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President Discusses Border Security and Comprehensive Immigration Reform, Participates in Swearing-In Ceremony for CBP Commissioner

Federal Law Enforcement Training Center
Artesia, New Mexico

 [In Focus: Immigration](#)

10:45 A.M. MDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all. Please be seated. (Applause.) Pete, thanks for your kind words and thanks for your leadership. New Mexico has got a fine senior Senator in Pete Domenici. All he talks about is New Mexico when I'm with him. (Applause.) Now I'm afraid all he's going to talk about is FLETC. (Laughter.)

It's good to be in Artesia. Some people probably think I've never heard of Artesia. You forgot I grew up in Midland. Home of the Mighty Bulldogs, Artesia is. (Applause.) The land where the sky is big and the people are friendly. I knew I was in pretty good country when I saw all the cowboy hats, and I think I saw one guy spitting in a can. (Laughter.) But I'm thrilled to be here, I really am, and I appreciate a chance to be here at the Border Patrol Academy, here at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center.

I want to -- the reason I'm here is because I want the country to pay attention to what you're doing. And I want you to understand, those of you who are training to become Border Patrol agents, and those of you who are training the trainees, I want you to understand that I really appreciate your contribution to the United States of America, and so do the American people. (Applause.)

What you're learning to do here is important. It's important for the security of our nation. And I want to thank you for volunteering. At this academy new agents undergo 19 weeks of training, and by the looks of it, it isn't all that easy. It's practical experience. It's the kind of experience that's going to put you in pretty good stead when it comes to doing the job that we expect you to do.

You're taking courses in counterterrorism and immigration law. You're taking courses in anti-drug trafficking and firearms. You're taking courses in motor vehicle operations. And for those of you who don't know how to speak Spanish, you're learning how to speak Spanish. Those are all very important parts of your training.

Look, I'm not here to give you a lecture, but I am here to thank you. I want to appreciate what you're doing, I



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President's Remarks

 [view](#)



appreciate your service. I look forward to seeing you out there on the border doing the job we expect you to do. And in a little while, I'm going to tell you, you expect something from us, too. But the first thing you can expect is the full support of the federal government, and you have it. (Applause.)

I appreciate -- Pete Domenici is keeping pretty good company today, with Senator Jeff Bingaman. It's good to see the Senator. Thanks for coming. I'm proud you're here, as well. (Applause.) I flew down with two members of the United States Congress, Congressman Tom Udall -- he's from the northern part of the state -- and Congressman Steve Pearce -- he's here from the eastern part of New Mexico. It's good to see you all. (Applause.) Pearce has got that umbrella up -- (laughter) -- because he's bald-headed. (Laughter.) He's also a fine Congressman. (Laughter.)

I want to thank the Governor of the great state of New Mexico, Governor Bill Richardson. Governor, I'm proud you're here. Thank you for taking the time. (Applause.) I know what it's like to be the governor of a border state. And I know Governor Richardson counts on the federal government to pass a good piece of legislation that will enable him and the people of this state who are working with you to do their jobs. And I'm proud you're on the lead of comprehensive immigration reform, Bill.

I want to thank Secretary Mike Chertoff for joining us. I want to thank other members of my administration, starting with Ralph Basham, who is the Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and his wife, Judy. We're fixing to swear Ralph in. Part of this ceremony is for you to witness the swearing-in of your boss. I think that's a good way for us to make it clear that those of us who are in Washington, D.C. -- in my case, on a temporary basis, I want to emphasize -- (laughter) -- we know you're out here, see, and we care about the job you're doing. I thought it made sense to swear in the new commissioner in your presence, as a way of making it clear -- (applause) -- as a way of making it clear for us to say, he may have an office in Washington, but his heart is right here with the Border Patrol agents.



I appreciate very much Connie Patrick, who's the Director of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center. I want to thank David Aguilar. He's the Chief of the Border Patrol. For those of you fixing to join the Border Patrol, you need to know you've got a chief who knows what he's talking about. See, he did exactly what you've done. (Applause.) Plus, he's a Texan. (Laughter.) I appreciate Jay Ahern -- he's Assistant Commissioner of Field Operations for the U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

I just had a tour given to me by Charlie Whitmire. Maybe you've heard of Charlie. (Laughter.) He's a no-nonsense kind of guy. See, he's the kind of guy you want running a facility like this. He's got one thing in mind, and that is to give you the tools necessary to do the job. Whitmire, I appreciate your service and thanks for your leadership. Thanks for the tour. (Applause.)

