

Trump restricts travel from Europe to fight spread of coronavirus

Trump said the extraordinary restrictions would not apply to Great Britain, which formally left the European Union at the end of January. Ireland is also exempt from the restrictions, according to a proclamation later issued by the White House.

Trump, in just his second Oval Office address since taking office, sought to assure a worried nation about the spread of the virus, which has infected more than 1,000 Americans and killed more than 30 thus far.

The president used the sober 11 minute address to detail the new travel restrictions and targeted economic relief for small businesses and individuals impacted by the virus, while calling on Congress for further action on payroll tax relief and benefits for hourly workers.

“We are at a critical time in the fight against the virus,” Trump said, reading from prepared remarks. “We made a lifesaving move with early action on China. Now we must take the same action with Europe.”

“I will never hesitate to take any steps to protect the lives, health and safety of the American people. I will always put the wellbeing of America first,” Trump said.

The virus has presented a unique challenge for Trump, who has proven immune to scandals and statements that would likely have doomed other presidencies.

Trump struck a measured tone after facing days of criticism from Democrats and former government officials that he was not taking the outbreak seriously enough. He urged the public to wash their hands and stay home if they were feeling ill and projected confidence that the U.S. was well prepared for the situation.

But the president has in the past delivered serious and thoughtful scripted remarks after national tragedies and critical moments, only to revert back to partisan swipes and Twitter attacks.

Trump urged Americans to “put partisanship aside” and come together as “one family,” a plea that may be difficult to accept from a president who last week labeled the governor of Washington a “snake.”

And the White House was forced to walk back his initial remarks about the extent of travel restrictions on Europe, underscoring the dysfunction that has engulfed the administration for much of Trump’s presidency.

Trump touted his decision last month to curb travel to the United States from China, South Korea and Iran, and he argued Europe increased its own exposure to the virus by failing to do the same.

“The European Union failed to take the same precautions and restrict travel from

China and other hot spots,” he said. “As a result, a number of new clusters in the United States were seeded by travel from Europe.”

Trump said that the new travel restrictions will be put in place Friday at midnight and that there would be exemptions for Americans who have undergone appropriate screening.

A proclamation later issued by the White House says that the restriction does not apply to U.S. citizens and their immediate family members. The ban applies to foreign nationals who have been physically present in European countries that are part of the Schengen Area during the 14 days before their attempted entry into the U.S. Ireland is one of five European Union member countries that are not part of the Schengen zone.

The president indicated in his address that the restrictions would apply to trade and cargo coming from Europe, in addition to people but the White House later clarified that the proclamation by definition only applies to people and that goods would be allowed into the country while people transporting goods would not.

The president did not explain why the restrictions would not apply to the U.K., which currently has over 400 confirmed cases of the coronavirus. This is more than other European countries subject to the ban, but far lower than the numbers reported by Italy, France, Spain and Germany.

Trump has come under criticism for his handling of the coronavirus thus far, particularly from Democrats for contradicting top health officials and repeatedly downplaying the severity of the outbreak. He argued as recently as two weeks ago that the number of confirmed cases in the U.S. would soon be “close to zero.”

The World Health Organization (WHO) earlier Wednesday declared the coronavirus a pandemic and the Dow Jones Industrial Average plunged over 1,400 points, closing in a bear market.

The number of American citizens confirmed to have the coronavirus, referred to as COVID-19, topped 1,000 overnight Tuesday, and there have been over 30 deaths in the U.S. as a result of infections of the disease.

Trump on Wednesday maintained that the risk to average Americans remains “very, very low,” even as public health officials have increasingly warned of the spread of the virus and told the public to expect changes in their daily lives.

But he also cast the battle against the virus as being above politics, and said all Americans needed to work on the issue together.

“Each of us has a role to play in defeating this virus,” he said.

He called on the country to “put politics aside” in order to chart a path forward together on the response to the virus.

Doing so may be difficult given the high tensions in Washington.

Trump was impeached by the House in December and his trial concluded in

February.

During the coronavirus outbreak, he has at times criticized members of the other



party. He described Washington Gov. [Jay Inslee](#) [Jay Robert Inslee](#) [Officials preparing public for long-term disruption](#) [Critical supplies shortage hampers hospitals, health providers](#) [States lead, unevenly, on coronavirus response](#) [MORE](#) as a snake just last week during a trip to the CDC over Inslee's criticism of his administration's response.

Trump in his address avoided alarmist language, telling viewers that the situation did not amount to a “financial crisis.”

“This is just a temporary moment of time that we will overcome together as a nation and as a world,” he said.

Still, the president laid out multiple executive actions aimed at boosting a sagging economy and calm nervous investors. Trump said he would direct the Small Business Administration to provide capital to firms affected by the coronavirus and instruct the Treasury Department to defer tax payments for three months without interest or penalties for specific individuals and businesses adversely impacted by the virus.

Trump called on Congress to pass legislation to extend relief to workers worried about missing a paycheck if they are feeling ill or put into quarantine. The request is likely to be well received among Democrats who have pushed for paid sick leave for hourly workers.

The president also urged Congress to consider a payroll tax cut. Trump on Tuesday pitched Congress on a payroll tax holiday through the end of the year, but the proposal has been received coolly in Capitol Hill.

If the president's goal was to calm uneasy investors, he initially appeared to be unsuccessful. U.S. stock futures dipped immediately following the remarks amid concerns about impact additional travel restrictions could have on global trade.

The Democrat-controlled House is prepared to vote Thursday on its own emergency legislation on Thursday that includes provisions to expand unemployment insurance, extend paid sick leave and make sure children from low-income families don't miss meals as a result of school closures.