



REMARKS

Remarks by President Trump in Cabinet Meeting

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THE PRESIDENT: Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you all for being here and joining the first Cabinet meeting of 2019. It's going to be a very exciting year. I think it's going to be a very good year. Some people think it'll be controversial and tough, and it probably will, but we're going to get a lot done. I think we can work with the Democrats, actually, and get quite a bit done. And we're looking at infrastructure, we're looking at many things that can happen and I think that both sides want.

We just did a very big and very highly touted criminal justice reform bill, and that's a very bipartisan thing. And we finished off the year with that. We had a tremendous year in terms of achievement, whether it's regulation cuts or tax cuts, or anything else you can name. So many things. We did judges, including two Supreme Court judges and many federal bench judges. So we've had quite a time. And we're going to have, I think, six

more years of great success. But I think this coming year is going to be tremendous, actually.

Every day, Border Patrol encounters roughly 2,000 illegal immigrants — I have to talk about this — trying to enter our country. Two thousand a day. And that's a minimum. Every week, 300 Americans are killed by heroin, the vast majority of which comes across through our southern border. Our southern border is like a sieve. It just pours through our southern border. And unless we're going to have physical barriers, it's never going to be able to be stopped. Too much money is being made.

Last month, 20,000 minors were illegally smuggled into the United States. In the last two years, ICE officers arrested 235,000 criminals who were able to come in over the years through the United States. And we're — we have a very tough border. I think you see that even last night, where people charged the border and tried to get through, but they couldn't because we have a wall up. But tear gas was flying, and a lot of things were happening. And I guess, for the most part, you've seen it. It's very sad.

If they knew they had a physical barrier, if they knew they had a wall, if they knew they had something that's going to stop them, they would have never come up in the first place. When you see children getting sick, they get sick on the trail up. Very sick. It's a terrible journey. It's a horrible journey. And you read the things that go on in those caravans. And if they knew they couldn't get through, they wouldn't even start.

Another one is forming in Honduras. And we've very much lowered the payments to Honduras and to a few other countries that are not playing right. Because there's no reason for caravans to be forming. They shouldn't allow it to happen.

The United States needs a physical barrier, needs a wall, to stop illegal immigration and to halt deadly inflow of drugs and crime. You have human traffickers. It's a thing that's horrible. Think of it: human trafficking. They

kidnap people, they steal people, and they sell people. And because of the Internet, one of the bad things that happens with the Internet — one of the many bad things — but because of the Internet, it's the highest it's ever been in history. And this is a world problem. This isn't a United States situation; this is a world problem.

But the southern border is a very, very high — highly used placed by people that do human trafficking. How can it get worse than that?

There's a reason why politicians and wealthy people build walls around their houses and their compounds. President Obama recently built a wall around his compound. There's a reason for it. And I don't blame him.

We're in a shutdown because Democrats refuse to fund the border security. They try and make it like it's just about the wall, and it is about the wall. I said, over the weekend, to a number of people that, you know, the wheel, the wall — there are some things that never get old. It's never going to change. The wall is your number-one point of security. If we had a wall — and we will. And, by the way, for those that don't know — we don't want to talk about it all the time — but we've done tremendous amounts of renovation of existing walls and fences, and brought them back into brand-new condition. We've spent a lot of money on it doing it, and doing it properly.

So we have a lot of brand-new fencing. If you saw last night, they tried to come through a wall area. If the wall existed — if it didn't exist, you would have had hundreds of people just flowing into our country. Some of these are criminals. Some of these will split up families by killing people and hurting people very badly. But if we didn't have a form of barrier up last night, you would have a lot of people — all those people would have been able to come through.

We're in the shutdown because of the fact that the Democrats are looking to 2020. They think they're not going to win the election. I guess a lot of signs

point to the fact that they're not going to win the election. And I hope they're not going to win the election. But they view this as an election point for them. I actually think it's bad politics, but I'm not thinking about the politics. I'm thinking about what's right and what's wrong. And we need a physical barrier. Everything else is bells and whistles. I know more about drones than anybody. I know about every form of safety that you can have. And it's all good, but it's just very minor compared to the power of a wall.

All of the people you see coming up, if they knew we actually had a physical presence there, a physical barrier — even when you have the soldiers, who have been fantastic; we've had our military — but when you have the military, you have Border Patrol, you have ICE, it doesn't — I mean, it's great to have, but you have 2,000 miles. You have anywhere from five- to six-hundred miles where you need the barrier. Some of it we've now completed, as you have seen and as I've told you.

But we need barrier, because you can't put a soldier every hundred yards. If you had a lot of people, you're going to put them every hundred yards — people are going to go right through. There's nothing you can do about it unless you're willing to build a wall. And walls work.

If you look at Israel — I was with Prime Minister Netanyahu, and he threw up his hands; he said, "I don't understand why they fight you on the wall." In Israel, as you know, they built a wall. He said 99.9 percent it works. And it would with us too. It would work almost 100 percent of the time, and we'd have much less of a problem. And we'd save money — so much money — on a monthly basis. Probably it would pay for itself in a month or two. Because we lose pretty close to \$250 billion on illegal immigration. And I would say that it could be on a monthly, or a couple of months, it would pay for the wall, pay for what we're talking about.

The House, as you know, approved \$5.6 billion. And that's a very small price to pay for total security on the southern border. The drugs alone, that

nobody can even calculate it's such a big number — the money you'd save just on drugs and helping families where all of this horrible stuff doesn't come through on the southern border, right there you'd save. And you'd save a lot.

The new Pelosi bill — and, by the way, we're having, I guess they call them, the "Big Eight." So the Big Eight plus me are meeting in a little while — I think it's going to be three o'clock — to discuss the border. We have ICE and we have Border Patrol. They're going to make a plea for the wall. They need the wall. They can't do it without the wall. All they can do is add many, many more men and women.

But the protection isn't good because you're going to go to a certain area where you don't have the wall, and they're going to walk right through. Like the killing that took place a few days ago — the young police officer. Great, young, beautiful person. Great family. Just took a picture with his son and his wife at Christmas, and a few hours later he was shot and killed by somebody that just came across the border. Things like that wouldn't happen, or certainly they'd be happening far, far less.

Now, the Democrats, in the bill, want \$12 billion additional for foreign aid. They want \$12 billion more. It's \$54.4 billion, which is, by itself, a lot. But in foreign aid, they want \$12 billion over the \$54 billion. Think of it: We give \$54 billion — a lot of it because they want to give it. They don't even know who they're giving it to. In many cases, people don't even — don't even know the name of the country. They know nothing about the country. And yet — so they're going to give \$54.4 billion in foreign aid, but they want \$12 billion more than that in foreign aid, but they won't approve \$5.6 billion for a wall that's going to pay for itself almost on a monthly basis. It's just politics, folks. It's purely politics.

So we have a lot of loopholes, whether it's catch-and-release, the world's most ridiculous loophole. You catch somebody and then you release them.

Now, what we're doing is we're catching and retaining. The problem is we have to build vast fields of rooms and places for these people to stay that we're catching. And it's physically not possible, nor is it possible even cost-wise. But we're catching and retaining.

You have the lottery system — the visa lottery system — where we bring people into our country based on a lottery. We want to end all of this nonsense, the visa lottery system. So they pick them out of a jar. We want to pick people to come into our country on the basis of merit and talent so that all of the companies that are moving in — we have large numbers of companies — many, many companies — more than we've seen in many years. The companies that have left our country are coming back because of what's going on. You see our job numbers are great. We need people to come in, but we can't have these loopholes. These loopholes are crazy.

One thing I have to say: DACA. We are all for DACA. The Republicans are for doing something with DACA. But it's been so misreported. We had a — the confines of a deal. And the \$25 billion didn't just cover a wall; it covered a lot of border security. And we have a lot that that's been covered very incorrectly. But it's confusing to a lot of people.

But we were close to having a DACA deal, and then we had a judge rule from the Ninth Circuit — amazing ruling — and he said DACA was okay, even though when President Obama signed it, he essentially said, "Well, probably can't sign this. Probably not legal, but I'm going to sign it anyway." And so everybody thought that it was going to be easily overturned by the judge. And the judge amazingly ruled in favor of that signing, even though President Obama didn't think it was going to hold up as he signed it. He said it. Go back and check. And then you had it upheld in the Ninth Circuit, on appeal. And now it's going to the Supreme Court of the United States.

We had a deal, pretty close to being done, and lot of people say I backed

away from that deal. I didn't back way. The minute the judge overruled the case and they allowed DACA, they didn't talk to us about — and I don't blame them — but they didn't answer the calls. They said, "Well, we're not going to prove that. We won the case. Why should we make a deal with DACA?"

I think it's going to be overturned in the United States Supreme Court, and I think it's going to be overwhelmingly overturned. I mean, nobody thinks that should have happened. We think it was a fluke, and it was a disgraceful situation that a judge ruled a way the judge ruled. But we think it's going to be overturned. It's now going, as you probably heard two weeks ago — it's now going — it will be in the United States Supreme Court.

