

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

**Remarks at a Roundtable Discussion on Prison Reform in Bedminster, New Jersey
August 9, 2018**

The President. Well, thank you very much, everybody, for being here in Bedminster. We've had a lot of work. We've done a lot of work. They're renovating the White House. It's a long-term project, and they approved it years ago. And I said, "Well, I guess this would be a good place to be in the meantime." So they're doing a lot of work at the White House. I miss it. I would like to be there. But this is a good way of doing it.

We have some very outstanding people with us. And I'll make a few remarks. This is largely about prison reform—and other subjects—but largely about prison reform.

So I want to thank the Governors—Matt Bevin, Phil Bryant, Doug Burgum, Nathan Deal, and John Bel Edwards—for being here today. Been friends of mine. We've been, I could say, in wars, but we've been on the same side of the wars. [*Laughter*] That's always good.

I want to thank you also to Attorney General Pam Bondi and Ken Paxton. And Ken just filed a very interesting lawsuit, which I think is going to be very successful. I hope it's going to be successful. I also want to recognize Secretary Rick Perry and Secretary Alex Acosta. Thank you both. Rick, thank you very much.

Secretary of Energy J. Richard Perry. Yes, sir.

The President. We are doing some great things with health care, Alex.

Secretary of Labor R. Alexander Acosta. We are.

The President. And you're doing some wonderful things with energy. I hope that project comes along that we're talking about. It's going to help a lot of people. A lot of jobs are going to be created.

Secretary Perry. Indeed.

The President. So I know you're working on it.

I look forward to hearing from each of you about your experiences with prison reform and the lessons that we've learned. I know how Matt, in particular, you have been working so hard. Phil, you've been working long and hard on it, harder than anyone would know. But I can tell you, my administration feels very, very strongly about it.

One of the single most important things we're doing is to help former inmates in creating jobs. We're creating so many jobs that former inmates, for the first time, are really getting a shot at it, because they weren't sought, and now they are being sought, because our unemployment rate is so low, historically low, 50 years.

Now, our economy is booming. Businesses are hiring and recruiting workers that were previously overlooked. They're being hired. It's a great feeling. It's a great thing that we've all accomplished. We've created a lot of jobs in the States. And I guess I've helped you a lot in—on a national basis.

We've created 3.9 million more jobs since election day—so almost 4 million jobs—which is unthinkable. If I would have said that during the campaign, only a few of the people around this table would have believed me. But they would have. Three-point-nine million jobs since election day. That's pretty incredible.

We've added more than 400,000 manufacturing jobs since the election. Manufacturing employment is now growing faster than at any time than it has in three decades—over 30 years. Through the pledge of America's workers, launched just last month, almost 5 million Americans will receive enhanced career training and opportunities.

And I want to thank Ivanka Trump for having done an incredible job on that. She's really worked hard on it. It's something very important to her. I've really—and I've said it to a lot of people: Jared—I want to thank Jared for what's happening on prison reform, because you've really been leading it. It's something very close to your heart.

And as I've said before, we hire Americans. We want to hire and treat our Americans fairly. You know, for many years, jobs have been taken out of our country. We've lost our businesses. We've lost the hiring abilities that we had. Not anymore. Now those companies are coming back; they're coming roaring back—to your State, to your State. They're coming back faster than anyone thought even possible.

Our first duty is to our citizens, including those who have taken the wrong path, but are seeking redemption and a new beginning. That's people that have been in prison, and they come out, and they're having a hard time. They're not having such a hard time anymore.

We've passed the First Step Act through the House, and we're working very hard in the Senate to refine it and pass it into law. We think we'll be successful in that regard. The bill expands vocational educational programs to eligible Federal inmates so that more of them can learn a trade. And that's what we're doing. We're teaching them trades. We're teaching them different things so that they can put into good use and put into use to get jobs.

I recently met with Chairman Grassley and other Members of Congress to discuss the bill. We also agreed that we must be tough on crime, especially on criminals and trafficking of drugs and lots of other trafficking. We have a trafficking problem, including human trafficking. We're very, very tough on that. And that's going to remain tough or even tougher.

We must strengthen community bonds with law enforcement, including cities like Chicago that have been an absolute and total disaster. We'll be talking about Chicago today, because that is something that, in terms of our Nation, nobody would believe it could be happening. They had 63 incidents last weekend and 12 deaths.

That's bad stuff happening, and probably, I guess, you have to take from the leadership. That's called bad leadership. There's no reason in a million years that something like that should be happening in Chicago.

We want every child to grow up in a safe neighborhood surrounded by families that are loving and helpful and with a path to great education and a lifelong career.

