition are having on US foreign policy.

CNN's Matthew Chance has been watching the buildup of Russian troops on the Ukraine border and spoke to Ukraine's foreign minister about both those troop exercises and the actions of Giuliani before the 2020 campaign. [Read that here](#). He said Giuliani was "playing politics" but the Ukrainians did their best not to play along.

Both topics should be raised if Biden goes ahead and meets Russian President Vladimir Putin for a summit in June. Certainly that exchange will be different from the Trump-Putin summit in Helsinki, Finland, in July 2018, when [Trump sided with Putin against US intelligence agencies](#).

It may be an opportunity for a reset between the countries, but it will be impossible to undo the era of misinformation that got us all here.

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Exhibit 27

BREAKING NEWS

Ivana Trump, an ex-wife of former President Trump, dies at 73

Trump's big lie could backfire in Georgia



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'Are you outraged?': See Don Lemon's reaction to lawmaker's arrest 09:12

Editor's Note: Michael D'Antonio is the author of the book "Never Enough: Donald Trump and the Pursuit of Success" and co-author, with Peter Eisner, of the book "High Crimes: The Corruption, Impunity, and Impeachment of Donald Trump." The opinions expressed in this commentary are his own. View more [opinion](#) on CNN.

(CNN) — Remember all those scenes of the Capitol rioters giving police officers group hugs? How about those photos of the insurrectionists planting big kisses on their cheeks? No? Oh. Maybe that's because they are a figment of Donald Trump's imagination.

When Trump called into Fox News on Thursday night and tried to rewrite history, he proved himself to be the same old liar we knew as president. Describing the events of January 6, which led to the deaths of five people, Trump said, "It was zero threat, right from the start, it was zero threat. Look, they went in, they shouldn't have done it. Some of them went in, and they are hugging and kissing the police and the guards, you know, they had great relationships."

While one officer appeared to pose for a selfie with a rioter and others opened the barricades to allow the mob to enter the grounds of the US Capitol, many Capitol and DC Metro police officers also risked their lives and engaged



CNN

Opinion

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Michael D'Antonio

signed into law on Thursday.

Related Article: Opinion: Trump's major problem in Georgia election probe

in hand-to-hand combat trying to protect the lawmakers who were certifying the results of the 2020 election inside. During the melee, some officers were beaten and sprayed with chemicals. At least [138 sustained injuries](#) including burns, concussions and rib fractures. Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick died from injuries sustained during the attack, and two others later [died by suicide](#).

But after years of deception, it's no big surprise that Trump is at it again. What's remarkable is just how effective his lies have been, especially when it comes to his insistence that the 2020 election was "stolen" due to widespread fraud. This is the very lie that prompted Trump supporters to storm the Capitol on January 6. And this lie is what Republicans in Georgia used to justify sweeping new voting restrictions

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, who is up for reelection in 2022, [said](#), "There's no doubt there were many alarming issues with how the [2020] election was handled, and those problems, understandably, led to a crisis of confidence here in Georgia." But that statement is no more true than Trump's report of rioters kissing cops at the Capitol.

The 2020 election ran smoothly in Georgia but for Donald Trump's repeated falsehoods about being cheated. He then proceeded to phone state officials, imploring them to ["find 11,780"](#) votes so he could overcome Biden's margin of victory. Trump also used his bully pulpit to sow doubts about the election in many states by spreading falsehoods and baseless claims about voting machines made by a firm called [Dominion Voting Systems](#). (The company has since filed [defamation lawsuits](#) against Fox News and a number of other Trump allies.)

It was, to borrow Kemp's word, "alarming" that Trump repeated lies to contest the election, especially when officials in his own administration said it was the [most secure in US history](#).

The trick of creating a problem or magnifying a minor issue into some major concern in order to stoke fear and accumulate power is an old political ploy. It was used in the 1950s by Sen. Joe McCarthy to scare Americans about ["subversives,"](#) and more recently by former Republican Sen. Rick Santorum, who [warned](#) that marriage would "disintegrate" if same-sex marriage became legal.

Although few admit to playing this game, occasionally someone lets the cat out of the bag. Decades ago, in an interview with American journalist Peter Eisner, former Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega put it [this way](#): "In order to solve a problem, you first have to create the problem." Trump did it in 2016 by sowing a fear of immigrants -- and planning to build a wall. He highlighted crime, poverty and a broken government before [claiming](#), "I alone can fix it."

In 2020, Trump created the problem of voter fraud. When he failed to implement his desired solution -- serving a second term as President -- Republicans in Georgia swooped in to devise their own: restrictions on voting. The state's [new law](#)

Related Article: What Jim Crow looks like in 2021

imposes new voter ID requirements for absentee ballots, limits the use of ballot drop boxes, and makes it a crime to give food and water to voters in line. It's not a great look for Republicans in the state to take such swift action after the special election

in Georgia, which delivered a narrow majority for Democrats in the Senate, was largely credited to Stacey Abrams, the 2018 Democratic gubernatorial candidate who spent a decade building the political infrastructure there to [increase turnout](#) among Black, Latino and Asian voters.



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Republican Party also faces a serious problem with [suburban women](#) and [younger voters](#) who represent the future of politics. By trying to suppress the vote, it seems Republicans are more interested in creating obstacles for Democrats than they are in worthwhile ideas or policies that will win over undecided voters. This is shortsighted and self-defeating.

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It's possible that GOP leaders are so focused on the short term that they believe voter restrictions will tip the scales in their favor during the 2022 midterm elections. Here they might consider the possibility that enacting a new law isn't always the end of things. In 2015, political hell broke loose after Indiana Gov. Mike Pence, Trump's future vice president, signed a law infringing on the rights of gay, lesbian, and transgender Americans. Citizens protested and boycotts caused business leaders to demand revisions. The normally staid Indianapolis Star published a [huge frontpage headline](#)

that read "Fix This Now." The Star, which endorsed Pence for governor in 2012, was adamant that changes be made and revisions to the law were [completed](#) post haste. Voters in Georgia and other states that are slated to adopt voter restriction laws might consider that episode as members of the Republican Party continue to push Trump's "big lie."



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Exhibit 28

Ivana Trump, an ex-wife of former President Trump, dies at 73

New US intel report shows Russia, Trump and GOP acolytes have same goals

Analysis by [Stephen Collinson](#), CNN

Updated 7:19 AM ET, Wed March 17, 2021

(CNN) — A [new US intelligence report](#) that finds Russia interfered in the 2020 election to help [Donald Trump](#) and hurt [Joe Biden](#) also underscores a fundamental truth: The gravest threat to US democracy comes from within.

