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President Bush Discusses Comprehensive Immigration Reform in Texas

Anzalduas Park
Mission, Texas

- [Fact Sheet: Operation Jump Start: Acting Now to Secure the Border](#)
- [In Focus: Immigration](#)

2:40 P.M. CDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very much. It's good to be home. Thank you for coming. Please be seated. You know, when I left the governor's office, I knew I would leave it in capable hands with Rick Perry. And I'm proud of the job he's done as Governor of the state of Texas, and I'm proud to have been introduced by the Governor of my state.

I want to thank you all for the warm welcome. It's nice to get out of Washington. (Laughter.) It's even better to come down to Texas. (Applause.) And I'm proud -- I'm proud to be with my fellow Texans.

I learned a lot growing up here. I learned a lot as your governor. And as Rick said, I understand this border, and I want to talk to you today about border policy. We have an obligation to secure our border, and we have an obligation to treat people with decency and respect. And we're going to do both in the United States of America. (Applause.)

I just traveled and met some of the fine men and women of the National Guard and Border Patrol who are working long hours to do the -- to keep this border secure. And I first -- I want to say thanks to all the Border Patrol agents and the Guard men and women who are here. (Applause.) You've got a tough job, and the role of the federal government is to give you the tools necessary to do your job.

So we landed, and we saw choppers with all kinds of new equipment on it -- airplanes that can interdict people flying in drugs, fast boats to stop the people trying to bring drugs or people up and down the coast of Texas. One of the things you'll hear me talk about is the need to modernize the technology along this border. And that's what we're going to do.

I also recognized we needed more people to help the Guard and to help the Border Patrol do its job. And so, last May, I said we'll deploy up to 6,000 National Guard members to assist the Border Patrol. And I said we'd get it done by August 1st. Well, we got it done by August 1st. And I want to thank those in the National Guard who have joined us. (Applause.)



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President's Remarks

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It's good to look out in the crowd and see a lot of folks I got to know over the years. And most of the folks that I got to know over the years realize that I married well. And so Laura sends her deep affection to the people of south Texas and our friends here in the audience. She's doing just fine, by the way. She's a great First Lady. (Applause.)

And I'm proud to be here with Congressman Ralph Hall, right out of the Dallas area. Thanks for coming, Congressman. He's a fine Texan who cares deeply about the people along the border here. I'm traveling today with the Commissioner of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Ralph Basham. Ralph, thank you for joining us. (Applause.)

So, what happens when the President sets policy in Washington, like on the Guard policy -- I said, we need to get 6,000 members of the Guard down to help the Border Patrol. And then that order goes down the chain of command, and the first person whose desk it landed on in the chain of command after Secretary Rumsfeld was Lieutenant General Steve Blum of the Guard Bureau. General Blum said, Mr. President, we're going to get the job done. I said, that's good, General Blum, because come August 1st, I'm going to come down to the area and take a look-see. And he did. Thank you, General Blum, for a job well done. (Applause.)

David Aguilar is the Chief of the U.S. Border Patrol. I don't know if you know this or not, but David's mother lives here in the area. And he made sure the first person I met when I got off the airplane, as far as he is concerned, was his mother. (Laughter.) One reason he's advanced so highly in the Border Patrol, like the head of the whole thing, is because he has listened to his mother -- (laughter) -- just like I have listened to mine. So thank you for being here, David. Thanks for serving.

Major General Chuck Rodriguez, Adjutant General of the Texas National Guard, very instrumental in making sure we've got the troops here to help the Border Patrol. General, thank you very much. General Alan Dehnert is the Adjutant General for the Texas Air National Guard. General Dehnert, thank you very much, as well. General Mike Kostelnik is the Assistant Commissioner, Office of CDP, Air and Marine, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol. Look, he's the guy in charge of airplanes and boats. (Laughter.)



We're here, as well, with Lieutenant Colonel Jos Carrillo. He is the Rio Grande Valley Texas National Guard Task Force Commander. See, in other words, when you got to bring people down from other states to help the Border Patrol do their job, you have to have an organization. You just can't send people down here. And one thing the Guard has done well is they've organized this effort. I'm also proud to be here with Chief Lynne Underdown. She is the Rio Grande Valley Border Patrol Sector Chairman. Chief, thank you for being here. Thanks for serving. (Applause.)

I want to thank Mayor Salinas of Mission who's with us today. Mayor, thank you for joining us. Proud you're here. (Applause.) Mayor Cortez of McAllen is with us. Mayor, good to see you. Thank you very much. (Applause.) Yes, that's a good sign, Mayor. It's a good sign.

Finally, one of my dear friends, I've known him for a long time, and that's Mayor John David Franz of Hidalgo. Mayor, it's good to see you. (Applause.) John David told me just as I got off the airplane -- I said, how is your family? He said, "My son has just enrolled in West Point." And you tell him thank you, John David, on behalf of a grateful nation. (Applause.)

