



PRESS BRIEFINGS

# Press Briefing by Press Secretary Sarah Sanders and Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen

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James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

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MS. SANDERS: Good afternoon. As you know, President Trump has laid out an immigration reform proposal that closes loopholes and provides the necessary resources to secure the border.

Congress needs to fix our broken immigration system. To answer some of your questions on this topic, I've invited Secretary of Homeland Security, Kirstjen Nielsen, and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Kevin McAleenan to the podium.

And, as always, I'll be back up afterwards to take questions on other news of the day. Thanks.

SECRETARY NIELSEN: Well, good afternoon. It is my pleasure to be here because I would love to see if I can help explain some of what's going on and give you some of the facts. I know there have been a lot put out there, but hopefully we can clarify some things today.

I just wanted to start by thanking the sheriffs of the United States. I had the privilege of speaking to them this morning at the National Sheriffs' Association Conference. We are so thankful for their partnership at DHS and all they do to protect our community. So I thank them.

So I want to provide you an update on the illegal immigration crisis on our southern border and the effects — the efforts the administration is taking to solve this crisis and to stop the flood of illegal immigrants, drugs, contraband, and crime coming across the border.

So let's just start with a few numbers and facts. So in the last three months, we have seen illegal immigration on our southern border exceed 50,000 people each month. Multiples over each month last year.

Since this time last year, there has been a 325 percent increase in unaccompanied alien children and a 435 percent increase in family units entering the country illegally.

Over the last 10 years, there has been a 1,700 percent increase in asylum claims, resulting in asylum backlog to date, on our country, of 600,000 cases.

Since 2013, the United States has admitted more than half a million illegal immigrant minors and family units from Central America, most of whom today are at large in the United States. At the same time, large criminal organizations such as MS-13 have violated our borders and gained a deadly foothold within the United States.

This entire crisis, just to be clear, is not new. It's been occurring and expanded over many decades. But currently, it is the exclusive product of loopholes in our federal immigration laws that prevent illegal immigrant minors and family members from being detained and removed to their home countries.

In other words, these loopholes create a functionally open border. Apprehension without detention and removal is not border security. We have repeatedly called on Congress to close these loopholes. I, myself, have met with as many members have been willing to meet with me. I've testified seven times. I will continue to make myself available to ask that they work with us to solve this crisis.

Yet the voices most loudly criticizing the enforcement of our current laws are those whose policies created this crisis and whose policies perpetrate it.

In particular, we need to reform three major loopholes. Let me quickly walk you through them.

First, we need to amend the 2008 Trafficking Victims Prevention Reauthorization Act, or TVPR —

which is much easier to say. This law encourages families to put children in the hands of smugglers to bring them alone on this dangerous trek northward. And make no mistake, we've talked about this before — this trek is dangerous and deadly.

Second, we need to reform our asylum laws to end the systemic abuse of our asylum system and stop fraud. Right now, our asylum system fails to assist asylum seekers who legitimately need it. We are a country of compassion. We are a country of heart. We must fix the system so that those who truly need asylum can, in fact, receive it.

Third, we need to amend the Flores Settlement Agreement and recent expansions which currently allow for — which would allow for family detention during the removal process. And we need Congress to fully fund our ability to hold families together through the immigration process.

Until these loopholes are closed by Congress, it is not possible, as a matter of law, to detain and remove whole family units who arrive illegally in the United States.

Congress and the courts created this problem, and Congress alone can fix it. Until then, we will enforce every law we have on the books to defend the sovereignty and security of the United States. Those who criticize the enforcement of our laws have offered only one countermeasure: open borders; the quick release of all illegal alien families and the decision not to enforce our laws. This policy would be disastrous. Its prime beneficiaries would be the smuggling organizations themselves, and the prime victims would be the children who would be plunged into the smuggling machines and get gang recruitment on the trip north.

There's a lot of misinformation about what DHS is and is not doing as it relates to families at the border and I want to correct the record. Here are the facts:

First, this administration did not create a policy of separating families at the border. We have a statutory responsibility that we take seriously to protect alien children from human smuggling, trafficking, and other criminal actions while enforcing our immigration laws.

We have a long-existing policy. Multiple administrations have followed that outline when we may take action to protect children. We will separate those who claim to be a parent and child if we cannot determine a familial or custodial relationship exists.

