

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks in a Meeting With Members of Congress on Immigration Reform and an Exchange With Reporters

January 9, 2018

The President. Well, thank you very much, everyone, for being here. I'm thrilled to be with a distinguished group of Republican and Democratic lawmakers from both the House and the Senate. We have something in common, we'd like to see this get done, and you know what this means.

We are here today to advance bipartisan immigration reform that serves the needs of the American families, workers, and taxpayers. It's DACA. We've been talking about DACA for a long time. I've been hearing about it for years, long before I decided to go into this particular line of work. And maybe we can do something.

We have a lot of good people in this room, a lot of people that have a great spirit for taking care of the people we represent—we all represent. For that reason, any legislation on DACA, we feel—at least a strong part of this group feels—has to accomplish three vital goals.

And Chairman Goodlatte will be submitting a bill over the next 2 to 3 days that will cover many of the things. And obviously, that will—if it gets passed, it will go to the Senate, and they can negotiate it, and we'll see how it turns out. But I feel having the Democrats in with us is absolutely vital because this should be a bipartisan bill. This should be a bill of love. Truly, it should be a bill of love, and we can do that.

But it also has to be a bill where we're able to secure our border. Drugs are pouring into our country at a record pace; a lot of people are coming in that we can't have. We've greatly stiffened, as you know, and fewer people are trying to come in. But we have tremendous numbers of people and drugs pouring into our country.

So, in order to secure it, we need a wall. We need closing enforcement—we have to close enforcement loopholes. Give immigration officers—and these are tremendous people, the border security agents, the ICE agents—we have to give them the equipment they need, we have to close loopholes. And this really does include a very strong amount of different things for border security.

I think everybody in the room would agree to that. I think that we—it's a question of amounts. But I think everyone agrees we have to have border security. I don't think there would be anybody that says "no."

Second, it has to be a bill to end chain migration. Chain migration is bringing in many, many people with one, and often, it doesn't work out very well. Those many people are not doing us right. And I think a lot of people in the room—and I'm not sure I can speak for everybody, but a lot of the people in this room want to see chain migration ended.

And we have a recent case along the West Side Highway, having to do with chain migration, where a man ran over—killed 8 people and many people injured badly. Loss of arms, loss of legs. Horrible thing happened, and then you look at the chain and all of the people that came in because of him. Terrible situation.

And the other is, cancel the lottery program. They call it "visa lottery"—I just call it "lottery." But countries come in and they put names in a hopper. They're not giving you their best names; common sense means they're not giving you their best names. They're giving you people that they don't want. And then, we take them out of the lottery. And when they do it by hand—

where they put the hand in a bowl—they're probably—what's in their hand are the worst of the worst.

But they put people that they don't want into a lottery, and the United States takes those people. And again, going back to that same person, he came in through the lottery program. They went and they visited his neighborhood and the people in the neighborhood said, "Oh, my God, we suffered with this man—the rudeness, the horrible way he treated us right from the beginning." So we don't want the lottery system or the visa lottery system. We want it ended.

So those three things are paramount. These are measures that will make our community safer and more prosperous. These reforms are supported by the overwhelming majority of Americans. They're from every standpoint, from every poll, and they're being requested by law enforcement officers.

I had the big meeting with ICE last week; I had a big meeting with the Border Patrol agents last week. Nobody knows it better than them. As an example, on the wall, they say, "Sir, we desperately need the wall."

And we don't need a 2,000-mile wall. We don't need a wall where you have rivers and mountains and everything else protecting it. But we do need a wall for a fairly good portion. We also—as you know, it was passed in 2006—a essentially similar thing, which—a fence, a very substantial fence was passed. But unfortunately, I don't know, they never got it done. But they need it.

So I'm appealing to everyone in the room to put the country before party and to sit down and negotiate and to compromise, and let's see if we can get something done. I really think, Dick, that we have a chance to do it. I think it's very important. You're talking about 800,000 people—and we're talking about lots of other people are also affected, including people that live in our country. That's from the security standpoint.

So maybe the press can stay for a little while, and a couple of folks can make statements. And I don't mind the statements. We want to have this as a very open forum. I will say, though, that I really do believe—Democrat and Republican—the people sitting around this table—want to get something done in good faith. And I think we're on our way to do it.

This was an idea I had last week. I was sitting with some of our great Republican Senators, and we all agreed on everything. It was a great meeting. Right? David, right? We had a great meeting—Tom. It was perfect. Then, I said: "Yes, but we'd like to get some Democrat support. Well, what do they say?" And I say, "Let's have the same meeting, but let's add the Democrats." And that's what we've done. And I think we're going to come up with an answer. I hope we're going to come up with an answer for DACA, and then, we go further than that later on down the road.

Dick, perhaps you'd like to say a few words?

Senator Richard J. Durbin. Well, thanks, Mr. President, for inviting us. We're all honored to be a part of this conversation. September the 5th, you challenged us. You challenged Congress. You said we're going to end DACA; now, replace it. As of today, we have not done that. We face a deadline of March 5, which you've created with your elimination of DACA, and we know that, in the meantime, there have been efforts underway by Senator Graham and I.

We sat down with a bipartisan group of Senators. We have worked long and hard, many hours have been put into it. And we feel that we can put together a combination for the future of DACA as well as border security; that there are elements you're going to find Democrats support when it comes to border security. We want a safe border in America, period, both when it comes to the issues of illegal migration, but also when it comes to drugs and all these other areas.

Now, I will say that there is a sense of urgency that's felt by many of us when it comes to this issue. There are many of these young people who are losing the protection of DACA on a daily basis. As of March 5, a thousand a day will lose DACA protection. Nine hundred of them are members of the U.S. military. Twenty thousand of them are schoolteachers. In my State of Illinois, in the city of Chicago, there are 25 of them in medical school who can't apply for a residency if they lose their DACA status.

