

# Trump CNN Townhall Transcript

We're live here at Saint Anselm College for CNN's town hall with former President Donald Trump. I'm Kaitlan Collins.

Tonight, President Trump is here as he embarks on a campaign unlike any other in the history of U.S. presidential elections. He's the first former president in more than a century to seek a return to the White House. And he is currently leading the Republican field, while also facing multiple criminal investigations and an indictment.

Just yesterday, he was found liable for sexual abuse and defamation. No questions are off the table, and we agreed to no conditions. We're here to give voters the answers that they deserve. Our audience is made up of Republicans and undeclared voters who plan to take part in New Hampshire's Republican primary.

They will get the chance to question the former president directly. These voters and the issues that they care about the most will help decide if former President Trump will get a second chance to take on President Joe Biden.

Please welcome the front-runner for the Republican nomination, former President Donald Trump.

DONALD TRUMP, FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: Thank you.

TRUMP: Thank you.

COLLINS: How are you? Thank you for being here tonight.

TRUMP: How nice to see you.

TRUMP: Thank you.

COLLINS: You have got quite a crowd.

TRUMP: Thank you.

COLLINS: President Trump, thank you for your time here tonight.

TRUMP: Thank you.

COLLINS: We got a great crowd here in New Hampshire, a lot of voters with a lot of questions about what your 2024 term would look like, what another Trump term would look like.

We will get to the voters shortly, but your polls show that you are dominating the Republican race right now, but you are also under active federal investigation for trying to overturn the 2020 election results. Your first term ended with a deadly riot at the Capitol, and you still have not publicly acknowledged the 2020 election results.

Why should Americans put you back in the White House?

TRUMP: Because we did fantastically. We got 12 million more votes than we had in – as you know, in 2016. I actually say we did far better in that election, got the most that anybody's ever gotten as a sitting president of the United States.

I think that, when you look at that result and when you look at what happened during that election, unless you're a very stupid person, you see what happens.

A lot of the people – a lot of the people in this audience and perhaps maybe a couple that don't, but most people understand what happened.

That was a rigged election, and it's a shame that we had to go through it. It's very bad for our country. All over the world, they looked at it, and they saw exactly what everyone else saw. And you look – even if you just look recently with the 51 intelligence agents, that made a 16-point difference.

If you look at the FBI...

COLLINS: But, Mr. President...

TRUMP: If you look at the FBI and Twitter – they call it Twitter Files – made a big difference.

If you look at True the Vote...

COLLINS: Mr. President, back to what you just said there, though, it was not a rigged election. It was not a stolen election.

You and your supporters lost more than 60 court cases on the election. And it's been nearly two-and-a-half years. Can you publicly acknowledge that you did lose the 2020 election?

TRUMP: Now, let me – let me just go on.

If you look at True the Vote, they found millions of votes on camera, on government cameras, where they were stuffing ballot boxes.

So, with all of that, I think it's a shame that – what happened. I think it's a very sad thing for our country. I think it's a very sad thing, frankly, for the world, because, if you look at what's gone to our country, our country has gone to hell. Our borders are bad. Our military has been bad.

You look at the taxes, you look at inflation, what's happened to inflation, it's just destroying our country. We have really become, in many ways, a Third World country. And it's very sad what's happened in this administration. And it's something that we will turn around on day one.

We were energy-independent. Now energy is at a level that we have never had to pay before. We – nobody can afford to continue to pay what's happening with energy. But we were energy-independent. And we were getting out of Afghanistan with strength and with dignity. And, instead, we got out, we looked like fools...

COLLINS: And, Mr. President...

TRUMP: ... probably the most embarrassing moment in the history of our country.

COLLINS: We have a lot of questions about the economy and foreign policy tonight.

TRUMP: Good.

COLLINS: But what you just said there, Republican officials debunked those claims about fraudulent ballots. We want to give you a chance tonight...

TRUMP: Who? Who?

COLLINS: Republican officials in Georgia...

TRUMP: Who?

COLLINS: ... and every single state. There is no – your own election officials, Mr. President.

So, we wanted to give you a chance...

TRUMP: Look, people were afraid to take on the issue.

But we have a big problem in this country. We have elections...

COLLINS: Well, we wanted to give you a chance to acknowledge the results.

TRUMP: We have elections that were horrible.

If you look at what happened in Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, if you look at what happened in Detroit, Michigan, if you look at what happened in Atlanta, millions of votes, and all you have to do is take a look at government cameras. You will see them, people going to 28 different voting booths to vote, to put in seven ballots apiece. I mean, and they're all on camera.

COLLINS: But, Mr. President, I have to stop you there, because – because there is no evidence of that.

Your own election officials testified to that and have said that. Republicans in these states did this. In Georgia, there were multiple recounts, including a hand recount.

We have questions about the claims that you're making tonight from voters on this topic.

I want to bring in Scott Dustin from Concord. He works in insurance litigation. He is an undeclared voter. That's what they call independents here in New Hampshire, as you know.

TRUMP: OK.

COLLINS: He did vote for you in 2020.

Scott, what's your question for the president?

SCOTT DUSTIN, WORKS IN INSURANCE LITIGATION: Hi, President Trump.

TRUMP: Hi, Scott.

DUSTIN: And welcome back to New Hampshire.

TRUMP: Thank you.

DUSTIN: Will you suspend polarizing talk of election fraud during your run for president?

TRUMP: Will I suspend – excuse me? What?

DUSTIN: Will you suspend polarizing talk of election fraud during your run for president?

TRUMP: Yes, unless I see election fraud.

If I see election fraud, I think I have an obligation to say it. And what we went through a short while ago has really put our country in a big problem. I hope to do that. I hope we're going to have very honest elections. We should have voter I.D. We should have one-day elections. We should have paper ballots, instead of these mail-in votes.

But the answer is yes. And I hope that it's going to be very straight-up, because, if it's going to be straight-up, we're going to win the election.

Thank you.

COLLINS: So you will suspend talk, to his question, about the 2020 election on the campaign trail?

TRUMP: Well, I guess we're going to just win. We're at a point now. We're getting so close. Let's just win it again and straighten out our country.

COLLINS: One other question on this.

COLLINS: When you – when you have talked about the 2020 election results in the past, you once suggested terminating the Constitution.

Do you stand by those comments?

TRUMP: No, no. You are able to do certain things. I'm not talking about terminating the Constitution. I'm talking about cherishing the Constitution.

The Constitution says that we're supposed to have legal and well-maintained and well-looked-at elections. And we didn't have that. I cherish our Constitution, but we have to live up to the Constitution. We weren't living up to the Constitution.

COLLINS: I would just say that there's no evidence of that election fraud. You did once tweet...

TRUMP: I know you're supposed to say that, but – you know, I'm glad you say that. But, look...

COLLINS: It's the truth, Mr. President.

TRUMP: ... that was a horrible election.

TRUMP: That was a horrible election. And unless somebody is very stupid – and I know you very well. You're not stupid at all. But you perhaps are given an agenda, or you have an agenda.

Look, we have to have honest elections in our country. We have open borders. We have...

TRUMP: You look at what's happening.

I mean, we have elections. We have open borders. Look at what's happening on our Southern border. Millions and millions of people are coming here. They're being released from prisons. They're being released from mental institutions. And we have millions of people pouring into our country. And now they're getting rid of Title 42, which I put on, which kept people out that were sick and had problems.

COLLINS: And, Mr. President, we have a lot of questions about immigration to get to tonight.

TRUMP: Yes.

COLLINS: Obviously, that's a big topic, especially given what's expected to happen tomorrow.

But I want to talk about the influence you have over your voters. It's very clear that you are very influential over them. You have a lot of impact. I have been to many of your rallies and seen it up close, which raised a lot of questions about the influence that we saw that you had on them on January 6 and your supporters when they attacked the Capitol.

Do you have any regrets about your actions on January 6?

TRUMP: Well, you know, January 6 was – again, we go back to it, but January 6 had to do with the fact that hundreds of thousands of people – and you don't see the pictures very often.

A lot of the people here probably were there. January 6, it was the largest crowd I have ever spoken to. That was prior to the walk down to the Capitol Building. I don't think – and I have spoken to hundreds of thousands of people. I have never spoken to a crowd as large as this.

