*President Biden’s Big Decision*

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Run time: 10 minutes

**Cast of Characters**

ROBERT H. BIDEN US President, balding, mid-60’s

GWEN RODALE-GRASSLEY Secretary of Agriculture, tall, athletic, mid-50’s

Narrator (voice off-stage)

**Place**

The Oval Office, The White House

**Time**

Spring 2042

**Music**

As curtain rises: “Hail to the Chief” plays loudly in the background, as the narrator prepares to read opening. The music fades out slowly as the narrator begins.

As curtain falls:Military bass band rendition of *“Stars and Stripes Forever”* blares out loudly.

**Narrator** (in grave tones)

*The year was 2042. Seated behind the “Resolute” desk, poring over his PDB -- the President’s Daily Briefing -- President “Bobby” Biden’s eyes caught a page loaded with bullet-points, highlighted in brilliant yellow. After 20-odd years of failures, the COVID19 vaccine riddle was finally solved. But reliable polls showed that only half of all Americans wanted the country to return to normal, as it was before 2020. Life wasn’t the same for them without the buzz of packed political rallies, Coachella-type concert weekends. Who remembered their last day at the beach, or a morning at the gym? Would they ever thrill at the rush of Black Friday at the Apple Store? The other half liked the new world that Americans had made under COVID19. They took pride in their newly focused lives – not so much for making their own sour dough starter, but for its gentler pace, with endless quiet time. They also read...****(PAUSE)****... books! Lots of books. They loved breathing sweet, clean air, marveling at the sparkling blue, smog-free skies, listening to silence falling on the cities each evening. Nature’s recovery saw the return of bobcats, coyotes, mule deer and a rash of rabbits to the suburbs. And, they sure didn’t miss the struggle for survival to park at Whole Foods. They wanted the new changes to be permanent.*

*But what constituency should the President back? What path should the President chart? Turning his attention to the PDB, the President read aloud from it....*

(President, , concentrating intently on a document of 3-4 pages in an official-looking ring-binder)

### BIDEN

### (seated at the “Resolute” desk reads aloud from his PDB, occasionally raising his eyes to reflect)

Hmmm.... ‘Despite COVID19, indeed because of it, we’ve saved ourselves -- at least for a decade or two – both from a looming population explosion, and the doomsday prospects of climate change. In *culling* global population by a quarter, and throttling the production of greenhouse gases, the pandemic gratefully stifled two impending disasters that no political force would or could.’

BIDEN *(pauses, looks up, visibly shocked and disturbed)*

My Lord! ‘*Culling*’?! ‘*Culling’?!* That’s some ugly language to use about people. Looks like some staff Social Darwinist reveling in all the creative destruction going down around the globe. But how should I react? I don’t really feel up to speed on these things. (**PAUSES** to deliberate) I know! I’ve got it! I’m gonna get hold of somebody who really knows a thing or two about population, climate change and all.

BIDEN (Speaking into his desk phone, we hear him telling an aide)

Get me Secretary of Agriculture, Grassley, in here, pronto! Yes, yes, that’s right – **(PAUSE)** Gwen*RODALE-*GRASSLEY... Ag SecretaryGwen *Rodale*-GRASSLEY !

(*Before long, a tall, athletic mid-50ish woman strides confidently into the Oval Office*, and greets the president)

GRASSLEY

Good morning, Mr President. What can I do for you?

BIDEN

Good morning, Madame Secretary... I mean, Gwen. Have a seat, please. Have a seat...

GRASSLEY

Thank you, sir

(She sits down in the upright chair that is always there for guests alongside the “Resolute” desk)

BIDEN

Well, the thing is… Well, it’s today’s damned PDB... That thing’s put me in a bad, bad mood. It’s got me all agitated.

GRASSLEY

Oh? How so, sir?

BIDENhey

It has polls showing that lots and lots of people think that the COVID19 thing was a blessing in disguise – like, for controlling population and slowing climate change!

GRASSLEY

Frankly, sir, that only stands to reason. Back in the early 2000’s, you’ll remember how world population was raging out-of-control -- like a runaway brush fire. But people didn’t care. They were like so many bugs, flying right into a candle flame – especially in developing countries. It was like they were competing to see who could make the population flames even hotter. So, yes, you might say that by killing off billions, COVID19 did the world a good turn. It sure as heck doused the population flames.

BIDEN

Oh, dear Lord! How can you say that. That’s horrible!