So lives are hanging in the balance of our getting the job done. We've got the time to do it. In a matter of days—literally of days—we can come together and reach an agreement. And when that happens, I think good things will happen in other places. And we'll see some real progress here in Washington.

The President. I agree with that, Dick. I very much agree with that. Tom, would you like to say something? Tom Cotton.

Senator Thomas B. Cotton. Thank you for inviting us all here, and I'm glad to be here with some Democrats and with House members as well. You know, I think, on this issue, there's a lack of trust and there has been, for many years, a lack of trust between Republicans and Democrats; a lack of trust among Republicans; most fundamentally, a lack of trust between the American people and our elected leaders on not delivering a solution for many, many years about some of these problems.

And I hope that this meeting can be the beginning of building trust between our parties, between the Chambers, because I know, for a fact, all the Republicans around the table are committed to finding a solution, and I believe all the Democrats are as well.

So I think this is a good first step in building the trust we need for a good bill, Mr. President, that will achieve the objectives that you've stated: providing legal protection for the DACA population, while also securing our border and ending chain migration and the diversity lottery.

Thank you for the invitation.

The President. Thank you, Tom. Steny?

Representative Steny H. Hoyer. Mr. President, thank you very much for having us down here. I agree with Tom Cotton that the American public are very frustrated with us. One of the reasons they're frustrated with us is because we continue to couple things on which we have large agreement with things in which we do not agree. This is a perfect example of that.

[At this point, Representative Hoyer made brief remarks, concluding as follows.]

So I would urge us to move, as Senator Durbin has urged us to move, on the DACA students. As a matter of fact, the Speaker, I think today, but maybe yesterday, said, we need to solve the DACA issue, and we need to solve it in a way that is permanent, not temporary. And I agree with him on that issue.

The President. And interestingly, when you say that, President Obama, when he signed the Executive order, actually said he doesn't have the right to do this. And so you do have to go through Congress, and you do have to make it permanent, whether he does, whether he doesn't—let's assume he doesn't, he said it—and that was a temporary stopgap, I don't think we want that. I think we want to have a permanent solution to this. And I think everybody in this room feels that way very strongly.

Rep. Hoyer. What happened, Mr. President, I think, is that the Senate passed a comprehensive immigration bill, as you know. We did not consider it in the House, so we didn't reach those issues.

Very frankly, on border security, Mr. McCaul, the chairman of the committee, reported out a unanimous security solution, which we then included in the bill that we filed on comprehensive immigration reform. So I think we can reach agreement.

The President. Well, I also think that, after we do DACA—and I really believe we should be able to be successful—I really think we should look in terms of your permanent solution and to the whole situation with immigration. I think a lot of people in this room would agree to that also, but we'll do it in steps. And most people agree with that, I think, Dick. We'll do the steps. Even you say, "Let's do this, and then we go phase two."

Kevin, what would you like to say?

House Majority Leader Kevin O. McCarthy. Well, first, I want to thank you for bringing everybody together. You've got the Senate, you've got the House, you've got both parties. And I like the exchange of ideas, and I think everybody has a point here.

The one thing I don't want to have happen here is what I saw in the past. There were four bills that were passed on border security years ago that never got finished. There were immigration bills passed that—we're right back at the table with the same problem. Let's make a commitment to each one, and most importantly, to the American people, that, when we get done and come to an agreement, that we're not back at this problem 3, 4 years from now.

That's why—yes, we've got to do DACA, and I agree with you a hundred percent—but if we do not do something with the security, if we do not do something with the chain migration, we are fooling each other that we solved the problem. You know how difficult this issue is. So let's collectively—we're here at the table together. I'll be the first one to tell you, we're all going to have to give a little, and I'll be the first one willing to.

But let's solve the problem—but let's not tell the American public at the end that it's solved when it's not.

The President. Well, I think a good starting point would be Bob Goodlatte, who has done a bill, and I understand you're ready to submit it. And you're going to take that, and you'll submit it, and they'll negotiate in Congress or the House. And then, it goes to the Senate, and they'll negotiate, both Republican and Democrat. But it could be a good way of starting.

Now, if anyone has an idea different from that—but, I think—[laughter]—starting in the House. Starting in the House might be good. You're ready. I think you're ready to go.

Representative Michael T. McCaul. We are, Mr. President.

The President. I would like to add the words "merit" into any bill that's submitted because I think we should have merit-based immigration like they have in Canada, like they have in Australia. So we have people coming in that have a great track record, as opposed to what we're doing now, to be honest with you.

But I think merit-based should be absolutely added to any bill, even if it has to do with DACA. That would be added to the things I said. I think it would be popular. I think—I can tell you, the American public very much wants that.

But, Bob, where are you with the bill?

Representative Robert W. Goodlatte. So tomorrow Chairman McCaul and Congresswoman McSally and Congressman Labrador—we're the chairmen of the two committees and the chairmen of the two subcommittees—are going to introduce a bill that addresses the DACA concerns.

[Representative Goodlatte made brief remarks, concluding as follows.]

We're going to address chain migration. We're going to end the visa lottery program. We're going to address sanctuary cities and Kate's Law.

We think it is a good bill that will both address the two things our Speaker told us right after you made your decision, which is, we have to address the problem we have with the DACA kids being in limbo, as Dick Durbin described it, and I agree with that. But we also have to make sure this does not happen again.

The President. And, Dick, you're—and the Democrats are going to have a lot of things that they're not going to agree—you're going to talk to us about it. I just felt that this is something that was long overdue. You'd have a meeting, and you'd say, this is what we want. We'd have a meeting—and this has been going on for years. And I just—you know, at a certain point, maybe I'll just lock the doors, and I won't let anybody out—[*laughter*—until they come and agree.

Michael, do you have something to say about the bill?

Representative McCaul. Yes, I've been in Congress for 7 terms. I've been trying to get this border secure for 7 terms in Congress. I think this is a bipartisan issue. I think DACA is a bipartisan issue.

