

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks on Signing the America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 and an Exchange With Reporters
October 23, 2018

The President. Okay. Thank you very much for being here as we sign into law America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018. This important bill authorizes water infrastructure projects that benefit almost every State in the country.

I want to thank every Member of Congress who helped pass this crucial legislation. I especially want to thank Senators John Boozman, John Barrasso, Ben Cardin, Tom Carper—see, we have bipartisan on this one, folks. Don't be shocked. [*Laughter*] We'll probably have a lot more over the years. And Representatives Jeff Denham, Garret Graves, Gregg Harper, and Greg Walden. Thank you all very much. We appreciate it. Thank you. Thank you, fellas. Appreciate it.

Thanks also to Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, R.D. James, for joining us, and to the Commanding General of the Army Corps of Engineers, Todd Semonite. Thank you very much, fellas. Appreciate it. Good job.

As a candidate, I called for a great rebuilding of America's crumbling infrastructure. Today we're taking another major step toward that goal. Very important. This bill authorizes needed funding and tools to enhance our coastal ports; reduce flood risks; restore ecosystems; upkeep our inland waterways, which are in deep, deep trouble, but they won't be for very long; upgrade our dams, hydropower, and irrigation systems; and improve drinking water treatment, storage, and delivery.

With this legislation, we will also better protect American communities from hurricanes and storms. And I'm particularly proud that this legislation extends a requirement that protects—and projects supported by the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund use, construction materials, all made in the U.S.A., which is a good a thing. I love to hear that. We all love to hear that.

Under this administration, we are living by two simple, but very important rules: buy American and hire American. After years of rebuilding other nations, we are finally rebuilding our Nation. And as far as infrastructure goes, I have a feeling that the two gentlemen on my left, two great Senators—they happen to be Democrats—we're going to be doing a lot of infrastructure together. I really feel that you want it, and we want it. We feel very strongly about it. I think we're going to do a lot of infrastructure. This is the beginning. And I know how badly you want it on your side too.

So with that, again, I'd like to thank you all. And maybe I'll ask a few of you to say a few words. Would you like to say? John, would you maybe start?

Senator John A. Barrasso. Well, yes. Thank you very much, Mr. President, for your leadership on this. You've called for this in the State of the Union. We have delivered it in a big bipartisan way, the House and the Senate working together for infrastructure, for—this is a significant piece of legislation. This is good for our communities, it's good for the country, it's good for the economy, as well as good for the environment. So thanks for your leadership, Mr. President.

The President. Well thank you very much. Thank you, John.

Sen. Barrasso. Thank you. Appreciate it. Thank you.

The President. Appreciate it very much. Please. Come on, let's hear from you.

Senator John N. Boozman. Thank you so much. This is not glamorous, but it really is one of the underpinnings of our economy. Forty percent of the agriculture products in Arkansas are exported. Most of that goes to the inland waterways and then throughout our ports and harbors. So as the President mentioned, again, this is a very bipartisan effort. It's something that we can all be very, very proud of.

The President. Thank you very much. Appreciate it. Senator, please.

Senator Thomas R. Carper. I'm Tom Carper, and I approve of this message. [Laughter] Sir, if I could just add very quickly—

The President. Go ahead. Please.

Sen. Carper. I'm from a little State, Mr. President, Delaware. And for us—and for Delmarva, where Ben and I are from—we have great concerns for the quality of our drinking water. This legislation goes a long ways toward a partnership—furthering a partnership between the State and the Federal Government to provide more clean drinking water for people to drink.

[At this point, *Sen. Carper* continued his remarks, concluding as follows.]

People say to me all the time, back home—they say: "Why don't you guys work together? Why don't you work together to get something done?" Well, we have. And it's good stuff. Thank you.

The President. That's great. Thank you, Senator.

Ben.

Senator Benjamin L. Cardin. Well, Mr. President, first let me thank the leadership of our committee. The Environment and Public Works Committee worked in a very bipartisan matter to produce an extremely important bill. For the people of Maryland, this means jobs, it means cleaner water, it's good for the Chesapeake Bay, it's good for our economy, and I'm proud of our accomplishments.

The President. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Please, Greg.

Representative Gregory P. Walden. Well, Mr. President, thank you for your support of this. And to my colleagues, as well, at the Energy and Commerce Committee, we did a lot of work in a bipartisan way to reauthorize the Safe Drinking Water Act; first time in 20 years that's been done. This is the partnership we're all speaking about to clean up our water. So when a mom pours a glass of water for a kid, you know it's going to be safe.

You also have disaster relief in here for my Klamath Basin farmers who have been through enormous drought.

The President. That's right.

