

The President Discusses A Search For A Vaccine And Battles The Media Over The COVID-19 Pandemic; Dr. Fauci Offers A Pessimistic Testimony To A Senate Panel; President Trump Tweeting About His Predecessor, Barack Obama, Indicating That Obamagate Is Worse Than Watergate; Former Governor Mike Huckabee On Donald Trump's Clash With A Chinese-American Reporter; Joe Biden Says Accuser Changed Story' Marie Harf Looks At Joe Biden Using Television To Step Up His Defense Against Sexual Assault Allegations; NASCAR Is Roaring Back, But No Fans

Fox News Network MEDIA BUZZ 11:00 AM EST

May 17, 2020 Sunday

Copyright 2020 Fox News Network LLC All Rights Reserved

Section: NEWS; Domestic

Length: 7367 words

Byline: Howard Kurtz, Leslie Marshall, Griff Jenkins, Marie Harf, Jamie Little

Guests: Guy Benson, Mike Huckabee

Body

HOWARD KURTZ, FOX NEWS ANCHOR: This is MEDIA BUZZ. I'm Howard Kurtz. As President Trump talks up the search for a vaccine and battles the media over pandemic, Anthony Fauci sees the spotlight but offering much more pessimistic testimony to a Senate panel, remotely of course, and quickly became a cable news lighting rod.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI, NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH: My concern is that we will start to see little spikes that might turn into outbreaks.

DONALD TRUMP, UNITED STATES PRESIDENT: So Anthony is a good person, very good person. I disagreed with him. We are having bedlam already in the streets. You can't do this. We have to get it open. I totally disagree with him on schools.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: These liars and race baiters want you to think Fauci is not to be believed that social distancing is about stealing your freedom.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Tony Fauci has not been elected to anything. He's had the same job for nearly 40 years, this guy. Fauci maybe even be more off base than your average epidemiologist.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Democrats, the mob in the media, they seem to want to keep this country lockdown indefinitely. Dr. Anthony Fauci also seems to favor what the Democrats want, and that is massive restrictions with no end in sight.

The President Discusses A Search For A Vaccine And Battles The Media Over The COVID-19 Pandemic; Dr. Fauci Offers A Pessimistic Testimony To A Senate Panel; Pre....

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: It's almost Fauci versus the president's point of view on this, science versus the president.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: Joining us now to analyze the coverage, Guy Benson, a Townhall Editor and host of the Guy Benson Show online in Sirius XM, Griff Jenkins, a Fox News Correspondent here in Washington, and in Los Angeles, Leslie Marshall, radio talk show host, and Fox News Contributor. Guy, we have conservative commentators, including several on Fox, chastising Dr. Fauci.

We have liberal pundits defend him. Should this 79-year-old doctor be the focal point?

GUY BENSON, THE GUY BENSON SHOW HOST: No, although I think people are frustrated, Howie. It's a very unfortunate situation for the country on so many levels. So when you're angry and when you're frustrated, you look for people to blame. I think that's natural. That's what human beings do. I think that Fauci is playing the role that he should be, right?

He's the doctor. He's the medical expert. He's bringing his best advice on that front. And he's very candidly and openly admitted that he's not in charge of making decisions about the economy. He hasn't been elected to anything. There are politicians and leaders like the president who have to weigh some of these varying factors.

He just brings one of those to the table, a very important one, of course. I think a lot of the press has been stoking this narrative, Trump versus Fauci for a long time. Still it seems they're getting along all right, even if they disagree from time to time.

KURTZ: You mean the press loves a fight, I am shocked. Leslie, Fauci is a shrewd operator. He e-mailed The New York Times the night before to say that a premature opening could cause needless suffering and death, when in his testimony he was more nuanced. He was more diplomatic. For example, he didn't say don't open the schools.

He said they'll be no vaccine by September, and students may face difficulties. So I think he may enjoy the limelight, but I don't think he's looking to pick a fight.

LESLIE MARSHALL, FOX NEWS CONTRIBUTOR: I don't think he's looking to pick a fight. Look, I'm married to a physician who's just around the corner right here. We were talking about this yesterday. And one of the things that he said is Dr. Fauci, in his role, in his role prior to even any of us knowing his name, is responsible for a medical and scientific data with regard to public health, not with regard to one city, not regard to one state, on a whole to public health.

So you're looking at mass numbers. There are realities. And the reality is a month ago we didn't have this deviation of Coronavirus that is affecting children that mimics Kawasaki Syndrome that we're seeing take place in New York and other places like Italy. There is a concern. I have two children. And I have to say I want our economy open.

I love my kids. And I want them to go to school. But I want them to be alive. I want them to come home from school. And I don't want them to come home in a body bag, and that's his responsibility.

KURTZ: If we get stuck on science (ph) we'll ask your husband to come in. Griff, Trump has said that Fauci is playing all sides of the equation. But do you think the media which, you know, thrive on conflict want to, are casting this as a Trump versus Fauci debate?

