

Speaker Pelosi Issues Remarks at Press Conference With Rep. Cuellar, Mayor Saenz on Border Security, Commerce

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Body

House **Speaker** Nancy Pelosi, D-California, issued the following remarks with Rep. Henry Cuellar and Mayor Pete Saenz at a press conference to provide updates on legislative priorities, including **border** security and commerce:

"Good afternoon, thank you very much Mr. Mayor for your kind words of welcome, Mr. Cuellar for your kind invitation to be here and for your tremendous leadership in the Congress of the United States. I love coming here, in this week that we observe the births of our Presidents, in particular, George [Washington] our founding father, and our founding mother, George Washington and Martha Washington. Since the first time I came here for this observance, I have bragged about how patriotic Laredo is - a city that is 96 percent Hispanic. That's a source of great pride. But to be that proud of heritage, but deeply patriotic is an all-American ideal. And I like to tell people all around the country, you may have been to observances of Washington's birthday or President's day, but until you're in Laredo, that week to see the series of events, the great emphasis that is placed on it you haven't seen the most patriotic observances of our founding father and founding mother.

"The purpose of our visit is to celebrate our country's origin, to celebrate our country's diversity, those Founders said to us, E Pluribus Unum, from many one. They couldn't imagine how many we would be or how different we might be from each other but they knew we had to be one, one country. This area is so supportive of that value of our Founders.

"I'm pleased to be here at a special time, at a time when there is a challenge to the vitality of this era. When I come here I see it as the future -- as the present too, but as the future. The young people here with their aspirations for education, aspirations of people here for entrepreneurship, the hope, the courage, the determination, to make the future better really makes America, more American.

"I think that some people have a fear of that and that's why they don't understand the value of it, and oppose or try to create a different impression as to what is going on here that is so important to our country.

"As the Mayor [Pete Saenz] said, and Mr. Cuellar said, we do care about **border** security. Of course, we take an oath to protect and defend our country, our Constitution and our people. And Mr. Cuellar did us a great honor by being a conferee on the recent legislation that not only opened up government, protected our **borders**, but paid great respect to our values. Thank you Mr. Cuellar for your leadership role there.

"Those of you who have a parochial interest specifically in the Laredo area and the Rio Grande. We followed his lead on protecting the butterfly sanctuary and other environmental priorities that were here, and it's clear to us that because of the respect he commands in the Congress, the knowledge that he has of the region, being a **border** Member of Congress, that his word would be respected when it came to voting for the legislation, so we're all deeply in his debt for that.

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"What are we talking about here, not building a wall, but building a protection again that respects people and values, and what that meant was we would have hundreds millions of dollars for more sophisticated scanning and detection, for vehicles coming through the ports of entry, that we would have some infrastructure at the ports of entry because so much more is coming through now, that we would have other detection technologically where deemed necessary on the border, that we would have provision to meet the needs of people seeking asylum, whether it was for food, clothing, medical needs and the rest, we would have funding for judges to expedite the process of people coming through - so it was all about protecting and recognizing the needs of that were here. But none of them amounting to a crisis or justifying a declaration of a national emergency.

"So I come here to say thank you to everyone here for the spirit of Laredo, for the patriotism that we will celebrate tonight, tomorrow and the rest. You've already been celebrating - observing shall we say. And also to point out that this port - we had the opportunity to meet with David Higgerson, Director of Field for the CBP, Bradd Skinner, the Assistant Director of Trade Operations, and Albert Flores, the Port Director of CBP, and they told us what some of their needs were.

"A port of entry is about trade, it's about tourism. More and more now it's about immigration and it's also about detection of things that should not be coming into the country, like drugs.

"The president has made a big deal about the drug issue, and that's why we have put so many resources into detection in the bill, Mr. Cuellar played such an important role in passing.

"So two houses of Congress, Senate and the House, Democrats and Republicans voted overwhelmingly. There's a mythology of a crisis at the border, we say come see the reality of what happens here. I view this a community with a border going through it, as was mentioned by the Mayor and Mr. Cuellar - people come and go, families interact, communication, trade, commerce, and the rest.

"So we do not see this as a declaration of an emergency, it shouldn't be, and therefore under the leadership of Congressman Joaquin Castro, on Monday, we will send to the Rules Committee the resolution of disapproval of the President's actions.

"We say that not in a partisan way, we don't say it in a political way, we say it in a patriotic way, here on President's week. This is about the oath we take to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States, our Founders very wisely placed in the Constitution provision for the separation of powers. Co-equal branches of government, there to be, again, a check and balance on each other.

"That Constitution begins with the beautiful preamble to the Constitution, and the very first words following the preamble are, 'Article 1,' the Legislative Branch. The first branch of government, the text of which spells out our responsibilities. The first of which, the power of the purse, which our President is trying to usurp, many other powers contained there. We are there to honor the Constitution and protect it but also to strengthen the institutions in which we serve. We in the Congress of the United States, hopefully the Congress in the executive branch.