[*Rep. McCaul made brief remarks, concluding as follows.*]

I think what we don't want to see happen is for the conditions for DACA to occur again. We want to get security done so we don't have to deal with this problem 5 more years down the road.

So thank you, sir, for doing this.

The President. Well, there are so many points of agreement, and a lot of it is common sense. And I really think we're going to come out very well.

David Perdue, do you have something to say?

Senator David A. Perdue, Jr. Well, yes, my observation is that 3 times in the last 11 years, well-intentioned people, some of whom are in this room, attempted to do what we're starting to try to do today, and we failed. And I think the difference is, is their mission creep ended up in an effort that became too comprehensive.

[*Senator Perdue made brief remarks, concluding as follows.*]

But limiting this to the legal immigration side and combining the balance between various solutions on DACA; DREAMers, if it gets in the conversation; as well border security and chain migration, I think therein lies the balance of a good deal that can be done.

And I don't think—I agree with Dick. I don't think it's going to take long to get it done if we just locked ourselves in a room and made it happen.

The President. I think you're right. I think it could be done very quickly.

Would anybody have anything to say prior to the press leaving?

Representative Martha E. McCally. Mr. President, I just have one comment.

The President. Yes.

Representative McCally. Senator Durbin mentioned that lives are hanging in the balance. As we come up on the January 19 deadline, the lives that are hanging in the balance are those of our military that are needing the equipment and the funding and everything they need in order to keep us safe, and we should not playing politics on this issue to stop our military from getting the funding that they need.

I think we have the right people in the room to solve this issue. The deadline is March 5. Let's roll up our sleeves and work together on this. But those who need us right now before the January 19 deadline is our military. And let's not play politics with that. Let's give them what they need to keep us safe.

The President. Okay, good. And I think a lot of people would agree with that. We need our military—I can't say more than ever before. We had wars. Right, Lindsey? We had a lot of other areas and times. But we need our military desperately. Our military has been very depleted. We're rebuilding, and we're building it up quickly, and we're negotiating much better deals with your purveyors and with your manufacturers and with your equipment makers, much better than it was before.

I looked at boats that started off at \$1.5 billion, and they're up to \$18 billion, and they're still not finished. In this case, a particular aircraft carrier. I think it's outrageous. So we're very much agreeing with you on that, Martha.

Would anybody like to say? Yes, Steny, go ahead.

Rep. Hoyer. I want to follow up on that. There are no Democrats that don't want to make sure that the military is funded properly. And over the last 4 years, we had an agreement between Mr. Ryan and Senator Murray—Speaker Ryan and—that we understand that our military is critically important. But we also understand that our domestic issues, whether it's education, whether it's health care, whether it's the environment, whether it's transportation and infrastructure, they're important, as well.

[*Rep. Hoyer made brief remarks, concluding as follows.*]

So we can get to where we should get and want to get there, but we ought to have an agreement based upon what the last two——

The President. But, Steny, we do have to take politics out of the military. We need that military. All the other things we talk about, we're not going to be here if we don't have the right military.

Rep. McSally. Exactly.

The President. And we need our military, and we need it stronger than ever before, and we're ready to do it. But we have to take politics out of the military.

One thing that I think we can really get along with on a bipartisan basis—and maybe I'm stronger on this than a lot of the people on the Republican side, but I will tell you, we have great support from the Republicans—is infrastructure. I think we can do a great infrastructure bill. I think we're going to have a lot of support from both sides, and I'd like to get it done as quickly as possible.

Yes, John.

Senator John Cornyn III. Mr. President, I, too, want to thank you for getting us together. You made the point last week when Republicans were meeting with you that, why are we continuing to have these meetings just among ourselves when what we need to do to get to a solution is to meet, as we are today, as you insisted, on a bipartisan basis.

But part of my job is to count votes in the Senate. And as you know when you hosted us, the leadership, at Camp David this weekend, I believe both the Speaker and Majority Leader McConnell made crystal clear that they would not proceed with a bill on the floor of the Senate or the House unless it had your support, unless you would sign it.

So that's, I think, the picture that we need to be looking through—the lens we need to be looking through is not only what could we agree to among ourselves on a bipartisan basis, but what will you sign into law. Because we all want to get to a solution here, and we realize the clock is ticking.

But I think that for me frames the issue about as well as I can.

The President. Thank you. Very well said. And one of the reasons I'm here, Chuck, so importantly, is exactly that. I mean, normally you wouldn't have a President coming to this meeting. Normally, frankly, you'd have Democrats, Republicans, and maybe nothing would get done.

Our system lends itself to not getting things done—[*laughter*—and I hear so much about earmarks—the old earmark system—how there was a great friendliness when you had earmarks. But of course, they had other problems with earmarks. But maybe all of you should start thinking about going back to a form of earmarks. Because this system—[*laughter*].

Senator Lindsey O. Graham. Yes. [*Laughter*]

Participants. Yes, yes.

Participant. Where do I sign?

The President. No? [*Laughter*]. Well, you should do it, and I'm there with you, because this system really lends itself to not getting along. It lends itself to hostility and anger, and they hate the Republicans. And they hate the Democrats. And in the old days of earmarks, you can say what you want about certain Presidents and others, where they all talk about they went out to dinner at night, and they all got along, and they passed bills. That was an earmark system, and maybe we should think about it.

And we have to put better controls because it got a little bit out of hand, but maybe that brings people together. Because our system right now, the way it's set up, will never bring people together.

Now, I think we're going to get this done—DACA. I think we're going to get—I hope we're going to get infrastructure done in the same way.

But I think you should look at a form of earmarks. I see Lindsey nodding very hard "yes."

Senator Graham. Starting with the Port of Charleston. Absolutely. [*Laughter*]

The President. A lot of the pros are saying that if you want to get along and if you want to get this country really rolling again, you have to look at a different form, because this is obviously out of control.

