

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2019

Remarks at the Otay Mesa Border Wall Site and an Exchange With Reporters in San Diego, California
September 18, 2019

The President. Yes, why don't you start, Kevin? And this has been a very exciting project, as you know. It's—for many years, people have wanted the proper wall, and we have a wall that—the likes of which, very few places have ever seen. And I want to thank all of the people. General Semonite from the Army Corps of Engineers, we're working very closely with them. I want to thank Kevin and all of your staff——

Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Kevin K. McAleenan. Thank you, sir.

The President. ——because what they've done is beyond.

And I wanted to show you some of the details of the wall. You can say—you can see a pretty good view. This is going to be close to 500 miles by the time we finish. Those are the areas that are most important.

After we're completed five—that should be done pretty close to next year. Over—it will be over 400 miles. And we think we can get it close to 500 miles by the end of next year, depending on certain terrain conditions. But we're doing all of the most important areas. We have a lot of natural barriers, like mountains and streams and rivers and some pretty vicious and violent rivers, actually. But it's an amazing project.

And I think what I'd like you to do is, if you could explain the interior of these pipes. The wall is 30 feet high. We also have 18-foot wall. We have a combination of 30 feet and 18 [feet],* depending on the area, depending the—on the importance.

Tijuana is right over here. There are thousands of people over there that had been trying to get in. Tremendous cooperation from Mexico. And the President of Mexico has been fantastic. All of Mexico has been fantastic. As you know, right now they have 27,000 soldiers. So, in addition to the wall, we have the soldiers.

Now, the wall still, obviously, has a ways to go, but we're building it at a breakneck speed. I wanted them to show you the interior of parts of the wall and what's inside of each individual slat. And you'll see it's a combination of steel, concrete, and—as one of the folks just said—it really is virtually impenetrable. Any walls that were put up would get knocked down very quickly, very easily. This wall is not something that can be really knocked down. I guess anything can, but this is very tough.

And it goes down 6 feet. It's 3 and 4 feet wide. The concrete—you see it right here; it's exposed. And I might ask General Semonite to say a few words about it.

And I'd like to bring them right up—look at the inner tube—to see what happens. Because after the wall is up, we pour concrete, and concrete goes into the tube. And in addition to that, we have rebar. So if you think you're going to cut it with a blowtorch, that doesn't work because you hit concrete. And then, if you think you're going to go through the concrete, that doesn't work because we have very powerful rebar inside. So it's a very powerful, very powerful wall, the likes of which, probably, to this extent, has not been built before.

* White House correction.

This is an area, because it's so highly trafficked, this was one of the most dangerous areas. We have a double wall. We have a wall on both sides. One is 18 feet; that's your border. And the other one is 30 feet. And everybody, if they should be able to make that, this is where people are waiting for them. It's a very powerful situation.

So, General, maybe you could take over for a couple of minutes, and then I'll take it back.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Chief of Engineers and Commanding Lieutenant General Todd T. Semonite, USA. So, Mr. President, I want to build on your comments. This is a system. It is both the two walls, but it also is the road networks, down through the middle and the back, so that the Customs and Border can go ahead and continue to be able to move around it. Also, a lighting system.

And if you think about this, I mean, it really is kind of a defense in depth. When you think about these panels going up—right now we're putting in about 270 panels a day that are going in the ground. We've got over 44,000 panels that are already built. And you think about the depth of how we're doing it.

Without getting into a lot of details: 66 miles today are already completed. There's 251 miles that are under contract, going in the ground right now at 17 other sites. There's 163 miles that are actually on contracts that are going to be laid in the next 90 days. And the remainder of the miles the President talked about is mainly private land that takes a little bit longer to get.

One of the things I want to just remind you about: that when you have a football field—kind of a flat area like this—it's a little bit easier to build a wall. But if you just turn around and look at the mountain up behind you, one of the projects that's going to go up in the next year continues this barrier right up over the rest of that mountain. So it goes back to being able to—we've got to have this linear capability to be able to continue to provide that level of defense.

We will talk—this is what the bollards look like. Thirty feet high on the backside. And you'll see, on the inside, there was a time——

The President. Come on over here, if you want. You can bring the cameras. It's, sort of, interesting.

Lt. Gen. Semonite. ——where people were worried that maybe you could negotiate—you could negotiate through the bollard.

So what the bollard is now, again, is that there are two pieces of rebar—12 feet long—that are inside the bollard. And then, when we put it up, we put concrete in. I won't tell you the depth of the concrete, but it is a pretty substantial obstacle to be able to go through.

And I would defer to you, Commissioner, for anything else you want to add.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection Acting Commissioner Mark A. Morgan. Yes. Thanks, General. So a very important part of this—and that's why the President was talking about the general. Right here, what we—part of what the wall gets is, is it gets the men and women of CBP, specifically Border Patrol, operational capacity to get to the area where people are trying to illegally cross.