The report, released by Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines, finds that Moscow sought to inject misleading information about Biden into the campaign through officials and others close to Trump.

The real bombshell it contains is not the confidence of the spy agencies that Russia hoped to subvert American democracy. It is that US intelligence experts effectively confirmed that for the second election in a row, Trump acolytes repeatedly used, knowingly or otherwise, misinformation produced by the spies of one of America's most sworn foreign adversaries to try to win a US election.

And given the advantage of hindsight, the latest intelligence assessment is not just an isolated example of incriminating evidence against Russia and its efforts to create chaos and discord within the United States.

For all of the stale US debate about whether Trump and his aides "colluded" with Russia, there are now multiple reports, intelligence assessments and other known details to expose a damning reality: Moscow with its election meddling, Trump acolytes pushing false claims of voter fraud and his GOP supporters in the states now passing voter suppression laws share the same goal -- the denigration of the US democratic system.

BIDEN'S FIRST 100 DAYS

- [Border crisis stymies Congress as GOP bashes Biden and Democrats spar internally](#)
- [Biden says he supports bringing back the Senate's talking filibuster rule](#)
- [Harris uses UN speech to champion women's role in democracy](#)

The readiness of the former President's men to use Russian misinformation in 2020 -- while denying collusion in 2016 -- was but one prong of the assault on the integrity of US elections. After all, it came as Trump was challenging democratic customs that form the bedrock of American freedoms.

He spent months seeking to discredit the fairness of the vote -- the sacred core of US democracy -- to hedge against his eventual loss. He later denied his fair-and-square defeat, incited the [deadly US Capitol insurrection](#) -- which sought to disrupt Biden's transition to power -- and is using his sway over his party to force future Republican candidates to sign up to his big lie of widespread voter fraud.

Thus, the candidate who Moscow helped to win the 2016 election had four years later become the primary destructive force aimed at US democracy.

It ought to be concerning that the sentiments of many Republicans who falsely decry the fairness of the current US electoral system appear to coincide with those of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Ultimately, the most alarming implication of the release of Tuesday's report is that it may not be necessary for Russia to interfere in the 2024 presidential election in the same way as in 2016 and 2020.

Trump's China claims discredited

Related Article: US intelligence report says Russia used Trump allies to influence 2020 election with goal of 'denigrating' Biden

The report finds that Iran also tried to interfere in the election but that no foreign power -- not even Russia -- sought to change vote totals or attack electoral infrastructure. US intelligence agencies also assessed that China considered trying to influence the result but did not do so, largely undercutting false claims to the contrary by Trump, which his administration knew to be untrue but still made in the days before Biden's victory.

While the attempts to sway the opinions of American voters are serious -- and will likely draw US sanctions, according to White House officials -- they ultimately did not succeed. Biden prevailed in the election and Moscow did not go as far as it had to damage the previous Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton, four years earlier with its hacking scheme.

But the report comes with troubling new assessments of how Moscow was yet again able to use those around Trump -- often in plain sight -- in an effort to discredit an American election and to try to influence the result.

It finds, for instance, that Putin had "purview" over the activities of Andrii Derkach, a Ukrainian legislator who the US says is an active Russian agent. Derkach collaborated with Trump's attorney Rudy Giuliani to spread disinformation during Trump's first impeachment. That drama was caused by the ex-President's own effort to coax Kiev into probing Biden over false allegations perpetrated by people close to Moscow.

The DNI report didn't mention Giuliani by name.

Biden -- through US media organizations, US officials and prominent US individuals, some of whom were close to former President Trump and his administration."

Democratic Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, the Senate Intelligence Committee chairman, said Tuesday that the report did not leave a lot to the imagination.

"It doesn't take a lot of sophisticated analysis to figure out who some of those individuals -- hopefully again unknowingly -- (are who were) manipulated by the Russians," Warner said on Capitol Hill.

In some ways, the information released parallels the finding of special counsel Robert Mueller's report, which showed that those around Trump used information conjured up by the Russians in 2016 -- including emails stolen from Democratic servers that damaged Clinton.

Mueller wrote that although he could not prove Trump aides "conspired or coordinated" with Russia, the campaign "expected that it would benefit electorally from information stolen and released through Russian efforts."

There is another pattern here. Either gullible aides around Trump were oblivious to being manipulated by foreign operatives -- or they were not being willing to probe where the misinformation came from. And those alternatives put the best possible spin on their behavior.

Russian misinformation

Related Article: Biden administration unveils raft of sanctions on Russia over Navalny poisoning and imprisonment

The new report also found that Russia's primary effort in 2020 formed around a narrative that Biden and his family had corrupt ties to Ukraine. There has been no evidence of criminal activity by the current President nor by his son Hunter, who worked on the board of a Ukrainian energy company.

many campaign appearances -- an extraordinary marker of success for an intelligence operation hatched by a foreign power.

The report also makes clear that Derkach and another Russian influence agent, Konstantin Kilimnik, used willing conservative media networks in the United States to launder their deceptions and false information about Biden.

Putin, a former KGB agent who regarded the end of the Soviet Union as one of history's worst disasters, has long sought to damage the West by exploiting its own political and societal divides. The January 2017 US intelligence assessment into meddling in the prior election found, for example, that the Russians wanted to "undermine the US-led international liberal order." And Mueller said Putin was motivated by a desire to "provoke and amplify political discord in the United States."

MORE ON VOTING RIGHTS

- [Analysis: Watch these states as GOP tries to make it harder to vote](#)
- [Virginia governor restores voting rights to 69,000 former felons](#)
- [Georgia groups are lobbying Coca-Cola and others over voting rights](#)
- [Texas GOP targets Houston with bills seeking new voting restrictions](#)
- [Stacey Abrams on GOP efforts to target voting: 'It is a redux of Jim Crow in a suit and tie'](#)

The nature of such disinformation campaigns -- which unfold in the smoke and mirrors world where espionage, fake news and misinformation meet -- is that they continue to deliver for months and years afterward for a very modest investment.

For example, Trump's inevitable protests that he is yet again being targeted by a new "Russia hoax" will further poison the reputation of US intelligence agencies -- the sworn rivals of Russia's spy services -- among the ex-President's supporters.

Trump's propaganda may also serve to further foment distrust among his supporters with the US political system itself -- a feeling being exploited by GOP state lawmakers all over the United States to justify voter suppression laws supposedly designed to restore "integrity" to US elections.

From Georgia to Arizona and Texas to Iowa, Trump's allies are attempting to shorten early voting hours, limit Sunday polling -- used disproportionately by Black voters -- and roll back mail-in voting, which made it easier for more Americans to vote in 2020 in a record popular-vote turnout.



