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MSNBC: All in with Chris Hayes

CHAYES

English

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[20:00:00]

JOY REID, MSNBC HOST: Even after the Agricultural Department extended the program through the summer. So, if we're -- for continuing to put Florida's kids in outright peril and just being one mean cruel COVID boosting SOB, Ron DeSantis is once again tonight's absolute worst.

And that's the show. "ALL IN WITH CHRIS HAYES" starts now.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

CHRIS HAYES, MSNBC HOST: Tonight on ALL IN. As the pandemic spikes in states like South Dakota and Florida, the cruel irony of Republican leaders fear-mongering over foreigners as Coronavirus runs wild.

GOV. KRISTI NOEM (R-SD): This is a dangerous part of the world. We know that we have a lot of dangerous people there that want to do the United States harm.

HAYES: Plus, Spencer Ackerman on Joe Biden actually ending America's forever war.

Then, why today's big day for the Biden agenda in Congress could be key for Democrats to hold power. And why this version of the California recall could be even worse than the last.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I knew with Gary Coleman, porn stars, and you name it, all seem to be running.

HAYES: When ALL IN starts right now.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

HAYES: Good evening from New York. I'm Chris Hayes. I have to say, it has been remarkable truly, to watch the split-screen of the two big stories happening right now in America on the eve of the 20th anniversary of September 11. On one side, of course, Afghanistan, fall to the Taliban, the United States attempts to evacuate Americans and Afghan refugees in a chaotic cluster.

On the other, we are 18 months into the pandemic and seeing another summer surge that has now taken the lives of about 1000 people per day. And I cannot help but contrast the two, think about the two next to each other juxtapose there on the screen. Now, you don't have to look very far right now to find dire warnings about the situation in Afghanistan. There's the humanitarian aspect, but there are dire warnings from certain people about the security aspect.

Anne Applebaum writes in the Atlantic "Afghanistan provides a useful reminder while we and our European allies might be tired of forever wars, the Taliban are not tired of wars at all, nor al-Qaeda and other groups who may make Afghanistan their home again in the future. More to the point, even if we are not interested in any of these nations and their brutal politics, they are interested in us."

OK, fair enough. I mean, the idea of al-Qaeda reconstituting in Afghanistan does not sound good, sounds quite bad. But let's remember how we got here 20 years later. The generation of Americans who lived through 9/11 were so struck -- shocked and traumatized by that day by the mass murder in spectacular fashion of 3000 of our fellow citizens. The country lost its mind for a while.

Under the leadership of the Bush administration and rooted on by Fox News and even lots of mainstream centrist and establishment voices, and heck, even liberals and newspaper columns and on TV, we as a nation collectively, our government with our consent, did a bunch of awful things we should not have done, most notably invading Iraq, torturing people, opening Guantanamo Bay which remains open with prisoners still there, still no real process for them.

Those 3000 deaths, 3000 Americans murdered, an utterly horrific tragedy we're seeing by and large everywhere as an existential threat to everything American was. We changed the way we lived. We changed the way we travel. We started taking our shoes off at the airport. We opened a new ginormous cabinet agency, the Department of Homeland Security. We spent trillions and trillions and trillions of dollars on the military, huge amounts flowing to defense contractors who have had a very good few decades.

We sent hundreds of thousands of American troops around the world. We engaged in warfare in dozens of countries, drone killings in dozens of countries, create an entire new global legal architecture to wage war whenever we wanted at any point in essentially any country, all in an open ended global war on terror that is now going to enter its third decade, even after we leave Afghanistan.

I was, you know, 22 around then and I remember the saying was, this changes everything. Never forget, this is it. This is a turning point in history, a hinge. Anyone who was not on board was accused of being soft on terror or siding with the terrorists, being a traitor, a fifth column as Andrew Sullivan very famously said.

Here's the thing to think about, as I sit here talking to you this August 2021. We're going to lose 9/11's worth of Americans this week in the next three days of this pandemic, and probably in the three days after that. We've already lost more than 630,000 Americans. Just look at the difference and the risk assessment, the sense of existential and moral crisis between that one act of mass murder and its aftermath and the ongoing terror of this virus.

You can see it in a single Republican politician. Here's an example. This is Kristi Noem. We've talked about it before, the governor of South Dakota. Here she is warning about the possible danger of Afghan refugees coming to the United States.

[20:05:23]

NOEM: This is a dangerous part of the world. We know that we have a lot of dangerous people there that want to do the United States harm. And they should not be coming to the United States unless we know for sure that they are an ally and a friend and don't wish to destroy this country.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

HAYES: The Afghan refugees should not be coming unless we know they do not wish to destroy this country, these dangerous people from this dangerous part of the world. Do you know who Governor Noem did allow in her state just over two weeks ago? Hundreds of thousands of people on motorcycles from across the country for the annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, many of whom are proudly unvaccinated in concrete terms, life or death terms.

