

News; Domestic

**The 11th Hour With Brian Williams for August 17, 2021, MSNBC**

Brian Williams, Richard Engel, Philip Rucker, Victoria DeFrancesco Soto, Gabe Gutierrez

7,575 words

17 August 2021

MSNBC: The 11th Hour with Brian Williams

BRIWIL

English

Content and programming copyright 2021 MSNBC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. Copyright 2021 ASC Services II Media, LLC. All materials herein are protected by United States copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, published or broadcast without the prior written permission of ASC Services II Media, LLC. You may not alter or remove any trademark, copyright or other notice from copies of the content.

[23:00:00]

BRIAN WILLIAMS, MSNBC ANCHOR: And good evening once again. Day 210 of the Biden administration, which is now faced with trying to get thousands of Americans and Afghans who helped our side during the war out of Afghanistan.

NBC News confirming the Washington Post reporting that administration officials have told staffers on the Senate side of the Capitol that up to 15,000 passport carrying Americans remain in Afghanistan. Staffers were also told the administration has no plan to evacuate U.S. citizens outside of Kabul. Because of the Taliban checkpoints that have already gone up.

This afternoon, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan suggested American officials were trying to get the Taliban to cooperate with the evacuation.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JAKE SULLIVAN, NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER: We have been working, engaging, coordinating with Taliban elements on the ground to ensure safe passage. We will continue to work that issue day by day until we've completed our mission.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

WILLIAMS: Pentagon said some 4000 U.S. troops would be at the airport in Kabul by the end of today. State Department said over 1,000 people, including US nationals were evacuated today that tempo is going to pick up. Once again tonight our NBC News chief foreign correspondent Richard Engel is on the ground for us in Kabul.

(BEGIN VIDEO TAPE)

RICHARD ENGEL, NBC NEWS CHIEF FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): Today, we made it onto the military side of Kabul airport. This is where the U.S. is carrying out its final withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The American flag still flies here. This side of the airport has long been an American and NATO base, and it's full, with extra troops brought in to protect the evacuation.

(on camera): This has become effectively the last U.S. military base in Afghanistan, the last presence of American troops in this country after 20 years. They're only focused on one thing. Wrapping it up.

(voice-over): The evacuations are mainly bringing out Americans and other foreign nationals. Along with Afghans who managed to get visas and who are happy to be leaving too.

Hundreds packed into one American cargo jet. The Biden administration has promised to expedite visas for Afghans who worked for the U.S. military, what tens of thousands are still waiting. I spoke to a group of Afghans. They've all worked on this space for over five years. No one has a visa.

(on camera): What did you do on this space? What was your job?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Yes, I work in Billeting Office.

ENGEL: In the Billeting Office?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Billeting Office.

ENGLE: Assigning people to places to rooms. If you go back home, are you worried?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Of course, they will kill us.

ENGEL: You're here. You all have badges, you're on this base, and you can't get up. That seems like a total collapse of bureaucracy, or it seems like they just don't care.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: They don't care I think.

ENGEL: So what is it like for all of you to watch these planes take off in front of you and know that you can't get on one?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: We're crying. We were so sad for us.

ENGEL: Do you feel betrayed?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Yes. Yes.

ENGEL: Outside the airport, there's utter desperation. Afghans pushing and pleading to get in and board a flight away from Taliban rule. They don't believe the Taliban, which today promised to be different that women will have rights of free press and a general amnesty for translators who helped the US military. Afghans we spoke to say they were wrong to trust American promises, as the U.S. is leaving Afghanistan in the hands of extremists and leaving so many allies behind.

(on camera): It was here where Afghans were holding on to the underside of an aircraft as it was taking off. Now, this space is much more secure. The people have been cleared out aircraft are able to both take off and land. But the biggest danger remains the perimeter with Africans still trying to push their way into the airport. Richard Engel, NBC News, Kabul.

(END VIDEO TAPE)

WILLIAMS: And just tonight, President Biden came back to the White House earlier than planned from Camp David. Bipartisan group of 44 lawmakers is asking him to extend the August 31 deadline for a full withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan so that all Americans, our allies and vulnerable Afghans like the gentleman you just heard from can safely leave Taliban permitting.