GRIFF JENKINS, FOX NEWS CORRESPONDENT: Well, I think President Trump brings it a little bit on himself, Howie, because remember, just this week we heard the president say vaccine or no vaccine, we are back. Now, Fauci has said from the beginning. I hope I'm wrong and get blamed for being too strict, because that will mean that we will have better numbers in flattening the curve.

The President Discusses A Search For A Vaccine And Battles The Media Over The COVID-19 Pandemic; Dr. Fauci Offers A Pessimistic Testimony To A Senate Panel; Pre....

He has not deviated. He's been solid and firm on that. And when it comes to the vaccine, you've not heard Fauci deviate from 12 to 18 months. That statement about President Trump, vaccine or no vaccine we're back, is a shot at Fauci, and it helps feed, I think, the narrative that there is tension between the president and his top doctor.

KURTZ: And of course, we haven't seen much of the Coronavirus task force lately in terms of television. Now, there's a fierce media debate, Guy, about reopening the economy. Here is what the president told Maria Bartiromo.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Do you think your critics want you to keep it closed going into the election?

TRUMP: Yeah, I do. I do. I think it's a political thing in addition. You know, if it was up to some people, let's keep it closed for a long time, OK, a long time. And watch the United States go down the tubes.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: So Guy, the president says that opposition to fully reopen the country is partisan and the media said that's hogwash.

BENSON: Well, I would point out that some of the more, I'd say, bad-faith critics of the president are trying to make two points at the same time. One, we're going to trump depression or trump recession and look at the economy. It's tanking under this president. And then two, anything that might be done to reopen the economy and reverse those trends is killing grandparents.

And you're an evil monster if you suggest it. So I think that pretty cynical. It's a lose-lose for the president. And I think that's just a fraction of the left. It's not the whole left or liberals that are doing that, but some certainly are. I would say the biggest element of media bias right now, and I think it is partisan is you look at how they are covering not just Trump but governors.

Blue state governors largely have gotten the pass. Red states governors have gotten all sorts of scrutiny, some of it very unfair. And we see outlets like Axios, CNN just over the weekend saying look at all these spiking cases in a place like Texas. And it's because they are doing more testing, right? Everyone was screaming for more testing.

We are doing more testing. And the metric to follow is not total positive cases. It's percentage of positive tests and hospitalizations. I think that's deeply misleading. And it seems like there are different standards for governors depending on the letter next to their name.

KURTZ: A fair point, though it's been a little bit of media criticism lately of Andrew Cuomo for his handling of --

(CROSSTALK)

KURTZ: -- of New York. But Leslie, you touched on this earlier. Do you know anyone who wants to see the economy shut down for the next six months?

MARSHALL: I'm a liberal. I'm a Democrat and I live in the bluest blue state, largest blue state of California, absolutely not. Look, for people to say it's political, it's political suicide for anybody to go back to their state from Washington, whether you're a senator or whether you're a House member, and to say, sorry, but you have to stay home more.

Sorry, you're going to lose your business. Sorry, this many restaurants are going to close, this many mom and shop coffee stores. No, every politician needs to say, look, I helped create jobs. I help to make things better. And politically, let's be honest. In an election year, Democrat or Republican, they are going to say if the economy is bad. It's your fault to whoever is running for re-election.

The President Discusses A Search For A Vaccine And Battles The Media Over The COVID-19 Pandemic; Dr. Fauci Offers A Pessimistic Testimony To A Senate Panel; Pre....

KURTZ: Well, Griff, you know, some people forget that journalists are employees too, and the media business has been pretty hard hit, right?

JENKINS: Absolutely. You've got -- TV ratings are up because people want information in this unbelievably historic pandemic. But at the same time, the ad revenue is completely flat. The political season is spinning that would be happening, whether it is a local newspaper, TV station or radio station, it's just absent, so it's a very difficult time.

I would just chime in, by the way, you know, my mom had great saying about rooting for failure. She said no reason to shoot yourself in the foot despite your nose. However, I think you are seeing a little bit of a tone- deaf approach as some local officials from very frustrated business owners that don't see a light at the end of the tunnel, albeit local media or other small businesses.

KURTZ: Yeah. And there'd been a lot of layoffs and cutbacks and salary cuts at print media. Another one for you, Griff, there's a viral video of News 12 Long Island Reporter Kevin Vesey, covering a rally for the reopening in that area and getting a lot of flak from the protesters. Let's roll that.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Stop airing the Trump briefings and you keep airing Cuomo briefings. Go home, you fake news. Go home.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: You are the enemy of the people. You are the enemy.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: So Kevin Vesey said found this alarming. President Trump briefly re- tweeted the video, saying great people. And meanwhile, Chuck Schumer telling MSNBC thinks some of these small protests are over covered. We're a little tight on time, but quick thoughts, Griff.