And that was because they thought the election was rigged. And they were there proud. They were there with love in their heart. That was an unbelievable – and it was a beautiful day. And what I was asked to do – I wasn't involved in it very much. I was asked to come in. Would I make a speech?

I made a speech. I said, walk peacefully and patriotically, many different things. In fact, I brought a list of things. I don't want to bore the audience, but we can go sentence after sentence after sentence of things I said and things I put out.

One of the big problems was that Nancy Pelosi, crazy Nancy, as I affectionately call her...

TRUMP: ... crazy Nancy Pelosi and the mayor of Washington were in charge, as you know, of security, and they did not do their job.

COLLINS: They're not in charge of the National Guard. You're in charge of the National Guard.

TRUMP: They are in charge. Well, I offered them National Guard. I said, we will give you soldiers. We will give you National Guard. We will give you whatever you want.

And they turned me down. And, in fact, she turned me down.

COLLINS: Your acting defense secretary...

TRUMP: She turned – excuse me – she turned me down in writing. They turned me down.

COLLINS: But your acting defense secretary, Chris Miller, at the time, he says you never gave a formal order to deploy the National Guard.

But, when it came that day...

TRUMP: Excuse me. Just the opposite.

COLLINS: He test...

TRUMP: Chris Miller wrote a book, and he's a fantastic guy, and he was ready to go. They turned him down. If you look, the mayor of Washington, D.C., lovely lady, she said, we don't want it. We don't like the look. Nancy Pelosi said, oh, we don't like the look.

If they would have had just – I offered them 10,000 soldiers. I said it could be 10,000. It could be more. But I offered them specifically 10,000 soldiers. If they would have taken 500 soldiers, you wouldn't have had the problem. They turned it down.

And if you look at the inspector general report, he says they turned it down. They made a terrible mistake.

COLLINS: Well, Chris Miller was your acting defense secretary. He says you never gave that order.

But back to what happened on that day, he said you weren't...

TRUMP: He did not say that.

COLLINS: You – he has testified that, Mr. President.

TRUMP: He did not say that.

COLLINS: But you said you weren't very involved that day.

You did tell your supporters to come to Washington. You tweeted about it, about that speech...

TRUMP: That's true, of course.

COLLINS: ... that happened on the rally. So, when they...

TRUMP: Am I allowed to say that?

COLLINS: When they went to the Capitol and they were breaking into the Capitol, smashing windows, injuring police officers, why did you – why did it take you three hours to tell them to go home?

TRUMP: I don't believe it did. Oh, let me pull it out. I have to pull it out.

TRUMP: So – so, if you look at – on January 5, the day before, I said: "Please support our Capitol Police and law enforcement. They are truly on the side of our country. Stay peaceful. Stay peaceful."

This was the day before. And this was in the form of Twitter. Now I use TRUTH, TRUTH Social. I think it's far superior, OK?

TRUMP: I hope everybody's on – I hope everybody's on TRUTH.

If you look, January 6, this is at 2:00 – before 2:30. "I am asking for everyone at the U.S. Capitol to remain peaceful." This is right after – as it was happening. But what happened is, they took it down. I don't know why. I think they took it down because it was so good. They didn't like it being up there.

TRUMP: "I am asking" – this is – and we didn't know until I got it back, because now I have 90 million people waiting for me to go back.

But I'm on TRUTH, and I'm staying on TRUTH.

Listen, "I am asking for everyone at the U.S. Capitol remain peaceful. No violation." It's we want "no violation. We want no violence. Remember, we are the party of law and order. Respect the law and our great men and women in blue. Thank you."

That was at 2:30. That was very early.

COLLINS: Mr. President, I looked at the same timeline that you did.

Once it was clear...

TRUMP: No, I know, but you didn't report that. You know why? Because it was taken down.

COLLINS: We did report it. I was reporting that day.

TRUMP: It was taken down, and it wasn't put back up.

COLLINS: But when it was clear to you that they were not being peaceful – you saw them rushing the Capitol, breaking windows. They were hitting officers with flagpoles, Tasing them, beating them up.

When it was clear they weren't being peaceful, why did you wait three hours to tell them to leave the Capitol?

They listen to you like no one else.

TRUMP: Yes.

COLLINS: You know that.

TRUMP: They do. I agree with that.

But Nancy Pelosi...

COLLINS: So, why didn't you tell them to go home sooner?

TRUMP: Nancy Pelosi and the mayor are in charge. I assumed they were able to do their job. They weren't.

COLLINS: But Pelosi is not in charge of Capitol security.

TRUMP: And it kicked in.

And, if you remember, I made a video right outside the Oval Office in the Rose Garden. And I'm very proud of that video. I didn't have a script. I don't need scripts, like a certain person that's in there right now.

COLLINS: But what time – the video, it came out much later, after they had already attacked the Capitol.

TRUMP: It's right there. It's right...

TRUMP: It was a great video. And it was a beautiful video.

And it said – I mean, I don't want to read it all, but you have – "You have to go home now. We have to have peace. We have to have law and order. We have to respect our great people of law and order. We love the

people of law and order. We can't play into the hands of these other people. We have to have peace. Please go home."

I said that. You know what they did?

COLLINS: Well, referring to the law and order there, Mr. President...

TRUMP: They took that down. And, you know, to this day, it hasn't been put up.

And the reason is, it's so good and so conclusive that all of this nonsense and all of the tens of millions of dollars that have been spent are just wiped away with this one, and they have never put it back up. They had another one that they did the same thing.

COLLINS: But that video that you referenced there, it wasn't posted until 4:17 p.m.

TRUMP: No, I will tell you...

COLLINS: They breached the Capitol at 2:00 p.m., Mr. President.

TRUMP: That video was posted...

COLLINS: 4:17 p.m.

TRUMP: Yes, before – actually, a little bit before that.

COLLINS: Right. So, that's my question.

TRUMP: But – excuse me.

COLLINS: Because, in that three hours, over 140 officers were injured.

TRUMP: Excuse me. It was posted after the first one I just read, though, and that was at 2:00.

COLLINS: But I think the reason the timeline is so critical here, because, going back to your influence, in that three hours...

TRUMP: There's another one I post.

COLLINS: ... over 140 officers were injured that day.

TRUMP: And a person named Ashli Babbitt was killed.

COLLINS: Yes.

TRUMP: You know what? She was killed, and she shouldn't have been killed.

And that thug that killed her, there was no reason to shoot her at blank range. Cold, blank range, they shot her.

And she was a good person. She was a patriot.

COLLINS: One person who was there...

TRUMP: And there was no reason. There was no reason.

And he went on television to brag about the fact that he killed her.

TRUMP: She was a patriot. There was no reason –

COLLINS: One person who was there –

TRUMP: – there was no reason. And he went on television to brag about the fact that he killed her.

COLLINS: That officer was not bragging about the fact that he killed her.

TRUMP: Oh, he was bragging.

COLLINS: But one person who was at the Capitol that day, as you know, was your vice president, Mike Pence, who says that you endangered his life on that day. Do you feel –

TRUMP: I don't think he was in any danger.

COLLINS: Mr. President, do you feel that you owe him an apology?

TRUMP: No, because he did something wrong. He should have put the votes back to the state legislatures and I think we would have had a different outcome. I really do.

COLLINS: But he doesn't have the authority to do that as you know.

TRUMP: What?

COLLINS: The vice president doesn't have the authority to reject those – those electoral results.

TRUMP: Okay, are you ready? Let's have this now, just now, because it's interest – let's keep it interesting, right?

I like Mike Pence very much. He's a very fine man. He's a very nice man. He made a mistake.

His lawyer said, you cannot move. I call them the human conveyer belt. I said, even if the votes you mean – I talked to his lawyer – even if the votes are absolutely fraudulent, he can't send – yes, sir, he can't send them back. And the Democrats played it and the RINOs played it.

And then, the election was over. They told them he couldn't do it. And Mike said to me, I can't do it. The lawyers told me I can't do it, they can't do it.

But the lawyers were wrong because right after the election, they all met, the RINOs and the Democrats, and they worked out a plan to make sure that future vice presidents don't do what I said you could do.

COLLINS: That's not what happened. You're referring to the Electoral Count Act.

TRUMP: That's exactly –

COLLINS: I've read – I've read that. There is – there is no authority.

TRUMP: No, excuse me –

COLLINS: Legal experts, including Republican legal experts, say that he does not have that authority, Mr. President.