Earlier today the White House was asked about Biden's assertion that the buck stopped with him.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

SULLIVAN: He's taking responsibility for every decision the United States government took with respect to Afghanistan because as he said the buck stops with him. I am also taking responsibility and so are my colleagues.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

WILLIAMS: Amid all of this, the White House is preparing to unveil the next step and its fight against the virus. Federal health officials expected to tell the American people Wednesday they should get a booster shot eight months after they were vaccinated.

A report out tonight from the Washington Post says a slew of new data from various sources raised concerns about declining immunity as this delta variant spreads across our country.

[23:05:11]

CDC now says Delta accounts for 99 percent of all new infections in the United States. There have been over 37 million total cases reported in the United States. Texas Governor Greg Abbott is now one of them. Today he said he tested positive for COVID.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

GOV. GREG ABBOTT (R-TX): Also wants you to know that I have received the COVID-19 vaccine and then maybe one reason why I'm really not feeling any symptoms right now.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

WILLIAMS: Abbott is currently in the process of trying to enforce a ban against mask mandates in school districts across the state of Texas.

With that, let's bring in our leadoff guests on this Tuesday night. Philip Rucker, Pulitzer Prize winning senior Washington correspondent for The Washington Post, co-author with Carol Leonnig of The New York Times bestseller, "I Alone Can Fix It, Donald J. Trump's Catastrophic Final Year," Ben Rhodes, former Deputy National Security Adviser for President Obama, his latest book is "After the Fall, Being American in the World We've Made," also back with us Dr. Nahid Bhadelia, an infectious disease physician, the founding director of Boston University's Center for Emerging Infectious Diseases Policy and Research. Good evening, and welcome to you all.

And Ben, given your life's work, I'd like to begin with you. You obviously dealt with Afghanistan to a great extent in the Obama White House. You were obviously around Joe Biden during those same deliberations. If you were brought on to counsel, the president starting first thing tomorrow morning with him back at the White House back in Washington, how would you advise him?

BEN RHODES, FMR. DEPUTY NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER: Well, I think what I'd say Brian, is that the next few weeks would be absolutely critical in shaping both the moral dimensions of this withdrawal and the competence of the withdrawal.

In short, if we can demonstrate that we can get out the vulnerable Americans and foreign nationals, but also tens of thousands of Afghans who are clearly at risk, if we can execute that mission effectively. And yes, take as long as we need to get that done, then I think, you know, this looks different than it does in its worst moments here the last couple days.

And so I think the focus overwhelmingly has to be on doing whatever is necessary and providing whatever resources are necessary to get those people out. And frankly, just avoiding the bureaucracy entirely, you need to bring tens of thousands back ends to a third country or the U.S. military installations where they can then be processed, that's going to be what's necessary, because people can fill out visa forms in Afghanistan, it's going to be a matter of collecting names of people who are vulnerable, getting in touch with them, getting them on airplanes, and getting as many of them out of there as possible.

WILLIAMS: As we said, all of that Taliban permitting, of course, Phil Rucker, here's how your paper reports that tonight quote, one close Biden foreign policy ally, who's in regular contact with the White House, and the State Department said the President's team would never have let him leave for Camp David had they known just how quickly Afghanistan would implode, amid his decision to withdraw all U.S. troops by the end of the month.

Phil, what further reporting do you have from inside this West Wing, including but not limited to other regrets they might have?

PHIL RUCKER, THE WASHINGTON POST SR. WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT: Well, Brian, clearly, the President and his team did not anticipate the calamity that unfolded as quickly as it did over the weekend. And into Monday, they've acknowledged as much publicly. It was striking to see the president remain at Camp David through the weekend, although obviously he did come back unplanned to the White House on Monday to give that address to the nation.

But this is a real crisis for this president. It's the first time in his, you know, seven months in office here, where there are Democrats, there are allies who are publicly critical of his leadership and of his actions who are using words like failure to describe the withdraw from Afghanistan.

Obviously, if they follow through with the mission, as Ben just outlined it over the next few weeks, the assessment might become a little bit different. But at this moment, this is the president really back on his heels without a whole lot of support here in Washington for the way that this withdrawal is being executed. That's not to say there's disagreement with the withdraw itself. There's obviously widespread support for getting out of Afghanistan, but with the execution of the mission, clearly there is criticism within the President's own political family.

