

*Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018*

**Remarks on Signing the Energy and Water, Legislative Branch, and Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act, 2019, in North Las Vegas, Nevada**

*September 21, 2018*

*The President.* Well, thank you very much. Please. It's great to be with you. And thank you to Secretary Wilkie, who is doing an incredible job, I have to say. And also to the great leadership of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Some of those great leaders are with us today.

Today I'm honored to be at the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center to sign into law a historic Government funding bill that will renovate our Nation's military bases and provide great world-class care to our great veterans. Unless you don't want it. Unless you don't want it.

I want to thank your State's great Senator, Dean Heller. He has been so helpful. Dean has really been helpful. He's worked all the way, right from the beginning. And this was very important for him. But for working so hard to get the bill passed and get it put right on my desk and to pass the groundbreaking VA reform. There's never been reform like we've been able to do over the last very short period of time.

Thank you, as well, to Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval for being such a strong advocate for Nevada's veterans. We're also—[*applause*]*—thank you, Brian. Thank you, Brian. We're also very grateful to be joined by Nevada Attorney General Adam Laxalt. Thank you, Adam. Great job. Hear he's doing well.*

To every veteran here today: We are eternally grateful for your noble service to our Nation. I would like to ask all of the veterans with us now to, please, proudly stand. [*Applause*] That's great. That's great. You're fantastic people. You're really fantastic people. Please. Thank you. You really are.

And we're fighting to make sure that you get the care that you so richly earned. And today's legislation is one more promise that the Trump administration is keeping. And we've done a lot of promises, and we've kept them all. And this is another one for the veterans.

With this funding bill, we've increased the VA's budget to the largest ever. We are delivering the resources needed to fully implement crucial VA reforms that, as you know, we've gotten. You know the reforms. We're going to go over them in a minute, but they are some reforms. And to deliver for our great veterans, just the way I said I would constantly on the campaign trail. You backed me, and I back you. That's the way it works, right? That's the way it's supposed to work in life.

And with our booming economy, which is now, I think we can easily say, the greatest economy maybe we've ever had in our country. Stock markets yesterday—and I believe they're up today, so that means today. But the stock markets yesterday hit the highest they've ever been in the history of our country. And we've broken the record now over 100 times. So we keep breaking it, breaking it. And actually, we have a long way to go. There's tremendous potential.

So with our booming economy, I'm also proud to report that the veterans unemployment recently achieved its lowest level in more than 20 years. That means a lot of jobs. A lot of jobs are taking place.

Last year, I also signed into law the landmark VA Accountability Act. You know all about that. And that was something that was very important to me. Because you couldn't do anything—

you couldn't—if somebody was bad. You've got a lot of great people, but you have some bad ones. You couldn't do anything. Now you can do it.

So I want to thank the dedicated Veterans Affairs doctors, nurses, and staff members who join us. Now, we're finally rewarding the many great people at the VA, while also ensuring that those who mistreat our veterans—we had people that really mistreated our veterans—they are now being held accountable. That's why it's called the VA Accountability Act. And they are being held, seriously, accountable. Right, Mr. Secretary? He's had a lot of fun. *[Laughter]* He's had a lot of fun.

We take care of our good ones, and the others are held accountable. Right? And there was no way you could hold them accountable. They could be sadists. You had some of them too. It doesn't sound nice. They could be thieves. They could rob you blind. They could steal money, and you couldn't do anything about it. Now you can do whatever you want. Now you do what's right. And you have a Secretary that's doing what's right. He's tough and he's smart. *[Applause]* It's true.

And I can tell you—this is always a good sign—General Mattis was not happy when I took him out of the Department of Defense. *[Laughter]* You know, we were going to have him for a short while. And then, we said, "You know, he's doing so good, we're going to keep him here." He wasn't happy, and that's usually a good sign. Isn't it, Governor? When they're not—if they're happy, that's not a good sign. *[Laughter]* He wasn't happy. He's still not happy. But that's all right. But you're happy, right?

*Audience member.* I'm happy.

*The President.* In a few months—and a few months ago, I was very proud to sign into law another tremendous victory for our veterans. Maybe this is the one that we kept talking about and talking about—48 years. They couldn't get it approved. It made so much sense. I used to talk about it because I thought I was this great guy that had this great vision. It's called VA Choice.

