

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2020

Remarks at the North Carolina Opportunity Now Summit in Charlotte, North Carolina

February 7, 2020

The President. Good music. But we have to get down to business. We're in North Carolina, and they talk business.

But I want to just thank everybody for being here. Wonderful crowd. Oh, look up there. Look at all those people. Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

And thank you to Ben, a special guy. He was very tough, you know, on the campaign trail. I had to fight him for a long time. *[Laughter]* He wouldn't go away. He doesn't give up. And he's smart, and he's good. And he was a great surgeon. And, I don't know, he gave that up for politics. I'm going to have to talk to you about that. *[Laughter]* Where—where is he sitting? Where is he?

Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Benjamin S. Carson, Sr. Right behind the—*[inaudible]*.

The President. Why—they're going to talk to you about that later. *[Laughter]* Have to explain—I think he's probably regretting that. No, he's doing an incredible job. An incredible job. You really are, Ben. Housing—he's done a job like few people have done it.

But wonderful to be here with the incredible men and women who are restoring prosperity—that's what you're doing—rebuilding hope and delivering opportunity to those who need it most. Together, we're making our country stronger than ever before. And we are doing numbers that you wouldn't even believe. Nobody would have thought it was possible.

This morning, the brandnew jobs numbers came in. We smashed expectations and created 225,000 new jobs last month—225,000. They were thinking maybe 100, maybe 105. I was watching all the geniuses this morning on television. *[Laughter]* "What do you think it's going to be?" "It's going to be 110." Two twenty-five. Pretty good, right? Two hundred and twenty-five thousand for last month. That's only last month.

Unemployment claims in North Carolina are down 30 percent since the election and have fallen to their lowest level ever recorded. Pretty good. And we're here in Charlotte to expand and grow this unprecedented economic momentum that we have going all over the country. You're having the best year you've ever had in this State, by far.

Today we're launching a brandnew nationwide campaign to revitalize underserved cities and towns all across America. It's called "Opportunity Now." Opportunity Now. It's a big deal.

And you know, we did, with Tim Scott, Opportunity Zones. And they're the hottest thing you've seen. It's—the money is pouring in. Tim from South Carolina. And the money is—anybody from South Carolina here? Yes? *[Applause]* Huh? Say hello to Tim. He really did—he came to my office with this idea. And I said, "Sounds good." But those things traditionally have not worked. And Opportunity Zones are amazing, what's happened. Tremendous amounts of money being put into areas that hadn't seen money for decades and decades.

Anyway, so what we're doing is because we aren't waiting for tomorrow and we aren't deferring people's dreams to another day. With relentless optimism, we're taking action right now—and I mean right now—to create a future of dignity and security for all. It's going to be an incredible situation. You'll see it. And we believe in no American left behind. That's what it's all about. No American left behind.

In the coming months, my administration will hold summits, just like this one, in cities across the country, working closely with community leaders, workers, entrepreneurs, employers, and faith leaders. Our great faith leaders. So many great people I've met. You know, we got rid of the Johnson Amendment so they can speak their will. Right? Right?

To make sure that every citizen can join in America's unparalleled success and every community can take part in America's extraordinary rise, together we're building the most inclusive economy and the most inclusive society ever to exist. We're fighting for great jobs, great education, safe homes, and a limitless future for our people. We're lifting high citizens of every race, religion, color, and creed. We are all Americans, and we are all made equal by the hand of Almighty God. You know that very well.

Joining us today is Small Business Administrator Jovita Carranza, who is helping to lead this groundbreaking effort, along with Secretary Carson. Jovita? Where is Jovita? Jovita. Good. Thank you, Jovita. Great job.

Thanks also to the many great Members of Congress that you have with us. And these are warriors. These aren't like—these people have been fighting hard. Do you mind if I take—am I allowed to take a couple of seconds and introduce them?

I call them "warriors"—Senators and Congress men and women. But they've been incredible. You saw what happened. It was the impeachment hoax. And now that's a thing of the past. So now they have a failed impeachment hoax. They can put that on their résumé. *[Laughter]* That doesn't go good on a résumé, right? That's a failed hoax. Everybody—every one of them have to put it right on that résumé. *[Laughter]*

It was a fix. Except, when it got up to Congress, we had 197 to nothing. Our Republicans hung in, and our Senators were incredible. They were really incredible. Same kind of a thing.

And a man is here who's really become a friend over the last year and a half. And we had a good relationship, but we sort of disagreed on a couple of minor policies, and that's okay. Of course, I won't put up with it for long, Thom Tillis. *[Laughter]* He's been a great friend. *[Applause]* Stand up. It's great.

It's true. No, we had—we just had some disagreements at the beginning. And now, at the last year, year and a half—boy, it's been good. Right? It's been good. And you have something on sanctuary cities that's going to be incredible. It got one of the big hands. Did—I know nobody listened to the speech the other night, but it got one of the big hands. It's going to be good. We've got to push that, right? So, Thom, thank you. And thank you for your support. It was great, your vote and everything else.

And we have some Congressmen. I've gotten to know them well. It's like we're—we were in the trenches together. Representative Ted Budd. Ted. Thanks, Ted. Great job.

