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ANALYZING BIDEN'S FIRST 100 DAYS

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. KAMARCK: Good morning, everyone. My name is Elaine Kamarck. I'm a senior fellow here at the Brookings Institution. And welcome to this webinar on Joe Biden's first 100 days.

Let me just by saying that the one and only reason that we mark the 100 days of the presidency is because of Franklin Roosevelt, President Roosevelt. There is no statutory or constitutional significance, but Franklin Roosevelt's 100 days is without equal in the 20th century. 1933 was the death of the Great Depression. Roosevelt's inaugural address is responsible for the phrase, we have nothing to fear but fear itself. And less than two weeks after that, he gave the first of many fireside chats explaining over the radio in simple terms what was happening to Americans and how he would fix it.

But Roosevelt's mastery of rhetoric and of the new medium of radio were not what made him the president who is remembered for the first 100 days. It was the breathtaking scope of bold and new actions, both legislative and regulatory, that set the bar so high. To name but a few, in those 100 days he declared a bank holiday, which stopped at the disastrous run on the banks. He took America off the gold standard. And passed groundbreaking legislation and amendments to the hated Volstead Act, which had created prohibition. Immediately there were beer parties all over America in celebration.

And ever since, presidents have been evaluated for their performance in the first 100 days. In fact, the amount of legislation that Roosevelt passed was so amazing that the comedian Will Rogers joked at the time, "Congress doesn't pass legislation anymore. They just wave as the bills go by." Suffice it to say that if you have lived up to Roosevelt. Nevertheless, the 100 day mark has become a time when we collectively take the measure of a new president, which is what we're going to be doing today.

Just a reminder, that you can submit questions for speakers by emailing events@Brookings.edu, or be at Twitter by using #100Days.

So let's get right into it. The hallmark of the Biden presidency as far as I'm concerned is clear, under promise and over deliver. In December, President-elect Biden announced that in his first 100 days in office, 100 million shots for the COVID vaccine could be administered to Americans. At the time it seemed like a dangerous, maybe a downright foolish pronouncement. By March, America had met that goal. And by the time Biden made his first address to Congress at the end of his first 100 days, he could

announce over 220,000 shots -- 220 million shots had been administered.

Tonight I can say, because of you, the American people, this vaccine has been one of the best logistical achievements this country has ever seen. So Biden's accomplishments stand in stark contrast to his predecessor who often did exactly the opposite. He overpromised and under delivered. By October 2020 as the coronavirus raged, Trump had declared that it would be gone no less than 38 times.

And of course there have been other dramatic contrasts to Trump. He immediately rejoined the Paris climate records any place a former senator, presidential candidate, and Secretary of State John Kerry in charge of climate negotiations, which makes them by reckoning the most credentialed presidential staffer ever.

So let's discuss all of this and more. And to do this, we have a panel of great Brookings scholars. Bill Galston is the Ezra K. Zilkha chair in Governance and a senior fellow here at Brookings. He served with me in the Clinton administration and is the author of countless books and articles on both public policy and political philosophy. His latest book is "Anti-pluralism; The Populous Threat to Liberal Democracy."

Next is Molly Reynolds, a senior fellow here in Governance Studies. She studies Congress with an emphasis in how congressional rules and procedure affect domestic policy outcomes. She is the author of the book, "Exceptions to the Rule; The Politics of the Filibuster Limitations in the U.S. Senate." And she also is editor of the vital statistics on Congress, one of most important compendiums of data on the United States Congress.

Camille Busette is senior fellow in Governance Studies with affiliated appointments in Economic Studies and the Metro Policy Program. She is the director of our Race, Prosperity, and Inclusion Initiative, and focuses on issues of equity, racial justice, economic mobility for low income communities and communities of color. At Brookings, her work is focused on systemic racism, the economic advancement of Black and Native American boys, the importance of social relationships to economic mobility, and equity in healthcare in state and local government.

John Hudak is deputy director at the Center for Effective Public Management and managing director, managing editor of our very well read FixGov blog. His recent books are "Marijuana, a

Short History,” which offers a unique, up-to-date profile of how cannabis emerged from the shadows of the counterculture and illegality to become a serious and even mainstream public policy issue. And before that, he is the author of “Presidential Pork; White House Influence over the Distribution of Federal Grants,” which demonstrates that pork barrel politics occurs beyond the halls of Congress.

And last, personally not least, is John Valant. He is a senior fellow at the Brown Center on Education Policy here at Brookings. John studies K-12 education policy and politics with a focus on equity and urban reform. Much of his current work examines school choice reforms, especially in New Orleans where he is a nonresident research fellow at the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans.

So with that, with this great group ahead of us, let's start with Bill. And Bill, I wanted to have you start, because I know you've written recently about this. Tell us how is the public reacted to Biden's first 100 days. And how does this compare to the first 100 days of previous modern presidents?

MR. GALSTON: Well, I would summarize it as follows, Elaine. In his first 100 days, Joe Biden has made no new friends, but no new enemies either. His approval rating overall is between 53 and 54%, which is within hailing distance of what he got in the November 2020 election. He is strong now where he was strong then. He is weak now where he was weak then, especially with white voters without a college degree. And his support among Hispanics remains quite weak when measured against traditional Democratic Party expectations.

He's getting high marks on personal qualities. People like the way he has conducted himself as president. They especially believe that he cares about average Americans, about people like them. He gets somewhat lower, but still positive marks for honesty and leadership.

He gets his lowest marks, though still positive for uniting the country. And that may reflect the fact that there is -- he enjoys, if that's the right verb, the greatest ever partisan gap in job approval, at least as far as modern polling is concerned. He enjoys the support of 96% of Democrats. And I guess the other 4% just checked the wrong box. But only 10% of Republicans for a gap of 86 percentage points out of a possible 100. I don't think this record is going to be topped anytime soon.

What about the issues? He gets especially high marks for his handling of the coronavirus and the distribution of the vaccine. He is in positive territory on the economy and on climate. People are not so thrilled with his handling of the gun issue and especially immigration. I suspect we will talk more

about that later in this program.

Americans like the first bill that he introduced, the Rescue Bill. They liked it when he first proposed it and they like it now. The direct checks are especially popular. No big surprise there. They are cautiously favorable to the jobs bill. And the bill gets increased popularity when people are told that it will be financed with taxes on corporations and the wealthy rather than a more general tax increase.

And finally, sort of the mechanics of the first 100 days. The Biden team has been functioning pretty smoothly. A few leaks, a few public controversies. The events have been handled quite professionally with extensive advance preparation in which the president has been intensely involved. And the president and his team have been rationing the president's public appearances on the theory that what is scarce will be more highly valued. So far, so good.

To wrap it all up, how is Biden doing compared to previous presidents in the modern era? Answer, a lot better than Trump, but not as well as all the others. And it may very well be that in this era of intense partisan polarization, there is a lower ceiling than before on the level of job approval and support that a president of the United States can expect to enjoy.

MS. KAMARCK: Great, Bill. Thank you. And for everybody who would like to see more about this, Bill has a piece on our Brookings site about President Biden's public approval in his first 100 days. And some of the graphs and charts in there I'm sure will be interesting to everyone who has just listened to Bill.