I want to thank everybody for being here. And I think what we'll do, while the media is here, maybe we'll just go around the room real quickly, and we'll—introduce yourselves. And these are people that have really worked hard on prison reform—and lots of other things, but on prison reform. And that's largely what this meeting is about.

Governor, please.

Governor J. Nathan Deal of Georgia. Well, thank you, Mr. President. I appreciate the opportunity to be here. We're very pleased with what's happening in Georgia. We have seen, since I became Governor, a 10-percent decrease in violent crime in our State, a 20-percent overall decrease in crime. We have seen our African American percentage in our prison system drop significantly. Black American—Black males has dropped almost 30 percent.

The President. That's great.

Gov. Deal. Black females dropped about 38.2 percent. Our African American commitments to our prison is at the lowest level it has been since 1987. And in States like ours, we have a disproportionate number of minorities in our prison versus our population as a whole.

We have found that reentry is a vital part of this. We find that—I did have a question I asked; I said, "What's the most common characteristic of those in our prisons?" The answer was: 70 percent of them never graduated from high school.

[*At this point, Gov. Deal continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

So we have been very successful. We're pleased about it. And we're pleased to share whatever information we have that might be helpful.

The President. Good. Thank you, again. Thank you very much.

Pam?

Attorney General Pamela J. Bondi of Florida. President, Pam Bondi, attorney general of Florida. Thank you for doing this. As a career prosecutor, you see people who go to prison and get out of prison and can't find a job. And how do we expect people to succeed without being able to get a job? And you were just in Tampa—thank you for that—Tampa Bay Tech, supporting jobs for young people.

And that's what's so important, is reentry and being able to get a job and training people on how to be successful. And something we did in Florida shortly after I got elected was, we decoupled—if you were a convicted felon, you couldn't get an occupational license.

The President. Right.

Attorney General Bondi. So how do we expect you to succeed?

So thank you for everything you're doing, Mr. President.

The President. Good. Thank you, Pam. Thank you very much.

Gov. John Bel Edwards of Louisiana. Mr. President, John Bel Edwards. And I will tell you, in Louisiana, we are proud of the work we've done. It's been sentencing reform, prison reform, and a real focus on reentry. And for the first time in 20 years, I can tell you, Louisiana does not have the highest incarceration rate——

The President. Good.

Gov. Edwards. ——in the Nation today.

The President. Good.

Gov. Edwards. And it's paying dividends for us, and we're reinvesting the savings——

The President. Who does?

Gov. Edwards. Oklahoma.

The President. Really?

Gov. Edwards. Yes, sir.

The President. Oh. Okay.

Gov. Edwards. But we are reinvesting the savings into our reentry program and also into victim services. So we're excited about what we're doing, and we're looking forward to sharing that with you.

The President. Great. Great.

Gov. Edwards. Yes, sir.

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you, John Bel.

Please, go ahead.

Governor Douglas J. Burgum of North Dakota. Mr. President, Doug Burgum, Governor of North Dakota. Thank you for coming to North Dakota last month. Great to have you there.

The President. Things are looking good, aren't they?

Gov. Burgum. Things are looking great thanks to a lot of policies from this administration and the great Cabinet that you have.

As you know, you can't really separate, today, prison reform and our prison situation from addiction. In North Dakota, a hundred percent of the women that are incarcerated in our prison system have a disease of addiction. Eighty-five percent of the men in our prison have disease of addiction. And we can't solve a health care—a chronic health care problem with punishment. We've got to solve it—treat it like a disease and solve it that way.

The President. Right.

Gov. Burgum. And so I want to also thank you for the work that your administration is doing on the addiction front, because it ties directly back into this. And I think we've done a number of innovations we'll be happy to share at this roundtable today.

The President. Good.

Gov. Burgum. Thanks for inviting us.

The President. Good.

Gov. Burgum. But you know, in the end, we're trying to create better neighbors, not better prisoners. Ninety-eight-and-a-half percent of the people that go to prison in North Dakota end up coming back out. And so we have to—when they're there, like the other Governors have talked about it, it's education, it's career skills, it's treatment. Those are things we have to focus on. If we can do that, we can turn people's lives around and add people to the workforce. We know we need that, because we've got so many jobs open in this country.

The President. Thank you very much, Governor.

Attorney General Kenneth Paxton of Texas. Ken Paxton, Texas attorney general. Thank you, Mr. President. This is obviously an important issue to Texas. I think it's an important issue to the Nation. And, Jared, I appreciate your passion for this issue.

[*Attorney General Paxton continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

And you know, I could cite many statistics, but we were facing—spending \$2 billion, and we didn't spend the money. We put \$241 million into treatment and to helping people find jobs. We've expanded that since, but it's made a tremendous difference. We have not built any more new prisons since then. We've actually closed eight prisons. So it's really made a difference, and I think it can make a difference for the Nation. So I look forward to continuing the discussion.

