

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks at a Meeting of the President's National Council for the American Worker and an Exchange With Reporters

September 17, 2018

Assistant to the President Ivanka M. Trump. Thank you, Mr. President, on behalf of my Cochairs Secretary Ross and Secretary Acosta and Andrew Bremberg from—Assistant to the President and—at DPC here at the White House.

This was the first interagency meeting of the National Council for the American Worker. It was incredibly productive. We talked about, obviously, the booming and robust economy that has created unprecedented opportunity and really creating tremendous potential for so many who have been on the sidelines of the economy and now entering the workforce. And we want to ensure that they're equipped with the skills and the training needed to thrive in our modern economy.

[At this point, Assistant to the President Ivanka M. Trump continued her remarks, concluding as follows.]

So we're very excited about this initiative. It's just getting started. And this was a great kickoff meeting. So thank you for being here, and thank you for your engagement to ensuring that all Americans have an opportunity to thrive in this booming economy.

The President. Well, Ivanka, thank you very much. And I'm thrilled to join you for the inaugural meeting of the National Council for the American Worker. We've done some incredible numbers, and we'll have some of those folks speaking about that in a little while. But numbers that nobody thought—at least this quickly—we've been here less than 2 years, and nobody can believe the numbers they're seeing. A lot of it's the spirit of the country. You look at all of the polling coming out, people are more optimistic about our country and about business than they have been in many, many years, in some cases, since the beginning of these polls.

Hurricane Florence Response and Recovery Efforts

I also want to take a moment to send our thoughts to the incredible people of North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and everyone else affected by Hurricane Florence.

The Federal Government has dispatched nearly 20,000 Federal and military personnel to assist in the response and recovery effort. These are incredible people. They're really putting their lives at stake and they're putting their lives on the line every single day. They're out there for many, many hours out of a 24-hour day, and they're working hard.

Every relevant Federal resource is marshaled to help those in need. Many lives have been saved already. You've been covering it, actually, very fairly. But the job they're doing is incredible.

I just want to finish that by saying our administration is in constant contact with local and State authorities, and we will not rest until that job is done and done perfectly. I just want to thank all of the first responders, the FEMA folks and everybody else involved, including law enforcement. They have been incredible. And it's a very, very dangerous situation. You have collapses, you have slides; you have things that are happening that are very scary. That's why all of a sudden they're getting calls from people that we wish they didn't stay, but they stayed. And they're going in, and they're saving their lives. A lot of lives have been saved. So I want to thank them very, very much. We appreciate it.

The President's National Council for the American Worker

We're here today to talk about workforce development. And I'd like to begin by thanking Ivanka and all of the folks around this table who have worked tirelessly in the devotion of ensuring that no American worker is going to be left behind.

Our country is doing better possibly than—we can say, in an economic front—than it's ever done before. We don't want to leave workers behind. And that won't happen. Most are going with it and doing really well. Nobody is going to be left behind.

I also want to thank Secretary Wilbur Ross, Secretary Alex Acosta, Director Mick Mulvaney, and Administrator Linda McMahon. They have been working along with Ivanka and a whole group of people—a large group of people—on workforce development, and it's really making a big, big difference, because we have companies moving into our country like probably never before. In many cases, they're moving back. They left years ago, and they're coming back because they all want a part of the action. Our country is hot, and it's successful, and people want to be here.

We've created more than 4 million jobs since the election, with more than 200,000 jobs created just last month alone. More Americans are employed than ever before in our country. In the history of our country, today—as of today—we have more people working than they have ever had working before.

Middle class income reached its alltime high. That just came out, that number. It—and it reached it by all a lot. Jobless claims are at their lowest level in nearly 50 years. Almost 3.9 million Americans have been lifted off food stamps since the election. Now, that's a big, beautiful number. There are a record number of job openings, and the number of workers quitting their current jobs has hit at an alltime high. Now, that doesn't sound good, but actually, it is good. They're leaving jobs, because they're getting better jobs, and they're getting more money.

So that's a statistic, Linda, that I wouldn't say sounds great, but it is great.

Small Business Administration Administrator, Linda E. McMahon. It is very good.

The President. They're all looking for better jobs. They're going up, and they're getting more money.

