

Interview With Brian Kilmeade of Fox News Radio

October 17, 2017

Mr. Kilmeade. Hey, Mr. President. How are you? It's great to see you.

The President. This is radio, Brian, right? Radio.

Mr. Kilmeade. This is radio.

The President. It's supposed to be on radio. Now I saw Brian taking advantage of the situation. That's all right.

Mr. Kilmeade. You look great. But you're looking—you're TV friendly.

The President. I feel good.

Mr. Kilmeade. Right.

The President. I feel good.

Tax Reform

Mr. Kilmeade. So I know this is a big week. How important is getting this budget passed, to even get to the tax reform conversation, Mr. President?

The President. Well, it's very important. I mean, we need the budget, we need the passage. We have Thad Cochran, as you know, is not feeling so great. And he may not be able to vote. We don't know what John McCain is going to do. We have a couple of others that maybe could disappoint us, but maybe they won't.

They've been talking about all sorts of things for so long; now they have a President that's really willing to sign what we have to sign. But I think we're going to be good, and I think we're going to be good for taxes. And it's, you know, very close, because we have no support from the Democrats. They're obstructionists; all they want to do is obstruct. So we have 48 votes against us. So we literally can't lose more than two votes, which is a really tough situation.

Federal Budget/Tax Reform

Mr. Kilmeade. On tax reform or the budget? On the budget—on the budget in particular, right?

The President. On the budget. Well, we have phase one and phase two. Phase one, we have to think only—I'm only right now thinking about the budget. Phase two is tax, because that will be next week, but phase one is the budget. And if we get the budget, I think we'll be in good shape to get the tax, but we have to get the budget.

Tax Reform/West Virginia

Mr. Kilmeade. I saw—I talked to Senator Joe Manchin yesterday, who really seems to enjoy your interactions. And he says, "If they could give me a little something, I could deliver six to eight Democrats." Number one, do you believe that? And number two, are you willing to negotiate?

The President. Well, we'll be talking to Joe. I think it's hard for Joe to vote against tax cuts. We're talking about massive tax cuts——

Mr. Kilmeade. In West Virginia.

The President. —in West Virginia. And I've turned West Virginia around, because of what I've done environmentally and with coal. And I don't know if you saw, but West Virginia is second to Texas in percentage increase of GDP. And everyone is saying, "I can't believe it," because they were having such problems.

But I think it's very hard for Joe, I think it's very hard for other people to vote—especially where I'm very popular in their States and they're coming up for election—to vote against the largest tax cut in the history of our country. People need their money, where their Government is taking too much money. We're the highest taxed nation in the world. We need the tax cuts.

Tax Reform

Mr. Kilmeade. So what Mick Mulvaney brought up to me this morning on television was, no one talks about the zero percent, because up to \$24,000, you're not going to pay any tax; that's part of the tax reform also.

The President. Right, right.

Mr. Kilmeade. People are focused on the corporate rate deduction. What about the small business?

The President. So small business is coming way down. And if you talk about the zero—you know, I said you've got to put the zero in. They were saying we have three brackets. I said, I know you like to say we only have three brackets as opposed to seven or eight, but you've got to put the zero in; that's a bracket.

Mr. Kilmeade. It's four.

The President. So I said, make it four. And the Democrats, Schumer and all, were using that, and they were using it as bait. Now they can't use it anymore, because where they're paying a much higher rate—or are paying a very high rate—right now a lot of people are going to pay zero. Then, we go to a 12 percent, as an example—it comes down from 15, but it really comes down from much higher than that.

So it's a great tax cut for the middle class, but much—hey, look, even the middle class will say it's an unbelievable tax cut for business, which is going to employ people, and the biggest beneficiary will be the middle class.

Tax Reform/Senator Randal H. Paul

Mr. Kilmeade. So you golfed with Rand Paul over the weekend, and I think most agree, including Marc Short this morning said, that he's going to be the biggest challenge, because he does not like to vote for budget to tax reform. I mean, can you be friends with someone—

The President. I think he's coming with us.

Mr. Kilmeade. I mean, can you be friendly with someone that's going to vote against that? Have you talked to him about it?

The President. I think Rand—I've had a great relationship with Rand Paul, and I think he's going to be with us. I think in the end he's going to be with us. I hope John McCain is going to be with us; we just don't know yet. We have a couple of votes. And of course, Thad is in a position where it's maybe impossible for him to be here, which is a big—you know, that's like a "no" vote. That's almost the equivalent of a "no" vote. And the problem is we have no Democrats; we have absolutely no Democrat votes.

Tax Reform

Mr. Kilmeade. Have you tried?

The President. Yes, we've tried, we've tried. They're in a block. They have 48 votes, and all they want to do is obstruct. Now, I think we'll have Democrats if we get through the budget—you know we have to get through the budget first. If we get through the budget, we have the taxes. I think we're going to have some Democrats, especially in States where I did very well. I mean, I had some States where I won by 30 and 40 points, and that's a big margin. And I think we could have potentially some Democrats in those States for the massive tax cuts that we're talking about.