JENKINS: Quick thoughts are I send my support in regards for Kevin Vesey for going out there. He went by himself. He had no camera man. He was shooting it with his cellphone. The reality of this time, and he was there to tell their story and they harassed him. They really missed their opportunity with a guy that was there to be fair.

I'm not sure the president tweeting -- was supporting them is the right move here. I've been in the reporter role when I've been out there back during the anti- war protesters during Bush and during Obama years. And we are telling your story, let us do it without being harassed.

KURTZ: A fair point. I mean, he was there to put them on television. One sound bite I think, Guy that sums up the president's position is this one.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

TRUMP: America has risen to the task. We have met the moment and we have prevailed.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: So has this become a media debate about mission accomplished versus no, no, things are terrible and they could get worse?

BENSON: Yeah. And I think that some of the rhetoric that we just heard there could be premature, right? But the president has said many times that he's a cheerleader for the country and he wants to keep morale high. And I think some of the reporting, as I alluded to earlier, has seemed to poll in a direction where the dark situation is portrayed too darkly where some of the good news isn't getting reported in the way that bad news is.

And there's not enough context, I would say, but if things, let's say by September, October, aren't feeling a lot better for a lot of voters. You'd better believe those types of sound bites are going to in odds against the president.

The President Discusses A Search For A Vaccine And Battles The Media Over The COVID-19 Pandemic; Dr. Fauci Offers A Pessimistic Testimony To A Senate Panel; Pre....

KURTZ: OK, let me jump in and ask Leslie -- Rick Bright (ph), the doctor who was transferred at HHS testified before the House. He said that the Trump administration wasn't telling the truth about the pandemic and we are facing tough times. CNN, MSNBC carried a couple of hours of its testimony, Fox only a few minutes. How much has that broken through and not broken through and the president calls him a disgruntled employee?

MARSHALL: Well, I think that's a just pattern of behavior for the president. If somebody is let go, you know, he didn't know them. They really didn't do much. Don't listen to them, and especially if they say anything negative or contrary to what he says, that is a pattern of behavior. I think -- you know, I think it's going to be hard for anybody in a position to say I dropped the ball or re-dropped the ball, especially if you're the president, because you're the captain of the ship. And if it's sinking, it is your responsibility.

KURTZ: Let me leave the ship for a minute. Ahead, Mick Huckabee joins us with the president battling the press. But when we come back, we will look at the coverage of Donald Trump's accusations against Barack Obama.

KURTZ: President Trump has been tweeting about his predecessor, saying that what he calls Obamagate is worse than Watergate, and was asked about that by Washington Post reporter, Phil Rucker.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: What crime exactly are you accusing President Obama of committing, and do you believe the Justice Department should prosecute him?

TRUMP: Obamagate. It's been going on for a long time. It's been going from before I even got elected, and it's a disgrace that it happened.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: What is the crime exactly that you're accusing him of?

TRUMP: You know what the crime is. The crime is very obvious to everybody. All you have to do is read the newspapers, except yours.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: Guy, other journalists have also asked the president what he is personally accusing Barack Obama of. And he hasn't spelled it out, what's going on?

BENSON: I think that he's angry at what we are learning about. And I think he has a right to be angry based on recently declassified documents, and of course, the inspector general report which seems like ancient history now but it's quite relevant. I think there is some question about what Barack Obama himself knew and when, because we learned that Sally Yates that the DOJ learned from the president, Barack Obama, herself -- from the president himself that this Flynn investigation was happening, and that seems interesting at the very least.

I think we will know a lot more about who did what, and if there were crimes committed when John Durham swings into gear and either issues indictments or a report of some sort. And I think people generally should keep their powder dry until we hear from Mr. Durham.

KURTZ: Yeah, media not big on keeping powder dry. Leslie, Trump tweeted at Lindsey Graham, the first person I would call to testify about the biggest political crime and scandal in the history of the USA by far is former President Obama. Just do it, no more Mr. Nice Guy. Now, the senator doesn't plan to call the former president at his upcoming hearings, but there's a lot of media outrage about all of this, your thoughts.

MARSHALL: Well, first of all, again, there is no crime that we know of. And I'm sure when Durham's report comes out we are going to see that. Second of all, President Obama is not going to be called and probably wouldn't appear if he were, and quite frankly I wouldn't blame him. This is -- if everybody wants to blame the left with Coronavirus of politics, this is politics of its finest.

The President Discusses A Search For A Vaccine And Battles The Media Over The COVID-19 Pandemic; Dr. Fauci Offers A Pessimistic Testimony To A Senate Panel; Pre....

We have an election coming up. People forget that. This is a diversionary tactic, because the economy's not doing well. And also, because we're not able to reopen state by state as quickly as everyone would like, and this virus is something we can't seem to completely get under control. And of course, we can't get a vaccine as quickly as we would like and our very drive through world that we live in. And that's the reality. Obamagate is just a good headline.

