

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks on Signing Legislation To Combat International Narcotics Trafficking

January 10, 2018

The President. Well, thank you very much. This is very important to all of us gathered here. We're pleased to be joined by many of the Members of Congress as we take an important step to halt the flood of deadly drugs that are pouring into our country like never before. It took place 2, 3, 4 years ago. It's at a level that people haven't seen over the last few years.

In a few moments, I'll sign the INTERDICTION Act. This law directs the Department of Homeland Security to provide additional tools and resources to detect and intercept the supply of illicit fentanyl, which is our new big scourge. It's disgraceful what's happening, coming from different countries including, frankly, China and others.

And it's pouring in at record numbers. In 2016, nearly 20,000 Americans died as a result of using synthetic opioids such as fentanyl. Each death is a tragedy, leaving behind devastated parents, spouses, and orphans all over our country.

It's reaching every corner of our great Nation, and it shouldn't be. Rural areas like Hancock County, Ohio—and we have Senator Portman here, and he understands it very well. Where's our Senator?

Senator Robert J. Portman. Over here, Mr. President, yes.

The President. What is going on in Ohio is incredible—

Sen. Portman. Yes, thanks for your support.

The President. —and frankly, just about every other State. And Kankakee County, Illinois have seen record numbers of overdoses, record numbers of deaths due to drugs.

The supply of these deadly drugs come from places outside the United States: Mexico, China, other countries. Drugs are entering our country across our borders and even through our own postal system. They're using our postal system, and they're killing our people.

This law will provide our customers and our customs—what we want is Customs and Border Protection. We have to have Customs and Border Protection, which is desperately needed. And we have the resources to detect and interdict these dangerous drugs.

The drugs, for a lot of reasons, are far more dangerous than they've ever been. Even the dogs can't track them down. If they track them, they die. The dogs die just from the scent. Nobody's ever seen anything like it. So you imagine what it does to people. It will increase the number of chemical screening devices, as well as the number of experts to interpret the data that's collected.

My administration is committed to doing everything we can to combat this deadly scourge of drug addiction and overdose. This law represents a significant step forward. I think, before we sign, we have great Congress men and women, we have great Senators behind me, and maybe we'll start with Rob, and we'll go around a little bit if anybody would like to say anything.

Rob.

[*At this point, Sen. Portman made brief remarks, concluding as follows.*]

Sen. Portman. So this will help and we appreciate your willingness to step forward and take a lead on fighting back against this poison that's coming into our States.

The President. And yet it's getting worse and worse every year. You look at the charts, you look at the statistics—every year. The country fights hard. I mean, not just since I've been here; it's been fighting hard, and it gets worse and worse.

And what's your recommendation? Senator, what's your recommendation?

[*Senator Edward J. Markey made brief remarks, concluding as follows.*]

Sen. Markey. So this is the epidemic. It's gone from prescription drugs to heroin, but it is now a fentanyl epidemic in the country, and the legislation you are signing will give the tools to our law enforcement, to our detection of people in the country to be able to identify it before it gets into the hands of families in our country. So we thank you.

The President. Well, it's going to help. Hopefully, it will help a lot.

Michael.

Representative Michael T. McCaul. Thank you for your leadership on this issue. It's very lethal. It's poisoning our children in this country, killing so many people. You're empowering DHS and Customs and Border Protection to capture this before it gets in the hands of the wrong people.

In addition, I think a lot of these precursors coming from China are going to Mexico as well, which is why your border security efforts, I think, are so imperative.

Representative Louis B. Gohmert, Jr. Amen.

The President. Well, we're really tightening that up. Unfortunately, it does come in from China. Much of it—I would say, a good percentage.

Sen. Markey. Most of it.

The President. What percentage would you say?

Sen. Markey. I'd say 80 to 90 percent, because first from China, it goes to Mexico, and then it comes into our country.

The President. And I was with President Xi, and I said, "Don't send it, don't send it." [Laughter] But we'll see what happens. We'll see what impact we're having.

Ron, do you have anything to say?

Representative Ronald D. DeSantis. Well, Mr. President, you're tough on borders, everyone knows that. And when you think about the illegal immigration, which is obviously part of it—but this, this is why I think people elected you, because they knew that you were going to take this drug scourge seriously. It's taking a lot of American lives.

And so I applaud the Senators and the Congressmen for supporting, and I applaud you for signing it.

