

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks on Signing the John S. McCain III, Daniel K. Akaka, and Samuel R. Johnson VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018

June 6, 2018

Well, thank you very much. This is a very big day. Choice. We've been looking for choice for a long time, and today is the day. So it's very important. Very happy.

Thank you all for being here. This is truly a historic moment, historic time for our country. I'll be signing landmark legislation to provide health care choice—what a beautiful word that is, "choice"—and freedom to our amazing veterans.

I want to welcome every veteran—we have many veterans here today—every caregiver, and servicemember who has joined us on this very momentous occasion. All during the campaign, I'd go out and say, "Why can't they just go see a doctor instead of standing on line for weeks and weeks and weeks?" Now they can go see a doctor. It's going to be great. You fulfilled your duty to our Nation with tremendous loyalty and courage. And with the signing of this veterans choice legislation, we take one more crucial step in fulfilling our duty to you.

We're pleased to be joined today by our great Vice President, Mike Pence, along with my nominee to lead the VA, Robert Wilkie. Wherever Robert—Robert. Stand up, Robert. You're going to do a great job. And working along with Robert is Acting VA Secretary Peter O'Rourke. So, Peter, thank you. Peter. Where's Peter? That's a great team.

I also want to thank some of our many leaders. I call them leaders because on this legislation they are indeed leaders. You know, they said that it would be very slow. It's a political season. We have an election coming on November 6. So they said it would be very, very slow this period of time.

And I was just telling Mike, "You know, Mike, this hasn't been very slow." If you look, we passed Dodd-Frank, "right to try." We just got \$700 billion for our military. That's a big one. We needed to get that. The military is going to be stronger, bigger, better than it ever was before. Hopefully, we won't have to use it very much, but the fact that we have it so strong means we probably won't have to use it as much. And I want to thank all of the great people in the audience that helped us so much.

On December 22, which doesn't quite fit into the January 1 date, but on December 22 we signed the biggest tax cuts in the history of our country. That's a big one. And we got \$1.6 billion; we've already started the wall on the southern border. The wall has started—\$1.6 billion. So important.

I also have to recognize some of the people that have worked so hard to make all of this happen. And, Johnny Isakson—you're here. Where's Johnny? Boy, has Johnny been working—have you worked with Jerry Moran and the whole group. You and Jerry. Where's Jerry? Where's Jerry? [*Laughter*] Hi, Jerry. Good job. Good job. Bill Cassidy, John Boozman, Dean Heller, Tom Cotton—all here—Thom Tillis, Lindsey Graham. I see Lindsey sitting right up there. [*Laughter*] Hi, Lindsey. Good job. Todd Young. Todd, thank you. Joni Ernst. Where's Joni? Because I did you a good favor for the farmers yesterday. [*Laughter*] Right? We love the farmers. Right, Joni? Good. Good. I'm glad it worked out. John Hoeven, Steve Daines. All here.

We have on the House of Representatives, Mike Coffman, Brian Mast, Jack Bergman, Buddy Carter. Did I introduce you, Senator? What's going on? Huh? I hope so. If I didn't introduce you, I'm in trouble. *[Laughter]* You know, the problem with this, there will be four people that we didn't introduce and they'll never speak to me for the rest of my life. *[Laughter]* They'll make sure I suffer, right? That's—*[laughter]*. So please, I apologize. Jenniffer González Colón. Peter King. Where's Peter? Oh, stand up, Peter. You have been so nice to me. *[Laughter]* Well, he should; he comes from New York. I mean, he should. Right, Peter? Thank you, Peter. Jack Bergman. Our chair, Phil Roe. Phil. What a great job. That was a lot tougher than we thought, right? You would think it would have been easy. It makes sense. But you would have thought.

