Remarks in a Meeting With Republican Congressional Leadership and an Exchange With Reporters  
September 5, 2018

The President. Well, thank you very much. I want to thank Members of the House and Senate leadership for joining us today to discuss the September legislative agenda, including how we can responsibly fund the Government, protect American taxpayers, and defend American security.

We've gone a long way toward doing that. We've made tremendous progress over the last year and a half plus. And this group is very special to the country and very special to me. It's a great group of people. I don't think they get recognized as they should, the job they've done.

Thank you to my good friends: Speaker Ryan, Leader McConnell, Majority Leader McCarthy. The most brave—the bravest person around—where is our guy? Steve Scalise. And I saw you the other night on a very major program. And good job. It was great. You've done a great job. And Senator Cornyn, good job this morning. I was watching. And, Senator Thune, thank you very much for being here.

Also, I want to thank Secretary Nielsen and Director Mulvaney. They've been working very well with the group and with Congress, and a lot of progress is being made.

In recent years, due to the Democrats' obstruction—which is really what they are; they're obstructionists. Their whole campaign is called "resist." That's about all they have going. The Government has been forced to pass so-called omnibus spending bills, where all of the spending is rolled into one giant package in a very rushed manner.

Last year, I said we're not going to do that. We don't want to do that again. We don't like it. But we wanted to take care of our military, which we did. And we took it beautifully. And they're right now rebuilding the military to a level that it's never been at before.

And also, we got $6 billion for the opioid crisis. And that was a very important thing. If we didn't get that, we would have had some very big problems. So we took care of our military, and we spent a lot of money, and we're spending a lot of money on working very hard on the opioid problem.

I'm also pleased to say the Senate and House Republicans have responded in so many different ways. They've made tremendous progress in funding our Government at the fastest pace, Mitch, I think since 2000, I've heard. So that's a pretty fast pace.

Also, I want to make good on a promise to fund border security. Democrats want to abolish ICE. They want to—I guess, by abolishing ICE, they don't mind crime flooding into our country, because that's exactly what would happen at a level like we've never seen before in the history of our country. And Republicans want to save American lives and support American law enforcement. And that's what we're doing.

No matter where I go, law enforcement comes up to me, and they say, "Thank you so much, Mr. President." And they really mean it.

I also want to make sure we pass a farm bill, which is moving along nicely, before the end of the month to help our great farmers. I strongly support the commonsense work
requirements and the food stamps in the farm bill. We'll see if we can get that. The farmers would like to get that.

We're right now negotiating, as we speak, with Canada. And Canada is coming along. We'll see how it all works out. But we have to have a fair—I won't call it NAFTA, because we'll be changing the name. We don't want NAFTA. NAFTA has been very bad for our country. But we'll have a trade bill. I'll give you a little surprise as to the name when it's completed—[laughter]—because it may have two or it may three. We're going to find out pretty soon.

But I look forward to talking to the leaders. And they really have been a spectacular group of people to work with. And I want to thank all of you, Mitch and Paul and everybody. You really have been great. And we've made a lot of progress, and we will make a lot more. The country is doing—on an economic basis, on a financial basis—probably better than it's ever done before. The markets are up almost 50 percent since my election victory, which is something that, in history, I don't think anybody would be able to say. Even in a much longer period, they wouldn't be able to say it, for the most part.

But a lot of great things are happening. I think probably one of the stellar achievements are jobs, because unemployment is at the lowest levels that it's ever been. And whether you look at African American unemployment or Asian unemployment or Hispanic unemployment, it's at historic lows. Never in the history of our country has it been so good. Women is 65 years. I always have a little fun with that one—I said we're going to catch. Because 65 years is good. But 65 years is not as historic as "historic."

So we're doing very well in just about every way, and we'll let you know about Canada. A lot of people are saying, "How are you doing with Canada?" We'll let you know. We should know over the next 2 or 3 days. Maybe even today. But you will be the first to know.

And just one other point: The Amir just left, of Kuwait. And we talked about the difficulties in the Middle East. And I will tell you that tremendous progress has been made with respect to Iran. If you look at Iran, the first day that I got to office—or let's look at it differently: A day before I got to office, everybody was saying Iran would be taking over the Middle East. It was just a question of when. Now they're just looking to survive.