GRASSLEY

Not news, really. Those grim forecasts of overpopulation had been floating around interagency circles for years. But nobody wanted to face the ugly facts and do anything about it sir. “Fake news,” they used to call it. Nobody would hear of it. Some of us did see the signs, but it took COVID read the signs and solve the problem in its own way.

BIDEN

Signs? What signs?

GRASSLEY

Remember how US ag exports went into orbit at the end of Trump45’s *third* term – you know, the ‘state of siege’ third term? That should have told us something. 3rd world demand for food had never jumped like that -- ever! Still, don’t forget that it was that rolling ag boom that eventually got you elected in 2036. Upset wins in Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa and Missouri? Well, they bagged you the Electoral College, even after losing California.

BIDEN

Yeah, that election was chock full of surprises. Not even all the things Governor Kamala Harris tried could pull California for me.

GRASSLEY

So, what else is the PDB saying, exactly?

BIDEN (Pointing demonstrably at the PDB document)

Well, it claims right here that we’re not going to be able to get that lost population back – nor *should* we even try! Hear that? Nor, *should* we even try! Polls are telling me that lots of people now believe our old Go-Go economy trapped us into ecological disaster. And – *get this* – *(Again, jabbing a finger demonstrably at the PDB document)* the governments of the Third World are totally on board! They’re taking the lead and ditching the growth model for good!

GRASSLEY

Really?!

BIDEN

Yes. Look, here. I’m quoting now, (**PAUSE,** then gesturing again at the PDB) “... once the world population had thinned, Third World survivors claimed they *preferred* small-and-steady to the old go-go ways. Why, last night, even Sinead Hannity showed 3rd World crowds chanting ‘AC, yes! BC, no! AC, yes! BC, no!’

GRASSLEY

AC?? **(PAUSE)** BC??

BIDEN

Yeah, yeah, you know ‘Before COVID19’! No!”, ‘After COVID19’ Yes!”

GRASSLEY

Can’t say that I really blame them, sir. You’ve always known me for pushing organic farming and ‘small is beautiful’ ag anyway. **(PAUSE)** Mr President, you know what? The more you talk about what the PDB says, the more I think I am going to like the way this new ‘AC’ world is shaping up... like it a lot.

BIDEN

Well, we’ll see how all that eco-small-is-beautiful happy-talk works out, Gwen.

GRASSLEY

But Mr President, you know in your heart these measures to control population and climate change will give these folks a better chance at lasting prosperity, not less!

BIDEN

Oh, really? Just take population, Gwen. What will magically control that? Nobody’s going to try that old Maoist ‘one child policy,’ again. People always want more.

(Turning directly to the president, GRASSLEY confronts him)

GRASSLEY

You know the answer, Mr President. **(PAUSE)** You know the answer very well -- WOMEN will! When the COVID19 pandemic was at its worst, remember how four or five countries flattened their curves fast and got back to normal? Remember what made those countries special? THEY WERE ALL LED BY WOMEN! Then, as the COVID19 deaths mounted disproportionately among men, women filled the vacuum left by so many male deaths. Decades later, the population imbalance between genders virtually ended male dominance in politics and economics.

BIDEN(Shaking his head with regret)

Indeed. Because that decline in the world’s male population came so gradually, we hardly noticed it. But, notice it or not, there had never been a greater gender ‘sort’ like that before or since.

GRASSLEY

Yes, sir, and we all know why, don’t we?

BIDEN (In a low, hollow voice, heavy with sadness)

Yeah, we do... well, we do *now*.

GRASSLEY

Don’t you remember all those Trumpy guys, all got up in designer camou’, mobbing state capitols and courts, brandishing their AR’s to protest the 2020 lockdowns? Thanks to COVID19’s lethal efficiency in targeting men, our stocks of capable men collapsed by the end of the 2020’s. In a way, Natural Selection and swaggering machismo conspired to *sort out* the genders in favor of women. If strutting around all gunned-up and unmasked didn’t get ‘em, bellying up to the bar at the local tavern to celebrate, sure did. 49% infection rate recorded 2 weeks later, and 25% fatality rate a week or two after that.

BIDEN

You realize, Gwen, that had my dad won in 2020, he was going to try to save those young fools from themselves. Dad was like that. But those Boogalooers, 3-Percenters, Proud Boys and all, were taking their cues from 45 and Chief Justice Jennine. But, as it turned out, Mother Nature played by her own rules, not theirs. She mowed them down like so many weeds. Two or three weeks after each mass exposure, ‘bingo!’ more gun-toting guys would get infected. In the end, the numbers of younger males shriveled to statistical insignificance. Both president Donald Trump, Jr and his dad always said they wanted to achieve ‘herd immunity.’ Well, what they got was ‘herd *mortality*.’