The President. How are you doing with your recently filed case? How's that looking?

Attorney General Paxton. Well, we had a hearing yesterday, and it—I think it went quite well. Let's see what the judge says. But we know we're right on the law, and we're right on the Constitution. And so we're confident things are going to go in the right way.

The President. It's true. Okay. Thank you.

Governor D. Phillip Bryant of Mississippi. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Phil.

Gov. Bryant. I'm Phil Bryant of Mississippi. In 2014, we began our "Right on Crime" program. We used all the things that Georgia has been successful with, and Texas. I called both of these Governors and said, "Tell me how you did it."

[*Gov. Bryant continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

And then, finally, the faith-based organization. It takes a change of heart. I've been around a lot of people who are in jail, and if their hearts aren't changed, their lives will not be changed. So prison ministries—all of those things that government doesn't like to admit to that works—

The President. Right.

Gov. Bryant. —works. And so, when we bring faith back into the prison system, prisoners have hope again. And that worked better for us than anything we could have done—another reentry program, getting them jobs, getting their driver's license, keeping them connected with their families so that they have something to work towards when they're getting out of prison.

And I can tell you, I had to call a lot of my Republicans into the Governor's office and convince them to vote for this bill. And they were worried it was soft on crime. They were hesitant about what they were going to tell their people back home. And I said, "You tell them to call me." Because crime is down 6 percent. We have 3,000 less inmates. We saved \$40 million since 2014.

The President. Right.

Gov. Bryant. And you can do the same thing. And, Jared, thank you for your leadership.

White House Senior Adviser Jared C. Kushner. Thank you.

The President. Thank you, Phil.

Gov. Bryant. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Secretary.

Secretary Acosta. Mr. President, I'd like to make two key points. First, as you mentioned, the economy is doing incredibly well. For the first time since we've been keeping records, we have more open jobs than we have people to fill these jobs.

The President. Right.

Secretary Acosta. And so these reentry programs are needed for the economy. We have jobs ready and waiting for individuals when they leave prison.

Second, I'd like to follow up on what some of you Governors have said: These programs work. As you know, and others at the table know, I was U.S. attorney in Miami. And when you talk with the law enforcement communities, what they will tell you is that these programs foster public safety. When someone leaves prison, the best that could happen for them is for them to find a job. The best that can happen for society is for them to find a job and start contributing to society, rather than go back to the old ways of crime.

[*Secretary Acosta continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

I want to thank the Governors, and I want to thank all that are working on this issue. It's very important.

The President. Well, you've been great, and your health care plan is going along beautifully. That is really doing something. It's—are you surprised by the numbers you're hearing?

Secretary Acosta. It is. I—just this morning, I read an article mentioning a number of associations around the country—

The President. Right.

Secretary Acosta. —I believe one in Wisconsin, certainly one in Nevada—that are already forming these.

And just today I was talking to some of the Governors here about the various activity in their States. And so it's moving very nicely.

The President. It's been great. Thank you, Alex, very much. Thank you.

Rick. Go ahead, Rick.

Assistant to the President for Intragovernmental Affairs and Technology Initiatives Brooke L. Rollins. Well—

Secretary Perry. Why don't you go, Brooke?

Assistant for Intragovernmental Affairs Rollins. I would be—thank you so much, Mr. President. We're so happy to be here. I tell you, I am overwhelmed and so encouraged. These Governors are real innovators, and they're entrepreneurs.

[*Assistant for Intragovernmental Affairs Rollins continued her remarks, concluding as follows.*]

And having lived it, in Texas, beside these two great men for more than a decade, we've seen firsthand how this changes lives—

The President. Right.

Assistant for Intragovernmental Affairs Rollins. —how it gives people second chances, how it puts communities back together, and keeps families together. So thank you for the opportunity.

The President. Thank you. Great job you're doing.

Assistant for Intragovernmental Affairs Rollins. I'm glad to be here.

Secretary Perry. Mr. President, thank you for bringing her onboard. I think you're seeing, on a daily basis, what a talent she is dealing with these issues that are really important.

Two things that I want to share with the table and with you and with the general public. And one is that it's because of those tax policies, because of regulatory policies that you pushed through, we've got more people working in America than ever before.

Assistant for Intragovernmental Affairs Rollins. I'll clap to that, yes.

The President. It's true.

Secretary Perry. We have to have that. Because if these programs are to work, when folks get out of prison, or if they don't go to prison to begin with, and that's our real goal.