Molly, a lot of a president's success of course depends on his relationship with Congress. We know for instance, and I have a personal memory of this, that Jimmy Carter had a really tough relationship with his own party in Congress. It started off badly and frankly, never really improved, getting so bad that he got a primary challenge from Senator Kennedy for his run in 1980. How is Biden doing with the -- this relationship with Congress in his first hundred days?

MS. REYNOLDS: Yeah, thank you, Elaine. So I mean, I will start with one of the things that Bill mentioned, which is the American Rescue Plan. So that is the first that's the Biden's administration first major legislative priority right out of the gate. They got it passed quite quickly. If we kind of -- I think there is some value in comparing how quickly the Biden administration was able to move on their first legislative priority to where the Trump administration was on their first legislative priority,

which was, as folks will remember, repealing Obama Care. That obviously failed, but the Biden priority moved quite quickly through Congress. We can talk more kind of about why that is.

But there is this sense I think that part of why the American Rescue Plan moved as quickly as it did is because, sort of Biden was a driving force and that there was a sense among folks on the hill that it was important to give kind of first legislative wind, rack something a big help the American people. What Biden had campaigned on; it's what congressional Democrats with their narrowest majorities had campaigned on.

And as we kind of think over the next couple of months, the next several big legislative priorities, it's a little less clear to me whether that kind of need to get a win mentality is going to help drive agreement on the two components of the infrastructure plan. There is the jobs piece and then there is the piece that is meant to support American families. And that's in part because kind of the choice about how to proceed on those other next legislative items is a little bit more can't get it. There are some more strategic choices.

There is this question about how bipartisan does, as measured by working with congressional Republicans. Bill was talking about the pulling on the jobs package and the package to support American families. Those are elements that are quite popular among voters of both parties. But if we think about bipartisanship as whether there will be Republicans who are willing to vote for something in Congress, how aggressively does the Biden White House want to work with Congress to try and construct such a package.

There is this question of how and in what ways to use the reconciliation process, which is a special set of budgetary procedures that allow for certain legislating without the threat of a filibuster. That was used for the American Rescue Plan. There are kind of a number of open strategic and procedural questions about the degree to which and how many more times that process is available for additional legislative priorities by the Biden team.

What I will say though, is at the very least, the Biden White House has not been a destabilizing force in moving things through Congress in the way that the Trump White House sometimes was. So for the about things that happened during the Trump administration, like the record government shutdown at the end of 2010, the beginning of 2019. That happened in part because President Trump

himself would sort of say one thing and one meeting and another thing in a different meeting and it did not help Congress kind of drive to agreement when there was disagreement within Congress, which is inevitable.

So I think that one important kind of feature of the first hundred days is that that's not what we're seeing anymore. We are seen sort of the White House as a consistent -- taking a consistent position on issues. When the White House says this is how they feel about a particular legislative proposal, there is much less concern that Joe Biden is going to change his mind on a dime.

And then the last thing I will say, I've been talking so far about kind of legislation. It's also important always when we are told that Congress at the beginning of a new administration to make a note of how Congress is -- how the Senate is doing in processing presidential nominations. Our Brookings nonresident colleague, Katie Tenpas, has a great tracker on this that is continually updated on the Brookings website. When you sort of take it out and look at as of last week, the last time it was updated, Biden is going a little bit quicker than Trump, a little bit slower than Obama in terms of staffing up Senate confirmable positions in the first 100 days. It's was absolutely knowing that for Biden, some of that obstacle, some of the reason that that has not moved as quickly as some folks would have liked involves in part the long delay that we experience in the Senate organizing itself at the beginning of the year.

So we didn't know who was going to control the Senate until those two runoff elections in Georgia the first week of January. And then it took several more weeks for Leader Schumer and Leader McConnell to reach agreement on how they were going to organize a tight Senate. And so that I think has delayed somewhat the process of getting folks confirmed. That's again, just an important thing to keep an eye on, particularly given how closely divided Congress is.

The Senate could not be closer. It's tied 50/50. And so as we move out of some of this sort of big legislative, low hanging fruit and think about other priorities that the administration has that may be more difficult to get done legislatively, who is in these executive branch positions through this and it has confirmed. It's going to be I think quite important. So that will be another thing to keep in mind on going forward.

MS. KAMARCK: Great. And again, for our listeners, our viewers, Molly has a piece on Congress and the first 100 days on the Brookings website. And also the -- Katie Tenpas has updated her

account of the way personnel is going. And so that should be up sometime today, a final update for the first 100 days.

Camille, there was a very -- a sort of famous January memo from Chief of Staff Ron Klain to President Biden in which he pointed out that there were four overlapping and compounding crises, the COVID-19 crisis, the economic crisis, the climate crisis, and the racial equity crisis. I mentioned in my opening remarks, COVID-19 and climate. How is -- can you fill us in a little bit? Give us your judgment on how he is doing on but the economic front and on the racial equity front?

MS. BUSETTE: Sure. Thanks, Elaine. It is great to be here. Good morning, everybody. Thanks for joining us. So I'm going to start with the economy, because I think the picture there is a little clearer than it is on the racial equity front. So on the economy, I think it's very, very clear that we are about to be on a really fast ride. In April 2020, so a little over a year ago, our unemployment rate was 14.8% nationally. We are now down to 6% nationally across the board. And that is likely to drop significantly in the next few months.

So by one of the measures of the economy that's important, do people have jobs, the Biden administration is just doing an excellent job. And most of that has been driven by both the intense and very overall very successful vaccination effort, and also as Molly mentioned, the quick passage of the American Rescue Plan, which really has led not only to a certain level of stabilization, but a high level of consumer spending because of the stimulus checks and the unemployment benefits that are included as part of that plan.

So I think we're doing really well. There are lots of sectors of the economy that were really down on their backs are back again. Maybe not exactly where we were, but certainly heading in that direction. And that's true for the food services industry, somewhat for hospitality, leisure, some of the segments that really just have been really battling almost closure in the last year or so.

So you think about Disneyland. Disneyland in California just recently opened this week. So those are the kinds of things that are happening.

So the economy, I think the picture in the economy is very clear for the moment. And the reason I say for the moment is that what we're doing now is we're making up for lost ground in terms of economic growth and in terms of unemployment. However, there are still 4.2 million people who are in

the long term unemployment categories. So that means people who have been unemployed for 27 weeks or more. And that's a pretty high number. So we still need to get that to be chipped away at.

We still have, in the Black community, 9.6% unemployment, which is much higher than the 5.4% unemployment rate experienced by whites at this moment. So we have some ground to make up, but overall, doing pretty well there.

I was in terms of racial equity, it's a little bit more mixed. And the reason I say that is something like racial equity is just going to be very, very difficult to obviously embrace an address in 100 days.

But here are the things that I think are positive. So the first thing I think is that the Biden administration has normalized the concept of systemic racism. This is now a common term. They use it a lot. They use it a lot and official pronouncements. They're basically not touching that systemic racism exists and that it needs to be rectified. The generally speaking, normalizing that is a good thing because kind of acknowledging you have a problem is always the first step to trying to solve it.

