

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2019

Remarks on Signing the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2017 and an Exchange With Reporters

January 9, 2019

The President. Okay, thank you very much. Appreciate you being here. Hasn't been so long. Late last night. And we're having some very good times in our country. We're doing very well, except for the border. The border is a big problem. It's a very dangerous problem. And—so I can talk all about the job numbers and how well we're doing on the economy. The stock market's up. I guess now we're over 30 percent since the election.

So many good things are happening, but we have to take care of the border. And we're all working together. I really believe the Democrats and the Republicans are working together. I think that something will happen. I hope. Otherwise, we'll go about it in a different manner. And I don't think we'll have to do that, but you never know.

In a few moments, I'll sign legislation continuing my administration's extensive efforts to combat the scourge of human trafficking. I spoke about it last night. Human trafficking. It really hits a nerve. We're talking about, in many cases, women and children grabbed, thrown into the back seat of a car, or thrown into a van with no windows, with no—any form of air. Tape put across their mouths. And they're brought across the border. And they don't go through checkpoints; they go through the emptiest spot they can find, with no walls, with no fences.

I want to thank Vice President Pence, who's here; Secretary Nielsen; Acting Attorney General Whitaker; Secretary Azar; a woman known as Ivanka Trump. [*Laughter*] She's a great one. Where's Ivanka? Good. Hi, Ivanka. She's worked very hard on this. This is very close to her heart. Deputy Secretary Sullivan; Administrator Green; Acting Director Vitiello; Assistant Secretary Johnson; and Ambassador Richmond for being here today. It's a group of people that has really, really worked, and they worked hard.

I also want to recognize a great friend of mine, a man who's done so well and so popular in the State of Ohio, Rob Portman. Where's Rob? Great job, Rob. Appreciate it. And Senator Chris Coons, who, on occasion, we disagree, but I actually like him. [*Laughter*] We pray together, right? That's a good step.

Representatives Michael McCaul, my friend Susan Brooks, Ann Wagner, and Chris Smith. I signed Representative Smith's antitrafficking bill yesterday. That was just signed. And I want to thank you very much. You worked hard on it. We all worked hard on it. Antitrafficking.

And, you know, just so we understand, human trafficking now is bigger worldwide. This is not a U.S. situation; this is a world situation. Because of the internet, far worse than it ever has been. You would think that was an ancient form of criminality. It's not. It's a very modern-day form. And because of the internet, what they do with the internet and how they find people through the internet is disgraceful.

We're also honored to be joined by many from law enforcement who fight this heinous crime every single day.

Finally, I want to thank the inspiring advocates and survivors. And we have numerous of them with us, and maybe they'll say a few words.

My administration has made the fight against human trafficking one of the highest priorities. Today's bill marks the fourth robust piece of bipartisan legislation—and it is bipartisan, I have to tell you; the Democrats have been great—that I've signed in just the last weeks. We have a couple

of others here that are already signed, having to do with the same situation. Little different, but all related. And it's just over the last couple of weeks that we've signed this. It's been a very strong priority but it's not easy getting everyone together.

But this was, Chris, I would say, about as easy as it gets, because this is a problem that there is no definition of the other side. There's only one side. So I want to thank Democrats for helping us out with this one.

But still, much work remains. We cannot defeat the menace of international human trafficking if we do not secure our border. They're bringing them through the border. That's where they're coming from in this part of the world. All over the world—but in this part of the world, they're bringing them through the border. They're driving in, and they're not going through checkpoints, because you can't have four or five people sitting in the back of a car with tape over your mouth and your hands tied, and go through somebody that's checking out your car or your van.

Unsecure borders allow traffickers clear passage to transport their victims. And into the United States, it's very easy to come. All you do is drive 20 miles one way or the other, and you'll find an open spot where there's no protection, and then you'll go hundreds of miles where you'll see pure, open spots.

In fiscal year 2018, ICE made more than 1,500 human trafficking arrests. Mostly sex trafficking.

I'd like to ask Acting Attorney General Matt Whitaker and Assistant Attorney General Eric Dreiband to say a few words about the recent case that dismantled a Mexican sex-trafficking organization that was brutal, that operated in the United States and horrendously abused young women from Latin America. A brutal, brutal situation.

Could I ask Matt to say a few words?

Acting Attorney General Matthew G. Whitaker. Yeah. Thank you, Mr. President. I agree with you, human trafficking is a scourge on humanity, internationally and here in the United States. And it's something the Department of Justice is absolutely committed to ending and something for which we have leadership in the Federal Government and across the country in law enforcement to do all we can to prevent these horrific cases from happening.