For example, if there's no documentation to confirm the claimed relationship between an adult and a child, we do so if the parent is a national security, public or safety risk, including when there are criminal charges at issue and it may not be appropriate to maintain the family in detention together.

We also separate a parent and child if the adult is suspected of human trafficking. There have been cases where minors have been used and trafficked by unrelated adults in an effort to avoid detention. And I'd stop here to say, in the last five months, we have a 314 percent increase in adults and children arriving at the border, fraudulently claiming to be a family unit. This is, obviously, of concern.

And separation can occur when the parent is charged with human smuggling. Under those circumstances, we would detain the parent in an appropriate secure detention facility separate from the child.

What has changed is that we no longer exempt entire classes of people who break the law. Everyone is subject to prosecution. When DHS refers a case against a parent or legal guardian for criminal prosecution, the parent or legal guardian will be placed into the U.S. Marshals Service custody for pretrial determination, pursuant to an order by a federal judge. And any accompanied child will be transferred to the Department of Health and Human Services and will be reclassified as an unaccompanied alien child. That is in accordance with the TVPRA — a law that was passed by Congress — and a following court order, neither which are actions the Trump administration has taken.

And let's be clear: If an American were to commit a crime anywhere in the United States, they would go to jail and they would be separated from their family. This is not a controversial idea.

Second, children in DHS and HHS custody are being well taken care of. The Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement provides meals, medical care, and educational services to these children. They are provided temporary shelter. And HHS works hard to find a parent, relative, or foster home to care for these children. Parents can still communicate with their children through phone calls and video conferencing.

And a parent who is released from custody can be a sponsor and ask HHS to release the child back into their care. Further, these minors can still apply for asylum and other protections under U.S.

immigration law, if eligible.

We take allegations of mistreatment seriously. And I want to stress this point: We investigate. We hold those accountable when, and if, it should occur. We have some of the highest detention standards in the country. Claiming these children and their parents are treated inhumanely is not true and completely disrespects the hardworking men and women at the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

Third, parents who entered illegally are, by definition, criminals. Illegal entry is a crime as determined by Congress. By entering our country illegally, often in dangerous circumstances, illegal immigrants have put their children at risk.

Fourth, CBP and ICE officers are properly trained to care for minors in their custody. DHS and HHS treats all individuals in its custody with dignity and respect, and complies with all laws and policy. This reinforces and reiterates the needs to consider the best interest of the children, and mandates adherence to establish protocols to protect at-risk populations, to include standards for the transport and treatment of minors in DHS and HHS custody.

Additionally, all U.S. Border Patrol personnel in the southwest border are bilingual — every last one of them. They are directed to clearly explain the relevant process to apprehended individuals, and provide detainees with written documentation in both Spanish and English that lays out the process and appropriate phone numbers to contact.

And finally, DHS is not separating families legitimately seeking asylum at ports of entry. If an adult enters at a port of entry and claims asylum, they will not face prosecution for illegal entry. They have not committed a crime by coming to the port of entry.

As I mentioned, DHS does have a responsibility to protect minors. And in that case, as well, we will only separate the family if we cannot determine there is a familiar relationship, if the child may be at risk with the parent or legal guardian, or if the parent or legal guardian is referred for prosecution.

We have a duty to protect the American people, and it's one that I take very seriously. Here is the bottom line: DHS is no longer ignoring the law. We are enforcing the laws as they exist on the

books. As long as illegal entry remains a criminal offense, DHS will not look the other way. DHS will faithfully execute the laws enacted by Congress, as we are sworn to do.

As I said earlier today, surely it is the beginning of the unraveling of democracy when the body who makes the laws, instead of changing them, tells the enforcement body not to enforce the law. I ask Congress to act this week so that we can secure our borders and uphold our humanitarian ideas. These two missions should not be pitted against each other. If we close the loopholes, we can accomplish both.

Before I take questions, I just want to ask that, in your reporting, please consider the men and women of DHS who are dedicated law enforcement officers and who often put their lives at risk. Let's remember their sacrifice and commitment to this country.

And with that, I'll take some questions. Yes.

Q Secretary Nielsen, if you could, what you talked about there — DHS is no longer ignoring the law — you're calling on Congress to change the law.

