

# [***Interview with Jeh Johnson, Former U.S. DHS Secretary***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BFF-5B51-JCS1-61GC-00000-00&context=1516831)

Fox News FOX AND FRIENDS 6:00 AM EST

February 29, 2024 Thursday

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**Section:** NEWS; International

**Length:** 3201 words

**Byline:** Brian Kilmeade, Steve Doocy, Ainsley Earhardt

**Guests:** Jeh Johnson, Former U.S. DHS Secretary

**Body**

BRIAN KILMEADE, FOX NEWS HOST: And let's bring in our next guest. He says we need to - need a solution to the border crisis. Not more ***politics***. Jeh Johnson served as DHS secretary under President Obama, and joins us right now to explain.

Mr. Secretary, great to see you.

STEVE DOOCY, FOX NEWS HOST: Good morning.

JEH JOHNSON, FORMER DHS SECRETARY: Thanks for having me back.

AINSLEY EARHARDT, FOX NEWS HOST: Good morning.

KILMEADE: Have you - have you ever seen it this bad, the border?

JOHNSON: No.

KILMEADE: And what do you think -

JOHNSON: December we had 250,000 apprehensions in one month. My second year in office we had 315,000 apprehensions in all of the year, 2015, just for some perspective here. I understand the numbers have dropped a bit of late, but longer term, big picture, this is a - a hemispheric shift northward.

DOOCY: Right.

JOHNSON: It's a crisis on multiple levels in multiple places.

DOOCY: There you use that crisis word. Whenever we think about numbers, we think about you, when you said this back in the day.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JOHNSON (March 2019): I know that a thousand overwhelms the system. I cannot begin to imagine what 4,000 a day looks like. So, we are truly in a crisis.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

DOOCY: OK, so we've doubled -

JOHNSON: Who -- who was that guy?

DOOCY: Just as handsome.

JOHNSON: He was just younger. That was --

DOOCY: Why are you on that channel?

JOHNSON: That was five years ago.

DOOCY: It was five years ago.

JOHNSON: The network across the street, right.

EARHARDT: Yes.

DOOCY: Exactly.

JOHNSON: So -

DOOCY: But you were talking about how 1,000 was bad, 4,000 is a crisis.

JOHNSON: Yes.

DOOCY: Now we're -

EARHARDT: Ten thousand a day.

DOOCY: In some -- in some cases triple that.

JOHNSON: That is - that is true. And it's a crisis on the southern border, in Texas, in Arizona. And it's a crisis here in midtown Manhattan, just a few blocks away. You can you see migrants by the Roosevelt Hotel, on the subways, at Times Square. This is extended nationwide now.

The issue is, what do we do about it?

DOOCY: Yes.

JOHNSON: Do we continue to play ***politics*** and scream about this issue, or do we fix the problem? There are solutions to this problem. But given our ***politics***, they've become politically unattainable solutions. In my view, the legislation that James Lankford, the very conservative James Lankford, Chris Murphy and Kyrsten Sinema negotiated is a good bill and would fix this problem on number - on a number of levels. I guarantee that if that -- if that - if those provisions become law, the numbers will drop. The question is, what are our politicians in Washington going to - going to do about this? Are they going to adopt this hard-fought compromise or we going to just continue to complain about the problem?

EARHARDT: Yes, I mean you hate to make it political. We want this all fixed. But day one, Joe Biden took office, he rolled back Donald Trump's policies. He's rolled back 90 different policies on - on -- when it has to do with the border. So, it is political because it's affecting lives.

JOHNSON: Well, day one Donald Trump rolled back a number of our policies from the Obama administration that were actually working. We hit a million in 2019 while President Trump was in office.

And so I think we need to put aside whose fault it is, on what administration did this happen. There are solutions to this problem. We need more border patrol officers. We need more judges. We need an emergency authority, like a Title 42, when the numbers get high. We need to fix how one qualifies for asylum in this country, raise the bar on the front end. That aspect of the s system serves as a magnet for more illegal immigration. And then, longer term, we've got to deal with what's happening in the hemisphere that is causing this great shift northward.

KILMEADE: Who caused it? So -

JOHNSON: Yes.

KILMEADE: So, a couple of things.

JOHNSON: Nobody likes to say that, by the way. We want quick and easy solutions.

DOOCY: Yes.

JOHNSON: But, so long as those conditions in Central America and South America persist, we're going to see this problem over and over again. It will ebb and flow, but it's going to get worse.

