

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks on Signing the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 at Fort Drum, New York

August 13, 2018

The President. Thank you everybody. It's a great place; I've been here before. We love this location. We love this base and, most particularly, the people that are working so hard here and so effectively.

So I want to start by saying, "At ease." Just relax. It's okay—do you have seats? You can sit down. Come on. Sit. If you want to stand, you can. We'll just get one big standing ovation, right? [*Laughter*] Sit down. Thank you. That's pretty good. Everybody has got a seat. Thank you very much.

I want to thank our wonderful Vice President, Mike Pence, and say a special hello to the incredible patriots of Fort Drum and the 10th Mountain Division. Special people. Thank you. A few moments ago, I witnessed your extraordinary capabilities firsthand during an artillery raid demonstration. So I'd like to begin by applauding the 10th Mountain Division Combat Aviation Brigade, along with the 3d Battalion, 6th Field Artillery. I hate to say this, but nobody stands a chance against you folks. Nobody stands a chance.

I'm here today to sign our new defense bill into law and to pay tribute to the greatest soldiers in the history of the world: the United States Army. Thank you. Thank you. The National Defense Authorization Act is the most significant investment in our military and our warfighters in modern history, and I am very proud to be a big, big part of it. It was not very hard. You know, I went to Congress; I said: "Let's do it. We've got to do it. We're going to strengthen our military like never, ever before." And that's what we did. I want to say, very strongly, there is no better place than right here at Fort Drum to celebrate its passage. No better place.

After years of devastating cuts, we're now rebuilding our military like we never have before, ever. Because we know that to survive and having that survival of our freedom, it depends upon the might of our military. And no enemy on Earth can match the strength, courage, and skill of the American Army and the American Armed Forces. Nobody is even close. They never will be.

We're grateful to be joined today by many of our nation's top military leaders. I'd like to recognize Deputy Secretary of Defense Shanahan, who's with us. Please, Mr. Secretary. People I've heard about all my life—a very prestigious title; I always loved the ring: The Joint Chiefs of Staff. Right? That's got a good ring. Anybody in the audience going to be a member of that someday? I think so. Raise your hand. You think you're going to make it, raise your hand. Go ahead. Oh, come on. That's all? Only a few? I don't know.

I want to thank General Dunford, General Milley, General Neller, Admiral Richardson, General Goldfein, General Lengyel, and Vice Admiral Ray. Thank you all for your leadership. You are magnificent. We appreciate it very much. Thank you. Thank you.

A very special thank you to the commanding general of the 10th Mountain Division, Major General Walt Piatt. What a special man. Walt, I want to thank you. Where is Walt? Where is Walt? Walt, thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you. Walt is back on American soil after deployment in Iraq. And I just want to welcome you home. You have tremendous respect. They have great, great admiration and respect for you, Walt. Thank you very much.

I also just had the chance to meet Division Command Sergeant Major Jason Roark, along with 10th Mountain Division Soldier of the Year, Michael Lima. Where's Michael? Where is

Michael? Soldier of the Year. Michael. That's pretty good. And that's Soldier of the Year, Michael, out of how many?

Specialist Michael Lima, USA. Eighteen thousand.

The President. How many?

Sgt. Lima. Eighteen thousand.

The President. That's a lot of soldiers. Eighteen thousand? Do you want to work for me? [Laughter] Thank you, Michael. That's a great job.

We would not be here for today's signing ceremony without the dedicated efforts of the Members of Congress who worked so hard to pass the National Defense Authorization Act. I'd like to recognize Congresswoman Elise Stefanik, whose district proudly includes Fort Drum. And I have to tell you about Elise. She called me so many times. I said, I don't want to take her call. She wanted me to be here. I said, I won't be able to; we'll have to change a lot of scheduling. But that didn't suit her. She didn't stop. And here I am. Here I am.

Elise, come here. Come here, Elise.

Representative Elise M. Stefanik. Thank you, Mr. President. It is truly an honor to welcome you to Fort Drum, home of the historic 10th Mountain Division, the most deployed unit in the U.S. Army since 9/11. Thank you for being here to sign the historic National Defense Authorization Act, which includes the largest pay increase, support for our military families, and investing in our military readiness. "Climb to Glory," 10th Mountain Division! Thank you.

The President. Thank you very much. Great job.

She's an incredible representative.

I also want to thank Representatives Don Bacon, Dan Donovan, and Joe Wilson, who are with us today also. Thank you. Where are you? Stand up, please. Hi, Dan. Stand up. Thank you. Thank you, fellas. Very good.