I appreciate all the state and local officials who have taken time out of your day to come and say hello, and I particularly want to thank the Mayor, Manuel Madrid, for being here, as well. Mr. Mayor, thank you for coming. Proud you're here. Thanks for your time. (Applause.)

Most of all, I want to thank you all, and I want you to thank your families, on behalf of a grateful nation. You need to tell your wives and children, mothers and fathers how much we appreciate what you're doing. So you've got my permission to take a little time off this afternoon -- (laughter) -- and let them know. This is a family deal. You're here training for a very important mission, a mission that's sometimes dangerous. And I understand how important it is to have the support of somebody in your house.



See, I got support from a great lady, too, like many of you who are married. I'm fortunate to be married to Laura Bush who sends her very -- (applause.) She sends her best to all the good folks out here in eastern New Mexico. Her mother is living right across the border, so we stay in touch with how people are thinking out here.

And it's -- I can't tell you how -- a joy it is to be out here where the air is dry and fresh, and the people are down-to-earth and decent, people who love our country, and people who expect us to handle this immigration debate with dignity and to get something done. That's what they expect. The people of Artesia want something done on the immigration issue, and the people all across our country want something done on this important issue. So I want to talk to you today about the debate we're having in Washington, D.C.

The first thing is illegal immigration is a serious problem. The first thing we got to understand as a country is that illegal immigration undermines the rule of law. It creates an underground economy. It can danger [sic] our national security. And therefore, we need to do something about it.

Illegal immigration makes it tough on local communities. It puts a strain on public schools and strains state and local budgets, brings crime to some of our communities. And we need to do something about it.

We've also got to remember this, though, during this debate, that illegal immigration is a problem, but we need to remember that immigrants have been one of the great strengths of the United States of America. For generations immigrants to this country have risked everything because of the dream of freedom. And they've assimilated into our society. And they've contributed to our economy. And they've contributed to the greatness of America. During this debate, this important debate on illegal immigration, we've got to remember we're a land of immigrants, and therefore, conduct this debate with dignity.

The United States is a nation of laws, and we're going to enforce our laws. We're also a nation of immigrants and we're going to uphold that tradition. And these are not contradictory goals. America can be a lawful society, and America will be a welcoming society at the same time.

So I'm going to work with Congress to fix our immigration problems, and I'm going to work with Congress to pass a comprehensive bill I can pass into law. And we're making progress. I know you're following the debate in Washington, but we're making progress toward a comprehensive bill.

When I visited the border last fall, Congress was still debating whether to take any action at all. See, last fall there was a doubt as to whether or not Congress was going to act on the immigration bill. The last time I visited the border last month, the House had passed a bill, focusing on border security and interior enforcement. Now the Senate has passed a bill, and it's a more comprehensive approach that includes a temporary worker program and a plan to resolve the status of illegal immigrants inside our country. And the next step is for the House and the Senate to reconcile its difference and agree on legislation that both houses can agree on. And I believe that legislation needs to be comprehensive in nature, which I'm going to talk about here in a minute.



I know when you watch your television or listen to the radio it seems like there's nothing but disagreement on immigration policy in Washington. Yet there's a growing consensus among all parties and all regions of the country that fundamental reforms are needed. In other words, people are coming to the conclusion we got to do something about a system that isn't working. And while the differences grab the headlines, the similarities in approaches are striking.

We all agree we need to control our borders. There's a common agreement that the federal government has a responsibility to control the borders, so that

every illegal immigrant caught at the border needs to be sent home. We agree with that. Secondly, we agree that the government needs to crack down on businesses that hire illegal workers. In other words, in order to help you do your job, we all agree that if someone is hiring somebody who is an illegal immigrant, they've broken the law, and we need to crack down on that.

We all agree we must reduce the incentives for foreign workers to cross the border illegally. See, there's agreement on that in Washington. We agree that it's unacceptable to have millions of illegal immigrants living in our country beyond the reach of law and the protection of the law. And we all agree that immigrants to America must assimilate into our society. They must embrace our values and learn to speak the English language. See, there's common agreement. There's a consensus. And we need to act on that broad consensus and deliver comprehensive reform that makes our system, orderly, secure and fair.

