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The People's Hour

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- [AP Top News] Most families of US troops killed in the Iran war's deadliest attack weren't at White House event

<https://apnews.com/article/iran-war-trump-gold-star-families-soldiers-4ab4e67f85d9035f2f19b8e61062927a>

Why: Gold Star families being left out of a White House event is a gut-level veterans and military story about how the country treats those who paid the highest price. It also raises the question of who is really answering for the costs of the Iran war.

- [AP Top News] Trump doesn't commit to repaying federal funds already spent on controversial ads

<https://apnews.com/article/trump-taxpayer-funded-ads-super-pac-reimburse-d728ad3cf091576d09a63d9218be3fe2>

Why: Taxpayer money spent on political-style ads, with the president's PAC refusing to pay it back, is a classic who-pays-the-bill story. It lets the host hold power accountable on spending regardless of party.

- [AP Top News] Third-country deportation policy

<https://apnews.com/article/supreme-court-trump-deportations-third-countries-2219c35c065eab4b0690058d81bd787a>

Why: A Supreme Court ruling on sending deportees to third countries is a major immigration enforcement development with real legal stakes. It speaks directly to the audience's border and deportation concerns.

- [New York Post] Trump says he's considering suspending federal gas tax as states lead effort to lower costs

<https://nypost.com/2026/10/06/us-news/trump-says-hes-considering-suspending-federal-gas-tax-as-states-lead-effort-to-lower-costs/>

Why: A possible federal gas tax holiday is immediate pocketbook news for commuters and working families. It opens a debate on whether relief is real or political, and what states are doing on their own.

01 — OPENER JINGLE

[STING — markford_open.mp3]

02 — COLD OPEN (DATE SLATE + ROADMAP)

Good evening, America. It is Tuesday, October sixth, two thousand twenty-six, and this is The Mark Ford Show.

Tonight comes down to two questions. Who pays, and who gets left out? Four stories, and every one of them answers it differently.

We start with the families nobody called. Six American soldiers were killed in the March first drone strike on Port Shuaiba, Kuwait. This week the White House held a Gold Star event, and most of those six families were not in the room. Some say they were never invited. Others got less than two weeks' notice. Survivors of that strike say they warned that the air protection was weak. The Army finished its investigation in June, and the families still have not been briefed. Nineteen troops are dead in this war and more than eight hundred are wounded. The president has called it small potatoes. Some families have praised this administration, and we will say so. But the ones asking for answers deserve to hear them.

Next, your money, his face. Nearly twelve million dollars of a twenty million dollar Homeland Security contract has already gone out in ads that glorify the president. Some of that money was meant for Customs and Border Protection. Mr. Trump says he will pay from here on out with MAGA Inc., but when asked about paying back what was already spent, he said, "we'll decide." Republicans like John Thune and Katie Britt have pushed back. Chuck Schumer wants an investigation. Legal experts are asking whether this breaks the ban on using taxpayer money for publicity or propaganda. My view is simple. If it's a good ad, pay for it yourself. And give the taxpayers their money back.

Then, sent somewhere you've never heard of. The Supreme Court, in an apparent six to three order, is letting the administration keep deporting people to third countries while it hears the case in December. About twenty five thousand people have already been sent to more than two dozen countries, often under agreements nobody is allowed to read. Most went to Mexico. The administration says these are people with final orders who cannot go home, and that foreign governments gave assurances. Lawyers say many have no criminal record, and some now face prison or torture. We will lay out both sides, and then ask who is keeping track when the deal is secret.

And last, pain at the pump. The president says he is considering suspending the federal gas tax. That is eighteen point four cents a gallon on gasoline and twenty four point four on diesel. Trouble is, Congress is not back until after the election. Gas now averages four dollars and thirty seven cents. A year ago it was three thirteen. Diesel is six thirty two, up from three sixty eight. Ohio, Utah, Georgia and Indiana have already cut their own taxes, and Kentucky paused its increases. Mr. Trump signed an order on red dye diesel, and the G-7 is releasing one hundred million barrels from reserves. Is that real relief, or election-season timing? Ask a trucker. Ask any family that drives forty miles to work.

Soldiers' families, taxpayers, people in handcuffs on a plane, and everybody filling a tank. Somebody is footing the bill in each of these stories, and somebody is being shut out. We are going to find out who.

This is The People's Hour, on The Mark Ford Show, right here on WRZF.

03 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

04 — SEGMENT A: THE FAMILIES NOBODY CALLED

Tonight at the White House, there's a reception for Gold Star families. Gold Star is the military's name for the relatives of troops who died on active duty. It's an annual event tied to Gold Star Mother's and Family's Day, which fell on the last weekend of September. The White House says this year's gathering honors nearly forty fallen service members from conflicts going all the way back to Vietnam. The president and the first lady were there. There was a candle-lighting ceremony and a musical performance that included "America the Beautiful."

It sounds like a fine thing to do. Honoring the dead should be the one thing in this country that sits above politics. But here's the part that should bother you. Most of the families of the six soldiers killed in the deadliest attack of the Iran war were not in that room.