What do you think is actually more of a risk to South Dakotans right now, to your average South Dakotans, Afghan refugees who by the way have gone through an incredibly onerous vetting process, get a special visa, or the virus? What do you think? Let's take a look.

So far, the virus has killed more than 2000 South Dakotans. South Dakota also has two of the top three counties in the United States with the fastest-growing outbreaks as of today, Meade County and right next door, Lawrence County. Now, Meade County, of course, is the home of a small city called Sturgis. And you may remember earlier this month that we reported on this on what would happen if thousands and thousands of people descended upon Sturgis.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

HAYES: Today is the first day of the annual motorcycle rally in Sturgis, South Dakota. Despite rising COVID cases and the very transmissible Delta variants, 700,000 people are expected to attend. Last year, nearly half a million people said the hell with masking and social distancing. They made the trip to Sturgis.

There's some pretty good data suggest that Sturgis wound up being one of the most catastrophic pandemic events of the year. A research team from the CDC said it had many characteristics of a super spreading event.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

HAYES: So, here we are again, like clockwork. It's been nine days since the end of the Sturgis rally, cases are already spiking. Now, you might think Governor Noem would have learned her lesson last year, but Sturgis went forward this month with her full approval and endorsement. You can see her picture here riding a horse through downtown.

People like Kristi Noem and a lot of Conservatives, Republicans, they want to talk about the danger of brown people and Muslims who don't look like us, who wear different clothing. These are terrified, desperate people, many of whom shed blood or risked their lives on behalf of American interests now seeking freedom and safety in this country. Those people are dangerous, she says.

But the silent virus with no political affiliation, nothing to conveniently demagogue stalking its way through American ICU as well, who cares? Freedom, freedom, freedom. I guarantee you, guarantee you, there will be more South Dakotans killed by this virus than ever been killed by refugees or ever been killed by members of al-Qaeda or the Taliban. I guarantee you.

That doesn't matter to people like Governor Noem as she whip up this frenzy about fear of the other, the invading hordes, the impure fifth column, the people from other places coming to defile America, yadda, yadda, yadda. The ideological and rhetorical constant of 20 years of the war on terror, that notion, that fear, that assessment of the risk, all the while we allowed America's public health infrastructure, not to mention our information ecosystem to deteriorate, which brought us to the situation we are now in, we have more vaccines than anyone else in the world, safe and effective ones, and we can't get people to take them.

In fact, one of the attendees at Sturgis told the Daily Beast, not only is he not vaccinated, but no one he knows is either. I mean, the politics of the right around the virus are essentially like they're being a pro-al-Qaeda caucus in American politics back in 2001. Like, one of the two major parties, it's like running on that platform, like yes, they've got a point.

Now, Kristi Noem was probably the worst governor in the country on this issue, and it is crowded field, she's also made it clear that she wants to run for president on a platform of who is the most pro-COVID.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

NOEM: We've got Republican governors across this country pretending they didn't shut down their states, that they didn't close their beaches, that they didn't mandate masks, that they didn't need to issue shelter in places. Now, I'm not picking fights with Republican governors. All I'm saying is that we need leaders with grit. That their first instinct is to make the right decision, that they don't backtrack and then try to fool you into the fact that they never made the wrong decision.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

HAYES: Yes, that's going to be the angle. That's the lane she's picked. That's why she's running on horseback in Sturgis. The governor trying to make who likes COVID the most, who's the most pro-COVID the bar for Republican presidential nomination, which is why you have other Republicans who want to run for president and are eyeing their political future like Ron DeSantis of Florida, watching over their shoulder.

[20:10:09]

Now, more people are dying per day from COVID right now in Florida than at any other point in the pandemic, a fact that I honestly can't even quite believe but it's true. There it is. We showed you this data last night. Instead of focusing on the very real crisis -- I mean, again, politics aside, right? Like this is a problem for Florida. Governor Ron DeSantis has been picking fights with Joe Biden about security at the border, tweeting about Florida's annual Python Hunt while more than 2500 Floridians have died so far, just this month, 2500. That's almost a 9/11's worth.

Now, on some level, this seems to be falling apart politically because as we've said many times on this program, people don't want to die of COVID. They don't want to get sick from COVID. They want to be kept safe. They want their leaders to take threats to their safety seriously, not to overreact, not a panic, but to take them seriously. COVID continues to be the biggest threat Americans face. I mean, it's just statistically is the leading -- was the leading cause of death.