A man I campaigned with, and he was fantastic. He handled pressure very well. They said you couldn't win, and he won by a lot. We did a little bit of a rally for two guys that are very special. One of them is Dan Bishop. Dan? Thank you, Dan. He campaigned, and he didn't choke. There was no choke. He had a lot of pressure, but he ended up—won by like 5 or 6 points. Wasn't—it was, like, boring that evening. You were winning by too much. *[Laughter]* I thought it was going to be a lot closer than that, right?

Richard Hudson, another one. Great. Richard, great. Great job. Everybody knows Mark Walker. Thanks, Mark.

Another one of those two that I talked about recently—you know, CNN and they all had their vans. They were all ready, because they thought we'd have two losses, and they'd go out and say, "Trump had a terrible night." But they both won. *[Laughter]* And this guy—it was pretty

even, and I think he won by 28 points, right? It was like—Greg Murphy. Right, Greg? He won by a lot. They both won by a lot.

A man that I've gotten to know too well. *[Laughter]* I love his wife. I mean, his wife—she was with me before he was with me, I have to say it. *[Laughter]* But he came along very quickly. A long time ago, right? And she would go out with Women for Trump, the buses. You have buses all over the place, right? Deb. Where is she? Where's our Deb?

Representative Mark R. Meadows. She's not here, but they're at the Women for Trump.

Audience member. At the Women for Trump.

The President. Oh, they're—well, I know them, because they followed me around a little bit, right? They are incredible. They are incredible. How many of you come to—how many rallies have you—this isn't a rally, you know. This is a serious deal. How many rallies, would you say, because I'll—

Audience member. *[Inaudible]*

The President. A lot.

Audience member. *[Inaudible]*

The President. *[Laughter]* And we have a lot of fun. Thank you very much, hon.

Mark Meadows, everybody. Mark. Great guy.

A man who has, without question, the greatest name in politics. *[Laughter]* I said, "If I had his name, I would have been President at least 10 years sooner." Patrick McHenry. Right? Best name in politics. A woman who's much tougher than any of these people. *[Laughter]* She doesn't stop, right, Mark? She doesn't stop. But she's great. We love her. Virginia Foxx.

A very popular guy who wins elections by a lot. He's a tremendous asset to Congress and a tremendous friend. Ralph Norman. Ralph. Thank you, Ralph. We call him "Landslide Ralph" because he wins by a lot. William Timmons. William. Thank you. Great job. Great job.

And a man whose son I probably like even more than him. *[Laughter]* Alan. What a job Alan has done. Joe Wilson is tough and smart, and he is there all the time. And his son is just like him. His son is better than him, I think. Right? And he doesn't mind. You know, I have a lot of fathers that they don't like it when I say that. I've had some: "Please don't say that my son is better." I say, "You're not a good father." *[Laughter]* He's a great father, and he's proud of his son. His son is fantastic and he's fantastic. And thank you very much. Thanks, Joe.

So we're honored to be joined by North Carolina Lieutenant Governor Dan Forest, who's—*[applause]*. Big future. Big future. You've got to get rid of the sanctuary city, Dan. You going to be able to do that? Huh? I think. Right? A lot of people want to get rid of them. Plenty of people in California want to get rid of them, believe me. It's something.

And we have many other State and local leaders from all across North Carolina. We're thrilled to have you all here. And you're the ones that really know best. And we are; we're spending a lot of time in this State. We'll be coming here.

Louis is around someplace. Where is Louis? Louis DeJoy. Thank you very much. And I appreciate it. We'll be coming here a lot. And we're way up in the polls. But do you know what I say? I pretend one point down everywhere. Somebody said, "How are you doing?" I said, "We're one point down everywhere." *[Laughter]* But we're way up. That's what they tell me. Way up in North Carolina. Way up in South Carolina. Way, way up in South Carolina, Ralph. *[Applause]* Huh? Way, way up.

So anyway—so we just assume—that's always good. I always say, "Pretend you're 1 point down." That way you work your ass off, right? *[Laughter]* We have to do that because this is the most important election coming up. This election is—I used to say the other and the other. You know, the other is the other—2016 was incredible.

But you see what's going on. You see what's happening on the other side. They want to take everything away. They want to destroy everything we've built. We've got the most successful country in our history. They want to take it away. Not going to happen. It's not going to happen.

As I said in my State of the Union Address earlier this week, our Nation is in the midst of the single greatest comeback that we've ever had. This is a comeback. We were doing poorly.

You know, if you remember, it goes all the way back—for years, I heard that China will take over as the largest economy in the world in 2019. I kept hearing that. I hated it, because I said, "If I run, 2019 is not so far away." We are so far ahead. We are so far ahead now. We became a rocket ship, taking in billions and billions and billions in tariffs, giving a lot of it to our farmers and different people that were targeted.

Now we have a deal with China. I just spoke to President Xi last night, and you know, we're working on the problem, the virus. It's a very tough situation. But I think he's going to handle it. I think he's handled it really well. We're helping wherever we can.

But we have a great relationship. It's incredible. They respect us again. They didn't even respect us. What they were doing to us; they didn't even respect us. They respect us again, and we respect them.