Rep. Walden. We deeply appreciate that. And there's hydropower streamlining for licensing so we can get clean, carbon-efficient, carbon-neutral hydropower in existing facilities in an expedited way.

The President. Well, and unrelated, I want to thank you, Greg, for all of the work—and I think every one of you—all of the work that you did on "right to try." That's a very powerful thing that we signed. We're getting—I have received more thank-yous for "right to try." You all know what it is. It's a phenomenal thing. And, Greg, you really headed it up.

Rep. Walden. Yes, Mr. President. Thank you.

The President. I appreciate it. Thank you. Please.

Representative Jeffrey J. Denham. Thank you, Mr. President. This certainly goes right along with the Executive order that you signed on Friday helping us to bring more water to California. The New Water Act, which is a part of this legislation, will actually have the upfront financing so we can start building Shasta, Temperance Flat, and Sites, some of these big reservoirs that had been on the drawing board for decades now. We can finally get them done under this bill. Thank you.

The President. Well, thank you very much. Great job. And we will get that done in California. It's going to happen.

We're just about set from a Federal level. The State has to get moving. And you'll get them moving, I know you will. Please.

Representative Gregory L. Harper. Thank you, Mr. President. Gregg Harper from Mississippi. I just want to thank you for your continued support. This has been an emphasis of what you have been standing for, for our infrastructure. And the safe drinking water is critical across the country. So this is a great step, and we thank you for your support.

The President. Well, thank you very much. And I just noticed a major celebrity is in the room, Pastor Andrew Brunson standing next to our great Vice President. And, Andrew, just come here. Stay in the country for a while, Andrew. [*Laughter*] Andrew, stay here for a little while.

Great. We really appreciate everything. You've been through a lot. And we appreciate it, Andrew. Thank you very much.

Dirillis (Resurrection) Church Pastor Andrew C. Brunson. Thank you for all you did for us. We're very grateful.

The President. Thank you very much, Andrew. Appreciate it very much.

Would you like to say something?

Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works Rickey R.D. James. Yes, I would, sir. I'd like to thank you and these fine gentleman of the Congress for passing a bill that I can now use, along with General Semonite, to get the good work of this country done. We have to balance water supply, recreation, flood control, navigation, hydropower, along with many other items, sometimes out of the same reservoir. With this legislation, we're more apt to be able to do that than we were before have you signed it, sir.

The President. Thank you very much. Great job. And I'm going to see you later because we're talking about something on the border. We're looking at something on the border to give us a hand. And if you guys can't do it, then nobody can. Right?

Lieutenant General Todd T. Semonite, USA, Chief of Engineers and Commanding General, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Yes, sir.

The President. Please, would you like to say something?

Lt. Gen. Semonite. Sir, I think this is a great example of where the entire Federal Government has really stepped up here to be able to help take care of the people and the infrastructure. It's everybody working together. It's requirements that come from the bottom up. But it's unbelievable support from the administration and from Congress. And this is where almost 99 percent of everybody bought into this particular bill. And it's what we need to do, as the Corps of Engineers, is to be able to have that support. So now when we go down there to turn dirt, we're able to be able to put some products in the ground and be able to make America an awful lot stronger.

The President. Thank you very much. With that voice, you should be a politician. [Laughter] I'm saying, "Whoa, that's pretty good." Thank you very much.

Go ahead.

Representative Garret N. Graves. Mr. President, thank you. Garrett Graves from South Louisiana.

The President. Yes.

Rep. Graves. I was here 2 weeks ago when you signed disaster reform legislation into law, and it was major reform for how we prepare for and respond to disasters.

This is a really important component because this is how we actually prepare for and make our communities resilient. There's a \$100 billion backlog in Corps of Engineers projects. You're a builder, and you know that you don't get stuck in the studying and the doo loop. This begins to cut the redtape, cut the bureaucracy, and allowing us, as the general said, to turn dirt, to make sure our ports are competitive, our ecosystems restored, and our communities are safe. So thank you.

The President. You're right. And the Army Corps of Engineers, frankly—and I'll say, previous to Trump, the Army Corps of Engineers was a—wonderful people, but it was a tremendous holdup in terms of the bureaucracy we had to go through. And I know we've made tremendous strides in that. Sometimes, we go through EPA much, much faster than the Army Corps. And the Army Corps never wanted that.

But they built up artificial roadblocks that just weren't letting the things get done that we had to have done. And we have gotten rid of many of them. We're getting rid of all of them. And EPA is moving very, very fast, and the Army Corps is starting to move very quickly also. And I very much appreciate that. And we've got some incredible projects to go, so I very much appreciate that.

Rep. Graves. We're all in, sir.

The President. Good. Thank you very much.

Mike Pence. Would you say something, Mike?