Kevin Cramer, Jim Banks, Andy Barr, Claudia Tenney, Martha McSally. I hear you're doing very well, Martha, wherever you may be. I hear Martha is doing very well in the great State of Arizona. That's what the word is. Don Bacon, Brad Wenstrup, Jason Lewis, Cathy McMorris Rodgers, who's terrific. *[Laughter]* Cathy? Hi, Cathy. Representative Neal Dunn, Representative Lee Zeldin, Ann Kuster, and Julia Brownley. I want to just thank, and I assume we have a couple of others out there that—anybody I didn't announce? Do you want to stand and we'll announce you? You deserve it. Thank you all very much. Really, it's incredible.

And finally, I want to thank the fantastic veterans service organizations that helped us push today's choice legislation across the finish line. Whenever I spoke, this was one of the most important things, and it was something I got the biggest hand for. People want to take care of our great vets. They are our great people.

Four years ago, our entire Nation was shocked and outraged by stories of the VA system plagued by neglect, abuse, fraud, and mistreatment of our veterans. And there was nothing they could do about it. They couldn't do anything about it. Good people that worked there, they couldn't take care of the bad people. Meaning, you're fired; get the hell out of here. *[Laughter]*

With us today are many brave veterans who endured that grave injustice, including Steve Cooper and Laura Vela. They served their country with honor, only to be denied the medical treatment they desperately needed. To Steve and Laura: No one should suffer what you suffered. They suffered gravely. No one who defends our country in uniform should have to fight for their lives when they come back, when they come to their home.

We commend your strength and courage in the face of hardship. And we pledge to act in your name and in the name of every other veteran who has been so badly wronged, neglected, and mistreated. To those who serve our Nation, who risk life and limb for country, we must never be denied care, access, or treatment that they need. That is why we are here today and that is why we are signing this most important bill. It made so much sense. It's been so long. They've been working on it for years and years and years. And it wouldn't happen. And accountability is the other one.

As a candidate for President, I promised to make reforming the VA one of my absolute highest priorities. And from the first day of my administration, that is exactly what we've done. Last year, I signed the historic VA accountability legislation, meaning you now can immediately get rid of people that don't treat our veterans right; that rob us, or cheat us, or aren't good to our great vets. You can get them out. You couldn't do it.

For 40 years they've been trying to pass this—Phil, you know that. Forty years. And they couldn't. Made so much sense. But it was hard. You have civil service; you have unions. Of

course, they'd never do anything to stop anything, but they had a very great deal of power. And in the end, they came along. Everybody came along because they knew it was right.

So we passed something that hasn't been that recognized, and yet I would put it almost in the class with choice. Almost in the class with choice. VA accountability passed. And now, if people don't do a great job, they can't work with our vets anymore. They're gone. So we're very proud of accountability.

In the campaign, I also promised that we would fight for Veterans Choice. And before I knew that much about it, it just seemed to be common sense. It seemed like if they're waiting on line for 9 days and they can't see a doctor, why aren't they going outside to see a doctor and take care of themselves, and we pay the bill? It's less expensive for us, it works out much better, and it's immediate care. And that's what we're doing. So we're allowing our veterans to get access to the best medical care available, whether it's at the VA or at a private provider.

In a few moments, I will keep that promise that I've been making ever since the first day of my campaign—it seems like a long time ago—and I'm going to sign legislation that will make veterans choice permanent. And I just can't stress—the people here, the people in the audience, Senators, Congressmen, the great people working at the VA and soon-to-be Secretary Wilkie, and everybody—the work that they've done to get this through is really inspirational to me. I've learned so much from the standpoint that I actually see how hard these people work. And this was very important. And Phil and Mike and everybody, I really appreciate what you've done. It's been incredible. It's and—been incredible.

This has been for years; for 30, 40 years, they've been trying to get this done, and they haven't been able to. And we got it done. If the VA can't meet the needs of a veteran in a timely manner, that veteran will have the right to go right outside to a private doctor. So simple and yet so complex. This legislation also expands access to the caregiver program for seriously injured veterans. Because no matter where you served or when you fought, if you were in uniform—at some point, if you wore that uniform, then you deserve our absolute best. And that's what we're doing. *[Applause]* Right?

