

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks on Immigration Reform and an Exchange With Reporters Prior to Departure for Paris, France

November 9, 2018

The President. So we're heading off to Europe. It should be a very beautiful period of time, the 100th anniversary of the ending of World War I. We have many countries; the leadership of many countries will be there, especially since they heard the United States will be there. And we look forward to that. It'll be a great, really, commemorative service. I think it's going to be something very special. I've seen what they have planned, and I think it's going to be something very, very special.

I just signed the proclamation on asylum. Very important. People can come in, but they have to come in through the ports of entry. And that, to me, is a very important thing. Again, I reiterate we need Democrats' votes. They have to pass new immigration laws, because they're flooding our country. We're not letting them in, but they're trying to flood our country. We need the wall; we're building the wall. But we need it all built at one time and quickly. It's very important.

We need Democrat support on new immigration laws to bring us up to date. The laws are obsolete, and they're incompetent. They are the worst laws any country has anywhere in the world. And it's only because we don't have the Democrats' votes. So we need Democrat votes so we can change immigration, and we'll have no trouble whatsoever at the border. We want people to come into our country, but they have to come into our country legally. They have to come into our country legally.

We want people to come in through the merit system so that they can work for all of these great companies that I have coming into our country. We have many car companies coming in. We have many tech companies coming in. We have literally hundreds of companies moving back into the United States. We need people. We need to have—you've seen the unemployment numbers are at record lows. We need people in our country, but they have to come in legally, and they have to have merit. They have to come in through a system of merit. We have everything worked out. We need some votes from the Democrats, or we need support from the Democrats, and hopefully, they see what's going on.

And the reason this is happening is, we've created such a successful country, economically, that everybody is flooding into our country, or they want to. But we're stopping them at the border. And that's why we have our great military there. Okay?

Acting Attorney General Matthew G. Whitaker

Q. Mr. President, what do you say to all the criticism of Matt Whitaker and the calls for him to recuse himself, given what he's said about the Russia investigation?

The President. Well, Matt Whitaker—I don't know Matt Whitaker. Matt Whitaker worked for Jeff Sessions, and he was always extremely highly thought of, and he still is. But I didn't know Matt Whitaker. He worked for Attorney General Sessions. He was very, very highly thought of and still is highly thought of. But this only comes up because anybody that works for me, they do a number on them.

But Matt Whitaker is a very smart man. He is a very respected man in the law enforcement community, very respected, at the top of the line. And actually, the choice was greeted with raves, initially, and it still is in some circles on—you know, it's a shame that no matter who I put in, they go after them. It's very sad, I have to say. But he's Acting. I think he'll do a very good job. And we'll see what happens.

But I will say this: Matt Whitaker is a very highly respected man, and you didn't have any problems with Matt Whitaker when he worked for Jeff Sessions. He's respected by law enforcement. He's a very strong law enforcement personality and person.

Acting Attorney General Matthew G. Whitaker

Q. Mr. President, did you talk with Matt Whitaker at all about the Mueller probe before you appointed him?

The President. I didn't speak to Matt Whitaker about it. I don't know Matt Whitaker. Matt Whitaker has a great reputation, and that's what I wanted. I also wanted to do something which, frankly, I could have brought somebody very easily from the outside. I didn't want to do that. When Sessions left, what I did, very simply, is take a man who worked for Sessions. Again, he worked for Jeff Sessions. He's a highly respected man, especially by law enforcement. And I think he's going to do a great job. He's there in an acting position. He's a—probably, from what I hear—a very strong person, a very strong personality. And I think that's what they need.

Acting Attorney General Matthew G. Whitaker

Q. Is Kellyanne's husband's wrong?

Q. Mr. President, Mr. President——

The President. Who?

Q. Kellyanne's husband wrote that the appointment was unconstitutional.

The President. You mean Mr. Kellyanne Conway? [*Laughter*]

Q. He wrote that you're unconstitutionally appointing him. He is wrong?

The President. He's just trying to get publicity for himself. Why don't you do this? Why don't you ask Kellyanne that question, all right? All right? She might know him better than me. I really don't know the guy.