So if we win that case — and I say this for all to hear — we'll be easily able to make a deal on DACA and the wall as a combination. But until we win that case, they don't want to really talk about DACA, although they should, because there are those that don't want to allow DACA. I happen to think that we can do something with DACA. Mike agrees. Other people agree. Some people don't. So I think they're foolish if they don't want to make a deal with DACA. Because if we get overridden, that means everybody that's been here has to leave the country.

So there are a lot of things going on. We're very proud of what we've done with respect to the wall and the renovation that we've done. It's covered a lot of territory. A tremendous amount of miles. And that continues to go on. But we need the wall for the security of our country. People want to see it. It's about border security. And I think, in the end, we're going to be successful. We are doing so much work right now. You see it going up. It's going up all over. That's the money that we were given.

I want to thank the military because the military has been fantastic. We've been working with Pat Shanahan, who is the Acting Secretary of Defense, who has — he's been such a pleasure to work for — work with. We worked

really hard over the last, actually, four or five weeks. And so much has been done not only in terms of protection, but in terms of helping us with respect to areas that we need help for physical barriers. The military has been really great. The Army Corps of Engineers has been fantastic.

And so, with that, I think what I'll do is I'll ask Pat to say a few words, and then I'm going to ask Matt and Kirstjen to say a couple of words. Maybe I'll start with Pat Shanahan.

ACTING SECRETARY SHANAHAN: Thank you, sir. And Happy New Year, everyone. Maybe just three points to share with all of you.

First is, we've been very, very closely coupled with Kirstjen, Customs and Border Patrol. I was speaking with General O'Shaughnessy, the Commander of NORTHCOM. He sends his best. The team is executing operational training every day. The collaboration has been seamless.

Kirstjen, as you know — and she's off here to our right — the National Guard has been in support, and the active duty. Maybe a shout-out: Manny Padilla, Kirstjen, has done an exceptional job. When I was talking to General O'Shaughnessy, he said Pete Flores and Kevin McAleenan. And we've just had exceptional interaction.

The second is — and you highlighted it — restoration of the fences, building out of additional mileage for the wall. The Army Corps of Engineers is dialed in on doing this cost-effectively, quickly, and with the right amount of urgency as to where we can build additional standup walls quickly and then get after the threat. The threat is real. The risks are real. We need to control our borders.

And maybe the third piece I would share with you is that we're doing additional planning to strengthen the support that we're providing to Kirstjen and her team.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, your people have been fantastic. And you've headed it up, and I have to say they really have done a great job.

And again, we want to finish it. We want to complete it. Because you can't have a partial wall, because people come through the area that's not built. But the areas that are built, nobody is getting through. You can't get through, unless you're a world-class pole-vaulter in the Olympic team. It's very hard to get through. Very few people are able to get through. And you have done really — in particular, you have done a fantastic job.

And while we're on you, as you know, I just back from Iraq. We had a fantastic meeting with the generals and the Syria situation. I mean, I'm the only person in the history of our country that could really decimate ISIS, say we're bringing the troops back home over a period of time. I never said so quickly, but over a period of time. But everybody gives me credit for decimating ISIS.

So we do that, and we say we're going to bring the troops back home, where they belong. I've been campaigning on that for a long time, before I won. A big part of my campaign: I want to bring our troops back from the endless wars. We have endless wars. They've been going on for 19 years in the area. But I'm going to bring them home from Syria.

So I'm the only one that can do that and get bad publicity. They say, "He's bringing them home." Because let me tell you, when I took over Syria, they were supposed to be there for three to four months, Pat, and they ended up being there for five years. So that's a little bit different than you thought. But they were supposed to be there for a short period of time. They've been there for a long time. And we have done a real job.

But we are continuing to fight. We never let anybody down. And there was a lot of misinterpretation, but I think you'll see at the end, that's working out. We're bringing our troops back home. We're doing things that are very exciting, that I really — very exciting, that I can't talk about, that I don't want to talk about. They're very exciting. A lot of great people understood it.

Lindsey Graham understood it. Some others understood it.

But what we're doing is the right thing to do. And in many respects, it's very exciting because I like winning. When I took over Syria, Syria was a mess. It was riddled — I think you could say this better than anybody — it was riddled with ISIS. And now, everybody says it's down to 1 percent of the land, and sometimes, you could even say, less. One percent. That place was a mess. It was terrible.

But we also have to have to other countries fighting ISIS. You know, we're helping by doing this. People say Russia and Iran. We're helping them. Everything we do over there helps them. They don't like seeing us leave because we're knocking out ISIS. Let them fight ISIS too. We're spending all of this money. I want to spend money in our country.

But we've had a tremendous success in Syria. We're slowly bringing people back and bringing them back. We're hitting the hell out of them, the ISIS people. And we are doing something that, frankly, if I would have told you two years, when we first came into office, that we would have had that kind of success, nobody would have believed it. They would have said you're exaggerating; it's not possible.

But we're down to final blows. And those generals were fantastic. When we met with the generals in Iraq, they were really fantastic. They really know their business.

So we have a lot of exciting things to talk about militarily. We've had a lot of victories.

I just got a great letter from Kim Jong Un. And those few people that I've shown this letter to — they've never written letters like that. This letter is a great letter. We've made a lot of progress with North Korea and Kim Jong Un. And Chairman Kim has been — we've had a — we've really established a

very good relationship. A lot of good things are happening.

And I never said speed. Look, it's been this way for 80-plus years. We had our meeting six months ago, in Singapore. We'll probably now have another meeting. He'd like to meet; I'd like to meet. But we've established a very good relationship. We're given no credit for it.

You know, frankly, if this administration didn't take place, if another administration came in instead of this administration — namely Mike and myself, and the group around this table — you'd be at war right now. You'd be having a nice, big, fat war in Asia. And it wouldn't be pleasant. And instead of that, we're getting along fine. I'm not in any rush. I don't have to rush. All I know is there's no rockets; there's no testing.

In fact, I watched, last night, PBS. I haven't seen it in a while, PBS. And I just noticed — you know, I was in the White House all by myself for six, seven days. It was very lonely. (Laughter.) My family was down in Florida. They were all — I said, stay there and enjoy yourself. But I felt I should be here just in case people wanted to come and negotiate the border security.

But I have to say that I was watching PBS, and they really covered it accurately. They said that, in Chairman Kim's speech, he really wants to get together. He wants to denuclearize. And a lot of good things are happening. They covered it very, very nicely. I was surprised, based on everything I've heard about them. I'll have to start watching PBS much more. (Laughter.) But they covered it very accurately. And I actually put a quote out last night about what they said. But that was very accurate.

They really do want to do something. Now, does that mean it's going to be done? Who knows? Who knows? Deals are deals. You never know. But I tell you, we have — we've established a very good relationship with North Korea. That was going to be a war. That could've been a World War III, to be honest with you, because that would've — a lot of people would have had to

get involved in that, all over Asia, and then it spreads beyond Asia. And instead, we have somebody that I really think wants to get on to the economic development and making a lot of success and money, frankly, for his country. Because North Korea has tremendous potential, and we'll help them out too. But North Korea has tremendous economic potential.

And so I look forward to our meeting with Chairman Kim. We'll set that up. We'll be setting it up in the not-too-distant future.

And with that, I'll ask Secretary Nielsen — we'll get back on to the border — to say a few words. Please, Secretary.

SECRETARY NIELSEN: Sure. Good afternoon, Mr. President. So I'm in San Diego reviewing our border security and immigration efforts. Is it working? Can you all hear me?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

SECRETARY NIELSEN: Okay. And as you've described, sir, in fact this is a humanitarian security crisis. We're doing our best out here. I always want to take the opportunity to thank the great men and women of the Border Patrol and Customs and Border Protection.

But the system itself is simply overwhelmed. This is my 17th — around 17th trip to the border in the last year. And I can tell you, unfortunately, the crisis is getting worse. Our immigration system is simply badly broken.

So let me start by saying, from a DHS perspective, Mr. President, now more than ever we need the wall. Today I'm going to talk quickly about how bad the crisis has gotten. But to fix it, we need what our frontline operators are demanding, which is a barrier that will keep illegal aliens, drugs, criminals, terrorists, and other threats from entering our country.

Walls work. As you said, it's not a political issue; it's an operational one. We've seen the successes of walls in El Paso, in Yuma, in San Diego, and in El Centro Sector.

Under your leadership, we're building the first new wall in over a decade, but we need more. We need new sections of wall at our top illegal entry points — something that Congress unfortunately prohibited us from doing last year in our appropriations. And we also need to continue to replace the old, outdated, and ineffective wall sections that you referenced. We need to replace them with wall that has been identified for operational purposes by the professional men and women of CBP, not by uninformed political restrictions that have been put on our appropriations.

As you know, the southern border remains a principal entry point for both cocaine and methamphetamine entering the United States. And seizures in both narcotics are spiking. We've also seen, unfortunately, an increase in fentanyl coming across the southern border, which kills about 72,000 Americans every year.

