

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024*

**Remarks Following a Briefing on Border Security Efforts in Brownsville, Texas**  
*February 29, 2024*

Where am I going?

Again, thank you. And as my mother would say, please excuse my back. I apologize.  
[*Laughter*]

*Wildfires in Texas and Oklahoma*

Hello, folks. Good afternoon. Before we start, I'd like to say a few words about the devastating wildfires that are scorching the Texas Panhandle and northwest Oklahoma. You know, yesterday one of the biggest fire events in Texas history, with more than 1 million—more than 1 million—acres of Texas land burned.

From the start, I directed my team to do everything possible to help protect the people and the communities threatened by these fires.

In response to specific requests from the—made from the State, we've already had more than 500 Federal personnel here working on fire suppression. That includes the deployment of 100 Federal firefighters—and more are on the way—as well as dozens of additional fire engines, air tankers, small planes, helicopters to help fight the flames.

And FEMA has already guaranteed that Texas and Oklahoma will be reimbursed for the costs of keeping folks safe.

And we're grateful for the brave first responders risking their lives to save others. And we urge—we urge—folks to listen to the warnings from the local officials. Listen to them.

I've flown over a lot of these wildfires since I've been President. As a matter of fact, I've—in a helicopter in the West, in the Southwest, in the Northwest—flown over more land burned to the ground—all the vegetation gone—than the entire State of Maryland in square footage.

The idea there's no such thing as climate change—I love that, man. [*Laughter*] I love some of my neanderthal friends who still think there's no climate change. Well, my administration is going to keep building on the progress we've made fighting climate crisis. And we're going to keep—help folks rebuild themselves in the wake of these disasters.

And we rebuild to the standards that are up—the up-to-date standards and building codes and the rest. Because a lot of—if you fly over these areas that are burned to the ground, you'll see, in the midst of 20 homes that are just totally destroyed, one home sitting there because it had the right roof on it.

And, anyway, since I took office, FEMA has provided Texas alone over \$13 billion—\$13 billion—in 3 years in disaster relief after fires and winter storms across the State.

And when disasters strike, there's no red State or blue State where I come from. There are just communities and families looking for help. So we're standing with everyone—everyone—affected by these wildfires. And we're going to continue to help you respond and recover.

*Border Security*

Now, turning to the purpose of my visit.

I want to thank Congressman Gonzalez. Where—there you are, pal. I thanked him—[*applause*]  
—I thanked him for the passport into his district, but he's been a great partner.

Also want to thank Mayor Cowen for his partnership. And I want to thank County Judge Treviño—I—for over 30—and over the 30 local officials who have joined us here today. No one—no one works harder for a safe, secure border than all of you.

And Secretary Mayorkas has joined us today. And he is joined by seven mayors in cities and towns across South Texas. Four county judges here from across the State. I was—told the county judge that I used to be a county official. It's the hardest job in American politics. You know why? They think you can do everything, and you don't have the budget. So, any rate. *[Laughter]*

But—and the two leaders from the Texas legislature—State House Leader Trey is here—Trey Martinez Fischer—and the State Senate Leader Carol Alvarado [Alvarado; White House correction]. And—hey, look, and all the other local officials that are here today, I want to say thanks.

Folks, it's real simple. It's time to act. It's long past time to act.

I just received a briefing from the Border Patrol at the border as well as immigration and enforcement and asylum officers. And they're all doing incredible work under really tough conditions—really tough conditions. They each told me what they—what you already know and we already know: They desperately need more resources. I'll say it again: They desperately need more resources. They need more agents, more officers, more judges, more equipment in order to secure our border.

Folks, it's time for us to move on this. We can't wait any longer.

Folks, on my first day as President, I introduced a bill I sent to Congress: a comprehensive plan to fix the broken immigration system and to secure the border. But no action was taken.

Then, months ago, my team began a serious negotiation on a bipartisan group of Senators—Democrat—leading conservative Republicans and progressive Democrats—and it resulted in a compromise bill. It's the toughest set of border security reforms we've ever seen in this country.