The President. All right, thank you, Ron.

Senator Sherrod C. Brown. Mr. President—

The President. Yes. Go ahead.

Sen. Brown. Eleven people a day, in my State of Ohio, die from opioid overdose. This is an important bill. The next step is that we actually provide dollars to communities so we can scale up treatment. But we woefully underfund education, prevention, and treatment programs. The waiting lists are too long. That's the importance of Medicaid. That's the importance, frankly, the Affordable Care Act. That's the importance of funding local communities so that they can do what they need to do to deal with the terrible addiction that so many families face.

The President. Senator.

[*Senator Shelley Moore Capito made brief remarks, concluding as follows.*]

Sen. Capito. But as you know, and you said when you declared a public health emergency, we need a spectrum of solutions. This—stopping the flow or working to stop the flow of fentanyl—is absolutely critical, but other things are critical as well. And so I think we've worked well together across party lines—

The President. That's true. That's true.

Sen. Capito. —across Senate and House. This is job one for us, I think, to make sure that we don't lose another generation. So thank you.

The President. It's very true.

Yes.

Representative Peter F. Welch. We've got to keep the fentanyl out, but we've got to build the rural communities up. One of the biggest things we have to do long term is restore economic vitality in rural America.

The President. We all agree with that. Senator, go ahead.

Senator Ronald H. Johnson. Well, again, I want to thank you. I want to thank all the men and women here. This is a classic example of bipartisan success, because it's something we agree on. So I think if we concentrate those areas of agreement, we need to have more of these kind of accomplishments.

[*Sen. Johnson made brief remarks, concluding as follows.*]

Sen. Johnson. So again, this is a classic example—concentrate in areas of agreement, you can accomplish some good things.

The President. And your State has made some progress.

Sen. Johnson. Yes.

The President. Tough progress, but you've made some progress. Go ahead.

[*Rep. Gohmert made brief remarks, concluding as follows.*]

Rep. Gohmert. And best thing we could do is maybe build a wall where we need it—*[laughter]*—and secure the border. And Americans are helped without the drugs, Mexico is helped without the drug cartel money, and we're much better neighbors.

The President. And as you know, we're going to build the wall. *[Laughter]* And we really have no choice.

Anybody else like to say something?

Representative Nicola S. Tsongas. Mr. President?

The President. Yes. Thank you.

Rep. Tsongas. I appreciate your celebrating this bipartisan moment. It's a testament to what can happen for the benefit of the American people when we come together on a scourge such as fentanyl and the opioid addiction. And I encourage you to focus your efforts on further funding and thinking about opioids, and marijuana we can talk about at another time.

[*Laughter*]

The President. Okay. That's okay. That's okay.

Yes, sir.

Representative Brian Babin. Mr. President, I'm Brian Babin from Texas——

The President. Yes, I know that.

Rep. Babin. ——and I'm a health care practitioner.

The President. Right.

Rep. Babin. And you know, fentanyl is basically an operating room drug. And it's stunning to me that it would be to this extent.

But I want to thank you for your support. I want to thank the people who sponsored this bill. And I was very proud to vote for it. And thank you for helping to make our border secure, because this is just one symptom of the open border problem that we've had. And it's the reason that you're sitting behind this desk right now.

The President. Well, I'm very proud to say that we're way down in the people coming across the border. And we have fewer people trying to come across, because they know it's not going to happen. But we do need the wall, and we need more border security anyway.

But we are way, way down, and we're also stopping other forms of entry such as airplanes and, you know, coming in through different ways. Even the ports—coming in through cruisers and cruise lines. And people are coming in ways that we've never even thought possible. A lot of bad people, a lot of drugs, and we're stopping it.

But we're increasing the numbers. You see it. You've all been a very big part of it. We're increasing the numbers, in terms of getting it stopped and getting it stopped, ideally, permanently.

Anybody would like to say anything?

Senator C. Jeanne Shaheen. Well, as has been said, and we can see by the people assembled here, if we work together——

The President. That's right.

Sen. Shaheen. ——in a bipartisan way——

The President. I agree.

Sen. Shaheen. ——we can get things done. And this is a place where we can all agree that we've got to do more and where we can work together. So I applaud everyone's efforts.

The President. Well, I agree.

Senator Margaret Wood Hassan. And we have the STOP Act that we—might be a next step that Rob and I are working on. Yes.