Before my election, less than half of the manufacturers were optimistic about the future. Today—so think of that: less than half, meaning they weren't very optimistic—today's number is exactly 95 percent, and I expect that's going to go higher too. That's a big, big number, because people go out, and they invest because they're optimistic about our country. And that means jobs, and it means a lot of other things.

Thanks to the work of everybody around this room, employers across the country have taken our pledge to American workers, and they've committed to training more than 4.2 million American workers for American jobs.

We have so many companies that are just incredible, what they're doing. The money they're spending and the training programs are incredible. Frankly, you wouldn't be able to do it through government, the quality of training. You wouldn't be able to do it as a government program. These companies are really something. And you know the list of companies—they're really a "who's who" of companies in this world, in our world and in our country. And I want to thank them. A couple of them have been picking up training for over 900,000 people. That's really something to see.

The task of the Council is to develop a national strategy to ensure that all American students and workers have access to affordable results-driven education, preparing them to fill the jobs of

the future and to make a great, great living; to make, frankly, more money than they've ever made before and to enjoy their job more than they've ever done before. It's very exciting.

In this mission, we are partnering with the private sector to identify the most innovative on-the-job training programs that will provide our citizens with the skills that they need to thrive and to grow. We believe in vocational education, very important word. I've asked to be—to have that word brought back. When I was young, I remember seeing schools—they were called "vocational schools," where people that had great talent at mechanical things, fixing engines and laying brick and plumbing and electricity and electric. These were incredibly talented people. People going to college with me didn't have their talent for that and never would have their talent for that.

So vocational is very important, and these are some of the best jobs in our country. So we believe in vocational education. We believe in lifelong learning. And we believe in saving taxpayer dollars while producing greater results for our workers. That is having the private sector train millions and millions of people for future jobs. Because it's different; jobs are much different today than they were even 10 years ago.

So I want to thank every member of the National Council for the American Worker. Really, a great group of people. And I want to thank you very much for being here and working so hard. Together we will build the greatest vocational programs so that American workers can follow their dreams, earn a great living, and enjoy a truly rewarding career.

I just want to say that so many companies are coming back, and many of these companies have agreed to train their worker so that we don't even have to get Government involved, other than making the process a little bit easier, a little bit better. It's a really great thing to see. Millions and millions of jobs. And these are highly skilled jobs, in many cases.

So I want to thank you all. I think I might just go around and ask a couple of the folks at the table where things are going, where they see it. We have a tremendously talented guy, Kevin Hassett, who has, along with me, predicted where we'd be now. And as you know, we hit 4.1 GDP, and that was adjusted upward to 4.2. And I think we're going to have a lot of great quarters, hopefully, even much higher than that.

But if we would have said during the campaign that we were going to be in the fours, people would have sort of smiled or laughed or said we're not—you know, we must be kidding. If you look at where we were, we were really at 1, and we were heading down. I think we would have been minus-4 or -5, because that's where we were.

We loosened up regulations. We have better regulations. But—and frankly, I think, in many ways, Kevin, they're tougher than they were. But you don't have to go through 10 years of a process and then find out you can or can't do something.

So it's been a great thing. Kevin, could you just say a few words about the economy?

Council of Economic Advisers Chairman Kevin A. Hassett. Sure, sir. And I think that one way to think about the labor market right now is that, in January of 2017, the Congressional Budget Office forecasted how many jobs we would make this year, just a year ahead. And so far, this year, we're coming in at about double that pace.

And I think that the sense of this table is that presents us with a historic opportunity, because the marginalized person—the person who was discouraged, the person who was forgotten, that you spoke to in the campaign—if you give them skills in a weak economy, they don't necessarily get a job. But if we can get them skills now, then we can reconnect them to the labor force and to society. And that's why our job here is urgent, and we're really pursuing it with an amount of vigor that even a bunch of my staff are at a vocational school today to study this so that we can do a better job, sir.

The President. And the economic numbers are even much better than we thought.

Chairman Hasset. They are. They are. That's right. And we're going to have to revise up our forecast for the next budget.

The President. Yes, we don't mind. [Laughter] Just don't revise it down, please. [Laughter] Okay?

I'd like to ask Alex Acosta, Secretary of Labor, to say a few words, please.