GRASSLEY

Too true, Mr President. But naturally, with males disappearing, women just moved right in – especially into areas where women had built up fiercest resentments. I’m thinking, of course, of intimate areas where men had lorded it over us – like sex and reproductive functions. Women stood up and said “No!” to carrying any and all pregnancies to term, just because the patriarchy said so. But, as if by magic, patriarchy just faded away. Gone! Women had their kids (or not) when and how it suited them. Take it, or leave it, guys! You need us more than we need you. So, deal with it!

BIDEN

(Speaking with clenched chin) A hard, hard truth, but true just the same.

GRASSLEY

Things sure have changed, sir. Just look at your own Cabinet. You could count the number of qualified male Cabinet secretaries on the fingers of one hand. It’s hard to imagine ever having another male president after you’ve completed your term, sir.

BIDEN (Dejected)

Yeah, looks like I am the end of the line, doesn’t it, Gwen?

GRASSLEY

Afraid so, sir. And, let’s not forget how years of Trump45 forcing those poor West Point cadets to crowd in for his annual commencement addresses decimated the Army’s supply-chain of future officers for years – mostly young men, as well.

BIDEN

Well, dad and I did try really hard to stop all that dumb macho-driven stuff. But without the Big (presidential) Megaphone, no one paid any attention. Even after those vicious 4th and 5th waves of COVID19, some guys seemed to act as if heavy doses of testosterone could poison COVID19... **(PAUSE)** ya’ know, **(PAUSE)** like bleach.

GRASSLEY

Maybe that why it’s been so hard for you to find young men of faith to serve in your administration, Mr President?

BIDEN

Yeah, pretty much. But no one can blame *me* for not trying. There just weren’t enough young, interested and qualified, religious youths in the right age cohort to fill my recruiting quotas. **(PAUSE)** Remember what they called the ‘Slaughter of the Innocents,’ Gwen?

GRASSLEY

Not really.

BIDEN

That’s what they called the Big Religious *Sort*! – the ‘Slaughter of the Innocents’ -- when COVID19 clobbered church-goers, and they started dying in droves.

GRASSLEY

Were they really all that *innocent*, Mr President?

BIDEN

Well, yes they were innocent, even if foolish. Trump45 misled all these young men who literally worshipped him for killing Roe v Wade. Barely a month after Trump45 sounded the all-clear to return to packed churches back in Spring 2020, COVID19 tore through the religious communities like a swarm of small tornados. It wasn’t until the numbers were toted up and charted that we appreciated the scale of losses. What folly of faith in a guy who never asked God’s forgiveness, rarely stepped inside a church, or didn’t even know which end of the bible was up!

GRASSLEY

That’s pretty much news to me, sir. I’ve been so caught up in gender politics and Green issues that I didn’t recall the ‘Slaughter of the Innocents...’

BIDEN

Back then, as a young man, I honestly couldn’t really boast of being much of a church-goer, myself. I can remember, though, how immortal, invulnerable and arrogant as hell I felt. Back in those days, I was rushing headlong to ruination along with all my good-buddies.

GRASSLEY

That bad, eh?

BIDEN

And, who can forget how things fell apart for me – and especially for dad -- when Rudy Giuliani staged that media circus with those incriminating Burisma files on me that he finally dug up in Ukraine. The rest is history. Trump 45 roared back from being way down in the polls, and crushed my dad going away. I’ll never forgive myself for handing Trump a club to beat my dad.

GRASSLEY

But you must forgive yourself, Mr President. You’re not that slacker, that stoner -- ‘*Hunter* Biden’ any more. You’re that new you -- you’re Robert H. Biden – *President* Robert H. “Bobby” Biden! – the first Democrat to break the streak of nearly 20 years of Trumps in the White House. And, now, the nation depends on you to make the right choice for our future.

BIDEN (Suddenly revived, and decisive, he turns to Grassley and says in a firm steady voice)

And you know something, Gwen? **(PAUSE)** I AM ready! **(PAUSE)** I am SO ready!

GRASSLEY

So, what’ll it be, then, Mr President? **(PAUSE)** BC or AC? **(PAUSE)** What’ll it be, sir?! **(PAUSE)** The old ways of fond memory, or the strange, but braver, new ways? **(PAUSE)**  Where will you send us, Mr President **(PAUSE)** -- *back* to the future, or *forward* into something new?!

As the president begins to answer, “Stars and Stripes Forever” blares out loudly, drowning out his garbled, undecipherable words.

***FADE TO BLACK***