SECRETARY NIELSEN: Yes.

Q I mean, that is the big message here. Members of Congress on the Democratic side say that you're using children as a lever to try to get them to take legislative action. What do you say to that?

SECRETARY NIELSEN: I say that is a very cowardly response. It's clearly within their power to make the laws and change the laws. They should do so.

Yes.

Q Have you seen the photos of children in cages? Have you heard the audio clip of these children wailing, that just came out today?

SECRETARY NIELSEN: I have not seen — as something that came out today. But I have been to detention centers. And again, I would reference you to our standards. I would reference you to the

care provided not just by the Department of Homeland Security but by the Department of Health and Human Services when they get to HHS.

Q But is that the image of this country that you want out there — children in cages?

SECRETARY NIELSEN: The image that I want of this country is an immigration system that secures our borders and upholds our humanitarian ideals. Congress needs to fix it.

Yes.

Q Madam Secretary, I'd like to give you a chance to respond to Laura Bush. In an op-ed, she says this is cruel. She supports an application of the law. Even the current First Lady, Melania Trump, has said we should be a nation of laws; we should do so "with heart." Do you have anything you want to tell them? Do you believe they're misunderstanding the situation? Or do you believe there's any component of this policy which, as you've outlined, other administrations have done, but you're using in a way that is more intense and creates this separation issue?

SECRETARY NIELSEN: What my response would be is, is calling attention to this matter is important. This is a very serious issue that has resulted after years and years of Congress not taking action. So I would thank them both for their comments. I would thank them both for their concerns. I share their concerns. But Congress is the one that needs to fix this.

Q And this policy is not, by your definition, in any way, cruel?

SECRETARY NIELSEN: It's not a policy. Our policy at DHS is to do what we're sworn to do, which is to enforce the law.

Yes.

Q Following up on Major's question there, Former First Lady Laura Bush compared this to Japanese internment during World War II — one of the darkest days in the nation's history. Do you believe that the effect of this policy — so not the law — but the effect of it on separating children from families in those specific instances is moral, is ethical, is American?

SECRETARY NIELSEN: What I believe is that we should exercise our democratic rights as Americans and fix the problem. It's a problem; let's fix it.

Yes.

Q How is this not child abuse?

SECRETARY NIELSEN: Which? Be more specific, please. Enforcing the law?

Q The images that Cecilia was talking about, and the sounds that we've seen from these big box stores — the Walmarts, the other stores — when you see this, how is this not specifically child abuse for these innocent children who are indeed being separated from their parents?

SECRETARY NIELSEN: So I want to be clear on a couple other things. The vast majority — vast, vast majority — of children who are in the care of HHS right now — 10,000 of the 12,000 — were sent here alone by their parents. That's when they were separated. So somehow, we've conflated everything.

But there's two separate issues. Ten thousand of those currently in custody were sent by their parents, with strangers, to undertake a completely dangerous and deadly travel alone. We now care for them. We have high standards. We give them meals. We give them education. We give them medical care. There's videos; there's TVs. I've visited the detention centers myself. That would be my answer to that question.

Yes.

Q If I could follow up, though. For the hundreds that are not included in there — you said 10,000 — but for the hundreds that we have seen — perhaps up to 2,000 — are there any examples of child abuse, do you believe? And how could this not be child abuse for the people who are taken from their parents? Not the ones who are sent here, with their parents' blessing, with a smuggler, but the people who are taken from their parents?

SECRETARY NIELSEN: Unfortunately, I am not in any position to deal with hearsay stories. If someone has a specific allegation, as I always do when I testify, I ask that they provide that



information to the Department of Homeland Security. We will look into it. Of course, we do not want any situation where a child is not completely adequately taken care of.

Yes.

Q A couple of questions. One, why is the government only releasing images of the boys who are being held? Where are the girls? Where are the young toddlers?

SECRETARY NIELSEN: I don't know. I am not familiar with those particular images.

Q You don't know where they are? Do you know where the girls are? Do you know where the young toddlers are?

SECRETARY NIELSEN: We have children in DHS care — both. But as you know, most of the children, after 72 hours, are transferred to HHS. So I don't know what pictures you're referencing, but I'd have to refer you to HHS.

