

Newsmaker Transcript

President Donald Trump Remarks During Briefing at the Rio Grande Valley U.S.-Mexico Border, as Released by the White House

Thursday, January 10, 2019

TRUMP:

So they apprehended people from the Middle East, and they do it all the time. And everybody says, "Well, where are they from?" We're not talking about only Mexico. All over the world, they come in, because it's a weak spot. They make it strong, but the laws have to be strong. And we need -- we need security. We need the kind of backup that you want.

And they've asked -- by the way, we have lists of things. What they need, more than anything, is the barrier, the wall. Call it whatever you want. Whether it's steel or concrete, you don't care. We need a barrier. And they have done a fantastic job. Never so many apprehensions ever in our history. But, you know, it could be a lot easier. It could be a lot easier for you.

ORTIZ:

Yes, sir.

TRUMP:

And you could spread your people out to a lot different areas, which would also be very helpful.

ORTIZ:

And, Mr. President, we have 55 miles of fencing in this sector. We started a job in 2006. We need to finish that job. We've got the personnel. We need the technology, we need the resources, and we need the infrastructure in order to control this border and manage it.

Part of our area is covered with some fencing on our east side. That accounts for about 6 percent of our traffic. Where we have no fencing, over 90 percent of our traffic occurs in those areas.

TRUMP:

Okay, folks? I mean, you don't have to say anymore. That's it. That's it. And we never even spoke before this, right?

ORTIZ:

No, sir.

TRUMP:

I never told you to say that.

ORTIZ:

No, sir.

TRUMP:

I should have -- except he said it perfectly, all right?

So, look. Look, this is common sense. They need a barrier. They need a wall. If you don't have it, it's going to be nothing but hard work and grueling problems. And, by the way, and death. And death. A lot of death.

I want to thank you. You do a fantastic job.

ORTIZ:

Thank you, Mr. President. I appreciate that.

TRUMP:

That's really good. Thank you very much.

QUESTION:

(INAUDIBLE) you saw today and what happened late yesterday, how much closer are you, at this point, to declaring a national emergency?

TRUMP:

Well, we can declare a national emergency. We shouldn't have to. Because this isn't even -- this is just common sense. I mean, you were at the last meeting, where we saw people who, like, as you know -- Reggie Singh's brother. Reggie, I got to know him a little -- got to know today a little bit.

This shouldn't be happening in our country. This shouldn't be happening. And what you see on the border, that's not as much of a problem as they come through the border and they go out throughout our nation. So you'll have crime in Iowa. You'll have crime in New Hampshire. You'll have crime in New York. You'll have crime in places -- you know, you don't associate it with the border. But it comes through the border. Tremendous amounts. And as hard as we work, and well as we're doing nationwide on crime, a lot of it is caused by people that come that in through the southern border.

So -- and, you know, if we had the barrier, it wouldn't happen. It wouldn't happen. They could have fewer people. They could put people other places, instead of having everyone concentrated right here.

And it's all common sense. And Nancy and Chuck know that. Look, they're not winning this argument. They're losing the argument badly. They know it. And it's not about an argument, and it's not about politics for me. It's about doing the right thing. I mean, I could do a lot easier things. I could just forget this, like everyone else did. This should have been done 30 years ago, and 20 years ago, and 10 years ago, and 5 years ago. I could have done like everyone else, just sort of say, "Hey, forget it."

A lot of the crime in our country is caused by what's coming through here. These people do the most incredible job, and they're not given -- they're not given a full hand because they need the barriers. If they don't have the barriers -- and you just said it better than anybody could say it: Where we have a good, strong barrier, you don't have problems. Now, the problem is, they go to the barrier, that's it, but now they go around the barrier. So when you fill up the gaps, it's going to be a much different day.

QUESTION:

Mr. President, are you considering a broader immigration deal? Something that would involve --

TRUMP:

We are. I would like to look at broader. I think we can do this quickly, because this is common sense. And it's not expensive. We will save the cost of the wall every year, but much more than that. Much more than that.

But I would like to do a much broader form of immigration. And we can do immigration reform; it will take longer. It's been complex. It's been going on for 30, 35 years. They've been talking about immigration reform. But we have to -- before we do that, we have to create a barrier. That we can do very quickly.

