

Remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast
February 7, 2019

I will never let you down. I can say that. Never. Thank you. I am honored to be here with leaders from across the country and all around the world who are all united by a shared belief in the glory of God and the power of prayer.

I want to thank Senator Coons and Senator Lankford for the introduction and for carrying on this wonderful and uplifting bipartisan tradition. Thank you both very much. Thank you, Senator. Senator, thank you very much.

We're thrilled to be joined by our tremendous Vice President Mike Pence, along with our incredible Second Lady, Karen Pence. And by the way, I've gotten to know Karen so well. She is a Marine Corps mom, a tremendous woman, a proud supporter of military families, and she just recently went back to teaching art classes at a Christian school. Thank you. Thank you, Karen. Terrific woman.

We're also thankful to be joined by the countless faith leaders, foreign dignitaries, and Members of Congress, along with many members of my cabinet, including Secretary Mike Pompeo, Sonny Perdue, Alex Acosta, Alex Azar, Ben Carson, Betsy DeVos, and Acting Attorney General Matt Whitaker. Thank you all for being here. Thank you very much.

And thanks also to Gary Haugen for those very powerful words and for rescuing people around the world from the bondage of human trafficking. You are truly doing the Lord's work, and as you know, our administration is doing everything we can to make your work easier. We're working very closely together. Thank you very much. Thank you, Gary.

On Tuesday, it was my profound honor to address the Nation from the House Chamber of the State of the Union. And our Union, as you heard me say, is very, very strong. As I said in my address, there is no limit to what we can achieve if we follow the path of cooperation, compromise, and common good. America's potential is unlimited, because our extraordinary people are just something that is number one, no matter where you go. We have people, they love our country, and they love their faith.

We are graced by those extraordinary heroes from Tuesday night: the SWAT officer, Timothy Matson, who graced—and raced through a very, very bullet-filled doorway. He was shot many, many times. He has been operated on many times, and unfortunately, he is going back for more. But he was really stopped from having something as bad as it was. The Tree of Life synagogue was a horrible, horrible event, and he really did do a job. He made it so much better. It was so good to see him. I saw him in the hospital, and he was suffering, and he's still suffering. But he told me the other night he is so proud to have been a part. He was just a great, great gentleman. We introduced him the other night.

And the wonderful young girl Grace, who overcame brain cancer—had no idea this was going to happen to her—and bravely rallied an entire community.

And the intrepid soldiers who stormed the beaches of Normandy in the Allied liberation of Europe. On D-day, all those warriors set out on their mission of liberation, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt led our Nation in prayer. In a national radio address, President Roosevelt began with these solemn words: "Almighty God, our sons, the pride of our Nation,

on this day have set upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our Republic, our religion, and our civilization."

Since the founding of our Nation, many of our greatest strides—from gaining our independence, to abolition, of [to]* civil rights, to extending the vote for women—have been led by people of faith and started in prayer.

When we open our hearts to faith, we fill our hearts with love. Many of the people in this room lead and support the charities and faith-based institutions that bring hope to the lives of our citizens, comfort to those in despair, and solace to those in grief, aid to those in need, and a helping hand to the struggling people all around the world, of which there are so many.

With us today are leaders involved with Prison Fellowship, started by the late Chuck Colson, a man transformed by leaders of this breakfast. Today, Prison Fellowship ministers to more than 300,000 prisoners across America to help others like Alice Johnson and Matthew Charles, who we saw Tuesday night, transform their lives through the mercy and grace of God.

And faith leaders helped us achieve historic bipartisan criminal justice reform. They've been wanting to do that for many, many years, and we all together got it done. We just passed the First Step Act into law. So thank you very much, everybody in the room, for that help. That was a very big thing for our country.

America is a nation that believes in redemption. Every day, the people in this room demonstrate the power of faith to transform lives, heal communities, and lift up the forgotten. Some of those in this room are among the Muslim and Christian faith leaders from Minnesota who partnered to send millions of meals to Somalia last year. Also with us today are Catholics, evangelicals, and members of the Jewish faith who help build homes for our fellow citizens through Habitat for Humanity.