Acting Attorney General Matthew G. Whitaker

Q. Mr. President, given Matt Whitaker's public comments——

Q. [*Inaudible*]

Q. Given Matt Whitaker's public comments concluding about the Mueller——

The President. Well, when you make a comment——

Q. ——should he recuse himself? Should he recuse himself?

The President. First of all—let me speak, please. First of all, when you make comments, I see everybody on television—all these lawyers, all these law enforcement people—making comment after comment. They never ask to get recused. They make comment. The fact that you go on Fox or CNN or MSNBC or anybody, you make a comment, you'd have nobody left to choose. You would have absolutely nobody left.

I see different people, at different times, going on shows. Am I supposed to say, "Oh, now he's never qualified to serve in Government?" So, all the time, I'm watching many different people go on many different shows, saying many different things. That doesn't mean they're unqualified.

Now, in all fairness to Matt Whitaker, who, again, I didn't know—okay?—other than through reputation. His reputation is excellent. But in all fairness to him, he did some shows; so did many of the people that you're talking about. So did everybody that—you're talking about a permanent position. I think everybody looking at a permanent position, in any department, has done many shows. Does that mean we can't hire anybody? We have to hire somebody that's in a shell? I don't think so.

Q. [*Inaudible*]—a normal amount of attention——

Florida Gubernatorial and Senatorial Elections

Q. Mr. President, do you see or envision a Federal role in the Florida recount?

The President. Say it again.

Q. Do you foresee——

The President. You have to speak up.

Q. And I'm trying to. Do you foresee a Federal role in the Florida recount, which you tweeted about last night?

The President. Well, it could be. Because if you look at Broward—and Palm Beach, to a lesser extent—if you look at Broward County, they have had a horrible history. And if you look at the person—in this case, a woman—involved, she has had a horrible history. And all of a sudden, they're finding votes out of nowhere.

And Rick Scott, who won by—you know, it was close, but he won by a comfortable margin; every couple of hours, it goes down a little bit. And then, you see the people, and they were involved with that fraud of the fake dossier, the phony dossier. And I guess, I hear they were somehow involved or worked with the GPS Fusion people, who have committed—I mean, you look at what they've done, you look at the dishonesty—look, look, there's bad things have gone on in Broward County, really bad things. She's been to court. She's had a lot of problems. She's lost. I'd say this: He easily won, but every hour it seems to be going down. I think that people have to look at it very, very cautiously.

Q. Sir, what do you say to Michelle Obama? What do you say to Michelle Obama, sir?

Investigation Into Russia's Interference in 2016 Presidential Election

Q. You're finishing up the written answers——

The President. What?

Q. You're doing the written questions to Robert Mueller. Have you ruled out a sit-down, an in-person sit-down, with Robert Mueller?

The President. I haven't ruled out anything. I haven't even thought about it. I'm thinking about the world.

Q. How long——

The President. Right now I'm thinking about the world. I'm not thinking about sit-downs or not sit-downs. There was no collusion. It's a whole hoax. This was a thing set up by the Democrats, just like they set up other things, when you look at what's going on in Florida, when you look at what's going on in lots of different locations.

The Russian investigation is a hoax. It's a phony hoax. I didn't speak to Russians. The fact is, I was a much better candidate than Hillary Clinton. I worked much harder. I went to the right places. She went to the wrong places, because she didn't know what the hell she was doing. I did a great job; I was a great candidate. She was a bad candidate.

I went to Wisconsin. I went more to Michigan. I went to Pennsylvania. She didn't do a good job. This has nothing to do with Russians; it's a Russian hoax.

Q. How long is your timetable for Attorney General, Mr. President? What's your timetable?

Former First Lady Michelle Obama/Former President Barack Obama

Q. Sir, what do you say to Michelle Obama, sir? What do you say to Michelle Obama, who says she will never forgive you for your birther comments in the past?

The President. Oh, Michelle Obama said that? I haven't seen it. I guess she wrote a book. She got paid a lot of money to write a book. And they always insist that you come up with controversial.