WILLIAMS: Yes, Phil, you have it's so right. Even among friendly media friendly political allies. This is new territory for this still new presidency. Dr. Bhadelia, tomorrow, the White House and the President will try to shift our attention to these booster shots. Is this proceeding too quickly for your taste too slowly for your tastes or about right?

[23:10:10]

DR. NAHID BHADELIA, INFECTIOUS DISEASES PHYSICIAN: Well, Brian, we don't have randomized control trial for third doses and the countries that are looking at their doses or boosters. They're basing that on laboratory data or including us or cohort or observational studies.

And when you look at that, I think in my mind, there's very clear evidence that people who are immunocompromised needed that dose. We've seen that in a lot of studies. You could make an argument from the data that's coming from Israel and elsewhere that people who are 65 could benefit from that because they are more likely if they get a break or infection to be hospitalized. And CDC actually, last month released some data that in nursing home residents, the effectiveness may go down over time.

There's a lot less evidence for the general population. We do know that more breakthrough infections could happen. There was a Mayo Clinic study, you know, last month. But, you know, people -- health care workers like me, were the, you know, we're the canaries in the coal mine. We've not seen any data, for example, for those of us who've got vaccines back in December or January, but you might be seeing that for the general population increase in hospitalizations, and deaths.

But the CDC does have something called the heroes cohort, which is healthcare workers, frontline workers who got early vaccine. So I'd be interested in knowing if they have other data that we have not seen that supports this. Because in absence of that, a third dose and a healthy person, I think most people would agree is a lower priority for compared to first doses to more people here and the rest of the world, Brian.

WILLIAMS: Great point that I hadn't heard expressed that way before. Ben, back to your bailiwick, I'm going to play something that happened tonight on Fox News, we'll get your reaction on the other side.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

DONALD TRUMP, FMR. U.S. PRESIDENT: The Taliban, good fighters, I will tell you, they're good fighters, we have to give them credit for that they've been fighting for 1,000 years, that's what they do is they fight. The Taliban has circled the airport. And who knows if they're going to treat us right, you know, all of a sudden, they'll say, well, frankly, if they were smart, they'd really and they are smart, and they are smart. They should let the Americans out.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

WILLIAMS: So Ben, there's your primer on foreign relations for tonight, including complements for the Taliban. What's your reaction to that?

RUCKER: Well, I mean, look, it's obviously kind of farcical Taliban has not been around for 1,000 years, either. Frankly, you know, the reality of this is that, you know, Donald Trump is the one who made a deal with the Taliban in which we essentially promised them that we would withdraw that also, all U.S. military contractors, on which the Afghan security forces were highly dependent, that they would withdraw as well, without requiring the Taliban to make a deal with the Afghan government, without requiring the Taliban to a ceasefire across the country.

And, frankly, when we see the Afghan security forces not fighting, or we see what appears to be regional political figures and Afghanistan cutting deals themselves to the Taliban, they were kind of following in Trump's deal. They were basically getting assurances that the Taliban wouldn't attack them if they didn't fight back.

So, you know, it was easy in the Trump years, I think, to look at the absurdity of some of what he was doing, including, you know, wanting to invite the Taliban to Camp David on September 11. But in reality, that deal on paper is part of what said motion, the events that led us to where we are today. And the fact that he's praising the Taliban and talking about them being around 1000 years and reinforces that you have absolutely no idea what he was doing, other than trying to grandstand around some agreement with the Taliban that, you know, frankly, helped precipitate the collapse of the Afghan government that we all just witnessed.

WILLIAMS: Phil Rucker, all classically trained journalists are taught from the get go to question everything that comes out of every White House. So it's with that in mind that I asked about tomorrow's event and remarks on vaccines. Can we just assume it is an attempt to change the subject flavored by genuine rigor and concerns over the public health?

RUCKER: You know, Brian, I think it's actually probably a pretty genuine effort to address what had been the major crisis facing this country a few days ago, which is the surge in COVID cases and hospitalizations across the country because of this delta variant. That, of course, became overshadowed in the last couple of days by the collapse in Afghanistan. But the news focus on Afghanistan doesn't mean that the COVID situation is any less alarming than it had been.