Sen. Portman. You mentioned the postal service. Unfortunately, our own U.S. Postal Service is the conduit for this fentanyl.

The President. That's true. A lot of it. A lot of it.

Sen. Portman. Yes. They don't go through FedEx or UPS or DHL because—

The President. No. They go right through the good old-fashioned post office that loses about \$6 billion a year and delivers internet packages all over the place, okay?

Sen. Portman. So we need to require them to—

The President. And they lose a lot of money. And you should make sure—while we're at it, make sure the internet—they're going to have to start paying sales tax, because it's very unfair what's happening to our retailers all over the country that are putting—put out of business.

Anybody else? Yes.

Representative Garland H. "Andy" Barr IV. One quick comment, Mr. President. Thank you for your leadership. Thanks to all these members who have worked in a bipartisan way to keep these lethal drugs out of our communities.

[*Rep. Barr made brief remarks, concluding as follows.*]

Rep. Barr. Keeping these drugs out of these communities is important for the productivity of our economy.

The President. Very good. Have we covered—come on, what's wrong with you? I can't believe—you're being so quiet.

Representative Steven A. King. [*Laughter*] I was waiting for the last word if could get it. But it really comes down to this, and everybody worked here—well here together on a bipartisan and piece of legislation that will definitely save lives.

[*Rep. King made brief remarks, concluding as follows.*]

Rep. King. So I think there's lives saved in the press conference and in the bill signing ceremony, as well as the function of the bill itself. Thank you.

The President. It'll help. If it's one life, it helps. But it'll help.

Representative Susan W. Brooks. Right. Mr. President, Susan Brooks, from Indiana.

The President. Yes, sure.

Rep. Brooks. And great to be here with you and the Vice President. I want to thank you so much.

The President. Thank you, Susan.

Rep. Brooks. But on behalf of law enforcement, fentanyl is impacting them on a daily basis. They're the ones—and our first responders, with our firefighters, EMT, and police—who are being impacted when they come upon offenders and people with fentanyl. And they, too, are actually suffering from overdoses.

And so this will actually have an impact on CBP officers, but also on our street officers. And this is such an important step forward to keep those drugs out of the hands of families

and—but also law enforcement who really are taking their lives in their hands by saving our lives.

The President. That's right, Susan.

Rep. Brooks. Thank you so much.

The President. Thank you, Susan. You know we used to have the "Age of Aquarius." Everyone thought that was a big drug age. [*Laughter*] That was nothing compared to this, believe me.

Vice President.

Vice President Michael R. Pence. Thank you, Mr. President. Last year, you declared a public health emergency regarding opiate abuse and addiction. There's not a State in the Union that hasn't had families torn apart by this.

And I just want to take the opportunity, along with you, to commend these Members of Congress for acting swiftly and in a bipartisan way and to provide new resources to interdict the flow of fentanyl into the country.

And just know that I know how anxious you are to continue to work with Members of Congress to stem the flow of drugs into our country and particularly deal with this crisis of opiate abuse.

The President. Thank you. Matt, would you like to say something?

Representative Matthew L. Gaetz II. I fear we've reached the point where everything has been said just not yet by everyone. [*Laughter*] So I'll deal it back, Mr. President. [*Laughter*]

The President. Okay, thank you, Matt.

So we're going to sign this, and it's a step. And it feels like a very giant step, but unfortunately, it's not going to be a giant step because, no matter what you do, this is something that keeps pouring in.

And we're going to find the answer. There is an answer. I think I actually know the answer. But I'm not sure the country is ready for it yet.

Does anybody know what I mean? I think so. Okay, folks.

[*At this point, the President signed H.R. 2142, the International Narcotics Trafficking Emergency Response by Detecting Incoming Contraband with Technology Act. He then continued his remarks as follows.*]

The President. Who is getting this pen? Who is getting this pen? Can I ask for a vote? We're going to get all of you a pen. I'm going to give it to a Democrat, okay? Shows you're bipartisan. That's bipartisan when I give it to a Democrat. [*Laughter*] And the Republicans told me to give it to a Democrat.

[*The President handed the pen to Sen. Markey.*]

Sen. Markey. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Congratulations. Thank you very much. Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:22 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Xi Jinping of China. H.R. 2142, approved January 10, was assigned Public Law No. 115–112.

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