



THE WHITE HOUSE  
PRESIDENT  
GEORGE W. BUSH

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## President Tours Border, Discusses Immigration Reform in Texas

El Paso Sector  
El Paso, Texas

 [In Focus: Homeland Security](#)

9:41 A.M. MST

**THE PRESIDENT:** First of all, it's good to be back in El Paso. I spent a lot of quality time in this part of the world when I was the governor -- and I appreciate, by the way, the governor, standing with me here. I don't know if you remember or not, but Laura's mother was raised here, so El Paso has always had a special spot in our heart.

I want to thank the people that are working the border. We have a responsibility in the government to enforce our border. It's important for national security, it's important for economic security to have a good border security plan. And so the Secretary and I, and the Attorney General - Secretary of State of Texas, Johnny Sutton, the D.A., Congressman Mike Conaway -- we've just taken a tour of this part of the border. And what should be a lesson is that you've got to adjust your strategy based upon the conditions. This is an urban environment. Right over here is Juarez. And people are able to easily come into the border - into Texas, in this part of - in part of the border.



And so what you're seeing is, you're seeing a combination of fencing, cameras, infrared, and border patrol agents all doing their job. What we've done is we have boosted the amount of money available to our - to enforce this border. We're adding agents - we've added agents since I've become the President; we're adding more agents as a result of the bill I just signed; and we're adding infrastructure to make the city secure, as well as the rural parts of our border secure. So step one of a border control strategy is increase the resources so the people standing behind me are able to do their job.

Step two is when we catch somebody, don't release them. Catch and release has been a long-standing policy of the federal government and we're going to change that. Listen, we've got people risking their lives to do their job here on the border, and there's nothing more dispiriting than to know

the person that they have stopped coming into our country illegally is being released back into society. And so we've got a plan for what we call internal repatriation for Mexicans, and we've got a plan for non-Mexican illegal immigrants.

And part of that plan is to increase the number of beds available to detain people caught illegally coming into our country. And the second part is for Congress to change the laws that will enable us to have - more likely to have expedited removal.

The third aspect of our comprehensive strategy to do our duty and enforce the border is to have a worksite enforcement program. I mean, our employers in America have an obligation not to hire illegal immigrants. Many of those immigrants, by the way, use forged documents. And so we've got a computer system up and running to enable employers to be able to determine whether or not the documents they're being presented are fake or not. We're also increasing the number of agents that will be working in the internal part of the country to find those who've broken the law and bring them to justice.

See, we're a nation of law. We're also a compassionate nation. We've got to treat people with respect and dignity. The third aspect of our policy is this: We need to have a rational, temporary worker plan that is not amnesty. Amnesty would be a mistake. Granting amnesty to the people who have come to our country illegally would invite others to come to our country illegally. On the other hand, a temporary worker program would take pressure off our border. When you match willing worker with willing employer on a job Americans won't do, with a tamper-proof card that says, I'm here legally for a temporary basis, it means our border patrol agents won't have to chase people coming here illegally to work, they'll be able to chase criminals and drug traffickers and crooks.



What I'm telling you is, we want to make the job of these folks easier. We want to support them. We want to support them with resources, we want to support them with rational policy, so that we can say to the American people, we've done our job - which is enforce this border.

I want to thank you very much for the tour, I want to thank you all for your hard work. You bring great pride to the uniform. I appreciate the risks you take on a daily basis. And with the bill I signed, the appropriations bill I signed, and the bills that are going to be working through the House and the Senate, will make it more likely you'll be able to do your job. So it's an honor to be here on the border and I want to thank everybody for showing up.

I'll be glad to answer a couple of questions. Patsy.

Q Sir, with elections coming up next year, how much pressure are you under to reduce the U.S. troop presence in Iraq, before the end of 2006?

THE PRESIDENT: Our policy - I'm giving a speech tomorrow that outlines the training - and the progress we're making in training Iraqis to provide security for their country. And we will make decisions about troop levels based upon the capacity of the Iraqis to take the fight to the enemy. And I will make decisions based upon -- the level of troops based upon the recommendations by the commanders on the ground. If they tell me we need more troops, we'll provide more troops. If they tell me we've got sufficient level of troops, that will be the level of troops. If they tell me that the Iraqis are ready to take more and more responsibility and that we'll be able to bring some Americans home, I will do that. It's their recommendation.

Secondly, we want to win. The whole objective is to achieve a victory against the terrorists. The terrorists have made it very clear that Iraq is a central front on the war on terror. See, they want us to leave before we've achieved our mission. You know why? Because they want a safe haven. They want to be able to plot and plan attacks. This country must never forget the lessons of September the 11th, 2001. And a victory in Iraq will deny the terrorists their stated goal.

Finally, a democracy in Iraq, which is now emerging, will serve as a fantastic example for reformers and others. And as democracy takes hold in the broader Middle East, we can say we have done our duty and laid the foundation of peace for generations to come.

Q Since we know that the preparation of Iraqi troops is a main reason you want to bring U.S. troops home, can you talk about how satisfied you are with the Iraqi troop preparedness?