The levels of hatred—and I'm not talking about Trump. I'm talking you go back throughout the 8 years of Obama and you go before that, the animosity and the hatred between Republicans and Democrats.

I mean, I remember when I used to go out in Washington, and I'd see Democrats having dinner with Republicans. And they were best friends, and everybody got along. You don't see that too much anymore. In all due respect, you really don't see that. When was the last time you took a Republican out? Why don't you guys go and have dinner together? [*Laughter*]

Leader McCarthy. Because he only wants to—[*inaudible*]. [*Laughter*]

The President. But you don't see it. So maybe, and very importantly, totally different from this meeting, because we're going to get DACA done—I hope we're going to get DACA done, and we're going to all try very hard—but maybe you should start bringing back a concept of

earmarks. It's going to bring you together. You're going to do it honestly. You're going to get rid of the problems that the other system had—and it did have some problems—but one thing it did is, it brought everyone together. And this country has to be brought together. Okay? Thank you.

Sen. Graham. Mr. President.

The President. Yes, Lindsey?

Sen. Graham. Well, at 6:40, I'm going to go to Menendez's office, and he's taking me to dinner. *[Laughter]* So he's—*[inaudible]*.

And he's buying.

The President. Wow. Sounds like fun.

Sen. Graham. He didn't know that, but he's buying. We're going to Morton's. You're all welcome to come. *[Laughter]* Bob's buying, so——

Rep. Hoyer. We can usually get bipartisan agreement when the other guy buys. *[Laughter]*

The President. Well, I think it's a very important thing, because our system is designed, right now, that everybody should hate each other. And we can't have that. You know, we have a great country. We have a country that's doing very well in many respects. We're just hitting a new high on the stock market again, and that means jobs. I look at the—I don't look at the stocks, I look at the jobs. I look at the 401(k)s, I look at what's happening, where police come up to me and they say: "Thank you. You're making me look like a financial genius"—literally—meaning about them. And their wives never thought that was possible, right?

No, the country is doing well in so many ways, but there's such divisiveness, such division. And I really believe we can solve that. I think this system is a very bad system in terms of getting together. And I'm going to leave it up to you, but I really believe you can do something to bring it together.

Sen. Graham. Other than going to dinner with Bob—I've been doing this for 10 years—I don't think I've seen a better chance to get it done than I do right now, because of you. John's right: I'm not going to support a deal if you don't support it. I've had my head beat out a bunch; I'm still standing. I'm "Lindsey Grahamnesty," "Lindsey Gomez"—you name every name you want to give to me, it's been assigned to me. And I'm still standing.

[Sen. Graham made brief remarks, concluding as follows.]

To my Democratic friends, thanks for coming. The "Resist" movement hates this guy. They don't want him to be successful at all. You turn on Fox News, and I can hear the drumbeat coming. Rightwing radio and TV talk show hosts are going to beat the crap out of us, because it's going to be amnesty all over again. I don't know if the Republican and Democratic Party can define love, but I think what we can do is do what the American people want us to do.

Sixty-two percent of the Trump voters support a pathway to citizenship for the DACA kids if you have strong borders. You have created an opportunity here, Mr. President, and you need to close the deal.

The President. Thank you, Lindsey. You know, it's very interesting, because I do have people that are—let's just to use a very common term—very far right and very far left. They're very unhappy about what we're doing, but I really don't believe they have to be, because I really think this sells itself. And you know, when you talk about comprehensive immigration reform, which is where I would like to get to eventually—if we do the right bill here, we are not very far way. You know, we've done most of it. If you want to know the truth, Dick? If we do this properly, DACA, you're not so far away from comprehensive immigration reform.

And if you want to take it that further step, I'll take the heat, I don't care. I don't care—I'll take all the heat you want to give me, and I'll take the heat off both the Democrats and the Republicans. My whole life has been heat. *[Laughter]* I like heat, in a certain way. But I will.

I mean, you are somewhat more traditional politicians than me. Two and a half years ago, I was never thinking in terms of politics. Now I'm a politician. You people have been doing it, many of you, all your lives. I'll take all the heat you want. But you are not that far away from comprehensive immigration reform. And if you wanted to go that final step, I think you should do it. And if you want to study earmarks to bring us all together, so we all get together and do something, I think you should study it.

Chuck, did you have something to say?

Senator Charles E. Grassley. I'd like to talk about the reality of the whole situation and take off from what Cornyn and Graham have said of the necessity of you working with us. And you are doing that by having this meeting and other meetings as well. But we've always talked in the United States Senate about the necessity of getting 60 votes. And that's pretty darn tough.

But if we would write a bill that you don't like and you veto it, we're talking about a 67-vote threshold——

The President. Right.

Senator Grassley. ——two-thirds in the United States Senate. So that's the reality of negotiating in good faith and getting something you can sign.

[Sen. Grassley made brief remarks, concluding as follows.]

You know, I would vote for a path to citizenship, which isn't very easy for me, but I would do it just as an effort. But there are certain things that you've got—we've got to guarantee that we're going to do.

The President. By the way, Chuck, that's got to be brought up. I really believe that will be brought up as part of what we're talking about, at some point. It's an incentive for people to do a good job, if you want to know the truth. That whole path is an incentive for people—and they're not all kids. I mean, we're used to talking about kids. They're not really kids. You have them 39, 40 years old, in some cases. But it would be an incentive for people to work hard and do a good job. So that could very well be brought up, the path.

Sen. Grassley. We're talking about legalizing people here that didn't break the law, because their parents, who broke the law, brought them here. And we ought to be talking about what we can do for the people that had no fault of their own and get the job done and not worry about a lot of other things that we're involved in. And that means that we've got to make sure that we tell the American people, when we're taking this step, that we're doing something that all the people agree to.

Rep. Hoyer. Mr. President, let me just say, I think Dick and I agree with what Chuck Grassley just said.

The President. That's hard to believe. When was the last time that happened? *[Laughter]*

Rep. Hoyer. We need to take care of these DACA kids, and we all agree on that. Eighty-six percent of the American public agrees on that.

