

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2026

Remarks on Signing an Executive Order Establishing the Task Force To Eliminate Fraud and an Exchange With Reporters

March 16, 2026

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

This is a very big thing that we're doing. It's about fraud—having to do with all the fraud that's taking place in our country. And we have two people that are extremely brilliant and just very talented, and they're going to be put in charge.

But I'd like to ask, Will, if you would, to give a little description of what we're signing, the Executive order, and then I'll ask J.D. to speak.

White House Staff Secretary William O. Scharf. Yes, sir.

As you stated in your State of the Union Address, in light of widespread revelations of fraud in federally funded programs in States like Minnesota and California, this Executive order in front of you will establish a new Task Force aimed at rooting out that fraud, returning potentially billions or tens of billions or even hundreds of billions of dollars to the American taxpayer.

This Task Force will be chaired by the Vice President. The Vice Chairman will be the—head of the FTC, Andrew Ferguson, who's with us here as well today.

But this is going to launch a whole-of-Government approach to rooting out the very serious problem of fraud in federally funded programs around the country.

The President. As an example, you know, you've been seeing it and seeing it pretty big in Minnesota: \$19 billion. But that's only for one little aspect of the fraud. It's \$19 billion. And California, as they say, is 10 times worse, and other States are 10—and this is not a Republican-Democrat thing. This is wherever it's taking place.

It seems that it's usually in blue States. If it's in a red State, we're going there too. But it seems that it's heavily, heavily, heavily Democrat, and what they've done is so sad.

When you look at the Minnesota scam, a lot of it has to do with Somalia. Nobody's calling out anybody, but a lot of it has to do—but it's Somalia and plenty of others.

And I believe the Governor is complicit. I believe Ilhan Omar is complicit. I believe that your attorney general is complicit. And if they are, you're going to, hopefully, find out about it and you're going to be—you're going to have to do what you have to do.

If we found half of the fraud that's taking place in this country—and I think you have a chance of doing that—we would have much more than a balanced budget. That's the kind of numbers you're talking about. The theft is incredible.

And I think J.D. will make—and Andrew will make a charge later on that local States should handle nursing homes and all of these things that—the Federal Government shouldn't be involved in—there—it's too big. The Federal Government should handle military and a couple of other things.

But when it comes to nursing homes, you saw where a young gentleman was going around and knocking on doors, and none of the nursing homes existed. None of the nurseries existed. The money that's being paid out—and the Federal Government pays for it.

When you see all these people coming in illegally into our country—many criminals, many drug dealers, murderers—11,888 murderers. And you look at California, and more and more come in. And yet, they never had money, and yet they pay them. You know why they pay them? Because the Federal Government is charged with paying them. We're not paying them anymore, and I said that.

So these two really smart guys are going to be—I think it's going to—hopefully, it's going to be J.D.'s—this will not be like a Kamala, where she was put in charge of the border—*[laughter]*—and she never went there, J.D. Right? You promise?

Vice President James D. "J.D." Vance. I promise, sir. *[Laughter]*

The President. Remember, Kamala was put in charge—she was the border czar. She never went to the border. She never called any of the great Border Patrol. The Border Patrol testified, "We never spoke to her in 4 years." That was a disaster.

But this is different. This is a different group of people.

I think maybe before J.D., I'll ask Stephen Miller to say a few words too, please.

White House Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy Stephen Miller. Thank you, Mr. President.

Well, under President Trump's leadership, as we've seen, the illegal flow across the southern border was stopped completely.

But what we found since President Trump came into office is that the Democrats have set up a system to funnel hundreds of billions and ultimately trillions of dollars to migrants that are in our country, oftentimes from places like Somalia.

So, as an example, ICE recently asked a group of illegal immigrants that were in detention whether or not they were receiving Medicaid. Half of them raised their hands and volunteered that they were on Medicaid. *[Laughter]* Just volunteered that. These aren't the ones who are hiding it. *[Laughter]* Right?

They also asked illegal aliens how they paid their medical bills, and they said that if they don't have Medicaid, they go to hospitals, they get free care there, and they bill it to the taxpayers. So they aren't paying for any of their own healthcare in this country. This is one example, and we've seen this over and over and over again.

So, under President Trump's leadership, and then of course with J.D. and the head of the FTC, Andrew Ferguson, we are going to see the first-ever effort in American history to reclaim the ultimately trillions of dollars that were stolen from taxpayers.

I believe and I know President Trump believes that when this theft is exposed, we will see that if all of it were stopped, it would be enough to balance the budget. The extraction of wealth from American taxpayers to people who don't belong here is the primary cause of the national debt, and this is the first-ever effort to shut that down.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. First ever. And they—everyone knows they've been cheating for years. It's the first ever, and it's got to be stopped. I mean, it's got to be stopped.

It's—think of it, Somalia is a third-world—maybe a fourth-world nation. One of the worst, one of the most dangerous. They don't have anything. They don't have councils. They don't have government. They don't have police. They shoot each other all over the place.

They come here, and they steal \$19 billion. It's crazy. And Ilhan Omar—I hope this is part of it, but she married her brother, supposedly. I mean, there's a lot of documentation. That means

she's here illegally, and she's a Congresswoman. And I hope you're going to be looking at that or somebody is. All right? Because she's one of the ringleaders here. She's a—she's bad news—really bad news. She's so bad for our country.

Anyway, J.D., please say a few words.

Vice President Vance. Yes, sir. Well, thank you, Mr. President. This is a very important, whole-of-Government approach to tackle the fraud problem.

And let me just tell one story. One of the things that even before this Executive order was signed that we were able to stop under the President's leadership is we saw evidence that in Minneapolis there were Somalis—primarily illegal immigrants—who were defrauding a Medicaid program that was meant to go to autistic children.

So they were taking children who were supposed to get benefits, and they were claiming that their kids were actually autistic, even though they weren't.