[*At this point, Acting Attorney General Whitaker continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

We need a secure southern border, and we need Congress to do something about it. And I'm going to turn to Eric Dreiband, our Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division, to talk a little bit about a case that we just announced some convictions in. And I also want to introduce Rich Donoghue, the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, whose office prosecuted that case.

So, go ahead, Eric.

Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Eric S. Dreiband. Thank you, Matt. Thank you, Mr. President. First of all, thank you for prioritizing the prosecution of human trafficking here in the United States. The case that Acting Attorney General Whitaker mentioned was a very complicated, long-running human trafficking case where Mexican nationals were engaged in trafficking young girls and women across the border, smuggling these women across the border, into the United States, and forcing them into prostitution.

Working with the United States Attorney's Office in Brooklyn and in Atlanta, as well as the Department of Homeland Security, the Justice Department obtained convictions of eight of these

individuals. And earlier this week, five of the eight were sentenced to extensive prison sentences. In addition, we are now working with the victims—in this case and in all others—the victims of human trafficking, whose lives have been devastated by these kinds of horrible crimes. So thank you, Mr. President.

The President. And thank you very much, Eric. And Rich also, because Rich has done an incredible job of not only prosecution, but other things that are coming up. And maybe you'd say a few words, please.

United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York Richard P. Donoghue. We have a tremendous team in Brooklyn and across the Eastern District of New York. But every day we go to work, we see the results of having a border that's not secure, whether it's MS-13, drug trafficking, or human trafficking that we're talking about today.

[*U.S. Attorney Donoghue continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

And so, stepping forward, we think that it would be a tremendous advantage to us in law enforcement, in New York and across the country, to have a border that is secure so we can protect our people and protect our country.

The President. Thank you, Rich. Great job. Thank you.

The fact is that if we don't have barriers, walls—call them what you want—but if we don't have very strong barriers, where people cannot any longer drive right across—they have unbelievable vehicles. They make a lot of money. They have the best vehicles you can buy. They have stronger, bigger, and faster vehicles than our police have, and than ICE has, and than Border Patrol has. So they're pretty good at that. They have areas that they go to. It's like a highway. And we have to close them up. And if we don't close them up, you're all kidding yourselves.

Look, we can all play games, but a wall is a necessity. All of the other things—the sensors and the drones—it's all wonderful to have and it works well, but only if you have the wall. If you don't have the wall, it doesn't matter. A drone isn't stopping a thousand people from running through. And so we can all talk. And, you know, interestingly, if you look, every—virtually every Democrat over the last 15 years, they've approved what we're asking for.

So I think we're doing something. I think we're getting closer. But we really have to think about the people of our country. This is not a fight I wanted. I didn't want this fight. We have to think about the people of our country, and we have to do what's right at our border and many other places. But we have to do what's right at our border.

Human trafficking cannot be stopped if we don't have a steel barrier or a concrete wall, something very powerful. It cannot be stopped. There is nothing. We have the most talented law enforcement people in the world, as far as I'm concerned, right alongside of me and behind me. It doesn't mean a thing if they're going to be driving women and children through sections of the border where nobody is, where you can't be, because you don't have enough manpower or womanpower. You don't have enough of anything. You have 2,000 miles of border.

So if you're not going to stop it, in all fairness, there's not much they can do. They can get them every once in a while; but the other way, we can eliminate the problem as it pertains to the area that is the worst problem. Probably the world's worst problem—because they come into the United States because we have the money. That's true with drugs. And everything I said for human trafficking is also true with drugs.

So we got to get the politics out of this and go back to common sense. You know, they say it's a medieval solution, a wall. That's true. It's medieval because it worked then, and it works even better now. Israel put up a wall—99.9 percent successful, according to Bibi Netanyahu. He came into my office a couple of months ago. He said: "What's with the wall? We put up a wall. It

was 99.9 percent successful." Ninety-nine. I said, "Do you mind if I use that number?" He said—because, you know, they'll fact-check it, and they'll go and say: "Oh, it was actually only 99 percent. The President told a fib." Now, well he told me 99.9. Maybe he'll change it and make it 99.

But they put up a wall, and they don't have a problem anymore. And we have to do the same thing.

The United States must not incentivize or enable these evil crimes. Instead, we should do everything we can to fight them. And that's what we're doing. I call on Congress to send me a funding bill to secure the border, build a barrier, and help end this horrific assault on innocent life, not to mention the drugs, not to mention the gangs and the criminals.