Before—the old landing style—they could cut through that in seconds. Sometimes, they could come in a vehicle and just knock it over, and literally, within seconds, they were in the United States illegally. This makes it almost impenetrable. Right now they've had four attempts to cut through this. All four times, it's failed. Border Patrol has been able to respond and interdict those individuals. This, right here—this design—it's a game changer.

The President. And the reason we pour the concrete afterwards is because it's too heavy to lift when the concrete is poured in. So we put it up, and we pour the concrete. A lot of people don't see that. But we pour the concrete afterwards.

So you have the rebar, you have the steel, and then you have concrete. And it's hardened concrete. Very powerful concrete. What is that—4,000 pounds or 5,000-pound concrete?

Lt. Gen. Semonite. That would be 5,000, sir.

The President. That's a very strong—that's a very powerful concrete. And a lot of technological advances have been made with concrete. It sounds pretty simple, but it's not. It's a very powerful concrete.

So you have the rebar, you have the outer crust, and you have the inside is concrete. And it's pretty amazing. And again, the concrete is poured after it's up. They pour it through funnels and cover much of the territory of the bollard.

Lt. Gen. Semonite. Mr. President, also, this is a great view to look at the anticlimb.

The President. Yes.

Lt. Gen. Semonite. I defer to the Commissioner to explain what that panel does.

Acting Commissioner Morgan. Hey, you know what? I'd actually turn this over right now to our Chief Patrol Agent right now——

The President. Yes, please.

Acting Commissioner Morgan. ——Agent Harrison. He's really going to be able to give you, from an agent's perspective, exactly the magnitude of what this wall—the operational capacity—gives the Border Patrol agents.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection San Diego Sector Chief Patrol Agent Douglas Harrison. Thank you, Commissioner and Mr. President. So——

The President. The real deal.

Chief Patrol Agent Harrison. So you know, sir, this is the wall that the agents asked for. And they wanted me to tell you personally that they appreciate this—and not only this here, but the extension that's bringing the secondary out, further out. They really appreciate it. It makes them safer——

The President. Well, you've been great. You guys have been great.

Chief Patrol Agent Harrison. ——it makes the community safer, and it allows us to make that apprehension here in the border zone, as opposed to getting in vehicles and getting in pursuits on the highway. We want to make that apprehension here.

The President. Well, you know, just in terms of the quality, I came with the Border Patrol—we worked with them very closely. And I said, "Fellas, how about doing a less expensive version?" They said, "Well, this is the version that works"—including the poured concrete in the steel, with the rebar and everything else. That's the Rolls-Royce version.

Then, I said, "Well, fellas, how about doing one wall instead of two?" In a lot of areas, we have two, where you have tremendous amounts of people on the other side trying to break through. We know exactly where those areas are, Tijuana being over here, as I said. And they

said, "Well, sir, two works much better in these areas." A lot more expensive. So we have the one side, on the border—18 [feet].* And then, we have over here, 30 feet.

And I think one of the things you were asking, Mark, and wanted somebody to explain is the protection on top, how that stops—it's an anticlimb device, if you look at the steel on top. It's also structural, but actually, it was there, more importantly, for anticlimb.

Do you want to explain that? The panels up top.

Chief Patrol Agent Harrison. So it's one thing to figure out how to navigate the vertical posts, but the transition at the top makes the climb orders of magnitude more difficult. It requires different equipment, different tools, different skills. And so it's the change, as we get to the top, that adds to the protection of that fence, sir.

Acting Commissioner Morgan. And again, anything that we can do to give the Border Patrol agent even a few more seconds, a few more minutes to respond, that's a game changer.

And, sir, if you don't mind, I think this is important to talk about. The Chief Patrol Agent just mentioned—is that there's a false narrative out there that this wall is the President's vanity wall. I'm here to tell you right now that's false. This President, this administration, what they did is exactly what the President just explained. He reached out to the experts: to the Border Patrol agents that are on the frontlines every single day, risking their lives protecting this country, enforcing the laws that Congress enacted. He reached out to those agents, to those line agents, and asked, "What do you need to do your job more effectively to secure and safeguard this country?" And those Border Patrol agents said, "We need this."

So this President—thank you. You listened to the agents, and you gave them exactly what they asked for.

The President. This is your maximum that you could do. And one thing we haven't mentioned is technology. They're wired so that we will know if somebody is trying to break through. And you may want to discuss that a little bit, General.

Lt. Gen. Semonite. Sir, there could be some merit in not discussing that.