And we think—I think we have the best relationship we've had with China. But it's really incredible. So we signed the deal. We signed the Mexico deal and Canada deal—USMCA. Signed a deal with Japan, \$40 billion coming in. Signed a deal with South Korea, which had a terrible deal. That was a deal made by Crooked Hillary Clinton. She said, "250,000 jobs this will produce." "It's going to produce 250,000 jobs." And she was right—for them. *[Laughter]* They got 250,000 jobs. She never said that. She said "250,000 jobs." Anyway, we changed it around. We said, "Sorry about that, but we're changing this deal around." *[Laughter]*

For decades, Washington politicians put special interests ahead of American interests. They enacted disaster trade—really, and I mean disastrous trade policies. Like, it's unimaginable, frankly. I looked at some of these deals; I said: "Who the hell would have done this? Who would have done this? A child wouldn't have agreed to this stuff." *[Laughter]* Unbelievable.

And we're still here. You know, it's pretty incredible when you think of it. But I don't know that we would have been for long. So we changed them around.

But the trade policies that shuttered our factories, gutted our communities, and shipped millions and millions and millions of jobs overseas and to other places—they spend trillions of dollars in the Middle East, but they allowed our own cities to crumble in total disrepair. You have a road. You have a bridge. You have a school. We'd build schools in Afghanistan; they'd blow it up. We'd rebuild it; they'd blow it up. We'd rebuild it. But if a school in South Carolina needed money, if a school in North Carolina needed money, if a school in Florida—or any of the places—you know, right here in North, you can't get money. But we get you the money. We get you the money.

But they've spent almost \$8 trillion now in the Middle East. Terrible. Terrible thing. But we're doing tremendous work, and a lot of our soldiers are coming back home. You see it. You see what's happening: They're all coming back. They weren't meant to be law enforcement. They weren't meant to be law enforcement; they're meant to be soldiers, you know. And we love our law enforcement, but we didn't put the soldiers over there to be law enforcement.

And they imposed crushing government burdens that punished working-class Americans of all backgrounds, but not anymore. Those days have changed, and they've changed very quickly, and more so than you're even hearing about.

After years of building up other countries, we are finally building our country. From our inner cities to rural communities all over the land, the forgotten men and women of America are forgotten no longer, because we are finally putting America first. It took a long time. A long time. A long time.

Our economy is now the envy of the entire world. It's—you have to see when leaders come to my office—this beautiful Oval Office. I've had people walk into the office—it's beautiful—but they have more beautiful, in many cases, I guess. But it's what it represents.

They walk in—powerful people, big people—and you see them crying. I've seen heads of corporation walk in: "Have you ever seen the Oval Office?" "No, I haven't." "How many times have you been in the White House?" "Fifty-one times," they've said—the head of a big car company. "Fifty-one times." "Huh. Have you ever seen the Oval Office?" "No." "They never took me in." "I'll take you in." I like showing it, right? "I'll take you in."

And you see them start to cry. Tough people. They haven't cried since they were a baby. Some of them never cried at all, even when they were a baby—[laughter]—and they start to cry when they walk into the Oval Office. Pretty amazing.

Since my election, America has gained 7 million brandnew jobs, including 220,000 brand, brand, beautiful, new jobs in a place called North Carolina. Isn't that great? Great State. New business applications in North Carolina have surged by 30 percent.

African American workers have gained 1.3 million jobs. For the first time ever—[applause]—think of this: For the first time ever, most new hires—that's new jobs—are minorities and women. Think of that. First time ever.

The unemployment rate has just hit—and has been for a little while—but has just hit the lowest in over 50 years. The average unemployment rate under my administration is lower than any previous administration in the history of our country. Think of that: the average rate. The average rate.

And you've heard me say this many times, but I keep saying it, because I think people are really getting it and understanding what's going on. This has been an incredible thing. African American unemployment, Hispanic American unemployment, Asian American unemployment have all reached the lowest levels in the history of our country. I say it, because, you know—[applause].

Very importantly, African American youth unemployment has reached its lowest level ever recorded. African American poverty has plummeted to the lowest rate ever recorded. The best numbers we've ever had.

Remember, I used to say, "What do you have to lose?" I was in a room, and it started, and I'm reading off economic numbers—the worst crime numbers, worst housing ownership numbers, worst everything. It just—worst education. Worst everything. I think there were 9 or 10 different very major factors—African American.

I said, "You've been with the Democrats for 100 years"—112 to be exact. But for 100 years—over 100 years—and they treat you badly, and they only come around 2 months before the election. And then, right after the election, they say: "Bye-bye. We'll see you in 2 years or 4 years." Right? But they come around, and they work real hard. They want your vote. And then, the day after the election, they're gone. That's the Democrats.

And I said—all these bad numbers—"What the hell do you have to lose?" I say it two ways: When I have a very sophisticated, tough group like this, I say, "What the hell do you have to lose?" [Laughter] And when I have a very kind group—I know too many of the people in this whole place; not so kind. But I say, "What do you have to lose?" It's very much less effective when I say it that way. [Laughter] When I go, "What do you have to lose?" It's, like, let's fall asleep. [Laughter] But when I say—but I remember I said it this night; I said, "What"—it was 25,000 people. I said, "What the hell do you have to lose?" The place went crazy.

Then, I went offstage and my people told me: "I don't know. That's not nice." I said, "No, it's true." [Laughter] "It's true. What do they have to lose?" Right? They didn't like it. They didn't like it. That's why they're all looking for jobs. We didn't take that one—[laughter].

But I said, "No, we've got to get the point across." And we did well in the election. But now we're doing numbers that I think maybe no Republican has done. We're doing numbers—let's see if that has to carry. November 3d—we have to go to November 3d. But the numbers have been incredible.

