

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2019

Remarks on Signing a Message to the House of Representatives Returning Without Approval Legislation To Terminate the National Emergency Concerning the Southern Border of the United States and an Exchange With Reporters

March 15, 2019

Shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand

The President. Thank you very much. Earlier today, I spoke with Prime Minister Ardern of New Zealand to express the sorrow of our entire Nation following the monstrous terror attacks at two mosques. These sacred places of worship were turned into scenes of evil killing. You've all been seeing what went on. It's a horrible, horrible thing. I told the Prime Minister that the United States is with them all the way, a hundred percent. Whatever they need, we will be there. New Zealand has been a great friend and partner for many years. Our relationship has never been better. And what they're going through is absolutely terrible.

So our hearts are with them, and whatever we can do.

National Emergency Concerning the Southern Border of the U.S.

We're grateful to be joined today by the Vice President—thank you very much, Mike, for being here—members of my Cabinet, devoted public servants, and Angel parents—very important people to me and to a lot of other people. I want to thank you all for being here. Thank you so much for being here, and we appreciate it. Thank you. You've gone through a lot. As we take action to restore our national sovereignty and defend this Nation from criminal cartels, human traffickers, and drug smugglers. Crime of all kinds coming through our southern border and other places. But this is the place. This is the place. We have the biggest problem by far.

And I want to also compliment the incredible people at Border Patrol and ICE and law enforcement for the job they have done. They've apprehended so many thousands and thousands of people that, if we had the proper protection, we wouldn't even have to apprehend. They wouldn't be coming in.

As President, the protection of the Nation is my highest duty. Yesterday, Congress passed a dangerous resolution that, if signed into law, would put countless Americans in danger—very grave danger. The Democrat-sponsored resolution would terminate vital border security operations by revoking the national emergency issued last month. It is definitely a national emergency. Rarely have we had such a national emergency.

Therefore, to defend the safety and security of all Americans, I will be signing and issuing a formal veto of this reckless resolution—and that's what it was. And I have to, in particular, thank the Republican—strong, wonderful people—the Republican Senators that were on our side and on the side of border security and on the side of doing what they have to to keep our Nation safe. They were very courageous yesterday, and I appreciate that very much.

Congress's vote to deny the crisis on the southern border is a vote against reality. It's against reality. It is a tremendous national emergency. It is a tremendous crisis.

Last month, more than 76,000 illegal migrants arrived at our border. We're on track for a million illegal aliens to rush our borders. People hate the word "invasion," but that's what it is. It's an invasion of drugs and criminals and people. We have no idea who they are, but we capture them because border security is so good. But they're put in a very bad position, and we're bursting at the seams. Literally, bursting at the seams. What Border Patrol is able to do is incredible.

I also, by the way, want to thank our military, because our military has been very much involved, as you know. And they're putting up walls, in some cases temporary; in some cases, they were supposed to be temporary. They're so good that they're better than the permanent. So we're leaving them.

We've really nowhere left to hold all of the people that were captured. And we're at a point where we're just going to have to say, with these horrible decisions that we've been handed by people that aren't living in reality, that there's nothing we can do. There's absolutely nothing we can do. We're bursting at the seams. You can only do so much. And the only option then is to release them, but we can't do that either. Because when you release them, they come into our society, and in many cases they're stone-cold criminals. And in many cases, and in some cases, you have killers coming in and murderers coming in, and we're not going to allow that to happen. Just not going to allow it to happen.

There has been a nearly 2,000-percent increase in border-related asylum claims over the last decade. Part of the reason is because our country is doing so well economically that people are coming up in droves. The vast majority are rejected, but smuggling organizations—making a tremendous amount of money, like they've never made before—are using these people to crash the system. Our immigration system is stretched beyond the breaking point.

And as I said, nothing much we can do. We can just do our job and do it well. But there's a point at which, if the Democrats would—we'd get in, we'd be able to make a deal. Literally, in 15 minutes, we could make a deal on changing catch and release; changing the horrible asylum laws that are so unfair; changing visa lottery, chain migration. These laws are just horrendous. I won't explain them, but everybody standing behind me knows exactly what they are: They're dangerous for our country, and they're inspired by Democrats who have to change.

One in three migrant women is sexually assaulted on the journey north. The border crisis is driving the drug crisis. Seventy thousand Americans a year are killed by drugs, including meth, heroin, cocaine, and fentanyl. And the 70,000 people is a number that's so low that it probably shouldn't even be used anymore.