This bill speeds up the claims process, increases the health services, expands access to walk-in clinics, and fights opioid addiction. These are sweeping, historic changes. There's never been anything like this in the history of the VA—never been anything close—and we will not rest until the job is fully done.

My administration has also taken action to ensure veterans can seamlessly transition their medical records from the Department of Defense into the VA. And I've heard so many stories—how difficult it is, almost impossible. I said, "How is that possible?" It was almost impossible to do. It took years to do. We'll do it immediately now. We're set up. We have the right systems. After years and years of waiting, the two departments will now finally use the same system. They're matching.

Today we also mark another milestone, the 74th anniversary of D-day, the Allied invasion of Normandy. On June 6, 1944, more than 70,000 brave young Americans charged out of landing craft, jumped out of airplanes, and stormed into hell. They gave their heart, their blood, and their very lives on those beaches to drive out the enemy and strike a lasting victory for our country and for freedom.

In every generation, there have been heroes like them, patriots who answer the call to serve, who do whatever it takes, wherever and whenever we need them to defend America.

They put everything on the line for us. And when they come home, we must do everything that we can possibly do for them. And that's what we're doing.

And they can be very proud of their country because, literally, this week, we have gotten the best financial numbers, the best economic numbers, the best numbers on unemployment and employment that we've ever had as a country. Strongest economy we've ever had. It's so good, because we can do so many more things when that happens, including, of course, jobs.

Among the best job numbers ever, in the history of our country. African American unemployment, the lowest it's ever been in history. Hispanic unemployment, the lowest it's ever been in history. Women unemployment, lowest it's been in 21 years, and soon to be history. A little bit more, it's going to be history. [*Laughter*] Numbers that nobody has ever seen.

We've added \$7 trillion since the election; \$7 trillion to our country's worth, our country's—the value. The value. We've added \$7 trillion to our country's worth. We've never had anything like this. And I'll tell you what—it's going to get better. Cutting regulations, cutting taxes. It's just starting.

So it's now my great honor to sign the VA MISSION Act or, as we all know it, the Choice Act and to make veterans choice the permanent law of our great country. And nobody deserves it more than our veterans. Thank you all very much. Thank you.

Thank you very much.

[*At this point, the President signed the bill and distributed pens.*]

Thank you, everybody, very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:28 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Phoenix, AZ, resident Steve Cooper; and Harlingen, TX, resident Laura Vela. He also referred to S. 2155, which was approved May 24 and assigned Public Law No. 115–174. S. 2372, approved June 6, was assigned Public Law No. 115–182.

Categories: Bill Signings and Vetoes : John S. McCain III, Daniel K. Akaka, and Samuel R. Johnson VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act, signing remarks.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Bacon, Donald J.; Banks, James E.; Barr, Garland H. "Andy," IV; Bergman, John W.; Boozman, John N.; Brownley, Julia A.; Carter, Earl L. "Buddy"; Cassidy, William M.; Coffman, Michael H.; Cooper, Steve; Cotton, Thomas B.; Cramer, Kevin J.; Daines, Steven D.; Dunn, Neal P.; Ernst, Joni K.; González-Colón, Jenniffer; Graham, Lindsey O.; Heller, Dean A.; Hoeven, John H.; Isakson, John H.; King, Peter T.; Kuster, Ann McLane; Lewis, Jason M.; Mast, Brian J.; McMorris Rodgers, Cathy A.; McSally, Martha E.; Moran, Gerald W.; O'Rourke, Peter M.; Pence, Michael R.; Roe, D. Phillip; Tenney, Claudia; Tillis, Thomas R.; Vela, Laura; Wenstrup, Brad R.; Wilkie, Robert L., Jr.; Young, Todd C.; Zeldin, Lee M.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : Funding; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Economy, national : Improvement; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment rate; Government organization and employees : Accountability and transparency, strengthening efforts; Legislation, enacted : John S. McCain III, Daniel K. Akaka, and Samuel R. Johnson VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated

Outside Networks Act of 2018; Taxation : Tax relief; Veterans : Health and medical care;
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