And thank you for putting on that beautiful hat. I love that hat. But thank you, man.

But it's incredible. What you're seeing now is incredible. It's a renaissance for African American, but for Asian American, for women, for everybody. Workers without a high school diploma have achieved the lowest unemployment rate ever recorded in history. Think of that: There's a lot of people. They don't have a diploma. They didn't go to high school. They went to high school; they didn't graduate, let's say. And now they're doing well.

Low-income workers have seen a 16-percent increase since my election. That's in wages. That's a record. This is a blue-collar boom. Wages for African American workers have increased by \$2,400 per year. That's a record. Since my election, the net worth of the bottom half of wage earners has increased by 47 percent. That's three times faster than the increase for the top 1 percent.

Larry Kudlow left; he said, "Please, please, read this." I say, "Who the hell is going to know what it means?" But you know what it means? It means that people that are really working hard, that aren't doing so well—haven't done well—are doing proportionately better than people that are doing very well. It's great.

Median household income reached the highest level ever recorded. Think of that one: median household income. And think of it: President Bush, for 8 years, it's \$450. President Obama, for 8 years, it's \$975. President Trump—and really, when they did this stat, it was 2½ now we're at the 3—we're a little over 3. Can you believe how fast we're going? See? We'll keep the rallies going, don't worry. Even if we win—[applause]—even when we win next time, we'll do rallies, okay?

But no, think of it: So you have \$450, you have \$975, and now you have 2½—but let's say 3 years instead of 8 years. So it's 8, 8, and 3. And with us, when you add the tax cuts and we add the regulation cuts, it's close to \$10,000. And that's in a short period of time. That's what's fueling the boom. That's what's fueling the stock market. That's why other countries aren't doing well and we are.

And incredibly, according to the Gallup poll—no friend of mine; they tend to be slightly left of center, like, about 200 degrees—[laughter]—90 percent of Americans say they are satisfied with their personal life. The highest percentage ever. I wonder what their definition of "personal life" is. I don't know. [Laughter]

That's a strange poll. I've never heard of a poll like that: "Are you happy with your personal life?" Is everyone here happy with their personal life? I know Mark Meadows is. [Laughter] No,

it's a strange poll. I'm trying to—give me a definition of—there's a lot of definitions you could get there. [Laughter]

To lift up underserved communities across the Nation, our tax cuts created nearly 9,000 Opportunity Zones—again, Tim Scott—including more than 250 right here in North Carolina. So that's something. Two hundred and fifty in North Carolina.

Long-term investment in these communities is now taxed at zero. These deserving communities have not known opportunity in a long time, but now the investments are flooding in, creating energy and creating excitement like they haven't seen for a long time.

One of the Americans benefiting from this gusher of new investment is a man who became very famous the other night because I introduced him during the State of the Union: Army veteran Tony Rankins of Cincinnati, Ohio. Good place. I had a summer job in Cincinnati. I worked in Cincinnati one summer. I did a good job. I did a good job. I love Cincinnati, the Queen City. I love Cincinnati.

After struggling with drug addiction, Tony lost his job, his house, his family. And he was homeless. He lost everything. But then, Tony found a construction company that does work in Opportunity Zones. And the company saw Tony's great skill and talent. It helped him lift himself out of homelessness, break free of addiction, and—these are great people—and they trained him for the new job. He didn't need that much training either.

Tony is now a top carpenter who renovates historic buildings in Cincinnati. He's drug free, and he has reunited with his family. And, Tony, I'd love to have you come up and say a few words. Please, Tony. Tony Rankins.

Cincinnati, OH, resident Tony Rankins. Thank you. Thank you. I'm not a public speaker, so bear with me. [Laughter]

First of all, I would like thank the President for signing this bill, because without it, I wouldn't be standing here before you right now. It means a lot to me, and I know it means a lot to the people that we're going to help.

I was homeless. And due to that fact, I know how it feels, and I know that sometimes when you're down, you don't feel like getting up. But with this bill that has been passed, it's going to give opportunity for a lot of people to not be homeless and to get back on their feet and go back with their families. And obviously, I would like to thank the President of the United States for doing this.

The President. A lot of love. The fact is, he became very famous. [Laughter] So he'll leave his job as a carpenter, he'll go to California and become a movie star now. You know? [Laughter] You never know.

Good. Tony, thanks a lot. They really did. And they loved you the other night.

Mr. Rankins. Thank you.

The President. Sat right next to my daughter Ivanka. And great. Really great.

The construction business is where Tony is employed and working to help 200 people rise out of homelessness every year by investing in the Opportunity Zones. And now they're coming to North Carolina to build housing for veterans in an Opportunity Zone right here in Charlotte. And I want to thank their founder and ask their founder, Travis Steffens, to please come up and say a few words.

Please, Travis. Thank you, Travis. You know, Tony got a much bigger hand than the boss, right? Much bigger.

R Investments Founder and Chief Executive Officer Travis Steffens. Thank you all for investing your time to be here today. It's awesome. Thank you for loving on Tony. Tony, thank you for being the man that you are.

Mr. Rankins. Thank you, Travis.