The Associated Press reached out to those six families. Only one family member of the soldiers killed in the March first drone strike on Port Shuaiba in Kuwait confirmed that they planned to attend. One. Out of six families who lost someone in the single worst attack of this war.

Let me give you their names, because they ought to be said out loud. Sergeant Declan Coady. Master Sergeant Nicole Amor. Major Cody Khork. Master Sergeant Noah Tietjens. Major Jeffrey O'Brien. And Chief Warrant Officer Three Robert Marzan. Six soldiers, killed by an Iranian drone on the very first day of March, just a day after this war was launched on February twenty-eighth.

Since then, nineteen American troops have died in this war. More than eight hundred have been wounded. Eight hundred. Think about what that number means in hospital rooms and living rooms across this country. And the six killed at Port Shuaiba are the largest single loss of them all.

Now, I want to be fair here, because this is a subject that deserves care. Not every family is angry. Not every family stayed home out of protest. Some families have told the AP they are grateful for how the Trump administration and the military have honored their loved ones. That's real, and I'm not going

to wave it away. Grief doesn't follow a script, and nobody gets to tell a mother or a widow how she is supposed to feel about this president.

Take Donna Burhans. She is the mother of Major Cody Khork, one of the six killed at Port Shuaiba. She says she never received an invitation. But she also says she wouldn't have gone, because it's simply too painful. She calls herself a "big fan" of President Trump after meeting him during the dignified transfer at Dover Air Force Base, where the flag-draped cases come home. Her words to the AP in a text message were these. Quote. "I just can't keep going thru this over and over." End quote.

I can't read that without feeling it. A mother who buried her son does not owe anybody a trip to Washington. The White House, for its part, says it attempted to send invitations to Major Khork's family members. So there's a dispute over what was sent and what arrived, and I'll leave that where it sits.

But Mrs. Burhans is one voice. Other families are saying something very different, and the reasons they give are not complicated.

Start with timing. According to several families, the White House began sending invitations about two weeks ago, by phone calls and emails. Two weeks. John Thompson is a former Army sergeant and the founder of Salute to the Fallen, an Iowa organization that supports veteran mental health, suicide prevention, and funeral expenses. He told the AP that several families told him they couldn't go because they didn't get enough notice. In his words, quote, "What they've told me is there has been a lot of confusion around this event, and they weren't given the details in time." End quote. He added that some of them were also not in a position to pay for the trip.

Think about that for a second. You lose your husband, your wife, your son, your daughter. You get a call with less than two weeks to get to Washington. Maybe you work. Maybe you have kids. Maybe you can't afford the plane tickets and the hotel. The government that sent your loved one to war is the one issuing the invitation, and the cost of showing up falls on you.

That's exactly what happened with Libby Klinner. She is the spouse of Major Alex Klinner, an airman who was killed in an Iran-related combat operation this summer. She told the AP that less than two weeks' notice didn't

give her enough time to arrange overnight care for her three young children. Three young kids, and a husband who isn't coming home. She also said she wouldn't have gone anyway. In a text message she wrote, quote, "I have no interest in supporting an administration that has been so reckless with the lives of our service members." End quote.

Those are her words, not mine. But they come from a woman whose husband is dead, and she gets to say them.

Then there's the matter of who was never invited at all. At least two families told the AP they did not receive an invitation. Now, to be fair, tracking down a family's personal information isn't always easy, and the AP notes there can be hurdles. I accept that. But then you hear from Tina Marzan.

Tina Marzan is the widow of Chief Warrant Officer Three Robert Marzan, who died in the March first attack. She says she and her two children were not invited. She explained that in the immediate aftermath of her husband's death, she got multiple calls from federal officials, and she told them she did not want to be contacted. The White House says it does not contact people who request not to be contacted. That's a respectful policy, and I'm not going to pretend otherwise.

But listen to what she said. She had hoped they would have tried to reach her, or others in her family, for an event like this one. And she told the AP, quote, "We should be there. I mean, that's not a question." End quote.

That's the whole thing, right there. A woman asked to be left alone while she was drowning in grief, and months later she's left off a guest list for a ceremony about people exactly like her husband. You can call that a technicality. I call it a failure of basic judgment. When a family loses someone in the deadliest attack of a war, you don't hide behind a phone-call preference from the first week. You find a way to reach them. You send a letter. You send a person.

Now we get to what sits underneath all of this. Because I don't think the guest list is the real story. The real story is what these families still don't know.

Joey Amor's wife, Master Sergeant Nicole Amor, was thirty-nine years old when she was killed at Port Shuaiba. On Monday, he posted a public statement on Facebook. Here's what he wrote. Quote. "There are questions about what happened before the attack, what information was available, what decisions were made, and what happened in the moments leading up to six American soldiers losing their lives." End quote. And then this. Quote. "I am done asking quietly. Today, I am asking the American people to stand with these six families and demand transparency." End quote.