[*Secretary Perry continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

And then, you have the ability to show this country, and then these laboratories of innovation—you know, when Doug goes back up to North Dakota, and he's puts in, for his State, the right programs, and it's not top down, but you've sent the right message that, fellas, here's the

way to reform your prison system. We're not going to be in the way. We're not going to—we're not going to be a hurdle for you, and you all figure out how to do it the rest of the way.

And this country can be incredibly proud of what they're doing for the next generation of people to come along. And these Governors are going to be a real key part of that. So——

The President. Well, thank you, Rick. Very good. Thank you very much. How's it going, energy-wise, would you say?

Secretary Perry. [Laughter] I will tell you, I don't know how it could be much better. [Laughter] The people around the world—we're selling LNG now into 30 countries on five continents.

Ms. Rollins. Amazing.

Gov. Edwards. A lot of it—[inaudible].

Secretary Perry. John, a lot out of Louisiana. [Laughter] Gas is headed to a lot of places.

The President. That's right.

Secretary Perry. Doug, number-two oil producer in the world—or, I should say, in the United States, only behind the State of Texas. [Laughter]

Gov. Burgum. We're catching you.

Secretary Perry. Yes, sir. [Laughter]

Ms. Rollins. Yes.

Secretary Perry. And we want you to. Come on. Give us your best shot.

But the—things are going good, sir. I mean, it is a—massive jobs being created. We've got an opportunity to—you know, I don't want to get us off track here, but oil and gas infrastructure—if there's one thing that we, collectively—and these Governors will tell you that as well—that we'll produce it; getting it out of this country is the challenge right now.

The President. Well, we've become, as you know, number one in the world over just the last short period of time. So we've made it a lot easier.

Secretary Perry. Indeed.

The President. And yet environmentally perfect. Environmentally, really good. But we've become number one in the world, and we're now a net exporter, which nobody thought they'd ever hear.

Ms. Rollins. That's right.

The President. And we're doing a lot of good things for a lot of other countries too.

So thank you very much. You've done a great job. Thank you.

Matt.

Governor Matthew G. Bevin of Kentucky. Mr. President, I just want to thank you again for convening this—not just once, not just twice, but on multiple occasions. I had a chance to meet a number of folks around this table. A comment was made early on, I think by you in your introductory comments, about the fact that this is a war where people can be lined up on the same side.

[Gov. Bevin continued his remarks, concluding as follows.]

And I—again, I truly appreciate this. It's something, personally, that I have a passion for. And for you and your administration—and Jared, really, kudos to you, because you have done such a stellar job of bringing this to the forefront and gathering us together. And I'm grateful to the two of you for making this possible.

The President. Well, thank you, Matt. And I have to say, we have tremendous political support. It a little bit surprises me. I thought that—when we started this journey about a year ago—I thought we would not have a lot of political support; we would have to convince people. We have great political support. You see what's happening. People that I would least suspect are behind it a hundred percent. So that's a good thing.

Thank you all for being here. Thank you all very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:22 p.m. at the Trump National Golf Club. In his remarks, he referred to Assistant to the President Ivanka M. Trump. He also referred to S. 756. Attorney General Paxton referred to Andrew S. Hanen, judge, U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Prison reform, roundtable discussion in Bedminster, NJ.

Locations: Bedminster, NJ.

Names: Acosta, R. Alexander; Bevin, Matthew G.; Bondi, Pamela J.; Bryant, D. Phillip; Burgum, Douglas J.; Deal, J. Nathan; Edwards, John Bel; Grassley, Charles E.; Kushner, Jared C.; Paxton, Kenneth; Perry, J. Richard; Rollins, Brooke L.; Trump, Ivanka M.

Subjects: Business and industry : Domestic investment, promotion efforts; Commerce, international : U.S. exports :: Expansion; Drug abuse and trafficking : Illegal drugs, interdiction efforts; Economy, national : Improvement; Education : Vocational and technical education programs; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job training and assistance programs; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment rate; Energy : Domestic production, promotion efforts; Energy, Department of : Secretary; Georgia : Governor; Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Kentucky : Governor; Labor, Department of : Secretary; Law enforcement and crime : Community-oriented policing, strengthening efforts; Law enforcement and crime : Criminal justice system, reform efforts; Law enforcement and crime : Parole and ex-convict reintegration programs, improvement efforts; Law enforcement and crime : Trafficking in persons, efforts to combat; Legislation, proposed : First Step Act of 2018; Louisiana : Governor; Mississippi : Governor; New Jersey : President's visits; North Dakota : Governor; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Assistant to the President; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Intragovernmental Affairs and Technology Initiatives; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Senior Adviser.

DCPD Number: DCPD201800530.