And what did this mean? This meant two things. Number one, you had a lot of people getting rich off of the fraud while American citizens got poor. And the second thing that it meant is that you had autistic kids in Minneapolis—in suburban Minneapolis who weren't getting benefits they needed because Somali fraudsters were literally stealing out of their pocket.

It's got to stop. And unfortunately, that kind of fraud is one example of probably hundreds just within the State of Minneapolis. And then it's repeated and replayed all over the United States of America.

When we first started talking about this problem, the President made it very clear he wanted us to take the fraud problem seriously because nobody had until he was President. We started to figure out one big hole that existed is that the agencies of the Government weren't actually talking to each other.

So Treasury would have evidence of financial fraud but wasn't talking to the Department of Justice about it. Health and Human Services had evidence of Medicaid fraud but wasn't talking to the Department of Treasury about it.

So what this Executive order does is force the entire apparatus of the Federal Government to do two things: Stop the fraud on the American taxpayer and make sure that the benefits that ought by right go to American citizens go to American citizens and not to fraudsters.

Andrew Ferguson will be the Vice Chair and is going to do a great job. If you're curious what's the difference between the vice chair and the chair, the vice chair is going to do all the work, and I'm going to take all the credit. *[Laughter]*

Andrew.

Federal Trade Commission Chairman Andrew M. Ferguson. Yes, look, I mean, millions and millions of Americans pay into these programs every day and they expect to get something out of it. And this fraud is just siphoning money that millions of Americans pay to fund their hospitals, to fund their daycare centers into completely fake businesses.

It isn't just unfair to all of us as taxpayers who pay for all of this. It's particularly unfair to the Americans who need this the most and watch this money leave their hospital, leave their school system, and go out to fraud. And that is why this effort is so important.

And I think—we've just begun really looking at this, but I think that one of the things we're going to find is that in a lot of these agencies, the previous administration was pretty lax about existing antifraud controls, and we're going to expose that too.

The President. I would take the word "pretty" out. [*Laughter*] I would change it with "unbelievably lax." They weren't—not even lax—"lax" isn't a good enough word. The—previous administration was fraudulent. Okay? And I think that's what you're going to find also.

And you know, we worked so hard—like, most-favored-nations drug prices. For years people have wanted. We paid the highest drug prices anywhere in the world by far, by 5 times, 6 times, 10 times more than London would be paying in New York. More than any city in Europe was paying than our cities.

We would have a pill that would sell for \$10 in Munich. In Germany, it would sell for \$10, and in New York, it would be \$130 or what—and we worked so hard, and we pulled it off. It's called most favored nations.

So now we went from, by far, the most expensive drugs anywhere in the world—prescription drugs—to the least expensive.

And I had to get all the nations to agree. And I don't want to bore you with how I did it, but I did it. Everyone said it was impossible to do, including the drug companies. And we did it, and we worked so hard on it. And we're going to save so much money for the people. Your drug prices are going to be dropping at levels never even—by 50, 60, 70, 80 percent, in some cases. But you work so hard, and then you see them stealing \$19 billion. It's, like, in one pocket, out the other.

And I think Andrew and J.D., I think they have maybe one of the most important jobs. Maybe—it could be one of the most important things that we're signing, because——

Vice President Vance. Thank you, sir.

The President. ——because we—I really believe that they have an opportunity to do something so good for our country.

You know, people talk about balancing budgets. You can't balance a budget when people are stealing \$19 billion, and I—nobody has ever heard of anything like it.

We had, I guess, in the same State, you went—autism—where 4 or 5 years ago they spent \$1 million, and now it's almost \$400 million in just a few years. Well, autism didn't go up like that. And even the \$1 million was probably a fraud, but it went from \$1 million to almost \$400 million in just a few years.

These are crooked people. They basically said everybody in the State had autism. These are crooked, horrible people. And you know, I—was elected on—with J.D.—"Make America Great Again." That was a—and we can't have this stuff happening.

Vice President Vance. That's right.

The President. We have to be respected, and they laugh. So I'm going to sign this. We'll take some questions, but let me sign this first before I forget—I—don't forget. [*Laughter*] Let's see. Biden forgot—before I decide not to. [*Laughter*] Okay?

Vice President Vance. Yes, sir.

The President. I don't forget not to, but maybe I'll decide not to. I would decide not to if the—if I didn't think they could do the job, I would decide not to.

But that'll be a terrible thing. I think they're going to find numbers. Andrew, I think you're going to find numbers that are far higher than you even think.

And you—you know, Andrew came to us. He said, "Sir"—he's read the stories about Minnesota. We know California is many times worse, but Minnesota is terrible. They're all

terrible. Those cities are terrible. New York is terrible. What's going on in Chicago, Illinois, with that slob of a Governor, is terrible. And the kind of money we're talking about is just country changing. It's country-changing money.

It's having a deficit to having a—really profitable country where you can lower your taxes substantially for people. And I think that's—I think you have an opportunity to do it. And I think you two guys are the right guys—if you guys can't do it, we've got a problem because nobody else will be able to do it. Huh?

Vice President Vance. Yes, sir.

The President. So I'll sign, and then we'll take some nice questions from our wonderful media. [Laughter]

[At this point, the President signed the Executive order.]

Okay.

Vice President Vance. Good one.

The President. Andrew.

Chairman Ferguson. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you, J.D.

[The President handed out signing pens.]

Here you go. Very important. That's a big deal. We've been working on this very long, right?

Deputy Chief of Staff Miller. Yes, sir.

The President. Steve, right? Will.

Staff Secretary Scharf. Yes, sir.

The President. Andrew, do you have a question?

Fraud Enforcement/Minnesota

Q. Yes, Mr. President. You said during your State of the Union that this type of fraud—the corruption is the type of thing that can "shred the fabric of a nation." Why do you suppose, then, that leaders in recent memory haven't looked at the systemic amount of fraud that's been taking place?

The President. Because they're crooked.