KURTZ: Well, Griff, just explain to people further, acting director of national intelligence, Rick Grenell, provided documents which then were made public by couple of Republican senators, showing that 16 Obama administration officials including Joe Biden had asked for the un-masking - - that's the technical term of the person talking to the Russia ambassador, and it turned out to be Mike Flynn. Here is what the president had to say.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

TRUMP: And he said he knew nothing about anything. He has no idea -- he knows nothing about anything, nothing at all, and then it gets released today that he was the big un-masker. So how do you know nothing if you're one of the un-maskers?

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: President talking there about Joe Biden. Explain this whole un- masking controversy and that it was a relatively common practice, if you would.

JENKINS: Yeah. Here's the easy explanator. The crime that was committed was that Flynn's name was leaked to the media, on January 12th, the exact day that Biden requested. And that's why President Trump was mentioning it. Now, this list that includes top Obama officials that requesting the un- masking of Flynn's name are simply possible suspects of whom may have leaked it.

We don't know and we may never know. On the other side of this is the view that this is a very common practice of the intelligence community uses. There were some 10,000 requests to unmask names last year, in 2019 and it averages 9, 10,000. But what we are going to get to, and to Guy's point, the Durham investigation shouldn't find that there was some connection between this list of un-maskers in the name of Flynn being leaked to The Washington Post.

Well, that's going to be a prosecution. Quickly one last point and that is we saw a tweet from Mark Zane (ph), the attorney who represented the whistleblower in the Ukraine call. He says he believes there may be reason to prosecute here, so it's far from over, and of course, with Lindsey Graham's hearing starting early June.

KURTZ: All right. Guy, again, tight on time, but some journalists are saying that releasing the names could set dangerous precedent that a Democratic administration release the names of Trump people who asked for unmasking of various officials.

BENSON: Yeah. Look, I think that we're learning more about the providence and the conduct of the Russia investigation. And I think that a lot of people on the Democratic side have been leaking like sieves for a very long time to their friends in the press who have then reported it. And if Republicans go through, in this case, an official process of declassification and then that gets reported, oh, that's a problem.

We have to worry about press. And then all of a sudden, it's not a real story anymore even though we were treated to nothing but Russia coverage for three years. This is another side of that same story. Suddenly, we are not supposed to talk about it. I'm not going to play along with that game.

KURTZ: Leslie, the Biden campaign put out a statement about CBS reporter, Katherine Harris, my former Fox News colleague, who broke the un-masking story. Katherine Harris is a partisan right-wing hack who is a regular conduit for conservative media manipulation ploys. CNN's Jake Tapper called that gross, obnoxious, and indecent, quick thought.

The President Discusses A Search For A Vaccine And Battles The Media Over The COVID-19 Pandemic; Dr. Fauci Offers A Pessimistic Testimony To A Senate Panel; Pre....

MARSHALL: I agree with him 100 percent. I mean, one of the things that set us apart from every other nation is our Constitution, First Amendment and not freedom of the press first. Second, Joe Biden has actually talked about how it's necessary for a free nation to have a free press. He's written about that. He's tweeted about that. He's spoken about that.

And quite frankly, there should be some hand-slapping here and there should be a statement from the Biden campaign stating that this was not something that the former vice president is in favor of.

KURTZ: Right, CBS hired Katherine Harris because she breaks a lot of national security exclusives. Thank you, panel, ahead NASCAR is reopening today. We will talk with sports reporter who covers the beat. But up next, Chuck Todd apologizes for a (Inaudible) blunder. And the New York Times beat reporter who trashed (ph) President Trump, Vice President Pence, and their team.

KURTZ: Don McNeil is a veteran New York Times health reporter who went way over the line, spewing anti-Trump and anti-administration opinions in a CNN interview. Now, this is not a pundit or a columnist. He's supposed to stick to the facts, and his comments just reek of hostility toward those he covers. Here is what he told Christiane Amanpour about President Trump who he accused of a cover-up.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: We completely blew it for the first two months of our response. We were in a headless chicken phase. And yes, it's the president's fault. It is not China's fault. This is not somebody who grasp of the science, and even third-grade level.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: Wow, what about the Centers for Disease Control?

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: We lost two months there, and that was because of incompetent leadership at the CDC. And I think Dr. Redfield should resign.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: Got that? I've never heard a beat reporter who says that about an agency chief, in this case Robert Redfield, and there was this about the Coronavirus task force.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Getting rid of Alex Azar was a mistake. He was actually leading the dramatic response. He was replaced with Mike Pence.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: I think you get the idea. The Times says in a statement Donald McNeil Jr. went too far in expressing his personal views. His editors have discussed the issue with hi, to reiterate that his job is to report the facts and not to offer own opinions. We are confident that his reporting on science and medicine for The Times has been scrupulously fair and accurate.