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Exhibit 29

Ivana Trump, an ex-wife of former President Trump, dies at 73



The 'big lie' on voter fraud is still with us

Analysis by [Zachary B. Wolf](#), CNN

Updated 8:00 AM ET, Sat February 20, 2021

A version of this story appeared in CNN's What Matters newsletter. To get it in your inbox, sign up for free [here](#).

(CNN) — There's [a war over voting](#).

Set all these things aside:

- the blatant hypocrisy of [Texas Sen. Ted Cruz's vacation](#) after he [criticized others](#)
- the mealy mouthed effort to claim he was just trying to be a good dad
- his abrupt about-face and apology
- and the uncomfortable fact that someone on his wife's text chain outed their supposed friend as the Cancun ringleader.

What makes the Cruz vacation scandal most interesting is that while he's four years from reelection, this silliness could help make him among the most vulnerable incumbents if he runs for reelection in 2024.

That's no bold prediction even though we're years away in part because of Texas, where Cruz is a symptom of a much larger issue for Republicans: that the state is changing, becoming more friendly to Democrats and will, at some point, be the key US political battleground.

However.

Republicans are also learning from the gains Democrats made in 2020 and there's an effort afoot -- specifically in Texas, Georgia and a number of places still controlled by Republicans at the state level -- to make it more difficult to vote.

[Read this from CNN's Kelly Mena:](#)

Georgia voting rights groups are denouncing a sweeping voting bill introduced this week by Republican state legislators as a "direct attack on democracy" and on Black voters.

The bill comes as Georgia has become ground zero for election law changes in the wake of the 2020 election. Republicans in the state, citing baseless allegations of voter fraud pushed by former President Donald Trump and other GOP officials, have moved to roll back access to mail-in voting and early voting.

The [full story is here](#).

Not just Georgia. This is all part of a larger, coordinated Republican strategy to curb, restrict and more closely monitor voting practices like mail-in ballots that, along with distaste for now-former President Donald Trump and frustration with his policies, fueled record turnout in 2020.

The Brennan Center for Justice tracks voter-related legislation and [has identified 165 bills in 33 states](#) that would restrict voting in a variety of ways:

- cull early voting lists
- placing a new registration obstacles in the way of voters
- purge voter rolls
- require voters to actively request an absentee ballot
- tighten rules about witness signatures.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis also [unveiled a full slate of proposed voting changes Friday](#).

Broken record. There's no evidence of widespread voter fraud in the 2020 election, despite what Florida resident Donald Trump says. The idea of fraud is central to Republican calls for these new rules.

"We need to make sure that our citizens have confidence in the elections, that they have the ability to vote," said DeSantis. "We want, obviously, everyone to vote. But we don't want anyone to cheat. And we want to make sure that we strike that appropriate balance."

In Texas, there's a proposal to strip registration authority from county clerks and streamline it through the state, according to Brennan's review. Many large counties in Texas are controlled by Democrats. Republicans control the state government.

Conversely, Democrats in those states have proposals to make it easier to vote.

Mena has also written about how voting rights activists want Democrats in Congress to pass a sweeping election reform and voting rights package to block state election reforms. And read this story, with CNN's Fredreka Schouten, about [elections officials heading for the exits](#).

Broken systems

The New York Times had two interesting education stories Friday.

One headline will make you feel really good:

[A College Program for Disadvantaged Teens Could Shake Up Elite Admissions](#)

The other one will make your blood boil:

['I Am Worth It': Why Thousands of Doctors in America Can't Get a Job](#)

The undercurrent in both of these reports is testing -- the SAT/ACT, which might be on its way out, and the MCAT, which creates a stumbling block that prompts would-be medical students to go overseas for training that later makes it harder for them to be matched with a residency program.

The idea that disadvantaged teens who might not do well on standardized tests can compete in a top-level college environment is great to hear.

The idea that people who have gone to and graduated from medical school can't get matched with a residency program is maddening. That the US health system is facing a doctor shortage when qualified people can't pry their way in is criminal.

I mention these two reports because it's clear that the US education system has built so many barriers to entry, just as the US election system turns on so many barriers to voting.

And it rewards people whose judgment that often turns out to be flawed. Ted Cruz and his wife both went to Harvard, after all. That didn't make them smart enough to not go on vacation while his constituents were powerless.

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Exhibit 30

BREAKING NEWS

Ivana Trump, an ex-wife of former President Trump, dies at 73

Trump's big lie wouldn't have worked without his thousands of little lies



Opinion

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Updated 10:11 PM ET, Mon January 25, 2021

Avlon: Donald Trump told a big lie loudly 03:03

Editor's Note: Ruth Ben-Ghiat (@ruthbenghiat), a frequent contributor to CNN Opinion, is professor of history at New York University and the author of "Strongmen: From Mussolini to the Present." The views expressed here are her own. Read [more opinion](#) on CNN.

(CNN) —

"We won this election and we won it by a landslide," said Donald Trump at his "Save America" rally on January 6, which incited the assault on the Capitol. This is Trump's "Big Lie," a brazen falsehood with momentous consequences.

Trump's accusation that "radical left" Democrats stole his victory is certainly a whopper. But the focus on his Big Lie misses something fundamental about how propaganda works. A leader's Big Lie has no power and makes little sense on its own. It has traction only if the public has been fed many, many smaller lies. It relies on a larger network of falsehoods told by the leader and reinforced by his government officials and compliant media.



Opinion

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Ruth Ben-Ghiat

precedent in the history of the American presidency. He told more than 30,000 documented lies in public ([30,573](#) was [The Washington Post's final tally](#)), on Twitter, at rallies and in interviews. If taken as an average, it would come out to 21 lies per day over his four-year term.

Related Article: Why the Trump impeachment trial is crucial

Indeed, Trump's claims to a unique competence to rescue America [got an assist](#) from a cadre of evangelical Christian preachers, authors, and government officials, former White House press secretary [Sarah Huckabee Sanders](#) among them, who contended that he ruled by divine benediction -- that God installed him to do His will. This encouraged followers to believe that Trump's destiny was to stay in office, priming them for the moment when Trump's asserted that a second term was rightfully his.

The events of January 6 cannot be understood without this structure of blind belief and all the small lies that supported it. For his supporters, Trump was a victim of the "Deep State" and other enemies -- his reelection had been foiled by their treachery, so it was up to his believers to fight back, to fix a rigged system with the only tool left: direct action.

The Big Lie works because it is part of an established alternate belief system -- an edifice of lies, assembled piece by piece.

Trump, a leader of authoritarian intentions and tendencies, had disadvantages with respect to the foreign autocrats he so admires. He had no state media, like China's Xi Jinping. He could not rule by decree, like Hungary's Viktor Orbán. He had

in making journalists into [fake objects](#) for many of his followers, he could not revoke or destroy the First Amendment.