Q. And how much——

The President. Because they're crooked. They make money. They gain power. They use it for power.

Like with the Somalians, they vote in a bloc, a hundred percent. They make a deal with the Somalians. They all vote because they—they're on a gravy train. It's—a combination—it's—it's money first, power second. A lot of people say power first. No. It's money first, power second.

Do you ever see where, like, Mercedes—people come over from Somalia, they have no money, and now they're buying Mercedes-Benz cars. Okay? It's—more cash goes out of the Minnesota airport than any other place in the world or some—we're going to find it. And Minnesota is really bad. The Governor is corrupt. The attorney general is totally corrupt, just like the New York State attorney general, Letitia James. She's a highly corrupt person. Bragg, the DA, is a corrupt person. They're all corrupt. These are corrupt people.

And we got too many of them in our country, and we have to expose them, and we have to catch them. And if these two guys can't—these are high-IQ people. I like high—I've always liked high IQ. These are high-IQ people. If they don't do it, we've got—[laughter]—we're going to go a long way, fellas, to find somebody else that's going to. [Laughter] We have no choice. If—honestly. And they may not do a good job. If they don't do a good job—[laughter]——

Vice President Vance. Thank you, sir. [Laughter]

The President. No, no. It's possible. If they don't do a good job, the country is sort of in trouble.

Yes, go ahead.

Q. Thank you, sir. Two questions for the Vice President.

The President. And I think they're going to do a great job.

Go ahead.

Q. First, Mr. Vice President, Democrats are already calling you the fraud czar. What's your reaction to that title?

And then, second——

The President. Good title. [Laughter]

U.S. Military Operations in Iran

Q. Second, given your——

The President. I like it.

Q. ——past skepticism of foreign adventurism, are you completely on board with the current war in Iran?

Vice President Vance. So I like fraud czar. It's certainly what we're going to do. And look, we have to do it. As the President said, this is a problem that has festered in this country for far too long, and far too—few people have actually wanted to do anything about it. That's what makes this administration different, is that we actually tackle the problems the American people have been confronting. So I'm very happy about it.

And look, I—think that—I know what you're trying to do, Phil [Philip Wegmann, RealClearPolitics]. You're trying to drive a wedge between members of the administration, between me and the President. What the President said consistently, going back to 2015—and I agreed with him—is that Iran should not have a nuclear weapon. We have taken this military action under the President's leadership. I think all of us, whether you're a Democrat or Republican, should pray for a success and pray for the safety of our troops. That's the approach that I've taken: Make it as successful as possible.

Q. So there's no hesitation, given your past statements, with the current operation?

Vice President Vance. What do you mean there's no hesitation with my past statements?

Q. On your part, given your skepticism of foreign adventurism. You were a critic of the global war on terror previously.

Vice President Vance. Well, I think one big difference, Phil, is that we have a smart President, whereas in the past, we've had dumb Presidents. And I trust President Trump to get the job done, to do a good job for the American people, and to make sure that the mistakes of the past aren't repeated. Absolutely.

Q. Thank you, sir.

The President. Look, J.D.'s been great. But here's the simple thing, and I—have, you know, some people—I don't want wars. I want wars less than almost anybody. Peace through strength.

But you know what? I've watched Iran for a long time. I called them out 20 years ago when I was a civilian that liked watching the world. And they're violent, vicious people—the leadership. Violent, vicious people. They killed 32,000 protesters over the last 3 weeks. They put out a memo 2 days ago saying, "If you protest, we will shoot you and kill you in the streets."

And somebody said, "Oh, there's not that many protests." Well, first of all, there are bombs going off all over the place, but even if there weren't, who's going to do that? You know, who's going to do—they don't have any guns. And the other ones have latest-in-line machinegun—right?—and every form of gun you can have. They shoot them right through the middle of the head. They're violent people.

If they had a nuclear weapon, they would use it. And sometimes I'll have some of the people that, you know, feel very strongly, like I do, about wars. And I say, "Do you think Iran is violent, and do you think their people are violent?" "Yes, the leadership." "Do you think they should have a nuclear weapon, which is massive power?" I don't even want to discuss how powerful because it's depressing. And they said: "No, they shouldn't have. Definitely they shouldn't have." I say, "And you don't want to fight war?" "No, no, we don't want to fight war."

So these are naïve people that, frankly, are stupid. If you believe that Iran should have a nuclear weapon, there's something wrong with you, because they would use it within—the only question is within 1 hour, if they get it, or 1 day. They will use it, and they will blow up the entire Middle East, not just Israel. They'll start with Israel, but they will blow up—and you got to see that when they unexpectedly started sending missiles to every country within a thousand miles of them. I mean, they're blowing up countries that were neighbors, not necessarily—some friends. They actually were blowing up some friends. They were blowing up the people that handle their accounts. They're sending thousands of missiles into countries that didn't expect to be in the war because they wanted to take over the Middle East.

And if I didn't terminate Barack Hussein Obama's horrible Iran—nuclear deal, which I did in my first term—one of the dumbest deals, perhaps the dumbest deal because of the danger involved—you would have had them have a nuclear weapon 3 years ago, maybe 4 years ago. They would have used it, blown up the Middle East, and they would have then come after us.

And if these gorgeous B-2 bombers—give me that bomber, Andrew.

[*Chairman Ferguson handed the President a model of a B-2 stealth bomber aircraft.*]

Let me just hug that little sucker. [*Laughter*] Give me that bomber over there. Thank you. He knew immediately which one. This looks small, but in person, it's very big. [*Laughter*] Because it's the only plane capable of carrying a 200,000-pound bomb.

So I don't know how they do it, because it's very sleek and nice, but it carries a lot of weapons and there's a lot of bombs.

But had I not sent this incredible machine—times numerous others—to hit Iran at midnight with no Moon, dead dark—every single bomb was dropped right down the chute that it was supposed to hit. How they do it, who knows? Nobody else can figure. No other country can do it. No other country has our military or even close, and I think we've probably proven that with Venezuela and now with—because we have done a number on Iran.