The southern border is also the primary entry point for criminals and gang members. Just last year, we apprehended more than 17,000 criminals and 1,000 gang members along the southern border.

We are also concerned about potential terrorists as well, as you know. In 2018 alone, we apprehended 3,000 special-interest aliens coming into our country along the southern border. These are aliens that have travel patterns or other characteristics of concern to the intelligence community.

Mr. President, we need a strong border wall system to keep these threats and others out of the U.S. And I strongly support your continued efforts to obtain the needed resources from Congress.

And if I could, let me just give you a little bit more about the crisis. We also

need to address poorly written and outdated laws. Simply put, our laws allow illegal aliens into the country and allows them to stay. This must change.

Here is the reality of the crisis we're facing: On average, as you've said, we see about 2,000 people a day try to illegally enter our country at the southern border. We'll never be able to send the majority of them back home unless, and until, Congress acts to close the loopholes these people are exploiting to stay in the country.

To break it down, there are three categories of illegal aliens arriving at our border: single adults, family units, and unaccompanied children. In the past, single adults have been the vast majority of illegal aliens. They're still the easiest for us to handle. We're able to detain and deport them quickly. Under your administration, Mr. President, we've dramatically ramped up prosecutions of these illegal border crossers with help from the Department of Justice. And we will continue to do so.

But the demographics are changing, and the vast majority of the people that we see now are family units and unaccompanied children. They now make up about two-thirds of those arriving at our borders. Because of poorly written laws and (inaudible) decisions, it's virtually impossible to send them home.

We're only allowed, as you know, to hold families for 21 days. That's it. Then we have to let them go, under the law. Most of them then disappear into the United States. What's worse: In 9 out of every 10 cases, immigration judges find that these families are not even eligible for asylum in the first place and should be deported. But by then, most of them have vanished and escaped the law.

Smugglers and traffickers know this. In fact, they know our immigration laws much better than many members of Congress. They are using this as a

fast pass to get illegal aliens into America. The result is an explosion in the number of families arriving at our borders, and a massive spike in the number of fake families showing up. They know if they pretend they're together, they're likely to get in for good.

And quickly, the third category is unaccompanied children. Because of outdated laws, we cannot send kids to show up alone back to their home countries and to their families. They have to be transferred to the Department of Health and Human Services, which places them with sponsors or relatives in America.

The result is we see more and more of them every day. Parents are making the unconscionable decision to send children on long, dangerous, and sometimes deadly journeys to our country. We are busting at the seams. HHS is out of capacity. And under the law, CBP must transfer these kids to HHS.

These loopholes serve as a giant magnet, which is now resulting in a humanitarian catastrophe. Our system was simply not built to handle this influx of families and children. The human toll is real and shocking. Women are being trafficked and raped. In fact, 1 out of 3 women report they are sexually assaulted on the journey to our borders. Kids are getting abused. They're getting sick — very sick. Many of them are being recycled and used by smugglers to get more people into the United States. And nearly 70 percent of illegal aliens report being victims of violence along the journey. Seventy percent of those traveling north to our country.

Our hearts break for families who have lost children and those who are affected by this violence. We're doing everything we can to ensure rapid medical care when needed. But the men and women of CBP and ICE are doing the best they can with what they have, but they don't have the facilities, the resources, or the legal authorities to keep up with this crisis. Only Congress can give them that.

So, sir, the bottom line, as you know and as you've repeatedly stated: We need Congress to fund and build the wall, give us the resources to deal with this crisis, terminate the Flores Agreement, and grant DHS the authority to detain and remove illegal family unit aliens together, and modify the TVPRA so unaccompanied children can be returned home to their families.

Right now, our Border Patrol and ICE agents are spending so much of their time dealing with the overflow that we're having to pull them off important national security cases, counter-drug operations, and more. We can't afford to do this any longer.

I want to close by thanking the whole of your administration, the Department of Defense, Department of Justice, HHS, CDC, OMB, and others. We are all working together to address this security and humanitarian crisis.

Mr. President, you have brought the rule of law back to our border. The men and women of DHS could not be prouder to be given the opportunity to do the jobs that Congress and the American people expect. But we need Congress to act. We cannot continue to do more with less and attempt to secure our country with our hands tied behind our back.

Thank you for your leadership and your continued focus as we work with Congress to try to address this.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. That's a really fantastic presentation, and I appreciate it. And you have been working very hard. You've been down there. Every time I call, you're at a different location along the border trying to straighten it out.

If we had a wall or a barrier that was not penetrable, you wouldn't have people making that journey. And I think we can say that, Kirstjen, if we had the wall, people wouldn't even bother making the journey, because the journey is tremendously dangerous — horribly dangerous. And children are

getting sick. They're being accosted.

You heard what the Secretary said about all of the crime and rape and everything else that takes place during that horrible journey. If they thought they couldn't get in, they wouldn't be making the journey.

And again, we want people coming into our country. We need people to come into our country, but they have to do it through the system. They have to go — they have to do it legally. And we want people coming that can help our country; that can — where it can be based on merit and achievements; people that are going to help the companies that are coming into our country, which are so many.

So I want to thank you, Secretary. It was a great presentation. Thank you very much. We really appreciate it.

Acting Attorney General Matt Whitaker? Please.

ACTING ATTORNEY GENERAL WHITAKER: Sir, Mr. President, I will start by highlighting the fact that you stayed in Washington, D.C. over the holidays, giving up Christmas with your family, New Year's with your family, trying to bring an end to this shutdown, and security to our southern border, while members of Congress — some members of Congress went on vacation and ignored the problem.

You have demonstrated your dedication to delivering on this critical issue for our country and for the American people. But Congress has to act. They have to fund the wall. It is undeniable that a border wall improves the security of our southern border. A wall would reduce the flow of drugs, gangs like the violent MS-13, and criminals across our border, like you highlighted the brave officer who was a legal immigrant, who was murdered by an illegal immigrant in California.

It would reduce the incentives for individuals who attempt to enter illegally, and restore integrity to our immigration system. Also, we need Congress, as Secretary Nielsen pointed out, to close the loopholes in our immigration laws. Not only do the loopholes in our laws frustrate DHS's ability to enforce our immigration laws, including the TVPRA and the judicial rulings that prevent DHS from detaining family units together, but these loopholes overwhelmingly contribute to a substantial number of meritless cases languishing in our immigration courts.

During the shutdown, and afterwards, the Department of Justice will continue to do everything within our power to support both DHS in its critical mission and address illegality at the border. Illegality will not go unchecked. We will continue to prosecute aliens for committing immigration-related crimes, like illegal reentry and illegal entry, which are at record levels for prosecution currently in your administration. And we will never let up.

We will continue these efforts targeting transnational organized crime and criminal gangs, like MS-13. The immigration courts are working. We have been completing cases at levels we haven't seen in years. We have over 400 immigration judges on board, and we are hiring more. And we are restoring the rule of law to our immigration court system.

We will continue to do everything we can, and we are seeing tremendous progress. But the number of cases originating from the border are overwhelming the system. We will continue to defend our actions and your administration's actions in federal court, as well.

This administration has taken strong action to restore legality to our immigration system. But advocates continue to try to frustrate us in federal courts. We will prevail.

And finally — and I cannot stress this more — that we need Congress to act,

to show up, to negotiate with you, and to solve these challenges that our country faces. The Department of Justice will work every day to support this administration, to support DHS, and to support HHS. But we need Congress to do something instead of just going on vacation and avoiding the issue.

We need Congress to fund the wall, fund the government, and close the loopholes in our laws. If Congress wants to have catch-and-release at the border, and more drugs, gangs, and crime to come into our country, it can continue to refuse to provide the funds that we need to build the wall, and it can continue to refuse to close the loopholes in our immigration laws. That is the choice here, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: That's great, Matt. Thank you very much. So true. And you mentioned one thing about courts — and I know you're hiring judges — but we're one of the only countries that anybody knows of where if you step one foot into our country, you now have a court case. Other countries, you step a foot, and they say "get out." They put you out — or worse. With our country, if you're able to put a foot onto our land, basically that's what catch-and-release is, even beyond that. But now you end up with lawyers and judges and things. It's so ridiculous.

This is the system that we have. And nobody pointed it out until we came along. So you end up in a court case to tell somebody — normally, it's like, "Hey, you're on our land. We don't want you. And you have to come through legally. Get out."

No, we catch, we do paperwork. We bring them to court. You can never have enough judges because you're talking about thousands — tens of thousands of people. You end up in trials, but the trials don't take place, because what they have to do — because it's impossible to hold all of it. This is by law. This is by these idiotic laws given to us by — largely by the Democrats, mostly by the Democrats, that we can change in one hour, if

people got together.

So we end up with court cases for people that just happened to step a foot on our land. You can't take care of them. You're talking tens of thousands. I think we have close to 800,000 pending lawsuits. And what happens — these people disappear into the United States, never to show up for their case, which ends up coming back in about three, four years, five years, and even longer. It is the most ridiculous system.

