

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks on Signing Criminal Justice Reform Legislation and an Exchange With Reporters

December 21, 2018

The President. Thank you very much. I appreciate everybody being here. We've had a very busy 2 or 3 days. It's been very positive. Things are happening that haven't happened in our Government for a long time.

Border Security

The other night, as you know, we had a vote on border security, and I think we want to discuss this just for a second. But the House of Representatives voted 217 to 185, approving strong border security and the money necessary to take care of the barrier, wall, or steel slats—whatever you want to call it, it's all the same.

And it was a tremendous evening for the Republicans, to be honest with you, because the level of spirit, the level of happiness—a lot of people came out; they said they have never seen—one man in particular; he's been there for over 20 years—he said, "I've never seen spirit or enthusiasm like this." They came from all parts of the country. A couple of them came from other parts outside—so I say all parts of the world—in order to vote. And they voted, and it was an incredible vote.

And we were told that you would never get the House to vote. Well, we were able to get the House to vote. And it wasn't that we did it; they did it. They were incredible. So I want to thank, in this case, House Republicans, because what they did was rather incredible. And now the Senate is looking at it. We just had a meeting with some of our great Senator Republicans, and it lasted for a long time. Tremendous enthusiasm for border security.

And I think I can speak for them very strongly when I say they want to see something happen on border security. They want the security of safety. They want safety for our country. Drugs are pouring in—and we've done an incredible job considering we have no barrier. But drugs are pouring into our country. Human trafficking is at the all-time worst in history because of the internet. And the human trafficking problem is a problem that has gone on through the ages, but it's never been worse because of the internet. All of the world. This isn't the United States; this is all over the world.

So we need border security. And the Republicans in the Senate, as you know, are taking it up today, and it's really up to the Democrats—totally up to the Democrats—as to whether or not we have a shutdown. It's possible that we'll have a shutdown. I would say the chances are probably very good, because I don't think Democrats care so much about maybe this issue. But this is a very big issue. It's an issue of crime. It's an issue of safety. It's an issue of, least importantly, dollars. Spend \$285 billion a year on illegal immigration. We have to finally do it. The wall will pay for itself on a monthly basis. I mean, literally, every month it pays for itself.

So we're talking about small amounts of money. Think of it: We approved, and we got good Democrat support. Military, last year, \$700 billion. Recently, \$716 billion for the military. And here we're talking about \$5 billion. So it's a tiny fraction. But unfortunately, they've devoted their lives to making sure it doesn't happen. And that wasn't for what should happen; that was for political reasons.

So we are going to be working very hard to get something passed in the Senate. There's a very good chance it won't get passed. It's up to the Democrats. So it's really the Democrat shutdown. Because we've done our thing. When Nancy Pelosi said, "You'll never get the votes in the House," we got them. And we got them by a big margin, 217 to 185.

So now it's up to the Democrats as to whether or not we have a shutdown tonight. I hope we don't, but we're totally prepared for a very long shutdown. And this is our only chance that we'll ever have, in our opinion, because of the world and the way it breaks out, to get great border security.

Ronald Reagan tried many years ago—I got a note from a member of his family—many years ago tried to get a wall. And he fought for a long time, during his entire term. He was never able to get a wall. And I consider him to be a great President. He knew what he was doing.

We are going to—one way or the other, we're going to get a wall. We're going to get a barrier. We're going to get anything you want to name it. You can name it anything you want. But we cannot let what's been going on in this country over the last 10 years, we just can't let it happen.

Criminal Justice Reform Legislation

Now to a very positive note: criminal justice reform. Everybody said it couldn't be done. [*Laughter*] They said the conservatives won't approve it. They said the liberals won't approve it. They said nobody is going to approve it; everybody is going to be against it. It's been many, many years, numerous decades, and nobody came close.

And I just want to thank all of the people standing behind me. I want to thank my daughter Ivanka, my son-in-law Jared Kushner. I want to thank—[*applause*—and I have to say, I want to thank Paul and Kevin. I want to thank Mitch. I want to thank Nancy and Chuck, as I say, affectionately, actually. [*Laughter*] But I do. I want to thank everybody. This was incredible bipartisan support. Mike, you were great—Mike Pence. Everybody. Everybody worked so hard on this.

