

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks on Emergency National Security Supplemental Appropriations and an Exchange With Reporters

February 6, 2024

The President. Good afternoon.

Q. Good afternoon, sir.

Q. Good afternoon.

The President. For much too long, as you all know, the immigration system has been broken. And it's long past time to fix it.

That's why, months ago, I instructed my team to begin negotiations with a bipartisan group of Senators to seriously and finally fix our immigration system. For months now, that's what they've done, working around the clock, through the holidays, over the weekends. It's been an extraordinary effort by Senators Lankford, Murphy, and Sinema.

The result of all this hard work is a bipartisan agreement that represents the most fair, humane reforms in our immigration system in a long time and the toughest set of reforms to secure the border ever. Now all indications are, this bill won't even move forward to the Senate floor.

Why? A simple reason: Donald Trump. Because Donald Trump thinks it's bad for him politically. Therefore, he doesn't—even though it would help the country, he's not for it. He'd rather weaponize this issue than actually solve it.

So, for the last 24 hours, he's done nothing, I'm told, but reach out to Republicans in the House and the Senate and threaten them and try to intimidate them to vote against this proposal. And it looks like they're caving.

Frankly, they owe it to the American people to show some spine and do what they know to be right.

So I want to tell the American people what's in this bill and why everyone from the Wall Street Journal to the Border Patrol to the Chamber of Commerce—the United States Chamber of Commerce support this bill.

Because it's going to make the country safer, make the border more secure, treat people more humanely and freely—and fairly, and make legal immigration more efficient and consistent with the values of our Nation and our international treaty obligations.

It would finally provide the funding that I have repeatedly—repeatedly—requested, most recently in October, to actually secure the border. That includes an additional 1,500 border agents and officers to secure the border—to physically secure it.

In addition, 100 cutting-edge machines to detect and stop fentanyl at the southwest border. We have that capacity.

An additional—100 additional immigration judges to help reduce the year-long asylum backlog. You show up for asylum and you get told a judge is supposed to talk to you. It takes a year to get that discussion going.

This bill would also establish new, efficient, and fair process for the Government to consider an asylum claim for those arriving at the border.

Today the process can take 5 to 7 years, as you all know. They show up at the border, get a bracelet, told to be—come back when called, 5 to 7 years from now, in country. That's too long, and it's not rational.

With the new policies in this bill and the additional of 4,300 more asylum officers—who spend hours, I might add, with each immigrant to consider their claims, whether they qualify—we'll be able to reduce that process to 6 months, not 5 to 7 years.

This bipartisan bill will also expedite work permits so those who are here and who qualify can begin work more quickly. That's something that our Governors, our mayors, and our business leaders have been asking me for and asking them for. All across the country, they've been asking for this.

It will also create more opportunities for families to come together, for business to hire additional workers. And for the first time in 30 years—the first time in 30 years, this bipartisan legislation increases the number of immigrant visas for people legally—legally—able to come to this country through ports of entry.

And it ensures that—for the first time, that vulnerable, unaccompanied young children have legal representation at the border.

This bill would also give me, as President, the emergency authority to temporarily shut down the border when it becomes overwhelmed—the numbers they're talking—over 5,000 people trying get in in 1 day.

The bill—if the bill were law today, it would qualify to be shut down right now while we repair it.

The bottom line is, this bipartisan bill is a win for America because it makes important fixes to our broken immigration system, and it's the toughest, fairest law that's ever been proposed relative to the border.

Now, it doesn't address everything I'd like—that I wanted.

For example, we still need a path for—of documentation for those who are already here. And we're not walking away from true immigration reform, including permanent protections and a pathway to citizenship for young "Dreamers" who came here when they were children and who have been good citizens and contribute so much to our country.

But the reforms in this bill are essential for making our border more orderly, more humane, and more secure.

That's why the Border Patrol union—which, by the way, endorsed Donald Trump in the 2020 election—endorses this bill. These are the people whose job it is to secure the border every single solitary day. They don't just show up for photo ops like some Members of Congress. They're there to do their job.

This is the risk—the thing they—many of them risk their lives doing every single day. And they decided—they decided—the Border Patrol decided this gives them the tools they need to do the job: more personnel across the board.

It's also why the U.S. Chamber of Commerce endorsed this bill, because they know this bill is not just good for the border, it's also good for American business and for the American economy.

And it's why the Wall Street Journal endorsed the bill with the headline this morning which reads, quote: "A Border Security Bill Worth Passing. The Senate Has Reforms Trump Never Came Close to Getting." That's the quote from the Journal.

This bill would also address two other important priorities. First, it provides urgent funding for Ukraine. I'm wearing my Ukraine tie and my Ukraine pin, which I've been wearing because they're in dire straits right now, defending themselves against the Russian onslaught and brutal conquest.

The clock is ticking. Every week, every month that passes without new aid to Ukraine means fewer artillery shells, fewer defense air—air defense systems, fewer tools for Ukraine to defend itself against this Russian onslaught. Just what Putin wants.

