

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks on Signing the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018 and an Exchange With Reporters

March 23, 2018

The President. Thank you very much, everybody. We have a lot of good news to report. Some tremendous trade deals are being made with various countries. We are negotiating very long, very hard, but very quickly.

And the deal with South Korea, according to Secretary Ross and Bob Lighthizer, is very close to being finished. And we're going to have a wonderful deal with a wonderful ally. We're getting very close to it. It was a deal that was causing a lot of problems for our country, in terms of employment and in terms of lots of other things.

I might ask Secretary Ross to just say a few words about that. And then we're going to get on to this ridiculous situation that took place over the last week.

So, Secretary Ross.

Secretary of Commerce Wilbur L. Ross, Jr. Thank you, Mr. President. We believe we are relatively close to a pretty comprehensive resolution with the South Korean Government. It will encompass, if it goes through, both the 232s and broader trade issues. And we hope by sometime next week to be able to have a real announcement.

The President. Thank you very much, Wilbur. I appreciate it.

The last time we negotiated something like this—and as you know, it's always been a problem for our country. They get together, and they create a series of documents that nobody has been able to read, because it was just done. Now, you tell me who can read that quickly. It takes a long time to read it.

For the last 8 years, deep defense cuts have undermined our national security, hollowed out—and they just—if you look at what's taken out, they've hollowed our readiness as a military unit and put America at really grave risk.

My highest duty is to keep America safe. Nothing more important. The omnibus bill reverses this dangerous defense. As crazy as it's been, as difficult as it's been, as much opposition to the military as we've had from the Democrats—and it has been tremendous. I try to explain to them, you know, the military is for Republicans and Democrats and everybody else. It's for everybody. But we have tremendous opposition to creating, really, what will be the far—by far, the strongest military that we've ever had. We've had that from the Democrats.

So if we take something for the military, they want something for, in many cases, things that are really a wasted sum of money. And it's not right, and it's very bad for our country.

We're looking to do funding for our final fight in certain areas. As you know, we've gotten just about a hundred percent of our land back from ISIS. We have troop increases necessary to accomplish what we have to do. And we have, very importantly, a pay increase for our troops. And this will be, actually, the largest pay increase for our incredible people in over a decade. It increases total defense spending by more than \$60 billion from last year and funds the addition of critically needed ships, planes, helicopters, tanks, and submarines. We have submarines being built, the likes of which there's nothing anywhere in the world like the submarines we build.

Our military equipment is the best equipment in the world. And one of the things you saw 2 days ago with Saudi Arabia and with other countries—Saudi Arabia, as an example, is buying

hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of our equipment. And we're getting very fast approvals on that.

Therefore, as a matter of national security, I've signed this omnibus budget bill. There are a lot of things that I'm unhappy about in this bill. There are a lot of things that we shouldn't have had in this bill, but we were, in a sense, forced—if we want to build our military—we were forced to have. There are some things that we should have in the bill.

But I say to Congress: I will never sign another bill like this again. I'm not going to do it again. Nobody read it. It's only hours old. Some people don't even know what is in—\$1.3 trillion—it's the second largest ever. President Obama signed one that was actually larger, which I'm sure he wasn't too happy with either.

But, in this case, it became so big because we need to take care of our military, and because the Democrats, who don't believe in that, added things that they wanted in order to get their votes. We have to get rid of the filibuster rule. We have to get rid of the filibuster rule, and go to 51 votes in the Senate, if we're going to have really sustained, continued success.

DACA recipients have been treated extremely badly by the Democrats. We wanted to include DACA. We wanted to have them in this bill—800,000 people. And actually, it could even be more. And we wanted to include DACA in this bill. The Democrats would not do it. They would not do it.

To prevent the omnibus situation from ever happening again, I'm calling on Congress to give me a line-item veto for all Government spending bills. And the Senate must end—they must end—the filibuster rule and get down to work. We have to get a lot of great legislation approved. And without the filibuster rule, it will happen just like magic.

I want to address the situation on border security, which I call national defense. I call it stopping drugs from pouring across our border. And I call it illegal immigration. It's all of those things. But national defense is a very important two words. Because by having a strong border system, including a wall, we are in a position, militarily, that is very advantageous.

And before I get off of that subject, I'd like to ask Secretary Mattis to talk about what we've accomplished in terms of the military. Because there has never been anything like we've been able to do. Our military is very depleted, but it's rapidly getting better. And in a short period of time, it will be stronger than it has ever been.