And I look at, you know, behind me—I said, this is a cross-section of everybody in our country. We have everybody here. I won't go into details, because I'll get myself into trouble if I go into too many of those details. [*Laughter*] We have everybody wanting this. We had a few people that didn't, and that's okay. It's impossible to get a hundred percent. But we passed this in the Senate, 87 to 12. That's unheard of. And the one person that missed the vote was actually in Afghanistan doing a very good job: Lindsey Graham. And I think I can honestly say that he would have voted in favor. [*Laughter*] Lindsey was for it. And so it's 88 to 12.

And then, in the House, we passed it 358 to 36. And you look at this vote—358 to 36—it's impossible; you don't have votes like that. Hopefully, we can do so well for border security, but it won't happen. [*Laughter*] Hard to believe. Because border security, to me, is simpler.

Criminal justice reform—and I must tell you, I've been a little bit of a student over the last 4 or 5 weeks too, because I started off a little bit on the negative side and said, what does it all mean? And then, I'd speak to people that are really involved. I'd look at States. The State of Texas—Texas is a tough State for criminal justice. Very tough. They passed it a long time ago. It's had a huge impact. Kentucky—we have Matt here, and we have Mitch here. Matt. Kentucky passed it. Georgia passed it. And they've had tremendous, tremendous results,

results that are incredible. And other States also. And other States that are known for being tough on crime, tough on whatever you want to say.

So I started looking at it very closely. And when you have somebody put in jail for 54 years because he did something that has no chance of him coming out and totally nonviolent, but there was a violation of a rule, that's tough stuff.

Alice Johnson, I let her out. She was in jail for 22 years. She had another 28 years. And the crime was, let's say—I think most of you would agree—was not worthy of a 50-year term in prison. And she came out, and I'll never forget the look on her face. She walked out of jail after 22 years, and she was with her family. She was with her family. And they greeted her at the door, and everyone—she had grandsons; big, strong, beautiful guys. They grabbed their grandmother, and they were all crying. Everybody was crying. I said, what a beautiful thing that is. Everybody—big family. Everybody, they were gathered around—there was this large circle—hugging and kissing each other. She was in for 22 years. She had another 28 years to go.

There was another case where a judge came to me—a good man—and he was mandated to put a young man in jail for 28, approximately, years. And he wanted him to go to jail for 2 years. He said he did commit a problem, but he was mandated to put him in jail for 28 years. And he actually left the bench; he quit. He was a highly respected judge and is a respected person. He left the bench. He was so saddened that there was nothing he could do, because this young man was mandated to spend almost a good portion of the rest of his life, about 28 years, in jail. And the judge had no power to do anything about it, yet he was a judge.

And he's actually taken up a crusade for this, and he left the bench. He quit, as a judge. He said, "When I can't give this man 2 or 5 years, when he has to be in jail for the best part of his life, then I don't want to be a judge anymore." I never forgot it. This was 2 months ago that I met this gentleman, the judge.

So criminal justice reform is an incredible, beyond bipartisan, signing. We'll be doing that in just a moment. But what I wanted to do was maybe go around and ask some of these incredible leaders; these are political leaders—Senators, Congressmen—but they're also leaders from around the country, a couple from around the world, and some stars. We have some big stars in this room too. And we've had tremendous support. Shocking. To me it was shocking.

And I will say this: Nobody thought 3, 4 months ago this was something that we couldn't even think about. I had a man come up to me yesterday. You know, we passed the biggest tax cuts in the history of our country. We've done regulation cuts that has never been done before, more than any other President. And a man came up to me, who's a top lawyer in the—in this country, very, very knowledgeable in this subject. He said: "Sir, this is the single biggest thing you've done. Far bigger than tax cuts. Far bigger than regulation cuts. Far bigger than anything you've done." And I started to argue with him. And then, after a while, I said, "Why am I arguing?" [Laughter] I said: "Let's take it. What difference is it?" I said, "We'll take it."

So if I could just go around a little bit, and maybe I'll start with Mike, Vice President. And we'll go around. And if you'd like to say a few words, just essentially, raise your hands.