Vice President Michael R. Pence. Just a word, Mr. President, of gratitude to members of both political parties for putting a bill on your desk that is going to strengthen the economy of this country and the water quality in this country. And I know your passion for infrastructure, your desire that in the next Congress we would focus on rebuilding America's infrastructure, and today is really a down payment on that. And we're very grateful for the bipartisan efforts to bring us to this point.

The President. Thank you, Mike. Thank you very much.

Okay. This is a good one. The vote was 98—or 99?

Sen. Barrasso. Ninety-nine to 1 in the Senate.

The President. Ninety-nine to 1. I would say that's bipartisan. I won't tell you who the one was. [Laughter] But that is very bipartisan. So, hey, let me give you guys, because we don't do this much. Come here. [Laughter]

Q. [Inaudible]

The President. We'll do a lot of them. We'll do a lot. I think we're going to do a lot more as time goes by.

[At this point, the President signed the bill.]

Okay. This is so thick, I won't bother holding it up. You've seen me hold it up before. I think maybe what I should do—unless somebody disagrees—I think I'll give this pen to Pastor Brunson. Right? Where's Pastor Brunson? Please.

Pastor, on behalf of all of us, and for all you've been through, this is actually a very important pen, because of the very important water bill. And you know where water comes from ultimately, right?

Pastor Brunson. Well, God has blessed us with many natural resources as a country, and we need to be grateful to Him. And as long as we're seeking Him, He will continue to provide for us.

The President. That's fantastic. Thank you very much. Thank you, Andrew.

Pastor Brunson. Thank you, sir.

The President. And what we'll do is, we'll hand out some. Okay, fellas?

Thank you very much. You know, in the old days, the President would sign one letter at a time? And it looked terrible. And you looked at the signature. *[Laughter]* It really did look terrible. You ever notice that? Come on.

[The President handed a pen to Sen. Cardin.]

Give this to Chuck Schumer. *[Laughter]* Okay. We're very proud of this bill. This—a lot of work was in—went in. This has been going on for a long time, and I think particularly 99 to 1 is something that's very special, especially in this day and age. And I think we're going to have a lot more of it, especially maybe with infrastructure, but other things also.

So thank you all for being here. I very much appreciate it.

President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia

Q. Mr. President, are you going to meet with Vladimir Putin in Paris in a couple of weeks?

The President. We may. It's being discussed right now. Mike Bolton, as you know—he's in Russia talking about various things, including the whole nuclear situation, where we were not treated well for many years. This should have been done a long time ago. And I think something good could come out of that. And I very well meet with—I think we probably will. It hasn't been set up yet, but it probably will be.

Nationalism

Q. And, Mr. President, could you settle some of the confusion over your comments about what you mean when you say you're a "nationalist"? What does that mean?

The President. I love our country. And our country has taken second fiddle. If you look at the trade deals—and nobody knows it better than me—I'm knocking out some of the worst deals I've ever seen, where we're giving all of our wealth, all of our money, to other countries. And then they don't treat us properly; where we're protecting other rich countries—very, very rich countries—including, by the way, a country that happens to be very much in the news—Saudi Arabia. Immensely wealthy. And we're taking care of their military for a fraction of the cost. Not fair to us. Other countries, also, immensely wealthy countries. And we have to get reimbursed for that. We should not be the world's police keeper and not get reimbursed.

And by the way, when I bring up to the heads of countries like Japan, Prime Minister Abe, a friend of mine—I bring it up—he looks at me, and he goes, "I understand." They understand it. Nobody has ever asked him.

Q. But what about——

The President. He said, "Have you ever asked?" I said, "Have you ever been asked, like, you have to be—like, help out?" "Nobody has ever asked." So that's a pretty unfair thing.

Q. What about——

The President. I'll get back to you——

Q. What about those concerns—[inaudible]?

The President. Wait, wait, wait. Wait. I'm going to get back to you.

Q. If I may ask——

The President. Just nice and easy.

Q. Can I ask my follow-up question, though?

The President. No, not now. I'll get back to you, I said.

Q. All right.

The President. You can't take the whole thing. You have a lot of other very fine reporters.

Q. Well, no, I understand, but I——

The President. Go ahead, yes. No, behind you, please.

Death of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi

Q. Mr. President, have you heard back—first of all, can you tell us what you think about what the Turkish President said today? And also, have you heard back——

The President. What President Erdogan said?

Q. Yes, sir. And——

The President. Well, he was pretty rough on Saudi Arabia, I would say. I mean, I haven't gotten a full recap. As you know, I have people in Turkey, and I have people in Saudi Arabia, and other places. And they're all coming back as we speak. They're heading back.

