

# Meet the Press- September 12, 2021

Dr. Vivek Murthy, Gov. Asa Hutchinson (R-AR), Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV), Doris Kearns Goodwin, Hallie Jackson, Kimberly Atkins Stohr and George Will.

CHUCK TODD: Want to turn now to the Republican reaction. By Friday morning, 19 of the country's 27 Republican governors had condemned President Biden's mandate plan, calling it a federal overreach. More Republican governors have joined in opposition since then, but we invited the original 19 to come on "Meet The Press." Eighteen chose not to accept our invitation, but thankfully one did agree. It's Asa Hutchinson of Arkansas, and we are grateful that he did. Governor Hutchinson, thank you and welcome back to Meet The Press.

GOV. ASA HUTCHINSON: It's always good to be with you, Todd.

CHUCK TODD: Let me ask --

GOV. ASA HUTCHINSON: Or, Chuck. Excuse me --

CHUCK TODD: That's all right. That's all right. When you're born with two first names, that's the -- those are the breaks. We've had more than 650,000 people have died. It's two hundred times the amount of people that died in 9/11. If not now for a federal mandate on businesses, when? Because this feels as if we're up against sort of a last -- this is the last tool in the toolbox.

GOV. ASA HUTCHINSON: Well, I appreciated what the surgeon general had to say. And we have to overcome resistance. This is a very serious, deadly virus. And we're all together in trying to get an increased level of vaccination out in the population. The problem is that I'm trying to overcome resistance. But the president's actions in a mandate hardens the resistance. And we talked about the fact that we've historically had vaccination requirements in schools. But those have always come at the state level, never at the national level. And so this is an unprecedented assumption of federal mandate authority that really disrupts and divides the country. It divides our partnership between the federal government and the states. And it increases the division in terms of vaccination when we should all be together trying to increase the vaccination uptake.

CHUCK TODD: Governor, do you really think, do you really think this is what's increasing our divide? I mean, realistically, it feels like this divide's pretty hardened here. And at the end of the day, it did seem as if there were a lot of private businesses that wanted the political cover. They wanted to do their own vaccine mandate, which you're supportive of. You think if a business wants to do this, you have said, you don't want to stand in the way of that, like other governors have done. Given that, isn't it the responsibility of the federal government, in some ways, to give some cover to businesses that would like to enact this but are afraid of the blowback themselves?

GOV. ASA HUTCHINSON: Well, we'll see whether it's actually constitutional or not. I've never seen this type of federal action in terms of healthcare, in terms of vaccinations. It's always been done at the state level. And let's think about this for a second. We have some very aggressive governors from blue states, but I'm not aware of any governor from any state that said, "We want to mandate

businesses to require vaccinations." And so the states, none of them have done that. And yet, the federal government steps in. This is something that every state has to make decisions on. I support businesses being able to require vaccination. But it's their own independent choice for their workplace. But to have the federal mandate will be counterproductive. It's going to increase resistance. We're going to grow our vaccinations whether you have this or not. We're increasing them in Arkansas and we're going to be able to increase them nationally. But this will make it much more difficult, and will increase the divide. In my judgment, we've been divided over masks --

CHUCK TODD: Right --

GOV. ASA HUTCHINSON: -- but we've been more unified in terms of vaccination. Not totally, but more so. But this will not help us.

CHUCK TODD: But Governor, you yourself went on this tour. And we've seen some, and you've expressed your own frustration at the misinformation that had clearly gotten around, particularly in the rural parts of your state. You know, there was no other -- nothing else was accelerating the vaccine pace other than dead bodies, right? Unfortunately, the one thing that does seem to work in persuading people is when they have a family member who dies from Covid.

GOV. ASA HUTCHINSON: Our vaccination rates went up 40%, both because we're providing better information, bringing in trusted advisors to the public, but also because of the risk factor, as you point out-- and so yes, as the risk goes up, vaccinations increase. That's a little bit of human nature. But it's all about the trust factor. I try to build it by bringing in community-respected leaders in the healthcare profession to talk to and to get over some of the hesitation. But it was clear to me from the very beginning the distrust is with government. This enhances the distrust in a state like Arkansas.

CHUCK TODD: Right --

GOV. ASA HUTCHINSON: You know, other states can make their own decisions. But it shouldn't be a federal government, one size fits all across the country.

CHUCK TODD: Hey, before I let you go, I'm curious what you thought of what former President Bush said during his speech in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. I know it really touched a lot of people. Let me play a clip of it, and I want to get your reaction on the other side.

(BEGIN TAPE)

PRES. GEORGE W. BUSH: There is little cultural overlap between violent extremists abroad and violent extremists at home. But in their disdain for pluralism, in their disregard for human life, in their determination to defile national symbols, they are children of the same foul spirit. And it is our continuing duty to confront them.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD: Those are some interesting words from the former president. Do you think some folks will take his words to heart and start speaking back at these folks that are doing this?

GOV. ASA HUTCHINSON: Well, I certainly hope so. I thought those were words of wisdom. He went on to say that he didn't have any perfect solution. And that's a challenge we face. I think we all have to look in our heart and say, "What more can we do?" Even coming on this show today, I hesitate to criticize our president. But necessary on principle. But we've got to think of ways that we could diminish harsh rhetoric, bring people more together. I'm glad he raised that issue and I hope we can be more effective at it.

CHUCK TODD: Well, Governor Hutchinson, you're always been somebody -- you can disagree without being disagreeable. And there's nothing wrong with that. Governor Hutchinson, thank you for coming on and sharing your perspective with us, sir.

GOV. ASA HUTCHINSON: Thank you, Chuck. Great to be with you.