"But that's what will happen on Monday, Mr. Castro's resolution will go to the Rules Committee. We plan to be voting on the Floor of the House. We plan then after it passes the House to send it over to the Senate. We want to deal with this as expeditiously and carefully as possible, but I just wanted you to know what's going to happen in the next few days in that regard.

"Again, I thank my friend here, my colleague, Mr. Cuellar and the distinguished Mayor, for the nice welcome to Laredo. I love coming here. I love it so much this time I have my daughter and grandson so they could see for themselves the beautiful patriotism of the people of Laredo. Thank you so much!

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Q: Madam Speaker, your resolution to terminate the national emergency has a very good chance of passing in the House, much more difficult in the Senate. How are you going to get Republican Senators to go along with it?

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Speaker Pelosi. My responsibility is in the House of Representatives, we want to show them that we are ready. Let me just say about Congressman Castro, chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus representative of this great state of Texas, which has the longest **border** of any state in our country, he knows the subject. He started weeks ago to put together this very succinct resolution, hoping that it would not be necessary but prepared if it were.

So it is a one page resolution and I thank him for his leadership, so we were ready to move as soon as I got the letter from the President that he was doing - that's how it works, he send a letter to the leadership of the Congress, that he is declaring an emergency and then going from there.

So I think some of the arguments, not making an argument to the Senate, that's not my responsibility, but the case to be made to the American people, is that first of all, we have a constitutional responsibility to protect and defend the Constitution. To do anything less than overturn this action by the president, we would be delinquent in our duties, as those who take an oath to protect the Constitution.

Second, while there is no emergency at the **border**, it's a mythology by the president, not the reality at the **border**. And so, people have to realize that.

And third, when he tries to usurp the power of Congress for spending, he does so at considerable cost to his own effort. Those in the military don't want the money taken out of the defense budget for a purpose that is not a defense purpose. So when people see the opportunity cost of the money that the President is taking away it - he, the president, makes a good argument for us to the American people and the Senators that this is not the way to go.

I think there's evidence that they don't even know what they're doing because they're taking over \$2 billion dollars out of one account to spend elsewhere and they found out, except for \$80 million, that money had already been spent.

Speaker Pelosi. And I do think that the Department of Defense has a responsibility to say to the President that the money that you're taking from defense, we want your assurance that it will be spent on the national security of our country. A mythological emergency at the **border** does not meet that standard.

But, I'm only responsible for the House of Representatives. We'll have a good strong vote. That will be brought to Rules Monday, brought to the Floor shortly thereafter, sent to the Senate immediately and hopefully to the President's desk immediately after that.

Q: Madam **Speaker**, the Democrats, Madam, have supported funding fencing in the past, why have such a hard line against it now?

Speaker Pelosi. Some Democrats have and no one has said, if there is a place along the way where there might be some material fencing that that might not be acceptable, but that does not mean building a wall. A wall is not effective. It is very expensive. It is nothing more than a campaign applause line for the President in one of his speeches. It has no merit in terms of effectiveness, cost-effectiveness and does not support the values of our country by building walls between countries rather than smart **border** security where there needs to be more roads, more infrastructure and the rest - put it there, but don't build a wall.

Q: Madam **Speaker**, the **Border** Patrol agents from this area say they want to show you why they want a wall here. Have you met with them or do you plan to meet with them because they have that argument and if you could respond to that Madam **Speaker**. The second part of my question is, 55 miles are going in the Congressman's district in Starr County. What's the message to them if you say that, you know, a fence is - call it a fence, wall, levee, whatever it is - you say that that is -

Speaker Pelosi. We've never been opposed to some levees as I say, where appropriate, some infrastructure. But, I have not had anybody make a case to me, that is convincing, that a wall is the way to go.

Q: Including **Border** Patrol?

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Speaker Pelosi. I haven't had, I haven't gotten that -

Congressman Cuellar. Yeah, look, let me give you a lesson about **Border** Patrol. I support **Border** Patrol. In fact, **Border** Patrol has been losing more people than they're hiring and that's why we put retention money, to hire them.

But, I always ask the question about **Border** Patrol, are you asking pre-2012 or post-2012; do you know what I mean by that?

Before 2012, their position was quote 'building a wall would be a waste of taxpayers' dollars.' Okay? Because people will dig tunnels, and I think they found 290 tunnels, or they can use drones, there are some drones that can carry up to 500 pounds of drugs, or you can put a ladder, and with \$100 you can take it over.

So, I always ask the question, is it pre-2012 because look at what their position was, quote 'a waste of money.' So, again, you know, it just happened to be that they changed their position, but before that they were against it. You know, it happened, it happened.

