

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks on Signing the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018

December 20, 2018

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you very much. Please. That was from the Emmys. *[Laughter]* I sang "Green Acres" and received a very nice award that night. That was really great. So we had that. Somebody had it. I said: "Put it on. Not too much of it, but put it on." Congratulations, my man. *[Laughter]*

Well, it's great to be here. We have a lot of big things happening. And I want to thank our great Vice President, Mike Pence, for joining us. Terrific job. He loves our farmers, like I do.

And Zippy Duvall. Where's Zippy? Zippy. Zippy. Hi, Zippy. What a good name. *[Laughter]* Good job too. John Heisdorffer. John Bode. Thank you, John. Jimmie Musick—I love that name. You should be a singer with that name, right? Probably is. Kevin Kester. Chuck Conner. Chuck. Any relation to Chuck Connor, the great actor? Huh? No? *[Laughter]* He was pretty good. Randy Mooney and Jim Heimerl. Thank you all for being here. That's a great group of people. That's a great group.

And some of our great political geniuses we have with us today. And you think this was an easy one? You know? They think it was easy? It was not an easy one. But we have to take care of our farmers and our ranchers, and we will take care of them.

And not only is it a bill, it's great bill for them. So we're honored by it. And instrumental people—Leader Mitch McConnell, who may have the easiest job in the United States, especially around the border. *[Laughter]* Thanks, Mitch. Good man. John Boozman. John. John, thank you. Good. We got it there, John. John Hoeven. Thank you, John. Great. We've spent a lot of time together. Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith. She had a very easy race. *[Laughter]* Right? And she ended up winning by a lot. She ended up winning by a lot. Cindy, great job. Debbie Stabenow. And she's tough, I can tell you. We competed with her. *[Laughter]* She's tough and she's smart, and does a great job. Thank you very much, Debbie. Really good job.

Ralph Abraham. Ralph, thank you. Rick Allen. Jodey Arrington. Andy Barr. Where's Andy Barr? Where's Andy? Oh, did I do a good job for you? *[Laughter]* Did I do a good job? You're one of the only congressional Congressmen that I could have—I'll tell you: You, I went to specifically. Congratulations. That's a great victory you had. Mitch was there, with Rand Paul. We were all there for you, right? Great. Great, Andy. Good. Good job.

James Comer. Kevin Cramer—that's another one we worked hard on together, right? That was—great job, Kevin. Senator. Senator-elect; very shortly Senator. Very good. Proud of you, Kevin. Rick Crawford. Rodney Davis. Rick. Well, you know who this is: Greg Gianforte, great guy. Where's Greg? We worked hard. You did a great job out there. Thank you, Greg. Fantastic job. Neal Dunn. Ron Estes. Bob Goodlatte. Is Bob Goodlatte here? He's around here someplace. I think he's doing hearings. He's with Comey, I think. That should be exciting. *[Laughter]* Trying to see how much he's lying today. *[Laughter]*

Frank Lucas, Roger Marshall—these are great people. Dan Newhouse. Thank you, fellas. Thank you all. Great people. Collin Peterson. Hi, Collin. Good job. Good job. Very nice. David Rouzer. Hey, you know how you pronounce it? Rabble rouser—you go, David "Rouzer." Where's David? Is he around? Hi, David. Congratulations. That's the way to do it, right? Because, phonetically, it's very tough. But I know your name for other reasons. You've done a

great job. Thank you very much, David. Appreciate it. Austin Scott. Adrian Smith. Austin? Where's Austin? Thank you. Thank you. Glenn Thompson. Hi, Glenn. Bruce Westerman and Ted Yoho, thank you, fellas. Thank you very much.

So we're here to celebrate a really tremendous victory for the American farmer, ranchers, agriculture—incredible people—by the signing of the 2018 farm bill. Very important. We've been working long and hard on this one. We were hearing it might not be able to pass this year, but I didn't want to talk to Pat about that, so we passed it. [*Laughter*]

Criminal Justice Reform Legislation

We also just achieved another very historic landmark—a big additional victory—as the House and Senate have both passed landmark criminal justice reform and sent it to my desk for signature. That's a big thing. And, Ivanka—I want to thank Ivanka and Jared for working so hard on that. It was incredible how you did it. But it's—so many people have called and thanked me for that. And I thank Mitch and everybody for the job you've done. That was an incredible achievement. I think it'll go down as one of the great moments. This legislation will help thousands of former inmates and nonviolent offenders get a second chance at life.

Border Security

But before going any further, I want to address a matter of vital national importance. You've all been seeing it, reading it, hearing it: border security.