They are also using an old government approach. So every federal agency is really test with addressing racial equity issues. And that's really a big advance, a big advancement from the previous administration and certainly from even prior administrations. So I think doing that in a much more overt and explicit way is certainly a step in the right direction.

The Biden administration has obviously made it a real priority to try to make sure that vaccination happens among marginalized communities. It also put a lot of – given a lot of attention to paid family – to pay leave to get vaccines. This is important because a lot of low income workers don't get time off and this allows them to do that. They're making a great effort to reach out to marginalized communities and include them in policy dialogue. I mean, we've seen this a lot with the staffing and cabinet post, but a lot of the meetings that are happening in the White House are also really inclusive.

And they are addressing the national conversation, particularly around policing and police brutality pretty directly, and making it clear that the administration is in this struggle. The Department of Justice as we knew their attention on consent decrees. That's a, again, very positive step. That was done in the Obama administration. So we're just making up for lost ground there.

And they are also focusing on combating domestic extremism. So the FBI, Department

of Defense, Homeland Security, Department of Justice, all of them are involved in that.

But where I think we have – and this is something we will probably talk about a little bit later in the conversation, but we have a crisis in unemployment and we have a crisis in policing. And those two crises are going to take a lot of work with a lot of different kinds of stakeholders to get to a point where all Americans are comfortable with where we are.

MS. KAMARCK: Great. Thank you, Camille. I want to go next to John Hudak. John, there have been – you know, what happens to presidents, as you know having studied the presidency as well, what happens to presidents is a lot of things come at them that they didn't really plan for and would rather frankly have not been dealing with. Of course one of the biggest in the Biden first hundred days has been the surge of new people at the southern border, the new immigrants.

And sort of related – not related to that, that back home, and Camille mention this, is the sort of nonstop episodes of police brutality in policing departments around the country. I would like you to touch on both of those. Would you – how would you evaluate Biden's performance so far in these two areas?

MR. HUDAK: Sure. Thanks, Elaine, and thanks everyone for joining us today. Immigration is a really tough issue. And I think while I agree with the comments that you opened with the lame, and the polling data that Bill went over during his initial remarks, immigration is an area that really bucks this trend. This is not an area where the Biden administration has under promise and over delivered. In a lot of ways, is an area with the administration overpromised and so far has under delivered.

And the American public is recognizing this. Right now only about 37% of Americans support the administration's handling of immigration issues. That's in part because of some bad press. It's in part because of some issues that are a bit out of the president's control. But it's also in part because of some choices that this administration has made.

And so one of the problems the administration faces, one of the challenges that it faces, is that the previous administration dismantled, in many ways, the immigration system that we had. And they did so purposely. They broke the system not to rebuild it. They brought a system for the sake of breaking in.

And that creates an administrative challenge for the new administration that is twofold. First, Americans expect something different from President Biden. But at the same time that those expectations are high, there is, I think, another appreciation in the public that there is an administrative rebuilding that has to happen in order for that agenda to be put into action and be achieved.

At the same time, there's two other forces that are acting on the administration and on this area policy that in some ways are outside of the presidents hands, but at the same time upgrading problems out of policies successes. And Camille touched someone of them, and that is a recovering economy. We know that when the economy is booming in the United States there is pressure, particularly in the northern triangle, but in other areas of the world, for individuals to come to this country. And that is, I think, compounded by the fact that we are also doing well from a public health perspective relative to a lot of other countries around the world in terms of achieving the level of vaccinations that we have. That to create the motivation for individuals to come to the United States.

At the same time, President Biden has changed rhetorically in a dramatic way, in a dramatic break from his predecessor, by showing a more humanitarian approach to issues around immigration. That to motivate individuals to come to the United States. And so there are a lot of forces that are driving individuals here. And when they get here, the Biden administration is ill-equipped to deal with it because of the choices of the previous administration.

That said, this was obvious, I think. This was foreseeable for the administration, for the transition team. They knew both that this would – there was a crisis at the border when they came to office and they knew that as the economy improved and as presidential rhetoric changed, that that challenge would only grow larger. And they appear by most accounts, and certainly by approval from the public or disapproval from the public, underprepared for that moment. And that creates a real challenge.

It's compounded by a couple of other areas that the administration has really mishandled. One being the refusal to revoke Title 42, which allows the administration to turn away individuals at the border for public health reasons. The other is the Biden administration promised to raise the cap on the number of refugees that would be admitted to the country. There were clear expectations that the president would do better on immigration. And so far, he has not met does public expectations.

And is important to note, these are not just expectations among Latinos in the United

States. These are expectations across the Democratic coalition that expected the president to be but humanitarian, which he has, but also a problem solver in an area that was disastrous during the Trump administration. So far, that movement just have that happen in a sufficient enough way.

And I think at the same time, in the same way that we often think of immigration issues as being important to only the Latino community, I think sometimes we think of policing issues as being only important to the Black community in the United States. And that is not true either. Democrats and across the board want this administration to do more on policing.

Policing, as Camille said, is a really can't get it issue. It's not something a president can handle himself. It is something where a does the federal government needs to work with state and local governments, with law enforcement agencies, with attorneys general, etc. And that is a coordinated process that requires time. It requires space. It requires communications and it requires a real central strategy.

I agree 100% with Camille. Expecting President Biden to solve issues around racial justice and policing and police reform in the first 100 days is just asking too much. But all eyes across the Democratic Party with moderates, with independence, and with Republicans will be on the way that this administration can coordinate that policy nationwide to make sure that what we're seeing on Facebook videos and other types of social media a police brutality changes and that accountability is a prominent part of the system.

MS. KAMARCK: That's great, John. That's very interesting. You know, as you were talking about the warning signs on immigration, it reminds me of the Obama administration, which miss a lot of the warning signs on the Veterans Administration, which then blew up and became a scandal. So a lot of these things are there in the transition and people make mistakes. People miss things. The boy ignore things that then come back to bite them.

Jon Valant, let's turn to education for minute, because of course one of president elect Biden's biggest and most popular pledges was that he would get not only Americans vaccinated, but that he would get the children back in school. That was enormously popular. What's the status of children, vis-à-vis schooling right now? And what are the prospects for the Biden administration in the area of education in the coming years?

MR. VALANT: Thanks Elaine, and thanks everyone at home for joining us. So education has been on a lot of people's minds, as you say. Schooling has been on a lot of people's minds. I should start by stating the obvious, which is that this has been a very difficult 14 months for a lot of parents and kids across the country. There are lots of problems being canceled and kindergartners behind Zoom cameras and parents who would like to go to work, but can't. It's been a very difficult 14 months.

And that's been especially true for some groups of students. So students in poverty and students of color have been kind of especially likely to have the schools closed. Students in rural areas who have particular problems with Wi-Fi connectivity, students with disabilities who have challenges and being disconnected with the resources that they really need.

So kids need to be in school. And parents need their kids to be in school. And we have some research on what's happened with gets out of school and is not pretty. We see a lot of evidence that learning over this past 14 months has not been what it typically has.

And so Elaine, to your question, what the Biden administration did early on is a set of metric. And they said that within 100 days, the majority of elementary and secondary schools will be open five days a week for in person learning. And they kind of stumbled around with how exactly they were going to define that metric, but that was basically with them are promising.