So I'd like to ask Secretary Mattis to say a few words, please. Secretary.

Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis. Well, thank you, Mr. President. Well, thank you, Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen. In 1790, in George Washington's first annual address to Congress, he stated, to be prepared for war is one of the most effective means of preserving the peace.

As the President noted, today we received the largest military budget in history, reversing many years of decline and unpredictable funding. And together, we are going to make our military stronger than ever. We in the military are humbled and grateful to the American people for their sacrifices on behalf of this funding. Now it's our responsibility in the military to spend every dollar wisely in order to keep the trust and the confidence of the American people and the Congress.

Thank you.

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

The border, we've worked very hard on. We have a lot of—really, by any standard a lot, but not by this standard. But we're going to make it go a long way. We have a lot of money coming to

the border, and it will be coming over a period of time. We funded the initial down payment of \$1.6 billion. But we're going to be starting work, literally, on Monday, on not only some new wall—not enough, but we're working that very quickly—but also fixing existing walls and existing acceptable fences. There's some areas that you have to see through. You have to be able to see through the other side in order to see what's coming. And in many cases, it's not a pretty picture when you look. But you have to be able to see it.

So we have \$1.6 billion for the wall. That will start immediately. This is a short-term funding, but it's immediate. It starts immediately. And I'd like to ask Secretary Nielsen to say a few words about what we've done in terms of homeland security and what the bill does for homeland security.

Thank you.

Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen M. Nielsen. Good afternoon. We at the Department of Homeland Security work very closely with the Department of Defense, and we support this omnibus in the defense of our country.

As the President has stated, under his leadership he has delivered for the American people. This is a downpayment on a border wall system. This is a 10-percent increase for Immigration and Customs Enforcement. This will help us improve our aviation security with some badly needed upgrades. And we look forward to working with Congress on additional needs that we have.

I will say, however, that it's unfortunate that Congress chose not to listen to the men and women of DHS and those on the frontlines. They told us how to build the wall, where to build the wall. And we will continue to work with them to make sure that the wall is where we need it, how we need it, as the President described, and to make sure that it serves the American people and serves the security of this Nation.

We also will continue to work with Congress to close the dangerous loopholes that the President has mentioned many times and to continue to increase our overall security.

And, finally, we thank those in Congress who support the Department of Homeland Security. I will continue to make myself available to them. I look forward to working with them. But we must fund the Department and give it the tools and resources it needs to execute the mission the American people have asked us to do.

Thank you.

The President. Thank you very much, Secretary.

So we have many elements in the bill that we wanted. Just to look at a few of them, we're providing \$654.6 billion in total discretionary funding for defense. It's a record. All records for defense. There will be nobody that says that our military is going to be depleted, like they've been saying over the last long period of time—long period of time—frankly, beyond President Obama. That won't be happening.

We're spending a lot of money on nuclear—our nuclear systems—to upgrade and, in some cases, brandnew, whether it's submarines—nuclear submarines—and others. So we'll have, by far, the most powerful nuclear force on Earth, and it will be absolutely in perfect shape and condition. And hopefully, praise be to God, we don't ever have to use it. But there will nobody that's even close.

This will give a substantial increase to people even outside of the military, but military related. Some of the many things that we're buying in the military—we have \$23.8 billion to

procure 34 Navy ships. Our Navy is at about the lowest point, in terms of ships, that it's been in over a hundred years.

And we're ask—we're adding a significant number of extremely advanced vessels: \$10.2 billion for 90 F-35 aircraft. That's the most sophisticated aircraft in the world—jetfighters. Total stealth. They're hard to find; they're hard to see. Therefore, they're hard to beat. It's very tough to beat a plane when you can't see it. It's the most advanced in the world: \$10.2 billion for 90 F-35.

We have \$2.9 billion for 15 KC-46 tanker aircraft. The tanker aircraft is very important based on everything. It allows our planes to travel anywhere in the world without landing; \$1.8 billion for 24 FA-18E/F Super Hornet aircraft fighter jets; \$1.7 billion for 10 P-8—the Poseidons—incredible stuff; \$1.1 billion for 56 UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, most advanced helicopter in the world by far—a fighting machine; \$1.1 billion for the upgrade of 85 Abrams tanks; \$705 million for the cooperative programs that we're working with Israel and others on various missile defense systems.

We're spending a lot of money on missile defense. We have a lot of offense that's been recently installed. We're spending tremendous money on missile defense. You understand what that means; everybody does. With what we have out there, missile defense is very, very important.