Mr. Steffens. And, Mr. President, thank you for passing this incredible bill. We're all here to celebrate Opportunity Zones, and I—being part of the private sector, I just really want to implore all of us to pull together for the opportunity that we have to reunite this country through this bill. We have been working in Opportunity Zones for 14 years, and over that time, that's when we fell in love with being able to help the people in these areas. And all of us having the opportunity to take advantage of these long-term investments, which is what's going to really make the difference, is really where it's at.

And so this bill is really well thought through, with this 10-year enactment. And being able to have that amount of focus on these areas is really what's going to be impactful. And understanding that putting the people first, the money will come later—I guarantee it, and we're proof of that. So—[*applause*]. So we've helped hundreds of people like Tony, and you guys can do the exact same thing. So we'd love to share our model. We'd love to explore with you. We have an awesome algorithm. And it's not proprietary. We'd love to help this expand across the country.

The President. How did he do, Tony? Okay? Did okay? He did good, right?

Mr. Rankins. He did okay. [*Laughter*]

The President. You did better. [*Laughter*] He did better. Thank you very much.

And thank you, Travis. And it's 200 people, I think, Travis. So that's tremendous. Two hundred. And you'll be up to a lot more than that.

To further support Opportunity Zones, I established the White House Opportunity and the Revitalization Council, chaired by Secretary Carson. Ben has worked very hard on it, really hard. Its mission is to marshal 17 Federal agencies and coordinate dozens of existing Federal programs to provide maximum support to Opportunity Zones.

Under my administration, we are working every day to restore the American promise of upward mobility. We don't want anyone to just get by. We want everyone to get ahead and get ahead, big league.

From the day I took office, I have been working to build an unlimited future for African American communities who have given, served, and sacrificed so much for our Nation. Tremendous, tremendous amount. I have been fighting for higher wages, fair trade deals, safe communities, affordable health care, lower drug prices. This year—meaning last year's numbers just came in. First time in 51 years where drug prices, prescription drugs went down. First time in 51 years. And frankly, if the Democrats would ever negotiate, instead of wasting all their time, we could get—we could drive those prices down so low. It would be so beautiful. I mean, what's not to like?

But we're fighting for school choice and also criminal justice reform. You know, we got that done. Criminal justice reform—big thing—we got it done. I will not rest, I will not stop, I will not give up until we have delivered equal and abundant opportunity for every community in our land. We are not interested—[*applause*]—it's true.

No, we are not interested in business as usual, we're not interested in continuing yesterday's failures, of which there were many, or the old ways of doing things. We want to disrupt what's broken. I want to really disrupt this place, because none of the other stuff worked.

When you look at the Opportunity Zones—how successful they've been. We're doing things that are just really incredible. Now, the economy is helping, I guess, and a lot of things are happening. A lot of good things are happening. But so many people are benefiting.

We want to challenge what's failed and focus on delivering real results, improving real lives, and making the world a better place for every American child, no matter their place of birth or ZIP Code or residence, no matter where they live, no matter where they come from.

Our commitment to Opportunity Now includes those who have been released from prison. This is the first time where prisoners are coming out and getting jobs and not having to go back. The percentage is unbelievably different. To give former prisoners the chance for a fresh start, last year I was proud to sign the landmark criminal justice reform into law. It took a lot of work. It was a very tough one. And they've been trying to get it for a long time. And other administrations couldn't get it; we got it done. We get things done. America is a nation that believes in redemption.

People were in jail. You know Alice Johnson. She spent 22 years in jail. She has 18 or 20 left for something no good, but not—it's not a 40- or 50-year sentence. And she's an incredible woman. You probably saw the ad we took at the Super Bowl. And—[*applause*]—I had another ad. We had two of them. And the first one was going to go in that spot. That was the best spot. That was right after the first timeout. [*Laughter*] And this was one with jets and aircraft carriers and missiles all over the place. It was exciting; it was great.

And I was all—I thought this was going to be just great. And then, we had the Alice Johnson ad. So we played the first one. And I have one guy in particular whose a tremendously talented person. And everybody just assumed, you know, the missiles and the planes, that was going to be the ad. And then, we'll put Alice back a little further, frankly, and not in as good—you have two spots. You can get one great spot, one not-so-great spot.

This guy comes in, looks at both ads. He says, "The Alice Johnson ad is unbelievable." "I said, "What about the aircraft carriers?" [*Laughter*] He says: "Fine. But you know, I've seen them before." [*Laughter*] "You do them all the time actually, right?" And as soon as he said that, I realized—and—and everybody is talking about that ad.

Alice is a tremendous woman, tremendous person. And I said, "How many other women do you know in prison like that, Alice?" She said, "Many." I said, "Now, do you know some that can't come out?" "Absolutely." Because I wanted to hear that too, because that is true also. But I said, "How many?" She said, "Many." I said: "Get me their names. Just get me their names." She knows. She's in there a long time; 22 years, she spent.

Our roaring economy has, for the first time ever, given many former prisoners the ability to go out and get a great job. We've also made it a priority to encourage businesses to expand second-chance hiring practices. When my administration says "Hire American," we mean all Americans, every American.

To help former inmates find housing, jobs, and support, my administration has established the Council on Crime Prevention and Reentry. A very big deal. Today I am proud to announce that I am appointing Tony Lowden, pastor of Maranatha Baptist Church—where's Tony?—in Georgia.

Tony? Where is Tony? Come on, Tony. And Tony is going to be our Executive Director. Tony, tell us a little about your work, please.