With all due respect, Bob—and Mike and Lindsey—there are some things that you're proposing that are going to be very controversial and will be an impediment to agreements.

The President. But you're going to negotiate those things. You're going to sit down and you're going to say, listen, we can't agree here, we'll give you half of that, we're going to—you're going to negotiate those things.

Rep. Hoyer. Mr. President, comprehensive means comprehensive.

The President. No, we're not talking about comprehensive. Now we're talking about DACA.

Rep. Hoyer. No, we are. We are talking about comprehensive.

The President. If you want to go there, it's okay, because you're not that far away.

Rep. Hoyer. Mr. President, many of the things that are mentioned ought to be a part of the negotiations regarding comprehensive immigration reform.

The President. Okay. I think if you want to take it the step further, you may—I'm going to have to rely on you, Dick—but you may complicate it, and you may delay DACA somewhat.

Senator Durbin. I don't want to do that.

Rep. Hoyer. You can't do that.

Sen. Durbin. You said at the outset that we need to phase this. I think the first phase is what Chuck and Steny and I have mentioned, others as well: We have a deadline looming and a lot of lives hanging. We can agree on some very fundamental and important things together on border security, on chain, on the future of diversity visas. Comprehensive, though, I worked on it for 6 months with Michael Bennet and a number of—Bob Menendez and Schumer and McCain and Jeff Flake—and it took us 6 months to put it together. We don't have 6 months for the DACA bill.

Participant. We're not talking about comprehensive immigration.

Participant. Take a look at our bill, and let's talk some.

Participant. I hear you.

Sen. Durbin. Well, you've mentioned a number of factors that are going to be controversial, as Steny has mentioned.

The President. But you're going to negotiate. Dick, you're going to negotiate. Maybe we will agree, and maybe we won't. I mean, it's possible we're not going to agree with you, and it's possible we will, but there should be no reason for us not to get this done.

And, Chuck, I will say, when this group comes back—hopefully, with an agreement—this group and others from the Senate, from the House, comes back with an agreement, I'm signing it. I mean, I will be signing it. I'm not going to say, "Oh, gee, I want this or I want that." I'll be signing it, because I have a lot of confidence in the people in this room that they're going to come up with something really good.

Senator, would you like to say something? Dianne?

Senator Dianne G. Feinstein. I would. As you know, we tried for comprehensive immigration reform in the Senate. It was on the floor, there were a number of amendments, it got a lot of attention in the Judiciary Committee, and then the House didn't take it up.

I think there needs to be a willingness on both sides. And I think—and I don't know how you would feel about this, but I'd like to ask the question: What about a clean DACA bill now, and with a commitment that we go into a comprehensive immigration reform procedure? Like we did back—oh, I remember when Kennedy was here, and it was really a major, major effort, and it was a great disappointment that it went nowhere.

The President. I remember that. I have no problem. I think that's basically what Dick is saying. We're going to come up with DACA. We're going to do DACA, and then we can start immediately on the phase two, which would be comprehensive.

Senator Feinstein. Would you be agreeable to that?

The President. Yes, I would like—I would like to do that. Go ahead. I think a lot of people would like to see that, but I think we have to do DACA first.

Leader McCarthy. Mr. President, you need to be clear, though. I think what Senator Feinstein is asking here: When we talk about just DACA, we don't want to be back here 2 years later. We have to have security, as the Secretary would tell you.

The President. But I think that's what she's saying.

Sen. Feinstein. What do you think I'm saying?

Leader McCarthy. No, no, I think she's saying something different. I think she——

Sen. Feinstein. Clean.

I'm thinking you're saying DACA without security. Are you talking about security as well?

Sen. Feinstein. Well, I think if we have some meaningful comprehensive immigration reform, that's really where the security goes.

Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen M. Nielsen. No way.

Participant. No.

Sen. Feinstein. And if we can get the DACA bill, because March is coming and people are losing their status every day——

Rep. Hoyer. A hundred and twenty-two a day.

Leader McCarthy. But let's be honest with everybody. Security was voted on just a few years ago, and, no disrespect, there's people in the room on the other side of the aisle who voted for it. If I recall, Senator Clinton voted for it. So I don't think that's comprehensive; I think that's dealing with DACA at the same time. I think that's really what the President is making.

It's kind of like three pillars: DACA, because we're all in the room want to do it; border security so we're not back out here; and chain migration. It's just three items, and then everything else that's comprehensive is kind of moved to the side. So I believe when the President talks about DACA—[inaudible].

The President. And the lottery, by the way. And the lottery.

Leader McCarthy. And the lottery.

The President. And I think you should add merit. I mean, if you can, add merit-based. [Laughter] I don't think—I don't know who is going to argue with merit-based? Who can argue with merit-based? Dianne, go ahead.

Sen. Feinstein. Can I ask a question?

Sen. Hoyer. Then, what incentive will there be to do comprehensive if you do that?

The President. You can—[inaudible]. Dianne, go ahead.

Sen. Feinstein. Do you really think that there can be agreement on all of that, quickly?—to get DACA passed in time? I wanted to ask Mr. McCarthy a question.

The President. Kevin.

Leader McCarthy. Oh, yes. I'm sorry.

Sen. Feinstein. Do you really think there can be agreement on those three difficult subjects you raised in time to get DACA passed and effective? So——

Leader McCarthy. Yes, because you have heard from Leader McConnell and Speaker Ryan, who said they will put the bill onto the floor if the President agrees to it. And us getting to the room, I haven't seen us be this close and having this discussion in quite a few years—or the whole last 4 years.

So I think, yes, we can make this happen. We all know it. We've done it before. You and I spent a long time—we did probably one of the most difficult things to do in California: water. And I believe we can get there, and we can just keep working each day on this.

The President. I think what we're all saying is we'll do DACA and we can certainly start comprehensive immigration reform the following afternoon. Okay? We'll take an hour off, and then we'll start.