QUESTION:

Sir, to help the DREAMers, would any sort of broader immigration deal, in your mind --

TRUMP:

Something can be done. We can do that, Phil. We could help the DREAMers. We want to help the DREAMers. I was ready to help the DREAMers, and then we got a decision that the folks representing the DREAMers very strongly -- which is us also, if you want to know the truth -- but they said, "Well, we don't have to do it anymore." So now it's before the Supreme Court. We'll see what happens. And if the Supreme Court rules against the President Obama decision, which he knew would not hold up -- we will have a deal with the DREAMers. We can do it early. But this has to be done soon so we get our folks paid in our country.

QUESTION:

Sir, you said, in the earlier event with the Border Patrol agents, that you never -- when you say Mexico is going to pay for the wall, you never expected that they would write you a check. But during your campaign.

TRUMP:

Of course, I don't expect. When I say Mexico -- excuse me. When I say Mexico is going to pay for the wall, do you think they're going to write a check for \$20 billion or \$20 billion or \$5 billion or 2 cents? No. They're paying for the wall in a great trade deal.

You had the worst trade deal anywhere in the world, in NAFTA. We lost thousands of businesses, millions of jobs. Millions of jobs. You go up to New England, you go to Ohio, you go to Pennsylvania -- you look at those factories that were wiped out. And now we have a great trade deal, and it will take in. And we will -- look, billions and billions of dollars a year will be made now, as opposed to NAFTA, which was a disaster. You know that. Everybody knows that.

QUESTION:

Mr. President, now that you visited the Rio Grande Valley, do you think any differently now that you've seen these agents (INAUDIBLE)?

TRUMP:

Well, I think more impressive than anything are the agents themselves. Look at them. I mean, these people are incredible.

(APPLAUSE)

We have -- we have -- you know, you hear about them, and you -- when you meet them, it's different. You meet these people. I mean, they're a great group of people. They happen to be very good-looking. I have to say that.

(LAUGHTER)

They're good-looking people. They're smart, they're tough. They've got the whole package. And I want to tell you, they are impressive. And I've met a lot of them. I've met -- we just left a big room loaded up with Border Patrol and ICE and law enforcement. These are incredible people. They're incredible people. And, you know, there's something different when I meet them here as opposed to seeing you at the White House or seeing you in an office someplace, right? They do an incredible job.

QUESTION:

The local officials that Senator Cornyn mentioned here on the border, have you met with any of them who disagree with the wall?

TRUMP:

We have. We have. Yeah, we have.

QUESTION:

Do they disagree with the wall?

TRUMP:

Not anyone that I met with. But most people want it, I think. And I guess there could be some pockets where they maybe disagree a little it, but not very much.

Yeah.

QUESTION:

What is your timetable on a decision on a national emergency?

TRUMP:

About what?

QUESTION:

What is your timetable on a decision on whether or not you will declare a national emergency?

TRUMP:

Well, I'm going to see how we do with going through Congress. Don't forget, national emergency is going through Congress because that already went through Congress. That's what it's there for. If you read it, it is so clear, it is so perfect.

I'd rather not do it -- not for any particular reason, other than this should be easier to get approved through Congress. Because the same people that are holding it up have approved it many times before. Ted and John. I mean, they -- these people approved it just a few years ago. And now, all of a sudden, they're not. The reason they're not is because of me. I hate to say. Because they know they're going to lose in 2020. They'll do anything they can to not lose. They want to win. But it's not going to happen.

Go ahead.

QUESTION:

Are you going to make any time during your visit today to see the detention facility where parents were separated from their children?

TRUMP:

I don't know what they have planned. I would certainly do that, but I just don't --

QUESTION:

It's only three blocks away from where you were, but it's --

TRUMP:

I would do it. I would stop there if we could. You'd have to ask the Secret Service. But I would certainly -- hi, folks. Thank you. I would certainly stop there. I wouldn't mind. It's not a bad idea, actually. I wouldn't mind, if you want to do that. I wouldn't mind.

QUESTION:

Mr. President, given the fact that you are holding this position, and Democrats are not moving theirs, realistic --

TRUMP:

Well, I think they are moving theirs. If you read one of your competitors today, they will tell you that the Democrats that are starting to say this is not an argument they can win are some of the very young, very smart Democrats that just got elected to Congress. And I don't know if you saw the same story that I did, but they're saying this is not an argument we're going to win.

This is a commonsense argument. Now, if for any reason we don't get this going, and they're not going to act responsibly, and they don't mind death and crime and all of the problems that they cause by not having a barrier, then you will see what happens with national emergency, which I can do very easily. And there's no question it holds up. And it was approved by Congress because the act itself was approved by Congress.