KILMEADE: But you just said it's going to ebb and flow. Just on what you said on Central and South America, anybody who looks through history over the last few decades, there's always a problem. There's always a dictatorship. There's always a Nicaragua about to pop.

JOHNSON: Yes.

KILMEADE: A Bolivia that's about to go along with it.

JOHNSON: Yes.

KILMEADE: A Cuba of dissidence.

JOHNSON: Right.

KILMEADE: And now you have Venezuela, the biggest problem in -

JOHNSON: Yes.

KILMEADE: In the - in the hemisphere arguably.

But there's little things that can be done.

Number one, the Remain in Mexico, when you had a deal with Mexico, the president had the -- that was an immediate deterrence. The fact is, there's a sense right now among Central and South America, among Africans, eastern Europeans.

JOHNSON: Yes.

KILMEADE: Now is the time to come.

JOHNSON: Yes.

KILMEADE: So, there's always going to be tornadoes and communism and dictatorships, but there's something - the word went out that now's the time to come. Now or never. Do you agree with that?

JOHNSON: Let me - let me answer it this way. I owned this problem for three years. The lesson I learned is that there are things we can do on our southern border to clamp down on enforcement, to expand detention capabilities that will cause a very sharp, sudden decrease in the numbers. But so long as the underlying push factors persist, the numbers are always going to revert back to their longer-term trend lines.

KILMEADE: Push them back, push, you mean they just want to come, or magnet, we're bringing them?

JOHNSON: The overwhelming factor at issue here are the push factors. There are aspects of our system that serve as magnets to the problem. But there's a reason why these families are making a decision to leave Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala in the first place and head north.

One of the things we need to do, which doesn't get talked about enough, is get the Mexican government to do more on their southern border with Central America.

EARHARDT: Yes.

KILMEADE: Absolutely.

EARHARDT: Yes. Definitely.

JOHNSON: We have 1,900-mile - a 1,900 mile border with Mexico. They have a 300-mile border with Central America. They don't have much of a border enforcement force down there.

One of the ways we --

KILMEADE: We just have 20,000 Marines, right (ph)?

JOHNSON: One of the ways we dealt with the crisis in 2014 was to get the Mexican government to do more on their southern border.

DOOCY: One of the big problems -- and you know this because you read "The New York Post." Every third day there's a story about some sort of migrant crime. So, the Biden administration has allowed all these people in. And as it's being adjudicated, and some are getting court dates in seven or eight years. But while they're here, some of them are committing crimes. And in some cases, really bad crimes.

We had the story a couple of days ago about the young nursing student who was murdered when she was out for a jog. Turns out that may have been a sanctuary city. We're going to talk to the attorney general of Georgia in a moment.

JOHNSON: Yes.

DOOCY: But this is a sanctuary city. And there's been a lot of crime here. And now the White House is asking for sanctuary cities to cooperate with ICE. But, you know, a lot of them are going to say, nope, we're not going to do it. Don't care. Should they?

JOHNSON: So, this has been a problem through multiple administrations. In 2014 we had a program called Secure Communities that did exactly this.

KILMEADE: Right.

JOHNSON: It became politically and legally controversial. In 2014, I revamped the program to encourage local law enforcement to work with ICE, again, particularly on those who are the most serious felonies. And we got something like 80 percent of local communities start working with us again.

DOOCY: How?

JOHNSON: Only - only like two major cities refused. One of them was the city of Philadelphia. I got Mayor Nutter to work with us. His successor, on the first day in office, tore up the agreement. And, you know, I'll never forget talking with a member of the city council in Philadelphia who said to me, why should we send him back, he's already done his time here in the United States. That's not the point. He's a convicted felon.

KILMEADE: Are you kidding? Yes.

JOHNSON: So, they're -- we ought to be able to have local law enforcement work with ICE to detain and send back certainly the most serious criminals among us.

EARHARDT: Mr. Secretary -

JOHNSON: That - that's not - that's not a hard proposition.

EARHARDT: If those were your policies, and you felt like they were working well under Obama. Biden was our vice president. Are you disappointed with his policies now and the state of our country when it comes to immigration?

JOHNSON: I'll - I'll answer it this way. I'm all about solutions. I believe that there should be a sustained, visible, energetic, forceful commitment to addressing this problem. And messaging. You know, in Washington, you have to repeat yourself 25 times before anybody will listen to you. Same in the public space, you have to repeat yourself 25 times. I suspect you all know this on this network.