We should be able to say, "Sorry, you can't come in. You have to come in legally." End. That's your court case. What we have done with asylum and all of this — we're trying to be the nicest people on Earth, and it's destroying our country. And I think, honestly, if I didn't come along, nobody would even be talking about it, and it would be just as bad. But our country gets eaten alive by what's happening at our southern border. So we've got to do something about it, and we're doing it now. That's what we're doing.

And one of the things we can do is the wall, because we won't have problems. It will take care of a large number of the problems. Even the changing of some of the laws won't be nearly as important, because a lot of people won't come up because they know they can't get through. And if they do come up, they can't get through.

One of the other things I'd like to mention is I had a very successful meeting, about a month ago, with President Xi in Argentina. The President of China. And he and I had a meeting that was going to be 45 minutes; it lasted close to four hours. It was very successful.

One of the things I asked him to do was fentanyl, if you would criminalize it, because it's not criminal. And China has very strong criminal penalties. It's called the death penalty. If you would criminalize fentanyl, it would really help us, because we're losing 80,000 people a year with fentanyl. Eighty thousand. Think of what 80,000 people. That's like a football stadium full of

people a year, from taking this horrible drug, most of which comes out of China.

And he's agreed to criminalize it. That was a big statement. He agreed immediately. And, by the way, it wasn't a long negotiation. It was really a negotiation on trade, which is coming along very well. We'll see what happens. But before I started with trade, I talked about fentanyl. And he agreed to criminalize it and criminalize it at the highest level, which means, I assume, death penalty. So that's going to be put into effect fairly soon, and that should have an amazing impact on the fentanyl coming into our country, which is, right now, just about the worst thing we have coming in. It's nothing worse. It's just — that stuff is really brutal and really terrible. So I want to thank President Xi of China.

Rick Perry is here, and he was a great governor of Texas for a long time. Knows probably more about the border than anybody. This is a little unexpected, but I see you here, Rick. I'd like to have your feelings on the barriers that we have to put up. I know you feel very strongly about it, and you know the area very well.

SECRETARY PERRY: I think, Mr. President, your focus on this is really important. While I was the governor, I tried with very poor results to get the previous administration to recognize the lack of support that the state of Texas was getting. And we ran numerous operations along the border.

Mr. Vice President, you as the governor, we talked about it at Governor Association meetings, about the challenge that we had with that 1,200-mile border. Two-thirds of the border is, of course, with Texas and Mexico, and the United States and Mexico.

But the challenge has always been the lack of support from Washington, D.C. To have a chief executive finally recognize that it's going to take Washington acting to address this issue is really heartening, from my

perspective, having basically been ignored for those eight years, as I was the governor in the previous administration.

But it's this message that comes that — from the media, from those that, for whatever reason, don't want to secure that border — that you can come and be rewarded. That's got to stop. And one of the ways to do that is obviously with a clear message to those that are trying to use that border as access into the United States is there's not a reward anymore. Don't come.

When the summertime gets here, the humanitarian issue here, Mr. President, that all too often doesn't get talked about — I mean, the lives that are lost in Mexico, in the desert southwest, in that region of Texas that is incredibly inhospitable, when you're out there trying to cross it. I mean, that's the heart-rending side of this story, Mr. President, that you're trying to address here.

And, you know, I know here, over the course of the last couple of weeks, there's been some stories about young people who lost their lives. A couple of young people who lost their lives. And our hearts go out for them. But what about the, literally, hundreds of people who have died trying to cross that border because of the incentive that people have given them — all of these different incentives to come and penetrate that border? And you're standing up and saying, "Don't come. Don't put your family in jeopardy."

You know, I'd personally like to see the media really get focused on those stories, about what you're doing to stop that type of danger and, frankly, hostility to these individuals.

Building that border security is the most powerful message that we can send. But the most powerful message is from the Chief Executive of the United States standing up and saying, "Congress, you got a responsibility, a duty, to protect and defend the people of this country." I'm sitting here ready to negotiate with you. I'm sitting here ready to find the solution to

deal with this horrendous condition that we find in this country.

All they need to do is come and sit down with you, Mr. President. I know where your heart is. I know where the people around this table's heart is. We're ready to find a solution to this issue of illegal immigration, of drug trafficking, of potential terrorist activity along that southern border. And we've got the expertise. All we need is the will from Congress to come. And we'd be more than happy to partner up with them and find a solution to this.

THE PRESIDENT: That's really great. Thank you very much. And they'll be here, I guess, at three o'clock. So we'll see what happens. We'll see what comes of it.

You know, I have to say that it would be a lot easier if I never took up this issue, if I just left it the way it was, where people stream into the country. And we've had tremendous difficulties. If you look at the numbers, you look at the crimes, you look at what we do, what we're doing now — we're taking out thousands and thousands of people that are in, as an example, MS-13, the gang — it's a brutal gang, a vicious gang. They love using knives because they're far more painful than guns. And what they do to people is incredible. And we're moving them out by the thousands. People don't talk about that. We're moving them out by the thousands. They came here over years, and they've taken over towns in Long Island and other places. They're bad people.

And we're doing tremendous — I mean, we're doing big numbers. They don't like Donald Trump, I can tell you that. They don't like me at all, and that's just fine. That's the way I want it. But MS-13 and other gangs, we're getting them out. And ICE and Border Patrol, these people have done an incredible job. They are going to be making the presentation at three o'clock to the folks coming up from Congress.

But I have to tell you, it would be a lot easier if I didn't do anything, if I just sat and enjoyed the presidency, like a lot of other people have done, and don't bring up the southern border, and don't talk about all of the problems that were taking place at the southern border that nobody wanted to discuss. The fact that people would just flow in like it was water, and a lot of things happened. They'd stay in.

Look, when you hear — I've been hearing 11 million; I've been 12 million; I've been hearing 35 million. For years, we've been hearing the same numbers; you've been hearing the same numbers. I used to hear 11 million all the time. It would always stay right at 11. I said, does it ever increase or go down? "No, it's 11." Nobody knows. It's probably 30, 35 million people. They would flow in mostly from the southern border. They'd come in, and nobody would talk about it, nobody would do anything about it. And a lot of problems were caused, including problems to our educational systems, to our hospital systems, to so many different things that we have. And tremendous damage was done.

So it would have been a lot easier for me to sit back and just let it continue. But it was out of control. And our strong economy makes it even more difficult because people come up, because our country is doing better, by far, than any other country in the world, from an economic standpoint. We're the talk of the world. And we had a little glitch in the stock market last month, but it's still up, I guess, around 30 percent from the time I got elected. And it's going to go up.

Once we settle trade issues, and once a couple of other things happen, it's going to go up. It's got a long way to go. Tremendous amount to go. The trade deals we're making are fantastic for our country — fantastic — whether it's China, Mexico, Canada, South Korea. We started negotiations with Japan. They were all one-way streets. They were bad for our country and good for their countries. We're changing that.

Pat is working so hard on the military. We have a — we were taken advantage of by so many countries on our military. We're providing all they want, and they're not helping us, they're not doing anything toward helping us monetarily. It's disgraceful. I've been saying it for years. Disgraceful. We're giving military protection to countries that are very wealthy, and they're not doing anything for us. You can call them allies if you want, and we have some great allies, but a lot of our allies were taking advantage of our taxpayers and our country. We can't let that happen.

And Pat Shanahan agrees with that, and he's agreed with that for a long time. So — and that was very important to me. I couldn't get other people to understand it. They couldn't understand it. They didn't get what I was saying.

So a lot of great things are happening. It's a lot easier if I did nothing and we just kept going away. But eventually, at some point, really bad stuff would take place. So we're very proud of the job we're doing. I'm very proud of the people around this table.

I'd like to — we're talking the migration coming up. And just if Alex Azar, who's been doing a fantastic job getting drug prices down — we're almost ready to make that big, final push where they're going to see something, Alex. It's not an easy situation. They've been trying for years. I don't think anybody has actually been trying. We have been. And we've done an incredible job. You'll see a final couple of strokes made. It's going to be — which takes a long time to set up statutorily. Statutorily, we have — we've gone through a big process. And I think you're going to see a tremendous reduction in drug prices.

And a lot of great work was done, along with Secretary Acosta, who has created some incredible healthcare programs, cooperative programs, where the price of healthcare has really gone down, much far below Obamacare. Far below. And some really great programs that people are signing up, I

hear, in tremendous numbers.

I'd like to — and thank you. What a great job you've done on healthcare. A lot of people don't know about it, but we've set up some incredible healthcare programs that are far better than Obamacare and a lot less expensive.

But if I could ask Secretary Azar just to say — where the children are coming up and they're very sick by the time — these are young children, and they're forced to come up. And remember this: the coyotes. These are — these are bad ones. The coyotes. They're not stupid. They know our laws better than the people that wrote them. The coyotes are using children to gain access into this country.

They're using these children. They're not with families. They're using the children. They're taking the children. And then they dispose of the children after they're done. This has been going on for years. This isn't unique to us. But we want to stop it.