It's pretty basic. With this deal, we could hire 1,500 additional border security agents—1,500 additional—and officers and between ports of entry. For the last 4 years, staffing has been roughly that—flat—just flat. Agents working overtime, spending long hours patrolling the border, making major sacrifices. And I know it takes a big toll on them and their families.

That's why, in December, I signed a bill finally getting Border Patrol agents—what I've been pushed by and reminded by the Congressman—overtime pay they deserve. They're finally getting overtime pay. I—mean, it's ridiculous it took this long. It was long past time, and I was proud to do it. But we need to do more.

It's time to step up. It's time to step up and provide them with significantly more personnel and capability.

We also need more immigration judges to help handle the backlog. There are 2 million cases—a backlog of 2 million cases. This bipartisan deal would provide funding for a hundred more immigration judges immediately.

It would also establish new, efficient, and fair process for the Government to consider asylum claims for those arriving at our border.

Today, the process to get a decision on an asylum claim takes 5 to 7 years. Now, you all know it down here, but the people around the country don't understand it. That's far too long. They come in. You say, "I have a credible fear," and—we've changed that standard to make it hard—we want to change to make it harder. And what happens? You say: "Well, okay. You can come in the country, but come back in 5 to 7 years, maybe as many as 8 years, and you'll get a hearing from—before a judge to determine whether you can stay."

This will encourage more people—this encourages more people to come to the country. If they get by the first, they've got another 5, 7, 8 years before they have to do anything because they know they cannot handle the caseloads quickly and they'll be able to stay in this country in the meantime.

With new policies in this bill and the addition of 4,300 additional asylum officers, we'll be able to reduce that process to less than 6 months. That would have a serious deterrent effect on those coming north.

When—the criminal gangs say, "We'll get you north, but it's 8,000 bucks," you say: "Now, wait, let me get this straight. I'm going to go north. It's going to cost me six, eight"—probably closer to eight, I guess—"thousand dollars, equivalent, and I'm going to get there, and in 6 months, they may be able to get rid of me." And I don't know, man: 6 months, 7 years—two different things.

A person who's thinking about entering the United States understands the case is to be decided in a few weeks or months instead of 5 to 7 years, they're less likely to come in the first place. They're not going to pay the cartels thousands of dollars to make that journey knowing that it will be turned around quickly.

Look, and we also need more cutting-edge inspection machines to detect and stop fentanyl from entering the United States of America. A year ago, I stood at a border in El Paso and I watched these machines at work. They were able to detect everything from fentanyl to weapons to people being smuggled in cargo containers. This compromise bill would provide an additional four—three—\$424 million for 100 more of these machines and could save lives in the process.

This compromise legislation would also give me as President or any—the next President emergency authority to temporarily shut down the border between ports of entry when the numbers of immigrants and migrants—excuse me—overwhelm the border, straining the Border Patrol's ability to process them.

At the same time, at our legal ports of entry, like here in Brownsville, we're making investments in infrastructure. My bipartisan infrastructure law is going to provide nearly 4 billion new dollars to boost security, to ease waiting times at land ports of entry like Brownsville.

And I want to thank you again, Congressman Gonzalez, for helping me get that through and get that passed and—as the law. That you get the money for the—for example, that's how you got the money for the Gateway Bridge from that fund.

Folks, the bipartisan border security deal is a win for the American people, and it's a win for the people of Texas. And it's fair for those who legitimately have a right to come here to begin with. It's a win for the people of Brownsville.

And I believe that's why the Border Patrol union endorsed it. I believe that's why the national Chamber of Commerce—the national Chamber of Commerce endorsed it—not known as a Democratic organization, with a capital "d." *[Laughter]*

Look, and that's why the Wall Street Journal endorsed it as well. This is a truly bipartisan initiative. That's why the bipartisan South Texas Alliance of Cities endorsed it.

Folks, I didn't get everything I wanted in that compromise bipartisan bill, but neither did anybody else. Compromise is part of the process. That's how democracy works. That's how it's supposed to work. Compromise is a very positive step on a critical issue for the country—all those issues for the country.

And folks here in Brownsville and all along the border know that. We need to have their backs—your backs. And I want the people to understand clearly what happened here. This bill

was in the United States Senate. It was on its way to being passed. Then, it was derailed by rank-and-file politics—rank partisan politics.