I'll know, I think, everything in a very short period of time. It's a bad situation. But certainly President Erdogan was not complimentary of what happened. That was a terrible thing that happened, okay?

Yes, ma'am, go ahead.

Death of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi/U.S. Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia

Q. Oh, I was going to ask, do you believe him when he says he believes the Saudi Arabian leadership?

The President. I want to see the facts first. Look, Saudi Arabia has been a really great ally. They've been one of the biggest investors, maybe the biggest investor in our country. They are doing hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of investments and, you know, so many jobs. So many jobs, thousands and thousands of jobs.

And if you look at the other side—Iran. You look at what they've done to people—vicious, horrible. And that's no excuse for what happened with Saudi Arabia. No excuse whatsoever. But you take a look; it's a rough part of the world. It's a nasty place. It's a nasty part of the world.

But if what happened happened, and if the facts check out, then it's something that's very bad. At the same time, they have been a very good ally of ours. They've been helping us a lot with respect to Israel. They've been funding a lot of things.

I will tell you that Russia and China would love to have that military order. I mean, I can say it to my Democrat friends too. I mean, they would love—this is \$110 billion worth of military. And Russia would pick that up very quickly, and China would pick it up very quickly, and France would pick it up very quickly. France makes a lot of military equipment. It's a very competitive market.

I did a great job when I sold them on it. That's why I went to Saudi Arabia first. I went to Saudi Arabia on the basis that they would buy hundreds of billions—many billions of dollars' worth of things. And the ultimate number is around \$450 billion—\$110 [billion]* for military—\$450 billion. I think that's over a million jobs. A million to over a million jobs.

So if we do that, we're just hurting ourselves. We're just hurting ourselves. And I know that from a certain standpoint, you could also say, "Well, it doesn't matter," because it is a terrible thing. But we would be really hurting ourselves. We'd be hurting our companies; we'd be hurting our jobs. And so we'll see what happens.

But I should have a pretty good report—couple of seconds—I should have a pretty good report very soon.

Yes, go ahead.

Nationalism

Q. Mr. President, just to follow up on your comments about being a nationalist, there is a concern that you are sending coded language or a dog whistle to some Americans out there that what you really mean is that you're a white nationalist.

The President. I've never even heard that. I cannot imagine that. You mean, I say "I'm a nationalist"—

Q. You never heard that expression?

The President. No, I never heard that theory about being a nationalist. I've heard them all. But I'm somebody that loves our country. When I say a "nationalist," I don't like it when Germany is paying 1 percent of GDP for NATO, and we're paying 4.3 percent. I don't like that. That's not fair.

I don't like it when, as an example, we're protecting Europe and we're paying for almost the entire cost of NATO. We're paying for a very, very substantial portion, far greater than what it should be.

We have great respect for those countries. But on top of that, I don't like it when they put up barriers to our farmers, where our farmers cannot sell into Europe. They have trade barriers that make it—you guys know it better than anybody—they have trade barriers that are as severe as China's trade barriers, which will be coming down. They want to make a deal very badly. They'll be coming down.

But I am very proud of our country. We cannot continue to allow what's happened to our country to continue happening. We can't let it happen.

So I'm proud. I'm proud of our country. And I am a nationalist. It's a word that hasn't been used too much. Some people use it, but I'm very proud. I think it should be brought back. I'm

* White House correction.

somebody that wants to help other countries of the world, but I also have to take—I mean, we have to take care of our country. We cannot continue to allow ourselves to be duped on military and also duped on trade.

With the European Union, as an example, last year, on trade, we lost \$151 billion. On top of that, we lost hundreds of billions of dollars on protection. So we protect, and we get killed. We do the trading, and they get killed. Can't do it. I want it to be fair.

So I want them to open their borders, I want them to make it fair for our farmers, our companies, our medical companies. They sell medical equipment. They just put restrictions on—year and a half ago—where the medical equipment can't get into Europe, even though it's better than what they have.

So they have to treat us well. All I want for our country is to be treated well, to be treated with respect. For many years, other countries that are allies of ours—so-called allies—they have not treated our country fairly. So in that sense, I am absolutely a nationalist, and I'm proud of it.

Yes. Jeff [Jeff Mason, Reuters], go ahead.

Tax Relief

Q. Mr. President, you said this weekend and yesterday that you were planning a tax——

The President. Yes.

Q. A new tax project.

The President. We'll do a resolution. We're going to put in——

Q. Can you explain what you mean by a resolution?

The President. Well, very simple. Very simple.

Q. And can you tell us, just broadly, how this is going to look, how it's going to work?

The President. If you speak to Kevin Brady and a group of people, we're putting in a tax reduction of 10 percent, which I think will be a net neutral. Because we're doing other things, which I don't have to explain now, but it will be pretty much be a net neutral. But it will be great for the middle class.