Read that last part again in your head. I am done asking quietly. That's a man who tried the polite way. He tried phone calls and channels and patience. And it didn't work, so he went to Facebook and asked the rest of us for help.

So here's what we know about the attack. Troops who survived it have raised questions about why they were stationed at a site that didn't have sufficient air protection, and that was viewed as a likely target. The AP built its account of the March first attack from interviews with thirteen soldiers. Wounded soldiers told the AP about concerns they raised about the threat, concerns that went unheeded. They also said the military medical system failed them in the weeks that followed.

Let that sink in. These soldiers say they warned about the danger before the drone came. Then after they were hurt, they say the system meant to care for them let them down.

I'm not going to tell you what the investigation will find. I don't know, and neither do you. That's the problem. Because there is an investigation, and it's finished. The Army completed it in June. It is now October. That's roughly four months ago. And the Army says it still has not briefed the families of those killed on the outcome of its own investigation.

The Army told the AP it is still redacting sensitive information before releasing the findings. Sensitive information is a real thing, and nobody wants to give the enemy a roadmap. But think about the order of operations. The families are the ones who lost the most. They should be first in line, not last. Brief them privately, in a room, with an officer who looks them in the eye.

Then take your time with the redactions for everybody else. Instead, the Army declined to comment on the AP's reporting, and the Pentagon declined too.

Declined to comment. Six families waiting, a finished report, and a polite no from the people who hold the answers.

Now put that next to the way the president has talked about this war. In the early days, Donald Trump described it as a "little excursion." And on September fourth of this year, he called the conflict "small potatoes."

Small potatoes. Tell that to Tina Marzan, who is raising two children without their father. Tell it to Libby Klinner and her three little ones. Tell it to Joey Amor, who is asking the American people to help him find out what happened to his wife. Nineteen dead and more than eight hundred wounded is not a little excursion by any measure a family would recognize.

I understand that presidents talk. They use big words and small words to project strength, to calm markets, to win the news cycle. But there's a difference between downplaying a war and downplaying the people who are paying for it. When the commander in chief calls it small potatoes, a family hears that their loss was small, and that's a hard thing to forgive.

And I want to be careful about one more thing. This isn't a Republican problem or a Democratic problem. Honoring the fallen cuts across politics, as John Thompson said. The families don't carry party cards into their grief. Some of them are Trump fans, like Mrs. Burhans, and some of them are furious, like Mrs. Klinner. Both are grieving, and both are owed the truth.

So here's what I think is reasonable to ask. First, brief the six families on the findings of the Army investigation, now, before anyone else gets them. Second, explain why a site that survivors say was a likely target didn't have enough air protection, and who made that call. Third, answer the claim from the wounded that their warnings went unheeded and that the medical system failed them afterward. And fourth, next year, send the invitations early enough that a mother with three kids can find a babysitter and a widow can afford a flight.

None of that is complicated. None of it requires a candle or a song. It requires someone in authority to pick up the phone and tell the truth to six families who have been waiting since March first.

A reception is a fine gesture. But a gesture isn't an answer, and Joey Amor said it better than I can. These families are done asking quietly. The least this government can do is stop making them ask.

We'll be right back.

05 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

06 — SEGMENT B: YOUR MONEY, HIS FACE

Let's talk about television commercials. Not the kind that sell you a truck or a mattress or a personal injury lawyer. This is a different kind. These ads sell you the president, and the people paying for them are you.

Here is how it works. The Department of Homeland Security tapped twenty million dollars for a contract to run a series of ads. The ads began airing in late September. According to the tracking firm AdImpact, nearly twelve million dollars worth of those ads have already gone out over the air. Twelve million. Gone. Spent in about two weeks.

Now, what is in these ads? Is it a warning about a hurricane? Is it a notice about how to renew your passport? Is it a plea for people to report fraud? No. The ads glorify Donald Trump. One features a clip of Trump talking about the threat of communism. Another is a replay of an ad from his last presidential campaign. Think about that one. A campaign ad, from a campaign, now running on a government contract. The fifth ad in the series began airing today, Tuesday, and it focuses on the capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro. Every one of them echoes his political messaging, and they are landing right as the midterms come into view.

So that is the product. Now let's talk about where the money came from, because this is the part that ought to make your blood run hot.

Two top Democratic senators said last week that the money is being drawn from Trump's so-called One Big Beautiful Bill. And it was supposed to go toward Customs and Border Protection. Remember all the talk about the border? Remember how that bill was sold? Secure the border, fund the agents, finish the job. Well, here is a chunk of that money, and instead of going to the people who patrol the border, it is going to a television buy that shows you the president's face.

I want to be fair here, because I try to be. The White House defends these ads as public service announcements, similar to what past administrations have done to promote their policies. And Trump himself said, speaking to reporters today, that the ads are "really good," and that they are "promotion for the country, done by many presidents before."

Okay. Let's take that at face value. Presidents have always done some of this. Every administration puts out messaging. But there is a difference between telling people about a program and telling people how wonderful the man in charge is. One is a government telling you what it offers. The other is a politician telling you to like him. And when a replay of a campaign ad shows up in your taxpayer-funded series, you do not have to squint very hard to see which one this is.