The U.S. Senate needs to reconsider this bill. And those Senators who oppose it need to set politics aside and pass it on the merits, not on whether it's going to benefit one party or benefit the other party. It's about whether it benefits the American people. That's what the American people deserve.

And the Speaker of the House needs to put this bill on the floor, because if he put it on the floor unrestricted, it would pass. The majority of Democrats and Republicans in both Houses support this legislation—until someone came along and said, "Don't do that; it will benefit the incumbent." That's a hell of a way to do business in America for such a serious problem.

We need to act. It's time for the Speaker and some of my Republican friends in Congress who are blocking this bill to show a little spine. Pass the bipartisan border—bipartisan, remember, bipartisan—conservative leaders supported this—border security bill.

Let's remember who we work for, for God's sake. We work for the American people.

Let me end with this. I understand my predecessor is in Eagle Pass today. So here's what I would say to Mr. Trump: Instead of playing politics with the issue, instead of telling Members of Congress to block this legislation, join me—or I'll join you—in telling the Congress to pass this bipartisan border security bill. We can do it together.

You know and I know it's the toughest, most efficient, most effective border security bill this country has ever seen. So, instead of playing politics with the issue, why don't we just get together and get it done?

And let's remember who the heck we work for. We work for the American people, not the Democratic Party or the Republican Party. We work for the American people.

And let's remember who we are. We're the United States of America. No, I mean this. Think about this. There's nothing—nothing beyond our capacity—nothing—when we work together. And of all things we should be working together on, it's this. And we have the formula to get it done.

God bless you all, and may God protect our Border Patrol. And God protect our troops.

Now I'd like to turn this over to Secretary Mayorkas. Thank you.

*[At this point, Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas made remarks; no transcript was provided.]*

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:41 p.m. at the Brownsville Border Patrol Station. In his remarks, he referred to Rep. Vincente Gonzalez; County Judge Eddie Treviño, Jr., of Cameron County, TX; County Judge Richard Cortez of Hidalgo County, TX; County Judge Aurelio "Keter" Guerra, Jr., of Willacy County, TX; County Judge Ricardo Samaniego of El Paso County, TX; Mayor Victor D. Treviño of Laredo, TX; Mayor Javier Villalobos of McAllen, TX; Mayor Ronald A. Nirenberg of San Antonio, TX; Mayor Ramiro Garza, Jr. of Edinburg, TX; Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza of Mission, TX; Mayor Adrian Gonzalez of Weslaco, TX; Norma Sepulveda of Harlingen, TX; Sens. Krysten L. Sinema, Christopher S. Murphy, and James P. Lankford; and Speaker of the House of Representatives J. Michael Johnson. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 1.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Border security efforts, briefing in Brownsville, TX.

*Locations:* Brownsville, TX.

*Names:* Alvarado, Carol; Cortez, Richard; Cowen, John, Jr.; Garza, Ramiro, Jr.; Gonzalez Garza, Norie; Gonzalez, Adrian; Gonzalez, Vincente; Guerra, Aurelio "Keter," Jr.; Johnson, J. Michael; Lankford, James P.; Martinez Fischer, Trey; Mayorkas, Alejandro N.; Murphy, Christopher S.; Nirenberg, Ronald A.; Samaniego, Ricardo; Sepulveda, Norma; Sinema, Krysten L.; Treviño, Eddie, Jr.; Treviño, Victor D.; Trump, Donald J.; Villalobos, Javier.

*Subjects:* Asylum claims process, improvement efforts; Bipartisanship; Border Patrol, U.S.; Border security; Climate change; Climate resilience, improvement efforts; Disaster assistance, Texas; Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); First responders, service and dedication; Illegal immigration; Illicit drugs, interdiction efforts; Immigration reform; Infrastructure improvements; Mexico, border with U.S., infrastructure and security; Oklahoma, wildfire damage and recovery efforts; Opioid epidemic, efforts to combat; Refugees and migrants, U.S. admission policy; Secretary of Homeland Security; Speaker of the House of Representatives; Texas, disaster assistance; Texas, President's visit; Texas, wildfire damage and recovery efforts; Wildfires, damage and recovery efforts.

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