And so this is an administration that for the past week, if not longer, has been grappling with a policy of what to do about booster shots, how to call for them, at what point is it appropriate to tell the American people that they need to get an additional vaccine shot and grappling frankly, with the geopolitical dynamic the kind of moral and ethical component here, which is that a lot of critics believe that we should be holding off and letting foreign countries that don't have widespread access to these vaccines, give them access to the shot first before Americans get what would effectively be a third dose.

[23:15:19]

Those are all questions the White House and the health experts in the government have been dealing with. They've clearly arrived at some sort of a decision and a consensus here that's going to be announced tomorrow. And I assume that that's on the normal pattern. I don't think this is sort of a (INAUDIBLE) event in order to distract attention from Afghanistan.

WILLIAMS: And Doctor, I've saved the toughest question for last. And for you, is it a given in your line of work that we're in this through the fall winter, perhaps first quarter of next year? Where are we in your view, in this particular Delta spike?

BHADELIA: We're seeing some cases at some states, Brian, that had an earlier peak in the summer, their cases are starting to level off. But there are other states such as Florida and Texas. I mean, I read a horrendous story today that Texas had to request mortuary trailers, because they're expecting more deaths, because their cases are continue to go up. And that's our - we're going to lag behind that.

You know, so you might see that rolling peak for a little bit in the fall. Few concerns, I think that you will see more kids go to school, you'll see colleges, you know, come back into session, is that going to lead to more clusters of cases, particularly if it's combined with waning immunity among older people, you know, is one of the things that we're discussing with these boosters, and the fact that the weather is getting colder. And of course, a big unknown to Phil's sort of point about the transmission in the rest of the world. We don't know what other variants are potentially going to be on the horizon. And that's why I think that is one of the arguments potentially, is spread those vaccines so we can reduce transmission and potentially keep us safe there.

WILLIAMS: It's tough world out there on so many fronts, and we so appreciate our front line tonight. Philip Rucker, Ben Rhodes, Dr. Nahid Bhadelia. Our thanks for starting off our coverage and conversation.

Coming up for us, lives in the balance what will the U.S. and its allies do for those instant refugees desperately trying to get out of the Taliban's way. And later, more lives in the balance. This time the American schoolchildren caught between Republican governors in their states and doctors and educators fighting over five inches of fabric. All of it as the 11th Hour is just getting underway on this Tuesday night.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[23:21:08]

WILLIAMS: Our next guest is out with a column that says the President's decision to pull us troops from Afghanistan was a quote, withdrawal of choice. Richard Haass goes on to write this quote, The grim aftermath of America's strategic and moral failure will reinforce questions about U.S. reliability among friends and foes far and wide.

And so we're happy to have back with us tonight, the aforementioned Richard Haass, veteran diplomat under multiple presidents, longtime president of the Council on Foreign Relations, and an author of several books, his most recent work, "The World A Brief Introduction," now available in a recently updated version of the paperback.

Richard, as we've laid out, you've studied the world, you'd traveled the world, you have briefed presidents on it. What would you have counseled this president, in your view to have done differently?

RICHARD HAASS, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS PRESIDENT: Well, by the time Joe Biden became president, I actually think he inherited a situation Brian, where which she could have lived with. We had 2,500 American troops about four times that many Allied troops. We hadn't been involved in combat operations for six or seven years hadn't had a combat fatality, thank God, for a year and a half.

And this American presidents provided the anchor for not just the -- for other foreign troops, but for the Afghans themselves. I think this President hasn't been shy about distancing himself from his predecessor. He's changed policy on Iran. He's changed policy on climate change. He's changed policy on the World Health Organization. Why? Why then did he change policy on this? He could have, he should have, and instead he followed through with it, then he handled it badly. So I really don't understand the logic there.

WILLIAMS: For starters, Richard, why on earth did we leave Bagram Air Force Base in the middle of the night, a defended base with a hardened perimeter? We've now limited ourselves to one runway at the half military, half commercial airport.

HAASS: Look, Brian, that question - there's any number of questions about the details of how this was done. To me the first order question is why the policy? But then, as we used to teach when I taught in the School of Government, a lot of life is implementation or execution.

So even when I think an incorrect policy was selected here by the president, obviously against many of the advices he was receiving from the military and others, why it wasn't carried out better. Well, that'll be the stuff of history books and investigations for some time to come. Unfortunately, though, an awful lot of Afghans are going to pay a price. And unfortunately, America's reputation is going to take a hit.