The mass incursion of illegal aliens, deadly drugs, dangerous weapons, and criminal gang members across our borders has to end.

We are bringing out thousands and thousands a year of MS-13 gang members, and other gang members that are just as bad, where they come into our country, they're able to skirt the border, come through areas where we don't have proper wall, where we don't have any wall at all. And they get into the country and they do a lot of damage, in many cases. But we get them out by the thousands, and we bring them back or we incarcerate them.

The national emergency I declared last month was authorized by Congress under the 1976 National Emergencies Act. And there haven't been too many that are a bigger emergency than we have right at our own border.

Consistent with the law and the legislative process designed by our Founders, today I am vetoing this resolution. Congress has the freedom to pass this resolution, and I have the duty to veto it. And I'm very proud to veto it. And I'm very proud, as I said, of a lot of Republican Senators that were with me. And I'm also very proud of the House. The Republicans in the House voted overwhelmingly in favor of a secure border.

Since 1976, Presidents have declared 59 national emergencies. They often involved protecting foreign citizens in far-off lands, yet Congress has not terminated any of them. Every single one of them is still in existence. And yet, we don't worry about our land; we worry about other people's lands. That's why I say "America first." If that's okay: "America first."

The only emergency Congress voted to revoke was the one to protect our own country. So, think of that: With all of the national emergencies, this was the one they don't want to do. And this is the one, perhaps, they should most do.

We're joined today by many brave law enforcement officers, including sheriffs and just people that have been just tremendous, tremendous backers of law and order, which we have to have.

We're also joined by friends of mine, Mary Ann Mendoza, Kent Terry, Laura Wilkerson, Sabine Durden, and Steve Ronnebeck. And I'm going to ask Steve to say a few words. And I'm going to ask some of the folks behind me to say, also, a few words as to the importance of what we're doing. There's nothing more important.

As I said, I was elected on a very—by a very, very great group of American people—millions and millions of people—because they want security for our country. And that's what we're going to have.

I'd like to ask Secretary Nielsen to say a few words and then Attorney General Bill Barr. And then I'd like to go to some of the folks behind me, and perhaps you'd have something to say. And then we're going to sign something that's going to give us safety at our border.

Secretary?

Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen M. Nielsen. Sir, I just want to thank you and the Vice President for your leadership and your constant support of the brave men and women not only represented behind you, on the very frontlines of our country, but of CBP and ICE.

[At this point, Secretary Nielsen continued her remarks, concluding as follows.]

So we have a duty to know who comes in our country, and we have a duty to ensure that the flow is safe and orderly. That's what you've attempted to do and that's what you've demanded that Congress do. And I just, again, ask Congress to please pay attention. We've given you the facts. The system is breaking. Security is at risk. And the very humanitarian protections that we hold dear in this country are at risk in terms of our ability to provide those to vulnerable populations.

So, Mr. President, thank you always for your leadership and great support.

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you. Bill?

Attorney General William P. Barr. Mr. President, your declaration of an emergency on the southern border was clearly authorized under the law and consistent with past precedent.

As you said, the National Emergencies Act directly authorizes the President, and gives broad discretionary authority to the President, to identify and respond to emergent

circumstances that require a decisive response. And the humanitarian and security crisis we have on the border right now is exactly the kind of emergency that Presidents are permitted to address under the National Emergencies Act.

The President. Right.

Attorney General Barr. As you alluded to yourself, in the past 40 years, there have been 59 emergencies declared. And many of these have dealt with political conditions in countries like Burundi, Sierra Leone, Belarus. The crisis that we're dealing with today is right on our doorstep, and it presents a real clear and present danger to the American people.

So what you've done from a legal standpoint is solidly grounded in law. And from the standpoint of protecting the American people, it's imperative.

The President. Thank you very much, Bill. That's great. So you'll be defending it——

Attorney General Barr. Yep.

The President. ——and you'll defend it well. I have no doubt about that.

Would anybody like to say something? Why don't we start with Mike?

Vice President Michael R. Pence. Well, thank you, Mr. President. I don't know that I've ever been more proud to be standing next to your desk than I am today, to be standing with these courageous Americans and with these extraordinary Angel parents.

[*Vice President Pence continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

And today, Mr. President, with your strong support for the men and women of law enforcement, Customs and Border Protection, Homeland Security, and with, I know, what is your love in your heart for these Angel parents, you're keeping your word by vetoing this legislation, by finding the available resources to build the wall, address this emergency, and secure our border.