But I want to move on –

TRUMP: Kaitlan, why did they change the law then saying that you can't do it?

COLLINS: They didn't change the law. They strengthened the law because they are worried about a president exploiting –

TRUMP: Oh, they strengthened it, meaning you could do it. Thank you.

COLLINS: That's not what it means.

TRUMP: Thank you.

COLLINS: They strengthened the law –

TRUMP: Mike had the right to do it. They convinced him he didn't, and it was a horrible thing for our country. If you would have sent those votes back to Georgia, Pennsylvania, and other states – Wisconsin, which if you look at Wisconsin, they virtually admitted now that the election was rigged.

COLLINS: They have not admitted that, Mr. President.

TRUMP: If you sent the votes back to many of those states, they would not come back in the affirmative, and remember what I said, and you just said it pretty much. You admitted what I said was right.

COLLINS: I did not.

TRUMP: They said he didn't have the right to do it, and he did have the right to do it, and that's why they changed the law taking that right away.

COLLINS: I should note that your campaign paid for a recount that happened in Wisconsin and actually had more votes for President Biden by the end of it.

But I want to move on to Wayne Beyer. He's a retired attorney for North Conway –

TRUMP: By the way, so many illegal votes were cast in Wisconsin. And if you look in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, they had so many legal – illegal votes, they didn't even know what to do with them. You're absolutely wrong about that.

COLLINS: Mr. President, there weren't any fraudulent votes in Wisconsin.

I do want to get to the audience and we have questions from the audience.

A retired – Wayne Beyer is a retired attorney from North Conway. He's previously served in Republican administrations. He volunteered for the Republican Party in the 2022 midterms. He voted for you in 2020.

What's your question for the president, Wayne?

WAYNE BEYER, RETIRED ATTORNEY: Thank you for coming, Mr. President.

TRUMP: Thank you, Wayne.

BEYER: My question to you is: will you pardon the January 6th rioters who were convicted of federal offenses?

TRUMP: I am inclined to pardon many of them. I can't say for every single one because a couple of them, probably, they got out of control.

But, you know, when you look at Antifa, what they've done to Portland, and if you look at Antifa, look at what they've done to Minneapolis and so many other – so many other places, look at what they did to Seattle. And BLM – BLM, many people were killed.

These people – I'm not trying to justify anything, but you have two standards of justice in this country, and what they've done – and I love that question because what they've done to see many people is nothing – nothing. And then what they've done to these people, they've persecuted these people.

And yeah, my answer is I am most likely – if I get in, I will most likely – I would say it will be a large portion of them. You know, they did a very –

And it'll be very early on. And they're living in hell right now.

COLLINS: So when it comes to pardons –

TRUMP: They're living in hell, and they're policemen, and they're firemen, and they're soldiers, and they're carpenters and electricians and they're great people. Many of them are just great people.

COLLINS: Mr. President, one of the people who was convicted was a former policeman but he was convicted of attacking a police officer, I should note.

But when you said you are considering pardoning a large portion of those charged with crimes on January 6th, does that include the four Proud Boys members who were charged and convicted of seditious conspiracy?

TRUMP: I don't know. I'll have to look at their case, but I will say in Washington, D.C., you cannot get a fair trial, you cannot. Just like in New York City, you can't get a fair trial either.

COLLINS: Speaking of New York, I want to ask you about a significant verdict that was reached yesterday. I know this is something you want to weigh in on as well.

A Manhattan jury found –

TRUMP: Sure.

COLLINS: – that you sexually abused the writer E. Jean Carroll and defamed her. You've denied this.

But what do you say to voters who say it disqualifies you from being president?

TRUMP: Well, there weren't too many of them because my poll numbers just came out. They went up, okay? I think – I think I'm – I'm the only person in history who had a charge like that, and usually you leave office and you say, I'm sorry but I'm going to back home – I'm back home to my family and everything. I'm going to be resigned.

My poll numbers went up and they went up with the other fake charge, too, because what's happening is they're doing this for election interference.

This woman, I don't know her. I never met her. I have no idea who she is. I had a picture taken years ago with her and her husband, nice guy John Johnson.

He was a newscaster, very nice man. She called him an ape, happens to be African-American. Called him an ape – the judge wouldn't allow us to put that in.

Her dog or her cat was named vagina, the judge wouldn't allow to put that in. All these things, he – but with her, they can put in anything, "Access Hollywood" –

COLLINS: This was a jury of nine people who found you –

TRUMP: That's right.

COLLINS: – liable of sexual abuse. Do you think that – that will deter women from voting for you?

TRUMP: No, I don't think so because I think the whole thing – just so you understand – ready?

I never met this woman. I never saw this woman. This woman said I met her at the front door of Bergdorf Goodman which I never go into other than for a couple of charities. I met her in the front door. She was about 60 years. This is like 22, 23 years ago.

I met her in the front door of Bergdorf Goodman. I was immediately attracted to her and she was immediately attracted to me. And we had this great chemistry.

We're walking into a crowded department store. We had this great chemistry. And a few minutes later, we end up in a room, a dressing room of Bergdorf Goodman, right near the cash register.

And then she found out that there were locks in the door. She said, I found one that was open. She found one, she learned this at trial. She found one that was open.

What kind of a woman meet somebody and brings them up and within minutes, you're playing hanky-panky in a dressing room, okay? I don't know if she was married then or not. John Johnson, I feel sorry for you, John Johnson.

COLLINS: Mr. President, can I – can I ask you this?

TRUMP: Think of it, think of this –

COLLINS: I know you're recounting what you said but, Mr. President –

TRUMP: But let me just, if I could because you asked a question.

COLLINS: This was a jury though –

TRUMP: Just so you understand, because I was walking in at a department – because I was very famous then and I owned the Plaza Hotel right next door and I owned the buildings around it. I'm not going into a dressing room of a crowded department store.

Then I say, if she was being raped – and by the way, they said she wasn't raped, okay? That was her charge. It wasn't –

COLLINS: They found that you sexually abused her.

TRUMP: Oh, that was – say what the – they didn't – they said he didn't rape her.

COLLINS: They did not say –

TRUMP: And I didn't do anything else either. You know what? Because I have no idea who the hell she is. I don't know who this woman is.

COLLINS: But, Mr. President, can I – can I ask you given your recounting and your version –

TRUMP: I don't know who – and I tell you this. Are you ready?

COLLINS: But, Mr. President, can I – can I ask you because –

TRUMP: And I swear on my children, which I never do. I have no idea who this woman. This is a fake story, made up story.

We had a horrible Clinton-appointed judge. He was horrible. He allowed her to put everything in. He allowed us to put nothing in. This is a fake story.

COLLINS: Mr. President, you're recounting your version of events here right now to the audience. You reference the trial. You did not go to the trial and actually testify.

TRUMP: That's right.

COLLINS: Do you wish that you had testified?

TRUMP: No, it wouldn't have made a difference. This is rigged deal. This was a – my lawyer said, sir, you don't have to do it.

I actually said, I think I should, it would be disrespectful. They said, sir, don't do it. This is fake story and you don't want to give it credibility.

COLLINS: One thing you –

TRUMP: That's why I didn't go.

COLLINS: One thing you did do in this –

TRUMP: And I swear and I've never done that, and I swear to – I have no idea who the hell – she's a whack job.

COLLINS: Mr. President, you did not testify in person in this trial. There was a taped deposition of you from October, and in it, you defended the comments that you made on that "Access Hollywood" tape about being able to grab women how you want. Do you stand by those comments?

TRUMP: I said if you're famous and rich or whatever I said, but I said if you're a star, you are – and I said women let you. I didn't say you grab. I said women let. You know you didn't use that word, but if you look, women let you.

Now, they said will you take that back? I said, look, for a million years, this is the way it's been. I want to be honest. This is the way it's been. I can take it back if you'd like to.

But if you're a famous person, if you're a star – and I'm not referring to myself. I'm saying people that are famous, people that are stars.

COLLINS: But you were asked in a deposition if you consider yourself to be a star and you said yes.

TRUMP: People that are rich, people that are powerful, they tend to do pretty well in a lot of different ways, okay?

And you would like me to take that back. I can't take it back because it happens to be true. I've said it's been true for one million years, approximately a million years, perhaps a little bit longer than that.

COLLINS: So you stand by those comments?

TRUMP: I don't want to lie. Oh, here's what – here's what she wants me to say.