WILLIAMS: What do you think the odds are that this new Taliban is somehow different than everything we've learned about the Taliban, the Tom Friedman theory that governing may be different for them when they realize that there are things like irrigation and traffic control and commerce when they realize they're going to need foreign investment?

HAASS: Look, possibly but the last time they governed they were also responsible for collecting the garbage and irrigation and everything else. And they showed no signs of reasonableness. They were asked to get rid of terrorists and didn't, which is why they lost their jobs to two decades ago. So I'm not going to sit here and say it's impossible that Taliban 2.0 have not learned a few things. But I think we've all got to be skeptical until we see anything to the contrary.

WILLIAMS: How hurtful is it to the United States that this all kind of blends in with the Chinese and Russian talking points on two fronts. Number one, our middle military might isn't what it used to be. Number two, our word is not worth what it used to be.

[23:25:08]

HAASS: Well, both for me, particularly the latter, and this isn't the first time the United States has shown a degree of unpredictability. The previous president obviously left the Kurds in the lurch in Syria. Barack Obama talked about red lines. And when they were crossed it did nothing about it.

So I think the United States has been hurt on that scale. So I think a lot of our allies are wondering the fact that we did a lot of what we did in Afghanistan unilaterally. You know, for a long time, we talked about in together, out together with NATO. Well, guess what, we went out alone. We didn't do this with them. I think that's hurt.

And yes, if I were, Mr. Biden, beyond dealing with the immediate change, or showing on the screen in Kabul, what I would do is basically say, How do I signal to the world, to our friends that we are still reliable, that they're right to depend on us? How do we signal the Chinese this is not a moment of opportunity for them to do something or tie on Taiwan or for Russia to do something on Ukraine? That seems to me -- that ought to be the priority moving forward for this administration, once they're done dealing with the humanitarian crisis that's materialized.

WILLIAMS: Did we do anything right in Afghanistan over our two decades on the ground there?

HAASS: I think we were right when we went in two decades ago. We basically gave the Taliban a stark choice. And when they wouldn't get rid of the terrorists, they have been housing, we said, we're not going to treat you who harbors terrorists, any different than the terrorists themselves. And I think that was a really good message to the world. I think we were right. And when we stood up a post-Taliban government

But after that, I think most of the things we failed. We didn't do enough for that government. We didn't do enough to help build up its capacity. We allowed Pakistan to provide a sanctuary for the Taliban. The Obama administration sent way too many troops. It wasn't clear to me why we wanted that mission. And we've already talked about the Trump and Biden failures over the last year and a half.

So yes, it's not surprising that a policy ended in failure when it's so often along the way there are so many points, where the United States made decisions that were simply flawed.

WILLIAMS: The rare expert who actually knows his way around the globe's behind him. We're always fortunate to be able to spend time with our guests tonight, Richard Haass, Council of Foreign Relations. Richard, thank you very much. Great to have you. Good to see you.

HAASS: Thank you.

WILLIAMS: Coming up for us, look at the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan as the United States scrambles to evacuated refugees, that and more when we come back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[23:31:26]

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

SULLIVAN: My heart goes out to Afghan women and girls in the country. Today, under the Taliban, we've seen what they've done before. The alternative choice had its own set of human costs and consequences, as I say, and those human costs and consequences would have involved a substantial ramp up of American participation in the Civil War with more loss of life and more bloodshed.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

WILLIAMS: Reuters reporting the Biden administration has been holding secret talks with other nations in an attempt to help Afghan refugees. And we quote here the previously unreported discussions with such countries as Kosovo and Albania underscore the administration's desire to protect U.S. affiliated Afghans from Taliban reprisals, while safely completing the process of approving their us visas.

Back with us tonight, Victoria DeFrancesco Soto, Professor and Assistant Dean at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas, Austin, also joining us A.B Stoddard, veteran Washington journalist, and associate editor and columnist for Real Clear Politics. Good evening, and welcome to you both.

Professor, I'd like you to take a minute and talk about how dire the situation with the refugees, the humanitarian situation is, in your view, and more importantly, what concerns you the most starting sunrise tomorrow.