Federal Interagency Council on Crime Prevention and Improving Reentry Executive Director Tony Lowden. To God be the glory. I truly want to thank our President from the bottom of my heart for signing this legislation. Too many of our men and women are ending up in our

prisons and coming home with nothing to get back on their feet to. Too many of our children are ending up in our prisons. Too many of our people who are living with mental illness are finding themselves in our prisons. And here is one for you: Too many of our soldiers come home with Old Glory on their shoulders, end up in our prisons. And we are better than that.

And so, with this legislation that the President signed, now is the time to take this opportunity, rebuild our communities, and if you learned how to cut hair and cut grass and be an entrepreneur in prison, we're going to give you a second chance, and we're going to make sure you come home with your driver's license, your ID, and your birth certificate so you can get back on your feet and be reunited with your family. Now is the time.

So, with that, I encourage our faith-based organizations and our clergy, our businesses, our Chamber of Commerce, and all our legislators, now is the time to get together and get behind this President. Thank you.

The President. Wow. He's done that before. He's some pastor; that's what the word is. Now I understand. [Laughter] We're grateful to you, Pastor. Thank you very much. All of our country's African American churches have done such an incredible job. Everything they do, they really raise the spirit of our people and lift up the conscience of our Nation, and we really appreciate you being here. That was beautiful. Thank you very much.

My administration will always defend the cherished legacy and vital contributions of our African American churches. They are so vital, so important.

To make the most of America's boundless opportunities, every American child deserves a great education. Yet, for too long, countless American children have been trapped in poorly performing schools. That's why it's one of those things I talked about in the State of the Union Address. I highlighted the story of Janiyah Davis, a fourth grader from Philadelphia who was on the waitlist for a school choice Education Freedom Scholarship in Pennsylvania, along with 50,000 other Pennsylvania students.

We got Janiyah her second—really, you call it a sort of a second chance. But we got her the school choice scholarship that she so desperately wanted with her mother. Her mother is terrific. And now I want to ask Congress to pass legislation that would extend the same opportunity to 1 million American children, including 40,000 students right here in this incredible State, this incredible place. [Applause] Thank you. Thank you.

School choice. We all like school choice, right? Every child has the right to attend a great school. That's what it is: They have a right. So it's catching on like people wouldn't believe. In my State of the Union, I also asked Congress to support my plan to offer vocational and technical education at every single high school in America. We must be training our children so they have the skills to score well-paying jobs—sometimes better paying than if they did it the traditional way.

You know, when I was growing up, we had a lot of vocational schools, and they'd teach auto mechanics, and they'd teach bricklaying, and they'd teach all these great professions that make a lot of money. And I'd be in school with people, and they didn't love doing the traditional academics, but they could fix a car or an engine, a motor. They could fix it blindfolded. They were unbelievably talented. They also liked doing it. That's what they wanted to do.

And we don't really have that anymore. We call them "junior colleges." And maybe that's good, but I think the vocational school concept is what we really have to look at. They have tremendous talent. I'll never forget it. Tremendous talent.

Just—I sat next to one very young person at the time—just that's what he loved. That's what he wanted to do. Had no interest in what we were doing. It just—none. And I had no interest in

what he was doing, you want to know the truth. [Laughter] But he was unbelievable; he could fix anything. And that's—you know, that's that you have to do. You have to go with the aptitude, in addition to everything else. And they have tremendous aptitude, but there's no place. And so we're going to go with a vocational school system, where they can go out, actually make more money, and have something they really want to do.

My administration is determined to give our citizens the opportunities they need, regardless of age or background. Through our Pledge to America's Workers, spearheaded by a young woman that perhaps some of you may have heard of, Ivanka Trump, over 415 companies have committed—these are the big companies, for the most part—have committed to providing new jobs and training opportunities to nearly 15 million Americans.

You know, when she started, she said, "Daddy, I want to help people get jobs." This was at the beginning of the administration. She said, "I'm working on 500,000 jobs." So she'd call Walmart. She called all these great companies. So she had a goal of 500,000, half a million jobs. Sounds like a lot. I said, "That's a lot." She just broke 15 million jobs. Amazing. Fifteen million.

And they're not trained by government. Government can't train them. Look at what happened. I mean—[laughter]—look at—I love the State of Iowa. We just did very well in Iowa, by the way. We set a record, but nobody talks about that. What they do talk about—the fact is, the Democrats don't know what the hell they're doing. [Laughter] It's true.

Mark just got back. You know, I'm watching—because you have to see these campaigns. You know, they'll spend twenty, twenty-five million dollars, let's say, on average, but it's really more than that. And they go out, they work, and they work. They've been campaigning there for weeks. They even had to leave the impeachment hearing. [Laughter] I said: "Keep them here. You'll get a real fast settlement." But they couldn't do it. [Laughter]

But they go out, and they work, and they spend tens—I mean, just millions—hundreds of millions of dollars. And the only thing they didn't check: to see whether or not the app worked. [Laughter] It didn't; it fried all votes. They're all fried.

Audience member. We love you!