And, you know, there is – it's always been kind of a silly metric. So partly it's silly because school reopening to our local decisions that the federal government cannot commence ghost open. That's a decision that really rests with school boards and a bunch of local officials around the country.

The other reason it was a silly metric is because the best data we had early on and like the very beginning of the Biden administration suggested that we were already there, or that we were almost certainly going to get there. So this is maybe a prime example of under promise and over deliver. There was almost no chance without something really – like a really bad turn with the virus. There was almost no chance that they weren't going to hit that metric. So the metric itself was kind of silly.

But they have done some important things on that point in particular. The first is that they depoliticize school reopening's. So this – the questions of whether or not schools are open in person or is virtual learning, is not one that sounds inherently like it should be a political question, but it certainly has

been. And there is research. I did some when school districts were announcing their very initial plans.

And then there's been some research on what actually happened as it played out that looked at which school districts in which parts of the country are opening in person and which are keeping with virtual learning. And what has predicted school openings is not COVID transmission. It's not the sort of local, public health danger. It's not characteristics of the population so much. What it is, is his politics. If the county Trumps the board is sort of the strongest predictor of what school districts have been doing.

So this question got really charged and really politicized in large part because the Trump administration charged and politicize it. So the Biden administration was stepping into that context. As a what I think they did that was really important was they communicated and signaled early on that getting kids back in school in person is a priority and is a priority to Democrats too and that students need to be in school physically. And I think that that sort of tone did lower the temperature a bit on those at school reopening's.

And along with that – and I should say too that they put out guidance and a sort of helped. There are things you can do from Washington even if you can't command that schools open. You can put out guidance. And the new education secretary, Miguel Cardona, has been kind of touring schools and talk a lot about what it takes to reopen safely and well. So they've depoliticized.

And then the other piece of that that I think has been important as they got resources to schools quickly and it was a very substantial investment from the federal government. So in the American Rescue Plan, it was about \$125 billion that went to K-12 schools to help them with reopening and then what would follow after reopening. And there should have been more money in the last administration to help with sort of immediate needs and helping students get back in the schools we have these shutdowns. This is sort of, hopefully at least, on the telling of that.

But what this money is doing, is it helpful for districts that a thing about what students need and what communities need and they're using it and sort of interesting and creative ways because they have some flexibility. So they can offer tutors and counselors. They can offer summer school or extended learning time. And all those kind of things take money.

And so even though the metric I think was kind of silly and there's only so much they can do by sort of toning down the politics a little bit and then getting resources so that schools that are

reopening can both get open and then also address some of the issues that we've had over these last 14 months, I think it moved is in the right direction.

MS. KAMARCK: Great. Well, thank you. Thank you, everybody. This was a good overview of – and not overly rosy and not overly pessimistic. And so against this overview, I would like to ask each of you, and I would just go in the order that we originally did starting with Bill. How would you compare Biden's first 100 days to the beginnings of other administrations? Post Roosevelt, of course. What are the similarities? Are the differences? Is there any president that sort of jumps out at you either as a similar trajectory or a very different one? Bill, you want to take a crack at that?

MR. GALSTON: Well, this is a tough one, Elaine. But let me just snatch from the air, the three comparisons that are most frequently made to FDR, to LBJ, and to Ronald Reagan. And I hope there are some people watching or listening who are 36 or younger. If you are, you have never experienced a presidential landslide defined roughly as a victory by 10 percentage points or more.

This is the longest period in American history without a presidential landslide. Joe Biden certainly didn't get one. He didn't get one on his own behalf. He didn't get one in the house. He didn't get one in the Senate, which were about as narrowly divided as they possibly could be.

But by comparison, here are couple of landslide that history has recorded. FDR 1932, he won the presidency with an 18 percentage point margin. Democrats gained 101 seats in the House of Representatives and 12 in the Senate. When the dust settled, Democrats had a margin of 313 to 117 in the house, and they had a 21 seat margin in the Senate. They even picked up 11 governorships. It was a top to bottom landslide. And that meant that FDR had enormous freedom of action. He knew that Congress would ratify whatever he proposed.

Or take LBJ. He won the presidency by an even larger margin in 1964, 23 percentage points. And when the dust had settled on that election, Democrats controlled the house by more than a 2 to 1 majority and they controlled the Senate by more than a 2 to 1 majority, 68 to 32. So if you're wondering why the New Deal got off to a fast start and kept on going or why the Great Society got to a fast start and kept on going, just keep your eye on those numbers that I've just cited. So the dissimilarity between those two fast starts in the political situation that the Biden administration faces could not be starker in my opinion.

Finally, Ronald Reagan. And this is a more interesting comparison in my view, because Reagan famously campaigned on and then announced as he became president that government wasn't the solution, government was the problem. Biden, it seems to me, is trying to put a minus sign in front of that proposition. And everything that he does is unified by the proposition that in the circumstances we now face, government is the solution and not the problem.

If he succeeds in establishing that premise in the minds of the American people as their default setting, and the jury is still out on that, then the next decades of American public policy could be very different from the past four decades where the frame was very much the opposite. However, and I will end on this morning, Ronald Reagan's first year was not a single victory. It witnessed multiple legislative victories.

If after the first year the Biden administration we can see not only the rescue plan, but also some version of the jobs plan and some version of the family plan and acted as well as the other policies that Camille and John and Jon were talking about, then we can begin to talk about a comparison with Ronald Reagan.

MS. KAMARCK: That's great. And I would extend to your point about people under 36, or just young people in general. This is – the flipside is this is probably the first president you've ever seen who has this much legislative and government experience. We really have not had – I mean, Obama did not have a deep – a breadth of experience. George W. Bush did not have that. You really do have to go back in time to get a president with this many years behind him. And I'm not sure there are any that have this many years of experience. So we will see how that helps him.

Molly?

MS. REYNOLDS: Yeah. So I mean, I think just the sort of pick up where Bill left off, when we think about comparisons between the Biden first hundred days and other similar periods in relation to the U.S. Congress, it's really hard to make a lot of comparisons because of the, but historically high levels of polarization that we see between the parties in Congress and the extremely narrow majority that Democrats enjoy in both chambers.

And so if you say think back to the beginning of the Obama administration for example. Then, not only did Democrats have a much larger majority in the Senate than they do now, there was a

period of time in the middle 2009 with 60 votes in the Senate, which seems like a pipe dream frankly to either party of getting a majority of that size in the near future. And so we both have – the Democrats but had more Senate votes to work with there.

And also, you can remember a lot of the first six, nine months of the Obama administration was similarly wrapped up in these conversations about working with Republicans. But they were kind of more Republicans that folks thought were potentially potential legislative partners than I think folks think now. So again, it's just really hard to draw a good comparison. And we see that when we just look at the way in which the Biden administration and the Democratic Congress are thinking about using the budget reconciliation project to be basically all of their kind of party defining agenda items, which was a – has been a feature of the reconciliation process in recent years, but not really before 2010. That's really not – or you could argue that the Bush tax cuts fall into that category, but certainly not before the early 2000s.

So for me, again, think about this relation to the U.S. Congress, it really is difficult to kind of draw a good effective comparison.

MS. KAMARCK: Okay. Fascinating. So let's go now to Camille. Camille?