Secretary of Labor R. Alexander Acosta. Mr. President, thank you. To follow on what Kevin mentioned, I was looking at the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta statistics recently, and they are predicting, for the third quarter, an even stronger GDP growth rate from the second quarter. That's a real testament to how strong this economy is.

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

You asked us, and you formed a Task Force on apprenticeships. That task force did its work, delivered the report to you in 6 months, in May. Those recommendations have been largely implemented in July. And the applications for these new industry-recognized apprenticeships are now pending notice and comment. So far, since your election, this economy has created more than 350,000 new apprenticeships. And with the new approach to apprenticeships, that number is only going to increase. But there are so many other job skills that this group is working on. It's very exciting.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. And, Alex, I think, importantly, wages—for the first time in many, many years, wages are going up and people are able to make more money doing a job that they like, because they have options now. They have—they'll look at 5 or 6 or 10 jobs, and they'll take the one they like, and they'll make more money. Not just a money thing, but they'll also get paid more. That's the first time in many years.

Could you just mention the association health plans that we're doing too? Because I think it's very important.

Secretary Acosta. That's right. Under a new rule, chambers of commerce and industry associations can now come together and offer health insurance to their members' employees. And this is transformative.

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

You've also seen industry associations, like the National Restaurant Association, come together and say any restaurant in the Nation, any small restaurant in the Nation that wants to offer health care to its employees can now do it through the National Restaurant Association. That is transformative.

The President. It's working out to be a very big deal, and they're getting great, great health care at a very low cost. And you're coming out with another plan very soon that's going to be similar.

One other thing. As you know, we have the remnants of Obamacare. And one of the things that I'm very proud of is that we got rid of the individual mandate, which was a disaster for Obamacare and a disaster for people, where you had to pay a lot of money for the privilege of not having to pay for bad health insurance and health care.

But the thing that I really am very happy to announce is that the rates are far lower than they would have been under the previous administration or under a Democrat administration. We're holding the rates down. So that remnant is being able to—the remnant of Obamacare is much less

expensive than people thought. They were going up, before I got here, at 118 percent, in some cases; 150 percent, 160 percent, 55 percent. We have the percentage going up at a much lower level, because we're managing it very, very carefully. So we're very proud of that.

Linda McMahon, could you say few words, please?

Administrator McMahon. Certainly. Thank you. Well, we are here today talking about, you know, workforce. And I'm really on the ground visiting with small businesses all over the country. And one of the greatest needs they have today—not only big business, but small business—is a skilled workforce.

[*Administrator McMahon continued her remarks, concluding as follows.*]

And the pledge, Ivanka, when I'm going around and talking to small businesses, they'll sign the pledge for one to two reskilling or retraining employees. And boy, when you start adding that up around the country for 30 million small businesses, that can have an incredible impact.

Assistant to the President Ivanka M. Trump. And the Administrator mentions an unbelievable point. Because some of the best examples we've seen is when the employers reach into the vocational schools and reach into the high schools and develop curriculums and then employ the student right on the other end. And one of the things we're seeing just across almost all populations is the lowest unemployment rates in this country's history.

[*Assistant to the President Ivanka M. Trump continued her remarks, concluding as follows.*]

So one of the goals of this Council is creating that accountability and making sure that every dollar that's spent of taxpayer money is being measured and is achieving the end result that we desire and ultimately working more with the private sector to make them take on this mission, ready to ensure that they're doing the work of training our workers.

The President. Good. Thank you. Mick Mulvaney, could you say something and maybe respond to that?

Office of Management and Budget Director John M. "Mick" Mulvaney. I could say a bunch of different things, Mr. President. I want to start and go back to what Kevin talked about. Sort of hard to start—know where to start to talk about the economy. He mentioned the quit number. And I know that's a strange number to look at, but what that tells us is that people are confident. They're confident in themselves, and they're confident in the ability to go out and make a better life for themselves.

[*Director Mulvaney continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

So that's what we're trying to fix here, is to bring some accountability. Because we need it. Now it's not just a question of saving money. The economy needs more workers. And this group, I think, is going to make that a priority. So thanks for letting us do it.

The President. Thank you very much. Wilbur? Thank you, Mick.

