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Remarks on Infrastructure and an Exchange With Reporters in New York City
August 15, 2017

The President. Hello, everybody. Great to be back in New York with all of our friends and some great friends outside the building, I must tell you. I want to thank all of our distinguished guests who are with us today, including members of our Cabinet: Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, OMB Director Mick Mulvaney, and of course, our Transportation Secretary—who is doing a fabulous job—Elaine Chao.

Thank you all for doing a really incredible and creative job on what we're going to be discussing today, which is infrastructure. We've just had a great set of briefings upstairs on our infrastructure agenda. My administration is working every day to deliver the world-class infrastructure that our people deserve and, frankly, that our country deserves.

That's why I just signed a new Executive order to dramatically reform the Nation's badly broken infrastructure permitting process. Just blocks away is the Empire State Building. It took 11 months to build the Empire State Building. But today, it can take as long as a decade and much more than that—many, many stories where it takes 20 and 25 years—just to get approvals to start construction of a fairly routine highway. Highway builders must get up to 16 different approvals involving 9 different Federal agencies governed by 29 different statutes. One agency alone can stall a project for many, many years and even decades.

Not only does this cost our economy billions of dollars, but it also denies our citizens the safe and modern infrastructure they deserve. This overregulated permitting process is a massive self-inflicted wound on our country—it's disgraceful—denying our people much-needed investments in their community.

And I just want to show you this, because it was just shown to me, and I said, I think I'm going to show it to the media, both real and fake media, by the way.

[*At this point, the President displayed a flowchart illustrating the permitting process for a federally funded highway project.*]

This is what it takes to get something approved today. Elaine, you see that? So this is what it takes. Permitting process flowchart—that's a flowchart. So that can go out to 20 years. This shows about 10, but that can go out to about 20 years to get something approved. This is for a highway. I've seen a highway recently in a certain State—I won't mention its name—it's 17 years. I could have built it for 4 or 5 million dollars without the permitting process. It cost hundreds of millions of dollars, but it took 17 years to get it approved and many, many, many, many pages of environmental impact studies.

[*The President dropped the longer flowchart to the floor and displayed a shorter flowchart illustrating a streamlined permitting process.*]

This is what we will bring it down to. This is less than 2 years. This is going to happen quickly. That's what I'm signing today. This will be less than 2 years for a highway. So it's going to be quick; it's going to be a very streamlined process. And by the way, if it doesn't meet environmental safeguards, we're not going to approve it. Very simple. We're not going to approve it. So this is—maybe this one we'll save, let's throw the other one away. Would

anybody like it from the media? [*Laughter*] Would anybody like that long, beautiful chart? You can have it.

So my Executive order also requires agencies to work together efficiently by requiring one lead agency for each major infrastructure project. It also holds agencies accountable if they fail to streamline their review process. So each agency is accountable. We're going to get infrastructure built quickly, inexpensively—relatively speaking—and the permitting process will go very, very quickly.

No longer will we tolerate one job-killing delay after another. No longer will we accept a broken system that benefits consultants and lobbyists at the expense of hard-working Americans.

Now, I knew the process very well, probably better than anybody. I had to get permits for this building and many of the buildings I built—all of the buildings I built—in Manhattan and many other places. And I will tell you that the consultants are rich people. They go around making it very difficult. They lobby Congress, they lobby State governments, city governments to make it very difficult so that you have to hire consultants and that you have to take years and pay them a fortune. So we're streamlining the process, and we won't be having so much of that anymore.

No longer will we allow the infrastructure of our magnificent country to crumble and decay. While protecting the environment, we will build gleaming new roads, bridges, railways, waterways, tunnels, and highways. We will rebuild our country with American workers, American iron, American aluminum, American steel. We will create millions of new jobs and make millions of American dreams come true.

Our infrastructure will again be the best in the world. We used to have the greatest infrastructure anywhere in the world, and today, we're like a third-world country. We are literally like a third-world country. Our infrastructure will again be the best, and we will restore the pride in our communities, our Nation. And all over the United States, we'll be proud again.