Sen. Feinstein. Okay.

The President. I do believe that. Because once we get DACA done—if it's done properly—with, you know, security, and everything else——

Sen. Feinstein. That's the point.

The President. If it's done properly, we have taken a big chunk of comprehensive out of the negotiation, and I don't think it's going to be that complicated.

Sen. Perdue. Mr. President, we have——

The President. Yes.

Sen. Perdue. We have to be very clear though.

The President. Go ahead.

Sen. Perdue. In my opinion, we'll be right back here either 5 years, 30 years, whatever. But this, the chain migration, is so insidious; it is the fundamental flaw in the immigration policy of the United States. If any conversation about DACA is being held without that consideration—I agree with border security as well—but any conversation about that is not going to go anywhere in the United States Senate. And if we think we're going to divide one side versus the other, that's just not going to happen on this issue.

The President. David, I think chain migration has taken a very big hit over the last 6 months. People are seeing what's happening. People—for instance, the man on the Westside Highway that killed the people and so badly wounded. You know, it's incredible when they talk about wounded, they don't say that arms are off and legs are off, one person lost two legs. You know, nobody talks about it. They said 8 died, but they don't talk about the 12 people that have no legs, no arms, and all of the things. So I'm talking about everybody.

I really believe that when you talk about the subject that we're all mentioning right now, I think they had—how many people came in? Twenty-two to twenty-four people came in through him. He was a killer. He's a guy who ran over 8—many people—8 died, 10 to 12 are really badly injured. So I really think that a lot of people are going to agree with us now on that subject. I really don't see there's a big——

Sen. Perdue. Seventy percent of Americans want the immigration policy to be, the family—the nuclear family and the workers. Seventy percent.

The President. David, the chain immigration, though, has taken a very big hit in the last year with what's happening. I mean, you're looking at these killers—whether you like or not—we're looking at these killers, and then you see, 18 people came in, 22 people came in, 30 people came in, with this one person that just killed a lot of people. I really don't believe there are a lot of Democrats saying, "We're going to be supporting chain migration," anymore.

Leader McCarthy. Mr. President, should we get the Homeland Security Secretary—

The President. Yes. Go ahead.

Secretary Nielsen. Yes, if you don't mind. Just on a couple of things on border security. I just want to try to make sure we're all linking. The reason that border security is so important to have as part of this discussion is that it doesn't solve the problem if we can apprehend people, but we can't remove them. So we need the wall system, which is some physical infrastructure as the President described—personnel and technology—but we have to close those legal loopholes, because the effect of that is this incredible pull up from Central America that just continues to exacerbate the problem. So border security has to be part of this or we will be here again in 3, 4, 5 years again, maybe, unfortunately, sooner.

The other point I would just make is, the President asked DHS—he asked the men and women of DHS, what do you need to do your job? Congress and the American people have entrusted to you the security of our country. What is it that you need? The list that we have provided is what we need to do our mission that you asked us to do. It's not less than, it's not more than; it is what we need to close those loopholes to be able to protect our country.

So I would just encourage—everyone, much more eloquently than I can, described all the reasons why we all, I think, here are committed to helping the DACA population. But to truly solve the problem, it's got to be in conjunction with border security.

The President. Jeff.

Senator Jeffrey L. Flake. I would just echo what has been said by some here. For those of us who have been through comprehension reform, that was 6, 7 months of every night negotiating, staff on weekends. And a lot of things we're talking about on border security and some of the interior things have tradeoffs, and we made those during that process. I don't see how we could get there before March 5.

The President. That's okay. So I think that's why we make it a phase two. We do a phase one, which is DACA and security, and we do phase two, which is comprehensive immigration. And I think we should go right to it, I really do. We do one, and we then do the other. But we go right to it.

Yes.

Representative Mario R. Diaz-Balart. Mr. President, I think it's important to thank you for your flexibility and your leadership. And so I think what all of us have to do is have the same willingness to have a little bit of flexibility to get this issue done. And obviously, I want to do a lot more than DACA. But the urgent thing now, for obvious reasons, are these young men and women who we have to deal with, first and foremost.

The President. I agree.

Representative Diaz-Balart. And to Steny's point, there are two issues which we keep hearing that everybody agrees to, that is, dealing with these individuals on a permanent and real solution and border security.

So I don't see why we shouldn't be able to do that, and I'm hoping that that will then lead us—to Senator Cotton's point of, there's a lot of lack of trust. If we can get real border security

and deal with these individuals, if we can get that done, then I think, my gosh, it all opens up to do a lot more things in the future for the American people.

Rep. Goodlatte. I just want to reemphasize what Secretary Nielsen said. It is so important they understand when you talk about border security, if you apprehend somebody at the border, but then you cannot send them back outside the United States, even though they're unlawfully present in the United States, you have not solved this problem, because they're then released into the interior of the country, and the problem persists. And that sends a message back to wherever they've come from. Hey, come do it.

The President. I agree, Bob. And you know what? We're going to negotiate that.

Rep. Goodlatte. Absolutely.

The President. I agree, and I think a lot of people agree on both sides.

Henry?

Representative Henry Cuellar. Thank you, Mr. President. And I agree with my good friend, Mario, in the sense that if we focus on DACA and border security, I think we can address this. Issues of chain migration or the other issues, I think that should be looked at in the second phase.

[Representative Cuellar made brief remarks, concluding as follows.]

Let me explain this. For example, if you talk to—look at the latest DEA—you're worried about drugs, look at the latest DEA report—more drugs come through the ports of entry than in between ports. But we're not even talking about ports of entry, number one.

Participant. Our bill does.

Rep. McSally. Our bill does. *[Laughter]*

Rep. Cuellar. But no, I know—I'm just saying. I'm saying. *[Laughter]* I'm just saying ports—let's finish this. And some of us have been working this longer than some other folks.