MS. BUSETTE: Yeah. No, I would agree largely with Molly and Bill that the comparisons are few. I'm going to talk about two areas. So one is the economy and then secondly on racial equity. On the economy, with respect to the philosophy that government can solve a lot of our aggregate demand issues and our economic issues, the philosophy that is being deployed here is not that different from maybe what FDR had deployed during the Great Depression. What works for Biden in terms of the philosophy is that we're just still in the middle of the COVID pandemic and recession. And if ever there were an instance of how important the government is, certainly COVID generated that illustrative example.

So if the Biden administration is able to push forward is the other jobs act and families act, then we might get to a point in the United States with that philosophy is a little bit more dominant than it is now. But again, the context of the congressional numbers is just unlike what we saw during FDR or LBJ.

But one thing I would say, is in terms of making sure that that – in terms of encouraging

that philosophy around government involved in the economy, Biden is certainly in better shape than Obama was because of Obama, due partly to sort of the way things were done by the members in Congress, but also just the general philosophical kind of context around government economy, the Obama administration actually undertook a pretty limited fiscal stimulus relative to the problem. Some say Biden has some advantages over the Obama administration given that they were both – they both started in the middle of a crisis.

On racial equity though, I don't think there is – there are any comparisons. When we think about racial equity, we're going to think about the Kennedy administration. We are talking LBJ. Those are when the civil rights movement was really I think at its height. And LBJ was in a position, given his congressional majorities, to really enact a pretty radical set of programs. That is not going to be the case for Biden. So Biden is really going to have to work and move stakeholders together to get the kind of movement that LBJ got through legislative programs.

So again, don't think there is a comparison, but I do think that Biden is helped in this instance by the fact that almost everyone understands. They may not agree with, but they understand the term systemic racism. They know it exists. Certainly all policymakers are aware of it and they are trying to navigate that. And that's pretty different from the LBJ administration.

MS. KAMARCK: Okay, interesting. And you know, one of the things that of course Kennedy, who had generally a fairly disastrous first hundred days because he authorized the Bay of Pigs invasion, which turned out to be sort of a mess. Generally, Kennedy is not given very good marks. But one of the things that he did do early on, I'm not sure was quite in the hundred days, was he did brake control of the rules committee, which is one of those little pieces of history Molly would appreciate being a rules expert. But until Kennedy, the rules committee was controlled, was locked in by a group of Southern segregationist senators. So breaking the southern control over the rules committee was in fact the critical procedural step for going forward with the civil rights legislation that we then saw.

Let's see. John Hudak and Jon Valant, how would you compare him?

MR. HUDAK: So I agree with everything that's been said so far. I think finding a comparison is difficult. And I will say there are two real reasons why finding that comparison is tough. The first is just the sheer amount of reversal that the Biden administration needs to do relative to his

predecessor. It's really unprecedented. Every party transition and the presidency create some of that upheaval or some significant or nontrivial level of the people.

But this transition was far different. I mean, if we go back to the beginning of the Obama administration, President Obama and President Bush were very different presidents. They sell policy in very different ways. But even on one of the most signature policies of the Obama campaign in 2008, form policy, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, President Obama's policy ultimately was not that dramatically different than his predecessors. I think what a lot of people fail to appreciate is just how much continuity there is from presidency to presidency even during a party transition. This is very different.

We are seeing the most that's one of the most, if not the most progressive minded presidents in our history in terms of the policies that he has laid out and the types of ideas that he has gotten behind versus a president who was conservative by a lot of metrics, but also someone who thrived in political and administrative chaos. And that is such a dramatic clash with you Joe Biden is as an individual, who he was as a senator, who he was as a vice president, and now who he is as a president. I think just that dramatic shift in itself makes the comparison a lot more challenging.

But next, while we've had presidents enter office during crises, we've talked about FDR's obviously, President Obama entered during a significant financial crisis and economic crisis. Joe Biden, as you started off the program Elaine, you noted the four areas of crisis that the president mentioned, a public health crisis, and economic crisis, a climate crisis, and a racial equity crisis. I would add to that an immigration crisis and a crisis of democracy as well that we are seeing right now as states are restricting voting rights as we saw an insurrection is the attack on the United States Capitol to interrupt constitutional and democratic processes. These are real.

And while most presidents come to office with some type of crisis on the play, I can't think of a president who has come to office with so many large, different crises that he is a deal with. And so the ability to compare Biden to Obama or Biden to Reagan or Biden to Truman just is so difficult because of the magnitude and diversity of the challenges that he faces.

MS. KAMARCK: Great. Jon Valant.

MR. VALANT: So, I will pick up right there. I think both of John's points applied to education in particular. So you have a whole lot of reversal what was happening in the top administration

and you're stepping into a setting in education where schools are closed. And that is totally unprecedented. And so it is I think difficult to come up with comparisons historically.

Historically, the federal role in education has been extremely limited and it's ramped up a bit lately. But even out only about a percent of funding of our public education system comes from the federal government. So is still really limited. But that doesn't keep incoming administrations from having ideas and policy priorities. They often have things that they think school should do and ways they think school systems should look.

And what is characterized the last few administrations is some frustration when they realize that they have ideas, but there is resistance to the idea that the federal government is a place to do it. So for the Trump administration, they came and had and a vision early on that they would have a lot of support within the Republican Party for basically private school vouchers like private school choice programs, and were immediately frustrated by the lack of support among even Congressional Republicans whose feelings about federal control were stronger than their feelings about private school voucher program spatially.

And the Obama administration too at particular ideas on schools. Things like how we evaluate teacher performance. And they ran into trouble of their own. I do think – so there are some similarities with the Obama administration. They had the money that they were willing to sort of put up schools. To me what is the most interesting distinctions of our between the Obama administration and the Biden administration is the Obama administration basically took that money and they dangled it as a carrot to get states to try to sign on to the Obama administration's policy priorities. And so there was a here we have these race of the top funds and we will offer them up for states that are willing to get behind our thinking on teacher evaluation and then charter schools and then lots of other things.

The Biden administration is taking a different path in that for them the resources almost are the policies. They're getting resources into schools, but that they are not setting it up as competitive grants, which was kind of a preferred way of going in the Obama administration. They are trying to just get funds to schools. And even some of the newer proposals, which are necessarily K-12 focus, if it's ramping up universal pre-K or community college, those are basically proposals to get a lot of money out into the system without necessarily directing exactly how things look. So I think they have a sort of a

philosophical difference they are and how they are think about things. But again, no sort of perfect comparison.

MS. KAMARCK: Jon, that is so interesting because of course I was in the Al Gore campaign in 2000 and there were long stretches of a campaign where both Al Gore and George W. Bush acted as if they were running for school superintendent. And it was just as I was just very cognizant of the fact that they had really very little control over the situation.

And I think to John Hudak, that's going to be sort of the frustration with policing as well. I mean, policing and education, which is so important to so many Americans, the federal impact, the presidential impact, is hard to come by.

Okay. So let me ask you to go around very quickly before we go to our audience questions. I want you to talk about clouds on the horizon for the Biden administration, things that could go wrong. Now John, you've already mentioned that. We will come back to you, but I know you have some other thoughts.

