

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2019

Remarks on Infrastructure and an Exchange With Reporters at Lake Okeechobee in Canal Point, Florida

March 29, 2019

The President. We've had a tremendous construction success in Florida. This is Lake Okeechobee, which I've known for a long time. Lake Okeechobee, it's an incredible lake, but it's had a lot of problems, and it wasn't properly funded for years.

I want to introduce some of the folks here. We all know Governor DeSantis and Mrs. DeSantis. Thank you very much for being here. You've done a fantastic job. And Ron took over from a Governor that a couple of you know—[laughter]—Rick Scott—who's been bugging me about getting this done for a long time. And no sooner did Rick go to the Senate that Ron started bugging me the same way, and we got it done. We have the funding, and we're doing.

I want to just thank the Army Corps of Engineers, who's been fantastic. I said, "Let's go. We need a wall also on the border." You know that, right? I'm looking at all these walls; I'm saying, "Southern border, too. Don't forget our southern border." And we're right now building a lot of wall in the southern border.

I want to thank Senator Marco Rubio, who's been very involved in this. Marco, thank you very much. That's great. Been very, very involved in it and very important.

Congressman Mario Díaz-Balart.

Representative Mario R. Díaz-Balart. Over here, sir.

The President. Where are you, Mario? Fantastic job, my friend.

Rep. Díaz-Balart. Good to see you.

The President. Thank you very much.

Brian Mast.

Representative Brian J. Mast. Yes, sir.

The President. Congressman Brian Mast. Brian, fantastic job.

Rep. Mast. Thank you, sir.

The President. Fantastic job. We're proud of you, Brian.

Francis Rooney. Where is Francis?

Representative L. Francis Rooney III. Right here, Mr. President.

The President. What a job you do. You know so much about it. And a young, new congressman who has done really well, Greg Steube. Where are you, Greg?

Representative W. Gregory Steube. Steube.

The President. Come. Greg Steube.

So I just want to thank everybody for being here. We have something that's very important. It's important in terms of safety.

Our Secretary, as you know, David Bernhardt, is with us. He's been really doing something very special for Interior. Everybody respects him. Everybody likes him. He's right now up, so I hope you guys can help him get his approvals, if you don't mind. [Laughter] Okay? But he's Acting, but soon he'll be, hopefully, permanent. He's going through a process, and I hear David is doing very well.

And maybe I think it might be appropriate if I start with the Governor. We'll have—everybody can say a few words about what we're doing. But what we're doing is very, very important. It was very dangerous, and it's a big project. But it's a great project for Florida. And Florida is a State that's a phenomenal State. A very important project.

So if I could ask our Governor to start, and then we'll go around the horn. Thank you very much.

Governor Ronald D. DeSantis of Florida. Great. Mr. President, thank you for your support for Florida, and not just with this, but with the hurricanes and other things that we're working on. We really appreciate it.

Really, if you look at what we need to do—you have Okeechobee, and this goes all the way down, really, to Florida Bay, the Everglades, and our estuaries. This is an important part, the EAA Reservoir, which the President is committed to supporting. And obviously, at the State level, Governor Scott got that on line. We're going to push forward on that to get that done. We're going to try to get the additional funds from the Federal Government to raise the Tamiami Trail.

And then, our State legislature, in this session, is out answering my call for historic support for water resources and water quality. So I think it's great that we have so many of our local officials, State government, and the Federal Government really seem to be singing the same tune right now. So, Mr. President, thanks for helping us out.

The President. Thank you very much. And I will say—and I think I have to say, because it's really to the credit of all of us together—this project was dying until we got involved. This was really dying.

And you know, in 1928, over 5,000 people died here. Everything broke, and they had a problem. And the Corps was just explaining—in 1928, they had a problem that turned out to be a total catastrophe. And we're making it stronger than it would ever have been. And it's really in great shape.

So, Marco, do you want to say a few words?

Senator Marco A. Rubio. Well, we just want to thank you. This is a—the most important issue in Florida is water right now. And it's actually the algae blooms and all that that are destroying property values and economically threaten communities, where people come to have access to the water, and they can't go in the water for 3 or 4 months a year because of the algae blooms. This actually is related to that.

