

to achieve those dreams renews the spirit of the country, gives us a uniqueness and the capacity to say, we're all Americans.

So here are the elements for a comprehensive immigration bill—and I believe strongly this: That if we don't address all the elements together, none of it is going to be solved at all. The reason I called for a comprehensive bill is because I understand that in order for these good folks to do their job, we've got to link all five aspects together. We've got to be realistic about what it takes to enforce the border. So I look forward to working with Congress on this important issue.

I'll make you this pledge: My tone in this debate is going to be respectful. The language I use in this debate is going to remember the values and ideals of America. The language I use in this debate is to remember we're from different backgrounds, different religions, different cultures, but ultimately we're united under the great ideals of the United States of America. And I expect everybody else in this debate to carry that same tone as well.

And so I want to thank you for giving me a chance to share my thoughts with you. I feel passionately about this issue. I feel like one reason the people send us to Washington, DC, is to solve difficult problems. That's what you send us to do. You didn't send us up there to kind of shove them aside and hope that they go away. This one is not going away. This one needs to be solved right now.

And I also came to thank those who are getting ready to serve the Border Patrol for serving this great country of ours.

You're an important part of securing America, and I want to thank you for your dedication to our country.

I want to congratulate the new Commissioner for U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Ralph Basham. Ralph has a long and distinguished record of service in Federal law enforcement. He joined the Secret Service during the Presidency of Richard Nixon. Some of you all weren't even born during that period of time. [Laughter] He served as Special Agent in Charge of the Secret Service Offices in Cleveland and in Washington. He rose all the way to the position of Secret Service Director in 2003. I know he made it to that position because I put him there, and I put him there for a reason. He knows what he's doing. He can get the job done.

Ralph served as Chief of Staff for the Transportation Security Administration and Director of Federal Law Enforcement Training Center. That's where he came to know the Border Patrol Agency—Academy. He's a decent man. I trust him deeply, and he's going to be a superb leader for Customs and Border Protection.

And now it's my honor to witness his swearing-in.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 a.m. at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center. In his remarks, he referred to Charlie Whitmire, acting chief, Border Patrol Academy; Mayor Manuel Madrid of Artesia, NM; Gov. Rick Perry of Texas; Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger of California; and Gov. Janet A. Napolitano of Arizona.

Remarks at the Laredo Border Patrol Sector Headquarters and an Exchange With Reporters in Laredo, Texas

June 6, 2006

The President. Well, it's good to be in my home State with my home Governor.

Governor Perry understands, like I understand, the need to enforce this border. He

also understands what I understand—that in order to do so, we’ve got to have a comprehensive plan.

I started my day earlier in New Mexico, where I saw the training facility that is going to put out enough Border Patrol to be able to tell the American people, we will have doubled the Border Patrol since 2001. And that’s a really important part of our strategy, is to train more Border Patrol agents to help those that are working hard already to do their job. But we need to make the border technologically advanced as well.

We just saw some of the remote cameras that are in place that will help the Border Patrol be able to do its job better. But more than that, we’ve got to have a comprehensive approach. And that includes a temporary-worker plan that says, “You can come and do a job Americans aren’t doing if you pass a criminal background check, for a period of time. And then once you finish that time, you go home.”

We also have got to make sure that we deal with the problem of people who have been here for a long period of time. Some people say, “Throw them out of the country.” That doesn’t make any sense. You just can’t throw them out of the country. Others say, “Give them amnesty.” And that doesn’t make any sense. And the reason why giving them automatic citizenship doesn’t make any sense, it will encourage others to come. So what we ought to do is say to somebody who’s been here for a while, if you pass a background check, criminal background check, you’ve shown that you’ve worked here for a while, you paid a penalty—that you can apply for citizenship, but you get at the back of the line, the citizenship line, not at the front.

A comprehensive plan is necessary to help these good folks do their job. And I’m going to keep calling on Congress to think about a comprehensive plan. We agree on a lot of stuff. A lot of the elements of this plan have got common agreement. And now it’s time for folks to set

aside politics and get the job done on behalf of the American people.