Here's what happened next, and it is a little bit funny, if it were not your money. On Monday, Trump went on his Truth Social platform and called the ads "positive promotion for our Great U.S.A." Fine. But in the same post he promised to pay for them with, and this is his quote, "money I raised for MAGA Inc." End quote.

Think about what that says. If these ads are just a public service, a neutral thing, a normal thing that presidents do, why would he pay for them out of his political war chest? You do not pay for a public service announcement with campaign money. You pay for a campaign ad with campaign money. The minute he said he would use MAGA Inc., he told you what kind of ads these are.

And that war chest is not small. MAGA Inc. is Trump's political operation, and it had amassed more than four hundred million dollars by the end of July. Four hundred million. He has already begun tapping it to boost Republican candidates across the country in the midterm elections. So the man has money. Plenty of it. He did not need yours.

Now, so far this sounds like a fix. He says he will pay going forward. Problem solved, right? Not so fast.

Because a day after he said that, there is no sign he plans to give back the millions already spent. A White House official, who was not authorized to talk publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity, said that Trump's plan to pay for the ads with MAGA Inc. does not mean there is any reimbursement coming. So the nearly twelve million dollars that already aired, that is staying spent. Your money. Already on the air.

And when reporters asked Trump directly today whether he would repay the funds already spent, here is his answer. Two words. "We'll decide." End quote.

We'll decide. That is what you say when someone asks if you will give back the thing you took. We'll decide. Not "yes." Not "of course." Not "that was a mistake." We'll decide. As if the money is his to decide about. As if it were his in the first place.

I want you to think about how this goes in your own life. Say you borrow your neighbor's lawn mower and you break it. Then you tell him, going forward, I will rent my own mower. And he says, great, what about the one you broke? And you say, "We'll decide." How long do you think that friendship lasts?

Or say you work in a store and you take twelve dollars out of the register to buy yourself lunch. Then your manager catches you, and you say, "Don't worry, tomorrow I'll bring my own lunch." Does the manager say, well, that settles it? No. He says, put the twelve dollars back. And he would be right. Now multiply that by a million. That is the principle here.

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer has seen it, and he is hopping mad. He slammed Trump for not committing to reimbursement. He told The Associated Press, and I quote, "Trump must return this money to the American people and there must be a full investigation into this gross waste and abuse of taxpayer dollars." End quote.

Schumer went further. He said he believes the president's plan for covering future costs represents illegal coordination with his super PAC. That is a serious charge. The idea is that when a president and a political committee line up on spending like this, there are rules about how closely they are allowed to work together. Whether Schumer is right about that, I will let the lawyers fight over. But I will say this. Schumer is a partisan, and you can take what he says with a grain of salt. So let's look at who else is uncomfortable.

Because it is not just Democrats. According to the reporting, Republicans and Democrats alike have said these ads are not an appropriate use of government money. Alike. That means members of Trump's own party are looking at this and saying, no, this is not right.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, a Republican from South Dakota, has said the ads should not be paid for with taxpayer dollars. That is the top Republican in the Senate. Not some backbencher. Not a political enemy. The man who runs the Senate majority says the taxpayers should not be footing this bill.

Then there is Republican Senator Katie Britt of Alabama. And she matters here for a particular reason. She chairs the panel that oversees funding for the Department of Homeland Security. In other words, this is her turf. This is her money to watch. She said today at the Capitol that she had not yet seen the ads. Fair enough. But she said taxpayer money should be used as intended. And here is her quote. "We'll take a look at that." And then, "You want to make sure that any use of taxpayer dollars is done judiciously and in accordance with the law." End quote.

Notice she said "in accordance with the law." Because that brings us to the legal question, and it is a real one.

Legal experts say these ads might even violate federal statutes. There are two laws on the table. The first is a law against congressionally appropriated money being used for "publicity or propaganda." Publicity or propaganda. Those are the words in the statute. And I do not know about you, but if a series of ads that glorify the president, replay his campaign spots, and echo his midterm message is not publicity, I do not know what is. The second is a law limiting the partisan political activities of government employees. Those are the rules that keep civil servants from working on campaigns on the taxpayer's dime.

Congress passed those laws for a reason. The idea was simple. The money you send to Washington belongs to the country, not to whoever happens to be sitting in the Oval Office. It is supposed to pay for what Congress said it would pay for. When Congress says border security, it should mean border security. When it says disaster relief, it should mean disaster relief. It should not mean a commercial break featuring the president's greatest hits.

Now let me say what I think the common sense answer is, because I think it is pretty simple.

If it is a good ad, pay for it yourself. That is it. That is the whole thing. Trump says the ads are "really good." Great. If they are so good, he should be proud to put his own name and his own political money behind them. He has four hundred million dollars sitting in an account that his supporters gave him for exactly this kind of thing. Spend it. Run ads all day long. Put them on every channel. That is what campaign money is for, and nobody will say a word.

