

‘Our country is full’: Trump says migrants straining system

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Associated Press

CALEXICO, Calif. — Declaring “our country is full,” President Donald Trump on Friday insisted the U.S. immigration system was overburdened and illegal crossings must be stopped as he inspected a refurbished section of fencing at the Mexican border.

Trump, making a renewed push for border security as a central campaign issue for his 2020 re-election, participated in a briefing on immigration and border security in Calexico before viewing a 2-mile see-through steel-slat barrier that was a long-planned replacement for an older barrier — and not new wall.

“There is indeed an emergency on our southern border,” Trump said at the brief-



AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin
President Donald Trump visits a new section of the border wall with Mexico in Calexico, Calif., on Friday. Gloria Chavez with the U.S. Border Patrol, center, and Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen listen.

ing, adding that there has been a sharp uptick in illegal crossings. “It’s a colossal surge and it’s overwhelming our immigration system, and we can’t let that happen. ... We can’t take you anymore. We can’t take you. Our country is full.”

As Air Force One touched

down in the state, California and 19 other states that are suing Trump over his emergency declaration to build a border wall requested a court order to stop money from being diverted to fund the project. But Trump, who ratcheted up his hard-line immigration rhetoric in

recent weeks, declared that his move, which included vetoing a congressional vote, was necessary.

Also on Friday, House Democrats filed a lawsuit preventing Trump from spending more money than Congress has approved to erect barriers along the southwestern border. Congress approved just under \$1.4 billion for work on border barricades. Trump has asserted he can use his powers as chief executive to transfer an additional \$6.7 billion to wall construction.

Trump, who earlier in the week threatened to shut down the border over the high numbers of migrants trying to enter the U.S., appeared to walk back his comments Thursday. He said Friday that it was because Mexico had gotten tougher in stopping an influx of immigrants from moving north.

Taxes: There’s a huge range in both counties by code area

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But in terms of businesses contributing to the county tax base, Morrow County is outpacing Umatilla County. Morrow County’s top taxpayer, Vadata, Inc., pays \$1.3 million more in taxes than Umatilla County’s top contributor, Hermiston Power LLC. Vadata, a subsidiary of Amazon, pays \$4.72 million in taxes to Morrow County in 2018. It was also the second-highest taxpayer in Umatilla County, paying \$3.1 million in taxes. Hermiston Power paid the most in Umatilla County, contributing \$3.3 million in taxes in 2018.

Other major taxpayers in Morrow County are Portland General Electric, which paid \$3.66 million in 2018, Avista Corporation, which paid \$3.58 million, Threemile Canyon Farms, which paid \$2.4 million, and Lamb Weston, which paid \$1.96 million.

In Umatilla County, other top contributors in 2018 were Union Pacific, which paid \$2.2 million, Pacificorp, which paid \$2 million, and Hermiston Generating Company, which paid \$1.4 million.

According to data provided by Gorman, Morrow County’s real market value has increased by about \$3.7 billion in the past 10 years. That increase, he said, is mostly as a result of new industrial development and utility value. But the assessed value, or taxable value, has increased at a slower rate, by about \$1.1 billion. That’s because many of those properties have received tax exemptions, either through Enterprise Zone agreements or Strategic Investment Program (SIP) agreements. Additionally, a business can stack its exemptions — it can receive one for constructing a new building, and a separate one, with a different timeline, for purchasing new equipment.

of taxes means those businesses aren’t contributing to the county.

“Some folks are concerned they’re not paying their fair share, but at some point they’re going to pay a significant share,” he said.

Taxes to homeowners

Though Umatilla County is larger by population and area, the two counties have a comparable average tax rate. Umatilla County’s average property tax rate is \$14.15 per \$1,000 assessed value. Morrow County’s average rate is slightly higher, at \$14.83 per \$1,000 assessed value.

But there’s a huge range in both counties by code area. A code area refers to the specific taxing districts serving each geographical area within the county. Umatilla County has 151 code areas, and Morrow County has 63. Tax rates are higher in code areas within incorporated cities, because those places have more services. Three code areas in Umatilla County tied for the highest tax rate, all within the city of Hermiston. Those areas pay \$22.09 per \$1,000 assessed value. Unique costs in those areas include city taxes, a city bond, and the Hermiston Urban Renewal District. The lowest rate in Umatilla County is an unincorporated area near Ukiah, which pays \$9.84 per \$1,000 assessed value.

In Morrow County, the highest rate is \$25.06 per \$1,000 assessed value, within the city of Heppner. There, city taxes alone are \$10.62 per \$1,000 assessed value.

Because of Measure 5, passed in 1990, property taxes in Oregon have assigned rates and can’t go above a certain amount without being subject to compression. For school taxes, it’s \$5 per \$1,000, and for city taxes it’s \$10 per \$1,000 assessed value.

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Paul Chalmers,
Umatilla County assessor

Gorman said while many of the largest business contributors receive major tax exemptions when they first locate in the area, some of those exemptions are now starting to expire.

“They don’t contribute very much, while exempt, in hard costs,” Gorman said. “In soft costs maybe, like donations to local charities.” He said many enterprise zone agreements include language in their contracts to encourage businesses to support local interests.

Even with the exemptions, he said, those businesses have a huge impact on the county. About 25 percent of the taxes levied go to administering services in the county like the sheriff’s office, the planning and health departments, human resources, part of the district attorney’s office, and others, Gorman said.

Umatilla County Assessor Paul Chalmers said the goal with offering exemptions is to entice businesses to locate in the area.