A new Quinnipiac poll finds that 73 percent of Floridians think the spread of COVID in their state is a serious problem. 59 percent say the spread is out of control. 60 percent say they support mask requirements in schools, something, of course, Governor DeSantis has banned. A plurality of Floridians, 46 percent, even say DeSantis is hurting efforts to slow the spread of the virus.

And we're seeing resistance to step up. Several school districts including Miami Dade County are defying the governor's ban. They're requiring masks. In Palm Beach County, dozens of doctors staged a symbolic

demonstration yesterday. They did not, of course, walk out any patients but they did come out to raise awareness, expressed their frustration with the surge in unvaccinated patients.

One of those doctors is Leslie Diaz, an infectious disease specialist at Palm Beach Gardens Medical Center, the medical director of FoundCare, a community health center in the county, and Lucia Baez-Geller is a member of the school board in Miami Dade County. She voted in favor of the mask mandate in defiance of Governor DeSantis. And they both join me now.

Dr. Diaz, let me -- let me start with you and just ask what you're seeing there and what you're -- where you're at, how you're thinking and feeling and your colleagues are at this moment in this awful summer that you're having down there in Florida?

DR. LESLIE DIAZ, INFECTIOUS DISEASE CHAIR, PALM BEACH GARDENS MEDICAL CENTER: Thank you, Chris, for having me here. It's a pleasure being with you. The way that I can describe it is that every day, you walk into the ER and it's like a war zone. There are patients everywhere in the hallways, and each room, etcetera.

You're trying to move the patients up to the floor fast enough. They come in faster than what you can move. And it's very, very taxing on all the health care providers and it's tiring. We're all tired. We've been doing this since beginning of July and doesn't seem to want to stop.

HAYES: What has been your experience in terms of the levels of vaccination in the -- in the patients you're treating? And, you know, when you talk about hospital workers, and I started the show talking about 9/11. Of course, this act of mass murder that we all watched, right? You hospital workers are seeing what this virus is doing up close every day in a way most Americans are not. And I wonder if you feel like there's a disconnect when you go out into the world from the ER in how people perceive what's happened.

DIAZ: There's definitely a disconnect, no question about it. And that's one of my biggest concern that it is very chaotic in the hospital life on a daily basis. And when you walk out and to let's say Publix or supermarket, it's like, nothing is happening. And in reality, we have a crisis. We have a crisis here and we've been having a crisis since the beginning of July. And it could have been all avoided if there would have been more mass vaccination in this state.

And that's what we're trying to put up the word there to try to advocate for that. And now that we have a vaccine that is fully approved, take advantage of that and just stop the madness.

HAYES: Lucia, you're on the school board there in Miami Dade County. What is your plan for masking and precautions for safe in-person schooling this fall? And what does that mean in terms of the collision course that you may be on with the governor?

LUCIA BAEZ-GELLER, MEMBER OF THE SCHOOL BOARD, MIAMI DADE COUNTY: Thank you, Chris. I'm very proud of my colleagues on the board. Our majority voted for masks. The plan is really narrowly tailored to make sure that we're revisiting, that we're following the science, and that we're keeping in mind current conditions. But right now, in doing that, in following the science, we know that the best plan is to keep our students safe by the mask mandate.

And truly the governor and his executive orders, they're very dangerous right now. And it's something that now seven counties throughout the state of Florida are acknowledging and are fighting back. And so, we hope to continue. It's in the hands of the courts. And we're going to make a plan forward to make sure our kids are safe as we should be.

[20:15:24]

HAYES: Do you -- do you -- I mean, it's been -- I've been watching the sort of politics and public opinion sentiment on this changing over time or at least kind of coming to a head in Florida. Do you feel that you have the support of your community, of parents there for what you're doing and in terms of staring down the governor on this?

BAEZ-GELLER: Absolutely. I mean, the number of calls, e-mails, texts that we are receiving, first asking for the mask mandate, but now thanking us. And we see it especially in the last two days, we've had an amazing opening of schools. The children, they're comfortable with the masks and our parents are happy to see our 100 percent return to schools because at the end of the day, that's where our students should be. And the masks allow us to teach our kids in-person as they should be.

HAYES: Doctor, what is -- what are the next -- what is the next week of this look like for you? And how are you thinking about the way out of this? I mean, we have seen even the most terrific outbreaks anywhere in the world, probably India with this variant, Delta variant, in a country with a lower per capita GDP obviously and not vaccinated hardly at all.

You know, even that outbreak came to a close after doing horrific damage, like, how do you think about that timeline? And what do you want to see from public officials?

DIAZ: Well, it's really it can't come fast enough. I think that put in place things in place that are basic, like mask mandates, and social distancing, and avoiding group gatherings. I think we have to go back to that. There's no -- I mean, there's no other way of doing this.