But I want to thank you all. I want to thank you all for being here. This is an incredible event, an incredible success for our country. Thank you.

Mike Pence.

Vice President Michael R. Pence. Thank you, Mr. President. And just thank you. I know I'd speak for everyone here when I say thank you for your leadership. Thank you for stepping up for criminal justice reform. We believe that the Nation is safer—[*applause*]. I remember when you asked me to join that journey on the campaign trail, one of the things you said most often was, "Make America safe again." And I know that by breaking the cycle of recidivism, by opening the doorway to more opportunities for not just education, but character education and faith-based programs in our system, we're going to see more families intact again, more people that are going to choose a better pathway when they come out of prison, having paid their debt to society.

And—but your leadership on this brought together the broadest coalition. And I also think of that election night, where you pledged to be the President of all the American people. And today, Mr. President, I have to say, I look across this room, and this bill represents your commitment to stand up not just for public safety, not just for law and order, not just for second chances, but for all of the American people and the values they hold. So thank you. It's an honor.

The President. Thank you. Thank you, Mike.

So Chuck Grassley has been involved from day one. He is—and he's a tough cookie. [*Laughter*] He's tough. I said, "You mean Grassley likes it?" When I heard Grassley likes it, then I really started to get interested in it. Chuck, want to say a few words?

Senator Charles E. Grassley. Well, thank you for your support. And this is an example of bipartisanship that people at the grassroots don't see often enough. And so that's a victory right there. We learned from the States that you named that rehabilitation pays off: reduction in crime, productive citizens, and spending less on prisons.

Secondly, those of us that voted for these tough mandatory minimums, 30 years ago, realized that there is some unfairness in it, and I think this legislation will bring fairness to this system of sentencing. So it's a big victory.

The President. Thank you, Chuck. Thank you, Chuck. Well said.

Alveda King Ministries Founder Alveda C. King. Amen.

The President. Would you like to say something? Ted Cruz.

Senator R. Edward "Ted" Cruz. Mr. President, I want to commend your leadership on this issue. I mean, this is a coalition you don't see very often in Washington or anyplace else. And it's an example of bipartisan cooperation coming forward in the interest of justice, in the interest of moving our country in a more just direction.

[*At this point, Sen. Cruz continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

Right now there are far too many young men—particularly tragically, young Black men—who find themselves decades in prison for a nonviolent crime. This bill corrects this, and it's a great step in the direction of justice.

The President. Thank you, Ted, very much. That's very nice. Also, congratulations on your race. You won easily. [*Laughter*] Now he's running for President. I thought you were supposed to win before you run for President, no? [*Laughter*] Congratulations. That was a great race. Great job.

Sen. Cruz. Thank you.

The President. Mike Lee? Please.

Senator Michael S. Lee. Mr. President, thank you so much. It's almost hard for me to speak about this without being emotional. In the process of this, this has brought together friendships that I'll cherish for the rest of my life. I'm now texting buddies with Van Jones—*[laughter]*—with Dick Durbin and with Cory Booker. And I speak to Jared Kushner about five times a day. In the middle of dinner, when my phone rings, my family says to me, "It's Jared, isn't it?" *[Laughter]*

[Sen. Lee continued his remarks, concluding as follows.]

This bill today is going to make a loud noise. It's going to make a loud noise that extends across Democrats, Republicans, liberals, conservatives, from one end of this country to another, reminding this country that President Donald J. Trump has—makes—has made America safe. And, for that, I'll be forever grateful to you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you very much.

Van, go ahead. Please.

#cut50 President and Cofounder Van Jones. Mr. President, there is nothing more important than freedom. There is nothing more important than freedom. That's what America was founded on, what the civil rights movement was founded on, Civil War was fought over, women's rights—all the great movements—about freedom. And this is a movement that's about freedom.

[Mr. Jones continued his remarks, concluding as follows.]

And when you're trying to help people on the bottom, sir, I will work with or against any Democrat, with or against any Republican, because there is nothing more important than freedom. So thank you, sir.

The President. Thank you, Van. Thank you.

Matt.