But I want to start to Bill with sort of a specific question, Bill, which is that one of the things that was unique about the Trump presidency is how he never tried to expand his base. He didn't even make it – he really made very little effort at expanding the base. He just played to his base all the time and some people think very much to his detriment in the midterm elections. Let me ask you, can Biden expand his base? You began our session here with a very provocative thought, which is Biden is basically where he is the day he was elected. Can he expand his base?

MR. GALSTON: Oh, he is sure trying. If you look at the speech to the joint sessions of Congress that he delivered last week, the first two thirds of the speech was very much directed to working-class and middle-class Americans. And he was saying in effect, here's what government can do for you if you give me the chance to lead.

And juxtapose this to the fact that his approval rating right now among white voters without college degrees stands at 36%, the Biden bet is that the class appeal can soften working-class objections to the Democratic Party into the Biden presidency. And those objections are not simply white working-class objections. As we saw during the election and as we see now and survey results, many Latinos or working-class Latinos also share some of these reservations about the Democratic Party's

agenda.

The other side of the argument, and is an ongoing argument among strategists in the Democratic Party, is that the essence of the working class opposition to Democrats and to the Biden presidency is less about economics than it is about culture and race. And if that's the case, then the program announced in the joint session will, if enacted, have many beneficial results, but it may not that kind of political payoff that the Biden administration is hoping for.

MS. KAMARCK: John, John Hudak, you laid out a scenario where the Biden administration was that had not yet come to grips with the actual operational or administrative side of the difficulties at the border. Can they turn this around? Can they make this issue go away?

MR. HUDAK: Yeah, I think the capacity is there. Certainly the intention is there from the Biden administration. Putting the vice president in charge is the one person on this issue I think is both significant from an optics perspective. It elevates the issue within the White House, but also that it also shows that there is going to be significant staff level attention paid to this in the White House and in the relevant agencies. I think the administration recognizes both that this is a humanitarian issue. It is as I said earlier, matters to more than just Latino voters. There are progressives, there are moderates, there are independents, there are Republicans, some Republicans who want to see this crisis resolved in a serious and quick and humanitarian way.

So getting the administrative apparatus rebuilt, staffed, and moving, is going to take time. It's not going – as I said, it's not going to be salt in 100 days. But the president needs to talk more about his vision for immigration policy. He talked about immigration here and there. He talked a bit about it in the speech before the joint session, but he hasn't laid out that type of vision. And I think given his approach to the presidency as being a consoler in chief when necessary, being more of a grandfatherly figure, showing that type of compassion that he has demonstrated at other moments in his career, it is critically important to showing the American public boat that he cares deeply about the issue and that his administration is working on this issue.

But at the same time, and to extend the question little bit Elaine, from your initial question about issues on the horizon, I think immigration has been issue on the horizon for decades. We are seen at a breaking point now largely because of what the previous administration did. But I think one of the

other challenges, one of the other sets of challenges that's going to hit this administration, maybe not this year, but in year two or year three, is something that Camille touched on earlier, and that is an ongoing crises that have happened not just in the current environment.

But Camille was talking about the unemployment crisis, Black Americans having a higher unemployment rate than white Americans. That is not unique to the pandemic. That is something that has been true, essentially permanently throughout history. And those types of ongoing crises, those types of ongoing inequalities, those types of ongoing policy challenges are going to need to get addressed.

Our colleague Jimmy Schuetz writes about the housing crisis in the United States very convincingly. This is something that has been ramped up during COVID, but it is not something that started during COVID. John has talked about our challenges and crises in education. Those are not new to COVID. What they look like, how they are manifesting a new, but these predate this current crisis. And of course racial justice is another. These are all issues that the president is dealing with a lot right now it has to do with the law in the context of the current environment, but also these are things that have institutional reforms that need to happen so that we don't just get out of the problem that we are in, but we start to resolve the problems that we've been facing for decades.

MS. KAMARCK: Camille, add to that. It was on the rise in?

MS. BUSETTE: Yeah. Well, I'm just going to – I'm going to add to what has already been said as opposed to kind of repeating it. But I would say there are five sort of dark clouds on the horizon. One is sustainable economic growth. And I think we've got a little bump, but now we've got to sustain that. And I would say that very much depends on the infrastructure, what happens with our infrastructure bill or bills. Policing, as John Hudak has mentioned, Black unemployment and racial equity and racial equity more generally.

The fourth and the fifth or actually form policy issues. One is what's happening between Iran and Israel, I think it's going to be a form policy, very delicate issue. And what happens with our relationship to China? So those are inaudible.

MS. KAMARCK: And I would – by the way, we haven't talked about foreign policy very much on this, but I would draw our viewers' attention to two FixGov posts, one by Steve Pfeiffer on

Biden's relationship with Russia, which is very, very interesting, 180 degree turn around. And another by David Dollar on Biden's relationship with China.

Jon, and then we will end with Molly and will go to audience questions. Jon, what's on the horizon?

MR. VALANT: So potential dark clouds, I think if we sort of split politics and public opinion on one hand and the policy on the other. To me, the two potential warrior areas on politics and public opinion that come from the education side, one is if COVID takes a turn and if we have a third school you're disrupted, that's going to be on Biden and lots of people's minds. And that will be the case first, if it's actually the product of a bad turn in the pandemic. It will also be the case if people start to think that is really an overreach from teachers unions or someone else in schools are being close unnecessarily. The Biden administration is perceived by many as being pretty cozy with teachers unions. And so I think there is some risk they are on the sort of politics, public opinion side.

The second, which has been coming up for a few years now and is coming up again, and I may be thinking about this a little less and the politics side, but schools are getting wrapped up in culture wars, particularly as it relates to transgender students. And for long time that was about bathroom use. Now is about transgender girls participating in girl sports. And I don't – everyone else on this panel is better equipped than I am to talk about the politics of that. I will say I worry about the impact of that on transgender students. There are – I'm not sure there is a more vulnerable student – group of students in schools than transgender students. And those messages are heard clearly and that's groupware by any measure whether it's suicidal thoughts or lots of really bad measures has it rough. So I would hope that that conversation is had with care and awareness, that those messages are heard. Those are kind of on the politics side.

On the policy side, they have big, ambitious plans as they relate to children and families, and that's from early childhood all the way up through college. I think it's very to be determined about where those go. I mean even in the American family plan, within the Democratic Party, Joe mentioned he had some thoughts and reservations about the idea of universal pre-K. So there is some sales to do just within the party on the message with what is to come of that. But I think it's very TBD to see where that's going.

MS. KAMARCK: Molly, finally. And over the weekend, the Russian Post had a little piece about how retirements, democratic party retirements could even further jeopardize the Democratic majority in Congress. Your thoughts on clouds on the horizon.

MS. REYNOLDS: Yeah. So would say that there is sort of a short-term cloud. I don't know exactly what the weather analogy is. But in sort of the –

MS. KAMARCK: Happy cloud.

MS. REYNOLDS: In the near term there is this question of sort of our there are the votes among Democrats in Congress for the next two pieces of the Biden administration's plan, the jobs plan and the plan to help American families. There are – whether does go together, whether simply, sort of in what configuration.