QUESTION:

But some Republicans are also not really happy with the strategy. Realistically --

TRUMP:

I think Republicans are very happy. I mean, I have two of the most respected senators right behind me. I will tell you, you have -- you always have a few that feel a little bit differently. But I think we're unified. We had a great meeting yesterday. We had 53 people, or close to 53 people. And we used to have 51, and we had a couple that were on the difficult side. We have 53 great senators.

I think there's great unity. There's a few that feel, "Well, maybe we can it this way or that way." But basically, I think we have far more unity than the Democrats. You saw -- you saw the votes.

QUESTION:

How long do you think the shutdown will last now, realistic --

TRUMP:

What?

QUESTION:

Realistically, how long do you think the shutdown is now going to last?

TRUMP:

I don't know. That, I can't tell you. All I can tell you is that I feel very badly for people that have family members that have been killed. That should have never happened. Okay? Those are the people I'm thinking most about.

QUESTION:

Mr. President, on the DACA wall, a bigger immigration deal, are you saying you would only consider a broader immigration agreement after you get the wall money?

TRUMP:

No, I would do it simultaneously, but I'd like to see them move fast. The nice part about the wall, or the barrier, is I can have that worked out -- in 15 minutes we can start construction. We're already building. But now we would be able to carry the construction through. We actually have a fantastic design that's going to be efficient and fast and really, really work well.

QUESTION:

If you were to declare a national emergency in the next couple of days, how quickly could construction actually begin on the wall? How fast could the army --

TRUMP:

well, I think very quickly. Perhaps, if I read your newspaper, somebody will sue to stop it. But we would win that suit, I believe, very quickly.

QUESTION:

Are you prepared for that suit? And what would the defense look like?

TRUMP:

I'm prepared for anything.

QUESTION:

What if the lawyers --

TRUMP:

I'm prepared for -- the lawyers tell me, like, 100 percent. That doesn't stop people from suing, you know. If you look at various things where we got sued, and we end up winning recently in the Supreme Court a couple of times.

Go ahead.

QUESTION:

Sir, if you're considering a broader immigration package, doesn't that lessen the idea that you would use a national emergency? Are you thinking less about a national emergency?

TRUMP:

No, if came to me with a package beyond the barrier, and if it was something that we all agreed with, that the senators agreed with, that everybody liked -- it's common sense; most of this is common sense -- I'm all for it.

You have some laws and some codes and some things having to do with immigration that are horrible. I don't care if you're liberal or conservative. They're horrible. And if they want to straighten things out and do something with catch and release, which, as you know, is one of the great disasters in immigration of all time. You catch them and then you release them. What kind of stuff is this? If they want to do something with that, it would be all right.

Phil.

QUESTION:

And, Mr. President, back in Washington, there's some big news about Michael Cohen. He's agreed to testify before the House Democrats next month. What do you think of that? Are you worried about what he might say?

TRUMP:

I'm not worried about it at all. No.

Go ahead.

QUESTION:

Mr. President, when that rancher talked about his concerns that he's heard about eminent domain, it struck you. Can you tell us how and why, and what you intend to do about it?

TRUMP:

Well, it did strike me. And when I look at him and I look at the family, and I see -- but you know, eminent domain is one of those things -- and he's actually in favor of it; he wants to do something about it. You know, when you talk about that, you're talking about the fact that he wants to do something about it. He wants to see a wall. There's an example of somebody that's affected, from the standpoint of land, but he wants to see a wall.

So we're going to get this straightened out, hopefully. Hopefully, the Democrats are going to come to their senses, they're going to realize that they don't want people killed, they don't want crime. They want to end it. And that's going to happen.

Go ahead.

QUESTION:

Mr. President, what are you going to do to stop the (INAUDIBLE) caravan that's coming over?

TRUMP:

A caravan is forming right now in Honduras. It's supposed to be bigger than the other caravans. We will handle that as it comes up. If we had a wall, we wouldn't have any problems. But we don't, so we will handle it.

Okay, thank you all very much.

QUESTION:

Mr. President, any message to the federal workers who won't get paid tomorrow?

TRUMP:

I'm very concerned about people that are being badly injured and killed and family members. And I'm looking -- and you know what: A lot of the people that we're talking about in terms of pay, they agree with me. Many of the people that we're talking about, they agree with me. Thank you all very much.