So I want to thank everybody for being here. God bless you. God bless the United States.

And if you have any questions, we have—Mick, you could come up here please. Come on up. Mick Mulvaney.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask.

The President's Manufacturing Jobs Initiative Advisory Council

Q. Mr. President, why do you think these CEOs are leaving your manufacturing council?

The President. Because they're not taking their job seriously as it pertains to this country. And we want jobs, manufacturing in this country. If you look at some of those people that you're talking about, they're outside of the country, they're having a lot of their product made outside. If you look at Merck as an example, take a look where——

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Excuse me, excuse me—take a look at where their product is made. It's made outside of our country. We want products made in the country.

Now, I have to tell you, some of the folks that will leave, they're leaving out of embarrassment, because they make their products outside. And I've been lecturing them, including the gentleman that you're referring to, about you have to bring it back to this

country. You can't do it necessarily in Ireland and all of these other places. You have to bring this work back to this country. That's what I want. I want manufacturing to be back into the United States so that American workers can benefit.

The President's Response to the Situation in Charlottesville, VA

Q. Let me ask you, Mr. President, why did you wait so long to blast neo-Nazis?

Q. Why do Nazis like you?

The President. I didn't wait long.

Q. Why do Nazis like you?

Q. You waited 2 days——

The President. I didn't wait long.

Q. Forty-eight hours.

The President. I wanted to make sure, unlike most politicians, that what I said was correct, not make a quick statement. The statement I made on Saturday, the first statement, was a fine statement. But you don't make statements that direct unless you know the fact. It takes a little while to get the facts. You still don't know the facts. And it's a very, very important process to me, and it's a very important statement.

So I don't want to go quickly and just make a statement for the sake of making a political statement. I want to know the facts. If you go back to——

Q. So you had to—[*inaudible*]—White supremacists?

The President. I brought it. I brought it. I brought it.

[*The President removed a sheet of paper from his breast pocket.*]

Q. Was it terrorism?

Q. What did you bring, Mr. President?

Q. Was it terrorism, in your opinion, what happened?

The President. As I said on—remember, Saturday——

[*The President read from the sheet of paper.*]

"We condemn in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of hatred, bigotry, and violence. It has no place in America."

And then, I went on from there. Now, here's the thing——

Q. [*Inaudible*]—on many sides.

The President. Excuse me. Excuse me. Take it nice and easy. Here's the thing: When I make a statement, I like to be correct. I want the facts. This event just happened. In fact, a lot of the event didn't even happen yet, as we were speaking. This event just happened.

Before I make a statement, I need the facts. So I don't want to rush into a statement. So making the statement when I made it was excellent. In fact, the young woman, who I hear is a fantastic young woman, and it was on NBC——

Q. Have you called her family yet?

The President. ——her mother wrote me and said through, I guess, Twitter, social media, the nicest things. And I very much appreciated that. I hear she was a fine—really, actually, an incredible—young woman. But her mother, on Twitter, thanked me for what I said.

Q. But White nationalists——

The President. And honestly, if the press were not fake, and if it was honest, the press would have said what I said was very nice. But unlike you, and unlike——

[*Many reporters began speaking at once*.]

Excuse me, unlike you and unlike the media, before I make a statement, I like to know the facts.

Neo-Nazi Groups/Infrastructure

Q. Why do Nazis like you—[*inaudible*]—these statements?

The President. They don't. They don't.

Q. They do. Look——

Q. Richard Spencer has praised you. David Duke has praised you.

The President. How about a couple of infrastructure questions?

The President's Response to the Situation in Charlottesville, VA/National Economy/Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., President and Chief Executive Officer C. Douglas McMillon

Q. Was it terrorism, that event? Was that terrorism?

Q. The CEO of Walmart said you missed a critical opportunity——

The President. Say it. What?