And we've made a lot of difference in the Middle East. People are being pulled out of various areas of Syria. People are being pulled out of areas of Yemen, because it's very tough right now for Iran. And when I came in, the Iran deal was a disaster. Ending the Iran deal was a great thing for humanity. But we'll see how it all works out. We still have a ways to go, but Iran is a very much different place. We'll see what happens, also, as to whether or not they talk. If they want to talk that's fine, and if they don't want to talk, that's fine.

And just a final subject is China. We've done very well in our negotiation with China, but we're not prepared to make the deal that they'd like to make. We'll continue to talk to China. I have great respect for President Xi. He's really a very special guy. But right now we just can't make that deal. In the meantime, we're taking in billions of dollars of taxes coming in from China, and—with the potential of billions and billions of dollars more taxes coming in.

I don't like to see that China's markets have dropped by close to 25 percent, but that's what's happened over the last few months. Their markets have gone down. I don't like to see that. But I can tell you that the United States has picked up about $10 trillion in worth. And China would like to be in our position. They would like to be in our position.
So we'll see what is going on with respect to that. But we're doing very well in our
discussions with China. We're doing, maybe more importantly, very well with respect to China.
But hopefully, that will all work out in the not-too-distant future. Okay?

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis/Washington Post Associate Editor Bob
Woodward's Forthcoming Book

Q. Mr. President, are you going to get rid of Secretary Mattis? There's a report, you're
looking to replace Secretary Mattis. Is that true?

The President. Well, he just made the nicest quote about me, I think, I've ever had. In
fact, Mitch has never said anything so nice. Paul has never said—[laughter]. I think Steve
Scalise has said something just as nice. [Laughter]

But no, he just gave me—I think, because the book is, you know, a total piece of fiction.
And he was totally—not even misquoted. He never made the statement. He came out with the
statement that—honestly, you know, I've heard over the years that General Mattis is an
intellect. And when I read his statement, I asked him whether or not this was true.

He said, "Not only is it not true, I'd like to write a statement." I said, "Thank you very
much. That's very nice." He wrote the most beautiful statement.

No, I think he's a terrific person. He's doing a fantastic job as Secretary of Defense.

Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis/Washington Post Associate Editor Bob
Woodward's Forthcoming Book

Q. And he'll stay in that job?

The President. Yes. He'll stay right there. His—we're very——

Q. And on that——

The President. We're very happy with him. We're having a lot of victories. We're having
victories that people don't even know about. And he's highly respected all over the world.

And I did appreciate his statement, because he didn't have to write that statement. But I
did appreciate it. And I appreciated the statement of John Kelly. And I appreciated the
statement of many others.

It's like—you know, every week, I seem to have a book coming out. Some good, some bad.
In all fairness, I get some good ones too. But I like to take them on when they come out. That's
a piece of fiction.

Thank you, everybody. Thank you very much.

Q. Do you think you'll reconcile with China?

Q. Mr. President, can you rule out a shutdown? Can you rule out a shutdown before the
November elections, sir?

Washington Post Associate Editor Bob Woodward's Forthcoming Book

Q. For the American people, why should they believe you over Bob Woodward, a
respected journalist who helped bring——
The President. Well, if you look at Bob Woodward's track record, I mean, he had the same problem with Obama.

Q. His reporting helped bring down President Nixon.

The President. Excuse me. Ready?

Q. Sure, I'll——

The President. He had the same problem with President Obama. He had a tremendous problem with President Bush. Every time he wrote a book, they were complaining about it; they were complaining about the lack of accuracy.

And I understand him; that's what he does. And I fully understood that before. In the end, I'm very happy with the way it turned out, because I think the book has been totally discredited.

Thank you very much, everybody.

Q. Will you still deal with China?

Q. Mr. President, the shutdown: yes or no?

Q. Will you reconcile with China?

Potential Federal Government Shutdown/Border Security

Q. Can you rule out a shutdown, sir? Can you rule out a shutdown?

The President. If it happens, it happens.

Q. If it happens, it happens?

The President. If it happens, it happens.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. If it's about border security, I'm willing to do anything. We have to protect our borders. If we don't protect our borders, our country is not going to be a country. So if it's about border security, I'm willing to do what has to be done. Thank you very much.

Q. What about the people interrupting you? [Laughter]

The President. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:35 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Amir Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah of Kuwait; and White House Chief of Staff John F. Kelly.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Republican congressional leadership, meeting with President.

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