And I know I speak on behalf of all gathered here, people all across this country, when I say thank you for keeping your word, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you, Mike. I appreciate that.

Sheriff, please.

Jackson County, TX, Sheriff A.J. "Andy" Louderback. Mr. President, thank you so much for a very necessary veto to support public safety in this country. The sheriffs and men and women of law enforcement in this room and across this Nation owe you a debt of gratitude for something that we've been waiting for, for decades. Our hats are off to you again, sir. It's an honor to be here. It's an honor for sheriffs to be involved in this, and it's an honor for law enforcement, as we fight the drug trade every day in this country, and all the things that go along in our business, in our profession, from an insecure border. So, again, sincerely, we thank you, sir.

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you for being there with me all the way. I appreciate it very much.

Sheriff, what would you like to say? Thank you.

Wicomico County, MD Sheriff Michael A. Lewis. Mr. President, I can't thank you enough on behalf of America's sheriffs. As you well know, there are men and women in law

enforcement across this country that are fighting a battle every single day. They are in the trenches.

[Sheriff Lewis continued his remarks, concluding as follows.]

This is unprecedented for a President to take this type of action. And we commend you, we applaud you, and I salute you, sir.

The President. Thank you very much. Say something, please. What you've been through—what you've been through is terrible.

Mesa, AZ resident Mary Ann Mendoza. My son was killed in 2014 by a repeat illegal alien criminal allowed to stay in this country. He was police officer in Mesa, Arizona.

And Angel Families come forward to tell their stories not because we've created a manufactured crisis but because we want to tell the American people and share with you our heartache and let you know what is happening on our doorsteps, what's happening to your neighbors, what's happening to your fellow Americans. And there is a way to prevent this, and it's not by continually lying to you and telling you that there isn't a problem. There is a problem. It's a national emergency. And thank you——

The President. Thank you very much.

Ms. Mendoza. ——for following through on your promises.

The President. Please. Go ahead. Please.

Pinal County, AZ, Sheriff Mark Lamb. Mr. President, I echo the sentiments. Thank you for all the support. This has been something we're not used to for the last several years, to have this kind of support.

[Sheriff Lamb continued his remarks, concluding as follows.]

And I know I speak on behalf of the Arizona border sheriffs that I challenge our congressmen and women and senators to come down and see firsthand what we're dealing with. See it for yourselves before you cast your vote. And you'll see that we do—we are dealing with a crisis. And we're fighting every day alongside our Federal partners, our local partners, sheriff's officers to take care of this.

So thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you. Thank you. Great job.

Sheriff?

Bristol County, MA, Sheriff Thomas M. Hodgson. Mr. President, I've been a sheriff for 21 years, and I've been dealing with Congress for 21 years on this issue of immigration. A lot of people have listened over 21 years, but Mr. President, you are the first person who has taken action. And you have given us back our footing in law enforcement, but you've also given the American people back what they deserve, which is to be protected.

[Sheriff Hodgson continued his remarks, concluding as follows.]

But, Mr. President, you have stood up and you've taken the action. And the American people are behind you and we're behind you. And thank you and God bless you for what you're doing.

The President. Thank you, Sheriff. Thank you.

Is Thomas Murphy here? Where's Tom? Tom Murphy. Tom? Where's Thomas? You had a horrible ordeal that you just went through with your son.

Virginia State Police Special Agent E. Thomas Murphy III. Mr. President, I'd like to tell you and tell the public that if you don't think it can happen to you or your family, I have a quick story.

I've been with State police for over 30 years working narcotics and gang task forces, and supervised those for 22 years. My son grew up with depression issues and some mental health concerns. He self-medicated with marijuana. At 18—and his father, me, had him arrested a few times along the way.

[Mr. Murphy continued his remarks, concluding as follows.]

So I'm here to say: As far as stigma goes in narcotics and "It's not going to happen to me, it's not going to happen to my family"—my father is a retired minister of 45 years. My sister is in the medical field. My brother is in law enforcement. No one even smokes in our family. No one has ever been arrested. It happened to me. It happened to our family. So, it can happen. That's how horrific and addictive this drug is.

So anything you can do to help us and families like us is greatly appreciated.

The President. And it's coming through the southern border, folks. All through the southern border. Thank you very much.

Frederick County, MD Sheriff Charles A. "Chuck" Jenkins. Mr. President, thank you very much, sir.

The President. Yes, please.