COLLINS: Mr. President, let's get to the audience questions tonight.

TRUMP: A rich and famous person has no advantage over anyone else. Well, you do have an advantage, and I say unfortunately, but that's the way it is.

COLLINS: You said unfortunately or fortunately.

TRUMP: Well, fortunately or unfortunately for her.

COLLINS: But, Mr. President, we have a lot of audience questions to get to tonight. I want to go back to the audience.

We've got Danielle Reger. She works as an oral surgery assistant. She's a Republican activist from Derry. She was a New Hampshire delegate for you in 2020.

What's your question?

DANIELLE REGER, ORAL SURGERY ASSISTANT: Hi, thank you so much for coming to New Hampshire to answer our questions.

TRUMP: Thank you.

REGER: My question is regarding the economy.

Over the past two years, we have seen the prices for everything skyrocket, from food to gas to utilities and insurance costs. Many peoples' bills are up several hundred dollars a month, including mine.

If elected president, again, what is the first thing you would do to help bring down the cost to make things more affordable?

TRUMP: Drill, baby, drill.

TRUMP: Well, we were energy independent. We were soon going to be energy dominant.

And nobody had ever done what I did. We got oil down to \$1.87. Actually, it fell lower than that in some cases. We'd have to save the oil companies – the price was getting.

So, we were doing incredibly. We had the greatest economy in the history of our country, probably the greatest economy in the history of the world.



We're energy independent, soon to be energy dominant. We were going to be bigger than Russia and Saudi Arabia put together times two. We have more liquid gold under our feet than any other nation – any other nation.

And these stupid fools ended it. And energy went from \$1.87 and even lower for gasoline, for a car. They went from \$1.87 to \$5, \$6, \$7, \$8 and even \$9, and your electricity bills went through the roof. Your heating bills went through the roof.

And that's what started inflation. And it hasn't stopped because people are paying now for bacon and for eggs and for the – two and three times what it was just a little while ago.

We created the greatest economy in history. A big part of that economy was I get – I got you the biggest tax cuts in the history of our country, bigger than the Reagan cuts, bigger than any –

TRUMP: And also, Kaitlan, also, as you know, we got the biggest regulation and regulatory cuts.

We – this place was rocking, and then we were given a gift from China. And China paid a big price. And let me tell you something, I took in hundreds of billions of dollars in taxes from China.

But prior to COVID coming in – and then I rebuilt the economy again a second time. But we had prior to COVID coming in as – from China, from Wuhan, which I said it came from Wuhan, and everybody said, oh, you're wrong about that. You're wrong. It came from Wuhan. I said it right from day one.

So we had the greatest economy in the world, is historic. They made energy so high, and energy is all invasive. It is massive as an industry and as a cost. It lifted everything.

COLLINS: Mr. President, staying on the economy –

TRUMP: If you made do – if you made donuts, if you made – no matter what you did, and we had inflation the likes of which – I guess we have, as you said, for 52 years, but I think more than that, we had no inflation, we had the lowest energy prices we've had in decades. This country was rocking and rolling.

And by the way, we had the most secure border in the history of our country and now we have –

COLLINS: Mr. President, we have – we have more questions on the economy. I want to make sure we get to all of those.

As you know, the U.S. could be three weeks away from defaulting on its debt. There could be millions of jobs lost, people not getting their Social Security payments. We believe it'd put the U.S. into a recession.

On that topic, I want to bring in Marta Saravia, a student here at Saint Anselm. She's an undeclared voter who did not vote in 2020.

Marta, what's your question?

MARTA SARAVIA, SAINT ANSELM COLLEGE STUDENT: Hi, Mr. President.

TRUMP: Hi. Thank you.

SARAVIA: So, my question is, what do you think about the United States current debt situation, and how can we move forward?

TRUMP: Such an important question. So we're at \$33 trillion, a number that nobody ever thought possible. When we had our economy rocking and rolling just prior to COVID coming in, like literally, we were making a fortune. And oil, we were going to make so much money from oil, we were going to start paying off debt. But then with COVID coming in, we had to do other things. We had to keep this country alive because it was so serious. But we have to get the country back.

We have to lower energy prices. We have to lower interest rates. Interest rates are through the roof. Energy has to come down, it all has to come down and we have to start paying off debt.

But when we have a debt limit, and they use that very seriously. I mean, they came in – Schumer came in with Nancy Pelosi, and they were using, we'll violate it, we'll do whatever – they talked a whole lot different than they do right now.

I say to the Republicans out there – congressmen, senators – if they don't give you massive cuts, you're going to have to do a default. And I don't believe they're going to do a default because I think the Democrats will absolutely cave because you don't want to have that happen. But it's better than what we're doing right now because we're spending money like drunken sailors. You know the expression?

COLLINS: So, just to be clear, Mr. President, you think the U.S. should default if the White House does not agree to the spending cuts Republicans are demanding?

TRUMP: Well, you might as well do it now because you'll do it later, because we have –

TRUMP: Well, you might as well do it now because you'll do it later. Because we have to save this country. Our country is dying. Our country is being destroyed by stupid people, by very stupid people.

COLLINS: You once said that using the – that using the debt ceiling as a negotiating wedge just could not happen. You – you said that when you were in the Oval Office.

TRUMP: Sure, that's when I was president.

COLLINS: So why is it different now that you're out of office?

TRUMP: Because now I'm not president.

COLLINS: The U.S. defaulting would be massively consequential...

TRUMP: Well, you don't know...

COLLINS: ... for everyone in this room, for all Americans.

TRUMP: You don't know. It's psychological. It's really psychological more than anything else. And it could be very bad. It could be, maybe, nothing. Maybe it's – you have a bad week or a bad day, but, look, you have to cut your costs. We're – we're spending \$7 trillion on – much of it on nonsense – \$7 trillion on nonsense.

COLLINS: We've got another question from a voter tonight.

TRUMP: I actually said get all of that money that was wasted and, frankly, the Senate should have never approved it. Get all that money that was wasted. And if they don't get rid of that, you'll have to default.

COLLINS: Mr. President...

TRUMP: OK? You'll have to default.

COLLINS: Mr. President, we've got another voter here tonight...

TRUMP: And, by the way, you're going to default eventually, anyway, but it's going to be much messier. I don't think you'll have to default. I think, if the Republicans hold strong and they say "We want five" – let's say, "We want \$5 trillion off," I really think the Democrats have no choice but to do it. And if I win, they're going to be doing the same thing to me in two years, I guarantee you that. They're going to play a very hardball game...

COLLINS: Mr. President, we've got another voter here tonight...

TRUMP: ... and they did that before.

COLLINS: Bobby Petrino has been waiting very patiently. He's a student at Saint Anselm. He's a member of College Republicans. He's an undeclared voter right now. He supported you in 2020.

Bobby, what's your question for President Trump?

QUESTION: Hi, thank you for coming. This is a bit of a pivot. But, with gun violence and mass shootings in the news cycle recently, I'm worried that state governments and the federal government are going to act to repress gun rights. Under your administration, you instructed the Department of Justice and the ATF to ban bump stocks. If elected president again, how would you act not only to defend our second amendment rights but to restore rights that have been taken from us such as, by example, recently, the ATF's ruling on the pistol-stabilizing braces?

TRUMP: Yeah, as you know, the bump stocks are actually a very unimportant thing. And NRA, I went with them, and they said it doesn't mean anything. Actually, all they do is teach you how to shoot very inaccurately. So we did that.

There's been nobody that's protected the second amendment, as you know, like I have. I've protected it through thick and thin, not easy to do. But we have a very big mental health problem in this country. And again, it's not the gun that pulls the trigger; it's the person that pulls the trigger. And we have to protect our second amendment.

We have to protect our Second Amendment.

COLLINS: Mr. President, you dealt with a lot of mass shootings when you were in office. This year there have already been more than 200 mass shootings in 2023.

TRUMP: Yeah.

COLLINS: If you are re-elected, are there any new gun restrictions that you would sign into law?

TRUMP: I would do numerous things. For instance, schools, we would harden, very – very much harden – and I also, I'm a very believer – I believe in teachers; I love teachers. I think they're incredible, and they love the children – not quite like the parents, but they love the children, in many cases, almost as much.