Q We've seen images of boys, but we just haven't seen any of the girls or any of the young toddlers. And you're saying that they are being well cared for. So how can you make that claim if you don't know where they are?

SECRETARY NIELSEN: It's not that I don't know where they are. I'm saying that the vast majority are held by Health and Human Services. We transfer them after 72 hours. I don't know what pictures you're speaking about, but perhaps there are —

Q The pictures have been released to public; they've been aired all over national television.

SECRETARY NIELSEN: Okay. By DHS? Or by HHS?

Q By DHS.

SECRETARY NIELSEN: Okay. So let's find out from HHS. I don't think there's anything other than (inaudible) pictures.

Q They were released by your department. I mean, they've been aired all over national television throughout the day — the kids who are being held in the cages. We've only seen the boys.

SECRETARY NIELSEN: I will look into that. I'm not aware that there is another picture.

Yes.

Q Secretary, let me just follow up very quickly, because you continue to insist that this is something that Congress can change —

SECRETARY NIELSEN: Yes.

Q — and yet this is something that was enacted after the Attorney General announced the zero-tolerance policy. This never happened before he announced the zero-tolerance policy.

SECRETARY NIELSEN: That's actually not true. So the last administration —

Q Well, we've never seen this under previous administrations.

SECRETARY NIELSEN: — the Obama administration, the Bush administration all separated families at the —

Q We didn't see kids separated from their parents.

SECRETARY NIELSEN: They absolutely did. They did — their rate was less than ours, but they absolutely did do this. This is not new.

Q There were unaccompanied minors, there's no doubt about that. But this —

SECRETARY NIELSEN: They separated families.

Q — separating kids at this rate from their parents is something new and specific to this administration once the Attorney General announced the zero-tolerance policy. So why doesn't the President pick up the phone and change the policy? He said he hates it.

SECRETARY NIELSEN: I think what the President is trying to do is find a long-term fix. So why don't we have Congress change the laws to change —

Q (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY NIELSEN: No. Congress could fix this tomorrow.

Yes. I think you were next, right?

Q Yeah. Madam Secretary, President Trump has had a lot to say the last few days about immigration, but he's offered no compassion to the families that are being separated at the border. Do you know why that is? And why won't he simply pause your department's enforcement of this administration policy until Congress reaches that long-term fix so that these families can be reunited?

SECRETARY NIELSEN: He has been attempting to work with Congress since he's been in office. He's made it very clear that we will enforce the laws of the United States as long as this administration is here. As part of that, he has continually reached out to Congress to fix this. And I think what you've seen him do in the last few days is that: is continue to tell Congress, "Please work with us." The system is broken. The only people that benefit from the system right now are the smugglers, the traffickers, those who are pedaling drugs, and terrorists. So let's fix the system.

Yes.

Q That didn't answer the question. And does he feel any compassion for the families that are being separated? He has talked about the parents being possible criminals. He has blamed it on Democrats. He has offered no words of compassion.

THE PRESIDENT: I think he has said in tweets that he would like Congress to act to end the underlying laws that require the separation.

Q Madam Secretary, it seemed like a couple days ago, both the President and in your tweets, that the main posture or point was to say that this is not the administration's policy. But it seems like, in the last couple — well, today — that the message is a little different; is to say, well, this is our policy,

but it's our policy because either we believe it's a deterrent or we don't believe we have the resources to move families entirely.

And I'm just wondering — I want to make sure we get the reporting right — which of those is the most precise way to describe how the administration feels? And given the blowback by a number of Republicans as well as Democrats, are you considering rethinking this based on feedback? Or is this the administration's position going forward — period, paragraph?

SECRETARY NIELSEN: The laws prohibit us from detaining families while they go through prosecution for illegally entering the border, and while they go through prosecutions for immigration proceedings. If we close the loopholes, we can keep the families together, which is what they did in the last administration until a court ruled that we can no longer do that. After 20 days, we have to release both unaccompanied children and accompanied children — which means that we cannot detain families together. The only option is to not enforce the law at all.

Yes.

Q Okay, so going back to these two questions from Kristen and Margaret, you said that you want Congress to close some loopholes. With that, you also said that you want to make this work. Now, are these kids being used as pawns for a wall? Many people are asking that. And Democrats are saying this is your discretion and there is no law that says that this White House can separate parents from their children.