Number one, if you look at the 11 or 12 million undocumented aliens, which is the second phase, 40 percent of them came through visa overstays. So you can put the most beautiful wall out there, it's not going to stop them there, because they'll either come by plane, boat, or vehicle itself.

Rep. McSally. That's in our bill too.

Rep. Cuellar. Yes, and I know. So the other thing is, the other thing that we've got to look at—the wall itself, Mr. President—if you talk to your Border Patrol chief or the former Border Patrol chiefs, I've asked them, how much time does a wall buy you? They'll say a couple minutes or a few seconds. And this is our own Border Patrol chiefs that have said that.

Secretary Nielsen. It's not mine. Mine has made clear the wall works.

The President. Not the ones I spoke to.

Secretary Nielsen. They have not. The wall works.

The President. Not the ones I spoke to. They say, without the wall, we cannot have border security.

Rep. Cuellar. All right. Okay. Let me show you.

The President. All you have to do is ask Israel. Look what happened with them.

Secretary Nielsen. No, ask Yuma. Ask San Diego. The wall works.

The President. Henry, without the wall, you can't have it.

Rep. Cuellar. All right. Homeland Appropriations, your chief that was there, and the former chiefs have all said that.

Now, the other thing is——

The President. Well, then, they didn't do a very good job. That's why they're not there anymore.

Rep. Cuellar. Well, if you look at—this is where the wall—Mr. President, if you look at where the walls are at right now, this is where the activity is where the walls are at right now.

The President. We have massive miles of area where people are pouring through.

Rep. Cuellar. Right.

The President. Now, one of the good things, because of our rhetoric or because of the perceived—you know, my perceived attitude—fewer people are trying to come through. That's a great thing.

Rep. Cuellar. Right.

The President. And therefore—I mean, our numbers have been fantastic, maybe for all the right reasons.

Rep. Cuellar. But let me just finish my thought. The—I want to ask you that—we're playing—you saw the game last night. It was a good game last night.

The President. I did. Very good game.

Rep. Cuellar. We're playing defense on the 1-yard line called the U.S. border. We spend over \$18 billion a year on the border. If we think about playing defense on the 20-yard line—if you look at what Mexico has done, they stop thousands of people on the southern border with Guatemala. We ought to be looking at working with them.

The President. Henry, we stopped them. We stopped them. You know why? Mexico told me, the President told me, everybody tells me: Not as many people are coming through their southern border because they don't think they can get through our southern border, and therefore, they don't come. That's what happened with Mexico. We did Mexico a tremendous favor.

Rep. Cuellar. We actually put appropriations to help them with the southern border.

The President. The point is—I know, we always give everybody—every other nation gets money but ours.

Rep. Cuellar. But finally——

The President. We're always looking for money. We give the money to other nations. That we have to stop. *[Laughter]*

Rep. Cuellar. But finally, the last point, Mr. President, is instead of playing defense on the 1-yard line, if you look—this is your material—we know where the stash houses are at, we know where the hotels are at, we know where they cross the river——

The President. Right. And we're going after them.

Rep. Cuellar. Why stop—why play defense on the 1-yard line called the U.S.——

The President. Henry, we're going after them like never before. We're going after the stash houses——

Rep. Cuellar. All I'm saying is, if we focus on DACA, we can work on the other things separately—on sensible border security, listen to the folks that are from the border, and we can work with the——

The President. And you folks are going to have to—you're one voice—your folks are going to have to come up with a solution.

Rep. Cuellar. Yes, sir.

The President. And if you do, I'm going to sign that solution.

Rep. Cuellar. Yes, sir.

The President. We have a lot of smart people in this room. Really smart people. We have a lot of people that are good people, big hearts. They want to get it done.

I think almost everybody—I can think of one or two I don't particularly like, but that's okay. [Laughter]

Rep. McSally. Where is he looking?

Rep. Cuellar. Who is he looking at? [Laughter]

The President. I'm trying to figure that out. Everybody wants a solution. You want it, Henry. And I want it.

Rep. Cuellar. Yes, sir. I want to work with you on this.

The President. I think we have a great group of people to sit down and get this done. In fact, when the media leaves, which I think should be probably pretty soon. [Laughter] But I like—but I will tell you, I like opening it up to the media, because I think they're seeing, more than anything else, that we're all very much on a similar page. Not the same page.

Rep. Cuellar. We are. We are.

The President. And, Henry, I think we can really get something done.

Rep. Cuellar. Yes, sir.

The President. So why don't we ask the media to leave. We appreciate you being here.

Border Security

Q. Is there any agreement without the wall?

The President. No, there wouldn't be. You need it. Jon [Jonathan Karl, ABC News], you need the wall. I mean, it's wonderful—I'd love not to build the wall, but you need the wall.

And I will tell you this, the ICE officers and the Border Patrol agents—I had them just recently up—they say, if you don't have the wall—you know, in certain areas, obviously, that aren't protected by nature—if you don't have the wall, you cannot have security. You just can't have it. It doesn't work.

And part of the problem we have is, walls and fences that we currently have are in very bad shape. They're broken. We have to get them fixed or rebuilt.

But you know, you speak to the agents, and I spoke to all of them. And I spoke—I lived with them. They endorsed me for President, which they've never done before—the Border Patrol agents and ICE. They both endorsed Trump. And they never did that before. And I have a great relationship with them. They say, sir, without the wall, security doesn't work; we're all wasting time.

Now, that doesn't mean 2,000 miles of wall, because you just don't need that, because of nature, because of mountains and rivers and lots of other things. But we need a certain portion of that border to have the wall. If we don't have it, you can never have security. You could never stop that portion of drugs that comes through that area.

Yes, it comes through planes and lots of other ways and ships. But a lot of it comes through the southern border. You can never fix the situation without additional wall. And we have to fix existing wall that we already have.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program/Border Security

Q. So you would not be for what Senator Feinstein asked you, which would be a clean DACA bill that doesn't have——

The President. No, I think a clean DACA bill, to me, is a DACA bill where we take care of the 800,000 people. They are actually not necessarily young people; everyone talks about young—you know, they could be 40 years old, 41 years old, but they're also 16 years old. But I think, to me, a clean bill is a bill of DACA. We take care of them, and we also take care of security. That's very important.