Many of these teachers are soldiers, ex-soldiers, ex-policemen. They're people that really understand weapons. And you don't need – 5 percent of the teachers would be more than you could ever have if you're going to hire security guards. But in addition to that, have security guards. You have to harden your entrances. You have to make schools safe.

And you can make other places safe. But it is a big mental health problem in this country more than anything else. And remember, we have 700 million guns – 700 million. Many people, if they don't have a gun, they're not going to be very safe. I mean, if they don't have a gun – it gives them security. Now, you need them for entertainment; you need them for hunting; you need them for a lot of different things. But there are people that, if they didn't have the privilege of having a gun in some form, they – many of them would not be alive today.

You know, there's a certain country that had a very strict policy on guns, very, very strict.

COLLINS: Which country?

TRUMP: Brazil. OK, Brazil, very strict. And the former president of Brazil – and the killing was incredible. They were walking into people’s homes and killing people. They had no protection. He said, “Go out and buy guns.” People went out and bought guns, and it went way down. The numbers went way down because they had security.

If you look at Chicago, Chicago has the singles toughest gun policies in the nation. They are so tough, you can’t breathe; New York, too, and other places also. All of those places are the worst and most dangerous places. So that’s not the answer.

COLLINS: So no new restrictions that you would sign if re-elected, Mr. President.

I want you to meet Julie Miles, a registered nurse from Merrimack. She’s a Republican who voted for you in 2020.

Julie, what’s your question for the president?

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President.

TRUMP: Thank you.

QUESTION: I appreciate you answering this question this evening. How do you plan to appeal to women voters in New Hampshire who are concerned about the Dobbs decision and how states may change their laws?

TRUMP: It’s such a great question, and it was such a great victory. And people are starting to understand it now. You know that they wanted to bring it back to the states, but that was probably the least important part of that victory. Getting rid of Roe v. Wade was an incredible thing for pro-life because it gave pro-life something to negotiate with. Pro-life had absolutely nothing, being stuck in Roe v. Wade to negotiate with. And now what’s happening, and I see it all over, deals are being made; deals are going to (inaudible) look, everybody that was president wanted to get rid, and tried to get rid of Roe v. Wade.

COLLINS: You mean Republicans?

TRUMP: For 50 years – Republicans. For 50 years this has been going on – actually a couple of Democrats, too. But for 50 years, this has been going on. I was able to do it, and I was very honored to do it. But by doing it, things are happening that are very, very positive.

And you have to – I happen to believe in the exceptions, the life of the mother, rape, incest, like Ronald Reagan believed in the exceptions. But I happen to believe that. I think it – I think it’s frankly important to do that, but a lot of people are, you know, against that – a relatively small – relatively small number, but the way I – the way I look at it...

COLLINS: So let me ask you...

TRUMP: I think it’s very important to say this. I consider the other side to be radical. Because the other side, under Roe v. Wade and other things, the other side, they’re radical. Because they will – remember the debate with Hillary Clinton? And I said, “Rip the baby out of the womb at the end of the ninth month, they will kill the baby in the ninth month.” If you look at that crazy governor of Virginia from – the former governor, where he said, “No, the baby will be born and then we’ll decide,” essentially whether or not to execute the baby.

COLLINS: But, Mr. President, can we talk about what you would do...

TRUMP: No, but these are the radical people.

COLLINS: ... if you are re-elected...

TRUMP: It’s not the pro-life people that are radical...

COLLINS: But if you are re-elected...

TRUMP: It’s these people.

COLLINS: ... and you’re back in the Oval Office, and you get legislation to your desk, would you sign a federal abortion ban into law?

TRUMP: What I will do is negotiate so that people are happy. But the fact that we were able – I was able – I’m so proud of it. We put three great justices on the Supreme Court. We have almost 300 federal judges on the Supreme Court.

COLLINS: So you – just to be clear – just to be clear, Mr. President, you – you would sign a federal abortion ban into law?

TRUMP: Well, I said this. I said this. I want to do what’s right. And we’re looking. And we want to do what’s right for everybody.

COLLINS: But what’s right?

TRUMP: But now, for the first time, the people that are pro-life have negotiating capability, because you didn’t have it before. They could kill the baby in the ninth month or after the baby was born. Now they won’t be able to do that.

COLLINS: But I think this is a really important question for you to answer because this is something every Republican, including those who are running against you for the nomination, are being asked about, is would you sign a federal abortion ban into law?

TRUMP: Well, and many of them are going to give you the same answer as I – I am. First of all, I am honored to have done what I did, and a lot of people said – they said, “In 150 years, he’s now the most consequential president because he saved so many lives.” And I’m honored to have done it.

TRUMP: And – and because of what I’ve done, we now have a great negotiating ability. That’s what I do in life. I negotiate. We have a great negotiating ability, and I think we’re going to be able to get something done.

COLLINS: But what do you mean “negotiating ability?” Because the question that Republicans have, and some of your allies on Capitol Hill say that they want to introduce legislation when it comes to banning abortion. If they send it to your desk, would you sign it?

TRUMP: Some people are at six weeks; some people are at three weeks, two weeks.

COLLINS: Where’s President Trump?

TRUMP: President Trump is going to make a determination what he thinks is great for the country and what’s fair for the country. But the fact that I was able to terminate Roe v. Wade, after 50 years of trying – they worked for 50 years. I’ve never seen anything like it. They worked – and I was even – I was so honored to have done it. We are in a very good negotiating position right now, only because of what I was able to do.

And remember this, again, you talk about radicalism. People that will kill a baby in the ninth month or the eighth month or the seventh month, or after the baby is born, they’re the radicals, not the pro-life people.

COLLINS: I just want to give you one more chance, though, because you did not answer whether or not you’d sign a federal abortion ban or how many weeks into pregnancy you believe abortion should be banned.

TRUMP: Yeah, but I’ve given you...

COLLINS: Can you answer either of those tonight?

TRUMP: I’ve given you the answer probably four times already.

COLLINS: Which one is it, then?

TRUMP: I’m looking – I’m looking...

COLLINS: You haven’t answered it.

TRUMP: ... at a solution that’s going to work – very complex issue for the country. You have people on both sides of an issue. But we are now in a very strong position. Pro-life people are in a strong position to make a deal that’s going to be good and going to be satisfactory for them.

If you weren’t able to get rid of – you wouldn’t even be having a discussion if you weren’t able to get rid of Roe v. Wade, which put pro-life in a dead position, a horrible position. They could kill the baby at any time they wanted to. But we did something that nobody thought was do-able. And other Republican presidents, and others, by the way, they wanted to get it out. They also wanted to bring it back to the states. But bringing it back to the states is a less important issue...

COLLINS: But that’s why it’s...

TRUMP: ... than the issue that we just talked about.

COLLINS: the question about a federal abortion ban. You did not say yes or no to that. You did not say how many weeks...

TRUMP: It depends what – it depends what the deal is. Lindsey Graham’s a good man.

COLLINS: You did not say how many weeks.

TRUMP: He’s got an idea. And a lot of other people have an idea. And I look at all the...

COLLINS: And a lot of people will be curious what your idea...

TRUMP: I’ll make the right decision...

COLLINS: ... is on that.

President Trump, we’ve got more questions to come for you tonight.

TRUMP: Yeah, I’ll make the right decision...

COLLINS: We’ll be right back...

TRUMP: ... for the country.

COLLINS: ... in just a moment.

COLLINS: Welcome back to CNN’s Republican presidential town hall with former President Donald Trump.

President Trump, I’d like you to meet Jennifer Simmons. She is a stay-at-home mom and former town selectman from Windham. She’s Republican, and she voted for you in 2020.

Jennifer, what’s your question tonight?

QUESTION: Good evening, Mr. President.

TRUMP: Thank you.

QUESTION: Title 42 is expected to expire tomorrow. Our southern border and now our northern border are experiencing record migration. We learned on May 2nd that the Biden administration plans on deploying 1,500 troops to the southern border.

Do you agree with deploying troops to the border? And how will a Trump administration slow down the rate of migrants coming across all our borders?

TRUMP: Sure, a very fair question, especially since tomorrow is going to be a day of infamy. You're going to have tens of thousands of people pouring into our country. Even the judge, you know, the judge overruled them when they wanted to terminate it early. And he said, do you know that you better extend this thing. The judge in Texas said, I hope you're going to extend this.