Nedra [Nedra Pickler, Associated Press], you got a question?

Iran

Q. Yes, sir. Can you respond to Iran’s initial reaction to the incentives package today?

The President. Why don’t you tell me what it was?

Q. Well, the top negotiator said——

The President. As you know, I’ve been in Artesia.

Q. Right. I was. But the top negotiator said that the package contained positive steps, but there were some ambiguities, but the talks were constructive.

The President. I think that’s positive. I want to solve this issue with Iran diplomatically. And I think that—I appreciate Javier Solana carrying a message to the Iranians that America, Russia, China, Britain, France, and Germany—the main group of negotiators—wants this problem to be solved. And so we will see if the Iranians take our offer seriously.

The choice is theirs to make. I have said, the United States will come and sit down at the table with them so long as they’re willing to suspend their enrichment in a verifiable way. Sounds like a positive response to me.

Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

Somalia

Q. Sir. In Somalia, sir, it appears to have fallen to Islamic militants. Is there a need for international peacekeepers there, or what do you think has happened there?

The President. Well, I talked to Secretary of State Rice about this subject yesterday. And obviously, when there’s instability anywhere in the world, we’re concerned. There is instability in Somalia. The first concern, of course, would be to make sure that Somalia does not become an Al Qaida safe haven; that it doesn’t become a place from which terrorists can plot and plan. And so

we're watching very carefully the developments there, and we will strategize more when I get back to Washington as how to best respond to the latest incident there in Somalia.

Yes.

Immigration Reform

Q. President Bush—

The President. Where are you from, here?

Q. Laredo Morning Times.

The President. It's nice to be back here. Thank you.

Q. Very nice to meet you too.

The President. Rick and I were talking about the first time I came here after I had won Governor—he had already been in office for a while—was the Washington day parade, and I remember it fondly. It's good to be back in Laredo.

Q. It's good to have you here, sir. Are you all—are you hoping to—a lot of people say that the answer for immigration is to—well, one group is saying that the quotas need to be raised for the amount of legal documented workers that can come in. Is that part of your proposal?

The President. Well, I think the framework I've outlined recognizes that Congress has got the right to regulate what they call green cards. And if Congress thinks that the line for citizens from Mexico is too long, they can increase the number of green cards. If they think it's—or they can shorten—increase the number of green cards. If they think it's too short, they can eliminate the number of green cards. In other words, they can control the flow of people from a particular part of the country.

What I want is people who have been here for a while to be able to have the choice—if they pay a fine, if they learn the English language, if they've proven they worked—to be able to get in the citizenship—in the potential citizenship line—but at the back of it. See, they don't get to be in the front. The people who have been

here legally are in the front of the line. They get to wait in line. And if Congress wants to shorten the line, they increase the number of green cards.

Q. And I guess for those that haven't been here that long, do you favor deportation of those?

The President. Well, I believe that—as I've said in my remarks—that there ought to be a difference between those folks who have been here for a period of time and—like for those who own a home or have got a family established or have had a job for a long period of time and—and those who have arrived recently. Those people ought to be given a temporary-worker card for a limited period of time. And when the time is up, they need to go home. That's what a temporary worker is—it's not a permanent-worker card; it's a temporary-worker card.

And Congress needs to determine the length—the proper length of time. Right now, one consideration is 3 years with a 3 year renewal. And what that will do is that will help people who are looking for somebody to do a job Americans aren't doing find workers. It'll also mean that somebody doesn't have to sneak across the border. See, we've got Border Patrol agents chasing down people who are trying to sneak across and do work Americans aren't doing. So it seems like it makes sense to me that—“Here, you can come to our country on a temporary basis to do a job, and when the time is up, you get to go home.” That's how you enforce the border. You enforce the border with more Border Patrol agents, better technology, and a rational way to treat people who are coming here to do work Americans aren't doing.

That's one of the reasons I've come down here to Laredo, as well as Artesia, is I want to talk to these Border Patrol agents. And I want to assure them that we're listening to what they need to get their job done. Our job in government is to say to people who are risking their lives and working hard is, “What do you need to get

the job done?” And that’s why I’ve been coming down here, and we’ll keep coming down here. And Congress needs to get a bill done.