We all agree we've got to enforce the borders. Since 2001, I've worked with the United States Congress to increase border security funding by 66 percent. I want to thank the members of Congress for working on that. (Applause.) Border Patrol has been expanded from about 9,000 agents to 12,000 agents. And we're building new infrastructures on the border.

Federal agents like you have apprehended and sent home about 6 million people entering America illegally since 2001. It's an amazing statistic, isn't it? Most American people have no earthly idea how hard our Border Patrol agents are working. Six million people since 2001 have been caught trying to come into this country illegally and sent home. And that's why I tell you I'm grateful for your hard work. People are doing an outstanding job.

But we got to make sure that we give you more to secure the border. Congress needs to fund dramatic increases in manpower and additional technology that will help you build on the successes. See, there's more work to be done. We're going to increase the size of the Border Patrol by additional 6,000 agents by the end of 2008. You're going to be busy here at this facility. See, our goal is to have doubled the Border Patrol to about 18,000 Border Patrol agents. That's what they tell me is going to work. I said, fine, get it done. And your classes here are part of that doubling of the Border Patrol. And when these agents that are trained here are deploying, we're going to give them what's necessary in terms of technology to be able to do their jobs.

See, we need to add new technologies to the new manpower we're training so we can tell the American people we're doing our best we possibly can to secure our border. Americans expect us to secure the border. It's an important job of the federal government. And so we're going to double your size, and we're going to get you new technologies.

We're going to build high-tech fences in urban corridors. For the agents here who've been on the front lines of enforcing our border, you understand how important those high-tech fences are so you can do that job. We're going to make sure you got new patrol roads. We can't ask these new Border Patrol agents that we're training to do their job and not have adequate patrol roads to be able to go up and down the border. We're going to build virtual fence that employs motion detectors and infrared cameras and unmanned aerial vehicles to prevent illegal crossings. See, we're going to leverage technology so you can better do your job.

Proposals to boost manpower and upgrade technologies have the support of Republicans and Democrats in the House and the Senate. In other words, there's consensus on that. We're going to get this part of the job done. And I understand and you understand it takes time to get technology and Border Patrol agents in place.

The training you do here takes 19 weeks, as it should. We don't want to rush you through the academy. See, when we put you on the front line of doing your job we want you to be as well-trained as you possibly can be. That's what your families expect, that's what your government expects, and that's what your trainers want. They want to use their skills to give you the skills necessary to do the job.

But it takes the time, and yet, we don't have time to get this border enforced. And so, therefore, I decided to work with our state governors, Republicans and Democrats, to move 6,000 National Guard troops on the border to help the current Border Patrol do the job until the new agents are trained. That makes sense to me, doesn't it? If we've got a problem, let's address it square on. And if part of the problem is we're waiting to get new Border Patrol agents trained and we can't wait, let's move some troops in -- National Guard troops that will be able to help those of you on the front lines of securing our border do your job better.

Guard members are arriving at the border and they're going to set up a headquarters to support Border Patrol operations. You see, you notice I said "support the Border Patrol." The Border Patrol is in the lead -- that's why they're going through significant training. The Border Patrol is the primary law enforcement agency on the border. And so the Guard units are down there to support your job; they're to make it easier for you to do your job. Our Guard units will not be involved in direct law enforcement activities. That's not what they're going to go down there for. The United States of America will not militarize our border. We're going to make sure that the Border Patrol is the -- is directly involved in law enforcement activities. That's what you're trained to do. The Guard is going to free up Border Patrol to focus on stopping illegal immigrants coming in. They're going to be building the roads, and they're going to be doing the support.

When I was down in Yuma, I saw the Guard working side-by-side with Border Patrol, and what they're doing is they're freeing up the Border Patrol to be on the front lines. And I want to thank Governor Richardson and Governor Perry and Governor Schwarzenegger, Governor Napolitano for working with the federal government to prepare the way for the arrival of the Guard troops. And as soon as you get the Border Patrol agents trained, these Guard troops will be going home. But until that time, I want them down here helping you do the job that the American people expect us to do.

We've got to stop catch and release. Perhaps the people of Artesia, New Mexico know what I'm talking about; a lot of Americans don't. What happens is, these Border Patrol agents work hard, they find somebody coming back -- coming into our country; they say, the rules say you check in with the officer here, in the court, come back in about 20 days when we've got time for you to show up -- and they don't show up. So you've got somebody working hard to find somebody, and we let them back out in society, and guess what -- they disappear. And we're going to end that practice.