For those of you who have got a loved one in the United States military, you tell them the Commander-in-Chief is incredibly proud of the job they're doing to help secure this nation and bring peace to this world. We've got a fantastic military, and it's a military that will have the full support -- (applause.)



I'm going to talk today about comprehensive immigration reform. I say comprehensive because unless you have all five pieces working together it's not going to work at all. There's an important debate facing our nation, and the debate is, can we secure this border and, at the same time, honor our history of being a land of immigrants? And the answer is, absolutely, we can do both. And we will do both. (Applause.)

First, we've got to secure the border. We will keep it open to lawful trade and commerce, and we will work to secure the border to prevent people and goods and weapons from being brought illegally here. That's our job. It's the job of federal government, it's the job working with the state government to get the job done. That's what the American people expect.

All this strategy has got to start with more money, and so we've increased funding for border security from \$4.6 billion in 2001 to more than \$7.6 billion in 2006. In other words, you can't say the American people are going to make a commitment to secure the border unless you spend money to secure the border, and we're doing just that. And I recently signed an emergency supplemental spending bill that provides an additional \$1.9 billion in immediate funding for border security. And what does that mean? Well, it means we're going to give the Border Patrol, the people on the front lines of securing this border, better technology, and we're going to expand the number of Border Patrol agents that will be able to use that technology. That's the strategy.

We put new resources in people's hands, and as a result of the hard work of Border Patrol since 2001, federal agents have apprehended and sent home more than 6 million people entering America illegally.

People are working hard. There's people doing their job, but we could do more. There's more work to be done. And so we've called for increases in manpower and technology. We're going to train 6,000 additional agents, so that you've got more people to help you do the job. And in the meantime, the reason we brought the Guard down here was because we knew we had an immediate need to enforce the border. And so, until those 6,000 are trained, we're going to be using National Guard units from over 30 states here. And the plan is working. It makes sense. If we need more manpower and the need for manpower is immediate, it makes sense to call upon our Guard troops to come and help the Border Patrol do the job.

We're going to help build a virtual border by using infrared and motion sensors. We'll deploy unmanned aerial vehicles, and those are going to leverage the manpower we have. It's amazing, the new technologies that are arriving. People are -- these Border Patrol agents will tell you that they're seeing more and better equipment. You got heat sensors on guard stations that will enable people to detect movement. We got choppers that are able to send real-time video streams back to Border Patrol command centers that will then enable a dispatcher to help an agent catch somebody who's smuggling people or drugs on a near real-time basis.

This border is changing, and it needs to change so the Border Patrol can do its job. We call this, by the way, this operation when we moved the Guard down here, Operation Jump-Start. So when you hear about Operation Jump Start, that means Guard.

And the Guard has helped a lot. You know, it's interesting that -- and by the way, the Guard is not just in Texas. It's in Mexico, Arizona, and California, as well. In other words, Border Patrol agents all up and down this southern border are getting help from our Guard men and women. And the Guard are doing -- look, they're not arresting people. We're not going to militarize this border. The job of arresting people is up to the Border Patrol. That's your job. That's what you're trained to do. That's what your skill level is. Their job is to help the Border Patrol -- you know, surveillance and construction, logistics. I mean, if you've got a Guard person dispatching, it means there's more -- one more Border Patrol agent out on the front line. And so we're going to use this Guard until we get 6,000 more people trained.



For the people who wonder whether the Guard could be effective down here when we deployed Operation Jump Start, since we've deployed it, our agents have seen 17,000 pounds of illegal drugs and apprehended 2,500 illegal immigrants. In other words, the Guard is leveraging -- giving the Border Patrol more opportunity.

Last month, Border Patrol agents in this sector confiscated more than 4,200 pounds of marijuana that was hidden in a tractor trailer. And the support of the Guard was important in making this seizure happen. So for those of you in the Guard, I want to thank you for coming down here and helping these good folks in the Border Patrol, and your presence is making a difference. (Applause.)

In order to make sure the Border Patrol is effective, we've got to stop what's called catch and release. For the veterans down here, they know what catch and release means. And it had to have been discouraging for you -- risk your life, or you're spending long hours, and all of a sudden, you apprehend people who are sneaking in here illegally. But we didn't have enough detention space to hold people. And so the people are given a court date. And they said, you check back in when your court date comes back up. But a lot of folks didn't want to check back in when their court date came up. So they just didn't show up. And one of the things I learned early on was how discouraging that can be for the people on the front line of securing this border.

You can imagine what it must feel like to work hard and chase somebody down, treat them humanely, send them in for their court date -- and they don't show up. It seemed like wasted effort, didn't it? So this government is committed to ending this unacceptable practice. Step one is to add detention beds. If you didn't have enough detention space in the first place, the way you solve the problem is you add beds. And here in the Rio Grande Valley, we're going to add 1,500 beds in short order.