Yes, sir.

Congressional Action on Immigration Legislation

Q. Mr. President, you spoke about progress earlier today in Artesia. You said that you feel it’s progress that both the Senate and the House have both taken up the issue of immigration. What concrete progress can you point to, in terms of winning over the conservatives in your party who still stand pretty firmly against the idea of any path to citizenship for immigrants?

The President. Well, one thing is, it’s conceivable you could have been asking me, “How come you can’t get any Chamber in Congress to pass a bill?” And so progress—what I’m telling the American people is, is that from last fall to now, we’ve got two bills out there. That’s progress.

What else is progress is a common understanding. One, we’ve got to enforce the border; two, that people need to be treated with respect; three, that there needs to be assimilation; four, that we need to hold employers who break the law to account; five, there needs to be some way to deal with people who are here to work on a temporary basis; and six, ultimately, we’re going to have to do something about people who’ve been here for a long period of time. In other words, people understand those are the principles that we’ve got to work on.

There’s no question this is a difficult issue for some in Washington, DC. But my job is to continue calling people to account and say, “We’ve got to work together to get a bill done.” And one way to do it is to come right down here on the frontlines of border enforcement and say to the United States Congress, “There are people working hard on behalf of this country, and we owe them a comprehensive

piece of legislation so they can do their job.” And I’m going to keep doing it.

Yes, ma’am. Where are you from?

Q. ABC News.

The President. ABC News? I’d suggest getting a little sunblock—

Q. Sunblock. Yes. [*Laughter*]

The President. Yes. Always looking out for my fellow citizens. [*Laughter*]

Q. Thank you. Last summer, you set a deadline for Congress before their August recess to pass things like the energy bill. Are you going to put such a deadline on an immigration bill—

The President. My attitude is, is that in order for these people to be doing their job, they need a bill as soon as possible. I’m looking forward to getting that conference, seeing the conference get together. You know, people—there are people making statements, and that’s important for people to set out there, say things, and kind of set their markers. The conferences have a way of working things out. And I’m going to be continuing to urge people to work things out in conference.

They haven’t yet sat down as a conference yet, but they will pretty soon. And that will give us a pretty good feel for whether or not attitudes are hardened to the point nothing can get done. I don’t think so. I think the people want something done in America. If you look at the—you know what people are saying. They’re saying, “Let’s get something done in a comprehensive way.” And I believe we can get something done. No question, it’s hard work, but that’s all the more reason to work hard to get it done. I recognize some people in Washington would rather duck the hard issue, but that’s not the way I am, and that’s not the way most people in Congress are. They want to get the job done, so we should keep working on it.

Okay, thank you all, unless you want to stand out here a little longer. [*Laughter*] You’re back again.

Trade With Mexico

Q. Mr. President, I'm sorry, one last question.

The President. That's fine. I'm glad to be working with the local press.

Q. Thank you so much. Some people say that Mexico needs to do a whole lot more to just create more jobs that pay a more decent wage for its people, and that America should help Mexico by investing more or providing more development funds. Is that—what do you think about that, and do you have any kind of proposals for that?

The President. I think the people that say that the long-term solution to immigration is for people to be able to find work in Mexico, they're right. And that's why I've been a strong supporter of NAFTA.

One of the interesting things about the border here that I don't think a lot of Americans are aware, but I know those of us who grew up in Texas are aware of, is that this part of the world used to be really poor. Up and down the Rio Grande Valley, there was a lot of impoverished people. Laredo is a booming town—I mean, it's thriving. It has really changed a lot, and one of the main reasons why is because of trade with Mexico. On the other side of the border, the border States are prosperous States.

And so to answer your question, the first thing is to promote free and fair trade between Mexico and the United States. Trade enhances wealth; it provides opportunities for people. The problem is in Mexico is that the opportunities you can find here on the border don't extend to the south of the country. And so therefore, a lot of the Mexicans that we're finding at the border are people coming up from the south trying to find work so they can put food on the table. And I've talked to President Fox about this very issue, and I know Rick has talked to President Fox about this issue. And that is, what more can we do with

Mexico to encourage economic development south of the northern tier States?