We are funding our Border Patrol agents and our ICE agents. They are working long hours under tremendously dangerous conditions. We're adding large numbers of immigration judges, high-quality judges. Not only are we adding them in the district court level and the Federal level of Court of Appeals, but we're adding immigration judges at a very high level.

So while we're very disappointed in the \$1.3 trillion—nobody more disappointed than me, because the number is so large; it will start coming down—we had no choice but to fund our military, because we have to have, by far, the strongest military in the world. And this will be, by far, the strongest military that we've ever had. So when you look at all of these pages, a lot of that is devoted—a lot—to the military.

I just want to thank Members of Congress for working so hard. While we can be disappointed in some ways, we have to also know that there are a lot of strings pulling everybody in different directions. The Republican Senators, the Republican Congress men and women have been steadfast on their fight for the border and steadfast for their fight on the military.

We're also spending \$6 billion on, as you know, various forms of drug control, helping people that are addicted. It's a terrible problem, but this will be also—this will be a record. We'll be suing certain drug companies for what they've done with the opioids, and we'll be bringing the suits at a Federal level.

The level of drugs that are being put out there and the power of this addiction is hard to believe. People go to the hospital for a period of a week, and they come out, they're drug addicts. There has to be a better way. Doctors are way down now in their orders of the opioids. Way down. That's a great thing.

We're also looking for, in our research funds, we're looking for a medicine that can stop the pain without the addiction so that people aren't going to become addicted to these incredible drugs. So that's part of what we have. We're going to have \$6 billion in having to do with opioids and other problems that this country—and, in fact, the world—is having with drugs.

So we're extremely proud of what we've been able to do when it comes to our military. Our military will be far superior than to any military anywhere in the world. That's very important for us. You see the players out there. You see what we're dealing with.

We are very happy with what's happened with opioids. We're very happy with what's happened with certain elements of the border. Not happy with \$1.6 billion, but it does start the wall, and we will make that \$1.6 billion go very, very far. It's going to go very far.

I can tell you this, and I say this to DACA recipients: that the Republicans are with you. They want to get your situation taken care of. The Democrats fought us. They just fought every single inch of the way. They did not want DACA in this bill. And as you know, DACA is also tied to the wall for the major funding: the \$25 billion for wall and other things. So I think that will be coming up very soon. But I do want the Hispanic community to know and DACA recipients to know that Republicans are much more on your side than the Democrats who are using you for their own purposes.

With that being said, I just want to thank everybody for being here. We're very proud of many of the items that we've been able to get. We're very disappointed that, in order to fund the military, we had to give up things where we consider, in many cases, them to be bad or them to be a waste of money. But that's the way, unfortunately, right now, the system works.

But we have a great country. We are going to have the greatest military we've ever had. And lots of good things are happening.

The trade situation, we'll be talking about next week. We have many trade deals, not only the deal being made on South Korea, which looks like it's very close to being finalized, but many other countries are now negotiating fairer trade deals with us. So we'll be rolling them out as you see them. And part of the reason, frankly, that we're able to do that is the fact that we have the tariffs on steel and the tariffs on aluminum. Because it showed how unfair some of these trade deals that have been in existence for many years—how unfair they've been.

So it will be great for our country. And frankly, it will also be great for other countries. And it will be fair, and it will be reciprocal.

Thank you all very much. I appreciate it. Thank you. Thank you.

The President's Prior Consideration of a Veto of the Bill

Q. Mr. President, why the veto threat if you knew that you had to sign the bill?

The President. Well, you'll figure it out in about 20 minutes after you look at it. Okay? We're going to figure it out—you're going to figure that out.

We looked at it to veto. I looked very seriously at the veto. I was thinking about doing the veto. But because of the incredible gains that we've been able to make for the military, that overrode any of our thinking.

Stock Market/China-U.S. Trade

Q. How concerned are you about the impact of the tariffs on the stock market? And the Chinese—

The President. Well, I think the stock market is going to be great.

Q. —and the Chinese are retaliating.

The President. Look, the stock market is way up. When I came into office, the stock market was from a different planet. It's way up. China is going to end up treating us fairly. For many years, they had free reign; they don't have free reign anymore. We're very friendly with China. We have great relationships with China. And look, it's time. It's time. Last year, we lost \$500 billion on trade with China. We can't let that happen.

Thank you all very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:25 p.m. in the Diplomatic Reception Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to U.S. Trade Representative Robert E. Lighthizer. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization. H.R. 1625, approved March 23, was assigned Public Law No. 115–141

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