So Trump took a different tack, unleashing a barrage of disinformation common in authoritarian states but without

Let's break down the smaller lies that prepared Trump's followers to accept the Big Lie. Each of these was highly damaging and consequential, and most were repeated endlessly by Trump and his co-conspirators in and out of government and replicated on social media, right-wing TV and radio, and more.

Some were not expressed directly by Trump but were connected to the personality cult he built -- though he did make overt claims that he would "save the United States," and pronounced that "I alone" can fix the country's ills (an allegedly fraudulent election system among them). Personality cults enable the spread of propaganda by allowing an autocrat to forge a special bond with followers, one based on faith and emotion rather than reason. Put simply, they believe -- and help amplify -- his lies because they believe in him.

The Big Lie seemed convincing because Trump had been lying about American elections for years. He started [drumming up](#) suspicion about rigged elections in 2016, when it looked like he would lose to Hillary Clinton. The ensuing four years of relentless propaganda aimed to erase all confidence in this fundamental institution of democracy.

It's not surprising that Trump's lying had a [dramatic](#) uptick in 2020, when he was campaigning for reelection during a

pandemic that he mismanaged with lethal results. He needed to discredit the main thing that threatened his power -- the vote. He worked overtime to throw doubt on every single aspect of voting. He told lies about dead people voting, about fraudulent mail-in ballots, about votes illegally counted, not counted at all, or invented.

In his [January 6 speech](#), he falsely accused Democrats of

though they still don't have any idea what the votes are.

Related Article: Mitch McConnell's dilemma

another. Trump's aim in his ceaseless lying was to get his followers to trust him alone as the arbiter of reality and to distrust everyone and everything else -- especially the democratic system that stood in the way of his amassing sufficient power to become untouchable.

It's the authoritarian way. While Trump is now gone from the White House, millions of his supporters still cling fiercely to his lies. Each lie deserves our attention as we seek to combat the mass disinformation that threatens our democracy.

Focusing only on the Big Lie misses the big picture. It fails to convey the scope and gravity of the institutionalized lying that was Trump's biggest weapon. And it obscures the way minds were worn down, day after day, by one lie after another after

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Exhibit 31

BREAKING NEWS

Ivana Trump, an ex-wife of former President Trump, dies at 73

Call out Trump's big lie



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See historic moment House reaches enough votes to impeach Trump 02:08

Editor's Note: Joe Lockhart is a CNN political analyst. He was the White House press secretary from 1998 to 2000 in President Bill Clinton's administration. He cohosts the podcast "Words Matter." The opinions expressed in this commentary are his own. View [more opinion](#) at CNN.

(CNN) — There was a rare moment of bipartisan agreement on Wednesday's impeachment vote condemning the violence surrounding the domestic terrorist attack on our Capitol. But Republicans and Democrats didn't do enough to focus on the months that led up to the coup attempt and why it happened. They focused on blaming President Donald Trump and the appropriate way to hold him alone accountable.

[Ten House Republicans](#) voted to impeach the President, acknowledging his role in inciting violence. But many, citing the President's speech during his "Save America Rally" moments before the riot began, claimed there was no evidence of incitement and that the President was just doing his patriotic duty by encouraging his supporters to use their voices. And, as they argued against impeachment, they disingenuously claimed that it was in the interest of [healing the country's divide](#).

But lost in the debate was the root cause -- the big lie and who was telling it -- that set off the chain of events leading to the ransacking of the Capitol and the death of [five Americans](#): The baseless claim that Trump had the

election stolen from him by a grand conspiracy led by everyone from the Democrats, [George Soros and the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez](#), remains the primary source of domestic discord and potential future violence and political chaos.

This is what should have taken center stage during the



Opinion

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Joe Lockhart

Capitol, each speaker should have spent more of their limited time at the podium to remind their colleagues and the American public of the lie that sparked this fire.

Republicans voting against impeachment, not surprisingly, were not anxious to probe the fundamental reason of the insurrection.

While focusing on process and what was in the best interests of the country, they chose to ignore the claims made about the legitimacy of the election. That's likely because they were part of the chorus spreading the disinformation. Remember on the day of the coup attempt, [147 Republican House members](#) voted to block the vote of the Electoral College, in an attempt to overturn the election. A small number of Senators joined this seditious effort by forcing a vote on these outrageous claims.

To this day, the vast majority of elected Republicans have not acknowledged the legitimacy of President-elect Joe Biden's victory.

Not surprisingly, the President continued with the big lie at the heart of the whole problem. In his first video reaction to the rioting, [he emphasized the election was stolen](#) from him, granting his supporters a feeling of legitimacy in their efforts

Related Article: The House could have made a much stronger case for impeaching Trump

to try to stop Congress by any means necessary. In repeated comments and tweets, the President then gave lip service to opposing violence but never backed down from the lie of a stolen election.

And if you think he might accept reality for the good of the country, you have not been paying attention. Even Thursday morning, his confidant, Peter Navarro, tried to justify the actions of Trump's supporters while still claiming that the election was not legitimate. He told Fox Business -- no surprise there -- that the 74 million people who voted for Trump are rightly "[pissed off](#)" because their voice was silenced on Election Day. He knows that's not true, as does the President and every Republican and conservative member of the media.

Going forward, everyone in Congress needs to be accountable for the big lie.

Related Article: We should have seen the Capitol riot coming

Democrats need to do this by focusing on the legitimacy of the election if they expect to push through Biden's agenda and avoid an epidemic of domestic terror around the country.

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important symbol of accountability. And that goes for holding all of the elected officials like Senators Ted Cruz of Texas and Josh Hawley of Missouri, and Alabama Rep. Mo Brooks, accountable for their part in trying to undermine what has been proven to be a fair election. Failure to do so might lead to a repeat of the level of distrust in America's free and fair elections that led us to witness domestic terrorism on the Capitol and the first time a President has been impeached twice.



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Fear & Greed Index

What emotion is driving the market now? Click here to see today's reading

Experts warn that Trump's 'big lie' will outlast his presidency

By [Brian Stelter](#), [CNN Business](#)

Updated 12:33 AM ET, Mon January 11, 2021

(CNN Business) – A version of this article first appeared in the "Reliable Sources" newsletter. [You can sign up for free right here.](#)

So many lies led up to last Wednesday's riot in Washington. Now there are new lies being proffered on the right-wing web to defend the indefensible. And President Trump's cheering section is desperately trying to bury the riot down the memory hole.