SECRETARY NIELSEN: The kids are being used by pawns by the smugglers and the traffickers. Again, let's just pause to think about this statistic: 314 percent increase in adults showing up with kids that are not a family unit. Those are traffickers, those are smugglers. That is MS-13. Those are criminals and those are abusers.

Q When did —

Q Just let her finish.

SECRETARY NIELSEN: So — thank you. All I'm trying to say is, closing that loophole will enable us to detain families together throughout the proceeding as they've done in previous administrations.

Q Madam Secretary. Madam Secretary, can you definitively say, are the children being used as pawns against — for a wall. Yes or no? Can you say yes or no to that?

SECRETARY NIELSEN: The children are not being used as a pawn. We are trying to protect the children, which is why I'm asking Congress to act.

Yes.

Q (Inaudible) as the legal framework for the decisions that your administration has made. What we're seeing — the pictures, the audio, the stories — are they an intended consequence of the administration's decision-making or an unintended consequence?

SECRETARY NIELSEN: I think that they reflect the focus of those who post such pictures and narratives. The narratives we don't see are the narratives of the crime, of the opioids, of the smugglers, of people who are killed by gang members, of American children who are recruited, and then, when they lose the drugs, they're tased and beaten.

So we don't have a balanced view of what's happening. But what's happening at the border is the border is being overrun by those who have no right to cross it. As I said before, if you're seeking asylum, go to a port of entry. You do not need to break the law of the United States to seek asylum.

Q People are being turned away from ports of entry, Madam Secretary.

SECRETARY NIELSEN: That actually is incorrect. We have limited resources. We have multiple missions at CBP. And what we do is, based on the very high standards we have, if we do not have enough bed space, if we do not have enough medical personnel on staff, if we do have enough caretakers on staff, then we will tell people that come to the border they need to come back. We are not turning them away. We are saying: We want to take care of you in the right way; right now, we do not have the resources at this particular moment in time. Come back.

Q Thank you very much. Are you intending for this to play out as it is playing out? Are you intending for parents to be separated from their children? Are you intending to send a message?

SECRETARY NIELSEN: I find that offensive. No. Because why would I ever create a policy that purposely does that?

Q Perhaps as a deterrent.

SECRETARY NIELSEN: No.

Q AG Sessions says it was a deterrent.

SECRETARY NIELSEN: The way that it works —

Q The Attorney General said it was a deterrent.

SECRETARY NIELSEN: That's not the question that you asked me.

But the answer is, it's a law passed by the United States Congress. Rather than fixing the law, Congress is asking those of us who enforce the law to turn our backs on the law and not enforce the law. It's not an answer. The answer is to fix the laws.

Q Will the administration refrain from its current policy if Congress were to pass something that's close to what you want? Or will it continue to require the separation of parents from their children until the President gets exactly what he wants?

SECRETARY NIELSEN: If Congress closes the loopholes, some of which — many of which are closed in the two bills that we hope are taken up this week by the House, then they close the loopholes and the families will stay together throughout the proceedings.

Thank you.

MS. SANDERS: Thank you, Secretary Nielsen.

I'll jump right in and go to other questions, news of the day.

Steve.

Q The President said he would talk with the North Korean leader, Kim, yesterday. Do you know if that happened?

MS. SANDERS: I know the President has spoken with a number of administration officials that are working on the details following the North Korean summit, and we'll keep you posted on those details. But I'm not aware of a specific call between the two leaders at this time.

Q To follow up — there's a report that the United States and South Korea have agreed to suspend joint military drills in August. Is that real?

MS. SANDERS: I'm sorry, I didn't hear the last part of the question.

Q That they've agreed to suspend joint military drills in August. Are you aware of this? Is this true?

MS. SANDERS: Those conversations are ongoing at this point. As long as the North Koreans continue to act in good faith, as we saw in Singapore, then we expect those things to be on pause at this point.

Bill.

Q Yes, Sarah. Has the President discussed the family separation policy with the First Lady, in light of her statement yesterday? And does he have any plans to come out and address the American people? Maybe take some questions about how his administration is enforcing the policy.