Well, I'll give you a little controversy back: I'll never forgive him for what he did to our United States military by not funding it properly. It was depleted. Everything was old and tired. And I came in, and I had to fix it. And I'm in the process of spending tremendous amounts of money. So I'll never forgive him for what he did to our military. I'll never forgive him for what he did in many other ways, which I'll talk to you about in the future.

Q. Mr. President, how long—

The President. But what he did—because she talked about safety—what he did to our military made this country very unsafe for you and you and you.

Q. Mr. President, how long—

Former Governor Christopher J. Christie of New Jersey

Q. Mr. President, what is your timetable for an Attorney General, and did you meet Chris Christie here, yesterday?

The President. Well, we're looking at other people. I did not see Chris Christie yesterday. I heard he was in the White House. He's a friend of mine. He's a good man. When he got out of the Presidential race, as you know, the next day, he supported me. He has good taste. So he proved one thing: He has good taste. But when he got out, he immediately supported me. I like Chris Christie, but I have not talked to him about it. He was in the White House yesterday, but I have not—I did not see him.

Q. [Inaudible]—Pipeline decision today?

CNN Chief White House Correspondent Jim Acosta/American Urban Radio Networks White House Correspondent April Ryan

Q. Mr. President, how long are you going to leave Jim Acosta in the penalty box?

The President. I think Jim Acosta is a very unprofessional man. I think—he does this with everybody. He gets paid to do that. You know, he gets paid to burst in. He's a very unprofessional guy. Whether it was me or Ronald Reagan or anybody else, he would have done the same thing. Look, I don't think he's a smart person, but he's got a loud voice. And——

Q. And is it permanent?

The President. Wait, wait. David [David Martosko, Daily Mail], do you mind if I answer the question?

Q. Sure. Of course.

The President. And as far as I'm concerned, I haven't made that decision. But it could be others also. When you're in the White House—this is a very sacred place to me; this is a very special place—you have to treat the White House with respect. You have to treat the Presidency with respect. If you've ever seen him dealing with Sarah Huckabee Sanders, it's a disgrace. And he does it for, you know, the reason.

The same thing with April Ryan. I watched her get up. I mean, you talk about somebody that's a loser. She doesn't know what the hell she's doing. She gets publicity, and then she gets a pay raise, or she gets a contract with, I think, CNN. But she's very nasty, and she shouldn't be. She shouldn't be.

Q. Are you suggesting that reporters——

The President. You've got to treat the White House and the Office of the Presidency with respect.

Q. Are you suggesting that reports that you don't like——

The President. I see her nodding very positively, so I'll answer her, you know.

Q. [Inaudible]—the Midwest. Tell me about—[inaudible].

The President. You have to speak up though. You have a helicopter raging back—for all the people that don't know why, my hearing is great, but you have a helicopter that's raging back there.

Q. I'll help her out. I'll help her out.

Former President Ronald Reagan

The President. In fact, do you remember Ronald Reagan? He'd always: "What? What? I can't hear you." I never—I always thought he was hard of hearing; he wasn't. That's the problem.

Russia-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President, she wants to know what's going to happen when you meet with Putin.

The President. Well, I'll meet with Putin at the G-20. I don't know that we're seeing each other in Paris, but they may have—there may be a lunch for the leaders. I don't know. So I would say nothing. We have a good relationship. Having a good relationship with Russia and China, and every other country is a good thing, not a bad thing.

But we have a good—we have a very good relationship.

Q. Mr. President, are you punishing reporters because you don't like their questions?

Secretary of the Interior Ryan K. Zinke

Q. Mr. President, are you going to fire Ryan Zinke?

Q. Mr. President, are you punishing reporters because you don't like their questions?

The President. No. I'm going to look into any complaints. If, David, there are any complaints, I'll look into it.

Q. Mr. President, are you punishing reporters because you don't like their questions?

Keystone XL Pipeline Project/Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program (DACA)

Q. Mr. President, sir, your thoughts about the judge's decision to delay the XL Pipeline?

The President. Well, it was a political decision made by a judge. I mean, I think it's a disgrace. It's 48,000 jobs. I approved it; it's ready to start. And they went—and I guess they'll end up going to the Ninth Circuit, as usual. We're slowly putting new judges in the Ninth Circuit. Everything goes to the Ninth Circuit. Everything.