Eighty-five percent of the illegal immigrants caught crossing the border are Mexican citizens, so they get sent back quickly. Within 24 hours they're sent back across the country, and that's important for people to know -- if you get caught, you get sent home. It means it's less likely you're going to try to come in in the first place.

Unfortunately, it wasn't that easy to send home illegal immigrants from other countries, Central American countries, for example, and so they were released back into our society. It had to be frustrating for you Border Patrol agents who were on the front lines. You work hard, you find somebody who is trying to sneak in from Central America, you do your job; next thing you know you hear, oops, they're somewhere in society. So we're going to end that practice.

And the way you end it is, you build more detention facilities. See, part of the problem was we didn't have a place to hold these folks. And so now I'm working with Congress to increase the number of detention facilities along our borders, to make sure that when we catch somebody from a place other than Mexico, there's a place to hold them until such time as we send them back to their country.

I'm also talking to leaders of those countries from which these people are coming, and I'm saying, you have a responsibility to take them back as quickly as possible. And our mission is to end catch and release once and for all on the southern border of the United States, and we intend to do just that. (Applause.)

In order to make sure this Border Patrol strategy works, this strategy of securing the border, we all agree in Washington that employers must be held to

account for the workers they hire. I spoke to the Chamber of Commerce last week, and I made it clear that the United States is not going to tolerate employers who violate our immigration laws. See, it's against the law to hire someone who is here illegally. That's what the law says. We're a nation of laws, and we expect people to abide by the laws. Most businesses want to comply with the law; they really do. Most people are good, law-abiding citizens who want to comply, but they have trouble verifying the legal status of their employees because of widespread problem of fake IDs and fraudulent Social Security numbers. See, there's a problem here. We got people sneaking into our country, and there's a whole document forgery ring supplying them with fake documents. And it's hard to expect some small business person in Artesia, New Mexico to be in a position to be a document checker.

And the federal government can help. So we're working on an effective system for verifying work eligibility so the businesses can better comply with the law, and then we'll be in a position to say, if you don't comply with the law you deserve to be punished. If we catch you cheating right now, you'll be punished. But we got to make sure that small businesses and large businesses have got the capacity to verify whether a person is here legally or not.

Congress needs to give federal agents the authority they need to enforce the law when job applicants submit fraudulent Social Security numbers. Congress needs to make it mandatory for employers to check information provided by job applicants against federal databases. Right now it's voluntary. In other words, you getting ready to hire somebody, you need to check against the federal database to make sure the numbers on the cards aren't forged, are real. But what really Congress needs to do is to use a biometric technology to create a new tamper-proof identification card for every legal foreign worker. That's what we need. We need a tamper-proof card. It says, if you're here legally working, here's your card, and you got to show it. And the business owner has got to call for it. And if they hire somebody without the tamper-proof card, they're in violation of the law and will be fined.

We've got to reduce the incentives for foreign workers to sneak across the border. That's what we agree on in Washington. If I were a Border Patrol agent, I'd be asking, what are you trying to do about the people trying to sneak in here to work. How come -- how come you don't have a temporary way for them to come work on the jobs Americans aren't doing? See, I believe that we need to understand that there are people coming across this border to put food on the table for their family, and they'll do anything to make it into America to do work. That's what you got to understand. A lot of people in Artesia, New Mexico know what I'm talking about. There are people coming to do work Americans aren't doing. They're working in the dairy farms, they're working the crops, they're laying tile, they're putting roof on in August.

And, therefore, it seems like to me if we want to protect this border, we ought to recognize they're coming and give them a temporary worker card. They can come if they pass a criminal background check for a limited period of time, and after they do their time, they go back home.

If you want to secure this border, you got to make it so people don't feel like they got to sneak across the border. The people these people catch are coming into this country to do jobs. We ought to recognize that and say, here is a legal way for you to come on a temporary basis for jobs that Americans aren't doing. And when you finish your time, when your time is up with the temporary worker card, you go back home. And one way to secure that border is to have people not trying to sneak across the border; is to give them a chance to come here legally on a temporary basis.