The President. Okay. [Laughter] I like that. That was a great answer. I'll just tell you they're wired, okay? They're wired. It's—they're, technologically, very advanced. All set up for cameras any place we want. We have all of the—everything we need. But it's all set up for cameras, for anything. And you've been hearing "drone technology"—they're all wired out for drone technology. Anything you want, we have.

And frankly, this is the right time to do it. Because to do it later, after it's built is very expensive. This way, it's mostly just adding wire. So we're all set up to adapt.

And that's the story. We have certain areas like this, where you have double walls. If you look behind, you can see how it goes up the hill. And that goes many miles in that direction. And we're starting now many miles in this direction.

We also have—it all fits together like a puzzle. How many sites would you say, over the next period of time, will have been started construction?

Lt. Gen. Semonite. Sir, probably about 35 sites. At any one given point, all working—and some of the contractors, actually—if they're building 5 miles, they might having one on one end, one on the other, and one in the middle so they get the maximum amount of people building at the same time.

* White House correction.

The President. So we have different bids and different contractors. This is one contractor, an excellent contractor, by the way; they're doing a really good job. But we have many contractors bidding on many different parts in different States—in Arizona; New Mexico, where I just left. We have great contractors bidding, and we're starting walls in New Mexico. The Arizona wall are moving along really well. It's—they're really moving along rapidly, and they need them desperately.

And part of the beauty—sometimes you'll see the tunneling, where they go under the wall. Here, this goes down—the concrete goes down very deep. It's very hard to tunnel. You can't tunnel. It's actually dangerous. But, at a certain point, you hit rock, so you can't tunnel. So we have it covered underground. We have it covered over ground.

And this is—as I said, this is the finest you can do. I said: "Let's do it differently. We don't have to go 30 feet." They said, "Sir, if you don't do 30 feet, it won't be the same, because of the climb."

We actually built prototypes, and we have, I guess you could say, world-class mountain climbers. We got climbers. We had 20 mountain climbers. That's all they do; they love to climb mountains. They can have it. Me, I don't want to climb mountains. But they're very good. And some of them were champions. And we gave them different prototypes of walls, and this was the one that was hardest to climb.

And we've all seen the pictures of young people climbing walls with drugs on their back—a lot of drugs. I mean, they're unbelievable climbers. This wall can't be climbed. This is very, very hard.

And what the panel does on top, as I said, is structural, but it's also very hard to get by panel. Plus, it's designed to absorb heat, so it's extremely hot. The wall is—you won't be able to touch it. You can fry an egg on that wall. It's very, very hot.

So if they're going to climb it, they're going to have bring hoses and waters—water. And we don't know where they're going to hook it up, because there's not a lot of water out here. So it's a very, very hard thing to climb.

We were thinking about an all-concrete wall—this is a much more expensive version—but they want to be able to have a vision in through—looking through Mexico, looking in both directions. They have to be able to, because otherwise, you have a block; you can't see what's going on on the other side. They can build—literally, they could have a group of some pretty tough people out there. And we don't want to do that.

You may want to explain that. Why would you want—you need this vision. It was so important. Because, frankly, an all-concrete wall would have been a much less expensive wall to build. But from the standpoint of Border Patrol, they were very much opposed to it.

Go ahead.

Chief Patrol Agent Harrison. So, sir, as you mentioned, it—our agents patrol along these walls.

The President. Right.

Chief Patrol Agent Harrison. And as they get closer to that, being able to see the threat through the wall prior to a rock coming over the fence or something else coming over the fence at them is just—it's an officer-safety thing, sir. And we appreciate it.

The President. Good. Yes. It worked out. And I understood.

It's sort of interesting; I always envisioned maybe it's a solid concrete wall. And that would have been easy to do. But every time I had a meeting with Border Patrol, with ICE, with the General, with the—everybody involved—with Kevin, with Mark, they said: "Sir, we have to be able to see through. If you don't see through, this thing is not going to work. It's not going to be a good situation."

They even talk about things where somebody would be talking on one side of the wall and they would throw up bags of drugs that weigh a hundred pounds. They would catapult it up and over the wall. And it was—I mean, we've had instances where people got hit on the other side, because you don't see who's over there. So having the wall, though it's more expensive, but it's the right thing to do.

And people that have seen it—other countries are now coming, as you know, and they're studying the wall, because other people are thinking about something. The only thing is, I'm not sure that they can afford a wall like this. This is——

International Interest in U.S. Border Wall Design

Q. Which countries?

The President. This is really—I will tell you at a certain point if I get their approval. We've had three of them already. They're coming, and they're studying the wall. But I'll let you know. If I can get their approval, I'll give that.

Who asked that? Jeff [Jeff Mason, Reuters]?

Q. That was me.

The President. I'll give you that information if I can. I want to ask their approval first, okay?