The President. So now you have about—[applause]—now you have all these people fighting. "And I was first." "No, I was first." They're taking samples. They're doing the vote by sample. "We got 2 percent of the vote. Let's see. Who won?" [Laughter]

And it turned out to be Pete Buttigieg, whoever the hell that is. Mayor Pete. [Laughter] Mayor Pete. Explain that one to me. Someday, you're going to explain that one to me, right? [Laughter] Right? You. You people. [Laughter]

No, did you ever see anything so crazy? They can't count simple votes, but they want to fix your health care system. [Laughter] No, think of it. Remember the Obamacare—right?

Audience members. Boo!

The President. Remember? It was going to cost \$5 million. It cost 15—no, \$5 billion, right? Five billion. It still didn't work. It still didn't work.

But they have something going on in Iowa that's sad actually, if you want to know—it's embarrassing. Although, I'm not overly embarrassed by it. [Laughter]

I see these shows this morning, they're saying: "Oh, this is a disaster. Trump is going to kill us on this one." They're right. [Laughter] They're right. All that time. All that time. All that time.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Thank you very much. Now, if you want to drive them crazy, go, "12 more years, 16 more years." [Laughter] "Sixteen more years." No, it will drive them crazy. Look at all the fake news back there. [Laughter]

To expand equal opportunity, I'm also proud to report that my administration has achieved record and permanent funding—this is so important—every year—Historically Black Colleges and Universities. For 3 years, though, they'd come and see me, "We need money." And after 2 years, I'd say: "How come they come back all the time? That's not nice. That's not respectful of them." No, really, I really mean it. You understand, right? It's not respectful. They come back every year. They give them 1 year, the Democrats. They give them a 1 year, and then you're supposed to come back, hat in hand.

And what I did—I won't get any credit for it; they'll take the credit. But you know, it's one of those things. That happens all the time. Criminal justice reform.

Audience member. I give you credit!

The President. Thank you! [Applause] Thank you. That is nice. I think so. I think we're getting—look, hey, we are in the Oval Office; I guess something happened, right? [Laughter]

But it is true with criminal justice reform. They couldn't get it. Nobody could get it. And a group of people, including Van Jones and others, came to the Oval Office. They came with Jared Kushner—smart kid, smart guy. And they came to the Oval Office, and they said: "We can't get it. We need help." I said, "Who do you need help with?" "Some very tough Senators like Thom." [Laughter]

No, they need help with some very tough people that are Senators. They needed to get over the line. They needed numerous Senators—Republican Senators—that weren't so inclined. We had some that absolutely, right from the beginning—Ted Cruz, right from the beginning. Mike Lee—very conservative—right from the beginning. But they needed hope. There was no way they could—it was dead.

So they came to see me—a group of people headed by Van Jones—and they asked me for help. And I called, like, six people. And I got them—I explained it quickly, and I got them to support it. And it got passed. And you had another side that, you know, didn't necessarily like it. But people are starting to like it now a lot, because it's fair. It's just fair.

And some States have done it. Texas has done it, and Kentucky has done it—States that are known as being pretty tough on law and order.

So I got it done, and about a week later, I saw Van Jones making a speech. And he was thanking everybody. I call my wife; I say: "Darling, come. I'm so proud of this. Come in, I'm sure he's going to say nice things." [Laughter] He never mentioned my name. [Laughter] "I want to thank the Reverend Al Sharpton." Al Sharpton? I didn't even know he was involved. [Laughter] "I want to thank"—people that I never even heard of. He was thanking people; he never mentioned my name.

So I had somebody call him and say, just—"You don't have to do that, but—if it's so tough. Not fair. But you know, you should do it." He apologized. He said he made a mistake. But it could have never gotten done without me.

And sometimes, you know, in life—and you have to do this—if you're not going to get credit, you might as well take it yourself, because you're the only one that's going to give it. [Laughter] It's true. It's true. Right? Might as well. You might as well take it yourself—[laughter]—because they're not going to give it to you. [Laughter]

So we're very proud of it. But this was another one: Historically Black Colleges and Universities. And I said, "It's not fair." So we put them down, as you know. Right? We put them down where they have long-term—they don't have to come back every year and beg. They don't have to come back and beg every year, right? You were one of the guys; you mentioned it to me. It was just unfair.

And these are great schools. These are schools that—I mean, that do a phenomenal job. If we didn't have those schools, it would be terrible. So now they have a long-term deal. They've got the money. And they can focus on education, right?

And most importantly, we're going to ensure that the HBCUs will always be an important part of our educational system, because we were going to lose a lot of them. They couldn't do this. They just couldn't do it.

They were hiring consultants—you know, wise guys, right? Real wise guys. They were hiring "consultants," I call it—[laughter]—who get percentages, who get a lot of money to go to Washington and lobby and work and this and that. And a lot of the percentage of the time spent was on spending and seeing Congressmen, seeing Senators, seeing people. And I said, "We can't do that." And these consultants would say, "Hey, you've got to give us something that paid the consultants." It's just a waste of money. They didn't do anything. I never spoke to a consultant about what we're talking about. Right?

So we have it. You're done for a long term, and that's the way it's going to be. And we might as well let you have it, but I'm very proud of that one. Thank you.

Previously, Federal law also restricted more than 40 faith-based HBCUs and seminaries from fully accessing Federal support, but my administration has stopped the Federal Government from discriminating against faith-based HBCUs. And some of the best of them are faith-based. [Applause] Do you know that? Some of the best are faith-based. That's a whole thing going on. It's no good; we can't do that.