Now, DACA, that was actually good news yesterday, because you never win in the Ninth Circuit if you're on this half of the equation. When I say "half," it could be half or more. But you never win—you rarely win in the Ninth Circuit. The good news is, by rejecting DACA in the Ninth Circuit yesterday, finally, we've been waiting for that. We get to the Supreme Court, and we want to be in the Supreme Court on DACA.

President Obama said he had no right to sign it. He had no right, but it was upheld in the Ninth Circuit, as usual. If you take President Obama's statement, he knows—he knew that he couldn't sign it. So this whole thing, it's a terrible thing what's happening with the courts. The DACA will now, hopefully, go to the Supreme Court, where we'll be given a fair decision.

Potential Successors to U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Nikki R. Haley

Q. U.N. Ambassador. Have you made a decision, Mr. President?

The President. We'll be making a decision. I have so many people who want it. We are looking at Heather. We're looking at numerous people. We have plenty of time. Nikki is staying until the end of the year. We're working with Nikki also. We have some very good people that want that job.

I'll make the decision over the next few weeks, but by the end of the year.

Q. Sir, the Democrats—Mr. President, the Democrats keep picking up more seats in the House—

Potential Successors to Former Attorney General Jefferson B. Sessions III

Q. On the Attorney General, what's your timeline to make a decision? And who are the frontrunners?

The President. Well, I have some very, very good people. But, I mean, there's no rush. You know, it has to go through a Senate process, which takes a long time. But we'll pick somebody that's great. We're going to pick somebody that's very good. And again, I think it's very—Matt Whitaker is a highly respected man, but I didn't know Matt Whitaker. But he's a highly respected man.

Q. Mr. President, do you expect Matt Whitaker to be a part of the Bob Mueller investigation?

Acting Attorney General Matthew G. Whitaker/Department of Justice Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller III

Q. Mr. President, you said the Senate process, that this is a Senate process. Matt Whitaker has not gone through a Senate process.

The President. Yes, but neither has Mueller.

Q. [Inaudible]

The President. Excuse me. You talk about the Senate process. Mueller is doing a report. He hasn't gone through the Senate process. You're saying Whitaker hasn't, but Whitaker has. Wait a minute. Because he was a really distinguished U.S. attorney in Iowa, and he was approved by everybody. Because to be U.S. attorney, that's top of the line. He was a highly respected.

In fact, I'll tell you, the Ambassador to China, as you know, Terry Branstad—who used to be the Governor of Iowa—he told me that what a great choice that is; that he is one of the most respected people in all of Iowa. And that was coming from Terry Branstad, who was the Governor.

Look, Mueller—a big complaint people have—Mueller was not Senate confirmed. So he's doing a report. He wasn't Senate confirmed. Whitaker was Senate confirmed. And now, he doesn't need this, but he was Senate confirmed at the highest level, when he was the U.S. attorney from Iowa.

Q. Sir, the Democrats keep gaining——

The President. But Mueller was not Senate confirmed. Why didn't they get him Senate confirmed? He should have been Senate confirmed. Because——

Q. [Inaudible]

The President. No—but because of all the conflicts, they didn't want to bring him before the Senate, because he's very conflicted. So because of those conflicts, they didn't want to bring him before the Senate.

But don't tell me about Whitaker.

Q. [Inaudible]

The President. Don't tell me about Whitaker, because Mueller was not Senate confirmed, and Whitaker was, actually.

2018 Congressional Elections

Q. Sir, Mr. President, the Democrats keep picking up more seats in the House, now more than 31 seats. Can you still describe it as—[inaudible]?

The President. It doesn't—whether they get a couple of more House seats, it doesn't matter.

Q. How would you——

The President. It doesn't matter. But you notice the votes never go the other way? They hire lawyers, and the votes don't ever seem to go the Republican way, although I hear——

Q. Do you have evidence of fraud?

The President. Well, I don't know, you tell me. It's always the Democrats. It's always GPS Fusion. It's always crooked stuff.