So that's pretty much it. Again, the President of Mexico has been great. The soldiers who are right outside—we have a lot of soldiers right now—they've been great. Twenty-seven thousand, I think, is the number, as of today.

And this will be something very special. I want to thank Mark. And I want to thank Kevin. And I want to thank you. Really fantastic job they've done. The whole group. Border Patrol has been incredible. And the knowledge that you've imparted—who would think this is what we had to do? But that's it.

When you look down here, you'll see on a more flat area—this is fairly flat—you'll see what the wall looks like, and it's pretty impressive. If the cameras can look down here—and these are the real people. These are the workers that put up the wall, by the way. All of these guys, they don't do as much of that. [Laughter] But these guys do a great job, but we appreciate it, fellas. These are the ones that are here.

Each one of these is considered a panel. When they said—how many panels are you going to put up?

Lt. Gen. Semonite. Over 44,000 are in right now, sir.

The President. Forty-four thousand are already in. Each one of these—if you look they're—they're together. So each one of these, I think, they have—so they would have—yes—like eight? Eight.

Acting Secretary McAleenan. Yes, sir.

The President. Eight bollards.

Lt. Gen. Semonite. Right.

The President. And each one of them—so I guess it's mostly an eight bollard. We also have some very sophisticated openings when you have to get the Border Patrol through or various people through to the other side. We have some really beautiful openings that work, I hear, really well. I hear we finally figured that one out, right?

Lt. Gen. Semonite. Yes, sir.

The President. That's—that was not an easy thing to figure out, because of the weight. The weight is—it's tremendously heavy.

But if you look down here, you'll see what the wall looks like. And the beautiful thing is that people are seeing that we're not going to do—in another week, I understand—no more catch-and-release. We're not allowing people into the country at all anymore. Nobody is coming in unless they're coming in legally. They're coming in through a process.

We have it covered between 27,000 Mexican soldiers. And really, now the wall is starting to kick in very big. San Diego was just—they were just thanking me for the wall we built in San Diego. It's like—they said it's a difference of day and night. They actually said, "It's a hundred percent."

The only thing is, we have to now expand it out. The only way they get through to walk many, many miles in the opposite direction—one way or the other—and go around it. But going over it is impossible—is virtually impossible. But they were very, very happy with what we've done.

So the days—and I tell you this very strongly: No more people can come in. We wanted Congress to help us. It would have made life very easy. And we still want them to get rid of loopholes, but we've done it a different way. We've done it with the help of Mexico. We've done it with the help of Border Patrol. And we've done it with the help of Kevin and all of your great people and Mark. We've done it a different way.

We still want them to do it because it would be a little bit easier, but Congress wouldn't do it. When I say "Congress"—the Democrats just wouldn't do it. So now we have a world-class security system at the border, including the highest technology. I would think that there's no place like this anywhere. There's no place has anything like this or even close to it.

Now, other places have guards, and unfortunately, they have machineguns, and they have electrified fences. You touch them, and you get electrocuted. We don't do that. We don't do that. But this is something that is equally difficult to get across.

Okay?

Border Security/Border Wall Design

Q. Can you explain what was here before? Was there fencing here? Was there anything here?

The President. Yes. We had a very low fencing here. In fact, you were here before, I think. We had a very low fencing. It was a—like a sheet metal. And people would knock it over, like just routinely. And we ripped it out.

We have a lot of areas where we had that and even less than that, and then we have areas where we had nothing. We had some areas where we just had a pipe along the ground and that, sort of, stopped cars or trucks, but they'd knock that out pretty quickly.

So those are areas—but, in this case, we had—you saw it—it was sheet rock. It was like sheet metal, a very thin—used to build runways, as just a form to build runways. And they had a lot of it left over years ago, and they put it up. But it would be knocked down on a daily basis.

Tell them about that.

Acting Secretary McAleenan. Can I offer, Mr. President? This is the same area we had the prototypes built. The President was here 18 months ago. We now have 24 miles of new primary and secondary wall in this sector.

The difference that makes for us, operationally is, instead of 3 [300]* to 500 people crossing a day, we're now seeing 30 to 50. And combined with our partnership with Mexico, where people aren't being released into the U.S., the traffic in this sector has dropped dramatically. That's how your strategy is coming into play.

The President. And the only way you get to 50 is, they walk around the areas like this that aren't—you know, we haven't sealed this up yet. We'll be sealing this up very shortly, or, in part of this, we have a gate. But the only way you get the 50—nobody is going over the wall. But where we are still building it, that's where they get the 50.

We think it's going to be close to a hundred percent in the end. I don't think anybody is—I guess, maybe, one of the greatest pole vaulters in history can get over the low—[laughter]—the low one, but it's going to be very painful when they land, right?