But the twelve million already spent should go back. Every dollar. Because that money was meant for something else. It was meant for the border, for the agents who work it, for the equipment they need. It was not meant to make you feel warm about the man in charge. And if Trump truly believes these ads were a legitimate public service, then he has no reason to take his own money out. The fact that he is doing it tells you he knows.

Let me add a bit of perspective, because I think it matters. Think about what else is going on in this country this week. Today at the White House,

there was a reception for Gold Star families, the relatives of troops who died in service. The White House says nearly forty fallen service members were being honored. Meanwhile, according to The Associated Press, most of the families of the six soldiers killed in the deadliest attack of the Iran war were not there. Some said they did not get enough notice, and some could not afford the trip. At least two said they never got an invitation. This war has already taken the lives of nineteen American troops and wounded more than eight hundred others. And those families are still waiting on answers from the Pentagon about what happened.

I am not saying the two stories are the same story. But I am saying this. When the government cannot find the time or the money to make sure every grieving family can get to a ceremony, and cannot tell them the truth about how their loved ones died, but it can find twenty million dollars for television commercials about the president, you have to ask what this place thinks its priorities are.

And while we are at it, ask yourself what twelve million dollars means in your own life right now. The average price of gas is four dollars and thirty seven cents a gallon, up from three dollars and thirteen cents a year ago. Diesel is six dollars and thirty two cents. Your grocery bill reflects that. Your commute reflects that. The president himself said today that he is considering suspending the federal gas tax, which tells you he knows prices are hurting. So people are stretching every dollar until it screams, and meanwhile the government is spending nearly twelve million of them to tell you how well things are going.

Here is the bottom line. Nobody is saying the president cannot speak. He has the biggest megaphone in the world. He has a political machine with more than four hundred million dollars behind it. He can say whatever he wants, as often as he wants, and pay for every second of it.

What he cannot do, and what no president should be allowed to do, is take the money Congress set aside for the border and spend it on a commercial starring himself. And when he gets caught, he cannot shrug and say "we'll decide" about whether to give your money back.

The answer is not complicated. If the ads are good, he can pay for them. And he can start by writing a check for the twelve million he already took from you.

We'll be right back.

07 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

08 — SEGMENT C: SENT SOMEWHERE YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF

Imagine you're on a bus, or a plane, and you've got no idea where it's going. You were told one thing about your life, and then a man in uniform hands you a different one. You land somewhere you couldn't find on a map. Nobody there speaks your language, and you've got no family, no work, no friends. The first people you meet may be the ones who lock you up.

That's not a movie plot. That's a policy, and the Supreme Court just said it can keep running while the justices figure out whether it's legal.

Here's what happened today. In what the Associated Press describes as an apparent six to three order, the court let the Trump administration keep swiftly deporting people to countries other than their own. The order is temporary. It sits there while the court decides the bigger question, and the justices will hear arguments in December.

What the order did was lift a requirement put in place by lower courts. That requirement said migrants had to get a chance to object before being sent to a country they have no ties to. Not a guarantee they'd win. Just a chance to say something before the door closes. For now, that requirement is gone.

The three who would have kept it in place were Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan, and Ketanji Brown Jackson. The other six let the administration go ahead.

The administration says it needed this. Last week, it told the court the lower court order forced the cancellation of a deportation flight carrying about seventy people bound for three countries. So there's a plane on the tarmac, seventy people on a manifest, and a judge's rule that says wait.

Now I want to be fair here, because this issue deserves it. The government has a real argument, and I'm going to lay it out plainly.

The administration says this policy is for people who already have final deportation orders. That means a judge already ruled they have no right to stay. Nobody is arguing that part tonight. The question is where they go. And the administration says that in many cases, there's no good answer. Their home country might not take them back. Some governments simply refuse. Some people can't be returned to where they came from for other reasons. So the government says it sends them to a third country that will take them.

The administration also says this includes people with criminal convictions. And that's a fair point to raise. If somebody has been convicted of a serious crime, has a final order, and their own country won't take them, most Americans don't want that person released onto the streets in their town. They want that person gone. That's a reasonable thing to want, and I'm not going to pretend otherwise.

The government also says these third countries have given assurances. Federal attorneys told the courts that those governments promised people won't be persecuted or tortured. That's the safeguard. A promise from the receiving country.

And Attorney General Todd Blanche weighed in on social media today. He called the policy, quote, "an entirely lawful and critical tool for immigration enforcement." End quote.

So that's one side. Final orders. People who can't go home. Some of them criminals. Governments that promised to behave. And a Supreme Court that,

back last year, also let these deportation flights temporarily continue. The conservative majority has sided with the administration on this core policy before. Today wasn't a surprise to anybody who's been paying attention.

Now let's hear from the other side, and they have their own facts.

Lawyers for the immigrants say the government's picture leaves out a lot. They say many of the people sent this way have no criminal convictions at all. Not a few. Many. They say many have been found to be at risk of torture or persecution. Think about that. An official has already determined that this person could be tortured if sent home, and the answer was to send them somewhere else instead.