And your administration deserves credit. You helped pull forward money—used disaster relief money to finish this—which meant that now that money gets freed up for the rest of the Everglades. And you have a chance, Mr. President, and your administration, to go down in history as the Everglades President, as the person who helped save and restore the Everglades. And we're going to be very proud to be a part of that.

The President. We have a chance to go down as many things. [Laughter] But the Everglades is very important and very important to me.

Rick.

Senator Richard L. Scott. Sure. Well, first off, my first 6 years as Governor, I kept asking the Obama administration for the money to fix the dike. If you look at the risk here, just remember Irma. We thought, at one time, Irma was going to come right across this lake. The odds are, we would have had a lot of problems south of the lake. Anywhere that it burst would have been a big problem. We've got locals here. We've got the mayor of Clewiston here. And it would have been a big issue.

So we started bugging—I started bugging the President as soon as he got elected that we had to get the dike fixed, and he came through. He worked with Congress, and we got the money. This dike will be done by 2022. It would not have happened but for what President Trump did and the fact that he took charge of this. He said, "This is an important issue." He went to Congress and made sure we got the money. And everybody up here that's been involved federally has done a great job making sure we have the money.

We're not done. We've got a lot more work to do. And I know the President is going to continue to be a big supporter.

The President. I will be. Absolutely. David, could you say a few words, please?

Acting Secretary of the Interior David L. Bernhardt. Well, I think the one thing, Mr. President, that resonates here as an important issue is, first off, this is an incredible partnership of a split between the State and Federal government. And that's of everybody pulling their fair share. And then, you know, if you're a recreationist, want to be in the outdoors, this project fundamentally, long term, is a critical component to Florida lifestyle.

The President. You're doing great. Thank you. Thank you very much, on behalf of a lot of people.

Congressman, would you like to say a couple of words?

Rep. Steube. I just want to thank you for your commitment to Florida. You know, water is the lifeblood to Florida, both to Florida agriculture and our tourism industry. So I just want to thank you for your commitment to Floridians.

The President. Thank you. Appreciate it. My honor.

Brian.

Rep. Mast. Sir, this is Florida's kidneys. [Laughter] Unfortunately, we only have one of them, so we can't sacrifice it. It means a great deal to everybody that you took the time to be here, present, to fund the projects, to pay attention to them. And it means a lot to the entire State. Thank you, sir.

The President. Well, thank you very much, Brian. Appreciate it. Great job you're doing. Francis.

Rep. Rooney. Mr. President, I just want to thank you for this and for a lot of other things you've done. It kind of shows when a businessperson gets involved in government, good things can happen. And you are going to save the Everglades. We're doing as much in 3 years, because of you, than we've done in the preceding 13 years. So thank you, Mr. President.

The President. In a lot of ways and, really, a lot of other locations too. We're doing a lot. Thank you very much, Francis.

Congressman.

Rep. Díaz-Balart. Mr. President, just to reiterate that you have the mayor of Clewiston here. You have State officials. You have Federal officials. But it doesn't happen without your leadership. It doesn't happen without you stepping forward, saying that this is important; putting, in essence, your effort, your leadership. And all of us are here working together, but in particular to thank you because it would have not happened. And what Francis says is right: You have done more for the environment, for Lake Okeechobee—in essence, for Everglades restoration—in your 2 years than we have seen in decades. So thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you very much. And you know, despite all of that, I saw the general, and I said: "General, tell me about this in a minute. How are we doing on the southern border?" And here he is, anyway. Come on, General. Say a few words about this place.

Major General Scott A. Spellman, USA, Deputy Commanding General for Civil and Emergency Operations, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Sir, thank you. I shared with the President, down by the water, that it took us 13 years, with the funding that we had, to get this project to the halfway point. And with his leadership and all the elected leadership here from the State of Florida, it will only take us 3 years to get the remaining 50 percent. And we have a great, strong relationship and partners here, sir. So thank you.

The President. Thank you very much. You're doing a great job.

Okay, folks, thank you very much.

Border Security/Mexico-U.S. Trade

Q. Mr. President, if you close the border, would it be to all trade? Would you close the border to trade?

The President. It could be to all trade. Mexico is making absolutely a fortune with the United States. They have a trade surplus of over a hundred billion dollars, which is far bigger than anybody understands. They've had it for many years. And either they're going to stop—they have the strongest immigration laws anywhere in the world. And we have the weakest, the most pathetic laws. Number one, Congress has to act. And number two, Mexico—they make so much money from the United States and so many other things, so many other assets—they have to grab it, and they have to stop it.