Border Security

Q. Mr. President, it's been about 6 or 7 months since you declared a national emergency here at the border. Do you still consider the country—the situation at the border a national emergency?

The President. Yes. Sure.

Q. And what will—how will you measure success? When will you withdraw that declaration?

The President. Well, I think, really, the success is going to be when the wall is built, when human traffickers can't go through. You can understand, Phil [Phil Rucker, Washington Post]. Right here, nobody is coming through this here. If they got through here, they have go through here. And they drive, they make a left turn up here and someplace where they didn't have anything, and they drive into the country and usually go unnoticed. And if they are noticed, it's a big deal. It's—a big chase goes on.

I think that the—we certainly—this is certainly a tremendous national emergency, because of human trafficking, drugs, and people coming in illegally. And, in many cases, those people have criminal records. And we don't want them in our country.

U.S. Troop Deployment at Mexico-U.S. Border/Border Security

Q. And will troops be here indefinitely?

The President. The Mexican troops? Indefinitely.

Q. No. Any U.S. troops.

The President. Well, we're lowering it down. As we build the wall, we can just about take all of the troops out, and Border Patrol takes over. Border Patrol has really been taking over now anyway.

People are hearing about the wall, and they're not coming up nearly as much either. You know, when you're in Guatemala—and by the way, I want to thank, also, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador. The leaders of those countries have really been working with us very strongly. And in all fairness, they weren't at the beginning, but they are now.

* White House correction.

And, in a couple of cases—in all cases, ultimately, we'll be doing the safe third agreements. We already have them. In certain instances, we already have them. And we're talking about that.

But the thing is, when people see this—and it's, you know, one of the reasons I'm doing it today: People see this and they say, "Hey, there's no reason to make that long journey up, because we're not getting into the United States."

Q. Mr. President——

Chief Patrol Agent Harrison. If I could jump in, Mr. President.

The President. Yes, please.

Chief Patrol Agent Harrison. So to your point, although we've had a 43-percent decrease from May to August of this year, we're still 55 percent over last year. This is still a crisis. We've still got high numbers coming.

Illegal Immigration/Border Security

Q. For the Mexicans who do want to come over illegally, is the administration doing anything to streamline immigration?

The President. Well, if they come over illegally, they're not going to be able to get over, so they're going to try——

Q. Legally.

The President. ——and come in. So that if they want to try and come in—when the wall is built, it will be virtually impossible to come over illegally. And then we're able to take Border Patrol and put them at your points of entry, where you need some extra help and extra protection. And we're able to do a lot of things.

But the numbers now are way down. And as the wall goes up—literally, as the wall goes up, the numbers go down. But also, the Mexican soldiers have been incredible. They've really done a good job.

Immigration Reform

Q. But for the great Mexicans citizens who want to come over legally, are we doing anything to streamline——

The President. No, no. When they want to come over legally, we make it absolutely—in my opinion, it will be easier. They'll have passes. They'll have whatever we're going to sign. That's being worked on right now. And the farmers won't be hurt at all when we have—you know, as we—as you know, we have many people coming over from Mexico, and from certain other countries. And they're coming through legally or they're coming through with a work pass.

And do you want to explain that maybe?

Acting Secretary McAleenan. Sure. I mean, our neighbors from Mexico, we have 400,000 that cross the border almost every day. We have two of the biggest, busiest ports of entry in the entire country right here in San Diego: San Ysidro and Otay Mesa. So the border crossing cards for daily commerce, the longer term visas for employment, those are going to continue to be issued for people who follow the lawful process.

Mexico's Efforts To Curb Migration/Tariffs

Q. You said, in 2016, Mr. President, that Mexico would pay for the wall. Do you feel like you've kept that promise?

The President. Well, they're paying for 27,000 soldiers, as you know. And I am so—we are all thrilled. You know, Mexico has never done anything to impede people from pouring into our country, and now they're doing just the opposite. They've really been incredible.

I also think it's good for Mexico, because they're breaking up the cartels. The cartels were really a problem. If I took 5 percent—5-percent tariff for 6 months—that pays for the entire wall. But at this moment, I don't want to do that.

But if I charged a 5-percent tariff on Mexico—with all of the cars and everything else that comes through in commerce—for 6 months, that would fully pay for the wall. At this moment, I don't want to do that, because I'm really happy with what Mexico is doing.

Now, Mexico is doing this because they don't want to be tarified. So you can figure that out any way you want. But if I wanted to, for a 6-month period, charge only 5 percent, that would pay for the wall, and you would have money left over.

Q. Is that something that's still on—I mean, you say you don't want to do that right now, but is it still on the table?

The President. If Mexico stopped helping us, that would be immediately on the table. And that would more than pay for it. That would pay for the wall many times over, because it would be for, certainly, a lot longer.