Secretary, if I could ask you to just talk a little bit about the children situation and how sick some of these children are by the time they get to the border.

SECRETARY AZAR: Sure, Mr. President. Thank you very much, and thank you for your strong leadership and the efforts to secure our borders and fix our terribly broken immigration system.

We at HHS have a role in addressing the tragic consequences of this broken system through caring for these unaccompanied alien children, or UACs. These are minors who arrive at the border without their parents. Traveling to the U.S. border is extremely dangerous, with minors suffering physical, mental, or sexual trauma on the way to this country.

Parents should not send their kids on this journey. This is not a compassionate act; this is a dangerous act. It is endangering your children.

Unfortunately, more and more minors have been arriving at our border over the last year. When UAC are apprehended at the border, the Department of Homeland Security takes them into custody. DHS then refers them to HHS, where we then select a grantee to care for them until we can release them to a suitable sponsor.

While we saw a dramatic drop in the number of unaccompanied children arriving after the President took office, the numbers are now rising significantly. In calendar year 2017, we received approximately 29,000 unaccompanied children. In calendar year 2018, we received approximately 51,000 unaccompanied alien children referrals, almost doubling from the previous year.

Currently, there are almost 13,000 unaccompanied alien children in our care, and we expect that number to rise during the new year. We've brought more capacity online to address the situation, almost doubling our capacity in the past year.

But having to continually expand capacity is simply a symptom of a broken system. Caring for unaccompanied alien children in an appropriate environment is also incredibly expensive. Care for UAC in fiscal year 2018 cost about \$2 billion, just for that. And we expect something similar for this coming year, unless the situation is addressed.

Imagine if we secured our border and we didn't have to spend that \$2 billion caring for these kids, what we could do with that \$2 billion.

We also have had to provide technical assistance and surge capacity to help address medical needs of both adult and children migrants when they arrive in DHS facilities. We're proud of the standards that we've set for the care of

these kids in the Unaccompanied Alien Children Program, but this is a tragic, unsustainable situation that will continue until our immigration system is fixed.

As the President mentioned, we need a system that discourages parents from working with smugglers to bring minors into our country on this dangerous journey. And we need it now.

And I also want to note, Mr. President, that great work you did with President Xi on getting fentanyl scheduled so that it's a crime there, to cut down on the flow of fentanyl to this country. If we do not have border security on our southern border, it's going to redirect to Mexico, and it's going to come in from there and keep killing American citizens even with China scheduling it and stopping the flow from China. We'll get it out of Mexico if we don't get this border secured with a wall.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, thank you very much. And thank you also on what you're doing with drug pricing. It's going to be something. I really think it's going to be something very spectacular. We appreciate it. Thank you, Secretary.

Mr. Vice President, please.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Mr. President. And having spent the Christmas break here in Washington, along with you, I just — I want to thank you for the strong stand you've taken for border security, not just because you said you would, but because as the Cabinet and the nation looking on today can see, you recognize that we have a crisis at our southern border.

And we think of the tragedy of Officer Singh, a legal immigrant to this country being struck down by an illegal immigrant at the time of the Christmas holiday. We think of the videos that the American people woke up to today of a large assault on our border that required our Border Patrol

to deploy tear gas.

This is the information you hear every day, we are made aware of every day. But you bringing it before the American people, and being willing to take a strong stand to shut down the government until we secure the funding to build a wall and bring about the kind of changes that will achieve true border security, I know is something that millions of Americans appreciate. And I personally appreciate your stand.

You gave the numbers before, but they're worth repeating. Seventeen thousand criminals have been apprehended attempting to come into this country. And since this administration took office, 235,000 criminal illegal aliens have been apprehended by Immigrations and Customs Enforcement in this country.

We think about the tragedy along the border that the Secretaries both spoke about today, but we think of the human cost to the American people in our society by not addressing this issue in a meaningful way.

Mr. President, you directed our entire team to reach out to Democrats in the Congress. We met several times before Christmas. And Mick Mulvaney and I traveled, and we met with Leader Schumer. And there, we presented a good-faith offer to resolve this issue, to achieve a principled compromise, only to find out, days after Christmas, that the Democrats had stopped negotiations altogether.

They're coming here today at your invitation. Our sincere hope is that, confronted with these facts and with the information that we will review again today, is that Democrats on Capitol Hill will join Republicans and will join in your call to achieve real border security. And as you said yesterday, we're ready to deal. We have an offer on the table that would reopen the government and achieve border security.

I know other senators are talking about fresh ideas, some of which you've reflected on today and I know we'll give due consideration to those issues. But we owe the American people nothing less than our best efforts, not just to reopen the government, but as you have made clear, to reopen the government once we have the resources to build a wall, a physical barrier, and make measureable progress on achieving real border security.

THE PRESIDENT: That's right, Mike. Thank you very much. It's true.

I want to thank Mick Mulvaney. He's been really an activist. He has got great energy. And you're doing a great job as Chief. We appreciate it. Pulled everything together very quickly. Things are going very well.

Again, I want to say that Middle East — we inherited a lot of problems. When I became President, I took over a whole lot of problems — the Middle East, the southern border, North Korea. And that was the easy stuff. Okay? (Laughter.) We took over a lot of problems, and we've done — I think we're going to do well with all of them. I think we're doing really well. We're doing — whether we should have ever been in the Middle East or not, that's a question for a lot of people. You know where I come from on that. But we're doing something very special. I think, in the Middle East, I think you're going to see that.

And I follow what I said in the campaign for a long period of time. But we're doing a lot more work and a lot more result than I ever thought we could do and that I could do as President.

With North Korea, you know how I stand on that. It's been — it was rough there for a while. And if you go to before I got elected, and you looked at what was happening, and you look at what's going on right now, the relationships really have been very good. We'll see what happens. I always say, it's deals — it's dealing with people. But I will tell you, we have — I know you guys would love to see what's on this letter, and I'd, frankly, love to — I'd

love to read it to you. But we have a very — we have a very good relationship going. So, time will tell. Time will tell.

But — and the economy. The economy is doing fantastically well. Unemployment is at a record low. Unemployment for black, Hispanic, Asian, is at the lowest it's ever been in the history of our country. Even Kanye West came out today and said great things about Trump. He's a good guy but he said great things about us because he sees what we're doing. He's smart and he sees what we're doing.

You know, when you have record low — in the history of our country — unemployment for African Americans, or for Asians, or for Hispanics, that's tough to beat. That's tough to beat. So we're doing very well.

The world isn't doing so well, unfortunately. The world, you know, does have an impact on us. China has gotten hit hard, and other places have been hit hard. Europe is not doing too well, but they'll come back. We have to do what we have to do. But we are doing well. We are doing very well.

So I want to thank everybody very much. I want to thank the Cabinet. We'll stay around for a little while and talk about some other issues. Great job. Thank you very much to everybody.

And thank you to the media. Thank you very much. I was lonely over the weekend, and over the last — I was in Washington hoping that we'd see — hoping that we'd see a little action. I'd get a call and say, "Let's get together and let's work hard." But they chose Hawaii over Washington.

And we're going to see — I really believe that they want to do something. And what Mike said is true. There's been a lot of good discussions going on. Jared has been working very hard. And some of the talent we have around this table has been — even though they're not on that issue, they've been working hard. They have a lot of friends in Congress — on both sides of

Congress. And we actually have a lot of good discussions going on.

I think that the Democrats want to see something happen, and I can tell you I know that the Republicans want to see happen. But you can't have border security without the wall. You can't have border security without a very strong barrier. Call it anything you want. That doesn't matter. But it's got to be very powerful; it's got to be very strong — something that people cannot just walk through.

You have that — many of the problems that we've spoken about today will totally disappear. Even some of the laws that we have to have changed. We have to have changed right now because they come into the country, and we have to have laws once they enter. And nobody is going to be able to enter when we do it the way we're doing it.

So we've made a lot of progress on the wall, a lot of progress on the renovations. Much of that is finished. And we just gave out a large — Secretary Nielsen, we just gave out. And we're in the process of giving out additional large contracts for many miles — 115 miles of wall — in a very important area, as I said to you over the weekend.

And I just appreciate everybody coming. It's a — our country had a lot of problems when I was elected, and we have a lot less problems now. And I think a lot of the big ones, we're in the process of getting them solved. The southern border would be one, but we have a lot of others, too. And we're in the process of solving problems that a lot of people thought were not solvable.

And the easiest way, when you don't have a problem that you think is not solvable, don't do anything: Just sit back and enjoy the presidency. But I can't do that. I want to get it solved for the country because we have a long way to go. This country has a great future with tremendous potential. We have a long way to go, and we want to solve the problems, not just sit back

and enjoy the presidency.

So thank you all very much for coming. We appreciate it. Thank you.