MS. SANDERS: The President did take a number of questions, as I'm sure you're all aware, on Friday, in which — what he actually said very closely mirrored what the First Lady said. He said he hates seeing this. He's called on Congress — not just Friday, but for months — he's called on Democrats in Congress to work with him; let's fix this problem. The President isn't trying to kick the can down the road. He's actually trying to work with Congress to get real solutions and to fix the problem, and that's what we're doing.

Jeff. And I'll take your question since you and your network falsely accused me of not wanting to be here. So I'll be glad to pass that question on to you now.

Q Why did you decide to have Secretary Nielsen answer questions instead of you?

MS. SANDERS: I'm here answering questions as well, but I thought it was important for the Secretary, one of the primary experts on this process and the things that are going on, to come out here and have the chance to speak to you and for you guys to be able to ask questions directly of her and the leaders in this administration.

But I'm standing here in front of you.

Q I have a real question, though. Would the President sign a bill that did not —

MS. SANDERS: I wondered if you were going to throw it away.

Q Would the President sign a bill that did not include border funding if it did indeed close this loophole that Secretary Nielsen talked about? Would he sign that specific bill? Or does he require an entire bill with that \$25 billion in border funding?

MS. SANDERS: We've laid out what we would like to see on a number of different occasions. There are currently two bills that are in process in the House. The President supports both of those pieces of legislation that we have voiced support for the details in those.

The President doesn't just want to see a Band-Aid put on this. He wants us to actually fix our immigration system. He's tired of administrations claiming that they want to help the system and then just kicking the can down the road. He wants to actually fix the problems. He wants to secure our border. This isn't just something we can tinker with. We have to actually fix the entire system, and he's committed to doing that.

Q He would require border funding then?

MS. SANDERS: Again, we've laid out what we would want to see in legislation. The President wants to fix the system and we're committed to doing that. And we hope Congress will actually do their part. Democrats have got to stop playing political games and actually come to the table and get real about solving the problem.

John.



Q Thanks. On the IG report and the hearings in Congress with Mr. Horowitz and Director Wray: The President tweeted several times, today and yesterday, that the Mueller investigation continues to be “a witch hunt.” He said on Friday that, after reviewing the IG report, it shows that there’s no evidence of collusion. His own FBI Director today said that Mueller is not on a witch hunt and that the report doesn’t speak to the special counsel investigation. How is there that disconnect there between what the President believes another branch of his administration is doing?

MS. SANDERS: The President has been clear. He was obviously very involved in his campaign, and he’s laid out a number of times that there was no collusion, and he strongly feels this is a witch hunt. The President has also said that the IG report clearly calls into question the credibility of James Comey and many other senior FBI investigators who have been involved in the Russia investigation, and that report validates the claims that he’s made repeatedly.

Dave.

Q Thanks, Sarah. The governor of Massachusetts, who’s a Republican, today reversed course and ordered the National Guard not to send assets or personnel to southwest border because he said, in his words, actions of the federal government “are resulting in the inhumane treatment of children.” Would you comment on that? And have you seen any other impact on border operations from this whole situation?

MS. SANDERS: I haven’t seen his comments specifically, but I would tell him that he should call every member of Congress, particularly those in his own state, and ask them to fix the laws.

There’s only one body here that gets to create legislation and it’s Congress. Our job is to enforce it, and we would like to see Congress fix it. That’s why the President has repeatedly called on them to work with him to do just that.

Deborah.

Q Sarah, what was the President’s reaction to Laura Bush’s piece in the Washington Post?

MS. SANDERS: I’m sorry, what was the last part of your question?

Q What was the President’s reaction to Laura Bush’s piece in the Washington Post?

MS. SANDERS: I didn't speak directly with him about that, but I'm happy to address the concerns and echo what Secretary Nielsen said. Look, we share the concern. The President himself said that he doesn't like this process.

But once again, it's Congress' job to change the law. We're calling on them to do exactly that. And frankly, this law was actually signed into effect in 2008 under her husband's leadership, not under this administration. We're not the ones responsible for creating this problem. We've inherited it. But we're actually the first administration stepping up and trying to fix it.

John.

Q Thank you, Sarah. I have here in my hands figures from the German Ministry of the Interior, under Minister Seehofer, who says that crime has gone down 5.1 percent in Germany. In fact, it's the lowest rate in a quarter century in Germany — violent crime down 2.4 percent, burglary down 23 percent, and theft down 11.8 percent. Where did the President get the statement that crime was way up in Germany under the Merkel plan for admitting refugees?