But we don't want to do that now because they have been fantastic. Mexico has never done anything to impede the people from coming in. And now they're doing yeoman's work—yeoman's work—27,000 soldiers on today.

Yes.

Q. What is this border——

Department of Homeland Security Leadership and Staffing

Q. Mr. President, there has been a great deal of turmoil at the Department of Homeland Secretary the last several months.

The President. I don't think there has.

Q. Pretty much every person——

The President. Yes.

Q. ——leading that agency is in an acting capacity. Are you going to be——

The President. Well, being fired, because they weren't doing jobs. And some of them were there for a long time.

Q. When will you make permanent appointments there, nominations?

The President. Yes, I'm very happy, I can say. I haven't announced it yet, but I'm very happy with many of the people there. And we'll be announcing things in the future.

I mean, there were many people that were there for a long period of time, and I wasn't happy with the job they were doing. And who could be happy? They were there for many years. They weren't doing their job. And we've made some incredible replacements. And yes, I'll be announcing permanents in the—pretty soon.

Q. But should the American people expect——

The President. I like—you know that—you know, Phil, I like—I like having nonpermanent, to a certain extent. It gives me more flexibility. I like having acting. I like the word "acting," because it gives me great flexibility.

But at a certain period of time, we'll be making permanent positions.

Department of Homeland Security Leadership and Staffing/Border Security/Border Wall Design

Q. Is it unfair for the American people to expect some stability now——

The President. No, I think we have tremendous stability.

Q. ——in that agency, especially if there's a national emergency going on?

The President. I think we have tremendous—I mean, that's the way you write. But I think we have tremendous stability. I think we've never had a border—when this is completed, there won't be a border anywhere that's a border like this.

And a big beneficiary, frankly, is going to be Mexico. And one of the things that is happening—and I've heard it from the top echelons of Mexico—is, they're breaking up the cartels. The cartels have been disaster. And that's a good thing for Mexico because they have their own problems.

No, we have acting people. And the reason they're acting is because I'm seeing how I like them. And I'm liking a lot of them very, very much. We also have people that I've let go that have been here for many, many years and have done a bad job, and I let them go. And if you call that turmoil—I don't call it terminal—I really—I really don't say that's turmoil. I say that's being smart. And that's what we do.

And the structure that you see—I wanted to have you here, because nobody would believe this unless they see it. I hope you're impressed. But nobody would believe it. This is top of the line.

And I went to the general—General Semonite—I said, "General, can we do a less expensive version?" He said, "Yes, sir, but it won't be good like this." And he said: "This is something that you can't cut through. You can't use welders to cut it. You can't cut it down. It's the real deal." And we can do a less expensive, but it won't be—it won't be like this. And I think you see that.

Q. Mr. President, all told——

Homelessness in California

Q. [Inaudible]—from San Diego. We really appreciate it. We are dealing——

The President. Made a big difference, right?

Q. We are dealing with the homeless issue as well, and you said——

The President. Well, that's a different issue. And I'll be talking about that soon. But you do have a homeless issue. And in the case of San Diego, the mayor is doing the right thing. He's doing a good job.

In the case of Los Angeles, it's a disaster. In the case of—if you look at San Francisco, it's a total disaster what's happening, where they're going to ruin those cities. And I—we're going to get involved very soon on a Federal basis if they don't clean up their act.

One of the things we're very upset about and angry about is, we're paying a lot of money to Los Angeles to build the subway system, billions and billions of dollars. And yet you have tents all over the place. And you have—you really have a sanitary condition, because this water is

rushing into the ocean, and this is supposed to be storm water. It's not supposed to be sewage. And it's turning out to be sewage.

And if these Democrat, liberal politicians don't straighten it out, the Federal Government will have to come in. We're not going to lose cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, and others that are great cities. We're not going to allow that to happen to our cities.

And we also want to take care of the people. And I'll even put the people first. Let's say we're going to take care of people. But they shouldn't be living like that, and it's destroying the city. And they're being destroyed. They're being further destroyed.

But that's for a different day. It's going to be very soon though. We're going—we're working on that right now. It's a very good question. Okay?

Border Security

Q. Mr. President, all told, where—how much is this border wall costing the United States? And where is that money coming from?

The President. So it's coming from various sources. We've had tremendous Supreme Court victories over the last short period of time—you've all reported on them—and it's allowing us to do the proper job. And it's also allowing us to work with the Army Corps of Engineers, where we have very talented people, like the General, and we're getting it done.

You may want to comment on this section. How is this being paid for, General, as an example?

Lt. Gen. Semonite. This was through regular, normal congressional appropriations. Part of this was in FY 17, part was in FY 18. But it came through CBP appropriations.

