

Newsmaker Transcript

Vice President Pence Remarks Before Meeting With Customs and Border Protection Employees, as Released by the White House

Friday, January 11, 2019

PENCE:

Well, thank you, Secretary Nielsen. Thank you for your great leadership. The Department of Homeland Security; to Commissioner McAleenan, who is with us today; and to Chief Carla Provost - we just couldn't be more proud of your leadership or all of the great men and women of U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Would you join me in thanking Carla for her outstanding leadership?

(APPLAUSE.)

It's an honor to be with you today, with all the men and women who represent some 60,000 employees all across this country, public servants all - the men and women of U.S. Customs and Border Protection. And it is a privilege to be able to address you at this momentous time.

And let me bring greetings from a great champion of the U.S. Border Patrol and all of the men and women and all of the agencies in U.S. Customs and Border Protection. I want to bring greetings from the 45th President of the United States of America, President Donald Trump.

As the President said yesterday, and I say again today travelling all across this country, in his words, "You have no idea how much you are loved by the American people." As the President said many times, "a country without borders is not a country." And each and every day, the men and women of U.S. Customs and Border Patrol see to the territorial integrity of the United States of America. And every American is grateful for the service and sacrifice that each one of you provide to this country each and every day.

We're grateful for the work that you do. And let me assure you that, in a challenging time, in the midst of a humanitarian and security crisis on our southern border, on behalf of the President, myself, and our entire administration, I am here to say we are with you and we are going to continue to stand with you until you have the resources and the reforms to do your job. That's my pledge.

The men and women of CBP do an essential job for the national security of the United States. It's amazing to think this is one of the largest law enforcement organizations in the world. Each of you makes an extraordinary difference.

And the truth of the matter is, men and women of this department, you risk your lives every day to enforce the laws of this country, but you also save lives every day. And in the midst of this extraordinary humanitarian and security crisis at our southern border, the numbers speak for

themselves about your commitment to law and order, but also your commitment to demonstrate the compassion of the American people.

Now, while some in the public debate say that this is a "manufactured crisis" on the southern border, I expect the men and women in uniform gathered here and those that might be looking on know the truth of it. I mean, the reality is, today, we've got nearly 60,000 people attempting to come into our country illegally every single month.

And for the first time ever, driven largely by smugglers and cartels and human traffickers, 60 percent of those apprehended now are families and children. It's putting, as you all know, an extraordinary burden on our U.S. Border Patrol and on Customs and Border Protection.

Newly released data shows that December was actually a record-breaking month for family units apprehended at our border: 27,500 family units were apprehended illegally crossing the border in the last month. It's placed an incredible burden on our system and it represents, literally, 136 percent increase from 2017 alone.

Now, there's been some confusion among this, and some of it actually has been fairly innocent, in my view. I've talked to some elected officials who had the impression that illegal immigration on our southern border was down. And, frankly, because of the efforts of U.S. Border Patrol, individuals attempting to come into our country are being apprehended and are being prosecuted in a manner that that number has been declining in recent months.

But what you all know is we've seen a dramatic increase in the number of families, in the number of unaccompanied children. In fact, there are 10,000 - there were 10,000 more members of families and unaccompanied children in the last month than when President Obama called it a humanitarian crisis in the Rose Garden in 2014. Let me say that again: In the last month, we saw more than 10,000 families and unaccompanied children attempt to come across our border - that was 10,000 more than when President Obama called it a humanitarian crisis in the Rose Garden in 2014.

Well, he was right then, and President Trump is right now. We have a humanitarian crisis on our southern border and it demands action by the Congress. And the President, and I, and our entire administration are going to continue to stand strong until we give you the resources and the reforms that you need to accomplish your mission.

Let me also say it's not simply a humanitarian crisis. We recognize that each one of you risk your lives every day enforcing our laws. Gangs like MS-13 use our weak borders to gain entry into our country and they target unaccompanied minors for recruitment. We know heartbreakingly that 300 Americans lose their lives every week to heroin overdose and addiction, and that 90 percent of heroin enters our country through our southern border.

We know the scourge of human trafficking - that 70 percent of migrants are victims of violence on their journey north. Thirty percent of women, according to Doctors Without Borders report being sexually assaulted during the journey north.

It is remarkable to think, in the last year alone, U.S. Border Patrol and our border officials apprehended 17,000 individuals with prior criminal convictions attempting to come illegally into the United States of America.

We have a humanitarian crisis at our border, we have a security crisis at our border. And each one of you are on the frontlines of standing in the gap and enforcing our laws. And you have our gratitude.