As part of our relentless campaign to make life better for working families, I've asked Congress to pass legislation extending family leave to new parents nationwide so that every parent can spend critical time with their newborn or newly adopted child. And we've also overseen historic funding increases for high-quality childcare, enabling States to help more children, many of which have reduced or eliminated their waitlists altogether. We had tremendous waitlists, and those lists are way down.

At the heart of our economic agenda is the conviction that for America to truly prosper, all of our communities must share in the gains. We are making big gains, and they have to share.

Together, we're bringing opportunity back to the places that need it most. We're honoring the allegiance to the hard-working men and women whose faith, love, sweat, and sacrifice make our country run. We are restoring the bonds of loyalty that unite us as Americans.

No matter your party, no matter your politics, we are fighting to deliver freedom, justice, and equality to every man, woman, and child in our land. We are fighting to bring opportunity, dignity, and hope to every block and every neighborhood, all throughout this magnificent nation. And it is indeed a magnificent nation.

Audience members. U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you.

With the help of everyone here today, we are restoring the American Dream for the American family. We are giving a voice to those who were voiceless and hope to those who felt hopeless. No part of this country will ever again be ignored, neglected, overlooked, or abandoned.

We are all united by a shared home, a shared destiny, and a shared devotion to our fellow citizens.

We love our country. We are one American family——

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. Thank you, darling. I love you too. [Laughter] She blew my best line, but—would you stand up, please? [Laughter] Where are you? I think you're great. I love you too. Thank you very much.

I was all set to really hit it, but I like that better. But we're one American family. We rise together, we thrive together, and we win together.

And thank you very much to all those for your work, your drive, your commitment, your patriotism, your love for this nation. Our future has never been brighter. And, my fellow Americans, the best is yet to come.

God bless you. Thank you, North Carolina. Thank you very much. God bless you all. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:51 p.m. at the Central Piedmont Community College. In his remarks, he referred to Sen. Timothy E. Scott; South Carolina State Attorney General Alan M. Wilson; Louis DeJoy, national finance chairman, Republican National Convention Charlotte 2020 Host Committee; former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton; National Economic Council Director Lawrence A. Kudlow; Adviser to the President Ivanka M. Trump; Memphis, TN, resident Alice Marie Johnson, whose lifetime prison sentence was commuted by the President on June 6, 2018; Philadelphia, PA, resident Stephanie Davis; 2020 Democratic Presidential candidate former Mayor Peter P.M. Buttigieg of South Bend, IN; Van Jones, host, CNN's "The Van Jones Show," in his capacity as president and cofounder of the #cut50 criminal justice reform advocacy organization; White House Senior Adviser Jared C. Kushner; and political activist Rev. Alfred C. Sharpton, Jr.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : North Carolina Opportunity Now Summit in Charlotte, NC.

Locations: Charlotte, NC.

Names: Bishop, Dan; Budd, Theodore P.; Bush, George W.; Buttigieg, Peter P.M.; Carranza, Jovita; Carson, Benjamin S., Sr.; Clinton, Hillary Rodham; Cruz, R. Edward "Ted"; Davis, Janiyah; Davis, Stephanie; DeJoy, Louis; Forest, Dan; Foxx, Virginia A.; Hudson, Richard L., Jr.; Johnson, Alice Marie; Jones, Van; Kudlow, Lawrence A.; Kushner, Jared C.; Lee, Michael S.; Lowden, Tony; McHenry, Patrick T.; Meadows, Debbie; Meadows, Mark R.; Murphy, Greg; Norman, Ralph W., Jr.; Obama, Barack; Rankins, Tony; Scott, Timothy E.; Sharpton, Alfred C., Jr.; Steffens, Travis; Tillis, Thomas R.; Timmons, William R., IV; Trump, Ivanka M.; Trump, Melania; Walker, B. Mark; Wilson, Addison G. "Joe"; Wilson, Alan G.; Xi Jinping.

Subjects: Children and youth : Childcare, affordability and costs; China : Coronavirus outbreak; China : President; China : Relations with U.S.; China : Trade agreement with U.S.; Civil rights : Freedom of religion; Commerce, international : Free and fair trade; Congress : Senate : Impeachment vote; Crime Prevention and Improving Reentry, Federal Interagency Council on; Economy, national : Household income and wages; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Postsecondary education :: Community colleges; Education : Postsecondary education :: Federal assistance; Education : Postsecondary education :: Historically Black Colleges and Universities; Education : School choice and voucher programs; Education : Vocational and technical education programs; Elections : 2020 Presidential and

congressional elections; Elections : Voter participation; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job training and assistance programs; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment rate; Government organization and employees : Federal regulations, review; Health and Human Services, Department of : Secretary; Health and medical care : Health insurance exchanges; Housing : Homelessness; Housing and Urban Development, Department of : Secretary; Immigration and naturalization : Illegal immigration; Labor issues : Paid family and sick leave; Law enforcement and crime : Criminal justice system, reform efforts; North Carolina : Lieutenant Governor; North Carolina : President's visit; Presidency, U.S. : State of the Union Address; Small Business Administration; Taxation : Tax Code, reform; Taxation : Tax relief; Terrorism : Counterterrorism efforts; Veterans : Homelessness; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Adviser to the President; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Senior Adviser; White House Office : Economic Council, National; White House Opportunity and the Revitalization Council.

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