Speaking of memories, let's go back in time. One week ago on our "Reliable Sources" telecast, "On Tyranny" author Timothy Snyder [warned](#) that "we are now moving dangerously towards the territory of a big lie." He said "the idea that Mr. Biden didn't win the election is a big lie. It's a big lie because you have to disbelieve all kinds of evidence to believe in it. It's a big lie because you have to believe in a huge conspiracy in order to believe it. And it's a big lie because, if you believe it, it demands you take radical action. So this is one way we have really moved forwards towards authoritarianism and away from democracy. It's coming to a peak right now."

Wednesday was the peak -- maybe. Every day, more evidence of the attack comes to light. Much more reporting is still needed. I agree with Yashar Ali, who said Sunday night: "I feel like we know just 5% of the insurrection story."

But we also need to look ahead. As Jake Tapper [said](#) at the end of "SOTU" on Sunday: "Will there be any consequences? Will Kevin McCarthy remain the Republican leader of the House?" Are Ted Cruz and Josh Hawley "just going to be allowed to pick up their committee assignments and try to move on? And what about the President of the United States? Will he be allowed to fly out of Washington on January 19th to spend his days luxuriating on the golf course, spreading more lies through the TV networks that were also part of this treason?"

Tapper concluded: "What happens to us? What happens to our country if we continue to pretend leaders who played a role in this attempted coup, in this terrorist attack, end up doing just fine without no consequences at all? Will January 6th, 2021 be remembered as only the beginning?"

Was Wednesday the peak, or just the beginning?

That's what brings me back around to Snyder, whose book has skyrocketed back to #1 on Amazon. He wrote [the cover story](#) for next week's New York Times Magazine, and it is already online. The story is another warning, and it inspired the headline of tonight's newsletter.

"The lie outlasts the liar," Snyder wrote. "The idea that Germany lost the First World War in 1918 because of a Jewish 'stab in the back' was 15 years old when Hitler came to power. How will Trump's myth of victimhood function in American life 15 years from now? And to whose benefit?"

He concluded that "America will not survive the big lie just because a liar is separated from power. It will need a thoughtful repluralization of media and a commitment to facts as a public good." [Read on...](#)



Right now CNN.com's headline says the House "will move quickly on impeachment" if push for 25th Amendment fails."

"It will be the first time any American president has been impeached for a second time," Wolf Blitzer said on air Sunday night.

→ Big picture: More than 104 hours have elapsed since Trump incited a riot at the Capitol. And he is still in office.

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Exhibit 33

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'Firehose of falsehood': How Trump is trying to confuse the public about the election outcome

By [Brian Stelter](#), [CNN Business](#)

Updated 10:39 AM ET, Mon November 30, 2020

(CNN Business) – A version of this article first appeared in the "Reliable Sources" newsletter. [You can sign up for free right here.](#)

Trump is Trump. There's nothing new to say about the outgoing president. But there is still lots to learn about his enablers. So many people, from GOP functionaries to Fox News hosts, are helping him to undermine democracy by denying the election and attacking reality. So many people are complicit.

People like Maria Bartiromo. Formerly an acclaimed journalist, known around the world for making CEOs tell the truth, she now tees up Trump to recite lie after lie. Her Sunday morning call with Trump on Fox News was his first "interview" since he lost the election, but [it wasn't a real interview](#) at all. He wasn't ready to acknowledge that he lost, and neither was she. He displayed [delusional weakness](#). She was complicit. And she's far from the only one.

GOP leaders stay silent

This is what Ron Brownstein on CNN Sunday night: As Trump's conspiracy theory about the "rigged" election "gets more and more fantastical and far-reaching, implicating the DOJ, the FBI, and Republican governors, the silence of Republicans in Congress — Mitch McConnell in particular, Kevin McCarthy in particular, who are allowing this poison to spread in the American political system — looks more and more like a modern analogue to the silence of Republican congressional leaders during the rampages of Joe McCarthy in the early 1950s."

Brownstein added, "I think history will have no trouble finding a parallel between Mitch McConnell's efforts to kind of look the other way and what so many Republican leaders did until Joseph Welch said, at long last, sir 'have you no decency?'"

Trump is backsliding

He lost the election nearly four weeks ago yet he refuses to admit it. Judging by his tweets, he's spiraling even deeper into denial. The Bartiromo interview was a sign that he's prepared to do battle in public -- a disturbing display of weakness that some people interpret as strength. His Thanksgiving evening Q&A with reporters was another sign of the same thing. After holding a call with members of the military, he fielded questions for the first time in three weeks, though he mostly just deflected and distorted the truth. When he walked out, one reporter asked "Is this the language of a dictator?" and another said, "Mr. President, some people say you're denying reality."

[On Sunday's "Reliable Sources,"](#) author Jonathan Rauch, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, placed Trump's recent statements in the context of information warfare.

Trump is running a "classic Russian-style disinformation campaign," known as the ["firehose of falsehood,"](#) he said.

In this propaganda model, "you push out as many different stories and conspiracy theories and lies and half-truths as you possibly can, in order to flood the zone with disinformation," Rauch said. "The goal here is to confuse people, and he's doing very well at that. This is a classic propaganda tactic. He is very good at it."

Rauch pointed out that the falsehoods don't have to be consistent or logical. "It's about throwing spaghetti against



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"And that's very hard for democracies to deal with," he added. "Traditionally, we dealt with it by not doing it. It was unthinkable before Trump for anyone to run this kind of disinformation campaign from the White House against the American public. Once it happens, I think the best defense to start with is for people, at least a lot of people, to understand what's going on, to realize what's happening here."

Craig Mazin, the creator of HBO's "Chernobyl," [reacted](#) to Rauch's remarks by reprising one of the most memorable lines from his series: "The real danger is that if we hear enough lies, then we no longer recognize the truth at all."

The Murdochs own this

Trumpism is a big part of Fox's business model. The men who control Fox, Rupert and Lachlan Murdoch, were evidently pleased enough by Bartiromo's propaganda, proud enough of her Trump sycophancy, that they rebroadcast her 10 a.m. Eastern time hour at 3 p.m. on Sunday.

Right afterward, at 4 p.m., news anchor Eric Shawn matter-of-factly dismantled what Trump and Bartiromo had just built. (No wonder why Trump keeps attacking Fox's weekend news anchors.)

[Shawn said](#) Trump "doubled down on his claims of widespread voter fraud in the 2020 elections even though local and national election officials as well as federal and state courts in multiple states -- and in some cases the Trump campaign's own lawyers -- have said there is no evidence to prove that." He added, "Experts say such claims are simply unsupported falsehoods that are not backed up by any facts."