Q. And what about the—[*inaudible*], because the drugs cartels—

The President. I'll give you an example: You know, they tried to stymie us by saying \$1.6 billion, but only for renovation. Well, if they have a little 8-foot wall, 7-foot wall, or 10-foot wall that's like, you know—they just pull down the panel, and they walk across. And if we rip that down, I guess you could say that's renovation. So you know, we've used some of this water. Some of this comes right out of the budget. Much of the wall comes out of the budget.

But if we have even a small piece of steel going around, that's called a "renovation," because we take the piece of steel out, we put up a 30-foot wall. And so, in many ways, that works very much to our advantage.

Border Security

Q. Did you expect to have more of this done when you were talking about it in 2016?

The President. No, I think that—I've always heard 500 miles. That was always like a—you know, a number, because, you know, you look behind, and you see, even here, we're going up the side of the mountain. But in some cases, you can't. It's very, very hard to traverse. In some cases, you have areas that nobody is going to even get near.

So the number I heard was 500. What we're going to do is, we're going to stop at anywhere from 400 to 500, and we're going to see where else we may need something. And we can add pieces to that. But you really won't know until you stop, because you're going to have tread paths. It's like, you know, where are they going to go? Where are they going to walk?

So we're going to get up to about 400, and then we're going to look and see whether or not we have to go much more than 475, 500. It could be, at maximum, I would say, 550. So we might add another 50, but we won't know that until it's complete.

Q. Does that mean you don't think you need a wall along the entire U.S.-Mexican border?

The President. Well, you couldn't even do it, because in some cases, you have rapidly moving rivers, which are, in many ways, more effective than a wall. In some cases, you have mountains, and they're very dangerous mountains, which, in many cases, are more effective. So you wouldn't need that.

You have a little bit less than 2,000 miles, and you have 500 miles where it's really space where people can come through. And you may have a little bit extra, but about three quarters of it is covered by natural terrain, where the terrain doesn't allow people to get through.

Border Wall Design

Q. Mr. President, you said earlier that you wanted the wall to be painted black——

The President. Yes.

Q. ——and have the spikes at the top.

The President. I do.

Q. Why did you——

The President. I do.

Q. ——go against that?

The President. The general feels that we're better off letting it be a natural rust, letting it be the way it is. We'll make a determination as to painting it later. This will be a good strong rust color. And we'll see. We'll make that—it's not a big deal. The black attracts more heat, even than this color. But this is your natural steel, and I think we're going to see how it works out. We can paint at it at a later date if we decide to do it.

Lt. Gen. Semonite. I think the real issue though is that—and it goes back to economics. And so when you are able to use that money to be able to get more miles, therefore you're able to resist the threat better.

The President. It's not a huge amount of money, but it's enough to build many—you know, quite a few more miles. And I think we want to do that. And we can paint it at any time. We can paint it later on.

Okay?

Former National Security Adviser John R. Bolton/Iran/U.S. Military Involvement in the Middle East

Q. Can we just ask you again quickly about Iran, Mr. President?

The President. Yes.

Q. About—do we—should we expect to see military strikes coming soon? And John Bolton apparently was critical of you today, both your policies on Iran and on the Taliban.

The President. Well, I was critical of John Bolton for getting us involved with a lot of other people in the Middle East. We've spent 7½ trillion dollars in the Middle East. And you ought to ask a lot of people about that.

We are doing it the right way. We're doing it the smart way. It's very easy to go in. We could go in in one instant. Just one phone call, we could go in. And we'll see—and that might happen. That might happen. But we will see what we will see.

John was not able to work with anybody, and a lot of people disagreed with his ideas. And a lot of people were very critical that I brought him on in the first place, because of the fact that he was so in favor of going into the Middle East. And he got stuck in quicksand. We became policemen for the Middle East, and it's ridiculous.

So—and I've always felt that. I always felt it. From day one, I felt it. Even though I wasn't in government, I felt it. But I think that you will see what happens, and we'll see what happens.

Former National Security Adviser John R. Bolton/North Korea/U.S. Military Readiness

Q. He also said, on your North Korea policy, that negotiations with the North Koreans were doomed to failure, today.

The President. Well, it's easy to say that. He may be—he may be right, and he may be wrong. I mean, he—let's see what happens. Only time will tell.

In the meantime, for 3 years, there's been no nuclear testing. We've gotten our hostages back. We've gotten our great soldiers back who were killed, many of them. And many more are coming back. We have many more coming back. And the families of those—we call them "our heroes." And they were our heroes. And they're coming back.

And the relationship is good. So I think that's better than somebody that goes around saying we want to use the Libyan model. He said the "Libyan model." That set us back very badly when he said that. So I think John really should take a look at how badly they've done in the past, and maybe a new method would be very good.