And then there's what happens when they arrive. The AP reports that some migrants have found themselves imprisoned in countries they had never heard of before they got there. Imprisoned. Not welcomed, not processed, not resettled. Locked up in a place they didn't pick, for reasons they may not understand, with no say in it.

Others face serious safety risks in these places. And some of them, the AP reports, are left with little choice except to go back to the very home countries they were fleeing. Let that sink in. The policy is sold as a way to remove people safely and lawfully. But for some, the end result is that they get pushed back toward the danger they ran from in the first place, because the third country gave them nothing and nowhere to stand.

Trina Realmuto is the executive director of the National Immigration Litigation Alliance, and she's one of the lawyers representing immigrants in this case. She said the order, quote, "has now allowed the administration to resume sending people to third countries where they may face persecution, torture, imprisonment, or other grave danger." End quote.

But she also made a point that matters. She said, quote, "today's order does not decide that the government's policy is lawful." End quote. She said the court will hear that question on an expedited schedule. She's right. This wasn't a ruling that the policy is legal. It was a ruling that the policy can keep running until the court rules. Those are very different things. But for the person on the plane tomorrow, the difference may not feel like much.

The court said it will consider several questions. Is the policy lawful? Did the lower courts even have the authority to take up this case and issue such a sweeping block? And whatever other questions the government thinks are appropriate. That last part is interesting. The court gave the government room to add to the list.

Now let's talk about the numbers, because they're bigger than most people realize.

Under what the AP calls a series of often-secret agreements, the Trump administration has deported some twenty five thousand people to more than two dozen countries. The list runs from Liberia to Guyana. Two dozen countries. Twenty five thousand people.

And the vast majority of them have been sent to Mexico. Which makes sense when you think about it. It's next door. It's the cheapest and fastest place to put somebody. You can drive them across a bridge. The photo that ran with this story shows exactly that, agents walking a group across the bridge between McAllen, Texas and Reynosa on March thirteenth of this year.

So when you hear twenty five thousand, a big chunk of that is Mexico. But the rest are scattered across a couple dozen other nations, and those are the cases where the stories get stranger and the questions get harder. A person who isn't Mexican, put on a plane, flown halfway around the world to a place with no connection to their life.

Now here's the part that bothers me most, and it isn't the politics of immigration. It's the word the AP used. Secret.

Often-secret agreements. Think about what that means. The United States government makes a deal with another government. The deal covers where people will be sent, what happens to them there, and what protections they supposedly get. And the public often can't see the deal. The people being sent often can't see the deal. In some cases, it seems, the courts can't easily see it either.

The administration's whole defense rests on assurances. The other country promised. Okay. Who has read the promise? What does it say, exactly? Is it a

signed document, or a handshake and a phone call? Who checks whether the promise is kept? If a person is sent to a place and gets locked up, who is responsible? The country that holds them, or the country that sent them? Because when you hand somebody to a government that you know might jail them, and you did it with a promise nobody can inspect, you've built a system where nobody has to answer for anything.

That's the accountability gap. When something goes wrong in a normal government program, there's a record. There's a contract. There's an inspector general, a congressional hearing, a reporter filing a records request. A secret agreement with a foreign government is designed to avoid all of that. And a secret agreement is exactly what you'd want if you were worried the terms wouldn't hold up in the daylight.

Now, I'm not saying that's what's happening. The administration says the assurances are real. Maybe they are. But here's the problem with asking the country to trust that. We're not talking about a parking permit. We're talking about whether a human being gets tortured. When the stakes are that high, trust me isn't an acceptable answer from any government, whether it's run by people I like or people I don't.

And think about the other thing that today's order did. It removed the chance to object. That's the one check the lower courts had built in. The person could say, wait, I have a fear of that country, and somebody had to listen before the flight left. Now that check is paused. So you've got secret agreements on one end, and no chance to object on the other end. The only people with any real information are the ones doing the deporting.

I want to be careful about something. The administration has said it will send people to third countries when they can't be returned home or their country won't accept them. I get that. Some of these people are genuinely dangerous. If you ask most Americans whether a convicted violent criminal with a final order should be removed from this country, the answer is yes, and it isn't close. I agree with that.

But the argument for this policy is built on the best case. The convicted criminal nobody will take. And the lawyers are pointing at a different group.

People with no convictions. People already found to be at risk. If the policy only caught the first group, there'd be a lot less fight. The fight is about the second group, and the fact that the system is set up so it's hard to tell which group any given person belongs to before they're on the plane.

This also lands in a bigger picture. The AP notes this all comes amid a sweeping immigration crackdown, and the administration has pledged to deport millions of people living in the country illegally. Millions. If you want to deport millions, you need places to send them. Third countries are a pressure valve. The more people you want to remove, the more you need somewhere, anywhere, that will take them. And that's where the temptation lives. When the goal is volume, the incentive is to stop asking hard questions about where people end up.