And I think the Democrats want security too. I mean, we started off with Steny saying, we want security also. Everybody wants security. And then, we can go to comprehensive later on, and maybe that is a longer subject and a bigger subject, and I think we can get that done too.

But we'll get it done at a later date.

Yes, ma'am. Go ahead.

Senator Mazie Hirono. Mr. President——

Participant. Were we going to have the press——

Senator Hirono. I'm Senator Hirono from Hawaii.

The President. Yes, I know.

Sen. Hirono. And as the only immigrant serving in the United States Senate right now, I would like nothing better than for us to get to comprehensive immigration reform. But what I'm hearing around the table right now is a commitment to resolving the DACA situation, because there is a sense of urgency.

Now, you have put it out there that you want \$18 billion for a wall or else there will be no DACA. Is that still your position?

The President. Yes. I can build it for less. *[Laughter]*

Sen. Hirono. But you want that wall?

The President. I must tell you, I'm looking at these prices. Somebody said \$42 billion. This is like the aircraft carrier. It started off at a billion and a half, and it's now at \$18 billion.

No, we can do it for less. We can do a great job. We can do a great wall. But you need the wall. And I'm now getting involved. I like to build under budget, okay? I like to go under budget, ahead of schedule.

There's no reason for 7 years, also. I heard the other day—please, don't do that to me. *[Laughter]* Seven years to build the wall. We can build the wall in 1 year.

Secretary Nielsen. Yes, sir. We just need the money.

The President. And we can build it for much less money than what they're talking about. And any excess funds—and we'll have a lot of—whether it's a Wollman Rink or whether it's any—I've built under budget, and I've built ahead of schedule. There is no reason to ever mention 7 years again, please.

Secretary Nielsen. Appropriators in the room, please listen. *[Laughter]*

The President I heard that, and I said—I wanted to come out with a major news conference, Tom, yesterday.

No. It can go up quickly, it can go up effectively, and we can fix a lot of the areas right now that are really satisfactory if we renovate those walls or those fences.

Sen. Hirono. And can you tell us how many miles of wall you're contemplating? Whether it's \$17 million or \$13 million or whatever is, can you tell us?

The President. Yes, we're doing a study on that right now. But there are large areas where you don't need a wall because you have a mountain and you have a river—you have a violent river—and you don't need it. Okay?

Secretary Nielsen. Senator, I'm happy to come visit you this week to walk you through the numbers.

Immigration Reform Legislation

Q. I'm not the most politically astute person in the world, but it seems to me not much has actually changed here in terms of your positions at this particular meeting. Since we're the flies on the wall here.

The President. No, I think it's changed. I think my positions are going to be what the people in this room come up with. I am very much reliant on the people in this room. I know most of the people on both sides. I have a lot of respect for the people on both sides. And my—what I approve is going to be very much reliant on what the people in this room come to me with. I have great confidence in the people. If they come to me with things that I'm not in love with, I'm going to do it because I respect them.

Thank you all very much.

HARPO Entertainment Group Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Oprah Winfrey/2020 Presidential Election

Q. Think you could beat Oprah, by the way?

The President. Yes, I'll beat Oprah. Oprah would be a lot of fun. I know her very well. You know I did one of her last shows. She had Donald Trump—this is before politics—her last week. And she had Donald Trump and my family. It was very nice. No, I like Oprah. I don't think she's going to run.

Q. But she's making even Republicans—*[inaudible]*.

The President. I don't think she's going to run. I know her very well.

Immigration Reform Legislation

Q. *[Inaudible]*

The President. Yes, it's phase two. I think comprehensive will be phase two. I think—I really agree with Dick. I think we get the one thing done, and then we go into comprehensive the following day. I think it'll happen.

Thank you all very much. I hope we gave you enough material. This should cover you for about 2 weeks. [Laughter]

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:39 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Sayfullo Saipov, suspect in the vehicular terrorist attack on the bike path along the West Side Highway in Lower Manhattan on October 31, 2017; Antwerp, Belgium, resident Marion Van Reeth, who was wounded in the vehicular attack in New York City; and President Enrique Peña Nieto of Mexico. Rep. Goodlatte referred to H.R. 3004. Leader McCarthy referred to former Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton. Rep. Cuellar referred to Acting Chief Carla L. Provost of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Immigration reform, meeting with members of Congress; Interviews With the News Media : Exchange with reporters :: White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Cornyn, John, III; Cotton, Thomas B.; Cuellar, Henry; Diaz-Balart, Mario R.; Durbin, Richard J.; Feinstein, Dianne G.; Flake, Jeffrey L.; Goodlatte, Robert W.; Graham, Lindsey O.; Grassley, Charles E.; Hirono, Mazie K.; Hoyer, Steny H.; McCarthy, Kevin O.; McCaul, Michael T.; McSally, Martha E.; Nielsen, Kirstjen M.; Obama, Barack; Perdue, David A., Jr.; Saipov, Sayfullo; Van Reeth, Marion; Winfrey, Oprah.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : Funding; Congress : Bipartisanship; Congress : House of Representatives :: Majority leader; Congress : Members, meetings with President; Defense and national security : Border security; Defense, Department of : Procurement contracts, improvement efforts; Drug abuse and trafficking : Illegal drugs, interdiction efforts; Economy, national : Improvement; Homeland Security, Department of : Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S.; Homeland Security, Department of : Secretary; Immigration and naturalization : Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, review; Immigration and naturalization : Foreign nationals and refugees, U.S. admission policy; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Immigration and naturalization : Visa policy, U.S.; Mexico : Border with U.S., infrastructure and security; New York : New York City :: Terrorist attacks; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts.

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