Now, with all of that being said, may be a very powerful attack. We've never had a military as strong as our military right now because of what we've done. And when I first came into this position, our military was in very, very depleted, sad shape.

Q. And you mean a powerful attack against whom, sir?

The President. I'm not saying anything. I'm saying there may be a very powerful one, and maybe it won't be necessary. We'll see.

Q. With regard to Iran?

The President. But I will tell you, guys like Bolton and others wanted to go into Iraq, and that didn't work out too well, all right? That didn't work out too well. That was a horrible idea. It was—and I put him in anyway. And frankly, everybody knows: If you move wrong, he wants to—you know, he doesn't realize that you get stuck. You get stuck. And they got stuck. And I'm unsticking it. Okay? I'm unsticking it. And we're doing a great job.

North Korea, we'll see what happens. And frankly, in the Middle East, we'll see what happens. It's very fluid. A lot of things can happen. Rough things and not such rough things.

Q. Mr. President, how about the Fed's decision——

The President. And by the way: very, very easy to go in. One phone call—we go in. That's a very easy thing. And it doesn't have to be today. It can be tomorrow, and it can be in 2 weeks from now. You understand.

Federal Reserve System/Interest Rates/National Economy

Q. Mr. President, the Fed cut the rate today. With—your reaction on Twitter was not favorable.

The President. Well, I think it's fine. I think that, frankly, they should have acted faster. They raised far too quickly, and they lowered too soon.

And you look at Germany, where they're actually getting paid money to loan money. They get paid to loan money. Japan gets paid to loan money. And we're a much better credit than anybody—anybody in the world. We're a much better credit. And because of our Fed, we're actually paying interest.

So I'm not a fan. We have no inflation. We have an unbelievable economy. And we have no inflation. That's a very big thing, Peter [Peter Baker, New York Times].

So he just did this a little while ago. Some people thought he might do 50, instead of 25. He did 25. I figured he'd probably do 25. He—I think that they made some mistakes. And the mistake was, he raised too fast, and he lowered too slow.

But, despite that, we have a great economy. We have the greatest economy in the world. We're doing really well. Our businesses are doing very well. And regardless—but I thought it would give us an advantage. When other countries are doing it and we're not doing it, it becomes a little bit tougher, competitive-wise. But we're so much better than everybody else, it really doesn't matter.

I want to just thank everybody. This is—I hope you folks see the level of talent that's involved here, the level of quality that's involved here. If you came back here in 2 months, you would see this would be a paved road, right through the middle. And you'll have Border Patrol all over the place. But they're not going to have to work too hard, because nobody is getting over the wall. And if they get over the first one, they sure—they're not getting over the second one.

And I think, most importantly, I want to thank you folks. Great job. Really great job.

Construction worker. Mr. President, there is a tradition here on the border that anyone who works on the wall signs the wall for us. Would you be——

The President. Sign it.

Construction worker. Would you do that for us today?

The President. I'll sign it. Let's go. I'm going to sign it.

Thank you very much. See you back on the plane. Maybe we'll speak on the plane.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:11 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador; Mayor Kevin L. Faulconer of San Diego, CA; Kim Hak-song, Tony Kim, and Kim Dong-chul, U.S. citizens formerly detained by North Korean officials who returned to the U.S. on May 10, 2018; and Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome H. Powell. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 19.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Otay Mesa border wall site in San Diego, CA; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: San Diego, CA.

Locations: San Diego, CA.

Names: Bolton, John R.; Faulconer, Kevin J.; Harrison, Douglas; Kim Dong-chul; Kim Hak-song; Kim, Tony; López Obrador, Andrés Manuel; McAleenan, Kevin K.; Morgan, Mark A.; Powell, Jerome H.; Semonite, Todd T.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : Funding; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: POW/MIA remains, recovery efforts; Army, Department of the : U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; California : Otay Mesa border wall site in San Diego, CA; California : President's visit; Defense and national security : Border security; Defense and national security : Defense readiness, improvement efforts; Drug abuse and trafficking : Foreign narcotics traffickers; Economy, national : Improvement; Environment : Water management

policy, improvement efforts; Government organization and employees : Accountability and transparency, strengthening efforts; Homeland Security, Department of : Acting Secretary; 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; Judiciary : Judicial review; Law enforcement and crime : Trafficking in persons, efforts to combat; Mexico : Border with U.S., infrastructure and security; Mexico : Crime and narcotrafficking; Mexico : Immigration enforcement, cooperation with U.S.; Mexico : President; Mexico : Trade with U.S.; North Korea : International diplomatic efforts; North Korea : Nuclear weapons development; Reserve System, Federal; Transportation : Mass transit and rail infrastructure, improvement efforts.

DCPD Number: DCPD201900627.