Every nation has not only the right, but the absolute duty, to protect its borders and its citizens. A nation without borders is a nation not at all. Without borders, we have the reign of chaos, crime, cartels, and—believe it or not—coyotes. I will not surrender this Nation to the whims of criminal organizations who prey on the vulnerable, who hurt women and children, and who spread human misery and suffering.

Human trafficking and massive drug inflow must also be stopped. It's at a tremendous level. What we're doing and the incredible job being done by border security, ICE, Border Patrol, local police, and the military—the military has been incredible. And we're stopping them. It's a process, you wouldn't believe how tough. But we're stopping them in record numbers.

At this moment, there is a debate over funding border security and the wall, also called—so that I give them a little bit of an out—"steel slats." We don't use the word "wall" necessarily, but it has to be something special to do the job—steel slats. I've made my position very clear: Any measure that funds the Government must include border security. Has to. Not for political purposes, but for our country, for the safety of our community.

This is not merely my campaign promise, this is the promise every lawmaker made. It is the solemn promise to protect and defend the United States of America. And it is our sacred obligation. We have no choice.

For decades, Washington abandoned this commitment and allowed millions and millions of people to enter our country illegally and over the objections of the American people. No one voiced or voted for a policy, no one endorsed this policy, and no one ratified this policy. It was a total assault on our democracy itself.

Illegal immigration costs our Nation \$275 billion a year—you hear many different numbers; you can say billions and billions, but the number that I hear most accurate is \$275 billion a year, at least—millions of jobs, and thousands of innocent lives.

More than 90 percent of heroin comes across our southern border. Heroin deaths have tripled since 2002. Every week, this illegal heroin kills at least 300 Americans and costs our Nation over \$230 billion to \$289 billion, or nearly \$5 billion a week.

I spoke with President Xi of China, and he has agreed to make fentanyl—another one of the big, big problems, and probably, I think, it's just gone to number one; kills 80,000 people a year in our country—he's going to make that a major crime in China. And if you get caught, you pay a major penalty; it's called the "death penalty." And it wasn't listed as a crime until I spoke to him. So I appreciate President Xi for doing that. That's a tremendous—that's going to have a tremendous impact.

Every day, 10 known or suspected terrorists try to gain entry into our country. Every day, 2,000 illegal aliens try to cross our borders. They try. We get most of them. It's hard without a wall. Every year, 50,000 illegal children are smuggled by coyotes and criminals into our country. In the last 2 years alone, ICE officers arrested criminal aliens charged with or convicted of 100,000 assaults, 30,000 sex crimes, and 4,000 murders. It's rough stuff.

Yet the Democrats continue to oppose border security, no matter how many innocent people get hurt or die. Ridiculously and dangerously, certain people want open borders, which allow potentially massive crime. Our Nation has spent trillions of dollars and sacrificed thousands of brave young lives defending the borders of foreign nations. I am asking Congress to defend the border of our Nation for a tiny fraction—tiny fraction—of the cost.

Essential to border security is a powerful, physical barrier. Walls work, whether we like it or not. They work better than anything. In Israel, 99.9 percent successful. Think of it. I spoke to Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister, 2 days ago. We were talking about it. He said it's 99.9. I mean, he came up; I didn't ask. I said, 99.9 percent successful.

We have proposed a steel-slat barrier to halt the deadly flow of these illegal traffickers, smugglers, and terrorists. Every day that we deprive our Border Patrol and ICE officers the resources they need, we put many innocent lives in harm's way. It should be bipartisan. I think it will end up being bipartisan. I really do.

Illegal immigration also strains public services that Americans depend on. And illegal immigration drives down wages for the neediest Americans. No one who calls themselves a progressive should support illegal immigration. Open borders hurts poor Americans more than anyone else in our society.

In life, there are certain principles worth fighting for, principles that are more important than politics, party, or personal convenience. The safety and security and sovereignty of the United States is the most important principle of all. If we don't stand strong for our national borders, then we cease to be a nation and we betray our commitment to the loyal citizens of our great country.

I look forward to signing a bill that fulfills our fundamental duty to the American people. It is all about—and I say this in any way they want to hear it—it's all about America first. We have to put our country first, we have to put our people first, and we have to put safety first.

So thank you all very much. And we'll be working on that—Mitch and Paul and Kevin and everybody—and we'll see what we can do. But hopefully, that will all come together.

Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018

Now to the farm bill. We are proudly joined today by so many Members of Congress—Republicans, Democrats—who worked very, very hard on this bill. This was really an effort of everybody. It was a bipartisan success, something you don't hear too much about, but I think you will be. I actually believe we maybe will be over the coming period of time. I hope so. I think so. It's so good for the country. And I want to thank all of the people here, including the many Democrats who have really worked hard on this bill. They really have. I'll probably have to deny that I ever said that someday, but I won't do that. Because you really did; you worked very, very hard.

And, Mike, thank you, by the way. That was some job you did, I'll tell you. I watched you day and night work on this one. So that was really incredible. Thank you. Thank you very much. The—and the Chairman of the House and Senate Agricultural Committees—that's Mike Conaway—and Senator Pat Roberts, who's another one. I was really—it was very inspiring to work. Very hard to get it done for these two guys, because it meant so much to them. So I want to thank you. Thank you, Pat. Thank you, Mike. Great job. Great job.

We're honored to be with State, local, and Tribal leaders of the American agriculture, along with Zippy and all of the people, some of whom I introduced. One I have to introduce that has done such an incredible job—truly loves agriculture and, perhaps more importantly, loves the farmers and the ranchers—is our Secretary of Agriculture, Sonny Perdue. Special, special man.

And you know, he plans sort of everything out. He sometimes can be a little bit—a little bit—deceiving. This one is smart. And today happens to be his birthday, right? So you planned that out, probably like you do everything else. *[Laughter]* Happy birthday. This is the best—this is the best birthday present you could have, I think.

Secretary of Agriculture George E. "Sonny" Perdue. That's right. That's right.

The President. Knowing you, with how much you love the farmers, this is the best—

Secretary Perdue. Worked it all out, the timing. It's perfect.

The President. Oh, that's a fantastic job.

By signing this bill, we are protecting our crop insurance programs and funding that producers rely on in times of disaster. And I've told Sonny that while we had some pretty big problems in Alabama and Georgia, with the hurricanes, believe it or not—normally doesn't hit, but these were big and they hit—we're going to work it out so we can help those farmers, right? They got hit very hard. So we're going to work it out. Those two States in particular and some others. But those two States got hit very, very hard, and certain parts of Florida. But we knew about that, and they're being taken care of, right?

Secretary Perdue. Yes, sir.

The President. So work on that one, Sonny. That'll be great. Through fires, floods, and freezing weather, we will always stand with the American farmers. The farm bill doubles the amount of farmers that they can borrow to expand and improve their farms. It expends—and goes all over rural broadband. We are doing broadband. Everyone wanted it so badly. It's amazing how sophisticated the whole farm industry has become. But it expands rural broadband and dedicates additional resources to fight the opioid crisis, a tremendous crisis that we have it down about 18 percent, but it's just not acceptable. It's an incredible problem for our country. It opens new markets for American agriculture all over the world.

In addition to signing this critical legislation, today I am directing my administration to take immediate action on welfare reform. Thanks to our thriving economy, we have already lifted more than 4.6 million Americans off the food stamp roll since the election. And more work remains to be done. A lot more work remains to be done, but it's been incredible the strides that we've made. And I will say, it's really because of the fact that the economy is doing so well, and the farms now are being lifted.

And again, I'll go back to President Xi of China, at our meeting 2 weeks ago, he's agreed to start purchasing tremendous amounts of farm product. You know that. You know that better than—you were the first one I called, actually. In particular, soybeans. And they're starting that already, and I think you've already seen the signs of that. But they're starting that already.

Millions of able-bodied, working-age adults continue to collect food stamps without working or even looking for work. Our goal is to move these Americans from dependence to independence, and into a good-paying job and rewarding career.

Therefore, I have directed Secretary Perdue to use his authority under the law to close work requirement loopholes in the food stamp program. Under this new rule, able-bodied adults without dependents will have to work, or look for work, in order to receive their food stamps. Today's action will help Americans transition from welfare to gainful employment, strengthening families and uplifting communities. And that was a difficult thing to get done, but the farmers wanted it done; we all wanted it done. And I think, in the end, it's going to make a lot of people very happy. It's called "work rules." And Sonny is able, under this bill, to implement them through regulation.

With the passage of the farm bill, we are delivering to the farmers and ranchers, who are the heart and soul of America, all sorts of things that they never even thought possible. We are ensuring that American agriculture will always feed our families, nourish our communities, power our commerce, and inspire our Nation.

And I am opening up massive new markets in order to do things with other countries. You know, we've opened various countries. Canada is an example. Canada is going to be much more open over the USMCA. It's a terrific document. It replaces the horrible NAFTA deal. It was a horrible deal for this country.