Well, will readers have that confidence? That was a pretty mild slap on the wrist. Now, a reporter not accustomed to be on TV can always blurt out something wrong. But this interview just bristled with bias. Chuck Todd has apologized for an egregious error on Meet the Press. Here is how the NBC show handled a clip from a CBS interview with Bill Barr about history would view -- how history would view his dropping of charges against Mike Flynn.

The President Discusses A Search For A Vaccine And Battles The Media Over The COVID-19 Pandemic; Dr. Fauci Offers A Pessimistic Testimony To A Senate Panel; Pre....

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: History is written by the winners. So it depends on who is writing the history.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: But here are Barr's very next words conveniently cut by Meet the Press.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: But I think a fair history would say it was a good decision because it upheld the rule of law. It helped -- it upheld the standards of the Department of Justice and it undid what was an injustice.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: Todd says his staff didn't actively edit Barr's words but only saw the shorter of two clips aired by CBS, kind of a explanation.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: We should've looked at both and checked for a full transcript, a mistake that I wish we hadn't made and one that I wish I hadn't made. The second part of the attorney general's answer would've put it in the proper context. And had I seen that part of the interview, I would not have framed the conversation the way I did. And I -- obviously, I'm very sorry for that mistake. We strive to do better going forward.

KURTZ: I'm glad Chuck Todd apologized and took full responsibility for that even as the president called for his firing. But have you ever noticed how nearly all these media mistakes tilt the scales against Trump and his team? Ahead, Joe Biden using MSNBC to step of his defense against sexual assault allegations. But first, former governor Mike Huckabee on the president's clash with a Chinese-American reporter and much more, that's next.

KURTZ: The president really got into it at a news conference with CBS's Weijia Jiang, a Chinese-American reporter on the subject of testing, and his response drew plenty of media flak.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

WEIJIA JIANG, CBS NEWS CORRESPONDENT: Why is this global competition to you if every day Americans are still losing their lives and we are still seeing more cases every day?

DONALD TRUMP, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: Well, they're losing their lives everywhere in the world and maybe that's a question you should ask China. Don't ask me. Ask China that question, OK? When you ask them that question, you may get a very unusual answer.

JIANG: Sir, why are you saying that to me specifically?

D. TRUMP: I'm telling you, I'm not saying it specifically to anybody. I'm saying it to anybody that would ask a nasty question.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: Joining us now from Florida is Mike Huckabee, the former Arkansas governor, presidential candidate, and Fox News contributor. Governor, you've dealt with plenty of reporters as a presidential candidate and then little luck. Was that a nasty question?

MIKE HUCKABEE, FOX NEWS CONTRIBUTOR, FORMER ARKANSAS GOVERNOR, FORMER PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: Well, it was an unfair question because she specifically made it as is if the United States is the only

The President Discusses A Search For A Vaccine And Battles The Media Over The COVID-19 Pandemic; Dr. Fauci Offers A Pessimistic Testimony To A Senate Panel; Pre....

people where -- only place where people are dying. Clearly, there are dying all over the world. Clearly, this originated in China.

People have to start to understand that the president is not xenophobic because he recognizes the origin of the disease and the fact that China lied repeatedly and covered up repeatedly that made this disease and this horrible pandemic much worse than it ever should had been and it created a global problem rather than something that could have been localized.

KURTZ: Of course, her point was that why was she getting the ask China response. What happened right after that was that the president recognized CNN's Kaitlan Collins and then tried to move on. Let's take a quick look.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

D. TRUMP: Please, go ahead. In the back, please.

KAITLAN COLLINS, CNN WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT: I have two questions.

D. TRUMP: No, it's OK. We'll go up here.

COLLINS: But you pointed to me. I have two questions, Mr. President.

D. TRUMP: Next, next please.

COLLINS: You called on me.

D. TRUMP: I did and you didn't respond, and now I'm calling on --

COLLINS: Sorry -- I just wanted --

D. TRUMP: -- the young lady in the back, please.

COLLINS: I just wanted to let my colleague finish --

D. TRUMP: OK. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much, appreciate it.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: The president abruptly ended the news conference --

HUCKABEE: You know, I would say good for him --

KURTZ: -- that sparked a lot of -- good for him? The media take was that the press is getting under his skin.

HUCKABEE: I think they are. Wouldn't they get under yours if in every time you're trying to give information all they want to do is to play a got-you game? I think it's interesting that Kaitlan Collins thought that she was in charge of the press conference and that she was going to take her opportunity for a question and toss it over to someone else.

That's not how it works. If you get a question, you ask your question. If you don't want to ask a question and you want to give it to someone else, it is the prerogative of the person holding the press conference, in this case the president, to say no. If you want a question, you get it.

Howard, there is something that I feel maybe needs to be said. I can say it as a person who has been on the president's side of the podium. There's no law that requires you to have a press conference. There's no law that requires you to answer every question, especially the stupid ones.