MS. SANDERS: I'm not aware of the report that you're referencing, but I'd be happy to check into it, and circle back to you.

Q It's from the German Ministry of the Interior.

MS. SANDERS: I heard that part, but I haven't seen it. But I'll be happy to check into it and circle back.

Jon.

Q Thanks a lot, Sarah. I read the First Lady's statement that was put out and she seems very troubled by this zero-tolerance policy. Is there any daylight between the President and the First Lady on this issue?

MS. SANDERS: I think we've made it abundantly clear that the daylight exists between Democrats in Congress and their ability to change this law. The President himself said that he doesn't — he hates these images; he hates this process. And that's why he's asked for it to be fixed.

I feel like we keep ignoring the fact that the President isn't the one that creates the law, but it's Congress' job to create the law. And the President has already laid out and gladly stated, a number of times, publicly, that he would sign legislation that fixes these loopholes and fixes our immigration system.

I think that people should be begging and banging down the doors of Congress and asking them to join with the President instead of fighting him. Instead of constantly criticizing it, why aren't they offering solutions?

And you have people like Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer who come out and complain and attack. It's because they have no message. They have no solutions. We've laid out a solution and we'd like to see them work with us to put it in place.

Steve.

Q Also critical of this particular policy, besides the people that you mentioned on the Democratic side, are a number of Republicans, and also some very prominent members of some of the President's base — evangelical Christians. Do you know if the President has heard from those members of his base? Evangelicals, in particular — had discussions with the President about this particular policy? And can you sort of fill us in on discussions the President may have had in that regard?

MS. SANDERS: I think any evangelical that — or in any church for that matter — that feels strongly, they should open up their doors and help facilitate some of these individuals. I think that's their calling, that's the mission of the church, and they should certainly fulfill that. If they want to fix the immigration system, then they should call their members of Congress and ask them to join with us to do that.

Steve.

Q Thank you.

Q Sarah, can you just —

MS. SANDERS: Sorry, Steve. Go ahead.

Q There's some confusion about this Space Force that the President announced today. Did he actually sign anything? Does he believe that this can be done without the approval of Congress? The Air Force appears opposed to it. Where is the support for this coming from besides the President?

MS. SANDERS: The President has asked the Department of Defense to start the process. We're in the beginning stages of it, and we're going to work with the Department of Defense and the other relevant parties to put it into place.

Francesca.

Q Thank you, Sarah. If the administration is, as it says, not using the children as pawns in this situation, then why not just have Congress pass legislation that narrowly deals with this family separation issue, and sign it, and then deal with the other aspects of the immigration system that the President wants to overhaul at a different time?

MS. SANDERS: Once again, we want to fix the entire system. We don't want to just tinker with it. The President is tired of watching people kick it down the road and not take responsibility and not fix the problems that we have.

Q I understand, ideally, Sarah, that you would like to see all these other things change about the immigration system. But we're dealing with this particular situation right now. Why not —

MS. SANDERS: We're dealing with a number of situations. That's not the only one. We have people flooding over the borders. Look, the President wants people to come to this country, but we want them to come legally and through the right process. And that's what we're asking. We want to secure the border.

There have been a number of individuals that are permanently separated from their families due to the illegal aliens that have come across this border and murdered and killed American citizens. Where is the outrage over that separation? We want to fix the whole thing. We don't want to just tinker with one part of it. This is a broken system, and we've got to quit ignoring it. Just ignoring the rule doesn't fix it, and that's what this administration is actually trying to do.

I'm going to take one last question. Saagar.

Q Thank you, Sarah. So Secretary Pompeo came out today and he said that, in exchange for denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula, that the United States had committed to updating the armistice agreement that's currently in place. Can you confirm that the President did make this commitment to Kim Jong Un? And what exactly does updating the armistice mean? Does it put the future of U.S. forces on the Korean Peninsula in question? And just any more information you could update us on in that regard.

MS. SANDERS: We're finalizing the details of what the process will look like. Certainly would confirm Secretary Pompeo's comments. And would refer you to the State Department and the Department of Defense, who will be putting those details out and together.

Thanks so much, guys. Have a great day.

END

5:49 P.M. EDT