You know, I was out in Yuma, and they were describing one of the techniques for people coming here to work. You got a couple of Border Patrol agents out on a part of the world -- a part of the road there, and a hundred people rush them, a hundred people coming to do work rush right across the border, and you got three agents trying to stop them. And it's impossible. So the way to stop them is to do what we're doing out there: Add Border Patrol agents, add new double-fencing in that part of the border. But it seems like to me it's logical to say, you can come over, you don't need to rush the Border Patrol. Just come over here in a legal way, if you pass a background check, for a temporary period of time, and do work Americans aren't doing. That's called a temporary worker plan. And, in my judgment, any comprehensive bill that will work requires a temporary worker plan.

We all agree we've got to resolve the status of millions of illegal immigrants who are here already. And this is the toughest part of the bill for the Congress. Now, I believe there's widespread agreement that we should not have an automatic path to citizenship, which is called amnesty. I'm against amnesty. I'm against amnesty because it's unfair to those people who are standing in line to become a citizen and who have been here lawfully, and I'm against

amnesty because I think if you grant amnesty it invites a further wave of illegal immigrants to try to come in this country. So whatever plan we do should not be viewed as amnesty.

In other words, some say, well, the way to solve this problem is to say, you're here, you're automatically a citizen. I disagree strongly with that. Now, there is a debate and honest disagreement who believe that immigration policy should force every illegal immigrant to return home for good. That's what some people in Washington think. And, obviously, there are those at the other end who believe that every illegal immigrant should be granted automatic citizenship. Neither of those plans are going to work. I just described why one wouldn't work. And trying to find 10 million people who have been here for a long period of time, and rout them out of our society and send them home is just impractical. It may sound good; it's not going to work.

Our job is to put something on paper that will work, so these Border Patrol agents can get their job done. Our job is to be practical and to use common sense. And so here's a common sense middle ground between those two polarized positions. First of all, we've got to recognize that people who -- the difference between people who have been here for a while, and people here, newly arrived. Those who have been here newly arrived ought to be given a temporary worker card, and they work their time and go home.

But we've got to recognize that there are people who have been here for years, and they've got a home and a clean record, and they've been paying taxes. And so I believe if they want to stay here, that they ought to pay a fine, first and foremost. They've broken our law, and they ought to pay a fine for breaking the law. Secondly, I believe they've got to pay taxes, and make sure that they pay their taxes. Thirdly, I believe they ought to speak English. And fourthly, I believe they have to prove they've been working for a job for a number of years. In other words, there's a consequence. And then -- and then -- they can apply for citizenship, but they don't get at the head of the line, they get in the back of the line. You get behind the people who have been here legally.

In other words, you've got somebody who has been here for a while, they've been a good citizen, they've been working hard, and they pay a penalty for being here illegally. But if they want to choose to be a citizen, they get behind those people who have been here legally and who haven't broken the law. And if Congress is worried about the number of people getting in, they can decrease the number of green cards. You can control the size of the line by the number of green cards you issue. If you want a longer line for people, issue fewer green cards. If you want to shorten the line, issue more green cards. But here is a rational way to make sure that we treat people with dignity without granting automatic citizenship, which is called amnesty.

And finally, whatever our views on the issue, we've got to agree that we've got to uphold the great American tradition of the melting pot. You know, we are one nation, under God, for a reason, and that is because we appreciate our history and we share ideals, we respect the flag we fly, and we're bound together by a common language.

I believe English is the key to unlocking opportunity in America. It's been what it takes to help somebody go from picking crops to owning a grocery store, or from cleaning the floors of an office building to running that office. It's what we call assimilation, as part of assimilating to be Americans. When immigrants assimilate into this society, they realize their dreams. A lot of people have come here to this country over the decades with a dream, some of them just as simple as, I'd like to own my own house, or, I want to work hard so my child can go to college.

I'll never forget being the governor of Texas and going to schools like UTEP, University of Texas at El Paso. One of the most amazing parts of that ceremony is when the President of the university stood up and she said, how many of you are first-generation graduates from college, and you see the students -- a lot of them stood up. And you see their proud parents who've worked all their life to help a child go to college. There's something about America where people can work hard and realize dreams that has, I think, made us a unique nation. And as we go through this debate, we've got to understand that people who have dreams and work hard to achieve those dreams renews the spirit of the country, give us a uniqueness, and the capacity to say we're all Americans.

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

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

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

And I also came to thank those who are getting ready to serve the Border Patrol for serving this great country of ours. You're an important part of securing America, and I want to thank you for your dedication to our country. (Applause.)

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

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

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

(Border Patrol Commissioner Ralph Basham is sworn in.)

END 11:20 A.M. MDT

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