And sometimes, people act like it's Trump's fault if he gets a dumb question and he throws it right back at him. I would say bravo. I'm glad he's doing it because it just really shows -- let me give you a great example.

The President Discusses A Search For A Vaccine And Battles The Media Over The COVID-19 Pandemic; Dr. Fauci Offers A Pessimistic Testimony To A Senate Panel; Pre....

Kaitlan Collins is wearing a mask and then there's other shows where as soon as the press conference was over in the White House with Kayleigh McEnany, she immediately takes it off and is rubbing shoulder to shoulder with other reporters. So, this whole thing about every day asking, how come you're not wearing a mask, Mr. President? How come you're not wearing a mask? --

KURTZ: Yeah.

HUCKABEE: And then she takes her mask off. I mean, it's so phoney. We all get it. And I think it's just disgusting and it's so clear that the bias is just dripping out of these people.

KURTZ: Well, let me briefly get you in on the coverage of the coronavirus because there is continuous plenty of media criticism of the president for some journalists and pundits, say, kind of minimizing the advice of people like Anthony Fauci and perhaps pushing for reopening of the economy that might be too much too soon.

HUCKABEE: Well, first of all, Fauci has virtually had a day bed at the White House. I mean, the man has lived there. To say that the president didn't take his advice is just on its face ridiculous. He has been at his side at every press conference for two months.

He has allowed him to speak. He has invited him. He has deferred to him. He has followed his advice, for heaven's sake, to the point that he did shut down the economy, something that I think we all know the president was loath to do.

So, that's, I think, ridiculous when people say the president hasn't listened to Fauci. I would remind you this. While the president certainly has listened to him, it's not his responsibility to be dictated to by anybody. The president was elected, Fauci wasn't. I don't mean that in a harsh way, but I mean to just remind people --

KURTZ: Fauci says that. Fauci says he's just providing opinion.

HUCKABEE: Good for him.

KURTZ: He doesn't make decisions. Let me turn you to what the president calls Obamagate because I know you have strong feelings about this. He is demanding that former President Obama testify --

HUCKABEE: Yeah.

KURTZ: -- talking about the Mike Flynn case and all of that. You said you think the media are trying to ignore this, but haven't there been plenty of stories about the president's accusations and the response from Obama people?

HUCKABEE: No, not in balance. I guarantee you, Howie, if there had been this action by the Trump people or the Bush people for that matter against democratic administration, it would be page one every single day. It's not the top of the fold. It has not been the major story and it should be because this is a huge issue.

I will take one point of disagreement with the president on this. I don't think President Obama should be forced to testify and the reason is not because he wouldn't have something to say, not because I don't think he was aware of the unmasking and may have ordered certain things, but I think it's the terrible precedent that we don't want to start because it has no end.

But I do want to hear from James Comey, Clapper, Brennan, Strzok, Page, the whole lot of them. I think there were -- there was some extraordinary activity that sounds criminal to me and definitely should be looked into and accountability for these people who abuse the power of the United States government to first of all stage an attempted coup against the president and then cover up what they had done.

KURTZ: Well, you say it sounds criminal to you. I would love to see the result of the investigation. The president says that the former president committed a crime and that may be jumping the gun on the process. But let me ask you this as we close up here -- as we finish up here.

The President Discusses A Search For A Vaccine And Battles The Media Over The COVID-19 Pandemic; Dr. Fauci Offers A Pessimistic Testimony To A Senate Panel; Pre....

Whatever the importance of the unmasking story, the Obama story, the Mike Flynn case, all important and potentially important stories, don't you think that right now, most Americans are far more interested in the virus, going back to work, protecting their families, keeping their jobs?

HUCKABEE: I think they are and they should be, but I don't want us to miss a story that I think is the single biggest political story, not just of the recent days but of certainly my lifetime, whether or not people at highest levels of government, not one or two, but multiple of justice and intel agencies sought to up-end an election and to destroy a dually elected president. I think it's a pretty big story because it goes to the heart of our liberties.

KURTZ: All right. Mike Huckabee, appreciate you joining us. Thanks, governor.

HUCKABEE: Thank you, Howie.

KURTZ: After the break, Joe Biden says his accuser is changing her story in his latest interview about those sexual assault allegations. And later, NASCAR returns today. What does that mean for other pro-sports?

KURTZ: Joe Biden was back on MSNBC the other night and once again he was asked this time by Lawrence O'Donnell about Tara Reade's allegations that he sexually assaulted her back in 1993. He addressed his answers to the voters.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JOE BIDEN (D) PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: If they believe Tara Reade, they probably shouldn't vote for me. I wouldn't vote for me if I believe Tara Reade. The fact is that -- look at Tara Reade's story. It changes considerably. I don't want to question her motive.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: Joining us now is Marie Harf, a Fox News contributor and former State Department spokesperson who runs the Serve America Pac. Marie, Joe Biden is right that Tara Reade has changed story over time with reporters.