Federal Bureau of Investigation/Voter Fraud Allegations

Q. But there's no evidence that you have, is there?

The President. Look, look at what happened. How many FBI are gone? How many Justice Department people are gone? That I found out—that I found out. There's a lot of bad stuff going on in this country, and we're finding out, and I'm getting to the bottom of it. And I've done a hell of a job. How many people have been fired from the FBI? You've got Comey, you've got McCabe, you've got Strzok, you have Lisa Page, you have Baker. You have a whole list of people. There's a lot of crooked stuff going on.

But it is interesting; it always seems to go the way of the Democrats. Now, in Arizona, all of a sudden, out of the wilderness, they find a lot of votes. And she's—the other candidate is just winning by a hair. What's going on in a Florida is a disgrace. Go down and see what happened over the last period of time, 10 years; take a look at Broward County. Take a look at the total dishonesty of what happened with respect to Broward County. Broward County—

Q. [Inaudible]

The President. Just—[inaudible]. Broward County-slash-election. There's a lot of dishonesty.

Video of CNN Chief White House Correspondent Jim Acosta During the President's November 7 News Conference

Q. Why did your Press Secretary share a doctored video of the incident in the East Room of the taped video?

The President. The taped video of Acosta?

Q. Yes, sir.

The President. What are you talking about? I mean—

Q. The video is manipulated.

The President. All that was—nobody manipulated it. Give me a break. See, that's just dishonest reporting. All that is, is a closeup. See, that's just—that is just dishonest reporting. I watched that; I heard that last night. They made it close up. They showed it up close up.

And he was not nice to that young woman. I don't hold him for that—

Q. They sped it up.

The President. —because it wasn't overly, you know, horrible. But it was—but all that was—when you say "doctored," you're a dishonest guy.

Q. Mr. President—

The President. Because it wasn't doctored. They gave a closeup view. That's not doctoring.

Q. He's referring to the fact that they streamlined the video?

Supreme Court Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Q. Mr. President, are you thinking about more Supreme Court Justices since Justice Ginsburg in the hospital?

The President. No, I wish her well. She said something very inappropriate during the campaign, but she apologized for it. I wouldn't say she's exactly on my side, but I wish her well. I hope she gets better. And I hope she serves on the Supreme Court for many, many years.

Shooting in Thousand Oaks, CA

Q. [*Inaudible*]—another mass shooting, this time in California.

The President. Terrible. Terrible.

Q. What are we going to do about guns—[*inaudible*]?

The President. He's a very sick—well, that's a mental health problem. He is a very sick puppy. It was a very, very sick guy. Not too many people knew about it. But now that they're looking, they're starting to see he had a lot of problems, a lot of trouble. And we're very much into that. As you know, I funded a lot of money toward mental health for that reason. And we're continuing to do it, and we continue to look at the laws. We want to make sure—

Q. We're 2 years in.

The President. Look, it is a problem. It's a disastrous problem. It makes you sick to look at it. But he was a very, very mentally ill person.

Q. Do firearms play any part of this conversation? Do firearms—

The President. Say it?

Q. Do firearms play any part of this mental health conversation? Because—

The President. Well, he was a war veteran. He was a marine; he was in the war. He served time. He saw some pretty bad things. And a lot of people say he had the PTSD. And that's a tough deal. We're spending—as you know, I've given tremendous funding to the vets for the PTSD and for general health for PTSD. It's a big problem.

Q. Mr. President—

The President. People come back. That's why it's a horrible thing. They come back, and they're never the same.

Shooting in Thousand Oaks, CA

Q. Are you prepared to fly that flag at half-mast a lot more?

The President. Well, I don't like abusing any privilege, but when I see something that we should do, I always do that. Yes, I always do that.

Shooting in Thousand Oaks, CA

Q. Are you going to California, Mr. President? Are you going to California?

The President. I believe you should. When somebody—

Q. Do you expect Matt Whitaker to be involved in the Russia probe?

The President. When it's a worthy situation, I do believe it.

Acting Attorney General Matthew G. Whitaker

Q. Do you expect Matt Whitaker to be involved in the Russia probe? Do you want him to——

The President. It's up to him.

Q. Do you want him to rein in Robert Mueller?

The President. What a stupid question that is. What a stupid question. But I watch you a lot. You ask a lot of stupid questions.