Secretary of Commerce Wilbur L. Ross, Jr. Yes. I think one of the key markets is not just the few unemployed, but also the very large percentage of people who are of working age but don't identify themselves as even being in the workforce. We need to pull them back into the workforce. Training and better jobs are what will do that. And that's what will help drive the economy to these very, very high rates of growth. Because if you don't have increased workforce participation and you don't have increased productivity, we won't be able to meet our aspirations for growth. So it's very, very critical that we do that.

And that's why we're convening an advisory council of leading CEOs, leading academicians, leading thought people in order to provide advice to the Council: how we can do better, how we can cooperate better, and how we can increase workforce participation.

The President. Good. Thank you very much, Wilbur. And I want to say, as per what all of you basically were saying, we have some tremendous trade deals coming along. Mexico, we're largely finished. It's being papered. But we have a wonderful relationship, and I think we have a great deal for both. We had a very unfair NAFTA deal. It was a terrible deal for this country for many years between Mexico and Canada. It was a horrible, horrible deal. We lost thousands of businesses and millions of jobs. And that's not going to happen anymore.

But we have a really great deal with Mexico, and I think great for both of us. Very, very pro-jobs. Very pro-everything for both countries. So we look forward to that. That's in the process of—the deal is made. It's in the process of getting concluded. We'll see what happens with Canada. We've told them what we have to have, and we'll see how that goes. I'm sure it will go fine. And so we're working on that.

China is now paying us billions of dollars, and we will see how that all works out. It's a—I have great respect for President Xi, as you know. I was over there for 2 days with him. I have a lot of respect for China. But last year, we lost \$375 billion in deficits, and we had, in my opinion, way over \$500 billion in cash. And that's not including certain items that we won't even talk about.

So we're not going to lose that. We can't do that. We can't do that anymore. It should have been done many years ago. It should have been done by other Presidents. And actually, it's a disgrace that it wasn't done.

So China is now paying us billions of dollars in tariffs, and hopefully, we'll be able to work something out. We'll be having an announcement tonight after close of market, and that will take place, a pretty comprehensive statement. Kevin may speak, and Larry Kudlow may speak a little bit at that time. But some very positive news. I think it's going to work out very well with China. I think they want to make a deal. They do want to make a deal, that I can tell you. They want to make a deal.

But from our standpoint, it has to be fair. It has to take care of our workers. We can't have them pinpointing our farmers because they think that weakens me a little bit, because our farmers are the great—they are incredible patriots. They understand what's happening. The markets were closed to them. Vast markets were closed to them. And the farmers have been hurting for 15 years. If you look at soybeans, the pricing before the election, for 5 years, it was cut in half. And so we're going to open up markets.

The EU, we're moving along. They didn't want to talk, because they had such a great deal. And last year, they made \$151 billion off the United States. And they had tremendous trade barriers, and we'll see what happens. But as you know, they want to make a deal very much. And we'll see if we're going to be able to make a deal with them. But there's a good chance that we can.

And no matter where you look, we have new deals going—new trade deals. And that's going to have a huge impact on our country. It's going to have a huge impact on jobs. It's going to open up markets that weren't opened before. And if they don't want to do that, that's okay. Then we're just going to have to charge them when they sell their products to us. And our Treasury will take in tremendous amounts of money, which is great for our country. And we'll create jobs. So that's all very important.

And you know, what's going to happen is businesses will start moving back into the United States, which to me is—that's the dream. The businesses are going to pour back into the United States. That's jobs, that's a lot of other things; that's a lot of taxes coming to us. And product will start being made here again.

You remember the old days? We used to make our product, Kevin, right? Now we buy our product from everybody else. And frankly, we can make it here. And ultimately, if you include the fact that we have to have jobs and others things to do it, it will be far better economically.

But we'll see what happens as to whether or not we're able to do something in particular with China. That's a big one—because the losses have been staggering for so many years for our country. And we just can't let that happen anymore.

So I want to thank you all for being here. I want to congratulate the people around the table for what you've done with respect to workforce. We really need workers. I mean, with the companies coming in like they're coming in, we need workers. One of the things we'll be doing at the border is, we want people to come into our country, but they have to be qualified. They have to be merit-based. I want merit-based people.