Governor Matthew G. Bevin of Kentucky. I would just say this: From the perspective of a Governor of a State where this touches people at the ground level, this is significant. And again, I—it's hard for me to follow on these words, but I think what I'm struck by—we've heard the word "bipartisanship" mentioned. This transcends partisanship. I think that's why, honestly, this sense of good will that this creates—the reason it was so overwhelming—is that it's not a partisan issue. This is a human issue. It is about freedom. It's about inalienable rights.

[Gov. Bevin continued his remarks, concluding as follows.]

This gentleman that told you this may be the greatest thing—we have now taken people who, whether they were intended to be or not, had been relegated to second- and third-class citizenship in America—and they are legion—and we have now given them the opportunity—and their families and communities—to believe that there is hope, that there is the possibility of freedom, and that justice will be served. And it wouldn't have happened without you, and I'm grateful.

The President. That's great. Thank you, Matt.

James Lankford. James.

Senator James P. Lankford. Yes. I was a part of this bill, but I look around at how many parts that everyone else carried—my part was fairly small. I was dealing with juveniles—after working with youth for so many years—dealing with juveniles that are in solitary confinement and how do we manage that. And that's something Cory Booker and I have worked together on for a couple of years, to be able to include that in this bill.

[*Sen. Lankford continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

And we have 40,000 people a year that are coming out of Federal penitentiaries. We should do whatever we can to be able to help those folks reengage in our community and with their families and with their faith. And this bill allows us to be able to do that.

So I'm very grateful for the engagement that everyone has had on that.

The President. Thank you so much. Great job. Thank you. Appreciate it.

Mr. Jones. Mr. President—

The President. Bob Goodlatte, please. Yes, go ahead, Van.

Mr. Jones. I just would be remiss—there are two or three people here who you don't know their names—

The President. Good.

Mr. Jones. But Topeka Sam is here. She is one of the great formerly incarcerated leaders. She's here. Jessica Jackson—I just want to make sure she gets at least a chance to shake your hand. Give her a round of applause.

The President. Well, she's going to get a chance to speak. I could give her a second. Would you give up your place, Bob Goodlatte?

Representative Robert W. Goodlatte. Absolutely.

The President. Okay, we're going to have somebody that's really good. Right? But you're going to get right back there.

Topeka, please.

Ladies of Hope Ministries Founder and Executive Director Topeka K. Sam. Yes. Well, thank you, first, Mr. President, Mr. Vice President, Jared, Ivanka for this moment. It's very emotional for me. I want to give all glory to God because God is why this and why we are standing here together right now.

When I was in Federal prison for 3 years, there was no hope. There was no program. There was nothing for anyone. We didn't have—as a woman who was incarcerated, we fought to make sure we had sanitary napkins and hygiene products to us. There are sisters, like Pamela Winn, who lost her baby because she was shackled during child labor. And now this will all end.

And my sisters and brothers who are presently incarcerated and watching—because they have called me all morning—we have been fighting, and we will continue to fight, and this is just a first step. We are looking forward to continuing to work with you, President—

The President. Thank you.

Ms. Sam. —and to make sure that our people will have everything that they need when they come home so that we can all have an opportunity to transform our lives.

So I thank you. I thank every single person in this room. I thank Jessica Jackson and Van Jones from #cut50 who have believed in formerly incarcerated leadership and have invested in making sure that we were put in the front of this, which is why we do not look at it as bipartisanship; it is a people issue.

And the reason why this happened was because, Jared, you experienced incarceration through your father. And you fought like you were in there, just like we were. And I thank you. Thank you all.

The President. Thank you.

And I want to get to the other two too, Van. Because you were so good, I want to hear the other two. [*Laughter*] She'll be running for President. [*Laughter*]

Bob Goodlatte, please.

Rep. Goodlatte. Mr. President, you have me follow this wonderful lady, but I want to follow what she said. You know, Christmas and Hanukkah is a season of hope. And with the signing of this bill today, right before Christmas, you are giving hope to hundreds of thousands of Americans, when you count their families, really millions of Americans.

[*Rep. Goodlatte continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

It's the First Step Act. There's much more that can be done in criminal justice reform, and I hope we think of that as the first step.