Q. [*Inaudible*]—Mr. President. Mr. President——

Birthright Citizenship

Q. [*Inaudible*]—sign an Executive order on birthright citizenship this week. Why did that not happen?

The President. We're working. Well, because other things have come up, and we will be signing it soon.

Q. Was it a political stunt?

The President. No, no, no. Oh, we're signing it. We're doing it. And it'll probably work its way up to the Supreme Court. Birthright citizenship probably works its way up to the Supreme Court. It will be signed. We wanted a perfect document. And because of the election and all of the delays in the election and whatever is going on in Broward County—remember the word, "Broward County."

Voter Fraud Allegations in Broward County, FL

Q. Is there any evidence of fraud in Broward County?

The President. Wait. Well, you take a look at the past. Take a look at the past.

Q. Right now is there any evidence?

The President. And all of a sudden, they're finding votes? You mean after the election, they're finding votes? And then, you look at her past, where she's already been convicted, and now they're finding votes.

Q. Who is "her"?

The President. And you have this guy, Elias, who represented Hillary Clinton and a lot of very shady things. I think what you ought to do is get smart.

Good luck, folks. I'll see you in Europe.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:05 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House prior to boarding Marine One. In his remarks, he referred to George T. Conway III, husband of Counselor to the President Kellyanne Conway; Brenda C. Snipes, supervisor of elections, Broward County, FL; Senator-elect Richard L. Scott; White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders; Brian M. Morris, judge, U.S. District Court for the District of Montana; State Department Spokesperson Heather Nauert; James B. Comey, Jr., former Director, Andrew G. McCabe, former Deputy Director, and James A. Baker, former General Counsel, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); former FBI agent Peter P. Strzok II, in his former capacity as lead investigator of former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's use of a private e-mail server and the investigation into Russia's interference in the 2016 Presidential election; Lisa Page, former legal counsel to former Deputy Director McCabe; Senator-elect

Kyrsten L. Sinema; Ian David Long, suspected gunman in the shooting at the Borderline Bar and Grill in Thousand Oaks, CA, on November 7; and Marc Elias, general counsel for 2016 Democratic Presidential nominee Hillary Rodham Clinton. He also referred to Proclamation 9822 titled "Addressing Mass Migration Through the Southern Border of the United States."

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Immigration reform; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Acosta, Jim; Baker, James A.; Branstad, Terry E.; Christie, Christopher J.; Clinton, Hillary Rodham; Comey, James B., Jr.; Conway, George T., III; Conway, Kellyanne; Elias, Marc; Ginsburg, Ruth Bader; Haley, Nikki R.; Long, Ian David; McCabe, Andrew G.; Morris, Brian M.; Mueller, Robert S., III; Nauert, Heather; Obama, Barack; Obama, Michelle; Page, Lisa; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Ryan, April; Sanders, Sarah Huckabee; Scott, Richard L.; Sessions, Jefferson B., III; Sinema, Krysten L.; Snipes, Brenda C.; Strzok, Peter P., II; Whitaker, Matthew G.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : Funding; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), treatment efforts; California : Shooting in Thousand Oaks; China : Relations with U.S.; China : U.S. Ambassador; Commerce, international : Group of Twenty (G-20) nations; Communications : News media :: Accuracy and fairness; Congress : Bipartisanship; Congress : Senate :: Presidential nominations, confirmation process; Economy, national : Improvement; Elections : 2018 congressional elections; Elections : Voter participation; Energy : Oil and gas industry :: Keystone XL Pipeline project; Health and medical care : Mental health programs and services; Immigration and naturalization : Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, review; Immigration and naturalization : Foreign nationals and refugees, U.S. admission policy; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Judiciary : Supreme Court :: Associate Justice; Justice, Department of : Acting Attorney General; Justice, Department of : Special Counsel; Law enforcement and crime : Gun violence, prevention efforts; Mexico : Border with U.S., infrastructure and security; Russia : 2016 U.S. elections, interference; Russia : President; Russia : Relations with U.S.; United Nations : U.S. Representatives :: Permanent Representative; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Counselor; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Press Secretary.

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