THE PRESIDENT: Look, here's what I'm interested in. I'm interested in winning. I want to defeat the terrorists. And I want our troops to come home. But I don't want them to come home without having achieved victory, and we've got a strategy for victory. And the commanders will make the decision. See, that's what the people want. The people don't want me making decisions based upon politics; they want me to make decisions based upon the recommendation from our generals on the ground. And that's exactly who I'll be listening to.

Now, I know there's a lot of voices in Washington. We've heard some people say, pull them out right now. That's a huge mistake. It'd be a terrible mistake. It sends a bad message to our troops and it sends a bad message to our enemy and it sends a bad message to the Iraqis.

So my decision will be based upon the capacity of the - the willingness of our commanders to say, the Iraqis are taking more of the fight and, therefore, the conditions are such that we can reduce our troop presence.

Q Sir, do you agree with comments by Secretary Rice, who says that U.S. troops may not need to stay at current troop levels that we have there now for much longer?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, this is a conditions-based strategy we have. If conditions on the ground are such that we can reduce presence, the commanders will make that recommendation. But victory is the primary objective. We've sacrificed a lot. We've had - we've had, you know, some of the finest Americans die in Iraq. And one thing we're not going to do is let them die in vain. We will achieve our objective, which is a stable Iraq, an ally in the war on terror. And we will deny the terrorists safe haven

in Iraq. Their stated objective is to use the one tool they've got - which is suicide bombers, beheadings and killings of innocent people - to drive us out of Iraq and the Middle East because they want to have safe haven, they want to spread their totalitarian ideology.

And so our objective in Iraq is to win. And we will make our decisions based upon primarily victory, and, second, whether or not the commanders think we can achieve that victory and what the - with a certain troop level. And that's what's important for the American people to understand. That one, we're not going to cut and run. Two, we'll achieve our objective. And, three, the President is going to listen to those who are on the ground, who can make the best assessment.

Yes, where are you from?

Q With the El Paso Times, sir, Louie Gilot. Mr. President, what is the security risk on the border as far as homeland security and terrorism?

THE PRESIDENT: Look, there is great risk for people who wear the green. And they know that. And the reason there's great risk is because they don't know whether they're going to encounter some innocent soul just coming to work or somebody trying to smuggle drugs.

On our briefing as we came up and down the - came down the border here, I was told about a recent apprehension made by our border patrol agents of people trying to smuggle drugs in. And it's night, you know. And this happened to be in a more rural area, and the chopper had to leave to go refuel. And so we've got people risking their lives out there to stop the trafficking of drugs into our country, and that's dangerous. And so it's dangerous here. I mean, there's no other way to look at it. And that's why these folks need more resources and more agents to help them, and that's what we're providing.

And there is lighting up and down this part of the border. We're going to use drones to be able to help enforce the border in rural Texas and in rural New Mexico and rural Arizona. See, it's one thing to add agents, but if you look at the size of this border, you can't add enough agents. What you've got to do is get technology in the hands of the agents so they can better do their job. Slowly, but surely, technology is being employed up and down the border, and that's a key part of our strategy - as well as physical barriers. You see a physical barrier right here. This is good for an urban environment. As you head out into the rural parts of the world, there are other types of physical barriers we can use, such as impediments to vehicular traffic or berming, which is precisely what our strategy is.

We've got a comprehensive strategy that says we're going to enforce this border; we're going to prevent people from coming here in the first place. And when we catch people - and, by the way, since 2001, our border patrol have apprehended 4.5 million people illegally coming into the country. But we've got to end catch-and-release. In other words, we've got to end this program particularly for non-Mexican, illegal immigrants. This business about catching people and then letting them back out in the society - it's not fair to those who are working hard and it's not fair to the American people. We're ending the practice.

And then I told you we've got to have better interior enforcement, plus a rational worker plan that is not amnesty. That's a very important part of the plan.

Q Do you have any reaction to the resignation of Congressman Cunningham and the charges that were brought against him?

THE PRESIDENT: Any member of Congress, Republican or Democrat, must take their office seriously and the ethics seriously. The idea of a congressman taking money is outrageous. And Congressman Cunningham is going to realize that he has broken the law and is going to pay a serious price, which he should.

Q Is there going to be investigating the allegations that there are U.S.-run terrorist detention centers abroad? Don't the American people deserve an accounting of why these places exist and what's being done there?

THE PRESIDENT: The United States of America does not torture. And that's important for people around the world to understand.

Q Will we ever see a wall here in the border?

THE PRESIDENT: You've got a fence here in the border. You're going to have a virtual fence in the border when we bring technology to bear - infrared, cameras, drones. And you've got some of the finest Americans in our country enforcing the border. Ours is a nation of law. People should not be allowed to break the law.

So one of the ways to make sure we have a rational border control policy is to make work legal - not amnesty, but work legal - on a temporary basis. People ought to be given a tamper-proof work card, come here and do jobs Americans won't do, and then after a set period of time, go home. And that's what we're going to work with Congress about, a comprehensive plan that will make it easier for these good folks to do their job, which is enforce the border of the United States.

Listen, thank you all.

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