“Even if the benefit may be deferred, it’s always going to be beneficial,” he said. He noted that in SIP agreements, a certain portion is set aside to go on tax rolls each year during the exemption.

“So it’s not a stagnant number,” he said. “It gets indexed.”

Chalmers dismissed the idea that the deferral

Gorman said that despite that, Heppner lobbied to have a higher tax rate, but they lose about as much in compression as the city of Boardman, which has a rate of \$19.71 per \$1,000 assessed value.

“They lose almost the exact same in compression, but the city of Boardman collects a lot more in dollars,” he said. That’s because Boardman has more commercial property, and more people living there.

Chalmers said because of compression, without new businesses coming in, and without incentives like the enterprise zones to bring them there, schools and cities would not see additional revenue streams.

“They would have to lay people off,” he said. “The property tax system in Oregon is not fair or equitable.”

Gorman said it can be misleading to look at county taxes by their average rate, as both have cities with a huge range of services and populations. But, he said, overall they are similar communities.

“Umatilla County has some larger cities, but it’s still a rural frame of mind,” he said, citing the offerings of each county, like libraries and fire protection services. “They kind of want the same thing.”



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
Erin Merryn speaks to Kori Hibbard of Pendleton during a book signing after speaking Thursday in Pendleton.

Advocate: ‘I hope parents teach their kids about personal body safety’

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Merryn said her first abuser was her friend’s “Uncle Richard” who lived next door. The assaults happened again and again from the ages 6-8. Richard threatened to harm her family if she uttered a word, Merryn said, but she finally told her mother, who “just bawled and bawled” and exclaimed, “Oh my God, it explains everything” — her daughter’s depression, anxiety and making every excuse possible to avoid staying the night with friends.

Her parents told the police, Merryn said, but it was Richard’s word against hers and the case went nowhere.

The family moved across town, and Merryn said within five months she was off the school’s individualized education program, the instructions schools design to meet the needs of troubled children. She still has that paperwork, she said, and it helped when she worked the books.

Her life got back on track. Until she was 11, she said, when her older cousin, “Brian” began sexually

assaulting her. Brian told her to keep it secret because no one would believe her.

She said she stayed silent again, and for the next two years Brian abused and raped her every chance he could. She said she spoke up when she realized Brian was sexually assaulting her younger sister, sometimes at the very same family outings and holiday gatherings he assaulted her.

Her family in April 1998 took her to the Children’s Advocacy Center in Hoffman Estates, Illinois, which provided a safe place for her to reveal Brian’s abuse on the record.

Police got Brian to talk, she said, and he took a deal, receiving seven years probation, two years of sexual offender therapy, and 1,000 hours of community service.

Some 900 centers help save children across the United States, she said, and all are nonprofits, relying on donors. They have an enormous task, she said. Some national studies show 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 20 boys are a victim of child sexual abuse, while others peg the figures as high as 1 in 3 for girls and 1 in 5 for boys, both before

the age of 18. Merryn said the diagnosis for childhood autism and cancer pales in comparison for the scale of child sexual abuse.

Her experiences pushed her in 2010 to become a full-time advocate for Erin’s Law, which requires states to mandate teaching school children about sexual abuse prevention. Merryn said police in schools taught her the eight ways to say no to drugs, but no one ever told her what to do if she didn’t want someone to touch her.

Her home state of Illinois passed the law in 2011, and 35 states have joined the ranks. Oregon passed its version in 2015.

This past December, she said, a Portland student came forward in the weeks after a police presentation in her school about sexual harassment. That led to the arrest of Jonathon Paul Rogers, 33, on charges he abused two girls when they were 6 and 8.

Merryn said telling about Brian’s abuse caused a split in her family. Her parents believed her, Brian’s believed him. Over the years, she said, most of her relatives came to her side.

She said some of that is due to her advocacy. The family sees her work has not been about punishing her cousin but protecting other children.

That raises the big question of why she has not revealed Richard’s true identity or tried to sue him in civil court, where some sex crimes victims have met success in receiving damages from their abusers. Unlike Brian, Richard never faced any consequences.

Part of that stems from fear, she said, of what Richard might still do. Yet she also said he is older, dying of kidney failure and living in his sister’s basement, and he has nothing she wants.

Then her eyes widened, as though in a moment of realization.

“To be quite honest,” Merryn said, “I don’t want to see that scumbag again.”

Her story also is about the future, she said, and continuing the fight to have Erin’s Law in every state. And she wants parents to be involved. A mother of three, Merryn said she has one message she wants to drive home:

“I hope parents teach their kids about personal body safety.”

Hansell: Gov. Brown has voiced support for the bill

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a bill through its house of representatives that would put the issue up for a vote in the next general election.

If all three states agree to permanent daylight saving time, the trio would also have to get federal approval from Congress.

That’s not an automatic given that Florida is still waiting for congressional approval for a bill in 2018 that established a permanent daylight saving time.

But the quest to eliminate standard time — the “fall back” period from November to March — has some powerful, if unlikely, allies.

President Donald Trump tweeted on March 11 that permanent daylight saving time was “O.K with me!”

And Oregon Gov. Kate Brown, a Democrat, has also voiced support for the proposal.

But before the concept behind SB 320 goes before the governor’s desk and pos-

sibly the president’s, it will need to pass the Oregon House of Representatives.

A first reading was held in the House on Friday, but northeast Oregon’s two representatives — Greg Barreto, R-Cove, and Greg Smith, R-Heppner — did not immediately return messages left on their phones.