Q. The CEO of Walmart said you missed a critical opportunity to help bring the country together. Did you?

The President. Not at all. I think the country—look, you take a look. I've created over a million jobs since I'm President. The country is booming. The stock market is setting records. We have the highest employment numbers we've ever had in the history of our country. We're doing record business. We have the highest levels of enthusiasm. So the head of Walmart, who I know—who's a very nice guy—was making a political statement. I mean, ask him how he's doing——

The President's Response to the Situation in Charlottesville, VA

Q. So if you had to do it again—[*inaudible*]?

The President. I'd do it the same way. And you know why? Because I want to make sure, when I make a statement, that the statement is correct. And there was no way——

Q. Why——

The President. There was no way of making a correct statement that early. I had to see the facts, unlike a lot of reporters. Unlike a lot of reporters——

Former Ku Klux Klan Leader David Duke/The President's Response to the Situation in Charlottesville, VA

Q. David Duke was there. David Duke was there, Mr. President.

Q. They held a march with torches, sir. And—[*inaudible*].

Q. Nazis were there.

The President. I didn't know David Duke was there. I wanted to see the facts. And the facts, as they started coming out, were very well stated. In fact, everybody said: "His statement was beautiful. If he would have made it sooner, that would have been good." I couldn't have made it sooner because I didn't know all of the facts. Frankly, people still don't know all of the facts.

[*Many reporters began speaking at once*.]

It was very important—excuse me, excuse me—it was very important to me to get the facts out and correctly. Because if I would have made a fast statement—and the first statement was made without knowing much, other than what we were seeing. The second statement was made after, with knowledge, with great knowledge.

Q. But why say—[*inaudible*]—"on many sides"?

The President. There are still things——

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Excuse me—there are still things that people don't know.

Q. What was the—[*inaudible*].

The President. I want to make a statement with knowledge. I wanted to know the facts. Okay.

Civil Unrest and Violence in Charlottesville, VA

Q. [*Inaudible*]—saying many sides.

Q. Was this terrorism? Two questions. Was this terrorism? And can you tell us how you're feeling about your Chief Strategist, Stephen Bannon?

The President. Well, I think the driver of the car is a disgrace to himself, his family, and this country. And that is—you can call it terrorism. You can call it murder. You can call it whatever you want. I would just call it as "the fastest one to come up with a good verdict." That's what I'd call it. Because there is a question: Is it murder? Is it terrorism? And then, you get into legal semantics. The driver of the car is a murderer. And what he did was a horrible, horrible, inexcusable thing.

White House Chief Strategist Stephen K. Bannon

Q. Mr. Trump, can you tell us how you're feeling about your Chief Strategist, Mr. Bannon? Can you talk about that?

The President. Go ahead.

Q. I would echo Maggie's [Maggie Haberman, New York Times] question. Steve Bannon has come under——

The President. I never spoke to Mr. Bannon about it.

Q. Can you tell us broadly what you're feeling—do you still have confidence in Steve?

The President. Well, we'll see. Look, look, I like Mr. Bannon. He's a friend of mine. But Mr. Bannon came on very late. You know that. I went through 17 Senators, Governors, and I won all the primaries. Mr. Bannon came on very much later than that. And I like him, he's a good man. He is not a racist, I can tell you that. He's a good person. He actually gets a very unfair press in that regard. But we'll see what happens with Mr. Bannon. But he's a good person, and I think the press treats him, frankly, very unfairly.

National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster/Senator John S. McCain III/Health Care Reform Legislation

Q. Do you have confidence in him?

Q. Senator McCain has called on you to defend your National Security Adviser, H.R. McMaster, against these attacks.

The President. I've already done it. I did it the last time.

Q. And he called on it again, linking——

The President. Senator McCain?

Q. ——to the alt-right, and saying he's——

The President. Senator McCain?

Q. Yes.

The President. You mean the one who voted against Obamacare?

Q. And he said——

The President. Who is Senator—you mean Senator McCain who voted against us getting good health care?

Senator John S. McCain III/Alt-Right Political Movement

Q. Senator McCain said that the alt-right is behind these attacks, and he linked that same group to those who perpetrated the attack in Charlottesville.