And first and foremost, the vaccination, the process of vaccination has to be ramped up one way or another. This is the only way and the most reliable tool, the most efficient tool that we have so far better than any medication, any protocol that we have that that we use to treat these patients. We must focus on prevention, and that is where the next phase should lie.

HAYES: Dr. Leslie Diaz Lucia Baez-Geller, thank you both. That was really illuminating. I appreciate it.

DIAZ: Thank you, Chris.

HAYES: Right now, the deadline to withdraw troops in Afghanistan is August 31. That is one week from today. The president is facing increasing pressure to extend that deadline over concerns about the people who still need to be evacuated. The President Biden's response and what it means by ending this 20-year war after this.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[20:20:00]

HAYES: One week from today, on August 31, the United States is getting out of Afghanistan. Yet with evacuations underway, there's tremendous pressure on the president from the foreign policy establishment to stay longer. The pressure comes from many of the leading voices who advocated for the global war on terror for years, along with others, veterans who serve for instance, who are desperately trying to get folks out that worked with U.S. forces, humanitarian groups as well.

Today, President Biden reaffirmed his commitment to the deadline touting the amount of people the administration has managed to get out.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

BIDEN: As of this afternoon, we've helped evacuated 70,700 people just since August the 14. 75,900 people since the end of July. Just in the past 12 hours. Another 19 U.S. military flights, 18 C-17s and one C-130 carrying approximately 6400 evacuees and 31 coalition flights carrying 5600 people have left Kabul, just in the last 12 hours. A total of 50 more flights, 12,000 more people since I've updated you this morning.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

HAYES: It has been a remarkable logistical accomplishment just in the last few days. And President Joe Biden giving his third speech on Afghanistan in less than a week unwavering, we should say, in his stance that after 20 years of this, the longest war in the country's history, the U.S. is leaving, though that is, as we can all see hardly the end of the story.

Spencer Ackerman is a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist and in his new book *Reign of Terror: How the 911 Era Destabilized American Produced Trump* is so good. I spent my vacation reading it and I cannot recommend it highly enough. Spencer is going to be on the podcast next week. And he joins me now. Great to have you, Spencer.

SPENCER ACKERMAN, AUTHOR, *REIGN OF TERROR*: Thanks, Chris.

I have a lot of complicated feelings, as I imagine you do, about this moment. But one thing that has been interesting is to -- is to watch Biden's determination here. You could feel the crescendo of pressure growing, extend the deadline, stay a little longer, maybe send more troops in. And I was -- I didn't know what he was going to say today. What is your -- how do you read what is happening and this sort of focus on actually doing the thing and getting out?

ACKERMAN: I think it goes back to 2009 when Biden was President Obama's Vice President and was a very lonely voice in the Obama cabinet against escalation in Afghanistan. And among the things Biden would kind of note ruefully to President Obama is that none of the assembled generals, admirals, and security dignitaries who favor the surge in Afghanistan had a plausible way of connecting what the purpose of the surge would be, to be -- you know, giving the Taliban a bloody nose, to both resolving the war in Afghanistan, and as well to fighting al-Qaeda, which was the original purpose of this whole thing.

Biden was vindicated then. And although he wasn't arguing, as I would have preferred, for full abolition of the War on Terror, or even full withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2009, he was the dovish alternative. And he watched as Obama rejected his advice and escalated to nowhere except a futile and extremely bloody, inconclusive outcome.

So, I think that probably hovers in the background for him as he considered throughout this year following through on the 2020 deal with the Taliban for withdrawal.

[20:25:29]

HAYES: I was thinking about your book and some of the history of the early part of this war that's in it when I saw the headline that the CIA director -- CIA Director William Burns is a fairly legendary figure in sort of American foreign policy intelligence circles, that he held a secret meeting in Kabul with Taliban leader Abdul Ghani Baradar today. And the fact that 20 years ago, there were backchannels from the Taliban opening up the possibility of some negotiated settlement in which they might kick Osama Bin Laden out of the country or turn him over. And that was seen as like ridiculous. And obviously, you can't negotiate with these people. And here we are 20 years later, and the U.S. CIA director is face to face with the Taliban official negotiating.

ACKERMAN: Yes. They've recognized that the Taliban is a fact. They've really done everything they could over the last 20 years to avoid that, and very belatedly came to the conclusion that the Taliban can't be ignored. The Taliban in particular right now are your victorious force. They will become the government of Afghanistan.

And you know, what you heard from Biden as well today sounded to me like the likeliest message that Burns was delivering to broader, which is that what the Taliban does between now and August 31 determines what the international community's posture toward the Taliban will be, or at least when the U.S. says the international community it needs its allies, the elements of the "international community" that it functionally controls.

HAYES: Right.