The President. And we have started that; we'll call it "phase two." But it's already begun. And this is First Step, but there's going to be a second and a third and possibly a fourth. [*Laughter*] We'll see how it all works out. But it's a great subject. It's a great topic. People are very happy.

Thank you very much, Bob. I appreciate it.

Rep. Goodlatte. And a shout-out to Doug Collins, who's—[*inaudible*].

Representative Douglas A. Collins. Mr. President, thank you for what—just a few months ago, I had somebody come to me, and when we were talking about this in the House, then said—and we talked about this, they said, "This will never happen." To all of you out there who don't believe in miracles, it does happen. [*Laughter*]

[*Rep. Collins continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

And, Jared, we've have many conversations about this. We knew we'd get here. The group that surrounded you, Mr. President, support this. They support what you have done and are so appreciative for the fact that you opened yourself up to say, here is something that can help people. And in this time of the year, this makes it all the while.

The faces behind that bill will forever be grateful. And that's why we're here today.

The President. That's beautiful. Thank you, man. Thank you.

So he's got the best seat in the house, and I didn't see him. Tim Scott. He's right behind me. [*Laughter*]

Senator Timothy E. Scott. Thank you, Mr. President. Once again, we find ourselves in the Oval Office doing something significant for this country. And in this Christmas season, it's important for us to remember the 1 Corinthians 13 that ends with ". . . faith, hope, and love. The greatest of these is love." And where I find that focus of love today is on the communities.

This should be called "the community justice reform bill," because as you cut the rates of crimes committed by the folks who leave, you're making the community safer.

I look over here at these law enforcement officers.

Participant. Yes. Yes.

Sen. Scott. Thank you.

Participant. Thank you.

Sen. Scott. Thank you. Thank you for coming to the table. There is one thing that is crystal clear to all Americans: President Trump is a powerful President who believes in law and order. Being supported by FOP and law enforcement organizations brought many Republicans to the table to take a look and see what this legislation could do. It was your support and the support of President Trump that brought this coalition together. Without your support, this would not be possible.

So, Mr. President, thank you again for your courageous leadership on behalf of this [*inaudible*].

The President. And I see Kevin back there. Just so you can—please. Congratulations, by the way.

House Majority Leader Kevin O. McCarthy. Well, I want you to sign the bill, so I don't want to—[*laughter*]. I think the season that we are, this bill embodies why this country was created. Yes, we believe in law, but we also believe in second chances. We also believe in the individual. And we believe it doesn't matter where you're born or where you come from, you have hope in this country, and you have an opportunity. And I do want to give you credit because a lot of administrations have tried.

And if I could yield any time, I would yield to Jared—[*laughter*]—because he did not have a vote in this, but he had a voice in this. And the tenacity you kept, and never getting down, I think—and the ability to bring people together—there's not very many times that we're all like this from different walks of the aisle. But we're all excited because of the spirit of what this does. And I would yield you as much time as you need.

The President. Good. I like that. Jared has worked so hard on this. I'd say, you know, "What's it all about?" Many of us—when we just started, it's like, "What's going on here?" And he would be working so hard for, really, a long period of time, longer than anybody would even understand.

And I would like to have you say a few words.

White House Senior Adviser Jared C. Kushner. Sure. Thank you very much. And I just have to say, seeing this coalition and all of you who are with us today—and there's a lot of people who aren't in the room today, and we'll try to bring them all in for a bigger celebration, because this really took an army of a lot of devoted people. And each of you played a very important role towards helping us accomplish this very important objective that a lot of people thought could not be done.

[*Senior Adviser Kushner continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

So I just want to personally say it's been a real honor for me to work with each and every one of you to do this. And I've been thinking a lot about the people this is going to help. And

no matter what we all put up with to do what we do, this makes a lot of things in life worth it. So thank you.

The President. Great job.

[*Senior Adviser Kushner whispered in the President's ear.*]

Yes, do that, please.

Senior Adviser Kushner. Can I ask Pat Nolan? My friend, Pat Nolan.

The President. Hi, Pat.

American Conservative Union Foundation's Center for Criminal Justice Reform Director Patrick J. Nolan. Hello, Mr. President. [*Laughter*] There's somebody here overlooking all of this, and that's Chuck Colson. He was a lonely voice among conservatives, saying we had to reform the criminal justice system.