Sheriff Jenkins. This is the first real step in confronting the heroin drug crisis in this country. We're going to make real strides after this. I'm the sheriff of your home over at Camp David, Frederick County.

The President. That's right.

Sheriff Jenkins. We suffer the same problems there. And I'm convinced, without what you're here doing today, every county becomes a border county. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you, Sheriff.

So let's get this signed, right? On behalf of your great loved ones, right? I always said, "They will not have died in vain." Did I tell you that a long time ago? Three years ago.

Riverside, CA, resident Sabine Durden. Yes. You told me that 4 years ago.

The President. Right? When we first met on the campaign.

Ms. Durden. Yes. Four years ago. Yes.

The President. When they said, "Oh, Trump is not going to win." You said Trump was going to win, and I said, "And they will not have died in vain."

Ms. Durden. That's right. You told me that.

The President. And that's true. I say it today with even more meaning. It was a big step.

Ms. Durden. [Inaudible].

Participant. [Inaudible].

[*The President signed the message vetoing H.J. Res. 46.*]

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you. That's a big—a big step. We're building a lot of wall right now. It's started. A lot of people are saying, "Well, gee, you took down wall and you're building new." Well, we took down wall that almost didn't exist. It was like paper. And we're replacing it with, in many cases, 30-foot bollards. And, in many cases, we're replacing it with 18-foot wall.

But we have a lot of—we have many miles under construction right now, and we're going to be signing contracts over the next couple of days for literally hundreds of miles of wall. And it's being built in the right places, and it's doing the job. It's doing the job.

And it's interesting—it's like a little bit like water. As we do—we did San Diego. You know, California is very interesting because they keep talking in California—"We don't want wall." I see a new candidate who is in the mix; he wants to take down the walls. Try that sometime. You'll see what will happen. You'd have tens of millions of people coming in.

You see—take a look at Tijuana. Take down that wall. You want to see a mess? Take down that wall; you'll see what will happen. Right now, we have thousands of people who are in Tijuana trying to get in. They're not getting in.

So as we build it, it gets better and better. But it gets really to a point, and they come through a point. But you can control that point. And this is serious stuff. This is—we're able to do it cheaper, better. It's better wall. It's different from what you've been watching going up. We had to take the old plans. We didn't want to stop, so we took the old plans. We didn't like it.

This wall is a beautiful-looking structure. It's much stronger. And you can build it faster and cheaper. Other than that, what can I say, right?

It's a—it's going to be great, and it's going to have a tremendous impact.

And on top of that, I have to thank the Secretary and all the people that have worked so hard, because what you do on the Border Patrol—what you do, what those patrol agents and what the ICE folks do, and taking people out of the country that nobody wants to talk to. Even some of the sheriffs there—you know, if you can get ICE to do it, you don't mind if they do it. Right, Sheriff? As tough as you are.

These are tough people and they're great people. These are people that—the ICE folks that take such abuse from Democrats and some others. They love our country as much as anybody loves our country.

So we're building a lot of wall and we're taking good care of our people. And we're doing, at point of entry, a tremendous amount of work. We're already in contract to buy—they make pretty incredible new equipment for drug detection where you can find out what's in the wheel of a car, where it is, where it's in the engine, where it's in the hubcaps. I mean, we have some incredible stuff.

Plus, we have—also, we're getting dogs. More dogs, believe it or not. I still say—is that still true? There's nothing that replaces a good dog. Is that right?

Participant. Absolutely.

The President. Buying this equipment for very expensive. But we haven't been able—it's true. We haven't been able to match the dog.

I've seen out at Secret Service, where they showed me the dogs, certain types of German shepherd—very specific types of dog. But what they do is they'll run by 15 boxes, all empty except one. And they'll be very, very strongly sealed boxes. And they'll come running full speed and stop like on a dime. They know the drugs are in that box. It's the most incredible thing.

So, we're spending hundreds of millions of dollars on equipment, but I will say this: It's not as good as the dogs. [Laughter] But, as you know, we're getting you—so you're going to have the best equipment, but we're getting a lot of dogs for the various entry points also.

So with that, I just want to thank everybody for being here. In particular, I want to thank you, folks, because you have been—and please say "hello" to all of your friends that have been with us, really, from day one. What you've gone through is unthinkable, and I appreciate it.

And you're strong people. You're strong and you're proud. And your kids are, you know, looking down on you right now and they're—they're very proud of their moms and their dads. You know that, right? They're very proud. Thank you very much.