It's going to be a tax reduction of 10 percent for the middle class. Business will not enter into it. And this will be on top of the tax reduction that the middle class has already gotten. And we're putting in a resolution probably this week. I think these folks know about it. And Kevin Brady has been working on it very hard, really, for a couple of months. We'll put that in, and we'll start the work after the—sometime after the midterms.

Deployment of U.S. Navy Warships to Taiwan Strait

Q. Mr. President, why the decision now to send two U.S. Navy warships through the Taiwan Strait?

The President. I'll leave that decision to myself and my generals and my admirals, okay? Not to you.

Q. Are you worried about any negative reaction from China?

The President. I'm not worried about anything. I don't worry about things. [Laughter]

Tax Relief

Q. Mr. President, on the tax cut proposal, when you say that you want a middle class tax cut, is that an acknowledgement that the original GOP tax cut was too heavily tilted in favor of wealthy Americans and corporations?

The President. No. No. It really wasn't.

Q. Then why bring it now, right before the midterms?

The President. It's been great. I mean, the tax cut that we had—even if you look at estate taxes and what it's done for the small farmers and for small businesses, if you look at the passed—I'm talking about the one that was passed—we're very proud of it.

And what it did more than anything else: It brought jobs, tremendous numbers of jobs. That's why our job numbers, you hear it all the time when I speak—I mean, we have the best numbers, literally, we've ever had. African American unemployment, lowest ever. Asian American, Hispanic American—no matter what category you look at it. Women—65 years—lowest in 65 years. A lot of that was done by regulation cutting, and a lot of it was done by the tax plan. And that all inures, obviously, to the middle class.

In addition, they paid less. I mean, they walk away with \$2,000, \$1,000, \$4,000. It's a lot of money. This is in addition to that. But on this one, we're not going to do any business, because we think the business is really very incentivized. On this one, we're doing a pure 10-percent tax cut for the middle class, in addition to what they've already gotten in the first place.

Tax Relief

Q. But shouldn't the middle class have gotten a big tax cut to begin with?

The President. Well, I didn't think we could get any more than we got. I mean, we got the max. And now because of the fact that the economy is doing so well, we feel that we can give up some more.

I couldn't have gotten that extra 10 percent when we originally passed the plan. We maxed out. Now—and we had to take care of jobs. Jobs are very important. We gave the middle class a lot, but we couldn't have—now, as you've obviously seen, business has done so well. We've brought in hundreds of—many hundreds of millions of dollars from offshore because of the tax plan.

And that all went to creating—Apple, as an example—I was with them: They're going to be spending \$350 billion on building new facilities in the United States, which is something, as you know, from a long a time ago. I've been saying it from the beginning. I want Apple to build their plants here. They're going to spend \$350 billion. They're bringing in \$230 billion offshore because of our tax plan.

Now, that helps everybody. That's good for everybody. But this is in addition to the very substantial tax cuts that the middle class has already gotten. So this will be a 10 percent. It's going to be a resolution, probably introduced this week—the end of the week or early next week. And Kevin Brady has been drawing it up, actually for a while. We've been working on it very hard for a pretty long period of time, okay?

Q. Mr. President, you said——

The President. Yes. Jeff, go ahead. Finish off.

Q. It was somebody else, sir, who had——

The President. Yes.

Death of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi

Q. Mr. President, you said yesterday that you expected a briefing from investigators today on the Saudi case. Is that still the case? Or——

The President. Well, they're heading back. A couple of them are heading back. Gina, as an example, went to Turkey.

Q. Have you heard anything preliminary—[inaudible]?

The President. I've heard, but I'd rather talk about it when everybody is back here.

Q. Okay. So tomorrow you expect a briefing——

The President. I think they'll be back tonight and tomorrow—early tomorrow. Almost all of them.

Death of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi

Q. And ahead of your meetings in Paris with President Putin and some other European leaders, have you spoken to any of them about the Saudi issue?

The President. Yes, we have. And Mike Pompeo has. And John Bolton is actually over there now. We've been talking to many of them. They are—nobody likes what happened, let me put it that way. There's nobody that said, "Oh, gee, that's wonderful." They were all very angry about it, and they're very upset about it. Nobody more so than me.

Death of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi/U.S. Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia

Q. What do you think it means for the broader relationship going forward? Whether or not this bill—or whether or not the——

The President. Well, it's a good question. And I think what I'm going to be doing is maybe a little bit what I did with respect to the FBI investigations having to do with Justice Kavanaugh when they were asked for more time by the Democrats. I said, look, I'm going to leave it up to the Senators that were doing the job. And I think, here, I'm going to leave it up very much for Congress. Congress has some very strong ideas, both ways. I've been told by certain Senators, we want that investment to keep coming. At the same time, that doesn't mean that they're not going to do something. There has to be some kind of retribution. There has to be, no matter what you do.