That's clear, convincing language from Shawn. So then why did Fox broadcast all of Trump's claims without any real-time followups? A Fox News spokesperson did not respond to my inquiries.

Trump said Hannity 'gets it,' but...

During the Sunday morning phoner with Bartiromo, Trump praised Mark Levin's show "last night," even though Saturday's airing was just a repeat of a six-day-old episode of Levin's show. He also said "Sean Hannity, he knows, he gets it. He gets it." Meaning... what? That Hannity believes Trump won the election?

On Sunday night, Hannity posted a tweet that said the media helped "drive Trump from office," which was notable primarily for his admission that Trump's presidency is over. To understand some of the rage and election denialism on the far-right, [take a look at the replies to Hannity's tweet.](#)

A few days ago I [quoted](#) a longtime on-air staffer at Fox saying that "our audience has absolutely been radicalized," and that's what a lot of this is about: The audience. Bartiromo's Sunday morning show has a much bigger audience than the Fox newscasts later in the day.

The irony is rich

CNN senior media reporter Oliver Darcy writes: "If you've watched Fox News over the past week, you've no doubt seen a segment or two assailing reporters for lobbing supposed 'softball' questions at Biden. These segments have dominated Fox's talk shows lately. Which made Bartiromo's 'interview' a display of astounding double standards and heaps of hypocrisy. Think about Bartiromo's 'interview' the next time Fox has the nerve to attack reporters for the questions they ask Biden or members of his forthcoming administration."



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The Lead with Jake Tapper

Vaccine Approved By Christmas? Trump Refuses to Concede Election; Biden Names Economic Team. Aired 4-4:30p ET

Aired November 30, 2020 - 16:00 ET

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[16:00:01]

JAKE TAPPER, CNN HOST: That's the highest level of intelligence about the threats facing the United States and its allies.

It's a vital step, as president-elect Biden prepares to take office in less than two months, the transition process, of course, delayed by outgoing President Trump's refusal to accept that he lost.

Outgoing President Trump is continuing his baseless lies about the election, even as Chris Krebs, the former cybersecurity czar at the Department of Homeland Security, is now publicly debunking many of the Trump team's allegations.

But it is not just Krebs, official after official, Democrat, Republican, nonpartisan experts, finding themselves responding to the deranged claims made by President Trump and his team.

Here's Georgia election official Gabe Sterling, a Republican, earlier today.

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GABRIEL STERLING, GEORGIA VOTING SYSTEM IMPLEMENTATION MANAGER: The ridiculous thing claimed in some of these lawsuits are just that. They're insanity. It's fever dream, made up, Internet cabal -- I can't even -- however many words I can use to say how crazy some of these things are.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

TAPPER: Nonetheless, President Trump and his team continue to push forward these lies, with state and local officials doing the lion's share of standing up for the facts and the truth, and congressional Republicans essentially silent, with a handful of exceptions.

Take Congressman Adam Kinzinger of Illinois, who tweeted: "President Trump simply flooding the zone with baseless conspiracies again."

Retiring Congressman Paul Mitchell of Michigan tweeting: "Oh, my God, President Trump, please, for the sake of our nation, please drop these arguments without evidence or factual basis. #stopthestupid."

Meantime, president-elect Joe Biden is moving forward with building out his administration. Today, Biden announced key economic picks for his administration, as CNN's Jeff Zeleny reports.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

JEFF ZELENY, CNN SENIOR WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): For the first time since winning the election, Joe Biden receiving the president's daily brief today, the one-of-a-kind collection of classified intelligence and security threats facing the U.S.

For Biden and vice president-elect Kamala Harris, who also received a briefing, it's the biggest milestone yet on their way to the White House. President Trump finally signed off on the move last week, despite repeatedly refusing to concede defeat.

JOE BIDEN (D), PRESIDENT-ELECT: We're going to build an economy that leads the world.

ZELENY: It comes as Biden today continues filling out his Cabinet, surrounding himself with history-making picks, former Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen, who would be the first woman to serve as Treasury secretary,

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run the Office of Management and Budget.

Biden also announcing this White House communications operation, and for the first time with women in each of the senior roles, Press Secretary Jen Psaki, communications director Kate Bedingfield, senior adviser and chief spokesperson for the vice president Symone Sanders. All are among the women leading the team.

Psaki, a veteran of the Obama administration, is already overseeing confirmation of Biden's nominees in the Senate, which for now is controlled by Republicans.

JEN PSAKI, BIDEN TRANSITION ADVISER: We don't need a fabricated crisis in the Senate. And I don't think that the American people are going to tolerate that if there's a refusal to move forward with qualified nominees.

ZELENY: While there is only one president at a time, sharing the document known as the PDB with Biden underscores how Trump's time in power is drawing to a close. While hardly a stranger to classified briefings, today marked the first time Biden received one in nearly four years.

JOHN BRENNAN, FORMER CIA DIRECTOR: It could have something related to a recent terrorist threat or engagements with China or -- and Russia, maybe North Korea nuclear developments.

ZELENY: He received a briefing in his home outside Wilmington, where he spent the day out of sight, recovering from a weekend foot injury that aid say he received while playing with his dog Major.

His doctor says Biden will have a walking boot for several weeks to treat the hairline fracture.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

ZELENY: Now, we are expected to see president-elect Biden tomorrow here for the first time likely with that walking boot. He will be introducing members of his economic team.

Janet Yellen, of course, has received wide praise from both sides. Not all of his nominees have. Neera Tanden, for example, has taken criticism from progressives and from some Republicans, who say she will not be confirmed. That, of course, is why controlled the Senate is so important.

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TAPPER: All right, Jeff Zeleny in Wilmington, Delaware, thanks so much.

In Arizona today, more deranged conspiracies from Rudy Giuliani representing the president at what can only be described as a publicity stunt. You will notice that Giuliani never introduces these claims in an actual court of law, where you are not allowed to tell lies and you have to present actual evidence to back up your claims.

It was fitting, then, that, shortly after Giuliani's event, the state of Arizona certified its elections results, confirming that Joe Biden won in the state by a margin of 10,457 votes.

[16:05:09]

As Kaitlan Collins reports, President Trump remains deep in denial, even lashing out now at his former allies.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

KAITLAN COLLINS, CNN WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): Holed up in the White House again today, President Trump had no public events on his schedule as he continued to stew about the election.

Though no legal challenge, recount or audit has changed the outcome, Trump insisted, "There is no way we lost this election" and trained his anger on Republican officials once considered allies.

DONALD TRUMP, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: The governor has done nothing. He's done absolutely nothing. I'm ashamed that I endorsed him.

COLLINS: Trump's latest target is Georgia's Governor Brian Kemp, who Trump called hapless today for not using nonexistent emergency powers to overrule his -- quote -- "obstinate secretary of state."