At the same time, Politico has a piece, interviewing a number of people who said that over the years, Tara Reade lied to them, was deceitful, didn't pay the rent, ripped them off, and generally spoke positively about Biden.

So my question is two parts. Is Joe Biden turning more aggressive in use of television about these allegations and are stories like the one in Politico fair game?

MARIE HARF, FOX NEWS CONTRIBUTOR: I do think that the former vice president is getting more aggressive in answering questions about these allegations. Because they are serious allegations, he is called for a full investigation.

And we have seen news organizations whether it's the Post or The New York Times or Politico, like you mentioned, really digging into Tara Reade's accusations. They've been trying to find any evidence that it happened and they are also looking at a pattern potentially of behavior by the person who is accusing Joe Biden of this very serious crime.

So I do think it is fair game. He is called for journalists to look into every aspect of the story. I think it's fair when you're running for president and you make this kind of accusation, people should look into whether it happened and what your motives might be.

KURTZ: Right. I don't think the fact that she had problems in the past mean she's not telling the truth, but we have to try to assess people's credibility. Now, I want to get you in on the virus question because President Trump drew a lot of media attention for saying that testing for the coronavirus may be overrated. Here is more of what he said.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

The President Discusses A Search For A Vaccine And Battles The Media Over The COVID-19 Pandemic; Dr. Fauci Offers A Pessimistic Testimony To A Senate Panel; Pre....

D. TRUMP: We have more cases than anybody in the world. Why? It's because we do more testing. If we didn't do any testing, we would have very few cases. They don't want to write that.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

KURTZ: They don't want to write that? The media don't want to write that there is a correlation between testing and positive results?

HARF: The media have certainly written that, that the more you test, the more positive results you're going to get. They have also quoted scientific experts across the world, across the political spectrum, that testing is key to attacking this virus. We need to know how many people have it.

And this is one of those situations, Howie, where the president says something that maybe dangerous or maybe factually inaccurate, and the press throughout his entire presidency has had a challenge for how to cover those things, because you do give the president -- you give both sides an opportunity to put forward their point of view.

But when that point of view is dangerous or wrong, the press has really struggled with how to cover that accurately and paint a real portrait of what's going on at the White House.

KURTZ: Right. You worked in the Obama State Department. There seems to be real split between conservative media that are playing up the accusations about Obama officials unmasking Mike Flynn and all of that and liberal media which are basically agreeing with Joe Biden that this is all a distraction. What is your take on the coverage of these accusations?

HARF: It really is like two completely different universes, Howie. You hit the nail on the head. I think what I have been paying attention to isn't the pundits on either side of this. It is the real down the middle news stories which make clear that in the Trump administration, tens of thousands of unmasking requests have been put forward, that these are all adjudicated by NSA and they don't approve of them unless there is a national security reason, and really focusing on the facts here.

We have seen so many conspiracy theories spread on the internet, particularly about what did or didn't happen in the Russia investigation. A lot of that is being weaponized in partisan ways, quite frankly in ways I've never seen before, and it is really dangerous. So, again, media are struggling with how to deal with something. The president is --

KURTZ: Right.

HARF: -- putting forward some theories that have no evidence but they have to give some credibility to it even though it really doesn't have any. That's a challenge for the press right now.

HARF: We got half a minute. The president on Friday night fired his latest inspector general, Steve Linick, at the State Department. White House officials say it was at the request of Mike Pompeo. The Washington Post's lead story today calls it a retaliatory purge, a slow-motion massacre. But Linick was an Obama appointee, so why is the press treating it as such a huge deal?

HARF: Well, it is the fourth inspector general to be fired since the pandemic began. They often happen on Friday nights. The media have a challenge here in covering really important stories that potentially have some wrongdoing in them but in this context of coronavirus where it's so hard for people rightly so to focus on anything other than the pandemic.

But these are important stories. You heard Republicans about whether this was an appropriate firing. The press really needs to be able to both cover the pandemic in these really significant --

KURTZ: All right.

The President Discusses A Search For A Vaccine And Battles The Media Over The COVID-19 Pandemic; Dr. Fauci Offers A Pessimistic Testimony To A Senate Panel; Pre....

HARF: -- steps the Trump administration is taking. But that's hard, Howie. It's hard right now.

KURTZ: All right. Marie Harf, thanks very much for joining us this Sunday.

HARF: Thank you.

KURTZ: Still to come, we will get a pit reporter's take on NASCAR re- launching its season today and how things are very different.

KURTZ: We have all missed professional sports during this pandemic. Today, NASCAR ramps up its season, returning to action at Darlington, South Carolina, race you can see on Fox broadcast, but with all kinds of changes, including no fans in the stands.