ACKERMAN: And this is a circumstance that put me in mind of some of the people I've interviewed over the years who have been this backchannel to the Taliban who've negotiated with them. And uniformly, they report that among the impressions they get of the Taliban is that the Taliban consider its international isolation ahead of the 2001 invasion to be one of its most catastrophic errors, that that was a major factor behind what doomed its first time governing what it called the Islamic Emirate. And I imagine that was a point that Burns really drove home today that that posture is in the Taliban's hands right now.

HAYES: Finally, I want to ask you a question I asked Chris Murphy last night that there's ways of seeing this as this was a -- this was a huge logistical miscalculation by the Biden administration, or they refuse to see what's in front of their face, or they didn't care about the allies or the refugees, or the people to be hunted by the Taliban once it fell. And then there's another view, which is like, this essentially is the chaos that comes from the end of a failed war. What do you think?

ACKERMAN: I think this is both things at once. That the Biden administration wasted a lot of time deciding that it was going to kind of shift posture in the beginning months of this year. Remember, August 31, is not a deadline negotiated with the Taliban. It's a deadline that the Biden administration imposed on itself. The actual deadline that the U.S. negotiated with the Taliban was from May 1 for a full withdraw.

But instead, the administration shifted to a posture of trying to on its way out broker a peace process even while it was itself a cobelligerent. That failed. That ultimately wasted a lot of time. And the wasting of time here is measured in real people's lives as we can see at the airport.

The war was lost in December 2001. The war when the war was lost when the United States decided that it would go for unconditional surrender. It reaps the whirlwind.

HAYES: Spencer Ackerman whose new excellent, excellent book *Reign of Terror* is out now. You should absolutely pick it up. I've learned so much from reading it. And I can't wait to talk to you about it on our podcast *Why Is This Happening?* Thank you, Spencer.

ACKERMAN: Thank you.

HAYES: Coming up, House Democrats and the standoff delivering the Biden agenda crucial victory today while this small -- why this small group of Democrats who tried to tank it could be undermining their own midterm political prospects, next.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[20:30:00]

HAYES: OK, if there's one thing we know about modern American electoral politics, it's that midterms, those off your elections, right, in the first two years of a presidential term are a referendum on the president. The best predictor of performance is presidential approval. But the past two weeks, nine centrist Democrats have attempted to block President Joe Biden's \$3.5 trillion budget.

The sabotage squad, as Greg Sargent turn them this morning in the Washington Post, threatened to tank the budget blueprint to force the infrastructure vote, that's that bipartisan deal that was cut in the Senate that they want. This afternoon, the two sides struck a deal. That's House leadership, Democratic leadership Nancy Pelosi and these nine centrists with the House voting along party lines to begin crafting legislation but nothing is determined yet.

And the dynamics of all this are very interesting. In this environment, where midterms are tied to presidential popularity, members of Congress are not going to be able to say it themselves if Joe Biden's numbers are in the tank. I hate to break it to you. It doesn't matter what kind of campaign you're on, how much money you raised, if you're in a frontline district, or maybe even not in such a frontline district and Joe Biden's approval rating on Election Day, 2022 is 41 percent as it wasn't a Suffolk University poll today, you're toast, dude.

Your job now in a narrow political sense if you want to be reelected is to do what you can to make sure the President is popular. And the best way to deliver that is to create big, tangible, definitive wins that make people's lives better, and that the President can take credit for.

[20:35:12]

Sahil Kapur is a national political reporter for NBC News who covered the budget fight. And Donna Edwards is a former Democratic Congresswoman from Maryland and Washington Post contributing columnist. Her latest pieces titled, "What is it about progressives that makes Democratic moderates go nuts?" And both join me now?

Let me start with you, Donna, because I thought your piece was interesting and you've sort of experienced this. You've got this sort of caucus that said, we don't want to do the big budget thing. We just want the bipartisan deal. We wanted it to stay on its own. We're -- we don't like the budget framework and all the things that are in there. But in doing so, it seems to me that there's real political risk they run for themselves and for the party writ large.

DONNA EDWARDS, FORMER MARYLAND DEMOCRATIC CONGRESSWOMAN: Well, and let's be clear, the proposal that before the Congress, both the reconciliation and the infrastructure package are the President's agenda. It happens that it's a very progressive agenda, but it is Joe Biden's agenda. And so, by trying to distance themselves or separate themselves from the President's agenda is, you know, like the kiss of death going into a midterm election.

And so, it was hard to understand, like, what were they shooting for? And I always thought that it was doomed anyway because, you know, nine, moderate Democrats was not going to hold up Nancy Pelosi from delivering her entire caucus. It really -- you know, maybe it was a play for headlines, but it wasn't a play that would actually ever see fruition.