The President. That's great. That's great.

Mr. Nolan. And he was so—I'm sure he's smiling down from Heaven. I talked to his widow Patty 2 nights ago, and she said to give you her best and her thanks for it.

The President. Thank you very much.

Mr. Nolan. And Jared is just a superstar. I'm impressed with him so much.

God bless you, Mr. President.

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

That was incredible, by the way. I think what I'll do is ask a very special person to speak. Because whenever Jared had any difficulty with me on a couple of points, he'd send in a real power named Ivanka. [*Laughter*] And she would call me, and she would say: "Daddy, you don't understand. You must do this. You must." [*Laughter*] And I'd say, "Oh, all right." [*Laughter*]

Ivanka, would you say a few words, please? Honey, come on over.

Assistant to the President Ivanka M. Trump. Well, first of all, this is just so incredible and it is the culmination of so much blood, sweat, tears of every single person in this room and well beyond this room.

[*Assistant to the President Ivanka M. Trump continued her remarks, concluding as follows.*]

You campaigned for the forgotten men and women of this country. And there's nobody more forgotten than those who are in our system, had done their time, and left the system. And giving them pathways to be able to provide for their families and thrive is what this is all about.

So thank you for the honor of working on that.

The President. Thank you. Great job. Thank you, honey.

Assistant to the President Ivanka M. Trump. Thank you.

The President. I think we owe a lot, because law enforcement was incredible and so strongly behind us. And I'd like to ask you to say a few words. You represented so many people so well.

International Association of Chiefs of Police President Paul M. Cell. Well, thank you, Mr. President. First, I want to say thank you very much to you, Mr. President, Jared, and Ivanka, and the entire administration for what you've done.

[*Mr. Cell continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

So as president of the IACP that represents the head of law enforcement throughout this country, as well as the FOP who represent the officers throughout this country, we want to say we are proud to have been with you from the beginning. We are honored to be here today. And please know, as we move forward, we will be with you, side by side, each and every one of you. Thank you very much.

The President. Thank you.

Fraternal Order of Police National President K. Charles Canterbury. Mr. President, on behalf of the 800,000 uniformed police officers in the country, we're glad that people are starting to listen to our voice and listen to what we face every day on the streets.

[*Mr. Canterbury continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

And we want to thank you for your leadership. We also want to thank you for sitting behind that desk and listening to the people on the street that are doing this job every day. It's refreshing.

The President. Thank you very much.

Mr. Canterbury. Thank you, sir.

Faith and Freedom Coalition Founder and Chairman Ralph E. Reed, Jr. Mr. President, on behalf of the 2 million members of Faith and Freedom, and tens of millions of people of faith around the country, I want to thank you for your leadership, for your heart on this issue; and, Jared, for the historic role that you've played in this; Mr. Vice President, for all you've done.

[*Mr. Reed continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

This is an historic day. We've been working on this since 2014 in my organization. But I truly believe that were you not sitting behind this desk today, this would not be being signed into law. And I thank you.

The President. Thank you very much.

Representative Virginia A. Foxx. Mr. President, there are two bills you're going to sign today. One of them is juvenile justice reform, and this is another bill that has been being worked on for a long, long time. And our hope is that, with this reform, we will be able to reduce the number of young people who find themselves caught up in a system that leads to nowhere and that we're able to get those young people going in the right direction.

And I would like to yield to my colleague Bobby Scott, who has worked so hard on this for so, so long.

The President. Good.

Representative Robert C. Scott. Thank you. Actually, I'd like to start with referring back to what Chairman Goodlatte said. About 6 years ago, he appointed a subcommittee, with Jim Sensenbrenner and myself leading, on criminal justice reform. We had extensive hearings, heard from dozens of experts on what needed to be done. And at the end of a two-year process, came up with legislation called the SAFE Justice Act, which was a comprehensive ideal of

prevention, early intervention, rehabilitation, policing, sentencing reform. It had everything in it that you can imagine. When you have that big a bill, it's not a surprise that it didn't pass.