We're also accelerating the deportation process, particularly for people who are not from Mexico that we catch coming across the border. Last year, for example, we put together what was called Operation Texas Hold 'Em. We cut through red tape so we could quickly return Brazilians that we caught illegally crossing this border. We sent a clear message: When we catch you there will be immediate deportation. And guess what happened. As a result of that clear message the number of illegal immigrants from Brazil has dropped significantly across the whole region.

That's the message we must continually send over and over again to people who feel like they can come from Central America, for example, and if caught, be let back into society, and if not caught, they're able to escape the Border Patrol. We want to send a clear message: We will enforce our border.

But in order to make sure these Border Patrol agents can do their job, we must have a temporary worker program. You got to understand here, and I know you do, there are people doing jobs Americans aren't doing. There are people who have come across this border to do work Americans are not doing. And it makes sense to let them come on a temporary basis in a legal way. (Applause.)

Wouldn't you rather have people who are doing work Americans are not doing not trying to sneak across the border? I know the Border Patrol agents would rather not have people try to sneak across the border. It makes sense to me to say to somebody, if you're going to do a job Americans aren't doing, you can come for a period of time -- say, three years -- and do that work, and support your family back home. And then you go home after your time is up. That's the way to treat people humanely.

I don't like a system that's not working, and a system that forces people who want to work in the back of 18-wheelers. I don't like a system that encourages smuggling. I don't like a system that encourages people to walk across the desert to risk their life. (Applause.) I think we need to have a system that is orderly and fair and transparent.

We've got to enforce our immigration laws at the work site. But as a result of illegal activities in trying to get people into this country, there's a lot of document forgery. Our employers cannot be document verifiers. They don't know whether they've got a real document to look at or a fake document to

look at. One of the temporary -- parts of the temporary worker program would be to give people a tamper-proof temporary worker card, that they could say, I'm legal, I'm here to do the job, I'm going to work for a period of time and then I'm going to go home after I work a period of time. I can be here legally. That will make it easier for us to have work site enforcement.

Listen, we will hold people to account. It's against the law in the United States to employ somebody who is here illegally. And a nation of law is a nation that upholds its laws. But we've got to be wise about the policy that we enforce. We've got to give people something that document forgers can't tamper with, so our employers know whether or not they're hiring somebody who's here illegally, or not.

Fourthly, we've got to make sure that we resolve the status of illegal immigrants who are already in this country. It's an interesting debate taking place in America -- I'll give you my position. One, I do not think we ought to grant amnesty to people who are here illegally. And the reason I don't is I think that will encourage a whole other bunch of people to come. (Applause.) But I know you cannot deport 10 million people who have been here working. It's unrealistic. It may sound good in certain circles and political circles. It's not going to work.

The best plan is to say to somebody who has been here illegally, if you've been paying your taxes, and you've got a good criminal record, that you can pay a fine for being here illegally, and you can learn English, like the rest of us have done, and you can get in a citizenship line to apply for citizenship. You don't get to get in the front, you get to get in the back of the line.

But this idea of deporting people is just not -- it doesn't make any sense to me, and it doesn't make any sense to a lot of people who understand this issue. So here's a reasonable way to treat people with respect and accomplish what we want to accomplish, which is to be a country of law and a country of decency and respect. (Applause.)

And finally, in order to make a comprehensive immigration plan work, we've got to help folks assimilate into our society. And what does that mean? It means, help people learn English, to help people understand the traditions and history of the United States of America.

One of the fabulous things about our country is that our soul has constantly been renewed by people seeking the American Dream, people coming here to work to realize their dream, people wanting to raise a family in the United States of America. And we come from different backgrounds, but we're all united by the great ideal of being an American citizen. That's why we say, we're one nation under God. And to help people assimilate will help us keep that in place. (Applause.)

And so it's good to be down here on our border. It's an exciting part of the United States of America. It's amazing how this country has grown and how vital the valley is of the state of Texas. It's got to be exciting for people to grow up in this part of the world and see the new prosperity. Gosh, it wasn't all that long ago that -- I know these Mayors can remember -- the economy was tough down here. It was kind of farming, and that was all.

And now, there's economic vitality. People are making a living, and the schools are improving. It's a great place to raise a family. It's a great place to also come and honor those who wear the uniform of the United States of America, whether it be local law enforcement, or the sheriff's departments, or the Border Patrol, or the United States military. We're a blessed country. We're a great country because we've got people who stand up and say, I want to serve. And it's the service of the men and women in uniform that are doing the job down here that the American people expect.

I can't tell you how proud I am to be the Commander-in-Chief of the military and to be the President of the United States, full of such decent and honorable people. I'm honored to be back in this part of the world. I want to thank you for coming out and giving me a chance to talk about a comprehensive immigration plan. I expect the United States Congress to do its duty and pass comprehensive immigration reform.

God bless. (Applause.)

END 3:03 P.M.

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