VICTORIA DEFRANCESCO SOTO, MSNBC CONTRIBUTOR: So to begin, we know that the Taliban controls all of the land border crossings. So the only ability for refugees to get out at this point is the airport. There is no other options. I think this to me, is what is becoming increasingly bleaker.

The other piece of this is that the processing of the special visa program is slow and inefficient. And we've known this for several years. This was a program that was instituted in 2009 for folks who work with U.S. government interpreters, folks have been trying to come over for years. This isn't just something that suddenly new. And we have been dogged with these inefficiencies.

So, you know, why was this not addressed beforehand, if we knew that there was going to be a surge in refugees? In the last, you know, couple of weeks, we've seen more resources put toward that, but it is too little too late. There really is no way for folks to get out and seek refuge, even if different countries except to take in these refugees. The ability for them to get out is very scary.

And you know, as a woman who has a profession, it is terrifying. So my heart doesn't just go out. My heart breaks when I see these images. And Brian to put this into perspective, before the Taliban took over, women made up 25 percent of the Parliament in Afghanistan. That's the same rate of representation we have in the United States. 25 percent. Women made up 40 percent of those in colleges and universities. This is not going, I mean, the tragedy here is so medical on so many issues. And it just it breaks my heart.

WILLIAMS: Thank you for those numbers as sad as they are to here knowing the regression that is coming. A.B., on the political front. I'm going to play for you something from the Senate minority leader.

[23:35:02]

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

SEN. MITCH MCCONNELL (R-KY) SENATE MINORITY LEADER: But for those who thought it was important to get out, at least it's important to have a plan. This has been an absolute debacle and an embarrassment of staying on the reputation of United States of America.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

WILLIAMS: So A.B., how do you process the politics of this? There have been many reminders over on Fox News in the last 24 hours that the Republican talking points have been Joe Biden is abandoning these poor people. Oh, by the way, we don't really want any of them coming here.

A.B. STODDARD, REAL CLEAR POLITICS ASSOC. EDITOR AND COLUMNIST: Well, Brian, there are some Republicans who are stepping up on this issue, like Mike Gallagher, who's a congressman who's a veteran and senators Inhofe and Cassidy and Murkowski, who are joining with some Democratic senators to

focus on this issue and making sure the administration gets women in leadership roles at Afghanistan, special access back here in resettling, those are really good efforts. I'm glad they're bipartisan. I think they should be more bipartisan, and they likely will.

But the very hyperbolic language from the Minority Leader, I mean, it's often used on, you know, every day for every issue is actually really appropriate here. I mean, there -- there's a real sense of shock among people in his own party, that Joe Biden with all his experience, and all of his competence and all of his reverence for the sacrifice that people like his son has made in Afghanistan.

And all of the years we have invested there, that he would not have had a better, more prepared, thought through plan and that these reports coming out about the intelligence that they did have are making the administration look like they were dishonest or incompetent, that they did not have a good enough plan to get these people out before they evacuated -- before they close the embassy, before they shut some things down.

And that is it's really hard to argument without even if you're not an expert, I mean, people who are experts are telling people like us who are not that there was no way this preparation was adequate. And that is tragic, and it is calamitous for our reputation. And I think the scenes from yesterday, the President's defiance, the scenes at the airport will be terrible for him politically. Does that last a long time? We just don't know.

In this new cycle, even Americans perspective on the war in Afghanistan, and desire to get out. But in terms of how it was done, it is just a huge blow to a White House that people viewed as steeped and experienced, very competent, cautious in their planning. And this is just a calamitous end.

WILLIAMS: Those are weighty words to hear both of our guests having raised and nothing but thoughtful points. We have asked both of our guests to stay with us. We're going to fit in a break and continue our conversation in just a minute. Coming up, why the Republican fight on a domestic issue against mask mandates ran into something of a hiccup today where one of our guests is located.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[23:41:52]

WILLIAMS: News to Texas Governor Greg Abbott tested positive for COVID comes just a day after he boasted about attending a standing room only maskless GOP party event. And it comes as Texas schools and municipalities struggle to navigate the legal challenges to his ban on mask mandates.

Still with us thankfully, Professor Victoria DeFrancesco Soto and A.B. Stoddard. Professor, a dual question for you. Number one students returning to UT Austin, is there a masked mandate for them and tell us in plain English just how bad it is in your state?