As President, I will always cherish, honor, and protect the believers who uplift our communities and sustain our Nation. To ensure that people of faith can always contribute to our society, my administration has taken historic action to protect religious liberty.

Here with us this morning are Melissa and Chad Buck from Holt, Michigan. In 2009, they decided to adopt. Soon, they got a call about three young siblings in a terribly abusive home. Melissa and Chad had only a few minutes to decide, and they said yes to all three. Today, the Bucks have five beautiful adopted children. As Melissa has said: "They are the sweetest, most lovable children. They have the most unique gifts." Two of them have joined us for this breakfast: 10-year-old Max and 9-year-old Liz.

To Max, Liz, and the entire Buck family, thank you for inspiring us all. Thank you very much. *[Applause]* Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Thank you.

Unfortunately, the Michigan adoption charity that brought the Buck family together is now defending itself in court for living by the values of its Catholic faith. We will always protect our country's long and proud tradition of faith-based adoption. My administration is working to ensure that faith-based adoption agencies are able to help vulnerable children find their forever families, while following their deeply held beliefs.

My administration is also speaking out against religious persecution around the world, including against religious minorities, Christians, and the Jewish community. This week, I appointed a new Special Envoy To Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, and with us—thank

* White House correction.

you very much—Elan Carr. Thank you. Thank you very much. [*Applause*] A very effective person. The courageous Holocaust survivors in the gallery on Tuesday night powerfully remind us, and remind us all, of our solemn pledge: Never again.

My administration is also continuing to fight for American hostages who have been imprisoned overseas for their religious beliefs. Last October, we reached an agreement with Turkey to release Pastor Andrew Brunson, who is now free and joins us here this morning. Where is Andrew? He was there for a long time before I got there, and I said, "You've got to let him out." [*Laughter*] "You'd better let him out." And they let you out. [*Laughter*] It was a miracle. Right? We spent a lot of time together. Terrific man. Terrific family. Thank you very much, Andrew.

This Saturday, Pastor Brunson will walk his daughter down the aisle. Wow, that's great. [*Laughter*] Congratulations. Was I invited? I don't know. Was I invited? [*Laughter*] He said, "Yes." Thank you. [*Laughter*]

To protect the dignity and worth of every person, my administration has taken historic action to combat human trafficking. Last year, I directed the State Department to cut off development aid to nations that do not demonstrate a commitment to ending human trafficking in their own countries. And we are fighting every day to stop the tragedy of human trafficking all along our southern border.

Together, we will end the scourge of modern-day slavery that, because of the internet, is at levels that nobody can believe. The internet came along, and some good things happened. But some very bad things happened, and this is one of them.

As part of our commitment to building a just and loving society, we must build a culture that cherishes the dignity and sanctity of innocent human life. All children, born and unborn, are made in the holy image of God. [*Applause*] Thank you. Every life is sacred, and every soul is a precious gift from Heaven. As the Lord says in Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. . . . Before you were born, I set you apart."

Here with us today are Nikki and Tyler Watkinson. Our wonderful First Lady, Melania, who is right now working very hard with a group of people and saying a few words on opioids—she's very much involved; she wanted to be here so badly, but she'll be here with us next year—recently met with them and, when she visited them at Children's Hospital, was so impressed.

Last year, Nikki went into early labor during a blizzard. As she and Tyler were driving to the hospital, their son Grayson was born in the front seat. He was born 4 months premature and weighed only 1 pound and 11 ounces. But he let out little, tiny cries, and he made it to the hospital alive. Nikki and Taylor's [Tyler's]^{*} entire community began to lift up Grayson in their prayers, and to the surprise of doctors, he kept on improving, improving, improving. After 4 months in the hospital, Nikki and Tyler brought home their beautiful baby boy. Just a few weeks ago, Grayson celebrated his first birthday. He is a beautiful, happy, healthy guy.