And I said: "You know, if you have lines where you can't see a doctor for 2 weeks, 3 weeks, 4 weeks, 12 days, 8 days—how about 1 day? No good." I said: "I have an idea. Send them out to a private doctor. We got great doctors, and they'll be taken care of immediately. We'll pay the bill." I thought it was, like, this great idea.

Well, they thought about it for 40 years. They couldn't get it passed. We got it passed. So we have now VA Choice. So now if a veteran can't get the care they need from the VA in a timely fashion, they have the right to go see a private doctor.

Today, for the first time in American history, I am about to sign a bill that will fully and permanently give our great and cherished veterans choice, so you don't have to wait on line for 18 days to take care of a simple—I mean, we had people waiting on line with a simple problem that, by the time they saw the doctor, they were terminally ill. No more of that. If you have a line, you go see a doctor. You get yourself taken care of. We take care of it. Okay? Good. It was amazing. But it was amazing.

You would think that would have been easy to pass. Well, there's a reason it took so many years; it wasn't easy. You have different groups and different people. But in the end, we all came together, and we got it done: VA Choice.

Here with us today is Vin Putignano, a Vietnam veteran who is a great guy, who lives in Las Vegas. And now, through the Choice program, he can see the specialist doctors that he needs while still getting his primary care through the VA medical centers like this one.

And that's the other thing: There's so many great things that they do that people don't recognize. And you don't have to go out all the time to get what you need, because so much of it

is taking place here. We have some tremendously talented people. I always hear about the incredible level of treatment and talent that the doctors have. You have really incredible doctors and nurses. You had to get to them; that was the problem. But you have some tremendously talented people.

So, Vin, I'd like you, if you would, to say a few words about VA Choice, please. Thank you, Vin.

*North Las Vegas, NV, resident Vincent Putignano.* First of all, good morning. Thank you, Mr. President, for those kind words. I wish my mom was here. [Laughter] Because she wouldn't believe you. [Laughter] Anyway, it's an honor to stand with you today in your continued fight to bring the VA to where it is and should be.

[At this point, Mr. Putignano continued his remarks, concluding as follows.]

I wish to share with you a personal story. In the last 5 years, I have had a bleeding ulcer on my toe that we've not been able to fix. And because of VA Choice, I've been able to, with the support of the Veterans Administration, I've been able to find a podiatrist who operated 10 days on me—10 days ago on me. And the man did something that blew my mind. I got home. I took off the boot. There was a little bit of blood, and I called. He came and made a house call.

*Audience member.* Wow.

*Mr. Putignano.* Who does that? [Laughter] Not anymore, right? Anyway, Dr. Wesley Lyon and his staff are treating me. They're taking care of me. And by the way, with this whole upset with this toe, my golf game went right out the window.

*The President.* Oh, that's terrible. [Laughter]

*Mr. Putignano.* But there's a chance of it coming back.

*The President.* It will come back. It will be better than ever, better than ever.

*Mr. Putignano.* If it can, who knows? [Laughter] I want to thank you, Mr. President, for the commitment that you have made to myself and to my brother and sister veterans and those of us from World War II right up to the current time of our existence—of our military people.

No longer do they have to—as you just said, do they have to go and stand and wait and not get the proper care. That's all gone away. That's all because of you, and because of your staff and your Government. And must I say—I must say that I really am impressed with the fact that you and your Government are really focusing on making the country's promise to us a reality. Because you know what? We earned it.

*The President.* You did earn it.

*Mr. Putignano.* Thank you, sir. Thank you very much.

*The President.* That's great. Thank you, Vin. That was beautiful. Thank you very much. Take care of that toe. [Laughter]

The bill I'm signing today also provides the VA with vital funding for opioid treatment and prevention, a big problem in this country, a big problem here, and in the country; for mental health care services; telemedicine, which is the new thing; and more than \$1 billion for veterans electronic health records. We've done a lot of work on health records, and now you're able to transfer easily from Department of Defense to the VA and back and forth. Before, it was almost impossible. It was a big thing.

Today's funding package also delivers for the men and women now serving in uniform. The legislation includes more than \$10 billion to build, renovate, and repair houses, schools, training

centers, and other facilities on military bases. They need it. There's been a lot of—a lot time has gone by, and they're in bad shape. But they'll, very shortly, be in very good shape.

This is terrific news for Nevada's nearly 20,000 Active Duty and Reserve soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and National Guardsmen. We are providing nearly \$100 million for 3 bases right here in Nevada: Creech Air Force Base, Nellis Air Force Base, and the National Guard Readiness Center, just a few miles away.