DEFRANCESCO SOTO: So let me start with the second question, Brian. It's sheer chaos. I mean, and we've seen it ramp up over the last couple of days. Right now what we're seeing is schools and some of the rural regions of the state that didn't fight back against the governor and didn't enforce mass mandates, having to cancel classes because of surges. Just within the first couple of days of schools.

We're seeing in San Antonio, the school district mandating that apathy and staff have to get vaccinated. So what we're seeing is this bare knuckle fight between localities, school districts, and the state. I have lost count of the number of lawsuits. Every county every school district, every entity is suing is fighting with the state.

Now when we're looking at our public universities, so for example, UT, we can't have a mask mandate. We can't ask our students if they're vaccinated, we can't ask them to wear masks. However, what the university administration is doing in order to accommodate that, in order to accommodate the fact that we are enduring a surge is they're giving us as professors discretion.

So just actually today, we got a communication from the Provost saying, if you feel the need for your health, health of your family or for concerns about your students, that you need to move online for the first month, you can do so. That is fine. So I think at the very least you know that we have seen a collective sigh of relief among faculty because of that, because while many of us are vaccinated, for example, I have kiddos who aren't vaccinated yet. They're too young.

So what we're seeing is chaos, more so than we were at this time last year and a lot of fear from parents. These parents were the school started this week and many parts across the state. And I really don't see how this is going to end because even though Governor Abbott regrettably tested positive for COVID and I wish him the best. It doesn't look like there's going to be any change at the state level from the governor in terms of the mass mandate.



WILLIAMS: A.B., we indeed wish governor Abbott the best. And yet this is on brand as you write about DeSantis of Florida. DeSantis is not leading Florida out of catastrophe rather he is fighting for fighting sake, because somehow he thinks that will help him become president. And he knows people are dying because of it.

[23:45:00]

A.B., I got about 50 seconds, 60 seconds left. Did you ever guess that to win the MAGA basis, affections, it might require policies that could make people sick and perhaps make people die?

STODDARD: And keep people without COVID out of the hospital when they desperately need medical care like cancer patients and everybody else. Governor Abbott is deep into daily testing and Regeneron even though he has no symptoms, which means that he fears what COVID can do to you. He's had his third booster shot.

So the mask and the -- and fighting mass mandates is that -- it is the mascot of the frontline of the culture battle. And that's why he and DeSantis are digging in because it is that powerful with their base, even though they know it's breaking their hospital capacity, causing more infection and more depth. And we'll create the next mutation that outruns the vaccine more than the Delta variant right now.

So this is something that they are completely aware of a disease that they fear that they're vaccinated against, though they continue to do this surely because of the base and the culture war.

WILLIAMS: And this stands on its ear the American tradition, the kind of supervisory role the role of governors to protect and serve and look after the health and safety of the people in their states that traditional custodial role that the professor teaches her government students about on a daily basis. Victoria, A.B., can't thank you enough for being our guest tonight. We've covered a lot of ground, greatly appreciate it.

Coming up for us after another break. It just might be the definition of insult to injury will take you where an enormous relief effort is tonight underway.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[23:50:37]

WILLIAMS: The search for survivors of that massive earthquake resumed in Haiti today after torrential storms overnight, caused flooding and mudslides and of course slow down the relief effort. The good people at UNICEF are estimating over 1 million Haitians have been affected by the disaster, many of whom hadn't recovered from the last quake well over a decade now. People who now need clothes and medicine and shelter all over again. NBC News correspondent Gabe Gutierrez has our report from Haiti again tonight.

(BEGIN VIDEO TAPE)

GABE GUTIERREZ, NBC NEWS CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): Tonight the desperation in Haiti is growing. As if the earthquake weren't enough, the survivors just endured Tropical Storm Grace. After punishing wind and rain blew through overnight, the U.S. Coast Guard rushed in part of a massive international effort.

(on camera): One of the toughest parts about this relief operation is getting supplies to the people that most needed. Many roads are shut down, cutting off entire communities. It's a challenge to get into many parts of Haiti right now.

(voice-over): Flight mechanic Savannah Brewer from Alabama has served for seven years.

SAVANNAH BREWER, FLIGHT MECHANIC: It's extremely difficult emotionally to see these people and all their suffering and all of their injuries.