We have, right now, two big caravans coming up from Guatemala. Massive caravans walking right through Mexico. So, Mexico is tough. They can stop them, but they chose not to. Now they're going to stop them. And if they don't stop them, we're closing the border. They'll close it. And we'll keep it closed for a long time. I'm not playing games. Mexico has to stop it. They have people coming right through Mexico. It's a long, very dangerous journey. Mexico sends busses, they send trucks, they do absolutely—they started, at one point, a little bit—stopping. They don't do anything to stop it right now.

So the caravans form. I've ended payments to Guatemala, to Honduras, and to El Salvador. No money goes there anymore. We were giving them \$500 million. We were giving them tremendous aid. We stopped payment to Honduras, to Guatemala, and to El Salvador. We were paying them tremendous amounts of money, and we're not paying them anymore, because they haven't done a thing for us.

They set up these caravans. In many cases, they put their worst people in the caravan; they're not going to put their best in. They get rid of their problems. And they march up here, and then they're coming into their country; we're not letting them in our country.

Our Border Patrol, the job they've done, is incredible. The job that ICE is doing is incredible. And we have run out of space. We can't hold people anymore. And Mexico can stop it so easily. They don't go through a court system every time somebody steps on our land. You step on our land: "Welcome to the United States." It's ridiculous.

So Congress—and I know you guys are going to work hard on it—but Congress has to fix our broken immigration laws. We're the laughing stock all over the world. People pour into this country; we stop them, because Border Patrol is so incredible. But there's a point at which you can't stop them anymore. We have no detention space, no nothing.

So Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador have done nothing. Mexico has done nothing. And I'll tell you something: Colombia—you have your new President of Colombia. Really good guy. I've met him. We had him at the White House. He said how he's going to stop drugs. More drugs are coming out of Colombia right now than before he was President. So he has done nothing for us.

Okay. Thank you very much.

Q. Mr. President, your budget calls for \$60 million——

Immigration Reform

Q. Sir, are you willing to work with Democrats on immigration, sir?

The President. I am willing.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Policy

Q. Will you put DACA back on the table for—to speed up deportations?

The President. It's in the Supreme Court right now. After the Supreme Court.

Q. What about U.S. companies——

Small Business Administration Administrator Linda E. McMahon

Q. Any comment on Linda McMahon, sir? Any comment on Linda McMahon?

The President. She's great. We're going to have a news conference at Mar-a-Lago, I think at 4 o'clock, about Linda.

Everglades Restoration Funding

Q. What about more money for the Everglades restoration?

The President. We're going to be doing more. We're going to be doing more.

Q. When? How much?

The President. Soon. A lot. More than you would ever believe.

Q. What will happen if Russia doesn't leave Venezuela?

Q. Mr. President, about funding for the Lake——

Health Care Reform/Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act

Q. What about the health care ruling yesterday?

The President. Health care is going well. Health care is going well. We are going to have a plan that's so much better than Obamacare. Obamacare is a disaster. We're going to have a plan that is so much better than Obamacare. So the health care is going very well.

Q. Can we just ask about the lake, Mr. President? The funding for the lake?

Health Care Reform/Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act

The President. And we're going to take care of—we're going to always take care of preexisting conditions. Just remember that. Always preexisting conditions. But Obamacare is too costly for people. They can't afford it. And the deductible, which averages more than \$7,000, meaning, unless somebody has got really big problems, can't even use it.

Obamacare is a disaster. Right now it's losing in court. Right now, in the Texas court, as you know, probably ends up in the Supreme Court. But we're plan—we're doing something that is going to be much less expensive than Obamacare for the people. I'm not saying Government; I'm saying for the people.

And we're going to have preexisting conditions, and we'll have a much lower deductible. So—and I've been saying it—the Republicans are going to end up being the party of health care.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:20 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to President Iván Duque Márquez of Colombia. Sen. Scott and Rep. Díaz-Balart referred to Mayor Mali S. Gardner of Clewiston, FL.

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