And so, one of the ways you deal with this problem is continually send a message to Central America, don't come here. Don't just say it once. I used to go to Guatemala and Honduras to the airports and greet the ICE plane coming back with the cameras so people in those communities could see that we're actually sending people back.

KILMEADE: Right.

JOHNSON: So, you have to say it over and over again, along with the strict enforcement.

KILMEADE: So, there's a couple of things.

Number one, you know you sound like Henry Cuellar, his example.

JOHNSON: Yes.

KILMEADE: He said, I need to see video of people getting on to planes and being sent away.

JOHNSON: Yes.

KILMEADE: Because that image goes through every news network that's going to get it out.

JOHNSON: Exactly. Yes.

KILMEADE: So, the one thing that happened - I don't want any -- we can go back and forth on whose policies is whose. But the one thing that seemed to get through the messages, denying aid to countries that are allowing their illegal immigrant, their future illegal immigrants here to get in. Also telling - when in the president of the United States said his method is tariffs. He told the Mexican President Obrador, a socialist, he - who wasn't a supporter of his, he said, you should get (ph) tariffs. If these people keep coming through, we're going to put tariffs on it.

The next thing you know he's got 20,000 Marines on the southern border and the message is, remain in Mexico. And they did it. And the message was for these people, who were probably in some cases well-meaning people, if you come, you're not going to get in. The $20,000 you sold your car, you sold your house, you gave it to a coyote (ph) and you can't get in.

JOHNSON: Yes.

KILMEADE: So, this would ripple downward but you couldn't, for the longest time, get the Homeland Security secretary to admit was even a crisis. So, it was maddening to see one thing and have somebody describe it differently.

JOHNSON: Well, the problem with Remain in Mexico, it's like taking a balloon and filling it with water. Sooner or later it's going to burst.

I believe that more effective than that is getting the Mexicans to do more on their southern border to stop the flow heading into Mexico.

DOOCY: That's easy (ph). Right.

JOHNSON: Because what happens in Mexico is, there's a whole lot of incentive to just encourage and keep heading north. You know, don't stop here, just keep going. Just keep going.

DOOCY: Sure.

JOHNSON: And Mexico, if you put enough pressure on the Mexican government, will appreciate that it's in their interest to partner with us on this problem.

KILMEADE: So, would you urge a city like New York, right now in a crisis, stop with giving hotels, turn down service, three meals a day, the transportation to get here? Because we have to send the message, we can't - - if you come, you're getting turned right around.

Of course people who are in Guatemala and El Salvador would prefer to live here. These people are preferring to come to America -

JOHNSON: Yes.

KILMEADE: Instead of coming here and not using our system. So, do you -- would you - would you crack down on the Democratic mayors as a Democrat who's a Homeland Security secretary?

JOHNSON: Mayor - Mayor Adams - Mayor Adams has been very vocal about this issue. This issue has blown a hole in his budget.

KILMEADE: Not originally. Not originally.

JOHNSON: And, you know, I - I have - I have said to Mayor Adams, you know, keep making noise about this issue.

But this primarily is a matter for the federal government.

KILMEADE: Sure.

JOHNSON: Immigration is part of our foreign policy. It's part of our national security. It's really up to the federal government to continually send the message, send a consistent message, executive and legislative.

KILMEADE: Right.

JOHNSON: And I want to come back to this point. There is a solution to this problem at hand that has been negotiated in the U.S. Senate.

KILMEADE: You like that bill?

JOHNSON: I like that bill. That is the strongest bipartisan pro-border security bill we've seen in a generation.

DOOCY: Right.

JOHNSON: It would be -- it would be a tragedy if it slipped through our hands.

DOOCY: And that's what Joe Biden's going to say today. He's going to go down there to Brownsville and say, look, I'm trying, and I worked with Republicans, but Donald Trump doesn't want it. Said it would help me. So, we're not going to -

JOHNSON: We should - look, look, it's an election year.

DOOCY: Right. That - right. Exactly. And that's why he's doing it.

JOHNSON: We have to stop playing ***politics*** with this issue. People in Texas, on border communities, people here need relief.

DOOCY: Yes, 100 percent.

JOHNSON: And this is the solution.

DOOCY: So, my question is this --

JOHNSON: Yes.

DOOCY: The president is going to Brownsville.

JOHNSON: Yes.

DOOCY: Where the migration, illegal migration, has slowed to a trickle. Whereas he --

JOHNSON: For the moment.

DOOCY: For the moment.

JOHNSON: For the moment. It ebbs and flows.