Governor Kemp rarely pushes back on Trump, but he did in a statement today where his office said Georgia law prohibits the governor from interfering in elections, and he has no such authority.

But Trump isn't just lashing out at his own party. He's also going after the person he put in charge of securing the election, then fired for securing the election.

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We did it right. This was a secure election.

COLLINS: After Chris Krebs appeared on "60 Minutes" last night, Trump complained the show never asked him for comment and claimed the 2020 election was -- quote -- "the least secure ever."

His false claims about the election haven't stopped there. The president also alleged that world leaders have questioned the U.S. election, despite how many have congratulated president-elect Joe Biden.

TRUMP: You have leaders of countries that call me, say that's the most messed-up election we have ever seen.

COLLINS: The White House hasn't told reporters about a single call Trump has had with a world leader since the election.

SEN. ROY BLUNT (R-MO): Well, the president-elect will be the president-elect when the electors vote for him.

COLLINS: While many Senate Republicans have refused to acknowledge president-elect Joe Biden's victory, the one whose committee oversees the inauguration is publicly urging Trump to attend.

BLUNT: I think there's a big role for President Trump, and I hope he embraces that.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

COLLINS: Now, Jake, speaking of Republicans who have virtually ignored the president's attacks on the results of the election, the Senate is back in Washington today.

And Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell ignored a question from my colleague Manu Raju on whether he considers Joe Biden to be the president-elect today. Of course, that's not something he's going to be able to ignore much longer, given, as Jeff Zeleny just laid out, Biden is picking his Cabinet nominees and they are going to have to, of course, undergo confirmations by the Senate.

TAPPER: All right, Kaitlan Collins at the White House, thanks so much.

Let's discuss with our panel here.

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of building administration, trying to appeal to all factions of the Democratic Party, perhaps even bring in some Republicans. What are the challenges here for Biden?

ABBY PHILLIP, CNN POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT: Yes. I mean, I think you just hit on one of them. It's partly about making sure that the factions within the Democratic Party are satisfied. The other element of this is just the uncertainty around the United States Senate and what that's going to look like.

It very much seems, based on where Biden is going with some of these picks, that, frankly, are people who he worked with in the Obama administration. These are people who are known quantities in Washington, generally speaking. You don't see virtually anyone on these -- on this list who is somewhat out of left field.

So it suggests that the Biden administration is preparing for either possibility, that either there will be a narrow Democratic majority in the Senate or there will continue to be a Republican majority, and they need to get some votes across the aisle.

So, I think that it's probably more so the issue with Senate confirmation, making sure that they can get votes on the Republican side, because I think Democrats still, by and large, right now are pushing privately, but publicly are kind of holding their fire on most of those picks, with a few exceptions.

One of them you saw there, Neera Tanden, who will be nominated for the Office of Management and Budget position.

TAPPER: I'm going to ask Phil about that in a second.

But, before I do add, Abby, one key position that has yet to be filled is defense secretary. Tell us some of the name under consideration.

PHILLIP: Yes, so this is one, a big one. And it looks like Joe Biden, according to sources, is considering a couple of names, all of them, I think, pretty groundbreaking in their own right.

So, Michele Flournoy, who was a top Pentagon official in the Obama administration, she's under consideration. You have Jeh Johnson, the homeland security secretary under Obama, also under consideration, and a retired Army general, Lloyd Austin, who served as the head of Central Command under the Obama administration during that

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But Jeh Johnson, retired -- lieutenant Army General Austin, they would both be the first black picks to be Homeland -- Pentagon secretary, if they were picked. And then Michele Flournoy would be the first woman if she were picked to that position as well.

[16:10:14]

TAPPER: And, Philip, let's talk about Neera Tanden, Biden's pick to leave the Office of Management and Budget.

She's been attacked by some progressives, although who seems to be shoring up support among progressives in Congress, based on some statements I have seen, but also some Republicans are really going at. The communications director for Senator John Cornyn of Texas tweeted: "Neera Tanden, who has an endless stream of disparaging comments about the Republican senators whose votes she will need, stand zero chance of being confirmed."

So am I to understand that mean tweets are now important to Republican senators?

PHILIP BUMP, "THE WASHINGTON POST": Well, yes, I think we can add that to the list of hypocrisies that we're going to see over the course of the next month or so.

But, yes, I mean, Neera Tanden is someone who sits in a very unusual space, I think it's safe to say in the political conversation. She is both broadly disliked by a lot of people on the left wing of the party of the progressive/liberal space for being too centrist, but she's also been very vocal in her criticism of Republicans, which really gives her a long paper trail, to the point that you just heard, about having made disparaging comments, not necessarily unfair; disparaging comments, but certainly critical comments, about Republican legislators.

And so, yes, I mean, I think that that will be a contentious pick. And I think it will also be a contentious fight simply by virtue of the fact that the Republicans are going to look for someplace to fight, right? I mean, so someone Janet Yellen, it's hard for Republicans to kick up too much dust than it is for someone like Tanden, where they have a lot of ammunition, and it gives them something to really sink their teeth into.

TAPPER: But, Phil, I mean, you just mentioned Janet Yellen, the Treasury secretary nominee to be.

The chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Chuck Grassley, says he believes Yellen will get a favorable

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BUMP: Right. Right.

So, part of the process of getting that gig is to actually have to submit your tax returns. So there is an element of it which is it's mandated that she actually has to turn those over.

Obviously, though, for Grassley, for Republicans in general to point to returns as something that need to be reviewed before someone is given a senior position within the federal government, there's a level of irony there.

TAPPER: And, Abby, "The New York Times" has a report out on the links between some Biden picks and their ties to consulting and investment firms, which "The Times" says raises some tricky ethics questions.

For example, the secretary of state pick to be, Tony Blinken, he co- founded a group called WestExec Advisors. It's a major consulting firm. Is this going to be difficult for Biden to navigate in this era when it comes to ethics concerns?

PHILLIP: You know, that is, I think, one of those areas where, in the Trump era, I definitely think that there is, as you were just discussing, some of the hypocrisy in Washington.

There's going to be a little bit of that happening here, where some of these ethics concerns are probably more resonant for Democrats than they were for Republicans over the last four years. I think Biden can really deal with this early by mandating his own ethics disclosure requirements, forcing his own nominees to disclose who their clients were, how much they were paid.

These are things that they can do voluntarily to get ahead of some of these issues. And, in fact, that would be in keeping with a lot of the ethics rules that the Obama administration tried to do on certain other issues, including lobbyist regulations and other things that they tried to do to get ahead of some of these ethics problems.