Q May I ask you — thank you, Mr. President, and Happy New Year. I want to ask you a few questions. Most notably, is there a number below \$5 billion that you might be willing to accept in order to reopen the government and get this thing moving forward?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I'd rather not say it. Could we do it for a little bit less? It's so insignificant compared to what we're talking about. You know, I've heard numbers as high as \$275 billion we lose on illegal immigration. And here you have a wall where you're talking about, to complete — because again, a lot has already been done. You know, we've been getting money in. Somebody said that we didn't spend the money. Well, we have spent it, but we don't pay contractors before they finish the job. That's one of the other things that Pat and I sort of instituted. We like to have people do the work.

So if we're building a wall, we're paying as they build it. We pay it when it's finished so they do a good job. This way, if they don't do a good job, we don't pay them. So not all of the money has been paid, but the money has been used. So maybe you guys can remember that when you say that I haven't spent the money. We've spent the money. We want to finish it up.

The \$5 billion — \$5.6 billion approved by the House — is such a small amount compared to the level of the problem. When you see that the Democrats want to give away \$12 billion extra, and we're giving away \$54 billion in foreign aid. So we give money to countries, but we don't give money to our own country, which is another thing that I've been complaining about. And we're cutting that back. It's very unfair when we give money to Guatemala and to Honduras, and to El Salvador, and they do nothing for us. When we give money to Pakistan — \$1.3 billion. I ended that

— a lot of people don't know it — because they haven't been fair to us. We want to have a great relationship with Pakistan, but they house the enemy; they take care of the enemy. We just can't do that.

So I look forward to meeting with the folks from — and the new leadership in Pakistan. We'll be doing that in the not-too- distant future. But I ended the \$1.3 billion that we paid like it was water. We'd just pay it to Pakistan. So I ended that. And we ended a lot of other money that's being sent out on a monthly basis and a yearly basis to countries that don't even vote for us in the United Nations. We give them billions of dollars; they don't even vote for us in the United Nations.

When we want something to help certain countries — and, you know, it's not all about the rich countries, because the rich countries really do take advantage of us because they pay a very small percentage of their military, and they cheat on trade. They take advantage of us on trade. Other than that, they're wonderful. Okay?

But there are countries that are poor, that we will — we don't want anything from them. We want to help them. There are some horrible things going on in the world, and we want to help those people. We don't want money from them. We don't want that. We're not looking for that. But when you have massively wealthy countries that have very little military costs because the United States subsidizes them, so they take advantage of us on military. They could easily pay us the full amounts. And they also take advantage of us on trade.

So when I speak up — I mean, that's why I got elected. Issues like that. Issues like the border. And it would be so easy not to do anything. When they say I'm not popular in Europe, I shouldn't be popular in Europe. If I was popular in Europe, I wouldn't be doing my job. Because I want Europe to pay. Germany pays 1 percent. They should be paying 4 percent. They pay 1 percent; they should be paying even more than that. Other countries pay a

small percentage of what they should be paying.

So, you know, when I say, “I’m sorry, folks, you have pay up” — I shouldn’t be popular in Europe. They do a poll — I was at 88 percent, and now I’m at, you know, very low number — in Europe. I don’t care about Europe. I’m not elected by Europeans; I’m elected by Americans, and by American taxpayers, frankly.

So, you know, I think my relationship, I will tell you, with the leaders of Europe is very good. A lot of them don’t even understand how they got away with it for so many years. I’ll say to Angela, and I’ll say to many of the other leaders — I’m friends with all of them — I’ll say, “How did this ever happen?” And they sort of go like, “I can’t believe it either.” They can’t believe it. You know why? Because they had presidents and other people within administrations in the past that allowed them to get away. Like some of them would say, “Well, no one ever asked us to pay.”

We have negotiations going on with numerous countries right now to pay a lot of money to the United States for what we’re doing for them. I wouldn’t say they’re thrilled. Because they’ve had many, many years where they didn’t have to pay. So now they’re going to have to pay. And if that makes me unpopular in those countries, that’s okay. But we’re doing tremendous service to those countries, and they should at least respect us. They didn’t respect us, and that was the problem.

Go ahead.

Q Thank you. I’d like to —

THE PRESIDENT: You treat me so nicely, I have to give him a second question.

Q No, I appreciate it, Mr. President. I want to follow up. Maybe the military

has an angle here, or a possible —

THE PRESIDENT: They have no angle.

Q They have no angle?

THE PRESIDENT: I know the angles. I know every angle. No, they have no angle.

They — the military, under past leadership, including for many years, was taken advantage of by other countries — allies and not allies. They were taken advantage of. And our country has to be respected. We're not respected when we do that, when we're taking — when horrible things are happening on trade, where we have barriers put up, where we have tariffs put on, and we open our country up, we just opened it up; where cars are sent into our country with virtually no tax, no nothing, and yet they won't accept our cars. When cars are sent in and they pay no tax, but we're expected to pay 25, 40, 50 percent, and we they pay nothing? I'll be honest with you, it's just not in my DNA. I don't know how people allowed that in my position — allowed these things to happen.

And we're not allowing it to happen anymore. I could be the most popular person in Europe. I could be — I could run for any office if I wanted to, but I don't want to. I want people to treat us fairly. And they're not.

And it's not — there's no angles. There's no angles. There's nothing to — you know, when a country sends us 200 soldiers to Iraq, or sends us 100 soldiers from a big country to Syria or to Afghanistan, and then they tell me a hundred times, "Oh, we sent you soldiers. We sent you soldiers," and that's one one-hundredth of the money that they're taking advantage of, they're just doing that to make me happy, or to make past presidents happy.

I've heard past presidents, "Well, they're involved in the Afghanistan war

because they sent us 100 soldiers.” And yet, it’s costing us billions and billions of dollars. I mean, I could give you an example where I get along very well with India and Prime Minister Modi. But he’s constantly telling me he built a library in Afghanistan. Okay, a library. That’s like — you know what that is? That’s like 5 hours of what we’ve spent. And he tells it. And he’s very smart. And we’re supposed to say, “Oh, thank you for the library.” I don’t know who’s using it in Afghanistan. But one of those things.

But I don’t like being taken advantage of. What other countries have done for the last long period of time is give us some soldiers and then talk about it like it’s the end of the world, and we’re subsidizing their militaries by billions and billions and billions of dollars. Many, many, many times what those soldiers cost that country.

Q Did you hear about the Mitt Romney op-ed? What’s your reaction to it if you heard about it? He wrote an op-ed about your character.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I wish Mitt could be more of a team player. You know, I’m surprised he did it this quickly. I was expecting something, but I was surprised he did it this quickly. And, you know, look, I endorsed him. He thanked me very profusely. He was very nice. But I am surprised because we’ve done a lot. And he actually says it. I read his op-ed. He said it. You know, he agrees.

And I don’t think he would be — I don’t think anybody would have been able to do the tax cuts like I did. We got the greatest tax cuts ever. We got ANWR approved in the tax cuts. We got rid of the individual mandate, which essentially is repeal and replace of Obamacare, because that case from Texas should win in the Supreme Court.

I mean, it only — it only was kept, Obamacare — it was only kept because of the individual mandate. Now that that’s gone, I don’t know how you can possibly keep it. So that’s repeal and replace.

John McCain voted against it. You know, after campaigning for many years, John McCain voted against it. He went thumbs down, and that was the end of that. After — for many years, it was “repeal and replace.” And then at two o’clock in the morning, he went thumbs down.

So, I’m a great flexible guy. We were part of that lawsuit, as you know. And a great judge, highly respected from Texas, said the individual mandate is out. That means that we should win at the Supreme Court, where this case will go.

Now, when we do, we will sit down with the Democrats and we will come up with great healthcare. Far better. Far better. We’ll have everything included. We’ll have everything included. Far better. Because Obamacare is too expensive, the premiums are way too high, and the deductibles don’t exist. I mean, the deductibles, you can’t even use it. The deductible is so high. Unless you get hit by a tractor, you can’t even use it. Nobody has ever seen anything like it. The deductibles are so high.

Obamacare is a tremendous failure. But now that we won the individual mandate, and that’s — which, by the way, was by far the most unpopular. It was by far the most unpopular thing in Obamacare.

So with Mitt Romney, I’d love him to be a team player. Possibly he won’t be. I’m surprised he acted so quickly. I gave him an endorsement. I was happy that he won in Utah. I have great popularity in Utah. I love the people of Utah. I did something for them that nobody else would’ve done that has to do with their parks, as you know. That was a big day — a big thing. And we did that for a very special person, who is now going to be retiring after 42 years. You know who I’m talking about. Our great friend, our great senator, who is really a spectacular man. And also for Mike Lee, who really pressed it very hard. So Orrin Hatch and Mike Lee.

And the people of Utah really appreciate what I did for hundreds and

hundreds of miles of park that they'll be able to now use, as opposed to not.

And so I was surprised at Mitt Romney. But we — I just hope he's going to be a team player. And if he's a team player, that'll be great. I will say this: If he fought really hard against President Obama like he does against me, he would've won the election. Does that make sense to you? If he fought the way he fights me, I'm telling you, he would've won the election.

But I think he's going to end up being a team player. I think he agrees with many of the things that we've done and many of the things that we have in mind. And we'll see what happens.

Q Mr. President, in Afghanistan —

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah, go ahead. Afghanistan.