There's another Member of Congress here today who is not only an Air Force veteran, but the first woman ever to fly a fighter jet in combat in U.S. history. And I've gotten to know her very well, and she is terrific. Congresswoman Martha McSally. Congresswoman. Thank you, Martha. Thank you for being here. Thank you very much.

Thank you all for fighting for our military and for fighting for our vets. Nobody has made more progress on anything than what we've done with our vets. We have Choice approved. You know that. We have so many other things approved for our vets, and it's really moving along well.

I think, maybe, almost as important as choice is accountability. Now, when we find somebody not treating our vets probably, you know what we say, right? "You're out. Get out. You're fired. Get out." [Laughter] They couldn't do that. They couldn't do that. Now they can do it. Now they have to treat our vets properly. Our vets are our great people, and they get treated properly.

So you have choice and you have accountability, and nobody thought that would ever get approved. They've been trying for many, many decades.

Finally, I want to thank a very special group of patriots at Fort Drum: all of the amazing spouses and family members whose love and support make your service possible. Whether you like it or not, they make it possible. [Laughter] Please. Thank you. Thank you very much. They know. They know. Right? Look at them. He's smiling. They know.

Last year, we secured a historic \$700 billion to rebuild our military. And now the National Defense Authorization Act paves the way for another 1,700—listen to this now. So we've been trying to get money. They never gave us money for the military for years and years. And it was depleted. We got \$700 billion. And next year, already approved, we have \$716 billion to give you the finest planes and ships and tanks and missiles anywhere on Earth. Nobody makes them like we do.

And very, very far distant, in this case—jobs are very important in all cases—but in this case, military might is more important than even jobs. But all of this equipment is made right here in the U.S.A., and it's the best equipment on Earth. Nobody makes it like we do. So you have \$700 billion and now \$716 billion. So congratulations.

America is a peaceful nation. But if conflict is forced upon us, we will fight, and we will win. Right, General? Right? Right? Better believe it, generals. They're the guys. We're powered by the unstoppable force of the United States Army. Very special.

With this new authorization, we will increase the size and strength of our military by adding thousands of new recruits to Active Duty, Reserve, and National Guard units, including 4,000 new Active Duty soldiers. And we will replace aging tanks, aging planes and ships with the most advanced and lethal technology ever developed. And hopefully, we'll be so strong we'll never have to use it. But if we ever did, nobody has a chance.

It all includes 135 brand new, beautiful M1 Abrams tanks, 60 Bradley fighting vehicles, and over 3,000 Joint Light Tactical Vehicles for the Army Armored Brigade Combat Team. New Black Hawk and Apache helicopters—finest in the world—for the Army National Guard. Seventy-seven F-35 Joint Strike Fighters. You know, that's stealth. I talked to a couple of pilots—great pilots—I said, "How are they?" They said, "They're hard to beat because you can't see them." It's always hard to beat the enemy when you can't see it. The greatest in the world.

Full funding for the B-21 Raider bomber program. Thirteen new Battle Force ships and support ships, including a fourth Ford-class aircraft carrier and three additional Littoral Combat Ships.

Funding to modernize our nuclear arsenal—so important. We're doing a major upgrade of our missile defense. We're spending a tremendous amount of money on our nuclear arsenal. Nobody will have close. We will, hopefully, never, ever have to use it. But nobody will be close.

More than \$11 billion for the military construction, including family housing. And we are proudly giving our troops the biggest pay increase in a decade. And I know you don't want it because you're very patriotic. You'll say, just save the money. We're going to pay down debt. *[Laughter]* Does anybody not want it? Please raise your hand. What's going on here? *[Laughter]* Are these real patriots? I don't know, General. I don't know. It's the biggest increase in a decade.

A strong military also requires a strong economy, and our economy is setting records like never before. We have the great economy we've ever had. I think that's going to help us a lot in a lot of ways. It also helps us a lot in funding and doing all of the things we're doing for our great military.

We've created almost 4 million new jobs since the election, a number that the media in the back would never have said would be possible if during the campaign. *[Laughter]* I'm so proud of myself; I didn't call them the "fake news media." I didn't call them. I said to myself, I will not today, in front of our great Armed Forces, call them fake news. *[Laughter]* We know the real truth, but we won't say it today. *[Laughter]* But they wouldn't have believed it possible: 4 million new jobs. Nobody would have thought that possible on the campaign trail.

If when we were campaigning, Mike, if I would have said that—if I would have said, "Two million new jobs," people would have laughed us off the stage. Well, we have 4 million new jobs.

