but he was unlucky and was unable to get that done, but he has maintained the procedural option of reconsidering that vote. I certainly hope that will happen soon.

CORONAVIRUS

Madam President, on a separate issue, we are at a pivotal moment in the fight against COVID–19. Thanks to the leadership of this administration, our Nation has had one of the most successful vaccination efforts in the world: 340 million doses of COVID–19 vaccines have been administered in the United States, 80 percent of Americans over the age of 65 have been fully vaccinated—80 percent. That means the vast majority of our senior population is protected from being hospitalized or dying from COVID–19.

Yet, at this moment, there is trouble on the horizon. Case numbers across the country are ticking back up. It is important to note why. The Delta variant is spreading like wildfire among unvaccinated people. I have heard quotes from some that it is a thousand times more transmissible than the original COVID–19. And it has quickly become the dominant strain of this virus in America.

There is good news. The vaccines that we all have access to right now will stop the Delta variant in its tracks. They will save your life. With the spread of the Delta variant, the reality for Americans is quickly becoming: Get vaccinated or risk contracting a serious or deadly case of COVID–19.

As Dr. Walensky, the Director of the CDC, said last week—and I quote her—''this is quickly becoming a pandemic of the unvaccinated.''

Over the past week, we have started to see a renewed sense of urgency from my colleagues on the other side of the aisle. They finally—finally—become more vocal about dispelling disinformation about the vaccines. Even FOX News has begun airing public service announcements and encouraging viewers to get vaccinated against the coronavirus. I applaud them for starting to join the chorus of scientific experts, health officials, and community leaders who have been calling on Americans to protect themselves and their loved ones, because it was only a few weeks ago when a couple primetime hosts on FOX expressed their displeasure with me personally.

I was alarmed, and said so on the floor of the Senate, by some of the ideas that Tucker Carlson and Laura Ingraham were pedaling. Their anti-vax rhetoric, quite simply, put their viewers and the families of their viewers at risk. We can disagree on political issues, and I am sure we will continue to do so, but we shouldn't play political games with life and death when it comes to COVID–19 vaccines.

We have seen a shift in tone recently. Some hosts on FOX, specifically Sean Hannity and Steve Doocy, now encourage their viewers to get vaccinated. At the very least, they call on them to consult with their doctors. It is a move in the right direction, but we ought to make it clear once and for all publicly, where we can, that those who are spreading this anti-vax rhetoric are literally risking the lives of our fellow Americans.

We are seeing the good that comes from sharing the facts about vaccines and potential to save lives. As of yesterday, the 7-day average of newly vaccinated Americans is up nearly over one-third from last year week. Nearly 7 in 10 American adults have one dose of COVID vaccine. We need to keep it up.

More than 610,000 of our family members and friends and neighbors in America have died from this disease—and millions more around the world. We have the power within our hands, with vaccines, to stop this pandemic. We all have to do our part.

I want to take an opportunity to recognize something else. Disinformation is not the only reason why people are not getting vaccinated. Sadly, there is a long history of racial bias in our Nation's institutions, from education to housing, to healthcare. That history of racial bias has, understandably, led some Americans to question our institutions based on fear.

Let me first say this: Trust has to be earned.

We have a lot of work to do as a nation to address racial inequities in our healthcare system, like the fact that Black women are three times more likely than White women to die from pregnancy-related complications. Acknowledging these inequities, doing something about them, is how we can build and regain trust. That is the work we have to do.

President Biden's American Rescue Plan was an important investment in tackling health disparities. It increased funding for community outreach, expanded support for community health centers. It provided a $1 billion investment in the National Health Service Corps to help recruit more doctors, nurses, and other health professionals from communities of color. That was a provision that I added to the bill.

At this moment, if you are still unvaccinated against COVID–19 and you have questions, reach out to a medical professional that you trust. Talk with your doctor, ask them whatever questions you wish, but make sure you have the facts on your side, because the sad truth is the pandemic has deepened the existing racial disparities in America.

Last year, there was nearly a 3-year drop in life expectancy among Black and Brown Americans—3 years. Communities of color have been three times more likely to be hospitalized, twice as likely to die from COVID. We can end this cycle of sickness and despair, but we have got to stop the spread of the new variants. So please consult a medical professional and ask about getting vaccinated.

RANSOMWARE

Madam President, on another issue, a committee we both serve on, the Senate Judiciary Committee, is going to have an important hearing tomorrow on the issue of ransomware.

For those who may be unfamiliar, ransomware is a type of malicious software that can infect a computer. If hackers attack your computer system with it, they can lock up all the data in your system and demand a ransom payment in exchange for unlocking the data. As a product of our digital age, ransomware is a relatively new threat, but it could impact any individual, business, or organization.

Many Americans had a rude awakening about this threat earlier this year, when a cyber crime syndicate used ransomware to shut down the largest petroleum pipeline in the United States: the Colonial Pipeline. That shutdown sparked a nationwide panic that had people lining up at gas stations for hours, and it put the threat of ransomware into plain view for all Americans. Perhaps someone you know has had their world turned upside down by a ransomware attack. Tomorrow, we will discuss it at length.

GUN VIOLENCE

Madam President, we begin this week with yet another devastating toll of weekend gun violence across America, including the city of Chicago. More than 70 people were shot this past weekend in Chicago. Ten died. If you remember 2 weeks ago, Fourth of July weekend, over 100 people were victims of gunshots in Chicago. In that case, 19 of them died.

It is a mass killing on a regular basis in that great city. Much of it is concentrated in sections of the city, but it is starting to spread because it is so darned easy for a person to get their hands on a gun in that city.

Shootings in Chicago have surged during the COVID pandemic. We see it happening across America. The Biden administration is taking steps in the right direction to stop this gun violence: Cracking down on untraceable ghost guns, rogue gun dealers, and these braces, this equipment that can effectively turn pistols into short-barreled rifles.

Crucially, the Department of Justice announced the launch of five firearm trafficking strike forces. Chicago is one of the cities. New York; San Francisco; Washington, DC; and Los Angeles, are the others.

These strike forces will confront what I believe to be one of the most important causes of this gun violence: the illicit trafficking of guns. These strike forces will also provide support for law enforcement who are on the frontlines of fighting gun violence.

As a testament to that fact, last week, Attorney General Garland joined me in Chicago to highlight how the Justice Department is standing with our police officers and first responders. I am grateful that Attorney General Garland returned to his hometown of Chicago for this purpose. But sadly, it was a somber homecoming.

We first met with police officers and the mayor of Chicago, Lori Lightfoot,