The President. Well, I don't know. I can't tell you. I'm sure Senator McCain must know what he's talking about. But when you say the alt-right, define "alt-right" to me. You define it. Go ahead.

Q. Well, I'm saying, as Senator——

The President. No, define it for me. Come on, let's go. Define it for me.

Civil Unrest and Violence in Charlottesville, VA

Q. Senator McCain defined them as the same group——

The President. Okay, what about the alt-left that came charging at them—excuse me, what about the alt-left that came charging at the, as you say, the alt-right? Do they have any semblance of guilt?

Q. But, sir, sir——

Q. This was Senator McCain's statement, sir.

The President. Let me ask you this: What about the fact they came charging—that they came charging with clubs in their hands, swinging clubs? Do they have any problem? I think they do. So, you know, as far as I'm concerned, that was a horrible, horrible day.

Q. You're not putting these——

The President. Wait a minute. I'm not finished. I'm not finished, fake news. That was a horrible day——

Q. Sir, you're not putting these protestors on the same level as neo-Nazis——

Q. Is the alt-left as bad as White supremacists?

The President. I will tell you something. I watched those very closely, much more closely than you people watched it. And you have—you had a group on one side that was bad, and you had a group on the other side that was also very violent. And nobody wants to say that, but I'll say it right now. You had a group on the other side that came charging in, without a permit, and they were very, very violent.

Q. Is the alt-left as bad as Nazis?

The President. Go ahead.

Civil Unrest and Violence in Charlottesville, VA/Removal of Confederate Monuments

Q. Do you think that what you call the alt-left is the same as neo-Nazis?

The President. Those people—all of those people—excuse me, I've condemned neo-Nazis. I've condemned many different groups. But not all of those people were neo-Nazis, believe me. Not all of those people were White supremacists by any stretch.

Q. Well, White nationalists——

The President. Those people were also there because they wanted to protest the taking down of a statue, Robert E. Lee.

Q. Should that statue be taken down?

The President. So—excuse me. And you take a look at some of the groups, and you'd see—and you'd know it if you were honest reporters, which in many cases you're not—but many of those people were there to protest the taking down of the statue of Robert E. Lee.

So this week, it's Robert E. Lee. I noticed that Stonewall Jackson is coming down. I wonder, is it George Washington next week? And is it Thomas Jefferson the week after? You know, you really do have to ask yourself, where does it stop?

Q. Mr. President——

The President. But they were there to protest—excuse me—you take a look, the night before they were there to protest the taking down of the statue of Robert E. Lee.

Infrastructure question. Go ahead.

Removal of Confederate Monuments

Q. Should statues of Robert E. Lee stay up?

The President. I would say that's up to a local town, community, or the Federal Government, depending on where it is located.

Race Relations/Job Creation and Growth/Aid to Inner Cities

Q. Are you against the Confederacy?

Q. How concerned are you about race relations in America? And do you think things have gotten worse or better since you took office?

The President. I think they've gotten better or the same. I—look, they've been frayed for a long time. And you can ask President Obama about that, because he'd make speeches about it. But I believe that the fact that I brought in—it will be soon—millions of jobs—you see where companies are moving back into our country—I think that's going to have a tremendous, positive impact on race relations.

We have companies coming back into our country. We have two car companies that just announced. We have Foxconn in Wisconsin just announced. We have many companies, I say, pouring back into the country. I think that's going to have a huge, positive impact on race relations. You know why? It's jobs. What people want now, they want jobs. They want great jobs with good pay, and when they have that, you watch how race relations will be.

And I'll tell you, we're spending a lot of money on the inner cities. We're going to fix—we're fixing the inner cities. We're doing far more than anybody has done with respect to the inner cities. It's a priority for me, and it's very important.