But have I—if I didn't do that, if I didn't decimate—I call it their "nuclear dust"—they would have had a nuclear weapon within 1 month after that bombing took place, and they would have used it on first Israel and then the Middle East.

And you know that because all of those missiles that were launched against their neighbors were set long ago, long before they knew they would be using them this quickly. Had we not done this, you would have had a nuclear war that would have evolved into World War III. And more important, this is a war that—there would have been nothing left. So we've done a great thing.

The people that say it's okay for a very sick ideology, a very sick country in terms of its leadership—very good people. Great people. But the people that say that, I think they're actually—I—they're either evil or they're stupid.

So, if you believe that Iran should not have a nuclear weapon, they should not have it, then you have to absolutely love what I've done because, in 2 weeks, we have decimated them. They have no navy. They have no air force. They have no anti-aircraft weapons. They have no leadership. The leadership is gone.

But then they set up a new leadership to go and name a new leader, and that leadership is gone. And now they think maybe the son is gone. They're all gone.

My biggest problem is, I have no idea who we're talking to because nobody ever heard of any of these people. They're all dead.

But we did a job for the world, not a job for us. For the whole world. We took the worst country in 50 years, and maybe longer, from the ideological standpoint—a country that wanted to blow up the world, a country that is sick. Sick. And it has a religious fervor, and when you add religion—you know, people don't realize more people died in religious wars than every other war put together, and that's what you would have had here. And it was a terrible thing.

I'm very proud of what we did.

And I think J.D. understands better than most: If you give Iran a nuclear weapon, at least a very substantial part of the world would be blown up, and it will be used almost immediately.

Yes.

Q. Thank—thank you, Mr. President.

The President. You don't mind if I keep this here, do you? Isn't that a beautiful thing?

[The President referred to the model B-2 stealth bomber on the Resolute Desk.]

You know, I used to look at it, and I said, "It's a piece of art, but how can it be effective?" It's so stealth.

Think of it, Peter [Peter Doocy, Fox News]: One in the morning, it flies in, and they say, "Sir, they're in Iranian airspace." And I say, "Ooh." And I'm watching it from the Situation Room with a couple of other very smart people, including some good generals—real generals, not television generals. And all of a sudden, you see that dive. They start diving, and "Sir, they're"—and you see them—30,000, 20,000. "Boy," I said, "that was a lot." They went down fast to aim it.

And they know they're coming, and they're smart, and they never saw them. And they're firing a little bit, but they don't know what they're firing at because they can't see a thing. And then you hear the—the biggest explosions that anybody has ever heard. Those are the biggest bombs. Outside of nuclear, those are the biggest bombs. And you say: "What technology we have. What a great country. What"—I built it—largely, I built it during my first term. I built it. I didn't know I'd have to use it this much in my second term, but we had an incompetent President.

We had an incompetent administration. And if that group of people in any form—whether it's Kamala, him, it doesn't matter—would have had another 4 years, we would've had no country left.

Yes, please.

U.S. Military Operations in Iran/Oil Supply and Refining/North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. You say you're doing a job for the rest of the world. In your conversations with your counterparts, are they thanking you? What are the conversations like when you talk about this military conflict that's taking place in Iran?

The President. Well, they should be thanking me because many of them get 90 percent. China, as an example, should be thanking us, but I don't expect a thank you. But they should be thanking us.

Japan gets 95 percent. China, 91 percent. Many of the countries—South Korea gets a tremendous percentage of their oil and their—therefore their energy from the straits and—or, as they call it, the Strait. And they should be not only thanking us; they should be helping us.

What does surprise me is that they're not eager to help. There are a couple. You—we'll be announcing some names. There are some that really were right up front. I would announce the name now, other than I don't—you know, maybe they'd prefer it not be announced for whatever reason.

I will say this: It's a lot easier to get people today than it was 2 weeks ago. Two weeks ago, before we destroyed their—before we obliterated their country, before we took out—because they're down to about 8 percent of their missiles. They're down to a small portion of their drones. And we've demolished many of their factories where they make the missiles and the drones, and the rest are all following.

Our military has been amazing. We hit Kharg Island, took out every single thing on Kharg Island except one thing: We left the pipes, because if we take out the pipes, it takes a long time to build them. And at some point, something is going to happen that's positive with respect to those pipes.

But there are some countries that greatly disappointed me. And, you know, I'm the one that got them to pay from 2 percent to 5 percent of GDP—NATO. And I get along great with those countries in NATO.

But I always said, you know, the problem with NATO is, we'll always be there for them, but they'll never be there for us.

And when I hear the U.K.—which was sort of considered the Rolls-Royce of allies, right? Wouldn't you say?

Vice President Vance. Yes, sir.

The President. They were the oldest, and they were going to be there. And I say, "It would be really helpful if you'd send over a couple of ships, and if you have some—minesweepers"—which they do—"it'd be very helpful."

And the Prime Minister—he's a nice man; I think he's a very nice guy—he says, "Well, I'd like to ask my team." I said: "You don't have to worry about a team. You don't have a team. You're the Prime Minister. You can make a decision." "Well, I have to speak to my people." I said, "You don't have to speak to anybody."

So it was very disappointing. And then, after we obliterated them, destroyed their military, the whole thing, and it became a much safer zone, he said, "We're going to send over two aircraft carriers." I said: "I don't want them anymore. I don't want them after we win. I want them before we start. I don't need your aircraft carriers after we've already won."

So, you know, those things are very disappointing. And you have to remember: We have 45,000 troops in Japan. We have 45,000 troops in South Korea. We have 45,000, 50,000 troops in Germany. We defend all these countries. And then, "Do you have any minesweepers?" And they say, "Well, would it be possible for us not to get involved?"