Right now 60 percent over the last 10 years—you take a look—60 percent or, let's just say, so I get it exactly perfectly, large, large numbers—a large percentage of the people coming into our country immediately go into welfare or relief. And a lot of times they never work. And we have some very foolish policies in our country. We have to end that. We want people to come into our country. We want them to come in through merit so they can work for all of these massive companies that are coming back—in many cases, coming back to the United States.

So thank you very much. And we're very proud of the people around this table. And, Ivanka, I want to thank you for your leadership also. You have done a fantastic job of putting everything together. And, Chris, thank you very much. We appreciate it.

White House Director of Strategic Initiatives Christopher P. Liddell. Thank you, sir.

The President. Thank you, everybody.

Sexual Assault Allegation Against Supreme Court Nominee Brett M. Kavanaugh

Q. Judge Kavanaugh, Mr. President. Judge Kavanaugh, do you believe the allegations against Judge Kavanaugh?

Q. Do you have any reaction to the allegations against—

The President. Judge Kavanaugh is one of the finest people that I've ever known. He's an outstanding intellect, an outstanding judge, respected by everybody, never had even a little blemish on his record. The FBI has, I think, gone through a process six times with him over the years where he went to higher and higher positions. He is somebody very special.

At the same time, we want to go through a process. We want to make sure everything is perfect, everything is just right. I wish the Democrats could have done this a lot sooner, because they had this information for many months, and they shouldn't have waited until, literally, the last days. They should have done it a lot sooner. But with all of that being said, we want to go through the process.

One thing I will say is that, as I understand it, Judge Kavanaugh spent quite a bit of time with Senator Feinstein, and it wasn't even brought up at that meeting. And she had this information. So you would have thought, certainly, that she would have brought it up at the meeting, not wait until everything is finished and then have to start a process all over again.

But with all of it being said, we want to go through a full process. I have great confidence in the U.S. Senate and in their procedures and what they're doing. And I think that's probably what they're going to do. They'll go through a process and hear everybody out.

I think it's important. I believe they think it's important. But again, he is one of the great intellects and one of the finest people that anybody has known. You look at his references; I've never seen anything quite like it.

So they'll go through that process, and we'll get it done.

Sexual Assault Allegation Against Supreme Court Nominee Brett M. Kavanaugh

Q. Should it be delayed? Should the vote be delayed?

The President. I don't know. It depends on the process. I'd like to see a complete process. I'd like everybody to be very happy. Most importantly, I want the American people to be happy, because they're getting somebody that is great. I want him to go in at the absolute highest level. And I think to do that, you have to go through this. If it takes a little delay, it will take a little delay. It shouldn't certainly be very much.

But again, this is something that should have been brought up long before this. They had the information in July, as I understand it. That's a long time ago. And nobody mentioned it until the other day.

Q. Has he——

The President. It's very—you know, it's very unfortunate that they didn't mention it sooner.

But with all of that being said, it will, I'm sure, work out very well. You're talking about an individual who is as high a quality individual as you'll ever see.

Sexual Assault Allegation Against Supreme Court Nominee Brett M. Kavanaugh

Q. Have you spoken to him today?

Q. Have you spoken to him today? Have you spoken with Judge Kavanaugh?

The President. I have not spoken to Judge Kavanaugh.

Q. Do you know if he's offered to withdraw from the process? Has he offered to withdraw?

The President. Next question. What a ridiculous question that was.

Q. Do you think he has a path towards confirmation?

The President. Say it?

Q. Do you think his path toward confirmation is on track?

The President. Oh, I think he's on track, yes. I mean, I think he's very much on track. If they delay it a little bit just to make sure everybody is happy—they want to be happy. I can tell you, the Republican Senators want to be a hundred-percent happy themselves. They're doing it very, very professionally. Again, this should have been brought up a long time ago.

Q. But is—[inaudible]?

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

U.S. Tariffs Against China

Q. The tariffs, the tariffs. The \$200 billion in tariffs, are you going to do all 200?

The President. Yes, you're going to see on China today, right after close of business, we'll be announcing something. And it will be a lot of money coming into the coffers of the United States of America. A lot of money coming in. But you'll be seeing what we're doing right after close of business today—the markets closing. Thank you.

Q. [Inaudible]

The President. You'll see. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:30 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to National Economic Council Director Lawrence A. Kudlow.

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