DOOCY: Whereas Eagle Pass, you know, it's a fire hose.

JOHNSON: Yes.

DOOCY: The people are coming across like crazy. Why would the president go to Brownsville other than it's - it's good optics? There - there's hardly anybody coming.

JOHNSON: Well, Brownsville has historically been ground zero for this problem in southeast Texas. I probably visited Brownsville 10 times in - in three years. There's a lot of infrastructure there. I suspect the border patrol leadership in that region is there. I don't know why they picked - I don't know why they picked Brownsville. But Brownsville, traditionally, has been ground zero for this problem. And it ebbs and flows all across the southern border. You know, you go to Texas and they say, well, no, there's more in Arizona. Or you go to Laredo, and somebody says, no, there's more in El Paso.

KILMEADE: But it's very easy to pick out a different place because you could see what the numbers are and show up where it's bad and go to San Diego and see where the buses are unloading people, or Shelby County Park.

JOHNSON: Yes.

EARHARDT: Can I -- can I ask you, what do - what do we need to do to help Mexico fix their government because Rachel Campos-Duffy was down at the border and these were heart-wrenching stories of people coming across the border.

JOHNSON: Yes.

EARHARDT: They're saying they had to sell their car for $2,000 to get money to pay a cartel.

JOHNSON: Yes. Yes.

EARHARDT: Someone else said - what did they say, they had to sell their house. They were - they were all charged money. The majority of them were charged money to come over the border. So, the cartels are a problem. Kamala Harris was - was supposed to figure out root causes. Well, we know the root causes, it's the cartels, the drug problems down there. It's them not securing their southern border.

JOHNSON: The famine.

KILMEADE: (INAUDIBLE).

EARHARDT: So, why is it -- what - what does the -- how can we help the Mexican government clean up so their people don't want to leave?

JOHNSON: I've been of the view that it's in our interest and the Mexican government's interest to support their border security efforts on their southern border. Traditionally, we think of illegal immigration as single adult males from Mexico. That's not the problem anymore. It's Central America, South America.

KILMEADE: Chinese.

JOHNSON: Other continents.

EARHARDT: Yes.

JOHNSON: And so it really should be -- and - and we have a great relationship with the government of Mexico on so many levels, on trade, on lawful trade and travel. They ought to be partnering with us. And continued, sustained engagement and pressure with that government will make a difference. I know that for a fact.

KILMEADE: Would - would President Obama have ever allowed it to get this bad?

JOHNSON: President Obama - I mean, of course, that was a different time. It was 10 years ago. He did not mind, to a point, I think, the - the aggravation we'd get for strict enforcement because we all saw at the time, this was the path to fixing the system overall. Get the border under control. Comprehensive immigration reform. And - and that's what we need now.

Now, I keep coming back to this. We have a solution at hand. We have a bipartisan, very pro-border security solution at hand, negotiated by Republicans and Democrats. Let's embrace it. Let's vote on it. Let's get it done. I guarantee that if that legislation became law, the numbers would drop, A, because we've addressed the problem -

KILMEADE: Right.

JOHNSON: And, B, because people in Central and South America are seeing that we are addressing the problem.

EARHARDT: Were you happy with that legislation?

JOHNSON: And will make a different decision.

EARHARDT: What would you change about that legislation? Because Republicans were not happy. So, if we're going to get this passed, then it needs to -- both sides have to agree.

JOHNSON: Well, there's almost nothing for the left in this legislation. It's all very pro-border security. If I had a chance to add something -

KILMEADE: Bigger facilities.

JOHNSON: If I had a chance to add something, I would - I would protect the DACA kids who have been here since, you know, they were small.

DOOCY: That got started during your administration.

JOHNSON: Yes, it did, in 2012. There are DACA recipients who are practicing attorneys now who have been to Yale and Harvard Law School.

KILMEADE: Right.

DOOCY: Yes.

JOHNSON: But they have an illegally uncertain future. We ought to be able to take care of these young people. They are almost entirely amazing, responsible people. But we've got to - we've got to secure our border.

KILMEADE: Well, you've got another 8 million kids - 8 million have been here over the last three and a half years. So -- then they have kids and where do we start?

DOOCY: Where do you start, exactly?

Listen, you start with a great guest like you. Nobody knows more about this than you do.

Jeh Johnson, thank you very much.

JOHNSON: Thanks for having me.

KILMEADE: Appreciate it.

DOOCY: Great having you.

EARHARDT: Thank you for coming on.

**Load-Date:** February 29, 2024

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