I've been saying it for a long time. This is the greatest thing to come out of this. We spend trillions and trillions of dollars on NATO to defend other countries. And I always said, "But if it ever comes time to defend us, they're not going to be there." Many of them would not be there. And we're going to have to start thinking more wisely in this country.

Some have been very good. One or two have been great. I'll tell you who the great ones are at the right time.

Q. What are the——

The President. But there have been some that were right up there, Peter. They were right up there. They wanted to do it so much.

Go ahead, Peter.

U.S. Military Operations in Iran/Nuclear Weapons Development

Q. Thank you. You were talking about Iran a couple times today and what they did after Epic Fury began. You said: "They hit Qatar, Saudi Arabia, U.A.E., Bahrain, Kuwait. Nobody expected that. We were shocked." Are you surprised that nobody briefed you ahead of time that that might be their retaliation?

The President. Nobody. Nobody. No. No, no. No, the greatest experts—nobody thought they were going to hit. They were—I wouldn't say friendly countries. They were, like, neutral. They were—they lived with them for years.

Peter, they were going to take over the Middle East. They were going to knock out Israel with their nuclear weapon. But after we knocked out their nuclear potential, their nuclear potential weapon, they started building missiles—thousands and thousands of missiles. And they were going to do it with missiles while they developed—these are sick people—while they developed nuclear. Somehow, they were going to start at a different site because that site was—you saw the site. The mountain. They were going to go into a certain area, which we know exactly where it is, and they were going to do that.

And it's incredible what we've done. I tell you, the job we've done. Do you know if I didn't terminate Barack Hussein Obama's Iran nuclear deal, you would right now—well, Israel would be gone, it would be incinerated, and probably the Middle East likewise.

And, remember, they have all of those missiles. And I heard they were sending missiles to U.A.E. I said, "That's strange." You know, U.A.E. is, like, the banker for Iran. They're the—like, the banker.

Qatar—they're neighbors; they got along okay. Saudi Arabia. All of a sudden, Kuwait—Kuwait is getting hit. Bahrain is getting—all these countries are getting hit. There was no expert that would say that was going to happen. It's not a question of like, "Gee, should you have known?" And if we did known, big deal. I mean, we have to do what we have to do.

But we hit them so hard like nobody has ever been hit. We hit them very hard. And we've extinguished most of their missiles. We've extinguished most of their drones. We've extinguished most of the places where the missiles and the drones are built. We've fully extinguished two layers of leadership and, probably, a third, if you believe some stories.

So we only have one thing. They have a little choke point, and they've used it very well for years. But it doesn't work.

But I think this: If some of these countries that we've been good to for years—and maybe more important than that, some of these countries, they get 90 percent and 95 percent of their energy from Hormuz, the strait. Hormuz. A famous, wonderful, beautiful place. But you wouldn't want to be necessarily sailing a boat there right now. [*Laughter*]

Vice President Vance. I would not.

The President. Okay. You know why? Not because of them. Because of us. Because we've taken out their entire navy. We've taken out every one of their drone—they call it a drone layer, a minelayer.

There's specific boats that are meant to put mines down. How would you like to have a nation that has 22 boats where their sole function—they're very different-looking boats. You wouldn't want one for your family. They're not pretty. Their sole function is to lift a mine into the water and drop it a certain number of feet down. But they had 22 of them. We've taken out all of them. But you can probably—you can probably drop them off other boats. So—we don't even know—by the way, we don't know that any mines have even been dropped. But the thought that they would scares people that have billion-dollar ships.

Yes. Please.

Q. Thank you, President Trump.

The President. Thank you.

Iran/Political Leadership

Q. I'd like to ask the Vice President about his plans to go after possible fraud in California and New York. We know, of course, about Minnesota.

And, President Trump, first I want to ask you: You said earlier today that the new Supreme Leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, you don't know if he's dead or alive. A couple interesting reports about him today. There's one report that he just narrowly escaped death in the first air strikes by stepping out into his garden. There's another report that he may actually be gay, despite leading a theocracy that hates gay people. How do you determine what's true? And do you have an assessment of those?

The President. Well, so far, nobody knows. If you look at his father, he used to give talks a lot. You know, talking about death to America. He'd say "death to America" all the time.

When they say death to America, you should believe them because that's what they would've—if they had a nuclear weapon, they would've used it. But they never had the chance. I never gave them the chance to use it.

And other Presidents should have done—I spoke to one of the former Presidents, who I actually like. Actually, speak to some. I do like some people. Would be shocking. And he said, "I wish I did what you did." Could have done it. Other Presidents—somebody should have done it. Forty-seven years this went on.

They call Iran the bully of the Middle East. And you could have never had the Abraham Accords. You could never have had peace in the Middle East. Now you're going to have peace. You could never do it with the dark cloud of—of a nuclear Iran.

But Iran is a shell of itself. It's no longer a bully. It's the one that gets bullied. It's a bully that got beat up. We beat the crap out of them. And they deserve that.

Do you know, when you see a soldier walking down the street without his arms or being helped down the street because he's got no legs or his face is blown to smithereens with no legs and no arms and—those two—no legs, no arms, and a face that got racked, that was done by roadside bombs. That's the favorite weapon of Soleimani, who I killed in my first administration. General Soleimani. Had I not killed him—that was the beginning of their downfall, because had he not gone, it's possible that we would not be this far advanced in destroying Iran, because he was a really good general. He was a vicious, horrible man, but he was a brilliant general.

And he was looking to knock out five of our military bases at one time. And the man that killed—that died with him was the same—his counterpart in Iraq, and they were working together. And they got hit real hard. And if that didn't happen, we would have had a problem.

But maybe more importantly than that, they were—he was really the mastermind behind it. And they never found somebody to replace him in terms of the genius. I knocked him out. And that was a big step, knocking him out.

But if we didn't get rid of the Obama deal, terminated—I terminated it against the wishes of my then-Secretary of State. He was no Marco. Against the wishes of a lot of people at the time. You remember that, Peter? A lot of people.