But this is my policy that they're letting terminate because they lost in court. They wanted to go earlier. You're going to have millions of people pouring into our country right now at a level that nobody has ever seen before. These people are sick. Anybody that wants this to happen to our country, they're destroying our country. And this should not be allowed to happen, how they're not going to do a version of Title 42 or my Title 42, which was tough.

If people are sick and have infectious diseases and lots of other problems, we don't want them being into our country. We have enough problems right now. We have problems like we've never had in the history of our country. Our country—

COLLINS: But, Mr. President—

TRUMP: Our country is being—

COLLINS: — the reason it's ending—

TRUMP: — destroyed.

COLLINS: The reason it's ending is because the health policy, the COVID-era pandemic emergency is coming to an end. That's what Title 42 was. You put it in place because of COVID.

TRUMP: That's true, but you have—

COLLINS: When it comes to big questions about what your immigration policy would look like if you are re-elected, some of your Republican rivals have criticized you for not fulfilling the promises that you made on the campaign trail like finishing the border wall. So how do voters know that you would get those done if you're re-elected?

TRUMP: I did finish the wall. I built a wall. I built—

COLLINS: You didn't finish the wall.

TRUMP: — hundreds of miles of wall. And I finished it. And then I said, we have to build some more because there are areas like water going through a dam. There are some areas where a lot of people are coming. You close up one and they come into another. And we started another 100 miles of wall. In fact, I said to my people, if we start this and don't finish it, and then we had a rigged election, I'm sorry to say it. And—

COLLINS: The election was not rigged, Mr. President.

TRUMP: Oh, OK, good, I know. I'm—

COLLINS: You can't keep saying that all night long.

TRUMP: I'm glad you're saying that. And so then—

COLLINS: You cannot keep saying the election—

TRUMP: — they took over and—

COLLINS: — was rigged.

TRUMP: — they decided not to finish it. It would have taken them three weeks. I've built hundreds of miles of wall. If we didn't have it, it would be — hard to believe it could be any worse, they're just letting people flow into our country.

Look, a country has to have borders. There's never been anything like is happening to our country right now.

COLLINS: You built about 52 miles of new wall when you were in office—

TRUMP: You see this?

COLLINS: — Mr. President. It wasn't the complete wall. One other thing that — with immigration—

TRUMP: No, but I have to respond to that.

COLLINS: With your immigration — it was only about 52 miles—

TRUMP: OK. Can I respond?

COLLINS: — of new wall.

TRUMP: This is what she does.

TRUMP: I built hundreds of miles. Some of the wall was up there, and it would be laying on the ground, rusted rotten steel, rusted rotten wood. A little — and what the radical left crazy Democrats did, if there's a piece of wood laying down, they consider that a wall. I built 30-foot walls that go down seven feet into the ground. If

there was a little piece of wood sitting in the ground, they said, oh, he's not building a wall, we already had a wall. Because this is the game. They're a party of disinformation.

COLLINS: It's not a game, Mr. President. It's about 52 miles of new wall. One other immigration policy—

TRUMP: No, no—

COLLINS: — you had when you were—

TRUMP: — they — I built new wall.

COLLINS: — in office—

TRUMP: I built new wall.

COLLINS: Fifth-two miles of—

TRUMP: For hundreds of miles.

COLLINS: CBP, Mr. President.

TRUMP: What I did is I replaced other wall that was laying down, that was up and rotting in the ground for 30 years. Some of it was steel that you couldn't even say it was steel.

COLLINS: Mr. President, it was only about 52 miles of new wall. But moving on, another immigration policy you had was the zero-tolerance immigration policy that separated families at the border. If you are re-elected, are you ruling out instituting that?

TRUMP: Well, when you have that policy, people don't come. If a family hears they're going to be separated, they love their family, they don't come. So I know it sounds harsh, but if you remember, remember they said I was building prisons for children? It turned out that it was Obama that was building the prisons—

COLLINS: But would you—

TRUMP: — for the children.

COLLINS: — re — re-implement that if you're re-elected? Is that what you're saying?

TRUMP: Well, here's — we have to save our country, all right? We can't afford—

COLLINS: So it sounds like that's a yes.

TRUMP: No, no. When you say to a family that if you come we're going to break you up, they don't come. And we can't afford to have anymore — look at New York City. Look what's happening. They're living in Central Park in New York City. The city is being swamped. Los Angeles is being swamped. Iowa is being swamped. Our whole country is being destroyed. Millions of people are coming into our country.

And you know what the number is going to be, in my opinion, by the end of the year, not the 4 million that you hear and the 3 million. I think it's going to be 15 million people. And in these people, they have no idea where they come from. They come from 129 different countries so far, 129, not just—

COLLINS: But, Mr. President, just—

TRUMP: — the four that we talk about.

COLLINS: Just to put a button on that, it sounds like what you're saying is that you're not ruling out re-implementing that immigration policy. I want to get to another voter. Kaitlyn Boissoneau is a student here at St. Anselm College. She's a Republican. This will be the first election that she has voted in.

What's your question for the president, Kaitlyn?

KAITLYN BOISSONEAU, STUDENT, ST. ANSELM COLLEGE: Hello, President Trump.

TRUMP: Hi.

BOISSONEAU: Thank you so much for coming.

TRUMP: Thank you.

BOISSONEAU: The current administration has made it clear that we should continue to provide military equipment to Ukraine so that they can defend themselves. Do you support this decision? And how would you deal with the increasing threat posed by Vladimir Putin?

TRUMP: First of all, thank you very much. That's really nice. And it's an important question. So important. Because we're giving away so much equipment. We don't want have ammunition for ourselves right now. We don't have ammunition for ourselves. We're giving away so much. But here's the thing. Have to say it to start off. It no longer matters.

If I were president, this would have never happened. And even the Democrats admit that. Putin knew it would have never happened and his pipeline would have never happened. A lot of things would have never happened. But this would never have happened.

COLLINS: Which Democrats say that, Mr. President?

TRUMP: And all those dead people, both Russian and Ukrainian, it wouldn't — they wouldn't be dead today. And all those cities that are blown up and disintegrated right to the ground, that wouldn't have happened, OK? Now, here's the problem. We've given so far \$171 billion. They've given — they, meaning European Union, which is approximately the same size, altogether, as our economy, they've given about 20. So we're at 170,

let's say, and they're at 20. You don't have to know too much about history to realize – or geography to realize that they're a little bit more affected than we are, OK? So they've got to put up a lot more money because they're taking advantage of us like every other country did.

That's why I ended NAFTA and replaced it with the USMCA, Mexico-Canada.

COLLINS: But on this issue, Mr. President, I should know, I don't know any Democrats who have said they don't believe Putin would've invaded if you were president. But her question is, would you continue to give Ukraine money and weapons if you're elected. What's the answer?

TRUMP: I have a very good relationship with President Zelenskyy because, as you know, he backed me up with the – with the phony impeachment – impeachment hoax, number one, when he said the president didn't do anything wrong. So I happen to–

COLLINS: That was when you asked–

TRUMP: – like – so–

COLLINS: – him for an investigation–

TRUMP: – I happen to like – yes–

COLLINS: – for weapons.

TRUMP: – that's right. And it was – I was totally exonerated, by the way. Just a waste of time and money.

COLLINS: You were impeached over that.

TRUMP: Yes, I was impeached.

COLLINS: You were impeached over that. But let's stay on topic here, Mr. President. Because the question is, would you give Ukraine weapons and funding?

TRUMP: I was impeached by a crazy woman named Nancy Pelosi–

COLLINS: But the question here is, would you give Ukraine weapons and funding if you are re-elected?

TRUMP: I would sit down – let – let me just put it a nicer way. If I'm president, I will have that war settled in one day, 24 hours.

COLLINS: How would you settle that war in one day?

TRUMP: First, I'll meet with Putin, I'll meet with Zelenskyy. They both have weaknesses and they both have strengths. And within 24 hours that war will be settled. It will be over. It will be absolutely over.

COLLINS: Do you want Ukraine to win this war?

TRUMP: I don't think in terms of winning and losing. I think in terms of getting it settled so we stop killing all these people and breaking down–

COLLINS: What do you – can I just follow up on that? You said you don't think in terms–

TRUMP: But one of the things you have to do–

COLLINS: – of winning and losing–

TRUMP: – you have to get the – you have to get Europe–

COLLINS: Mr. President, can I just follow up on that? Because that's a really important statement that you just made there.