President Fox, the last time I saw him, said that there are 100,000 vacant jobs in northern Mexican States. I think that's really interesting. And I said, "What are we going to do about it?" And the issue is education. The issue is to make sure that people in the interior and the south of the country have got enough education, enough skills so they can fill those 100,000 jobs.

And so to answer your question, economic development works through free and fair trade, as well as helping put an education system in place that makes sense. And that's Mexico's responsibility; that's their job. But we can help, and we work with Mexico all the time. I know Texas has got all kinds of collaborative programs with Mexico to help their education system.

Yes, Steve. You enjoying the heat? [Laughter]

Immigration Reform

Q. It's not so bad.

The President. It's because you've got a fine looking hat on there. [Laughter]

Q. Thanks, sir. The word "amnesty"—the critics seem to be able to just label this an amnesty and get away with it. I mean, are you having trouble fighting back that impression? Is it sinking in to people that this isn't amnesty and it's going—

The President. Look, if you're one of these types of people that basically say, we got to, you know, throw them out, then you just use the word "amnesty," just toss it around. You know, amnesty is something nobody is for in America. I'm not for it. But in order to frighten people, you just say the word "amnesty."

On the other hand, you can't kick people out of this country. You can stop people from coming in, but there have been people here in this part of the world, for example, been here for a decade—honest, hard-working citizens doing jobs Americans aren't doing, providing for their families.

They own their home. And the fundamental question is, how do you treat them with respect and, at the same time, have a system that's fair and orderly and respects our laws?

And so my attitude is on that, if a person wants to apply for a citizenship, they've got to pay a fine first. They have broken the laws of the United States, and they need to pay a fine. Then they've got to prove they've got a clean criminal record, paid their taxes, and worked. And then they can apply for citizenship, but they're at the back of the line. See, there's a line of people waiting to become a citizen, and they need to get at the back of the line, not at the front of the line. And that's how I think we can have an orderly system. That's not amnesty.

Amnesty is, "Okay, everybody who is here, you're a citizen." That's amnesty, and I'm not for that. I think it would be a mistake. And the reason I'm not for—and I recognize some people are for that. The reason I think it's a mistake is that, one, there are people who played by the rules here in America, law abiding citizens who've applied for citizenship, who are in line to become a citizen. They've adhered to all our laws. They're here legally, and they're in line, and they ought to be at the head of the line. And if you say to somebody who has been here illegally, "You're an automatic citizen," then that means they're not the head of the line—

it means somebody jumped in front of them who had broken our laws.

Secondly, if people are granted amnesty—in other words, the Government would say, "You're automatically a citizen"—there's going to be another 8 million people trying to get in this country, because a lot of people want to be citizens of the United States. It's a great honor to be a citizen of this country. It's a great tribute to our country, by the way, that people are willing to come here to work and to live. We're the land of the free; we're the land of the opportunity. And yet we've got to control our border. And so therefore, to say to some group of people, "You're an automatic citizen," would increase the likelihood of a lot of other people trying to come back in here so they can become a citizen automatically. And therefore, I'm against amnesty.

And I understand words in politics and words trying to frighten people. But the comprehensive approach I've outlined, when people think about it, makes a lot of sense, and you can't—all five need to go together in order to be able to do the job of enforcing the border.

I've enjoyed this, and I hope you have. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:23 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Rick Perry of Texas; Secretary General Javier Solana of the Council of the European Union; and President Vicente Fox Quesada of Mexico.

Remarks on Immigration Reform in Omaha, Nebraska June 7, 2006

Thanks for the warm welcome. It's great to be back in Omaha. I'm a little—I just wish the timing were a little better—*[laughter]*—Senator. If I'd only delayed my trip, we'd have been able to watch the College World Series again. *[Laughter]*

But I couldn't delay it, for this reason: This country is debating an important issue. It's an issue about our soul and our character. It's an issue that relates to people that are in our country. It's the immigration issue. And I don't think this issue can wait