We've spent a lot of time talking about how much of that can be done in the reconciliation process that's not subject to the filibuster. But that rule is a magic. If you don't have the agreement, it doesn't matter as much or how you are trying to move it, that you're trying to move it through without the possibility of filibusters. So that's a big near-term question.

And that's everything from, can they move something where – without repealing a piece of – without resolving the state multi-tax seduction issue, which I know that something Bill has been a lot about, to either the votes for some of these expansions of programs to help families like Jon Valant which is talking about in terms of universal pre-K. So it's kind of a near term.

And then over the kind of medium to longer term, the midterm. So it's May 2021, but the midterms in 2022 will be here before we know it. Elaine, you just mention the number of debts or some Democratic retirements in Congress. We recently, last week, the week before, got the new apportionment for congressional districts that there are some states that are losing sees. There are states that are gaining seats. They will be retrying all these lines. We know from our American political history that as close of thing as we have to an iron law of American elections is that the president's party tends to lose seats in his first midterm. So that would – that structurally is not a great sign for Democrats continuing with their majorities past 2022, particularly in the house with have a very slim majority to begin with.

The Senators a little bit different because we have a particular set of (inaudible) a

particular map that we are looking at the looks of little better for Democrats than perhaps the house does. But that sort of debts that's looming in the not so distant future. So that really does going to bring it back to this question of, for however much the Biden administration wants to work with Congress, do they really need to try and get as much of that done as quickly as possible because who knows what will happen after November 2022.

MS. KAMARCK: Okay. All right. Well, we're going to turn to audience questions. Please send in any questions that you have, #100Days, and the other is events@Brookings.edu. We do have a question I think it's mostly for Bill. Bill, is there a difference between how Republicans and Democrats are evaluating the hundred days?

MS. KAMARCK: In your first statement, but –

MR. GALSTON: Yeah, just very, very quickly, Democrats are almost unanimously supportive of, and in most cases, enthusiastic about Joe Biden's first hundred days. Republicans take exactly the opposite view of the matter. They believe that he is – that Mr. Biden is moving the country toward socialism with American characteristics. But nonetheless, socialism. They disagree with them about economics. They disagree with them about culture. And you have about 1 in 10 Republicans who have a positive view of the first 100 days of the Biden administration. So the polarization that characterize the election 2020 is carrying over full strength into the early days of the Biden administration.

MS. KAMARCK: Okay, related to that – okay. We have a question, and I'm going to elaborate on it a little bit, from Ray, who is actually wondering, is there a downside to all the money that Biden is giving away. And particularly to the question of these \$1400 checks, what is this going to do to us economically? Is there a budget cost? Something that – is it going to be paid for by the wealthier corporations? How is this going to affect our overall future? Camille, why don't you take that?

MS. BUSETTE: Sure, I'm happy to do that. It's a great question. So the question is essentially, when people stop getting giveaways, so to speak, and they realize that they actually that somebody's going to have to pay for additional investments in the economy, are they going to be as enthusiastic about the Biden presidency and priorities. And so the question there is really about how does the Biden administration talk about and talk about the policies and actually showcase the outcomes of those policies.

So is increasingly clear that the Biden administration is going to be able to – had to bring over Democrats who are more recalcitrant on the Senate side by really talking about how they're going to pay for these next few legislative priorities, so the American jobs act and the families act. And right now they are talk about taxes on corporations and wealthy individual people, people who earn more than \$400,000 annually. But that's obviously just an opening gambit. And so there's going to be a lot of negotiation around that.

One thing we do know, is that economists, physically folks in her own tax policy Center, have said that we actually have a fair amount of fiscal room. So we are not at a point where we have to be thinking extremely carefully about the costs of more investment versus the – I mean, the cost and benefit. So we are at a point now where if we do spend the money that the Biden administration foresees that we spend and then we bring in some of that money, but not completely all of it, we will still generate the kind of economic growth that will more than compensate for that fiscal investment.

So I think it's important for Americans to understand that but the sales job and the responsibility for that sales job to the American public is actually what the Biden administration has to really concern themselves with.

And then, they also have to do – they also have negotiations that they have to undertake with members of the stick this Senate. That's kind of the – that's sort of where we are on the economic picture.

MS. KAMARCK: I have an interesting one from Richard for Jon Valant. And you'll like this Richard. If some big city's districts turn out to be laggards on school reopening is there some way -- do you see the administration pressuring them to move faster?

MR. VALANT: Thank you, and good question, Richard.

I have -- I real quick want to pick up on something Camille was just talking about. So I think when we're thinking about cost unlike what these programs are there's been an interesting debate for a long time in public policy circles and research circles about whether to offer programs in universal or targeted ways, with the benefit of targeted provision being you can sort of efficiently get access to the people who need the most.

But potentially, there being some benefits politically of more universal programs. I think

it's really interesting that two of the big ticket items from the American Rescue Plan are both universal. That's universal pre-K and then free community college. So I'm curious about the politics on that.

To Richard's question about school districts the Biden administration has been very clear on this. They think that school should be open and they – I mean just this week Miguel Cardona, the education secretary is visiting schools that have been a little bit reluctant to open and, you know, suggesting that they move.

The actual authority they have is very limited but what they can do is they can sort of keep talking about it and leaning on people they know to encourage them to get open. And also, just keep offering guidance and research in all those kind of things to make it as easy as possible.

So yes, I do think they're going to keep pushing.

MS. KAMARCK: Okay. Let's see. We have another one here from Richard Skinner which is besides the border, how do you see VP Harris's role developing in the Biden administration? And I'll – I've done a little bit of work on the vice presidency so I'll talk about that.

You know, modern vice presidents have tended to get specific jobs given to them, chores really, given to them from the president. And increasingly, as we went into the modern era these chores have been meaningful. Unlike Hubert Humphrey who was asked by Lyndon Johnson to chair the American Beauty and Tourism Commission, that was Hubert Humphrey's job from – given to him from Lyndon Johnson, not exactly a top priority.

And yet, since then presidents have given their vice presidents some pretty big tasks. This is the first one. The immigration is the first one. VP Harris has got a tough job. Nobody has really done this well before, dealing with three countries, the northern triangle, that are just in terrible trouble anyway you look at it get up on foot and leave their countries is things are pretty bad in those countries.

So we'll see what she can do there. This is a first big test. The other question will be will she get some kind of ongoing job from the president? Al Gore had reinventing government and he had almost all of climate change was in his bailiwick. And he had the relationship, as did Cheney, where basically the president said you do it; this is yours, and I won't second-guess you.

So it remains to be seen, not just what jobs Harrison gets but what kind of autonomy she has in those jobs. One of my own colleagues from the Clinton-Gore administration tells a story of people

on the Telecommunication Act, people always trying to run around Al Gore to go to Bill Clinton, only to be found out that Bill Clinton would say to them ask Al. And they thought they were doing an end run, and they couldn't.

So that's the one, to punch we want to look for with Harris. Not only what jobs does she get, but what kind of autonomy does she have in that administration to make policy and see it enacted. And that's a big one.

Let's see. Anybody else want to talk about Harris while I get new questions?

Yeah?