Ukrainians are fighting bravely. You know, you've—many of you—I look around the room here—have followed me in this for a long time. I pulled together a coalition of over 50 nations to support them. On the phone, talking to these leaders, I—we unified NATO. Remember when we first came into office, NATO was in—well, they're all together, and I actually increased the size of NATO.

We can't walk away now. That's what Putin is betting on. Supporting this bill is standing up to Putin. Opposing this bill is playing into his hands.

As I've said before, the stakes on this fight extend well beyond Ukraine. If we don't stop Putin's appetite for power and control in Ukraine, he won't limit himself to just Ukraine. And the costs for America and our allies and partners will rise.

For those Republicans in Congress who think they can oppose funding for Ukraine and not be held accountable, history is watching. History is watching. A failure to support Ukraine at this critical moment will never be forgotten.

The position of the MAGA Republicans can be characterized by the New York Times headline: "First"—and this is the headline. It reads: "Trump First. Putin Second. America Third." That cannot pertain.

This bipartisan agreement also provides Israel with what it needs to protect its people and defend itself against Hamas terrorists. And it will provide the necessary lifesaving humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people. By opposing this bill, they're denying aid to the people who are really suffering and desperately need help.

You know, there's more work to get this done, over the finish line. And I want to be clear: Doing nothing is not an option.

Republicans have to decide. For years, they said they want to secure the border. Now they have the strongest border bill this country has ever seen. We're seeing statements about how many oppose the bill now.

Look, I understand the former President is desperately trying to stop this bill because it's not—he's not interested in solving the border problem; he wants a political issue to run against me on. They've all but said that, across the board. No one really denies that, that I'm aware of.

The American people want a solution that puts an end to the empty political rhetoric which has failed to do anything for so long. We have to get the resources to the border to get the job done.

So Republicans have to decide: Who do they serve, Donald Trump or the American people? Are they here to solve problems or just weaponize those problems for political purposes?

I know my answer. I serve the American people. I'm here to solve problems.

It was just months ago that Republicans were asking for this exact bill to deal with the border, to provide support for Ukraine and Israel. And now it's here, and they're saying: "Never mind. Never mind."

Folks, we've got to move past this toxic politics. And it's time to stop playing games with the world waiting and watching. And by the way, the world is waiting. The world is watching. They are waiting and watching what we're going to do.

We can't let—we can't continue to let petty partisan politics get in the way of our responsibility. We're a great nation that's not acting like a great nation.

So I'm calling on Congress to pass this bill and get it to my desk immediately. But if the bill fails, I want to be absolutely clear about something: The American people are going to know why it failed.

I'll be taking this issue to the country, and the voters are going to know that it's not just a moment—just at the moment we were going to secure the border and fund these other programs, Trump and the MAGA Republicans said no because they're afraid of Donald Trump—afraid of Donald Trump.

Every day between now and November, the American people are going to know that the only reason the border is not secure is Donald Trump and his MAGA Republican friends. It's time for Republicans in the Congress to show a little courage, to show a little spine, to make it clear to the American people that you work for them and not for anyone else.

I know who I work for. I work for the American people. In moments like this, we have to remember who in God's name we are. We're the United States of America. You've heard me say it many times: There is nothing beyond our capacity if we do it together. We're right on the verge of doing it together.

I hope—I hope and pray—they find reason to reconsider blowing this up.

May God bless you all, and may God protect our troops.

Q. Mr.——

The President. Folks, you're going to ask me questions. Hang on a second. I'm going to be back on Thursday, and I don't want to prejudice what may be going on in negotiations now, so I'm not going to be answering any questions on this.

I'll be back Thursday to stand here with you and answer all the questions you want about this issue.

Thank you.

Q. Can we ask you about the hostage deal, sir?

Q. [*Inaudible*—the cease-fire, Mr. President?

[*At this point, several reporters began asking questions at once.*]

Hostages Held in Gaza, Palestinian Territories/Israel/Ukraine

Q. What needs to get done for the hostage deal to get resolved, sir?

The President. This indirectly has a lot to do with the hostage deal and what's going on in the Middle East—the decision on what we do relative to Israel, the decision what we do or in terms of American funding of whether we're going to engage with the situation in Ukraine. It all goes to the question of American power. It all goes to: Does America keep its word? Does America move forward?

There is some movement, and I don't want to—well, let me be—choose my words. There is some movement—there's been a response from the—there's been a response from the opposition, but it——

Q. Hamas?

The President. Yes, I'm sorry—from Hamas. But it seems to be a little over the top. We're not sure where it is.

There's a continuing negotiation right now.

U.S. Security Assistance

Q. Would—Mr. President, if this bill fails, would you consider supporting something separate that just addresses Israel or Ukraine?

The President. I'm not going to concede that now. I—we need it all. The rest of the world is looking at us, and they really are.

Thank you.

[*Several reporters spoke at once.*]

Q. [*Inaudible*—trust this Congress?

Q. What reaction—[*inaudible*]—to the ruling that Donald Trump does not have immunity? Mr. President, your reaction to that ruling?

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:16 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former President Donald J. Trump; and President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia.

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