TRUMP: Excuse me, let me just follow up.

COLLINS: Can you say if you want Ukraine or Russia to win this war?

TRUMP: I want everybody to stop dying. They're dying, Russians and Ukrainians. I want them to stop dying.

TRUMP: And I'll have that done – I'll have that done in 24 hours. I'll have it done. You need the power of the presidency to do it.

COLLINS: But you won't say that you want Ukraine to win. You said when you were in–

TRUMP: You know what I'll say? I'll say this.

COLLINS: – in office–

TRUMP: I want Europe to put up more money. Because they're in for 20 billion, we're in for 170. And they should be–

COLLINS: But that's not an answer about who should win the war.

TRUMP: And they should equalize. They have plenty of money. They should equalize. I got with NATO–

COLLINS: But I'm asking you about Ukraine right now, Mr. President.

TRUMP: – to put up hundreds of billions of dollars that they weren't paying under Obama and Bush and all of these other presidents. That's why they're – they're able to help them fight the war because of the money I got. But I want Europe to–

COLLINS: But let's talk about what's happening–

TRUMP: Excuse me.

COLLINS: – in Ukraine, Mr. President.

TRUMP: I want Europe to put up more money. Because they're laughing at us. They think we're a bunch of jerks. We're spending \$170 billion for a faraway land and they're right next door to that land, and they're in for 20. I don't think so.

COLLINS: When it comes to what's happening there, when you were in office, you said that you respected President Putin.

TRUMP: Yes, I do.

COLLINS: Do you still respect him today?

TRUMP: He made a tremendous mistake. Made that – he made – he's a smart guy, you know? I remember I said, he was smart, she was smart. They said, he–

COLLINS: What was his mistake?

TRUMP: – said President Xi of China, right, is smart. OK, 1.5 billion people, he's the ruler of 1.5 billion people. I said, yes, he's a smart guy. How dare he say he's smart. Of course he's smart. They want you to say he's a stupid person. OK, he's not a stupid person. He's very smart. He's very cunning. And Putin made a bad mistake, in my opinion.

COLLINS: What was his mistake?

TRUMP: It would have – his mistake was going in. He would have never gone in if I was president. We used to talk about it too.

COLLINS: Do you believe he is a war criminal?

TRUMP: What?

COLLINS: Do you believe that Putin is a war criminal? He's responsible for the deaths of thousands of Ukrainian–

TRUMP: Well, I think this–

COLLINS: – men and women and civilian –

TRUMP: I think it's something that should not be discussed now. It should be discussed later. Because right now we have to get a war – if you say he's a war criminal, it's going to be a lot tougher to make a deal to get this thing stopped, because if he's going to be a war criminal, where people are going to go and grab him and execute him, he's going to fight a lot harder than he's fighting, you know, under the other circumstance. That's something to be discussed at a later date.

COLLINS: But isn't it important to–

TRUMP: Right now we want to get–

COLLINS: – call it what it is?

TRUMP: – that war settled. And I'm not talking about the money, either, I'm talking about all the lives that are being – the number of people being killed in that war is far greater than you're hearing. When they blow up the city and those buildings come pouring down, and they say two people were injured, no, no, hundreds and thousands of people are being killed. And we have to get that war settled.

COLLINS: We have more with former President Trump right after this. We're going to take a quick break. And then we'll be back to questions from voters right after that.

COLLINS: Welcome back to CNN's Republican Presidential Town Hall with former President Trump.

President Trump, you – we had a lot more voters' questions, I should note, in here in New Hampshire to get to. But I also want to talk about some of the other investigations that you're facing. We've talked about others at the top. But one of those is the special counsel's investigation into classified documents that–

TRUMP: Sure.

COLLINS: – were found at Mar-a-Lago. Why did you take those documents with you when you left the White House?

TRUMP: I had every right to under the Presidential Records Act. You have the Presidential Records Act. I was there and I took what I took and it gets declassified.

Biden, on the other hand, he has 1,850 boxes. He had boxes sent to Chinatown, Chinatown, where they don't speak even English in that Chinatown we're talking about.

COLLINS: Well, can I – I got to stop you right there, because–

TRUMP: And nobody talks about him. They talk about us.

Just so you understand, I had every right to do it. I didn't make a secret of it. You know, the boxes were stationed outside of the White House. People were taking pictures of the GSA and the various people that were moving–

COLLINS: I got to stop you right there, though, because the Presidential Records Act, which is not well-known to a lot of people, I read it. It does not say that you can take documents with you.

It says, actually, that they are the property of the federal government when you leave.



TRUMP: It says you – it says you talk, you negotiate, you make a deal.

It's not criminal, by the way, not – it's –

COLLINS: It does – it does not say that you can negotiate.

TRUMP: The Presidential Records Act is not criminal. And just so you know–

COLLINS: It does not say you can negotiate to take the documents with you.

TRUMP: Just so you – can I tell you, just so you understand, the Presidential Records Act is not criminal. I took the documents. I'm allowed to. You know who else took them? Obama took them. Nixon took them. Reagan took them.

COLLINS: Obama did not take documents.

TRUMP: Oh, he didn't? He didn't?

COLLINS: The difference here that I would like to note –

TRUMP: Take a look.

Reagan took them.

COLLINS: The National Archives says that President Obama did not documents.

TRUMP: Even Jimmy Carter. Even Mike Pence had some documents, and he's a very honorable guy.

COLLINS: You referenced Pence. You referenced Biden.

TRUMP: But you know who took them more than anybody is Joe Biden. He has 1,800 boxes.

COLLINS: That's not –

COLLINS: – Mr. President. And you know that.

TRUMP: And nobody even knows where they are, 1,800, and nobody talks about him.

COLLINS: Mr. President, that's not accurate.

TRUMP: And they – and they put a rough guy on us. And they – in the meantime, they had nobody.

COLLINS: I think it's important, Mr. President, to actually set the record straight here.

They took documents, including President – Vice President Pence. When they realized they had documents, they turned them back over.

The difference is that you waited to turn yours over, and it was a year-and-a-half effort–

TRUMP: Excuse me.

COLLINS: – that included a subpoena with those documents.

One question about what happened when you had those documents.

TRUMP: It included a raid on my house. That what it included.

COLLINS: But you had gotten a – you had gotten a subpoena, and they had not been turned over yet.

TRUMP: They didn't raid Biden's house. They didn't raid Biden's house. You know what he – happened? They put him in the house. That's the one with the Corvette where the documents were laying all over the floor. That was fine.

TRUMP: And you know who happens to be at Mar-a-Lago? Secret Service. And they're phenomenal.

I have Secret Service. He didn't have Secret Service. The other thing, the vice president cannot declassify. He didn't have the right to declassify. He has documents from when he was a senator, and even Democrat senators say, I can't believe it.

No, I went by the Presidential Records Act, and we were negotiating with NARA.

COLLINS: That's not what the Presidential Records Act says. That's not what it says, Mr. President.

TRUMP: And NARA has red-flagged a thing called the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights, because they consider them dangerous documents.

COLLINS: Mr. President, that's not what it says. And I should note–

TRUMP: Those are the people we're dealing with.

COLLINS: And I should note that there is a special counsel investigating your document situation, also President Biden's document situation.

When it comes to your documents, did you ever show those classified documents to anyone?

TRUMP: Not really. I would have the right to. By the way, they were declassified after–

COLLINS: What do you mean not really?

TRUMP: Not – not that I can think of.

Let me just tell you, I have the absolute right to do whatever I want with them. I have the right. I was negotiating with NARA. Do you know what NARA is?

COLLINS: The National Archives.

TRUMP: Extremely – extremely left group of people.

COLLINS: But you don't negotiate with them.

TRUMP: Extremely left. And I was negotiating with them.

COLLINS: They're not left. They're bipartisan.

TRUMP: All of a sudden, they raided my house.

TRUMP: They didn't raid the house of Joe Biden. They didn't raid Obama.

COLLINS: But Joe Biden didn't ignore a subpoena to get those documents back, like you did. And so that's the question.

TRUMP: Joe Biden took 1,850 boxes.

COLLINS: But that's the question that investigators have, I think, is why you held onto those documents when you knew the federal government was seeking them and then had given you a subpoena to return them.

TRUMP: Are you ready? Are you ready? Can I talk?

COLLINS: Yes. What's the answer?

TRUMP: Do you mind?