Civil Unrest and Violence in Charlottesville, VA

Q. Mr. President——

Q. Mr. President, are you putting what you're calling the alt-left and White supremacists on the same moral plane?

The President. I'm not putting anybody on a moral plane. What I'm saying is this: You had a group on one side, and you had a group on the other, and they came at each other with clubs. And it was vicious, and it was horrible. And it was a horrible thing to watch.

But there is another side. There was a group on this side. You can call them the left—you've just called them the left—that came violently attacking the other group. So you can say what you want, but that's the way it is.

Q. Mr. President, in your words——

Q. [*Inaudible*]—on both sides, sir. You said there was hatred, there was violence on both sides. Are the——

The President. Well, I do think there's blame—yes, I think there's blame on both sides.

Q. Is there bigotry on both sides?

The President. If you look at both sides, I think there's blame on both sides. And I have no doubt about it, and you don't have any doubt about it either.

Q. Mr. President, but only the Nazis——

The President. And if you reported it accurately, you would say——

Civil Unrest and Violence in Charlottesville, VA/Removal of Confederate Monuments

Q. But as for bigotry, the neo-Nazis started this. They showed up in Charlottesville to protest the removal of that statue——

The President. Excuse me, excuse me. They didn't put themselves down as you do, and you had some very bad people in that group, but you also had people that were very fine people, on both sides. You had people in that group——

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Excuse me, excuse me. I saw the same pictures as you did. You had people in that group that were there to protest the taking down of, to them, a very, very important statue and the renaming of a park from Robert E. Lee to another name.

Q. George Washington and Robert E. Lee are not the same, Mr. President.

The President. No, George Washington was a slave owner.

Q. But sir——

The President. Was George Washington a slave owner?

Q. Yes, he was.

The President. So will George Washington now lose his status? Are we going to take down——

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Excuse me, are we going to take down statues to George Washington?

Q. Symbols of the Confederacy are very important to them.

The President. How about Thomas Jefferson? What do you think of Thomas Jefferson? You like him?

Q. I do love Thomas Jefferson, of course.

The President. Okay, good. Are we going to take down the statue? Because he was a major slave owner. Now, are we going to take down his statue?

Q. Mr. President——

The President. So you know what, it's fine. You're changing history. You're changing culture. And you had people—and I'm not talking about the neo-Nazis and the White nationalists, because they should be condemned totally—but you had many people in that group other than neo-Nazis and White nationalists. Okay? And the press has treated them absolutely unfairly.

Q. What——

The President. Now, in the other group also, you had some fine people. But you also had troublemakers, and you see them come with the black outfits and with the helmets and with the baseball bats. You had a lot of bad people in the other group.

Civil Unrest and Violence in Charlottesville, VA

Q. Who are the good people? Who are the good people?

Q. Sir, I'm sorry. I just didn't understand what you were saying. You were saying the press has treated White nationalists unfairly?

The President. No.

Q. I just don't understand what you were saying.

The President. No. There were people in that rally—and I looked the night before—if you look, there were people protesting very quietly the taking down of the statue of Robert E. Lee. I'm sure in that group there were some bad ones. The following day it looked like they had some rough, bad people: neo-Nazis, White nationalists, whatever you want to call them.

But you had a lot of people in that group that were there to innocently protest, and very legally protest—because you know, I don't know if you know, they had a permit. The other group didn't have a permit. So I only tell you this: There are two sides to a story. I thought what took place was a horrible moment for our country, a horrible moment. But there are two sides to the country.

Does anybody have a final——

Health Care Reform Legislation/Infrastructure Legislation

Q. I have an infrastructure question.

The President. You have an infrastructure——

Q. What makes you think you can get an infrastructure bill? You didn't get health care, you're struggling on tax reform.

The President. Well, you know, I'll tell you. We came very close with health care. Unfortunately, John McCain decided to vote against it at the last minute. You'll have to ask John McCain why he did that. But we came very close to health care. We will end up getting health care. But we'll get the infrastructure. And actually, infrastructure is something that I think we'll have bipartisan support on. I actually think Democrats will go along with the infrastructure.