Joining us now is Jamie Little, a pit reporter for Fox NASCAR who is joining today's coverage. Jamie, how does the virus change the way you'll be covering next race and are you worried at all about interviewing drivers and getting a bit too close?

JAMIE LITTLE, FOX NASCAR PIT REPORTER: Hi, Howie. Thanks for having me on. It is top racing again. It's time to get back after 10 long weeks for all of us. It will change the way that I do my job. First and foremost, there are usually four pit reporters on pit road covering 40 race cars.

They are only sending one and that's to protect people. We have a limited amount of people at the track, only essential people that we need. Everybody else is in L.A. or Charlotte, covering everything that they need to do from those studios.

So, for me, I will be at the Coke 600 next weekend covering the race for four hours by myself and getting information will be different. Like you said, it's all about social distancing. We can't get closer than 6 feet to talk to these guys to get information. So the way that I gather my storyline is going to be much different. We will be spending a lot of time like this on Skype with drivers and crew chiefs (ph) leading up to the race.

KURTZ: Right. You will get extra comeback pay there for one person doing a four-hour race.

(LAUGHTER)

KURTZ: Talk a little bit about how NASCAR is instituting more testing and taking other steps to protect the drivers and crews.

LITTLE: Yes, absolutely. They wouldn't be doing this if they weren't 100 percent sure that we are doing this safely. Every single person that goes into that field today at Darlington will be tested. Of course, everybody is wearing masks. Some people are wearing gloves.

I know that as a reporter, we have to wear a mask. That's great. Anything that it takes to keep us all safe and to show that we can have live sports back, we can do it safely, and this is something that can continue, so definitely keeping an eye on that.

And the drivers -- usually, the access is everything in NASCAR. People get to talk to the drivers. They are mingling. All the teams are mingling with each other. That's not happening today. There is no practice. No qualifying drivers will show up today, probably right about now, and then they will be called to their cars before the race, get in and go. No talking to anybody.

KURTZ: Fox's Joe Buck says the network is considering, when the NFL resumes, adding some crowd noise and virtual fans. Not so wild about that idea. But for you, what is it like to cover these major races and there is nobody in the stands and it's just quiet?

The President Discusses A Search For A Vaccine And Battles The Media Over The COVID-19 Pandemic; Dr. Fauci Offers A Pessimistic Testimony To A Senate Panel; Pre....

LITTLE: I've never been in that situation, right? I mean NASCAR fans, it's everything. It's so loud. You get 100,000 fans screaming and yelling. But the one thing about our sport is it is racing. You have car engine noise. There is a lot of noise, ambient sound that would bring that naturally and that will come through on the television screen.

Other sports, stick and ball sports, you really need that feel and that vibe of the energy of the crowd. So I think it will affect those sports more so than racing.

KURTZ: Yeah. I've got 10 seconds. People have been watching NASCAR drivers do videogames. Is there -- how much hunger is there for this sport to come back?

LITTLE: Oh, my Gosh. Well, the iRacing that we have been seeing, we have been getting over a million viewers on Fox and Fox Sports, just watching these guys play videogames and race each other on iRacing. So, there is a hunger for it.

And by the way, we are going to have a second screen viewing party today for Darlington. Join me and the broadcasters. We are going to ask some celebrities starting at 3:30. So, a lot planned today. It is a big day for the sport.

KURTZ: Jamie Little, I'm glad that you're getting out of the house. Good to see you. Thank you so much.

LITTLE: Thank you for having me.

KURTZ: I have some final thoughts in just a moment.

KURTZ: Journalists who get the coronavirus, Lesley Stahl, Brooke Baldwin, Chris Cuomo, tend to use their platforms to speak out. Mara Gay, a New York Times editorial writer and cable pundit, is 33-year-old runner who came down with COVID-19 and got wallop, still battling pneumonia. She writes this. "Maybe you don't live in a big city. Maybe you don't know anybody who is sick. Maybe you think we are crazy for living in New York. That's fine. You don't have to live like us or vote like us. But please learn from us. Please take this virus seriously."

That's a terrific message as the country slowly reopens. Being young and living in a rural area, none of that will protect you if you're exposed. I know the media is taking a lot of hits during this pandemic for hype, for partisanship, for alarming people though it's obviously hard to play down 88,000 American deaths.

But some of us are also getting sick and sick of being cooped up for all the frustration we feel as we yearn for greater degree of normalcy. I would echo the message. Please take this virus seriously.

That's it for this edition of MEDIA BUZZ. I'm Howard Kurtz. We hope you like our Facebook page where we post my daily columns. And let's continue the conversation on Twitter at Howard Kurtz. Also check out my media -- excuse me, my podcast "Media Buzzmeter." We will put that up. You can subscribe at Apple iTunes or Google Play and now on Spotify, as well.

We are back here next Sunday. We will be covering the waterfront, including the virus and this very serious environment. We hope you will join us then. See you with the latest BUZZ.

Load-Date: May 18, 2020