So here's where I land. You can be for strong borders and still ask what we're doing when we put a person on a plane to a country they've never heard of. You can want criminals out and still demand that the government show its work. Those aren't opposite positions. They're the same position held by someone who thinks the government should be able to defend what it does.

The court will hear this in December. Until then, the flights go. Twenty five thousand people so far. Two dozen countries. Deals most of us have never read, with governments most of us couldn't name.

If this policy is as lawful and as careful as the administration says, then show us the agreements. Show us who checks on these people after they land. A government that's confident in what it's doing doesn't hide the paperwork. And when the people who hold the power also hold all the information, the rest of us are asked to take it on faith. That's a lot to ask when somebody's life is on the plane.

We'll be right back.

09 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

10 — SEGMENT D: PAIN AT THE PUMP

Pull up to the pump tonight and you already know the number. Regular gasoline is averaging four dollars and thirty seven cents a gallon, according to AAA. A year ago it was three dollars and thirteen cents. That is a jump of a dollar and twenty four cents. Diesel is worse. It averages six dollars and thirty two cents a gallon, and a year ago it was three dollars and sixty eight cents. That is nearly double.

Today the President told reporters at the White House that he is considering suspending the federal gas tax. When they pressed him, here is what he said. Quote. We're thinking about that. End quote. That's it. Four words and a shrug, and your family is supposed to feel better.

Let's start with what this tax is. The federal gas tax adds eighteen point four cents to every gallon of gasoline. On diesel it is twenty four point four cents a gallon. The money pays to maintain the highways and bridges you drive on. It's not a secret fund and it's not a scheme. It's the road money.

Here is the part that matters. The President cannot suspend this tax by himself. He needs Congress to come back to Washington and vote on it. Both the House and the Senate are scheduled to stay home until after the election. The midterms are four weeks away. So the plan is to think out loud about a gas tax holiday that cannot happen until the ballots are already counted. If that isn't political timing, I don't know what is.

Now let's be fair about the size of it. Eighteen point four cents on a gallon that costs four thirty seven is about four percent. Fill up a fifteen gallon tank and you'd save two dollars and seventy six cents. That's real money to somebody counting dollars, but you've been hit for a dollar and twenty four more per gallon. Suspending the tax would hand back about fifteen percent of

that increase. On diesel, twenty four point four cents against an increase of two dollars and sixty four cents gets you back less than a tenth. It's a bandage on a broken leg.

So why are prices up like this? The source gives two reasons. One is the war with Iran. The other is Ukrainian attacks on Russian refineries. Take a big chunk of the world's refining capacity and put it under fire, and you don't need a degree in economics to see where the price goes. Diesel hit an all-time high of six dollars and fifty three cents on September twenty second. It has come down twenty one cents since, which is better than nothing, but it is nowhere near normal.

Look at what California was seeing that same day. A station outside the Marathon Petroleum refinery in Carson, near Los Angeles, was posting regular gasoline above six dollars a gallon and diesel above eight. Eight dollars for diesel. That isn't an inconvenience. That is a business-ending number for some people.

And diesel isn't just a trucker's problem. It's everybody's problem. The truck that brings milk to the grocery store runs on diesel. So does the one that hauls lumber, the one that brings in your produce, and the one that delivers the package to your porch. When diesel nearly doubles, that cost doesn't vanish. It gets baked into the price of nearly everything on the shelf. The source says it plainly, that it's indirectly increasing other costs. That's the polite way to say you're paying for it at the checkout too.

Now here's what I find interesting. While Washington is thinking about it, four states already did it. They didn't wait for a committee or a recess to end.

Ohio's Republican Governor Mike DeWine signed legislation waiving his state's gas tax of thirty eight and a half cents and its diesel tax of forty seven cents. That runs through December thirty first. That is a big cut, far bigger than the federal eighteen cents.

In Georgia, Republican Governor Brian Kemp suspended his state's thirty three point three cent gas tax and thirty seven point three cent diesel tax. That runs through at least October twenty ninth. Mark that date. It's five days

before the election. We'll see what happens to that suspension after the votes are in.

Utah's Republican Governor Spencer Cox went a smaller route. He lowered the state's fuel taxes by six cents through the end of the year. It's not much, but it's something.

In Indiana, Republican Governor Mike Braun suspended a seven percent gasoline use tax and a thirty seven cent excise tax. The source says that saves drivers roughly fifty nine to sixty one cents a gallon. That's real money at the pump. But he left in place a sixty three cent per gallon tax on diesel. He paired that with an expansion of red dye fuel, which I'll get to in a second.

Then there's Kentucky, where Democratic Governor Andy Beshear paused the automatic inflation adjustments to fuel taxes. That's not a cut. It just means the tax won't climb on its own while prices are already climbing. That's a smaller step, but it's the right instinct.

Notice something. Republican governors and a Democratic governor all moved on this. The source says both Republican and Democratic-led states have passed temporary waivers or eased the rules on red dye and ethanol blend fuels. When governors from both parties are doing the same thing, that tells you the pain isn't partisan. It's at the pump, and everybody feels it.