And I will very gladly sign this legislation having to do specifically with a horrible, horrible worldwide problem: human trafficking. And it's my honor to do it, and I very much appreciate all of the Democrat support. I very much do. Thank you.

[The President signed the bill.]

Okay. Maybe I'll give this to a Democrat. We're going to pass these around. We have a few pens and—we'll pass these around. Just, I'll explain to the press: So often—my whole life I've watched Presidents, they'd sign one letter at a time. One letter. Did you ever look at these signatures? They're a disaster. *[Laughter]* So I sign it with one pen and then I hand out pens. It works out much better. It's also a lot faster.

Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen M. Nielsen. Let's get some to the ICE guys.

The President. Folks—pass them. Yeah, where are my ICE guys? Come on. Where are they? Just pass them around. I think we have enough. We have enough for everybody. We're pretty accurate in our count. Okay? Here you go. Where's my Senator back there? At least we have to care of the Republican Senator. *[Laughter]* We took care of the Democrat, right? Michael, you have it? Good. Pass that around, fellas. Chris.

Federal Employees/Immigration Reform/Border Security

Q. Mr. President, what do you say to those Federal workers—security guards, Secret Service agents, TSA agents—who are now going without pay?

The President. I think they have been terrific. These are terrific patriots. A lot of them agree with what I'm doing. And I hope we're going to have the situation worked out. But they want security in our country, and so do I. That's all we want. We want security. We want common sense, we want security in our country.

When you look at what's going on—immigration just went to very high on your list. I saw even on your list. Immigration is very high on the list. But we're not talking about just immigration.

And I would like—and I'll say it in front of some of our Democrat friends here—I would love to see a big immigration bill, where we really take care of the situation. I know you want to. Everybody wants to. Who wouldn't want to? Right now we have a problem. We have to take care of this, and it's quicker and easier to do this individually.

But we would like to see real immigration reform in this country, because we need it, and it can be a beautiful thing. And with all of the companies coming into our country—we have seven car companies now that are announcing, or have announced just recently, and we have many car companies and other companies—as you know, they're flowing in. We have the best job numbers,

virtually, that we've ever had. For African American, the best ever. Hispanic, Asian, the best ever. The best in 50 years in the overall number, and soon that's going to be beaten.

So we have the best job numbers. We need people. We need great, qualified people. We want them to come in. So I think it's a great time right now, because of that. We need people, Rob. And, I mean, in Ohio, you need workers. And I know you feel the same way. I know Chris—I mean, I'll speak for Chris. But everybody wants to see immigration reform. It just—it's overdue. And it's always been very political, and maybe this will turn out to be a blessing in disguise.

But, Jon [Jonathan Karl, ABC News], I will tell you this: The people out there want something to happen at our southern border, whether it's human trafficking, whether it's drugs, whether it's criminals, whether it's MS-13. The folks behind me know all about MS-13 and how violent and vicious they are and where they come from. And they all come from the same place. And they call come in the same way; they come right across that border.

And we've thrown thousands out. I would say thousands—right, fellas? I mean, literally MS-13.

Secretary Nielsen. Yes.

The President. And you have a lot of it, I know that, Rich. We throw thousands out a year, and then they come back. And we move them all the way back to where they came from. All the way back. And they find a way to come back again.

We need strong borders, and we need immigration reform. Beyond that, we need immigration reform.

Ok, let's go.

Federal Employees/Border Security

Q. But these people have to go without their paychecks. They're being—some are being forced to work without pay. Some have been furloughed. These are park rangers—

The President. They all get their money. They're all going to get the money. And I think they're going to be happy.

And I will tell you—and I say it often: Many of those that you're talking about so humanly, the way you express it, but many of those people that you talk about are on my side. I've had so many people—the beautiful thing is, with social media, the world can write to you. And you take a look at social media. So many of those people are saying: "It's very hard for me. It's very hard for my family. But, Mr. President, you're doing the right thing. Get it done." I've had so many of them. They're patriots. They love our country, and they want to see it be done.

Look, this is just common sense. They want to see it be done correctly. We need a barrier. We have to stop people from coming in the way they come in. And if we don't have it—you can never have border security unless you have a steel barrier, a concrete wall. You can call it whatever you want. But without it, you'll never have—you can have the greatest talent in the world. You will never, ever, in a million years, you will not have border security. Can't happen.

The President's National Emergency Powers

Q. Mr. President, what's your current thinking on a national emergency? Why didn't you announce it last night? And when might you—

The President. Because I think we might work a deal. And if we don't, I may go that route. I have the absolute right to do national emergency if I want.