Civil Unrest and Violence in Charlottesville, VA

Q. Mr. President, have you spoke to the family—have you spoken to the family of the victim of the car attack?

The President. No, I'll be reaching out. I'll be reaching out.

Q. When will you be reaching out?

The President. I was very—I thought that the statement put out—the mother's statement I thought was a beautiful statement. I must tell you, it was something that I really appreciated. I thought it was terrific. And really, under the kind of stress that she's under and the heartache that she's under, I thought putting out that statement, to me, was really something I won't forget.

Thank you, all, very much. Thank you. Thank you.

[*As the President walked away from the podium, his exchange with reporters continued follows.*]

The President's Property in Charlottesville, VA

Q. Mr. President, do you think you're helping to heal the Nation?

Q. Will you go to Charlottesville?

The President. I own a house in Charlottesville.

Q. Will you go to check out what happened?

The President. Does anyone know I own a house in Charlottesville?

Q. Where is it?

The President. Oh boy, it's going to be——

Q. Where is it?

The President. It's in Charlottesville. You'll see.

Q. You do? Is it near the winery or something?

The President. It is the winery.

Q. Will you go to visit and try to just——

The President. I mean, I know a lot about Charlottesville. Charlottesville is a great place that's been very badly hurt over the last couple of days.

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. I own, actually, one of the largest wineries in the United States. It's in Charlottesville.

Job Creation and Growth/Race Relations

Q. Why was that image of a German-speaking—[*inaudible*]—retweeted?

Q. Do you believe your words are helping to heal this country right now?

Q. What do you think needs to be done to overcome the racial divides in this country?

The President. Well, I really think jobs can have a big impact. I think if we continue to create jobs—over a million, substantially more than a million. And you see just the other day, the car companies coming in, you know, with Foxconn. I think if we continue to create jobs at levels that I'm creating jobs, I think that's going to have a tremendous impact—positive impact on race relations.

Q. And what you said today, how do you think that will impact the racial, sort of, conflict, today?

The President. The people are going to be working, they're going to be making a lot of money—much more money than they ever thought possible. But that's going to happen.

Q. But I mean, your remarks today.

The President. And the other thing—very important—I believe wages will start going up. They haven't gone up for a long time. I believe wages now—because the economy is doing so well with respect to employment and unemployment, I believe wages will start to go up. I think that will have a tremendously positive impact on race relations.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:58 p.m. in the lobby of Trump Tower. In his remarks, he referred to Kenneth C. Frazier, chairman and chief executive officer, Merck and Co., Inc.; Heather D. Heyer, who was killed during the vehicular attack in Charlottesville, VA, on August 12, and her mother Susan Bro; and James Alex Fields, Jr., who was charged with second-degree murder in Ms. Heyer's death. He also referred to Executive Order 13807, "Establishing Discipline and Accountability in the Environmental Review and Permitting Process for Infrastructure Projects." A reporter referred to Richard B. Spencer, chairman, National Policy Institute.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Infrastructure; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: New York City.

Locations: New York City.

Names: Bannon, Stephen K.; Bro, Susan; Chao, Elaine L.; Duke, David; Fields, James Alex, Jr.; Frazier, Kenneth C.; Heyer, Heather D.; McCain, John S., III; McMaster, H.R.; McMillon, Douglas C.; Mnuchin, Steven T.; Mulvaney, John M. "Mick"; Obama, Barack.

Subjects: Business and industry : Domestic investment, promotion efforts; Civil rights : Racial equality; Communications : News media :: Accuracy and fairness; Confederate statues and monuments, status of public display; Economy, national : Household income and wages; Economy, national : Improvement; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment rate; Government organization and employees : Federal infrastructure review and permitting, modernization efforts; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Management and Budget, Office of; New York : President's visit; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts; Transportation, Department of : Secretary; Treasury, Department of the : Secretary; Virginia : Charlottesville :: Civil unrest and violence; Virginia : Charlottesville :: Vehicular attack; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Chief Strategist; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: National Security Adviser; White House Office : Manufacturing Jobs Initiative.

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