Now the red dye. Yesterday the President signed an executive order that lets truckers buy tax-free red dye diesel through December thirty first. Red dye diesel is the fuel normally used for tractors and construction equipment. It's dyed so it can be told apart from the taxed fuel that goes into on-road vehicles. Under this order, the dyed fuel can be used much more broadly. For a trucker, that means skipping the federal tax at the pump.

I'll give credit where it's due. That one doesn't need Congress. It's immediate, and it helps the people who move the country's freight. Take a hypothetical owner-operator filling up two hundred gallons. At twenty four point four cents a gallon, skipping the tax saves forty eight dollars and eighty cents on a single fill. Do that a few times a week and it adds up. But it expires on December thirty first. It's a patch with an end date.

Then there's the international piece. Last Friday the G-7 nations, including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Canada and Japan, agreed together to release one hundred million barrels of oil and diesel from their strategic reserves. The goal is to tamp down prices.

That sounds like a lot, and it is a lot of barrels. But keep it in perspective. By most estimates, the world burns about one hundred million barrels of oil in a single day. So this release is roughly one day of global use. It can calm the market for a bit. It does not fix a supply problem caused by a war and bombed refineries. And those reserves exist for emergencies. We can argue a war is an emergency, and I wouldn't fight you on that. But once they're spent, they're spent.

So what do we have? A tax suspension that is only being thought about and can't happen until after the election. A diesel order that ends December thirty first. A reserve release that amounts to about a day of the world's oil. And four states doing the heavy lifting on their own.

Is it real relief or election-season timing? My answer is both, and it's not close to even. The relief that's actually in your hands today came from governors and from one executive order. The part that sounds biggest, the federal gas tax holiday, is the part that has no vote scheduled and no date attached. When the biggest promise is the one that can't happen until after you vote, you should ask what it's for.

And there's a fair question nobody is answering. That gas tax pays for highways and bridges. If you suspend it, the repair bill doesn't disappear. The roads don't fix themselves. So where does that money come from? If they have a plan, they should say it out loud before asking you to cheer.

Now think about who this hits hardest. Start with truckers. A lot of them are owner-operators, small businesses with one truck and a loan on it. Diesel is up two dollars and sixty four cents a gallon from a year ago. They can't always pass that on to the company that hires them. When the fuel bill climbs that fast, some of them run at a loss, and some of them park the truck. If they park it, the freight doesn't move, and the next price you see is on the shelf.

Then think about the working family. Say you fill up a fifteen gallon tank once a week. At a dollar and twenty four more per gallon, you're paying eighteen dollars and sixty cents extra every week. Over a year, that's nearly a thousand dollars. And that's one car, one tank a week. If you live out in the country, where it's thirty miles to work and there's no bus, or you drive for a living, it's far more. A thousand dollars is a car repair. It's a month of groceries. It's the cushion some families don't have.

So what should real relief look like? Congress should come back to Washington now, not after the election, and vote on this. If a gas tax holiday is a good idea, then there's no reason to wait until the campaigns are over. Members of both parties have the same gas prices as the rest of us. They can come off the campaign trail for a few days and do their jobs.

And while they're at it, they ought to take a hard look at why Iran and a refinery fight overseas can wipe out a family's budget in the first place. That's a bigger conversation, and we'll keep having it.

For now, the facts are simple. Four states acted. One executive order acted. The G-7 acted. Washington is thinking about it. Gas is four thirty seven and diesel is six thirty two, and your tank doesn't care about the campaign calendar. If they can cut the tax after the election, they can cut it before.

We'll be right back.

11 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

12 — CLOSING / SIGN-OFF

That's the show for tonight, and I want to thank you for spending your evening with me. There's a lot of noise out there, and you could have been anywhere. You chose to be here, and I don't take that lightly.

Look at what we covered tonight. A soldier's family waiting on answers that should have come months ago. A taxpayer staring at a bill and wondering where the money went. A deportee caught in a system that couldn't be bothered to get the paperwork right. A driver at the pump doing the math on whether he can afford to get to work this week.

Different stories, same problem. Somewhere along the line, the people in charge forgot who they work for. You pay their salaries. You fund their offices. You foot the bill for every press conference and every committee hearing. That ought to buy you a straight answer when you ask a question. Instead you get a runaround, a form letter, and a spokesman who says nothing in four hundred words.

That's not how it's supposed to work. A soldier's family deserves the truth about what happened and why. A taxpayer deserves to see where every dollar went. A person facing deportation deserves a fair process, not a shrug. And a working man at the pump deserves leaders who feel that price on their own wallets.

None of that is radical. It's basic decency, and it's the least a public servant owes the public.

So keep asking questions. Call your representatives. Show up at the town hall. Make them earn the job, because they work for you and not the other way around.

I'll be back tomorrow night at seven, same time, same place. Bring a friend if you can. The more of us paying attention, the harder it gets for them to look away.

Until then, take care of your family, look out for your neighbors, and hold your head up.

I'm Mark Ford. Good night, America.