MR. GALSTON: Just very quickly. I find it interesting that her staff has been very careful to distinguish between the Golden Triangle assignment and immigration policy on a broader front. She has not visited the southern border. That is no accident. And I suspected that she and people around her are not eager to have her out front on what has been, as John Hudak has correctly argued, the most single difficult area for the Biden administration thus far.

And I think it will be interesting to see whether President Biden comes to her and says, I know this is a tough one, Kamila, but you got to do this. If necessary, take a bullet for doing it.

MS. KAMARCK: Yeah, well, that's interesting. John, did you have any --

MR. HUDAK: Yeah. On the point of what the vice president's role might become, or how it might develop in the administration, I think one of the things to look to is how much of the president is seeking to groom her to be his successor. If the president opts only to serve one term, or if he serves two terms, there will be an open primary in the Democratic Party.

And there are a lot of progressives who are skeptical of not just the president's progressive bona fides, but the vice president's progressive bona fides as well, given her record as the Attorney General of California, and as the District Attorney of San Francisco. And so there is a potential there for the president to say your biggest weakness in a primary will be from your left. Go out and be the progressive voice of this administration.

And if that happens, she can be leading the charge on a lot of issues that may be there successful, maybe they fail because there's opposition in Congress. Maybe they failed because there is opposition within the Democratic party. But if she can tamp down what will be an enormous race to run to

her left in a Democratic presidential primary, she can position herself well to be the next Democratic nominee after Biden chooses not to run, or is term limited.

Or, if that is not afforded to her, seeing whether she tries to carve out her own voice in that area could be one that then bills some tension between the president and the vice president. And so obviously we're only 100 days in, but I think the question that Richard asks about how her role develops is as important about the policies that she is focusing on as it is about the next open presidential primary.

MS. KAMARCK: Good.

MS. BUSETTE: I have just one thing to add. One small piece to add, which is on a thing that I think some folks maybe thought the vice president would be doing more of, but has ultimately not had to do much of, which is break ties in the Senate so far. Particularly on nominations. And so there was – when we ended up with the 50/50 split Senate there was a lot of, I think, since that may be what, particularly in these first couple of months that the vice president would actually have to spend a lot of time in the Senate breaking ties. And up until now she has had to – she has had to break exactly one tie on a nomination vote which was not until about 10 days ago. And so I think that that says something both about the kinds of folks that the Biden administration has it been picking for the roles that have come up for Senate confirmation so far.

And also, the degree to which while Republicans in the Senate might be sort of talking about some of these nominees that at the end of the day they're not ultimately necessarily going full bore ahead with obstructions. So it will be interesting to see over the next couple of months whether that is something she has to spend more of her time doing. But to me it's been notable that she hasn't had to do too much of that so far.

MS. KAMARCK: Good. Okay. So for our final question because we are almost out of time, I'm going to ask you to all very quickly, the – one of the pieces of conventional wisdom about this 100 days is that big government is back. And people are making the comparison to Bill Clinton who famously said the era of big government is over. And people are now making the flip comparison. Several of you have made reference to this that people are looking to government for solutions, and Biden has jumped into this.

Is this permanent? Is this going to be a permanent part of Biden's legacy, or is this going

to be something that happened as a result of COVID, and once hopefully, we are out of COVID eventually, politics will go back to more skepticism about big government?

Why don't we just go in the order we started, so I'll go to Bill, Molly, Camille, and the two Johns.

Bill?

MR. GALSTON: Nobody knows. And the acid test will come, as you suggested, when the air of emergency subsides. When COVID is under control, when the economy has roared back, which it almost certainly will do this year or next year because of pent up demand; \$2 trillion in excess savings and consumer's bank accounts. If there was ever a predictable economic surge this is it.

On the one hand, the American people have clearly signaled, at least according to public opinion polls, that they are more open to activist government than they were four years ago, or eight years ago, or 12 years ago, 16 years, etc. Whether that's a transient or a permanent shift nobody knows. I will say this, everything depends on how the government performs. If new policies are enacted that make people feel better about their lives, if the economy continues to grow, if while inflation stays under control, which is a crucial caveat, and everything seems to be reasonably stable and contained and sustainable, then, these early moves by the Biden administration could reinforce the sentiment that we're seeing right now.

If the performance is not that, then, I don't think that this current moment is going to last.

MS. KAMARCK: Molly, and then Camille.

MS. REYNOLDS: Yeah, so I agree with Bill that no one really knows. I mean, I think in one status we're kind of with two competing big broad trends in American public opinion to contend with here. One is the idea that there's a way in which public opinion operates like a thermostat that, you know, the government turns it in one way and reacts by sort of having opinions in the other direction. And so the notion that we are ramping up government investment may have a consequence of having people kind of turn against the notion of big government.

So we have that on one side, but then, at the same time, we have this notion that people are much more sensitive to losing things that they already have than they are to getting new things. You know, if we look at the 2018 congressional elections that entire campaign was run around the idea that

the Trump administration and the Republicans in Congress wanted to take away things that Americans had gotten through the Affordable Care Act's expansion of access to health insurance.

And so that would suggest that if we have an expansion of government services and people like them then there going to be quite sensitive to the idea that a different majority in Congress might take them away. And so I don't know which one of those kind of trends is going to win out in the end but I think that we have a lot of reason to believe kind of where Bill started that we just don't have a strong sense of where this might be going.

MS. KAMARCK: Camille, quickly.

MS. BUSETTE: Yeah, I would agree with the fact that we don't know. But here's what I think is going to be important. Bill had started off the session by talking about the great -- the enormous polarization in voters. And so I think that this move towards the government being viewed as important to improving the economy will be sustainable if white Trump voters believe that the government can work. And so I think what that's going to mean is that white working-class men are going to have to get jobs. I think that is sort of where we are.

MS. KAMARCK: John Hudak.

MR. HUDAK: Quickly, you know Paul Light has a nice piece on the FixGov blog right now that talks about Americans views toward how government should work and its role in our society. And I encourage our viewers to watch that. But I think the key moving forward to convince Americans that the Biden approach is the right approach is for the president to have a more balanced discussion of the role of government.

I think the idea that Americans support the Reagan view that the most terrifying words go in our I'm from the government, and I'm here to help, is foolish. Americans don't like big government except when they like big government.

And we've seen big government save us from an economic crisis and eventually put 300 million Americans to be vaccinated against COVID. But they don't want big government to solve every problem. And the idea, and there are proponents of this in Congress and elsewhere that the government is there to solve all of our problems should be discounted. That balanced review, and Camille touched on that powerfully, is the only way to convince people that a larger government role, not a dominant

government role is the best path to move forward.

MS. KAMARCK: Jon Valent, you get the very last word.

MR. VALENT:.. And very quick. So I agree with Bill's point that were sort of in the middle of things. We don't know where COVID is going and these other crises are going. I also agree with something Molly said earlier about how there's – the clock is ticking on this administration and midterms are looming. So I think we're in this interesting spot where the answer to whether or not we get big government policies and investments might actually come before we get an answer to whether or not attitudes toward government are changing.

MS. KAMARCK:.. Great. Thank you very much everyone for joining us today. Thank you Bill, and Molly, Camille, John, and Jon. And everyone thank you so much for paying attention to Brookings. There's lots of stuff on our website that elaborates on the themes we've talked about today. Have a nice day. Thank you everyone.

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