HAYES: Although there's nothing settled yet, right? This is still a very complicated thing to try to pull off, just to remind people. They've got these two tracks as the bipartisan infrastructure deal workout in the Senate. Then there's the reconciliation bill with the sort of larger Biden agenda that's got climate, it's got care infrastructure, it's got a ton of stuff in it, right? So, they're trying to do both of those. They've got a very thin majority in the Senate.

Sahil, what I thought was interesting today and the dynamics in last few days as someone who's covered these dynamics for, you know, 15 years now, it does seem to me like that caucus, the moderates, the so-called moderates, the centrist, are holding fewer cards than they used to, or that the sort of weight of the caucus has shifted a bit. What do you think?

SAHIL KAPUR, NBC NEWS NATIONAL POLITICAL REPORTER: That is absolutely true, Chris. I think back to 2009 and 2010, when I first moved to D.C. and started covering Congress, it was the moderate Blue Dog Coalition that called the shots. They made -- they extracted serious scalps on the ACA. They forced Speaker Pelosi to dial things back. You know, progressives at the time, made demands, but they ultimately caved and went along.

Now, it's very different. This whole dynamic exists because months ago, progressives did the whipping they needed and secured the votes they needed to convince Speaker Pelosi to say that these two bills have to move side by side, otherwise, they won't pass. Progressives, despite this September 27 deadline that Speaker Pelosi has put on the table to pass the infrastructure bill, I spoke to several members of the

Progressive Caucus, including some members of The Squad who said they're not prepared to vote yes on the infrastructure bill on September 27 unless reconciliation is in a good place they can agree with.

That is the key dynamic here, Chris, that the moderates got the concession they want to speed up the timeline, but at the end of the day, progressive still holds some leverage in terms of shaping this. And that is ultimately the play. It's all about leverage to shape the reconciliation bill. If the infrastructure bill is hanging, then progressives have more leverage. If the infrastructure bill is done and dusted, passed into law, then moderates get to call the plays and potentially shrink or block this thing entirely.

HAYES: Yes, that's why this is so delicate. And in the political sense, you know, I was going back to approval rating, Donna, of Trump. And he basically hits his low in December of that first year when ACA, you know, repeal has already failed twice, and then they're trying to pass the big tax bill, and the tax bill is not very popular.

But crucially, when they tax -- when they pass it and sign it, his approval rating comes up, because there's a certain degree to which like, success is popular particularly with your own -- members of your own party you might be defecting a bit. And I really do think that like the big political objective here for the Democrats is like, do what you can to make sure Joe Biden is successful. That may sound like overly reductive, but in just a narrow analytical sense, I feel like it's the truth.

EDWARDS: Well, that's exactly what the play is. I mean, what's really interesting here is that if Democrats really can get this done in the early fall, that means that all Democrats and the president are able to run on this victory for a full year going into the November elections.

It also means that you've got a building season coming in, a construction season coming in the spring where all of the projects are going to come to fruition. People are going to start to see in there, you know, in their paychecks the difference that it makes for them. That is a real agenda to run on and it's one to win on.

[20:40:07]

HAYES: Yes. And Sahil, I got to say, I mean, we've been covering this for a long time, you and I both in the sort of same window. If -- I don't know if they're going to pull this off. But if they do, it'll be one of the most remarkable bits of legislative magic I have ever seen.

KAPUR: That is true. I think, Chris, the fact that tiny narrow Democratic majorities just voted to move forward on a \$3.5 trillion budget bill under President Joe Biden, who a year ago nobody really thought of as a progressive, that is a remarkable thing in and of itself.

And look, when you're talking about presidential popularity and midterms, here's an interesting bit of history. The last Democratic president to gain seats in their first midterm election was Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1934. There's a reason Joe Biden likes to encourage that comparison. And there's a reason he likes to talk about his agenda as being kind of a parallel, a new FDR agenda, this massive expansion of the safety net, because if Democrats do have a shot at holding power in 2022.

They're going to have to give voters a very good reason to keep them there. And Biden believes and many Democratic strategists believe that this could be, I stress, could be a reason if they get it done, Chris.

HAYES: Sahil Kapur, Donna Edwards, thank you both.

Up next, do you know where you were when the politics of the state of California turned into a total circus 18 years ago?

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Adult film star Mary Carey was talking about her agenda for governor.

MARY CAREY, ADULT FILM STAR: Some people swim and some people do aerobics. I personally recommend having sex at least once a day.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

HAYES: Remembering the 2003 California recall election and looking ahead to another one. That's next.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[20:45:00]

HAYES: Nearly 20 years ago, California experienced a campaign unlike any other in state history. It was the 2003 recall of then-Governor Gray Davis. There were difficult times for California. It was dealing with a multi-

billion dollar budget deficit. Governor Davis would then allow for massive cuts in social spending that would drain \$45 million from Los Angeles alone.