Had I not terminated—remember that, Stephen? You remember.

Deputy Chief of Staff Miller. Oh, yes.

The President. They were all, "This is not"—that deal was a disaster. That was a road to a nuclear weapon. They would have had it 3 years ago, and it would have been—it would've been used, I would say, 2 to 3 years ago, and it would have been used in the Middle East.

And by the way, after they were finished that, they were coming over here. They never got a chance to do it.

U.S. Military Operations in Iran

Q. Mr. President, I just want to ask you about something very interesting that you've said twice today: that you talked to another former President——

The President. Yes, I did.

Q. ——about the Iran strikes.

The President. I did.

Q. Was it George W. Bush?

The President. No.

Q. Was it Bill Clinton?

The President. I don't want to say. [*Laughter*] I don't want to say it because——

Q. Barack Obama?

The President. ——a member of a party—a member of a party——

Q. Joe Biden?

The President. —they have Trump derangement syndrome, all, but it's somebody that happens to like me, and I like that person, who's a smart person. But that person said, "I wish I did it." Okay? But I don't want to get into who.

Q. I think I know. Okay.

The President. I don't want to get him into trouble. Maybe——

Q. I have——

The President. Hey——

Q. I have a guess.

The President. You know what? Yes, I think you probably know. [*Laughter*]

You know, it's interesting—and maybe he'd be proud. And I could even ask him that. "Would you like me to reveal your name to Peter at Fox?" High quality—well, at least you have high ratings. Your ratings are through the roof, Peter. Congratulations——

Q. They are. Yes. Thank you for noticing.

The President. Congratulations.

Iran/Nuclear Weapons Development

Q. I—can I ask you another question about the war?

The President. Yes.

Q. If Iran, as you say, totally obliterated—got the missiles, got the first two rounds of leadership, air force gone, navy gone—can we wrap this war up this week?

The President. Yes. Sure. Could.

Q. Will we?

The President. I don't think so. But it will be soon. It won't be long. And we're going to have a much safer world when it's wrapped up. It will be wrapped up soon. We're going to have a much safer world.

I had an obligation to do this. I didn't want to—I called it an excursion. I didn't want to make this journey now.

Look, we had the highest stock market in history. We had low gas prices. Everything was good. And I know exactly. I know what—you know, you're going to do it, and people are going to raise the price of oil, and that's going to—but—I know that.

But that's a very small thing compared to allowing them to have—you want to see a stock market go down? Start letting them hit you with nukes. Okay? I think—I said it this morning: I think it's a very small price to pay.

And frankly, I thought it was going to go down much more, if you want know the truth. I assumed that it was going to go down much more, only because people don't understand, to a large—it's a great—it's a big chess game at a very high level. It's a very high level of chess—the highest. And I'm dealing with very smart players. These are smart people.

They don't get there—you know, when you deal with some of these people, you're dealing with high-level intellect, high—very high-IQ people. These are not Jasmine Crockett and her group. These are smart people. These are really smart people and violent people and vicious people—and some very nice people. And some are very nice, but violent. They turn violent.

Q. And is——

The President. But—you know what? If I didn't do—if I didn't do what I did, we would've been hit. Number one, very important, was the termination of Obama's horrible deal. And number two, this beautiful plane hitting them 8 months ago, whenever it was, and taking out their—nuclear capacity. That totally threw them for a loop.

If they had that bomb at either time, 5 years ago or seven months ago—if they had that bomb, that bomb would've been used almost immediately.

Election Reform/Democratic Party/U.S. Supreme Court Decision on Tariffs/Republican Party

Q. Mr. President, two questions on domestic policy, bringing it close to home. First of all, the SAVE America Act. What are you expecting this week when this vote takes place in the U.S. Senate? Will the Vice President's vote be necessary?

The President. I think it's imperative that it gets done. I'm not sure it is. You know, the Democrats have horrible policy. It's just incredible. But they stick together. It's the one thing they do. Their Supreme Court members stick together. Those appointed by a Democrat stick together.

If Barack Hussein Obama appoints a member of the Supreme Court, that member never goes against him. And they're proud about it. They say: "I don't give a damn if it's good or bad. That man appointed me, and I'm never going to let him down." I don't say that's right, wrong. I just say they stick together.

Republicans go the opposite way. "If Donald Trump appointed me, I'm going to show the world that I can be totally just, and I can be independent of Donald Trump. He's not controlling me." And I don't want to control them. I just want to have smart decisions.

They gave us a decision on tariffs the other day that won't change tariffs. I can do it a different way. Always knew I could do it a different way. This was a little quicker, a little easier, a little better. But they gave it a decision that could cost this country \$500 billion to pay people back, because now I have to start the tariffs all over again. Very simple.

And what happens with the money I've already collected? Why didn't they say, "Starting from now, go the other way"? Five hundred billion dollars, perhaps. It's so sad.

But one thing about the Democrats: They stick together like glue. They impeached me twice for absolutely no reason, unanimously.

Fortunately, the Republicans stuck together, and it was something. It was pretty wild.

But the Democrats have horrible policy: Transgender for everybody, open borders, men playing in women's sports.

But the one thing they do have is, they stick together no matter how bad the policy. It's embarrassing to watch them try to defend it. And, in a way, I say, as a Republican, I would—in a way, I say, "Thank goodness they have bad policy," because you'd never beat them.

We have something in there now, the SAVE America Act—voter ID with a picture. Right? That's a 99-percent issue, even among Democrats. You know, Democrats poll at 89 percent on that. And then they have proof of citizenship. And then they have no mail-in ballots. No mail-in ballots. We have no mail-in—you go to California; they send out, like, 38 million ballots. Some Democrats get seven, eight ballots. Republicans are a lot of times calling in: "Where's my ballot? Where's my ballot?" They're lucky to get one.