Are they here? Where? Oh, good. Good. [*Laughter*] That's great. Beautiful. That's great. Thank you. As his mom Nikki has said, "He was put on this Earth to do big things." He may be here someday, right here. [*Laughter*] Nikki, he already has, and he will do more and more as he grows older.

^{*} White House correction.

As Jesus promises in the Bible, "Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete." We are blessed to live in a land of faith where all things are possible. Our only limits are those we place on ourselves. So true.

On Tuesday, I asked Americans to choose greatness. And everybody in that room stood and applauded. We asked for greatness—it's greatness for our country—and to renew our love and loyalty to one another, as friends, as citizens, as neighbors, as patriots, and as Americans. There could be no better way to begin this exciting national adventure than the way America has always begun our greatest adventures: by coming together in prayer.

So today, and every day, let us pray for the future of our country. Let us pray for the courage to pursue justice and the wisdom to forge peace. Let us pray for a future where every child has a warm, safe, and loving home. Let us come together for the good of our people, for the strength of our families, for the safety of our citizens, for the fulfillment of our deepest hopes and our highest potential. And let us always give thanks for the miracle of life, the majesty of creation, and the grace of Almighty God.

Thank you. It is an honor to be with you. God bless you, and God bless America. Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:23 a.m. at the Washington Hilton hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Gary Haugen, chief executive officer, International Justice Mission, who delivered the keynote address at the National Prayer Breakfast; Ofc. Timothy Matson of the Pittsburgh Police Department, who was injured in the shooting at the Tree of Life-Or L'Simcha Congregation synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA, on October 27, 2018; Long Hill, NJ, resident Grace Eline; World War II veterans Pfc. Joseph Reilly, S. Sgt. Irving Locker, and Sgt. Herman Zeitchik; Memphis, TN, resident Alice Marie Johnson, whose lifetime prison sentence was commuted by the President on June 6, 2018; Nashville, TN, resident Matthew Charles, who was released from prison on January 3; Holt, MI, residents Perry, Winnie, and Nathaniel Buck; Pittsburgh, PA, resident Judah Samet; Los Angeles, CA, resident Joshua Kaufman; Jacqueline Brunson Furnari, daughter of Andrew C. Brunson, pastor, Dirilis (Resurrection) Church in Izmir, Turkey, who was detained by Turkish authorities on October 7, 2016, and returned to U.S. custody on October 12, 2018; and Greenbackville, VA, residents Nikki and Tyler Watkinson.

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Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Acosta, R. Alexander; Azar, Alex M., II; Brunson Furnari, Jacqueline; Brunson, Andrew C.; Buck, Chad; Buck, Liza; Buck, Max; Buck, Melissa; Buck, Nathaniel; Buck, Perry; Buck, Winnie; Carr, Elan; Carson, Benjamin S., Sr.; Charles, Matthew; Coons, Christopher A.; DeVos, Elisabeth Prince; Eline, Grace; Haugen, Gary; Johnson, Alice Marie; Kaufman, Joshua; Lankford, James; Locker, Irving; Matson, Timothy; Pence, Karen; Pence, Michael R.; Perdue, George E. "Sonny"; Pompeo, Michael R.; Reilly, Joseph; Samet, Judah; Trump, Melania; Watkinson, Grayson; Watkinson, Nikki; Watkinson, Tyler; Whitaker, Matthew G.; Zeitchik, Herman.

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Services, Department : Secretary; Housing and Urban Development, Department of : Secretary; Justice, Department of : Acting Attorney General; Labor, Department of : Secretary; Law enforcement and crime : Criminal justice system, reform efforts; Law enforcement and crime : Law enforcement officers, service and dedication; Law enforcement and crime : Trafficking in persons, efforts to combat; Mexico : Border with U.S., infrastructure and security; Pennsylvania : 2018 shooting in Pittsburgh; Prayer Breakfast, National; Presidency, U.S. : State of the Union Address; State, Department of : Anti-Semitism, U.S. Special Envoy To Monitor and Combat; State, Department of : Secretary; White House Office : Vice President.

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