I've been told by others that they don't want investment of \$450 billion. I think that's foolish. But there are some that feel that. But I'm going to leave it very much—in terms of what we ultimately do, I'm going to leave it very much, in conjunction with me, up to Congress. And that means Congress, both Republicans and Democrats and one Independent. Right?

But I'm going to have—I want to have the folks in Congress come back and make recommendations to me. Because—and I'd like that to be a bipartisan recommendation. I think we can get a bipartisan recommendation, I really do. Because they feel—I don't think they feel any differently than I do. It's terrible. It's a terrible thing.

Death of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi

Q. Mr. President, why do you think something like this could have happened? Do you think that there was a failure of leadership on the world stage, that Saudi Arabia wasn't concerned about ramifications?

The President. They had a very bad original concept. It was carried out poorly. And the coverup was one of the worst in the history of coverups. It's very simple: bad deal, should have never been thought of. Somebody really messed up. And they had the worst coverup ever. And where it should have stopped is at the deal standpoint, where they thought about it. Because whoever thought of that idea, I think, is in big trouble, and they should be in big trouble. Okay?

Yes. Anybody else?

Border Security

Q. Mr. President, one more thing on the caravan. You had said that there were Middle Easterners—

The President. Yes.

Q. —in the caravan. Can you explain that? Are you saying there are terrorists in that caravan at this moment?

The President. Well, there could very well be. Yes. There could very well be. And if you look at—

Q. But do you know for sure?

The President. I have very good information. I have very good information. And if you look at what's happened with Honduras and statements made about Honduras and even a phone call that our Vice President had today—which I think you can maybe reveal. Do you want to mention that, Mike? Is that okay? Probably.

Vice President Pence. Certainly.

The President. Go ahead. Please.

Vice President Pence. At the President's direction, I spoke to President Hernandez of Honduras. He told me that the caravan is now making its way through Mexico, headed for the southern border. It was organized by leftist organizations and financed by Venezuela. And we—as we've said—

The President. And the Democrats maybe? And the Democrats?

Vice President Pence. Well—

Sen. Carper. Mr. President, let me give you that pen back. [*Laughter*]

Border Security

Q. Mr. President, I know—it sounds like you're teasing about that, but where is the proof that Democrats are paying for this caravan? Why would they pay for a caravan to come out 2 weeks before the midterms?

The President. You know what? You're going to find out, and we're going to see. Well, maybe they made a bad mistake too. We're going to find out about that.

What else did they say, Mike, about ISIS? Did they say something?

Vice President Pence. Well, just that it's been organized by leftist groups; they've made their way north. Once they crossed into Guatemala, and now crossed into Mexico, there are some estimates north of 7,000 migrants. So the group is growing.

The United States of America intervenes and prevents 10 terrorists, or suspected terrorists, from coming into our country every day. So it is inconceivable that there would not be individuals from the Middle East as a part of this growing caravan.

And what the President is determined to do is to put the safety and security of the American people first. And I know the President will be addressing this in the coming days about ways we need to close the loopholes that human traffickers and other dangerous individuals use to entice vulnerable families to make the long and dangerous trek north.

Border Security

Q. Mr. Vice President, are you saying that you have evidence that there are terrorists in the caravan right now?

Vice President Pence. What I can say to you is——

Q. You're saying, statistically, there's been a number over the years and so on. That's not the same as saying there are terrorists in the caravan. There are a lot of Middle Easterners who live in the United States—Americans of Middle Eastern descent—who find that kind of rhetoric appalling.

The President. Okay. Let me just say, let me just say this. I'll take it. Let me just say this.

Q. Isn't that true, Mr. President?

The President. Let me just tell you something. I spoke with Border Patrol this morning, and I spoke to them last evening, and I spoke to them the day before. I speak to them all the time. And they say—and you know this as well as anybody—over the course of the year, over the course of a number of years, they've intercepted many people from the Middle East. They've intercepted ISIS. They've intercepted all sorts of people. They've intercepted good ones and bad ones.

They've intercepted wonderful people from the Middle East, and they've intercepted bad ones. They've intercepted wonderful people from South America and from other parts further south. They've intercepted a lot of different people. But among the people they've intercepted, very recently, are people from the Middle East. Okay?

So you can't be surprised when you hear it. You've heard that before. It happens all the time. And I spoke to them, literally, last night; I spoke to another one this morning. Very good relationship with Border Patrol and ICE. And they say it happens all the time from the Middle East.