Jimmy Carter, probably the greatest thing he ever did—I thought he was a nice man. Not a great President, to put it mildly. How did his attack work out in Iran? Not too good. I think ours is slightly better, wouldn't you say?

But Jimmy Carter, the one thing he did after he left, with Scoop Jackson and some others, they formed a very elite council, a committee that came out and said very strongly, "No mail-in ballots." Because if you have—we're the only country in the world that has mail-in ballots like we do. The only country in the whole world. People have tried it. France tried it, and they went away. They're now doing paper ballots, watermark paper, which—very hard to cheat.

So, when you look at what happens with this country, we really have to fix it. That'll be very popular.

The other thing we put in there, just as "best of"—I call it "the best of Trump." We have the three things I just said, right? But then I added on no men playing in women's sports, and I added in no transgender surgery, the mutilation of our children. We have no mutilation of our children, no transgender. I think they're—they say, "That's an 80-percent issue." I think they're 99-percent issues. But whether they're 80 percent or 99—the problem is, we have a couple of Republicans—they're not—they shouldn't be allowed—they're—they're horrible people, and they're willing to vote against anything. And we have—all the Democrats will vote against it.

So I think it hurts the Democrats to vote against it because I'm going to instruct all the Republicans to say that so-and-so that they're running against voted against the saving of our children from transgender mutilation. Right? That's pretty unpopular. They want men in women's sports. That's pretty unpopular. They want voter ID, but the Democrats don't. Everybody wants voter ID. Everybody wants proof of citizenship. And most people don't want mail-in voting because they know it's a fraud. Touches too many hands. I mean, the postman gets it, this one gets it, that one.

So these are all issues that are in the 90s to 100. I would say some are virtually 100 percent. And the interesting thing is that that way, not only with Republicans—I'm not talking about leadership. I'm talking about—they're that way also, most importantly, with the people. The people of our country want voter ID. The people of our country want proof of citizenship. And that includes 88 percent, 89 percent of Democrats.

And I think the Republicans—Eric Schmitt, Rick Scott, Tim Scott—I speak to so many of them—they all want it. I hope John Thune can get it across the line. He's trying. I mean, I—he told me this morning—I spoke to him. He's trying. I think it will be a very—a very bad thing for our country if they don't.

We're just asking for basic things. Think of it. You can't have voter ID. Do you know, in California, if you ask a person to show their identification, they have the right to put you in jail? If you're an official and you say, "May I please see your identification," you're subject to going to jail.

That's how crazy it's gotten, with a low-IQ person, you know, because Gavin Newsom has admitted that he is a—that he has learning disabilities.

Honestly, I'm all for people with learning disabilities, but not for my President. I don't want—I think a President should not have learning disabilities. Okay? And I know it's highly controversial to say such a horrible thing—the President of the United States. Gavin Newsom admitted that he has learning disabilities, dyslexia. Everything about him is dumb. But then he looked at the audience and said, "But I'm smarter than you," or something like that that was pretty stupid.

So, now, on top of everything else, I call him a racist because it happened to be a Black audience.

I will tell you this: I think it was the worst interview I've ever seen of any human being in my life. *[Laughter]* Okay?

Anybody else have any questions?

U.S. Military Operations in Iran/Oil Supply and Refining

Q. Back on Iran, will it be necessary to use even a limited ground force to secure whatever nuclear material remains in Iran as part of that threat?

The President. Yes.

Q. And secondly, have you made a decision——

The President. You mean to go in and get it?

Q. Yes, sir.

The President. Why would I tell you a thing like that?

Q. And secondly——

The President. You know, I can't stand reporters. "Sir, will you attack Kharg Island? Will you occupy Kharg?" They ask me these questions. And I don't want to be mean, but they're stupid questions. If any—if any President answered those questions, they shouldn't be President.

Q. And secondly, sir, do you still plan to travel to Beijing at the end of this month?

The President. I don't know. We're working on that right now. I—well, we're speaking to China. I'd love to, but because of the war, I want to be here. I have to be here, I feel. And so we've requested that we delay it a month or so.

And I'm looking forward to meeting with him. We have a very good relationship. But because of the war—there's no tricks to it either. It's just—it's not like, "Oh, gee, I'm waiting." It's very simple: We've got a war going on. I think it's important that I be here, yes. So it could be that we delay it a little bit. Not—much.

Q. Mr. President——

The President. Peter.

Cuba

Q. When you say Cuba is next——

The President. Cuba.

Q. ——is Cuba—whatever you do with the military there; it seems like something—will that look more like Iran or Venezuela?

The President. Can't tell you that. I can tell you that they're talking to us. It's a failed nation. They have no money. They have no oil. They have no nothing. They have nice land. They have nice landscape, you know? It's a beautiful island. I think they have great people. You know, I know so many people from Cuba that were treated terribly, and they're over here, and they became rich. They're very entrepreneurial people, very smart. And there are a lot from Florida, especially. There's so many people.

A friend of mine started off with nothing. He's now the largest owner of gas stations in the country and stuff. I mean, Cuban.

I—also know—I—was just with a fantastic person who's Cuban and made a fortune in sugar. You know Fanjul family, right? And this family wants to go back to Cuba to visit it. They want to—they haven't been back in, like, 50 years or something. They come from—largely come from Cuba. And we'll see what happens.

They were asking me about that. They want to go back—not only Fanjul. A lot of Cubans have said, oh, boy, would they love to go back.

I think Cuba—I don't know, it's—in its own way, if—you know, tourism and everything else, it's a beautiful island. Great weather. They're not in a hurricane zone, which is nice for a change, you know? They won't be asking us for money for hurricanes every week.

But I think Cuba is seeing the end. You know, all my life I've been hearing about the United States and Cuba. You know, when will the United States do it? I do believe I'll be the honor of—having the honor of taking Cuba. That'd be a good honor. That's a big honor.