This bill also includes \$15 billion for the Department of Energy's Nuclear Weapons Security program, which is so important, to modernize our nuclear arsenal and keep the deadliest weapons from falling into the wrong hands.

Finally, we have secured \$7 billion for the Army Corps of Engineers to build crumbling ports and waterways and to keep and improve flood and storm barriers so that America remains safe.

On Wednesday, I visited North and South Carolina and met with first responders and survivors of Hurricane Florence. Incredible people. I was inspired by their unbelievable courage and resilience.

Our Nation mourns the tragic loss of life. And I don't know if you're aware, but by tomorrow afternoon, massive amounts of water will flood into South Carolina. They got hit, but the big hit comes days later. And it will be the biggest they've ever had. I said, "Well, is there a chance . . ." I was there. I said, "Is there a chance that maybe it doesn't show up?" They said: "Nope. It'll be here at about 2:30." [*Laughter*] And it's going to be very, very bad. But they're ready. They're ready. They're really ready. And folks that—in the military and FEMA and first responders, they've been incredible.

But our Nation mourns the tragic loss of life, and we are moved by the countless ways Americans have come together to rescue those in danger. You see it all the time. You turn on the news at night, and you'll see people being pulled from cars by first responders and the military, FEMA workers, and frankly, citizens that are there.

Last night a car just got taken away by the water, with people in it, and they were able to get them out at tremendous danger. Working with State and local leaders, we will not rest until that entire rebuilding—North and South Carolina, predominantly—is complete. Really great leadership in both places—the Governors, the Senators. I met with everybody, and they're really ready. They're really ready.

And North Carolina has largely been hit. They're almost at the stage where they're rebuilding. In South Carolina, as I said—watch tomorrow. It's going to be a tough one.

In everything we do, and everywhere we go, we are committed to safety, prosperity, and opportunity for all Americans and for every hero who wears the uniform. And that's really why I am here today. I love those people who wear that uniform. I love our law enforcement, the job they do. Our fire men and women. These are incredible people. And I think, for the most part, our Nation is beginning to realize it, maybe more than they ever have before. Incredible people.

With this legislation, we are securing a better future for our citizens. We are modernizing our nation's infrastructure. And we are building military bases worthy of our great heroes. We are ensuring that our brave veterans are respected and cherished like never before.

And our country is respected again. Our country is respected like never before. It's a big difference. The country is respected again.

*Audience member.* Thank you.

*The President.* [*Applause*] Thank you. Thank you.

So I want to thank you all for being here, and just say God bless you, God bless those who serve, and God bless the United States of America. Thank you all for being here. And I'll sign. Thank you.

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:11 a.m. at the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Roy A. Cooper III of North Carolina; and Gov. Henry D. McMaster of South Carolina. H.R. 5895, approved September 21, was assigned Public Law No. 115–244.

*Categories:* Bill Signings and Vetoes : Energy and Water, Legislative Branch, and Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act, 2019, signing remarks in North Las Vegas, NV.

*Locations:* North Las Vegas, NV.

*Names:* Burr, Richard M.; Cooper, Roy A.; Graham, Lindsey O.; Heller, Dean A.; Laxalt, Adam P.; Mattis, James N.; McMaster, Henry D.; Putignano, Vincent; Sandoval, Brian E.; Scott, Timothy E.; Tillis, Thomas R.; Wilkie, Robert L., Jr.

*Subjects:* Armed Forces, U.S. : Funding; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Defense, Department of; Defense, Department of : Secretary; Drug abuse and trafficking : Opioid epidemic, efforts to combat; Economy, national : Improvement; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Homeland Security, Department of : Emergency Management Agency, Federal; Infrastructure : National improvement efforts; Law enforcement and crime : Law enforcement officers, service and dedication; Legislation, enacted : Energy and Water, Legislative Branch, and Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act, 2019; Natural disasters : Hurricane Florence; Natural disasters : Preparedness efforts; Natural disasters : Response and recovery efforts; Nevada : Governor; Nevada : President's visit; North Carolina : Governor; North Carolina : Hurricane Florence, damage and recovery efforts; South Carolina : Governor; South Carolina : Hurricane Florence, damage and recovery efforts; Veterans : Health and medical care; Veterans : Mental health services, improvement efforts; Veterans : Service and dedication; Veterans : Unemployment and underemployment; Veterans Affairs, Department of : Personnel management reform; Veterans Affairs, Department of : Secretary.

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