But, again, I mean, I think that for Republicans to kick up dust over conflicts of interest when it comes to clients or people who are serving in the administration, I think, would be a little hypocritical, considering that they seemed to have very little trouble with that over the last four years as well.

TAPPER: All right, Abby Phillip and Philip Bump, thank you so much to both of you. Really appreciate it.

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authorization. How safe is this vaccine? When might you be able to get one? I will ask CNN's Dr. Sanjay Gupta next.

Plus: a CNN global exclusive you will see first here on THE LEAD, revealing documents that show what the Chinese government really knew about the first cases of coronavirus in China and that government's chaotic early response.

Stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[16:18:49]

TAPPER: Breaking news in our health lead now.

An official for Operation Warp Speed says 100 percent of Americans who want a vaccine will be able to have gotten one by June. This is the latest bit of promising vaccine news. Moderna today is applying for emergency use authorization from the FDA for its vaccine. That pharmaceutical company claims that their vaccine is 94.1 percent effective and 100 percent effective at preventing severe COVID cases.

CVS and Walgreens say that they are getting ready to be among the first to administer vaccines. And, according to Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, vaccines could very well be in the arms of Americans by Christmas.

CNN's chief medical correspondent, Dr. Sanjay Gupta, joins us now,

Sanjay, good to see you. Anyone who wants to vaccine will be able to have gotten one by June, according to Operation Warp Speed. Do you think most people will be vaccinated before them?

DR. SANJAY GUPTA, CNN SENIOR MEDICAL CORRESPONDENT: Yes, I do think that that you're going to sort of have this ramp up to the number of people becoming vaccinated.

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about 60 percent of people want it.

[16:20:03]

That would require -- I did the math on this -- some 300 million doses by June to be able to vaccinate the 60 percent of adults who want it. Now, obviously, I think, Jake, over time, as people hear the news about the vaccine, as they become more comfortable with it, the percentage of people who want it will likely go up.

So, there will probably be this surge of demand that increases over the spring and summer. And that's something Operation Warp Speed, I'm sure, is taking into consideration.

We know, Jake, the likely amounts of vaccine to be available by the end of the year. They say some 40 million doses by the end of the year. Two doses, right? So that's 20 million people. And then you can sort of look at how things progress after that, another 50 million by January, another 60 million by February and March.

And I will also point out, Jake, that that's based on these two vaccines, Pfizer, which we'd heard about, Moderna, you just mentioned. There may be others by that point as well that get this authorization.

TAPPER: Sanjay, the advisory board for the CDC, they're going to vote tomorrow on the priority list of who gets the vaccine first.

Along with front-line medical workers, who will be first in line, do you think?

GUPTA: Yes, I think it's primarily going to be these health care workers who are primarily taking care of COVID patients, because if you if you start to lose a significant amount of health care workers in the middle of this pandemic, that obviously puts a significant strain on the system.

So, again, you do the math on this, there's about 20, 21 million health care workers who sort of fit that bill. They're likely to be first in line. And that will be sort of the first phase of this. And, again, multiply everything times two in terms of doses needed, so 40 million, roughly, doses needed for that first phase.

And then, Jake, look, I mean if you start looking at everyone else who'd be considered either essential or vulnerable because of age or preexisting medical conditions, you're starting to look at well over 200 million

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And that's later in the spring, probably, late spring, early summer, by the time you get to that point.

TAPPER: Where will people be able to get the vaccine? And are they going to have a choice if there are two or three or four different kinds of vaccines available?

GUPTA: I have talked to so many people about this exact issue. And it's very interesting, because, first of all, we don't have the full data yet on these vaccines. There may be some data that says, hey, look, this worked really well for elderly people in terms of inducing immune response. This worked better for younger people.

We just haven't seen that data yet. That may come out. What we know about these two vaccines, Moderna and Pfizer, is, they're pretty similar vaccines in terms of how they work. So, people may not have a choice, but they may not need a choice, in that the vaccines are pretty similar.

What's interesting, Jake, is that, in terms of where the Pfizer vaccine goes, how its distributed, vs. Moderna, that may be very well just dependent on your resources in terms of cold storage, something that people have heard a lot about, but the Pfizer vaccine needs to be kept really cold. So that may be for larger cities, for example, cities that have those sorts of resources, larger institutions, whereas the Moderna vaccine, which also needs to be kept cold, but not as cold, that may be more for smaller locations, that can sort of handle that sort of vaccine.

So it may have nothing to do with the efficacy of the vaccine, just the distribution capabilities of a location.

TAPPER: So, Dr. Fauci told me a few weeks ago that it's not as though you get vaccinated, and then you can just act as though the virus is not there. People will still need to wear masks and social distance, because it's not a 100 percent effective vaccine, even though it's very high, 95 percent or 94 percent.

How soon before we can just start living our normal lives again?

GUPTA: Well, I mean, I think, if it means normal, except that you may still need to wear masks at some point if you go into large gatherings, that would probably be late summer, early fall.

A sort of complete sense of normalcy, where you're really looking at this in the rearview mirror, maybe by the end of the year. I mean, I think there's going to be a hangover effect from this for some time, Jake, where people are going to be cautious about the idea of respiratory viruses in large public settings.

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practices within those large public spaces. So I think we're going to feel this, much in the way that you take your shoes off when you go to the airport and things like that. I think there is going to be a sort of hangover effect of this for

some time. But I think once we start seeing the numbers come down, Jake, these awful trends that we see going up, once we start seeing them come down, and we get into a containment level, which is about one in 100,000 new infections per day, 3,500 people becoming infected a day, instead of close to 200,000, I think we're going to have a sense of normalcy at that point.

TAPPER: And, as you note, this vaccine news is promising, but we don't have a vaccine yet. And the surge right now is smashing records. Lawmakers around the country still refusing to implement mask mandates.

You think that's a mistake?

[16:25:01]

GUPTA: Yes, I think that there's -- this is going to be one of the great sort of, I think, mysteries of this pandemic for me, certainly.

Maybe it's easier to understand than I believe, but masks work. And the places where you have had mandates have had decreases in overall virus transmission significantly. You know, we have reported on this for a long time. There was new data that came out of Kansas. Basically, Kansas tried to put a statewide mask mandate in place. There were a certain number of counties that did it, and a certain number that didn't.

And a month later, Jake, roughly a month later, the counties that put the mandates in place decreased their overall new cases. Just flattening it would be huge. To actually decrease it was significant. The places that didn't have mask mandates, it went up.

I mean, we just see this over and over again, and we're going to need to pay attention to this data certainly over the next several months, because it really matters.

TAPPER: All right, Dr. Sanjay Gupta, good to see you, as always.

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(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

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