TRUMP: Can I – do you mind?

COLLINS: I would like for you to answer the question.

TRUMP: OK. It's very simple to answer.

COLLINS: That's why I asked it.

TRUMP: It's very simple to – you're a nasty person, I will tell you.

COLLINS: Can you answer why you – why you held onto the document?

TRUMP: Very simple.

I was negotiating, and we were talking to NARA – that's Washington – to bring whatever they want. They can have whatever they want.

When we left Washington, we had the boxes lined up on the sidewalk outside for everybody. People are taking pictures of them. Everybody knew we were taking those boxes. And the GSA, the Government Service, the GSA was the one taking them. They brought them down to Mar-a-Lago.

We were negotiating with NARA. All of a sudden, they raid our house. When Biden has his documents, he won't give back the 1,850 boxes. And you're going to find some real gems in there.

COLLINS: But it was Biden who alerted them that he had the documents.

TRUMP: So, you–

TRUMP: – have all these different sets of – all these different set of–

COLLINS: The National Archives reached out to you to get your documents back.

Why did you not turn them over when you got a subpoena asking for you to turn them over?

TRUMP: Because we were negotiating with them. We were negotiating with them, as per, as per the Presidential Records Act. We were negotiating with NARA.

COLLINS: That's not what the Presidential Records Act says. I have seen it.

TRUMP: Very nice people, but they got to love our Constitution a little bit more, because – and they shouldn't red-flag it, by the way.

Very nice people. We were negotiating with NARA, and that's what the Presidential Records Act says, because Richard Nixon, surprisingly, had problems. And he had a lot of problems dealing with NARA, and they ended up passing legislation–

COLLINS: Well, that's why they created–

TRUMP: – called the Presidential Records Act just for this kind of a thing. We were dealing with them.

COLLINS: My last on this – on this subject, Mr. President–

TRUMP: We were talking to them. Excuse me. Wait a minute. Wait. Wait. Wait.

We were talking to them. We would have done it. But, all of a sudden, they raided the house. Now, why haven't – why hasn't the FBI raided Biden?

COLLINS: But I just explained to you why.

TRUMP: Why? Eighteen hundred and 50 boxes.

COLLINS: It's because he – they alerted the government that they had those documents and had them come and get the documents from his house.

TRUMP: OK. Why didn't – no, he – they didn't take them.

COLLINS: My question for you, though, when it comes to documents, do you still have any classified documents in your possession?

TRUMP: Are you ready?

COLLINS: Do you?

TRUMP: No. No, I don't have anything. I have no classified documents. And, by the way, they become automatically declassified when I took them.

COLLINS: No, you had to declassify them.

TRUMP: But why – let me ask you a question. Why is it that Biden had nine boxes in Chinatown? And he gets a lot of money from China.

TRUMP: Why is that? And why–

COLLINS: There is no evidence of that, Mr. President. No, you cannot–

COLLINS: There is no evidence of that, Mr. President

TRUMP: And why don't they put this guy Jack Smith and his group of – and his group of thugs–

COLLINS: What you're referring to is an office that he had.

TRUMP: Why don't they put him in charge of that?

COLLINS: Mr. President, I need to stop you right there, because there's no evidence of what you just said there.

What you're referring to there is an office that he had after leaving the vice presidency.

TRUMP: No, no. That's at the University of Pennsylvania.

COLLINS: He had a temporary office.

But I want to ask you about another investigation that you're facing.

TRUMP: You're so wrong. You don't know the subject.

COLLINS: I do know the subject. And I do know the facts, Mr. President.

TRUMP: He had one at University of Pennsylvania, but he also had nine boxes in Chinatown.

COLLINS: I want to move on to another investigation that you're facing, which is the one that's happening in Georgia–

TRUMP: She doesn't understand.

COLLINS: – where they are investigating there your efforts to overturn the election results in the state of Georgia.

TRUMP: I did nothing wrong. It was a perfect phone call.

COLLINS: At the center of that – let me finish my question.

At the center of that is that call that you had with the secretary of state–

TRUMP: Perfect call.

COLLINS: – Brad Raffensperger.

TRUMP: Yes, sure.

COLLINS: Given the fact that there are indictments expected to come in that case this summer, is that a call you would make again today?

TRUMP: Yes, I called questioning the election. I thought it was a rigged election. I thought it had a lot of problems.

I had every – I guess he's secretary of state. I called – listen to this. There are like seven lawyers on the call, many of them from there. We're having a call. We're having a normal call. Nobody said, oh, gee, he shouldn't have said that.

Why – if this call was bad – I questioned the election.

COLLINS: You asked him to find you votes.

TRUMP: If this call was bad – I didn't ask him to find anything.

Let me just tell you–

COLLINS: We have heard the audiotape, Mr. President. There's an audio of you asking him to find you 11,000-something votes.

TRUMP: – if this call was bad – I said, you owe me votes because the election was rigged. That election was rigged.

And if this call was bad, why didn't him and his lawyers hang up? How dare you say that?

This was a perfect phone call.

COLLINS: Well, they were clearly concerned enough they recorded the call.

And I should note that, of course–

TRUMP: This was a call that was made to question the results of election.

And we have – and when we can't make a call to question election results, then this country ought to just forget about it.

COLLINS: You weren't just questioning the election results.

TRUMP: I was questioning the election.

COLLINS: You were asking him to find you votes.

And I should note that there is no evidence of fraud. There is no rigged election in the state of Georgia.

I want to get back to the audience, though, Mr. President, because those are false claims you're making about what happened in Georgia.

John – Jordan Sullenberger is here. He's an undeclared voter from Hollis. He voted for you in 2020.

Jordan, what is your question for President Trump tonight?

JORDAN SULLENBERGER, MILITARY VETERAN: Thank you, Mr. Trump.

TRUMP: Thank you very much.

SULLENBERGER: I'm 26. I'm a veteran. I help manage a private aviation company.

TRUMP: You want a job?

SULLENBERGER: I'd love one, yes.

TRUMP: I'm looking – I'm looking for somebody very good.

SULLENBERGER: I – I'm not for mandates or government interference in private business.

TRUMP: Right.

SULLENBERGER: But I have seen Republicans going after us, like DeSantis, after Disney.

TRUMP: Right.

SULLENBERGER: What would you do as president to protect us from government interference?

TRUMP: Well, I'm the one that really wants to protect you.

All of these fake investigations of me are about election interference. They think, because I'm leading Biden by 11 points, seven points, nine points, I'm leading DeSanctimonious by a lot–

TRUMP: – by 40 points or 45 points. I think he ought to just relax and take it easy and think about the future, because, right now, his future is not looking so good.

I will tell you this. We are really putting it to Biden, but he's putting it to himself, because the economy stinks, inflation is horrible, and the border is a disaster. And, by the way, the way he got out of Afghanistan was the single most embarrassing moment in the history of our country.

COLLINS: Mr. President, I have one more question for you here tonight.

And I think, while we're in front of the voters here in New Hampshire – in New Hampshire, this is a fundamental question for you.

You are running in the 2024 race. If you are the Republican nominee and you are in that 2024 race, will you commit tonight to accepting the results of the 2024 election?

TRUMP: Yes, if I think it's an honest election, absolutely, I would.

COLLINS: Will you commit to accepting the results of the election regardless of the outcome?

TRUMP: Do you want me to answer it again?

If I think it's an honest election, I would be honored to. And, right now, we are so far ahead of both Democrat and Republican. And you know what? If I don't win, this country is going to be in big trouble. It's so sad to see what's happening.

COLLINS: But no commitment there on the – accepting the results regardless of the outcome?

TRUMP: It's – if it's an honest election, correct, I would.

COLLINS: OK, so not committing to accepting the 2020 election results or acknowledging what happened in 2020.

TRUMP: Go ahead.

COLLINS: President Trump, I want to thank you for coming here tonight.

This is an important conversation with voters to hear and to have.

Thank you to our audience and to our host, Saint Anselm College.

COLLINS: CNN's coverage continues with Anderson Cooper and Jake Tapper.

TRUMP: Thank you.

TRUMP: Thank you very much.

Thank you very much, Kaitlan.

Good job.

TRUMP: Thank you. Thank you very much.

I like you guys. We love New Hampshire. Thank you. Thank you, Woody (ph). Good luck, Woody.

COLLINS: Thanks, everyone.