Q. Taking Cuba?

The President. Taking Cuba, in some form, yes. Taking Cuba. I mean, whether I free it, take it. I think I could do anything I want with it, you want to know the truth. They're a very weakened nation right now. They were for a long time. Very violent—very violent leaders. Castro was a very violent leader. His brother is a very violent leader. Extremely violent. That's how they governed. They governed with violence. But a lot of people would like to go back.

Okay. One more question.

Fraud Enforcement

Q. A quick question on fraud for Vice President Vance.

Mr. Vice President, you announced a couple of weeks ago in the EEOB that the administration would be halting Medicaid payments to Minnesota until the State decided to take pervasive steps to root out fraud. Do you have an update to the—to that specific situation? And do you think that that could be a model moving forward for the task force for States that won't cooperate?

Vice President Vance. So, I don't have an update there. Dr. Oz is looking to it, trying to work with the authorities in Minnesota to try to figure that situation out.

But yes, I mean, I think there are two obvious tools that we have to stop the fraud that's happening against the American people.

One is that when we see evidence of fraud, we stop the payments. Pretty simple, right? We know that the American people are being defrauded. Let's try to stop the payments and ensure that whoever is making these payments is actually complying with some basic due diligence and making sure the payments are going to the right place.

I think the second tool, of course, that we have, as the President mentioned, is we have law enforcement options. We know that some of this fraud is just bad. Some of it's criminal. We know that people are intentionally trying to defraud the American people. It's not just in Minnesota. It's all across the country.

The President. Ninety-nine percent is criminal.

Vice President Vance. Yes, sir.

So we—this is one of the reasons why DOJ is such an important part of this, is because we have to make sure that where we see criminal conduct, we actually prosecute it. And the President has talked about this a lot in the past—I don't need to repeat it—but it's worth noting that so many

times, when we find people engaged in really, really bad conduct, you know, the local judge or the local grand jury tries to stop it.

One of the cool things about what we're doing is we're trying to take some innovative steps to ensure that when we find criminal fraud, we can actually prosecute it all the way to the end.

Q. Mr. President? Mr. President——

The President. She wanted one question. She's over here, and you guys are over there.

Where's your main camera? Is it this one? Which one is the main camera? Okay, good. Nice center. Good. I thought it was that one.

Go ahead.

Department of Homeland Security Appropriations/Democratic Party

Q. Thanks, Mr. President. Mary Margaret [Mary Margaret Olohan] with Daily Wire, not CNN. We just wanted to ask about DHS. Still not funded, but we reported earlier today that 80 percent of the primary Task Force that focuses on investigating terrorism is working without pay. So should that impact——

The President. Terrible.

Q. ——Democrats' decision to fund DHS?

The President. The Democrats aren't paying. The Democrats—we have a deal. They just said: "We're not going to pay. We're not going to do anything." And it's terrible. The Democrats are terrible.

You know, it'd be nice to get along, but for years this has been going on, not just with me. For years, it's been going on. Different ideology, but also different tactics.

Here we are. We're fighting big battles with a very tough enemy and winning nicely, and we're not allowed to have security in our country. It's crazy. The Democrats don't want to pay.

These are bad people. These are not people that love our country, I can tell you that. They're very sick people.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

Vice President Vance. Thank you, sir.

The President. Thanks. Good job, fellas.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:06 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Timothy J. Walz of Minnesota; Minnesota State Attorney General Keith M. Ellison; independent journalist Nicholas Shirley; former Vice President Kamala D. Harris; Gov. Jay R. "J.B." Pritzker of Illinois; Manhattan District Attorney Alvin L. Bragg, Jr., of New York; Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei of Iran, son of former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Hoseini-Khamenei of Iran, who was killed in an Israeli airstrike in Tehran, Iran, on February 2; Prime Minister Keir Starmer of the United Kingdom; former Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson; Secretary of State A. Rubio; Rep. Jasmine F. Crockett; Sens. Eric S. Schmitt, Richard L. Scott, and Timothy E. Scott; Senate Majority Leader John R. Thune; Gov. Gavin C. Newsom of California; President Xi Jinping of China; José "Pepe" Fanjul, vice chairman, chief operating officer, and president, Fanjul Corp. and Florida Crystals Corp.; and former President Raul Castro Ruz of Cuba. He also referred to S. 1383. Vice President Vance referred to Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Administrator Mehmet Oz.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Task Force To Eliminate Fraud, establishment, signing the Executive order; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Bragg, Alvin L., Jr.; Castro Ruz, Raul; Crockett, Jasmine F.; Ellison, Keith M.; Fanul, José "Pepe"; Ferguson, Andrew M.; Harris, Kamala D.; James, Letitia; Khamanei, Mojtaba; Miller, Stephen; Newsom, Gavin C.; Obama, Barack; Omar, Ilhan A.; Pritzker, Jay R. "J.B."; Rubio, Marco A.; Scharf, William O.; Schmitt, Eric S.; Scott, Richard L.; Scott, Timothy E.; Shirley, Nicholas; Starmer, Keir; Thune, John R.; Tillerson, Rex M.; Vance, James D. "J.D."; Walz, Timothy J.; Xi Jinping.

Subjects: California, Governor; China, President; Cuba, political and economic stability; Department of Homeland Security, appropriations legislation; Election security and integrity, strengthening efforts; Federal Trade Commission; Fraud enforcement, strengthening efforts; Illegal immigration; Illinois, Governor; Iran, commercial transit through Strait of Hormuz; Iran, nuclear weapons development; Iran, political unrest and violence; Iran, Supreme Leader; Iran, U.S. airstrikes on nuclear facilities; Iran, U.S. military operations; Minnesota, Governor; Minnesota, Somali immigrants; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Prescription drug costs, reduction efforts; Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act; Secretary of State; Senate majority leader; Tariffs; Task Force To Eliminate Fraud; United Kingdom, defense relationship with U.S.; United Kingdom, Prime Minister; Vice President; White House Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy; White House Staff Secretary.

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