Something I'm very proud of: the African American, Hispanic—Hispanic American, and Asian—Asian American—the unemployment rates for all three have reached the lowest levels in the history of our country. Unemployment for African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, the lowest level in the history of our country.

Women's unemployment is not—I'm sorry—doing quite as well. It's only the lowest level in 65 years. *[Laughter]* So we're not doing as well. But we'll do better. I think within about 3 weeks, when the new numbers come out, you'll probably be lowest in history also.

Very importantly, the veterans unemployment rate recently reached its lowest level in nearly 20 years. It's a big one.

And we are creating manufacturing jobs again. Remember during the campaign, they said, "Oh, you can't create manufacturing jobs." I said: "Really? We're not going to make things anymore? Is that what it's come to? We're going to have other country make things? They're going to make things and we're going to buy them? And they're going to have the jobs and we're not?" Doesn't work that way. We're doing manufacturing jobs at the fastest pace in many, many decades.

No longer are we apologizing for America. Instead, we are now standing up for America. It's called "America first," if that's okay with you. We're standing up for our military, and we're standing up for our great American flag. We're standing for our flag.

The Armed Forces have endured continuous combat for the past 17 years. Yet, since the 1990s, the number of soldiers on Active Duty was cut by more than one-third. Our bases and vital equipment were allowed to fall into a state of disrepair. And I saw some of them. Total disrepair. But those days are over. Every day, the Army is fighting for us, and now we are fighting for you, 100 percent.

No one better understands how stretched our military has become than the soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division. Is that right, General? You were the first conventional combat force to deploy after 9/11. Since then, no division in the Army has been deployed more times to Iraq and Afghanistan than you. You've sent over 9,000 courageous soldiers to 26 different countries all around the world in the past year alone.

The 2d Brigade Combat Team just returned from a rotation at the Joint Readiness Training Center, and later this year, they will once again bravely answer our Nation's call and deploy to Afghanistan. Through it all, you've proven to the world, to our country, to your families, that Fort Drum soldiers aren't just tough; you're "mountain tough." That's what you are, you're mountain tough.

I said to your general, "What's the difference?" He said, "Sir, trust me, there's a difference." So I said, "I trust you, General." Right? I said, "Don't go into it. I trust you."

One of those soldiers is Specialist Brayden Cook, who is with us today. Where's Brayden? Where's—oh, Brayden—good location, Brayden. Very good. *[Laughter]* Last October, his team came under heavy fire while cleaning and clearing—they're clearing them out—Taliban strongholds in various locations in Afghanistan. An Afghan soldier fighting alongside U.S. troops was badly wounded when an explosive detonated nearby. Specialist Cook braved the hail of bullets and mortar rounds all over—they said it was all over; it was heavy fire—saving the life of that wounded soldier and earning a Bronze Star for Valor for his courageous action.

Brayden, I want to thank you. A brave young man. Thank you. Please, stand up again, Brayden. *[Applause]* Great.

We're also inspired by the devotion to duty shown by the family members who serve their nation here at home.

Ashley Shepard is one of those family members. She has been married to Sergeant First Class Ian Shepard for more than 14 years. Ashley supports military families in every way you can imagine. She has served as a Family Readiness Group leader, coleader, treasurer, and assistant treasurer for three companies. She works hard. She raises money for scholarships, organizes charity events for Gold Star families, and feeds homeless veterans. Ashley, I want to thank you. Ashley? Where is Ashley? I had a feeling that was you, Ashley. Stand up, Ashley. Thank your husband too. Thank you.

America is eternally grateful for every soldier, servicemember, and family member here at Fort Drum. And we are forever in the debt of every American who has ever served our Nation in uniform, from the snows of Valley Forge to the jungles of Vietnam and the mountains of Afghanistan. It's just incredible what you do.

A few days ago, Vice President Pence flew to Hawaii to greet the remains of some of our Nation's greatest heroes: our fallen warriors who gave their lives many years ago in Korea. Now these American heroes are finally starting to come home. They will be laid to rest on American soil. We believe in no American left behind.

And we believe our warfighters deserve the tools, the equipment, and resources they have earned with their blood, sweat, and tears. In a few moments, in honor of that sacred obligation, I will put my signature on the National Defense Authorization Act. This authorization will give America's warfighters the firepower they need to win any conflict quickly and decisively.

Thanks to the leadership of Representative Stefanik, we're also making an unprecedented commitment to developing our artificial intelligence capabilities.