Q In Afghanistan — you have won ISIS in Syria. But in Afghanistan, Taliban is getting (inaudible). And you mentioned India and Modi. What role do you want India to play —

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think India should be involved in Afghanistan. I mean, I'll give you an example. You can talk about our generals. I gave our generals all the money they wanted. They didn't do such a great job in Afghanistan. They've been fighting in Afghanistan for 19 years.

General Mattis thanked me profusely for getting him \$700 billion. He couldn't believe it. General Mattis thanked me even more the following year when I got him \$716 billion. He couldn't believe it. Because our military was depleted.

Now we're rebuilding our military and we're getting — in fact, Pat was very responsible for a lot of the orders for the new F-35 fighter jets and F-18s, and all of the things we're doing, including ships and missiles and everything.

But General Mattis was so thrilled. Well, what's he done for me? How has he done in Afghanistan? Not too good. Not too good. I'm not happy with what he's done in Afghanistan. And I shouldn't be happy. But he was very happy. He was very thankful when I got him \$700 billion, and then the following year, \$716 billion.

So, I mean, I wish him well. I hope he does well. But as you know, President Obama fired him, and essentially so did I. I want results.

Q So India (inaudible) more security (inaudible)?

THE PRESIDENT: We're going to do something that's right. We are talking to the Taliban. We're talking to a lot of different people. But here's the thing — because mentioned India: India is there. Russia is there. Russia used to be the Soviet Union. Afghanistan made it Russia, because they went bankrupt fighting in Afghanistan. Russia. So you take a look at other countries. Pakistan is there; they should be fighting. But Russia should be fighting.

The reason Russia was in Afghanistan was because terrorists were going into Russia. They were right to be there. The problem is it was a tough fight. And literally, they went bankrupt. They went into being called Russia again, as opposed to the Soviet Union. You know, a lot these places you're reading about now are no longer a part of Russia because of Afghanistan.

But why isn't Russia there? Why isn't India there? Why isn't Pakistan there? Why are we there, and we're 6,000 miles away? But I don't mind. We want to help our people. We want to help other nations. You do have terrorists, mostly Taliban, but ISIS.

I mean, I'll give you an example. So, Taliban is our enemy. ISIS is our enemy. We have an area that I brought up with our generals four or five weeks ago, where Taliban is here, ISIS is here, and they're fighting each other. I said, "Why don't you let them fight?" Why are we getting in the

middle of it? I said, “Let them fight. They’re both our enemies. Let them fight.” “Sir, we want to do it.” They go in and they end up fighting both of them.

It’s the craziest thing I’ve ever seen. I think I would’ve been a good general, but who knows. But you know what? These are two enemies that are fighting against each other, and we end up going in and fighting. And what are we doing?

But I say this: India — great relationship with Prime Minister Modi. He’s a great gentleman and a great man, and he’s done a fantastic job. He’s brought the country together. India, Russia — you look at some of the satellite countries that are extremely wealthy with oil, surrounding. I mean, I spoke to some of them. They — I said a certain country, very rich country: “What would you do if the United States pulled out?” “Oh, we’d be taken over by the Taliban and terrorists.” I said, “Huh, then why are you charging us when we have to use your country to send product through? Why are you charging us when we send airplanes over your country? We’re doing the job for you. Why are you charging us?”

He said to me — very, great gentleman. Smart. He said to me, “Well, nobody ever asked me not to.” I said, “I’m asking you not to. He said, “We will not charge you.” And I’m talking about millions and millions of dollars. Flights over his country. But I said to him, “What would happen if we weren’t here?” And he looks at me and he goes, “We would be overrun. We could not defend ourselves.” And yet he charges us. But he doesn’t charge us anymore.

Okay. Yeah, please. Jeff?

Q Mr. President, you used the word “slowly” when you were describing withdrawal from Syria.

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah, I never said fast or slow. Yeah, I just —

Q What's your timetable? When do you want troops to be out?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know — somebody said four months, but I didn't say that either. I'm getting out — we're getting out of Syria.

Look, we don't want Syria. Obama gave up Syria years ago when he didn't violate the red line. I did, when I shot 59 missiles in, but that was a long time later. And when President Obama decided not to violate his statement that never crossed the red line, and then they did, and he didn't do anything about it — you know, making a threat is okay but you always have to follow through with the threat if you're going to make that threat. You can't make a threat and then do nothing.

So Syria was lost long ago. It was lost long ago. And besides that — we're talking about sand and death. That's what we're talking about. We're not talking about, you know, vast wealth. We're talking about sand and death.

Now, the Kurds, it's very interesting — Turkey doesn't like them, other people do. I didn't like the fact that they're selling the small oil that they have to Iran. And we asked them not to sell it to Iran. But the Kurds — our partners — are selling oil to Iran. We're not thrilled about that. Okay? I'm not happy about it at all.

At the same time, they fight better when we fight with them. You know, when we send 30 F-18s in front of them, they fight much better than they do when we don't. And you've seen what's happened. But we want to protect the Kurds, nevertheless. We want to protect the Kurds. But I don't want to be in Syria forever. It's sand and it's death.

And when we kill ISIS, if we don't — now, everyone says, "Oh, then they'll come to our country." Well that's possibly true, a very small percentage.

But you know where else they're going? To Iran, who hates ISIS more than we do. They're going to Russia, who hates ISIS more than we do. So we're killing. And then I read, when we pull out, "Oh, Russia is thrilled." Russia is not happy. You know why they're not happy? Because they like it when we're killing ISIS, because we're killing them for them, and we're killing them for Assad, and we're killing ISIS also for Iran.

And just while we're on Iran — because, you know, people don't like to write the facts — Iran is a much different country than it was when I became President. Iran — when I became President, I had a meeting at the Pentagon with lots of generals. They were like from a movie. Better looking than Tom Cruise, and stronger.

And I had more generals than I've ever seen, and we were at the bottom of this incredible room. And I said, "This is the greatest room I've ever seen." I saw more computer boards than I think that they make today. And every part of the Middle East, and other places that was under attack, was under attack because of Iran. And I said to myself, "Wow." I mean, you look at Yemen, you look at Syria, you look at every place. Saudi Arabia was under siege. They were all. I mean, they wanted Yemen because of the long border with Saudi Arabia, and that's why they're there, frankly. But every place was under siege.

And I actually asked a question: "How do you stop these people? They're all over the place." They have plenty of money. President Obama had just given them \$150 billion. He just gave \$1.8 billion in cash. I'm still trying to figure that one out, Mick. Gave \$1.8 million in cash. Planeloads of cash. I mean cash from five different countries. You know why from five different countries, Jeff? Because we didn't have enough cash in the Tri-State Area to give them \$1.8 billion. So they had to use the currency of other countries. That's the real reason.

So with all of that, with all of that being said, I did something called

terminate the horrible Iran Nuclear Deal — which, by the way, in eight years, gives Iran the legal right to have nuclear weapons. Okay? I did it. Iran is no longer the same country. Iran is pulling people out of Syria. They can do what they want there, frankly. But they're pulling people out. They're pulling people out of Yemen.

Iran wants to survive now. Iran was a power in the Middle East. They were going to take over the whole Middle East. They were going to take over everything. That was what they wanted to do — and destroy Israel while they're at it.

Iran is a much different country right now. They're having riots every week, in every city — bigger than they've ever had before. Their currency is under siege thanks to us. A lot of bad things are happening. When we do all of the things that we've done monetarily to Iran, Iran is in trouble. And you know what? I'd love to negotiate with Iran. They're not ready yet, I don't think. But they will be. But Iran is a much different country right now, Jeff, than it was when I took over.

When I took over two years ago, Iran was going to take over the Middle East and who knows where, and they were going to have all the nuclear weapons they wanted in a very short period of time, because of that stupid deal. When I terminated that deal and then did what I had to do, Iran is a much different country today than it was 19 months ago. That I can tell you.

Q You just said you don't have a timetable for withdrawing troops. Do you think it's (inaudible)?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it's just over a period of time. But we're — oh, we're withdrawing.

Q But (inaudible).

THE PRESIDENT: We're hitting them. We're hitting them very hard. When I met with the generals in Iraq, I said to a couple of the generals — I said, "Why didn't you do this before?" He said, "Sir, our commanders were telling us what to do." I said, "Well, don't you tell them?" "No, sir. We take orders." And they do. You know, they're great soldiers. They listen. I do it differently. I sat around, and after a few minutes, they loosened up and they said, "This is what we should do." But we were supposed to be out of Syria many years ago.

If you remember, we went to Syria for some spot hits, and that was five years ago. And we never left. I don't want to be in Syria. I go to Walter Reed Hospital and I see soldiers that are so badly injured and hurt. I don't want that. I don't want it. And I want to rebuild our country, and I want to spend money on our military without depleting it every day. I want to spend money on our country. And that's what's happening. And our military is getting really strong. Our — I mean, I could tell you stories, when I first got here, about our military that I don't even want to talk about. I don't even want to talk about.