Then on top of the austerity, there was the energy crisis, rolling blackouts. People in California were not happy. And the state's Democratic governor became the fall guy for that unhappiness. California is one of about 20 states that allow voters to recall state officials before the end of their term. You only need enough signatures to trigger a new election and a well-funded Republican effort got to work.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Forget the unruffled appearance, this is a governor under siege.

GRAY DAVIS, FORMER GOVERNOR, CALIFORNIA: If the people want me to present my credentials again, I do not fear them.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: In fact, he has a lot to fear with more than a million signatures collected by his opponents. He's now all but certain to become the first governor in California history to face a recall election. Davis reelected just eight months ago says it's pure politics.

DAVIS: This agenda was financed by one rich person.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: That rich person, Republican Congressman Darrell Issa. He spent more than \$1 million dollars of his own money to finance the recall drive. Democrats say he's a right-wing zealot trying to hijack an election.

REP. DARRELL ISSA (R-CA): No one can hijack an election when almost two million people have asked for the election and everyone has an opportunity to vote for the candidate of their choice.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

HAYES: Darrell Issa's money in effort to manage to get the recall election on the ballot. And then as you may recall, if you live through it, the circus was on. In all, more than 100 candidates ran for governor.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: A huge cast of characters that includes political columnist Arianna Huffington.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON, POLITICAL COLUMNIST: I'm not to say the least a conventional candidate.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Not conventional, so are some of the others like Hustler Magazine publisher Larry Flynt.

LARRY FLYNT, PUBLISHER: Vote for (INAUDIBLE). Who cares?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Actor Gary Coleman. Remember him from Different Strokes? And Angelyne.

ANGELYNE, SINGER: I want the (INAUDIBLE) all the time because this is my lucky charm.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: A woman with a handful of screen credits and a whole lot of Hollywood billboards promoting herself.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Adult film star Mary Carey was talking about her agenda for governor.

CAREY: Some people swim and some people to aerobics, I personally recommend having sex at least once a day.

ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER, FORMER GOVERNOR, CALIFORNIA: The man that is failing the people more than anyone is Gray Davis. This is why he needs to be recalled. And this is why I'm going to run for governor.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

HAYES: All right, so that was the eventual winner, Arnold Schwarzenegger, a Republican celebrity with no government experience who instead leaned on his fame and personal wealth. He ended up serving two terms as governor of California. We've never seen a gubernatorial recall election California until 2003.

And now we're about to have the second one. This time, I think the stakes are much, much higher. We'll talk about what they are and the realistic possibility a conservative radio talk show host could become California's next governor, coming up.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[20:50:00]

HAYES: It all started last year, February 2020, before California went into lockdown for COVID, critics of Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom introduced a petition to have him recall. And they listed all sorts of grievances, things like high taxes and homelessness and rationing of water use.

And the thing is, recall petitions like these are pretty common in California but almost never successful. And at first it looked as though this whole thing was just going to fizzle out. Then, in November last year, you might remember, these pictures surfacing. They showed Governor Newsom celebrating the birthday of a prominent lobbyist at a high-end Napa Valley restaurant without masks or social distancing inside while California was basically shut down, which was not a great look at all.

In the month following that dinner, the recall effort gained about 400,000 signatures. The movement started to cobble together kind of unlikely coalition, anti-Newsome Republicans, California was frustrated with pandemic lockdowns. Ultimately, the recall effort ended up with 1.7 million signatures which was a fraction of course of voters in the largest state of the union, but more than enough to get on the ballot. And so, now, the recall is underway.

The election is set for September 14. 46 candidates are on the ballot to replace Newsom including Caitlyn Jenner, former Olympian and Keeping Up With Kardashian star who left the campaign trail earlier this year to appear on the reality show Big Brother Australia. John Cox, a Republican who lost to Newsom head to head by more than 20 points back in 2018. He toured the state with a live Kodiak Bear to gin up publicity this time around.

And then there's this guy, Larry Elder. He's a longtime right-wing radio host in California, believes the minimum wage should be zero, called Roe vs. Wade one of the worst decisions in Supreme Court history, and is currently the front runner to replace Governor Newsome as the head of the largest state in the country.

And because of this bizarre process, the guy who won the governorship by nearly three million votes could end up with 49.9 percent of the state supporting him and still lose to whomever gets a small plurality among the 46 people running to replace him.

David Plouffe is the architect President Barack Obama's two successful runs for the White House. He's now a resident of the great state of California where he has a front row seat to all of this. So, I want to start, David, with just how utterly insane the structure of this process is, which I really -- it cannot be stated enough. You get 1.7 million signatures which is not easy to get, right, you're -- there's some kind of -- you know, it's not an easy thing, but you get them, and then there's a recall vote.