And, again, to those Republican Senators that did what they had to do yesterday, I want to thank them. They're very special friends and very special people. And they want to see borders that are strong, where we don't allow drugs and crime and all of the problems coming into our country.

Thank you all very much. Thank you.

White Nationalism/Shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand

Q. Do you see, today, white nationalism as a rising threat around the world?

The President. I don't really. I think it's a small group of people that have very, very serious problems. I guess if you look at what happened in New Zealand, perhaps that's the case. I don't know enough about it yet. They're just learning about the person and the people involved. But it's certainly a terrible thing. Terrible thing.

Yes?

National Emergency Concerning the Southern Border of the U.S.

Q. Mr. President, for some of the Republicans who voted for this resolution say they support border security but oppose executive overreach. Do you have sympathy for their position?

The President. I do. Look, they were doing what they have to do. And I'm—look, I did—I put no pressure on anybody. I actually said—I could've gotten some of them to come along. I said, "I want you to vote your heart. Do what you want to do." I'm not putting any pressure. I'll let them know when there's pressure. Okay? And I told them that.

I said, "When I need your vote, I'm going to let you know." I didn't need the vote because we all knew it was going to be a veto, and they're not going to be able to override. It's going to go very quickly.

And we have a great—as your Attorney General just said, the case is a very strong case, a very powerful case. It was—I think, actually, a national emergency was designed for a specific purpose like this. So we have a great—we have a great case, and I think it's going very—

I mean, ideally, they shouldn't even sue in this case, if you want to know the truth. They shouldn't be suing on this case, but they will because they always do.

We want border security, we want safety, we want no drugs, we want no human trafficking. Okay?

Shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand

Q. And on—just one follow-up on New Zealand. The killer in this tragic incident wrote a manifesto apparently. Did you see that? Apparently, he mentioned your name.

The President. I did not see it. I did not see it. But I think it's a horrible event. It's a horrible thing. I saw it early in the morning when I looked at what was happening in New Zealand. I just spoke, as you know, to the Prime Minister. I think it's a horrible, disgraceful thing and a horrible act.

Okay? Thank you all very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:29 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Lincoln Park, MI, resident Kent Terry; Pearland, TX, resident Laura Wilkerson; Mesa, AZ, resident Steve Ronnebeck; and 2020 Democratic Presidential candidate Robert F. "Beto" O'Rourke. Special Agent Murphy referred to his father E. Thomas Murphy, Jr., and sister, Lorrie M. Murphy. A reporter referred to Brenton Harrison Tarrant, the suspected gunman in the March 15 shootings at Al Noor and Linwood Mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Categories: Bill Signings and Vetoes : Southern U.S. border, legislation terminating national emergency declaration, veto remarks; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Ardern, Jacinda; Barr, William P.; Durden, Sabine; Hodgson, Thomas M.; Jenkins, Charles A. "Chuck"; Lamb, Mark; Lewis, Michael A.; Louderback, A.J. "Andy"; Mendoza, Mary Ann; Murphy, E. Thomas, III; Nielsen, Kirstjen M.; O'Rourke, Robert F. "Beto"; Pence, Michael R.; Ronnebeck, Steve; Terry, Kent; Wilkerson, Laura.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Congress : Bipartisanship; Defense and national security : Border security; Drug abuse and trafficking : Foreign narcotics traffickers; Drug abuse and trafficking : Illegal drugs, interdiction efforts; Drug abuse and trafficking : Opioid epidemic, efforts to combat; Economy, national : Improvement; Homeland Security, Department of : Customs and Border Protection, U.S.; Homeland Security, Department of : Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S.; Homeland Security, Department of : Secretary; Immigration and naturalization : Illegal immigration; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Immigration and naturalization : Refugees; Justice, Department of : Attorney General; Law enforcement and crime : Gang violence, prevention efforts; Law enforcement and crime : Illegal immigration, deportation of criminals; Law enforcement and crime : Law enforcement officers, service and dedication; Law enforcement and crime : Sexual assault; Law enforcement and crime : Trafficking in persons, efforts to combat; Legislation, proposed : Southern U.S. border, legislation terminating national emergency declaration; Mexico : Border with U.S., infrastructure and security; New Zealand : Prime Minister; New Zealand : Relations with U.S.; New Zealand : Shootings in Christchurch; Terrorism : Global threat; White House Office : Vice President.

DCPD Number: DCPD201900150.