Q. And what's your threshold for when you might make that decision?

The President. My threshold will be if I can't make a deal with people that are unreasonable.

Border Security

Q. What's your message to the Republicans who are now on Capitol Hill saying——

The President. Oh, I think we have tremendous Republican support. I tell you what: I just spoke to a few of the people in the House. We have tremendous support. The Senate has been incredible. Mitch McConnell has been incredible. He said, "If the President's not going to sign, then I'm not going to waste my time." And I mean, Rob Portman's here; he can tell you, he's very strong on border security.

We have tremendous support in the Senate. We have tremendous support in the House. And by the way—you know, they say, "Oh, is it true that somebody's—you know, a Congressman, he broke away?" Let me tell you—yes, every once in a while, you're going to have that. But you know who else has that? The Democrats have that too, because they have their people breaking away too. You know why? Because they know you need border security. But you don't report that.

But the fact is that there is tremendous support. I would know—without support, I would be the first one to know. I may be the last one too. But there is tremendous support.

Right now, if I did something that was foolish, like gave up on border security, the first ones that would hit me are my Senators. They'd be angry at me. The second ones would be the House. And the third ones would be, frankly, my base and a lot of Republicans out there, and a lot of Democrats that want to see border security.

Okay. What else? Any questions?

Federal Government Shutdown

Q. So why not sign the other bills though? So some of these workers can get paid and the Government——

The President. You think I should do that?

Q. Yes, you can——

The President. No, no, do you think I should do that, Jon?

Q. Well, it's not for me to say that.

The President. I mean, I watch your one-sided reporting. Do you think I should do that? Hey, Jon—no, seriously, Jon, do you think I should just sign?

Q. Well, the argument——

The President. No, no, tell me. Tell me.

Q. [*Inaudible*]—sign these bills that have nothing to do with border security.

The President. Jon, do you think I should just sign?

Q. I'm saying that, if you sign that, these workers can start getting paid, the Government can start working——

The President. So you would do that? If you were in my position, you'd do that?

Q. I'm not in your position. I'm asking if you've got something—[*inaudible*].

The President. I'm asking you, would you do that if you were in my position?

Q. I——

The President. Because if you would do that, you should never be in this position.
[Laughter] Because you'd never get anything done.

Goodbye, everybody. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:01 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Adviser to the President Ivanka M. Trump; U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator Mark Green; Acting Director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement Ronald D. Vitiello; Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services for Children and Families Lynn Johnson; U.S. Ambassador at Large To Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons John C. Richmond; and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel. He also referred to H.R. 2200, the Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act of 2018, which was approved January 8 and assigned Public Law No. 115–425. S. 1862, approved January 9, was assigned Public Law No. 115–427.

Categories: Bill Signings and Vetoes : Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2017, signing remarks; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Azar, Alex M., II; Brooks, Susan W.; Coons, Christopher A.; Donoghue, Richard P.; Dreiband, Eric S.; Green, Mark; Johnson, Lyon; McCaul, Michael T.; McConnell, A. Mitchell; Netanyahu, Benjamin; Nielsen, Kirstjen M.; Pence, Michael R.; Portman, Robert J.; Richmond, John C.; Smith, Christopher H.; Sullivan, John J.; Trump, Ivanka M.; Vitiello, Ronald D.; Wagner, Ann L.; Whitaker, Matthew G.

Subjects: Congress : Bipartisanship; Congress : Senate :: Majority leader; Defense and national security : Border security; Development, U.S. Agency for International; Economy, national : Improvement; Government organization and employees : Funding lapse and partial furlough; Health and Human Services, Department of : Administration of Children and Families, Assistant Secretary for; Health and Human Services, Department of : Secretary; Homeland Security, Department of : Customs and Border Protection, U.S.; Homeland Security, Department of : Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S.; Homeland Security, Department of : Secretary; Immigration and naturalization : Illegal immigration; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Israel : Prime Minister; Justice, Department of : Acting Attorney General; Justice, Department of : Civil Rights, Assistant Attorney General for; Justice, Department of : U.S. attorneys; Law enforcement and crime : Trafficking in persons, efforts to combat; Legislation, enacted : Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act of 2018; Legislation, enacted : Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2017; Mexico : Border with U.S., infrastructure and security; State, Department of : Deputy Secretary; State, Department of : Trafficking in Persons, Ambassador at Large To Monitor and Combat; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Adviser to the President; White House Office : Vice President.

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