Q. But——

The President. But that's not even saying bad or good. But some real bad ones. But they intercept——

Border Security/2018 Midterm Elections

Q. But no—no proof that they're in the caravan now?

The President. Well, they could very well be.

Q. But there's no proof?

The President. There's no proof of anything. There's no proof of anything. But they could very well be—if you look at what that was building.

You know, they were talking about five or six thousand people—I'm pretty good at estimating crowd sizes, as you have probably figured out. You tend to get it a little bit off the real number. Last night, as an example, that was record-setting stuff, wasn't it, huh? But they don't want to talk about that. But I will tell you—let me just tell you that I really—I believe that——

Q. I've been to MAGA rallies. They're pretty big, sir.

The President. That was pretty big.

Q. Yes.

The President. That was pretty impressive by any standard. And these are great people.

And by the way, your vote that we just heard—the vote is—and this could be good, bad, or indifferent for Democrats or Republicans. But the amount of voting is a level that they've never seen before for the midterms. You heard that. I mean, I don't know whether I'm supposed to say that's good or bad. But I will tell you, the amount of people voting is at a level, Sarah, that you've never seen at midterms. A record level, by a lot.

Q. [Inaudible]

The President. So I think—I think very—I think there's a very good chance, honestly, that you have people in there. I also think there's a very good chance that, over a course of a period of time, you have. Or they don't have to necessarily be in that group. But certainly, you have people coming up through the southern border from the Middle East and other places that are not appropriate for our country. And I'm not letting them in. They're not coming in, all right? They're not coming in.

We're going to do whatever we have to. They're not coming in, okay?

2018 Midterm Elections

Q. And you don't think you're pouncing on this to try to stoke——

The President. No, not at all.

Q. ——fear and cause alarm to drive up your base?

The President. Look, I'm a very nonpolitical person, and that's why I got elected President.

Border Security/Immigration Reform

Q. Do you share the assessment that the caravan is financed by Venezuela? That—you said, Mr. Vice President, that the President of Honduras said that. Do you share that assessment?

Vice President Pence. President Hernández—when President Trump asked me to call the President of Honduras—when this caravan was initiated, he told me that it had been organized by leftist groups in Honduras that were being financed, in part, by Venezuela; and organized by human traffickers who have no regard for human life; organized by dangerous gang members that are moving people north.

When I spoke to President Morales of—in Guatemala, he informed me that they were already bussing people in the caravan back who had been left behind—left by the side of the road. Elderly, vulnerable families, simply left behind by this caravan.

They said—people need to understand, the people that are driving this caravan north to challenge our sovereignty, to challenge our borders, are doing so without any regard for human life and doing it to advance some political statement or, in the case of human traffickers, strictly for financial profit.

And the President is absolutely determined to use all means at his disposal to organize efforts to have Mexico turn this caravan around and work with Congress to close the loopholes that human traffickers use every day to entice vulnerable families to make this dangerous trip north.

Q. Mr. President——

The President. I really think, though, that what this really shows is that we have to change the laws.

Vice President Pence. Right.

The President. I say this having two very highly respected Democrat Senators behind me, but we have to do something that we all agree with; we have to change the laws. We have to make them much different. They're very soft, and it's a different time. It's really a different time. Maybe there was a time where that could have been appropriate, but we have to have immigration laws now that are suitable for this time and that work.

And the ones that we have now are old, and they don't work. They don't work, and they don't come close to working. And we need protection. We have to have a wall. We've been building the wall. We started the wall. San Diego is almost completed—the whole area—that whole area of California. But we want to do it quickly. We don't have to—we don't want to take years to do it.

But I really believe that—and I think that—I don't see any things—that kind of an asset, when you look at what's happening. When you look at—heartache on both sides. Because it really is, it's heartache on both sides. But when you look at 10,000 people—because I don't believe that was 5,000. I think that was much more than 5,000 people.

But when you look at that massive group of people on the bridge—when you saw it on the bridge, the group—I really think that it probably spells out to us and Congress: Something has to be done. You can't have this happen. Something has to be done. So, in that way, I think maybe it's going to be a good thing. And we're going to see. We're going to see.

We're counting on our military. We'll have to call up our military if we need to. But we can't let this happen. We cannot allow our country to be violated like this. And it's very unfair. People are waiting on line that went through a legal system of immigration, and they've been going through it for many years. And they've worked hard, they've done everything they're supposed to do, and then people just come running across the border. It's really unfair to the millions of people that are waiting on line to come in legally into our country. It's very unfair.

Yes, go ahead, Jeff.