And then if you recall, there's no -- it's just the -- whoever wins a plurality. Like, you can replace him. -- you can win 20 percent of the vote in a low turnout election and become the next governor of California.

[20:55:22]

DAVID PLOUFFE, MSNBC POLITICAL ANALYST: Yes. Well, not quite. Well, first of all, Chris, they paid for those signatures. So, you know, this has been a well-funded effort, you know, by Republican donors. Yes, listen, there's a lot of states -- I think it's up to 20 states that have recall. I personally don't like the recall process anywhere. Because you know, Gavin Newsom is up for reelection, you know, next year. So, if you don't like the job he's doing, that's your opportunity to replace him.

But this is really now become in the last two weeks, a Newsom-Elder race. Any incumbent, I don't care how popular you are, does not want to run in any election where it's solely a referendum. And now this has become a choice. And so, I do think the more that voters see this is Newsom-Elder, that's definitely going to accrue to Gavin Newsom's benefit.

The other thing I'd say, California is about 65 percent fully vaccinated. In talking to the Newsom campaign, they believe 78 percent of the so -- of the actual voters in this recall are going to be vaccinated. And what I find fascinating is it's going to be the first time that we've really had a major election where vaccinations and masks and kind of how we've handled the pandemic in a -- in a post-vaccination year is on the ballot. And I think Newsom has gained steam in the last couple of weeks because of that.

You saw polls in Florida today showing DeSantis grossly underwater on basically every measure. So, I think this is going to be an interesting question is does the vaccinated become kind of a powerful voter group in and of themselves?

HAYES: Larry Elder, I mean, Elder -- I was on a show once. He's like a, I don't know, like a replacement level right-wing radio host, I guess, is how I would describe him. Like -- he's just like, indistinguishable from a lot of

that stuff. I mean, I just think people need to understand, like, we ran the experiment with Donald Trump where we, like, took the guy who's like got takes and calls into Fox News, and was on a reality show, and we're like, do some governing amidst an incredibly fraught period. And then we got a pandemic.

To rerun that with Larry Elder just seems like obviously catastrophic to me, although maybe I'm missing something.

PLOUFFE: No. This is the world's sixth-largest economy. So, listen, Larry Elder is no Arnold Schwarzenegger, and California has also changed a lot in this 18 years. It's become much more progressive. So, yes, the more that this is seen in the closing weeks here as a Newsom-Elder race, that is definitely going to benefit Newsom.

And the other thing I'd say, Chris, is everybody in California who is a registered voter has been mailed a ballot already. So, there's legitimate concerns about who's got more intensity around turnout. And there's no doubt quite a bit of intensity against Newsome. But I think the fact that everybody has got a ballot, the fact that this has turned into a Newsom- Elder race, and the fact that this is really a question for those close to 80 percent of the people who are going to vote who've been vaccinated, do you want to turn the keys over to someone like Larry Elder who said on day one he'd get rid of the mask mandates in school, would clearly be a disaster on every front.

And so, the more the stakes are raised in this election, I very much agree with you what would happen here, that this is not fun and games. This could be catastrophic. I think that will really accrue at Newsom's benefit.

HAYES: What do you think Democrats have learned from this process so far about why Newsom is in this situation?

PLOUFFE: Well, listen, I think that this is not an off-year election. It's a recall election. But whenever you don't have a presidential year election or, you know, traditional, you know, congressional election in terms of timing, that can be challenging for Democrats. But I think that you've got to play offense.

And I think the Newsom campaign is starting to do a lot more of that, both in terms of defining this as a choice between he and Elder. But like, let's talk about how we've handled the COVID pandemic here. Let's talk about what I've done. Let's talk about what Elder would go. And I like to see Democrats across the country -- I know in your previous segment, you were talking about the economic packages which you can campaign on that for not just a year, for a decade in terms of what's going to come out of that.

But I think we have to be much more aggressive about the pandemic and prosecute the case. And really, I think, looking -- there are Republicans and independent leaning Republicans who I think Democrats can convert, maybe just for this election, maybe for the next one, based on how the Republicans have mishandled the pandemic. Biden benefited from that in 2020. I think those will be another test of that.

HAYES: David Plouffe in California, you know, all elections are a choice, but the problem with the process out there is it attenuates the choice which lead to catastrophe.

PLOUFFE: It's horrible.

HAYES: Thank you very much for your time tonight.

That is ALL IN on this Tuesday night which means "THE RACHEL MADDOW SHOW" starts right now. Good evening, Rachel.

RACHEL MADDOW, MSNBC HOST: Good evening, Chris. Thank you, my friend. Much appreciated. And thanks to you at home for joining us this hour. We got lots going on tonight.

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