Iran/Health Care Reform

Mr. Kilmeade. So it's going to be a big week obviously, and there's certain things you zone in on, and every President has got his preference, some with foreign policy. I think you love the numbers, the budget, the economy. But I've got to ask you something in the big picture——

The President. I think foreign policy for me has been very strong. I think we did the right thing with Iran. And if you noticed, Iran was respectful yesterday. They were not jumping up and down; they were respectful of what I did. And they might not agree with it, but they were very, very respectful.

I think that if you look what I did with the payments going to the insurance companies—you know, not going to poor people, they're going right into the pockets of the insurance companies. And I brought a list for you——

Health Care Reform/Health Insurance Companies

Mr. Kilmeade. You did. [Laughter] Is this for me?

The President. Look at these insurance companies. This is since Obamacare started. Anthem—big company, 270 percent increase—270 percent. And that's since ACA. That's Obamacare. So since Obamacare, Humana—420 percent increase; Aetna—470 percent increase; Cigna—480 percent increase.

Mr. Kilmeade. So I looked at those numbers——

The President. The insurance companies are making a fortune.

Mr. Kilmeade. So are you saying when you raise—when they raise premiums, or raise deductibles, they're trying to increase their profits instead of doing an honest job about giving people insurance? Are they being dishonest in going too profit oriented?

The President. No, they got a great deal with Obamacare. The one beneficiary—the great beneficiary is for Obamacare, it's not the people—they're getting killed. And looks at what's happening to their premiums. Look at what's happening to the deductibles, how high the deductibles. But look, these are not made up by me. When you have Cigna, Aetna, Humana, Anthem going up 270 [percent], * 420 [percent],* 470 percent, 480 percent, these are insurance companies that went up 480 percent since Obamacare. Is any stock on the stock exchange—has anybody gone up that much?

Mr. Kilmeade. You would know better than me.

The President. The reason is, is because Obamacare is a rip-off; it's great for the insurance companies. And find out who gave all that money to the Democrats. Take a look at the insurance companies. So the Democrats don't want to hurt the insurance companies. So the money I took away was taken away by—from the insurance companies. And by the way, since I took it down you saw what happened to their stocks.

* White House correction.

Health Care Reform

Mr. Kilmeade. Senator Alexander and Senator Murray are working on a bipartisan plan. They stopped when it looked as though Lindsey Graham and Cassidy had something going. Is this to force their hand to come up with something?

The President. Well, this helps, because nobody knows——

Mr. Kilmeade. No, not so much this paper, but so much the \$7 billion, "I'm not making that payment." Does that force——

The President. Yes, I think it helps. I think it helps to make a deal.

Mr. Kilmeade. So you did it to push action?

The President. I think if I did not do that, if I didn't hold it back—and I just said, "We're not going to make that payment." If I didn't do that, I don't believe the Democrats would have called.

Former President Barack Obama/National Football League National Anthem Controversy

Mr. Kilmeade. David Axelrod said last night that you're pulling this back, and tearing up the Iran deal is your attempt to obliterate the Obama legacy. Is it?

The President. No, it's just that I disagree with Obama on so many things. I mean, I heard—as an example, let's say Hillary Clinton said it was okay for the NFL players to kneel during the anthem. Well, I disagree. Maybe that's why she lost, because that's bad. That's real bad. We have to respect our flag, our country, our anthem. Obama, I disagree with what he does.

Look, when you look at this—nobody knows this. I just got these numbers. Nobody knows this about the insurance companies. The only beneficiary from Obamacare are the insurance companies. They made a fortune. And that's not—you've never heard that. You've never seen these numbers before.

Representative Thomas A. Marino

Mr. Kilmeade. I haven't. And that's why you handed it to me ahead of time, gave me a little bit of time to study. So some other news that broke today—and you tweeted out—Congressman Marino was pulled back as drug czar. What went into that?

The President. Well, he's a fine man. He was a supporter of mine from Pennsylvania, a great State. I won Pennsylvania. And he was a—he's a Congressman from Pennsylvania, very popular. And he told me, look—if there's even a perception that he has a conflict of interest with insurance companies essentially, but if there's even a perception that he has a conflict of interest, he doesn't want anything to do with it. So whether we have insurance companies or drug companies.

And there was a couple of articles having to do with him and drug companies, and I will tell you, he felt compelled—he feels very strong about the opioid problem and the drug problem, which is a worldwide problem, but it's a problem that we have. And Tom Marino said: "Look, I'll take a pass, I have no choice. I really will take a pass. I want to do it." And he was very gracious, I have to say that.

Mr. Kilmeade. Big exposé on "60 Minutes."

The President. He didn't want any—he didn't want to have even the perception of a conflict of interest with drug companies or, frankly, insurance companies.