So again, we believe in **border** security, but we want to do it in a smart way. We want to do it - I have asked every **border** patrol chief this question and I want you to ask them this. I've asked them, from Bush, from Obama and Trump's own **Border** Patrol chief also. I've asked them, how much time does a fence or a wall buy you? All of them have said this thing, quote, 'a few minutes or a few seconds.'

So, therefore, are we going to spend billions of dollars on a wall when all we have to do is just buy a \$100 ladder and take care of that? So, again, we want to be smart on how we secure the **border**. That's why we want to hire more **Border** Patrol and make sure we have the technology because if you want to stop drugs, it's right here at the ports of entry. If you want to stop people, 60, 70 percent of the people come in through legal visa.

So, the wall or the fence is not gonna stop them and if you're gonna hire more **Border** Patrol, are you gonna do what the President did? He put out a \$297 million contract to a vendor to show him how to hire **border** patrol. So, the first payment they made was \$14.8 million. You know how many **Border** Patrol agents they hired with \$14.8 million? Two. Two.

Now, I don't know if one of those was Captain America, I don't know who they are, but if you're going to spend \$14.8 million, you better do a better job and this is why our approach is make sure we hire them, make sure we give them retention money so they don't lose any more **Border** Patrol.

Speaker Pelosi. And, about the **Border** Patrol, also it's important to reinforce with some infrastructure the ports of entry. We heard today from some in the **Border** Patrol that their purpose has been trade and tourism, but now it's more immigration, there's so much more immigration needs here. And so, whether it's additional facilities to accommodate the people coming in. As I mentioned before, food, clothing and medical assistance.

But, that helps the **Border** Patrol because this isn't what their job was meant, what their job was before. It's kind of changed the nature. So, in order to keep the morale up, it's important to give them the resources that they need that match the challenge that we have here.

And, of course, we all want to stop drugs, guns and any other illicit contraband coming into our country and that's why under Mr. Cuellar's leadership there's over seven, there's like three quarters of a billion dollars in funding there for the non-intrusive scanning so that they can tell, with the least holding up of traffic, of what might be on some of the cars and trucks coming into our country.

So, if we want to help the **Border** Patrol, some of the things we need to do are to make their jobs easier with the technology, with the facilities, with the resources and the personnel in order to get their job done. There isn't going to be a wall.

Q: Madam **Speaker**, President Trump said he will 100% veto the measure you are trying to pass on Monday. That being said, does that change your plan at all and do you have anything to say -

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Speaker Pelosi. It doesn't change my plan at all. Let me be very clear, the President's attitude is not going to color whether I honor my oath of office to uphold the Constitution of the United States. I wish he would have the same dedication to that oath of office himself.

But, we will be fighting him on this usurping of power - violating the Constitution of the United States - in the Congress, in the courts and with the American people. So, this is a path I would not recommend he go down. I don't expect him to sign it, but I do expect us to send it.

Thank you.

Congressman Cuellar. One last question. One in Spanish.

Q: Mexico is the main partner of Laredo (as a port/trade city), they are friendly cities. Tomorrow, during the ceremony, the two cities will be giving each other the traditional hug. How much will the wall hurt the relationship between the two countries?

Speaker Pelosi. Well the final answer to your question, how much will it damage our relationship with Mexico to build the wall, I think there's - it's clear that this is not an act of friendship. This is, as we discussed earlier today Mr. Mayor, and you were there too, we talked about, we are all in one hemisphere. We are neighbors. Let's be friends. Let's respect each other in this hemisphere and I do know that many people in the Congress think that we should have more of a focus on our Latin American neighbors. Canada too, but also to the south of us - Mexico, Central America and South America.

So, let's use this as a pivotal moment not only to uphold the Constitution, uphold our values and how we respect people, but use it as a moment to say, let's go down a different path in terms of who we are as a hemisphere. We are all called Americans, North or South Americans. Let's respect each other in that way and let's return to what we talked about earlier, the beautiful beautiful salute to George and Martha Washington that we are observing this week. And, I look forward to tomorrow to engaging on the bridge with our friends from Mexico who are coming, who are meeting us half-way. And we wish to meet them half-way as well.

"Congressman Cuellar. So, you asked, if you look at where we started off, this is a matter of vision of the **border**. How we see the **border**.

"With our view, with respect to the President, the last time he was in the valley, he looked around for a little while and said, 'I've seen enough, we need a wall. There's crime, there's this and all that.'

"To show you our vision, tomorrow, the **Speaker**, the Mayor, myself and other officials, we are going to meet our counterparts in the middle of the bridge to do the abrazo ceremony, which means, it symbolizes the friendship between the United States.

Those are the two visions of how people see the **border** and I think our vision is the right way to see the **border**.

Thank you all so much. I know the **Speaker** has to go. Thank you.

Speaker Pelosi. Thank you all."

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