GUTIERREZ: We land in Lakay (ph), the same town we're just yesterday we'd seen desperate earthquake survivors in the stifling heat hoping to be evacuated. Now --

(on camera): We can feel the rain falling. The Tropical Storm just moved through. And we're about to find out just how extensive the damage was.

(voice-over): This young child with a broken leg. He and other patients had been waiting for days, some even younger, in their mother's arms. The hospital overwhelmed.

AUSTIN HOLMES, MISSION OF HOPE HAITI: They're significantly overrun and under resourced right now. The bed supplies and personnel support is critical.

GUTIERREZ: The wounded are carefully loaded into the chopper one by one.

STU MCCONNELL, U.S. COAST GUARD: And a lot of building collapses though that was the majority of what we've been seeing a lot of broken bones.

GUTIERREZ: Petty Officer Brewer cares for the young boy, he speaks not a word, his eyes tell you everything.

BREWER: Some of these kids that we've seen. They've had buildings come down on their parents and they're all alone. And it really is just so heartbreaking.

GUTIERREZ (on camera): International aid organizations are now scrambling to get supplies and assistance to some of those hard hit regions that have been tough to reach. And now the Haitian government says that the death toll here in Haiti has climbed to nearly 2,000 with almost 10,000 Haitians injured. Brian.

(END VIDEO TAPE)

WILLIAMS: Gabe, thank you. Correspondent Gabe Gutierrez remaining in Haiti. God bless those relief workers and God bless the U.S. Coast Guard. Coming up one of the reasons why the Taliban might have felt so empowered in their lightning fast drive to power in Afghanistan.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[23:57:14]

WILLIAMS: Last thing before we go tonight, the guys behind the pro- democratic political group called Occupied Democrats are out with a tough new spot. It repurposed his news coverage as a helpful reminder really of the thanks our nation owes to the Trump administration for their share of the Taliban taking power in Afghanistan.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

TRUMP: But I think the same as I've been thinking for the last number of years, what are we doing there? These people hate us. As soon as we leave, it's all going to blow up anyway.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: The White House had hoped to surprise the world with the Taliban at Camp David signing a peace deal.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Some Republicans criticized in the White House for the time and place in the meeting, especially just days before 911.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: President Trump was at that moment crowing about how great he gets along with the Taliban. Taliban prisoners were released from Afghan custody yesterday. The Afghan government did not want to let them go because of what these prisoners were accused of. But the Trump administration insisted.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: The Taliban welcomed the news in a statement today from Doha.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: The meeting between Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Taliban negotiators in Qatar.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: And they did a rather crucial thing that I think has been part of the failure, which is they excluded the Afghan government from negotiation.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: A president appears to have gotten ahead of his negotiators and his national security team with some warning this may reward the Taliban and undermine the delicate negotiations taking place right now in Doha, Qatar.

TRUMP: You're not going to need an exit strategy. I don't need exit strategies.

I'll be meeting personally with Taliban leaders in the not too distant future they say they're going to be doing they will be killing terrorists. Now it's time for somebody else to do that work. And that will be the Taliban.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: President Trump ordering a drawdown of troops in Iraq and Afghanistan by January the 15th. Just five days before he said to leave office.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: The major military move comes as President Trump and his administration refused to cooperate to and coordinate with the Biden administration transition team.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Former President Trump released a statement yesterday praising President Biden's decision to withdraw US forces from Afghanistan and called it quote, a wonderful and positive thing to do.

TRUMP: I started the process while the troops are coming back home. They couldn't stop the process. 21 years is enough, don't we think? 21 years. They couldn't stop the process. They want to do, but it was very tough to stop the process.

As soon as we leave it's all going to blow up anyway.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Occupy Democrats election phone is responsible for the content of us advertising.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

WILLIAMS: And indeed Occupy Democrats to take us off the air tonight. That is our broadcast on this Tuesday evening with our thanks for being here with us. On behalf of all our colleagues at the networks of NBC News, good night.

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

END

Content and programming copyright 2021 MSNBC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. Copyright 2021 VIQ Media Transcription, Inc. All materials herein are protected by United States copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, published or broadcast without the prior written permission of VIQ Media Transcription, Inc. You may not alter or remove any trademark, copyright or other notice from copies of the content.

Document BRIWIL0020210818eh8h00001