Department of Health and Human Services

Mr. Kilmeade. New HHS Secretary—I was talking to Kellyanne Conway today—it seems like you're close. Do you want to go over any names?

The President. We are more than close, but I won't be able to tell you the name yet because we have to do a little vetting, but we are more than close. And if this person gets approved, it will be a fantastic, a fantastic nomination.

Mr. Kilmeade. You came out with Mitch McConnell yesterday and seemed on the same page and then said, "I'll take any questions," and it was just a regular—it was like a press conference you'd see at a sporting event.

The President. I only did that because you weren't in the audience.

Mr. Kilmeade. I know. [Laughter] Why is that?

The President. If you were in the audience, I wouldn't have done that.

Presidential Communications With Families of Servicemembers Killed in Action

Mr. Kilmeade. One of the questions was about writing the Green Beret soldiers, and it ends up being a bigger story. Can I ask you, what you thought about when you brought up past Presidents and what they've done? Do you want to clarify anything there?

The President. Well, there's nothing to clarify, because if you look at my whole—this was again fake news, CNN. I mean, they're just a bunch of fakers. So they asked me that question. And for the most part, to the best of my knowledge, I think I've called every family of somebody that's died, and it's the hardest call to make, and I said it very loud and clear yesterday. The hardest thing for me to do is do that.

Now, as far as other representatives, I don't know. I mean, you could ask General Kelly. Did he get a call from Obama? You could ask other people. I don't know what Obama's policy was. I write letters, and I also call.

Now, sometimes, you know, if you've had a tragic event with—it's very difficult to be able to do that—but I have called, I believe, everybody, but certainly, I'll use the word virtually everybody, where during the last 9 months something has happened to a soldier. I've called virtually everybody. I've gone to Dover. I've seen what takes place at Dover. It's an incredible scene and very, very sad—one of the saddest things you'll ever see.

But I really speak for myself; I'm not speaking for other people. I don't know what Bush did, I don't know what Obama did. You could find out easily what President Obama did; all you have to do is ask the military people. But I believe his policy was somewhat different than my policy.

I can tell you, my policy is, I've called every one of them. And you have to let a little time go by. You can't just call immediately. But I will be calling—have called and will be calling the parents and the loved ones, wives, et cetera, of the soldiers that recently were killed.

The President's Popularity/News Media

Mr. Kilmeade. Nine months in. You happy?

The President. I love doing it. I'm getting tremendous support. Even in your polls, I'm getting tremendous support, and it's hard to believe I can get support when you have so many phony stories out there, you know, like CNN, like MSNBC, like NBC. NBC is probably worse than CNN. But all I know is, Fox is good. Fox—we love you, Fox.

News Media

Mr. Kilmeade. [Laughter] We're fair.

The President. You are fair.

Mr. Kilmeade. Thank you.

The President. You know what? The truth is, you hit me when it's needed, you do. I mean, you do in particular, right? But the fact is, you're fair.

Mr. Kilmeade. I think we're fair

The President. All I want is fair. I don't want anything else. I just want fair. And Fox has really been fair, and I appreciate it.

Mr. Kilmeade. Man, thank you. I appreciate the time you gave us and the "Brian Kilmeade Show" this morning. And thanks for having us out here.

The President. Thank you, man. Take care.

Mr. Kilmeade. Thank you, Mr. President. Great.

NOTE: The interview began at 9:45 a.m. in the Indian Treaty Room of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, the President referred to Sens. W. Thad Cochran, John S. McCain III, and Charles E. Schumer; former Secretary State Hillary Rodham Clinton, in her capacity as the 2016 Democratic Presidential nominee; White House Chief of Staff John F. Kelly, whose son 1st Lt. Robert M. Kelly, USMC, was killed in a roadside bomb blast during a foot patrol in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, on November 9, 2010; and Staff Sgt. Bryan C. Black, USA, Staff Sgt. Jeremiah W. Johnson, USA, Sgt. La David T. Johnson, USA, and Staff Sgt. Dustin M. Wright, USA, who were killed in an ambush in southwest Niger during an advise-and-assist mission with Nigerien security forces on October 4. Mr. Kilmeade referred to Director of the Office of Management and Budget John M. "Mick" Mulvaney; White House Director of Legislative Affairs Marc Short; Sens. Lindsey O. Graham and William M. Cassidy; Senate Majority Leader A. Mitchell McConnell; former White House Senior Adviser David M. Axelrod; and Counselor to the President Kellyanne Conway.

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Names: Black, Bryan C.; Bush, George W.; Clinton, Hillary Rodham; Cochran, W. Thad; Johnson, Jeremiah W.; Johnson, La David T.; Kelly, John F.; Kilmeade, Brian; Manchin, Joseph, III; Marino, Thomas A.; McCain, John S., III; Obama, Barack; Paul, Randal H.; Schumer, Charles E.; Wright, Dustin M.

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