In order to maintain America's military supremacy, we must always be on the cutting edge. That is why we are also proudly reasserting America's legacy of leadership in space. Our foreign competitors and adversaries have already begun weaponizing space, developing new technologies to disrupt vital communications, blind satellites, and just—I mean, you look at what they're doing. They've given me rundowns. I've seen things that you don't even want to see, what they're doing and how advanced they are. We'll be catching them very shortly. They want to jam transmissions, which threaten our battlefield operations, and so many other things. We will be so far ahead of them in a very short period of time, your head will spin.

China even launched a new military division to oversee its warfighting programs in space. Just like the air, the land, the sea, space has become a warfighting domain. It is not enough to merely have an American presence in space. We must have American dominance in space.

So that is why, just a few days ago, the Vice President outlined my administration's plan to create a sixth branch of the United States military, called the United States Space Force. Got to get it, Joe. Got to get it, Joe. Right, Joe? Right?

We will ensure that the next great chapter in history is written by the heroes of the United States military. America will always rise to every challenge and overcome every danger, because we are backed by the strength and power of the American soldier.

Speaking to his troops, General George Patton—a great one—once said: "We have the finest equipment [and] the best spirit and the best men in the world." Now, if it were today, he would be saying "the best men and women" in the world. Things do change. But that was quite a statement many years ago. Continuing his remarks, Patton then declared: "I don't want to get any messages saying, 'I am holding my position.' We are not holding a . . . damned thing. . . . We are advancing constantly." That was Patton.

Nearly 75 years later, Patton's words still ring true. America has the best equipment anywhere in the world. We have the best spirit, the best soldiers ever to set foot on any battlefield, anywhere, at any time. We are the most powerful. We are the best funded. We are the biggest. We are the strongest. We are the smartest.

And we are still not holding a damned thing, because America is on the move once again, and we are not backing down. Our country is respected again. I don't know if you see it, but America is respected again. There's a big difference, and a big difference in the air. You take a look around; there's a big, beautiful difference.

We are advancing forward with our confidence renewed, our might restored, and the unwavering conviction that our destiny is our victory. America's future is safe, sound, and brighter than ever, because each of you is mountain tough, mountain proud, and mountain strong and always will be climbing to glory. You will be climbing to glory.

Thank you again for the incredible men and women of Fort Drum. Special, special, great people. God bless our troops. And God bless the United States of America.

I'd now like to invite a few of our fantastic soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division 2d Brigade Combat Team to join me onstage to sign the National Defense Authorization Act. It's been an honor to be with you today. Thank you all very much. Thank you.

This is it, but I'll just sign one page, right? Or we'll be here a long time.

[At this point, the President signed the bill.]

Okay. That's good, right? *[Applause]*

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:53 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard Vice Adm. Charles W. Ray, USCG. H.R. 5515, approved August 13, was assigned Public Law No. 115–232.

Categories: Bill Signings and Vetoes : John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, signing remarks in Fort Drum, NY.

Locations: Fort Drum, NY.

Names: Bacon, Donald J.; Cook, Brayden; Donovan, Daniel M., Jr.; Dunford, Joseph F., Jr.; Goldfein, David L.; Lengyel, Joseph L.; Lima, Michael; McSally, Martha E.; Milley, Mark A.; Neller, Robert B.; Pence, Michael R.; Piatt, Walter E.; Ray, Charles W.; Richardson, John M.; Roark, Samuel J.; Shanahan, Patrick M.; Shepard, Ashley; Shepard, Ian; Stefanik, Elise M.; Wilson, Addison G. "Joe".

Subjects: Afghanistan : Former regime; Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Air Force, Department of the : Chief of Staff; Armed Forces, U.S. : Space presence and activities, strengthening efforts; Armed Forces, U.S. : Funding; Armed Forces, U.S. : Military families; Armed Forces, U.S. : National Guard; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Military compensation and retirement systems, modernization efforts; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: POW/MIA remains, recovery efforts; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Armed Forces, U.S. : Space presence and activities, strengthening efforts; Army, Department of the : Chief of Staff; Army, Department of the : Fort Drum, NY; Communications : News media :: Accuracy and fairness; Defense, Department of : Deputy Secretary; Defense, Department of : Joint Chiefs of Staff; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment rate; Homeland Security, Department of : Coast Guard, U.S.; Legislation, enacted : John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019;

Navy, Department of the : Chief of Naval Operations; Navy, Department of the : Marine Corps, U.S.; New York : Fort Drum; New York : President's visits; Veterans : Health and medical care; Veterans : Unemployment and underemployment; Veterans Affairs, Department of : Personnel management, reform efforts; White House Office : Vice President.

DCPD Number: DCPD201800532.