Let me also say, I was deeply moved to hear about the efforts of emergency medical technicians. I mean, it is remarkable to think that those of you wearing the blue and green uniforms out enforcing our laws on our borders have also been in the lifesaving business. I just learned that since December 22nd, you've escorted 48 individuals to the hospital per day. And again, this is a reflection of the vulnerable nature of the population that's coming to our border, being exploited by human traffickers and cartels and smugglers.

It's amazing to think that in the last year, 12,000 were referred for hospital visits by U.S. Border Patrol, but we're on track this year for 28,000 hospital referrals. Now, that's a demonstration of the compassion of the American people. Our hearts broke when we all learned of the loss of life of two young Guatemalan children who were presented at our border very ill. But the American people should know: 48 hospital trips per day, now on track 28,000. And again, it's a reflection of the families and the unaccompanied minors and their families that are being taken advantage of by those who would profit - more than \$2 billion estimated in the last year - from human trafficking and smuggling.

So it's a challenging time on our border, but I know you all have risen to the challenge and you're all about the mission. And I really came here to assure you of our support, but also to thank you. Thank you for staying focused on the mission even in these challenging times. And also to say to each one of you, on behalf of the President of the United States, everyone in Customs and Border Protection, that just as you fight every day to keep our nation safe, this President and this administration will keep fighting to build the wall and give you the resources and reforms you need to do your job. That's my promise.

(APPLAUSE.)

We do it because it's the right thing to do. We do it because the facts of what's happening on our southern border speak for themselves. But I also know that we do this in the midst of a partial government shutdown that has no doubt created anxiety for families that are gathered here today.

And I want to assure you and your families that, at President Trump's direction, we've taken steps to mitigate the impact of this partial government shutdown on you, on your families, and on the some-800,000 federal workers that are affected. We've made sure that tax refunds will be going out on schedule. We've made sure that food stamp benefits will go forward.

And I'm also pleased to report to you that, with the full support of the President of the United States, just moments ago the House of Representatives passed legislation that will ensure that all the dedicated professionals at Customs and Border Protection and all of the agencies affected by

this shutdown will be paid in full when the government reopens. Your families will get your paychecks.

We're going to continue to work to end this shutdown. But I promise you, we're going to continue to stand to give you the resources and the infrastructure that you tell us you need to do your job. And I want to thank all of you for staying on mission and I want to thank you for your support.

When I was putting my notes together to come over today, I came across a note from some members of the team down in Tucson. They sent me a note pointing out that, while fellow agents who are going to be impacted in their paychecks on a day like today, they still wanted me to know, and I quote, "We believe in what the President is doing and we're behind you 100 percent." Now, that's a voice of a public servant. That's someone who has responded to a calling to advance a mission. And I know all of you standing here today - and I can tell by the looks on your faces - share that same sentiment.

I mean, the truth of the matter is, as the President visited McAllen, Texas yesterday at the border, he acknowledged then, I acknowledge now, you're incredible people, but we know you need help.

We know we need a wall. We need a physical barrier in areas of our southern border. We know you need additional resources to meet the security and humanitarian challenges that you face with this rising tide of illegal immigration so much comprised of families and unaccompanied minors, different than in days past. And we know you need reforms in the law that will take the enticements that human traffickers use to encourage families to take the long and dangerous journey up the peninsula to attempt to come into our country illegally. And we're going to continue to fight for all of those reforms.

But in the midst of it, my word to each and every one of you is: Focus on the mission. I know here at U.S. Customs and Border Protection you are all about the mission. And it is a long and storied tradition here. And I want to assure you that we're going to figure this thing out. The President wanted me to communicate to each and every one of you, we're going to get you the support that you need. We're going to build that wall. We're going to get the resources that you need to secure our border one way or another. That's our pledge to each and every one of you. We owe you nothing less, and more importantly, we owe the American people nothing less.

But in the meantime, just keep doing what you do every day. Just keep making the American people proud, just every bit as much as you make your families proud. And keep that incredible, heroic tradition of U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

You know, there's a verse in the Bible that says we're surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses. And as I came in today, I stopped for a minute to stop at the memorial of your silent partners at U.S. Customs and Border Protection. It's amazing to think, in the nearly 95-year history of this agency, 127 have fallen in the line of duty. Fallen to protect the territorial integrity of the United States and to protect the American people.

You are a part of a long and proud tradition, and I promise you this President, his Vice President, our administration, the American people are with you. We are going to stand with you and give you the resources and reforms you need to accomplish your mission.

So, thank you. God bless you, and keep up the great work. It's an honor to be with you all.

(APPLAUSE.)