Before signing, I'd like to invite Secretary Perdue, who, as I said, is just doing an incredible job. He loves what he does. He loves the farmers and loves what he does. And I'm going to ask Sonny to say a few words.

Thank you, Sonny.

Secretary Perdue. Thank you, sir.

The President. Thank you very much.

Secretary Perdue. Thank you. Well, Mr. President, you can tell by the temperature in this room today, it's a great day for agriculture. It's a delight to have so many Members of Congress here, with the leaders, and chairman of the committee who worked so hard; the ranking members. We've got many members of USDA staff here who have worked hand in hand with your committees over this working of the farm bill, on both sides, and I'm very proud of the work they've done.

[*At this point, Secretary Perdue continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

I am proud to be U.S. Department of—Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue. And I am delighted to work on behalf of the farmers and ranchers. I am delighted to work for you, Mr. President, because you understand their heart. And this bill goes a long way.

Thank you, folks, for passing a great bill. We're going to do our best to implement that bill as you've intended. Thank you, and God bless you.

The President. Thank you, Sonny. Great job. Thank you, Sonny.

So now it's my great honor to sign the 2018 farm bill—very, very special, important piece of legislation. Thank you, Mitch. Very good. Great job. Thank you. Thank you all.

[*The President signed the bill.*]

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:37 p.m. in the South Court Auditorium of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Vincent "Zippy" Duvall, president, American Farm Bureau Federation; John Heisdorffer, director, American Soybean Association Director; John Bode, president and chief executive officer, Corn Refiners Association; Jimmie Musick, president, National Association of Wheat Growers; Kevin Kester, president, National Cattlemen's Beef Association; Charles F. Conner, president and chief executive officer, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives; Randy Mooney, chairman of the board of directors, Dairy Farmers of America; Jim Heimerl, president, National Pork Producers Council; James B. Comey, Jr., former Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation; Assistant to the President Ivanka M. Trump; White House Senior Adviser Jared C. Kushner; Speaker of the House of Representatives Paul D. Ryan; and House Majority Leader Kevin O. McCarthy. He also referred to H.R.5682. H.R. 2, approved December 20, was assigned Public Law No. 115–334.

Categories: Bill Signings and Vetoes : Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, signing remarks.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Abraham, Ralph L.; Allen, Richard W.; Arrington, Jodey C.; Barr, Garland H. "Andy", IV; Bode, John; Boozman, John N.; Comey, James B., Jr.; Conaway, K. Michael; Conner, Charles F.; Cramer, Kevin J.; Crawford, Eric A. "Rick"; Davis, Rodney L.; Dunn, Neal P.; Duvall, Vincent "Zippy"; Estes, Ronald G.; Gianforte, Gregory R.; Goodlatte, Robert W.; Heimerl, Jim; Heisdorffer; Hoeven, John H.; Hyde-Smith, Cindy; Kester, Kevin; Kushner, Jared C.; Lucas, Frank D.; Marshall, Roger W.; McCarthy, Kevin O.; McConnell, A. Mitchell; Mooney, Randy; Musick, Jimmie; Netanyahu, Benjamin; Newhouse, Daniel M.; Paul, Randal H.; Pence, Michael R.; Perdue, George E. "Sonny"; Peterson, Collin C.; Roberts, C. Patrick; Rouzer, David C.; Ryan, Paul D.; Scott, J. Austin; Smith, Adrian M.; Stabenow, Deborah A.; Thompson, Glenn W.; Trump, Ivanka M.; Westerman, Bruce E.; Xi Jinping; Yoho, Theodore S.

Subjects: Agriculture, Department of : Secretary; Agriculture, Department of : Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); Canada : Free trade agreement with U.S.; China : President; China: President; Commerce, international : North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); Communications : Broadband and wireless technologies; Congress : House of Representatives :: Majority leader; Congress : House of Representatives :: Speaker; Congress : Senate :: Majority leader; Defense and national security : Border security; Drug abuse and trafficking : Illegal drugs, interdiction efforts; Drug abuse and trafficking : Opioid epidemic, efforts to combat; Economy, national : Improvement; Homeland Security,

Department of : Customs and Border Protection, U.S.; Homeland Security, Department of : Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S.; Immigration and naturalization : Illegal immigration; Israel : Prime Minister; 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, enacted : Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018; Mexico : Border with U.S., infrastructure and security; Mexico : Free trade agreement with U.S.; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Assistant to the President; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Senior Adviser; White House Office : Vice President.

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