U.S. Aid to Central American Nations/Trade/Immigration Reform

Q. Do you see any argument, Mr. President, for trying to improve the conditions in those countries by not decreasing aid, but perhaps maintaining or increasing aid?

The President. I've heard that argument before, but it hasn't worked for a long time—those countries. I want to improve the conditions in our country. I want to improve the conditions here.

Now, part of that condition and improving the condition is, we are doing so well—so many companies are coming in. I spoke with Prime Minister Abe very recently and he informed me that we have five major car companies coming back in. I said: "You have to do something. You have to balance it out, because it's like a one-way street." The trade imbalances are so different between—as an example, Japan—just one, Japan and the United States.

We have Foxconn coming in. They make the phones for Apple. They do a lot of work for Apple. They do a lot of work for everybody. They're coming—they're opening up in Wisconsin. But we have a lot of companies coming in.

We need—at 3.7, it's the lowest in many years—many decades. We need great people coming in. I want great people to come in. I want them to come in through the merit system. I looked at the people that we're talking about. I really watched, pretty carefully, all of the networks—I have to be honest with you—all of them. And you have——

Q. Even CNN?

The President. Even CNN. You did—no, you had some beautiful shots of some very good people. And I really think that those—some of those people—a lot of those people, I think there's a lot of talent in that group. There's a lot of talent.

We need people because I have companies coming into the United States; they have to be able to get workers. And our great—even conservative people that maybe 3, 4 years ago would have felt differently about it, they now feel we have to get people to operate these big plants and factories that are opening in the United States. I want them to come in. I want them to come in through a merit-based system.

And I think a lot of people are going to be happy with that. I want to build our country. I don't want to go to other countries to rebuild. That's what we've done. We've been trying to rebuild the world and police the world. It's now time to rebuild the United States and to properly police the United States. And that's what we're going to do.

At the same time, we're going to help other countries all over the world. But we have to focus on our country for a change. And that's what we're going to do. Okay?

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:14 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Sen. Michael S. Lee; Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer; National Security Adviser John R. Bolton; Rep. Kevin P. Brady, in his capacity as chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee; Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Gina C. Haspel; Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo; and White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders. He also referred to Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization. S. 3021, approved October 23, was assigned Public Law No. 115–270.

Categories: Bill Signings and Vetoes : America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018, signing remarks; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Abe, Shinzo; Barrasso, John A.; Bolton, John R.; Boozman, John N.; Brady, Kevin P.; Brunson, Andrew C.; Cardin, Benjamin L.; Carper, Thomas R.; Denham, Jeffrey J.; Erdogan, Recep Tayyip; Graves, Garret N.; Harper, Gregory L.; Haspel, Gina C.; James, Rickey “R.D.”; Kavanaugh, Brett M.; Pence, Michael R.; Pompeo, Michael R.; Sanders, Sarah Huckabee; Schumer, Charles E.; Semonite, Todd T.; Walden, Gregory P.

Subjects: Army, Department of the : Civil Works, Assistant Secretary for; Army, Department of the : Corps of Engineers; Business and industry : Domestic investment, promotion efforts; Business and industry : Offshore earnings, repatriation efforts; Central Intelligence Agency; Congress : Senate :: Minority leader; Deaths : Khashoggi, Jamal; Economy, national : Improvement; Elections : 2018 congressional elections; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment rate; Environment : Water management policy, improvement efforts; Environmental Protection Agency; Europe : European Union :: Trade with U.S.; Foreign policy, U.S. : Foreign aid policies and funding; Government organization and employees : Federal infrastructure review and permitting, modernization efforts; Health and medical care : Experimental drugs and therapies; Homeland Security, Department of : Customs and Border Protection, U.S.; Homeland Security, Department of : Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S.; Immigration and naturalization : Illegal immigration; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Immigration and naturalization : Refugees; Infrastructure : National improvement efforts; Infrastructure : Ports and harbors, improvement efforts; Iran : Human rights issues; Japan : Prime Minister; Judiciary : Supreme Court :: Associate Justice; Justice, Department of : Bureau of Investigation, Federal; Legislation, enacted : America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018;

Mexico : Border with U.S., infrastructure and security; Natural disasters : Preparedness efforts; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Saudi Arabia : Death of reporter in Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey; Saudi Arabia : Relations with U.S.; Saudi Arabia : Trade with U.S.; State, Department of : Secretary; Taxation : Tax relief; Terrorism : Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization; Turkey : Death of Saudi reporter in Saudi consulate in Istanbul; Turkey : President; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: National Security Adviser; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Press Secretary; White House Office : Vice President; Wisconsin : Foxconn Technology Group manufacturing facility in Mount Pleasant.
DCPD Number: DCPD201800722.