And one of the things I've told the Secretary and other people: We do these reports on our military. Some IG goes over there, who are mostly appointed by President Obama — but we'll have ours too — and he goes over there, and they do a report on every single thing that's happening, and they release it to the public.

What kind of stuff is this? We're fighting wars, and they're doing reports and releasing it to the public? Now, the public means the enemy. The enemy reads those reports; they study every line of it. Those reports should be private reports. Let him do a report, but they should be private reports and be locked up. And if a member of Congress wants to see it, he can go in and read it. But for these reports, criticizing every single thing, and even, in some cases, saying "good" perhaps — but for these reports to be (inaudible), to be given out, essentially — forget about the public — given

out to the enemy is insane. And I don't want it to happen anymore, Mr. Secretary. You understand that.

We'll look at the reports. Nobody more critical of — hey, it's not my fault; I didn't put us there. But we're getting out, and we're getting out smart. And we're winning. We're winning. Okay?

But just to answer your question: Over a period of time. I never said I'm getting out tomorrow. I said we're pulling our soldiers out, and they will be pulled back in Syria, and we're getting out of Syria. Yeah. Absolutely. But we're getting out very powerfully.

Yes, ma'am.

Q Mr. President, would you accept anything less than that \$2.5 billion for border security?

THE PRESIDENT: No, not 2.5. No. We're asking for 5.6. And, you know, somebody said 2.5.

No. Look, this is national security we're talking about. You know, just like we talk about the military, just like we're talking about Syria or Afghanistan, or all these different places. I mean, we spend in Afghanistan more in one month than what we're talking about for the wall. Think of that. Okay? That's another way. We spend in Afghanistan more money than most countries spend, except a few. Okay? It's ridiculous.

What I'm talking about is the \$5.6 billion that the House approved. And I have to tell you, the House was very aggressive. They stepped up and they went in, and they approved and — I'm not holding Nancy to this, but she said, "You'll never get the Republicans to vote for it." I never saw anything so beautiful in my life. That spurred them on. The spirit they had — and I'd like Mitt Romney to join in that spirit because, you know, we're doing some

great things. We don't need another Democrat. And you know what? I want the Democrats to join in it, too.

The \$5.6 billion is such a small number. Literally, it's a month — it's one month in Afghanistan. And we're talking about national security. This isn't just a border; this is national security. This is health and wellness. This is everything.

Q So does that mean nothing below \$5.6 billion?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we're going to see. Look, let's see. Maybe they have an idea. And I talk also DACA, but I just think that we're better off waiting for the Supreme Court. If the Supreme Court rules that President Obama was wrong, which they should — because, by the way, if he was right, then I've been given tremendous power. Can you imagine me having that power? Wouldn't that be scary? Right?

No, if President Obama is allowed to do what he did on DACA, then I'm allowed to do whatever I want to do on things that, you know, probably a President, as he said — probably a President doesn't have the right to do.

Q So how long do you think the government is going to stay partially shut down?

THE PRESIDENT: It could be a long time, or it could be quickly. Could be a long time.

It's too important a subject to walk away from. I was here on Christmas evening. I was all by myself in the White House. It's a big, big house. Except for all the guys out on the lawn with machine guns. Nicest machine guns I've ever seen. (Laughter.) I was waving to them. I never saw so many guys with machine guns in my life.

Secret Service and military — these are great people. And they don't play games. They don't, like, wave. They don't even smile. (Laughter.) But I was there all alone with the machine gunners, and I felt very safe. And I have to tell you, they're great people, and there are a lot of them.

But I was hoping that maybe somebody would come back and negotiate, but they didn't do that. And that's okay. Look, look, this is really something that should be bipartisan, and we'll see if it is. I hope it is. I hope it is.

Okay?

Q Mr. President, are you willing to keep the government shutdown until the Supreme Court rules on DACA?

THE PRESIDENT: No, because I think Supreme Court — no, I think this should be settled. By the way, if the Supreme Court would do a great favor to this country, if they would say “the President should not have done that,” we will settle this whole thing, including, really, a big immigration policy, not just border security, which is very important because we would do something with DACA. A lot of the Republicans — most Republicans are fine with some deal on DACA. DACA is okay. These are people that have been in the country a long time. In many cases, they don't even speak the language of the country from which their parents came.

Q So how are you viewing this meeting later this afternoon? Is this — you mentioned Border Patrol coming in, ICE. Is this an education campaign? Is this a negotiation? Are you issuing demands to Democrats?

THE PRESIDENT: All this is, is to tell Chuck and Nancy, and some others — from ICE and from Border Patrol, and also from some local law enforcement — how bad it is, how dangerous it is, and why we need a wall. But they know that. Look, look — when they say the wall is immoral, well then you better — got to do something about the Vatican, because the Vatican has the

biggest wall of them all.

“The wall is immoral.” Look at all of the countries that have walls. And they work 100 percent. It’s never going to change. A wall is a wall. The other is just — I mean, we can have all the drones flying over the people last night as they tried to rush the border. The only thing that stopped them was the wall. If we have drones up there, it’s wonderful. We’ll get nice pictures.

Q The 5.6 is a small amount compared to the problem. How long are you willing to keep the government shut down —

THE PRESIDENT: It was never 25. You know, a lot of people just — a lot of people thought it was \$25 billion. And that wasn’t — that was for overall homeland security. That was for much more than the wall. The wall was a piece of that. So, you know, a lot people said, “He should’ve taken the \$25 billion.” Well, that covered a lot more territory than the wall.

Q How long are you willing to keep the government shut down, then, in order to get that \$5.6 billion?

THE PRESIDENT: As long as it takes. I mean, look, I’m prepared. I think the people of the country think I’m right. I think the people of this country think I’m right. Again, I could’ve done nothing. I could’ve had a lot easier presidency by doing nothing. But I’m here. I want to do it right.

And I’m not only talking here, I’m talking about Middle East problems and other problems, and North Korea problems.

Q Can I just ask on Mr. Romney too, why do think he’ll eventually become a team player? And do you expect —

THE PRESIDENT: I don’t know that he will. I hope he does.

Q Do you expect to get challenged from within the Republican Party in 2020?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't see it. I think I have the highest rating in the history of — I was just looking at that poll. Yeah, I think — I mean, I don't know why, but they like me.

They say I'm the most popular President in the history of the Republican Party. You see the same polls as I do. A number that is hard to believe considering I never get fair press or good press. How do I have these numbers and I get bad press?

Because people see the job we're doing. People see that gasoline is way down. And the reason it's way down is because I called up some of the OPEC people. I say, "Don't do it." You know, if you look back a few months, gasoline was at \$83 a barrel. That was going to be bad. And it was going to \$100, and some people were saying \$125, Rick.

And I make calls. I said, "You better let that oil and that gasoline flow." And they did. And now it's down to \$44. And I put out a social media statement yesterday; I said, "Do you think it's luck that that happens?" It's not luck. It's not luck. I called up certain people, and I said, "Let that damn oil and gasoline — you let it flow — the oil." It was going up to \$125. If that would've happened, then you would've had a recession, depression, like we've had in the past when that happened.

Q These are all numbers that Senator Romney is aware of. Why do you think he is going to come around and become a team player?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know if he's going to become a team player. I hope he does. If he does, I think it's going to be better for him. I think people are very upset with what he did. He hasn't even gotten to office yet. He hasn't even gotten to office. And he was very happy when I endorsed him.

So, you know, I don't know what changed — other than we've succeed in many of the things that I said we were going to do. And let me tell you, we're succeeding in others. We're really succeeding in things that people thought were impossible to do.

So I think that Mitt Romney hopefully will be a team player. And if he's not, that's okay too. Look, I handle it. I mean, I just got rid of — I wouldn't say — they say they retired. They say that Bob Corker retired. They say that Jeff Flake, wonderful guy — I never even met him and he's hitting me. He was going to tell people how to win in 2020 because 2016 can't — he wrote a book about it. Didn't work out too well that book, because we won in 2016 because we didn't want until 2020.

So Jeff Flake is now selling real estate, or whatever he's doing. He'll probably go to work for CNN. That's my prediction. Bob Corker, unfortunately — you know, I had a good relationship, and then he thought he was going to get some publicity for himself, And his ratings tubed, where he couldn't have come in fourth in the primary.

He was going to be a senator. Bob Corker was going to be a senator for another 20 years. And then, for some reason, he hit me because he thought it was going to be good publicity. It didn't work out too well.

So, with Mitt, I hope he's a team player. But if he's not, that okay, too. I will tell you, we have some great Republicans. And if you look at the way they're standing up for border security, you'd be very proud of them — if you're a Republican or if you're a person that loves our nation.

Thank you very much everybody. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Q What are you going to do about those markets?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it will be good.

Q They'll bounce back?

THE PRESIDENT: We want to — look, we need a little help from the Fed. Fed. I hope the Fed is going to be —

But we — they're going to be good. The trade deals are kicking in — when they kick in, when we (inaudible).

Thank you very much everybody.

END 1:42 P.M. EST