[*Laughter*]

[*Rep. Scott continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

So I want to thank our chair, Virginia Foxx; Chairman Goodlatte; and chairman of the subcommittee, at the time, Mr. Sensenbrenner, for all of the work going in this direction to make sure that we can have an evidence-based approach to criminal justice reform.

Thank you very much.

The President. That's great. I'd like to hear from your two girlfriends, or your two friends that are here.

Mr. Jones. Jessica.

The President. You were so good. [*Laughter*] You were better than all of the politicians. [*Laughter*] So maybe your friends could just say a couple of words.

#cut50 National Director and Cofounder Jessica Jackson. Thank you, Mr. President. I just want to say thank you so much. This is about more than just a bill signing. When I was 22 years old, I stood in a courtroom holding my 2-month-old daughter and watching my husband go to prison. I felt so alone, and so ashamed, and so scared. And there are millions of Americans who have that feeling right now.

And right now all that goes away. Because if you look around this room, we have not only Hakeem Jeffries and Doug Collins, who got this started in the House. We have the American Conservative Union. We have Jared Kushner. We've got Senators, politicians—you know, lawmakers. We've got the President of the United States standing with those people. We're not alone anymore. We're not alone, so thank you.

Georgetown University Associate Professor of Law Shon R. Hopwood. Hi, Mr. President. We met once before. I am a lawyer and a law professor at Georgetown, but I spent 11 years in Federal prison before that.

The President. Yes, I remember.

Mr. Hopwood. And I've been given a lot of second chances. And what this bill does is give second chances to hundreds of thousands of people in Federal prison. And I think you're going to be very surprised at what they do with that second chance.

What I saw in prison was not evil people, it was people that, for whatever reason, made really bad choices and deserve to be punished, but who have the potential to turn it around. And this bill actually gives them the opportunity to do that, and I thank you for that.

The President. Thank you very much.

Reentry Initiatives at Right on Crime National Director John Koufos. My name is John Koufos, and I have the blessing to be the national director of Reentry Initiatives at Right on Crime.

Alcoholism sent me to prison. I was in the throes of addiction years ago, and then I was able to find sobriety, get clean. Ms. Rollins gave me a job helping out in Texas with reentry initiatives.

Jared and Ivanka have been so wonderful here to me to put this policy forward. And I want to tell you, Mr. President, what—this is going to lead to jobs. We're going to make folks job ready, to respond to the record low unemployment. We're going to make sure that people who may have not been contributing to taxes or paying taxes, they're going to redeem their lives and they're going to be reunified with their family.

God bless you. And thank you. Thank you.

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

Anybody over here? Yes, please. Go ahead. Go ahead.

Prison Fellowship Ministries Senior Vice President for Advocacy and Public Policy Craig Deroche. Mr. President, on behalf of Prison Fellowship, the largest program, a faith-based service provider inside of the prison, serves hundreds of thousands; just this month, 292,000 children of incarcerated adults will be served Christmas through our Angel Tree program. This First Step Act is everything that Chuck Colson, our administrator, stood for. It's going to make our country safer, more just, and it respects the value and dignity of human life exactly as our Constitution and our laws should. On behalf of all of us, thank you very much.

The President. Great. Thank you very much.

Gov. Bevin. This is what Washington should be like every day. [*Laughter*] It should.

The President. Would you like to say something, Senator? Please.

Senator Sheldon Whitehouse. From the——

The President. Senator Whitehouse.

Sen. Whitehouse. ——Senate perspective, I've got a big thank you to Chairman Grassley here. He was my coauthor on the juvenile justice bill that is in front of you, Mr. President. And he helped coordinate the Durbin-Lee-Cornyn-Whitehouse assemblage that brought the sentencing reform bill before us. The Senate is an unusual institution. [*Laughter*]

The President. And that's true. [*Laughter*]

Sen. Whitehouse. It has some old-school traditions that are important from time to time. And Chuck Grassley is an old-school chairman, who used his old-school chairman authority and power to make sure that this stayed together until it could move; and when it could move, to make sure that it did move. It was old-school Senate work at its very best.

The President. Everybody okay? Bernie?

Former New York City Police and Corrections Commissioner Bernard B. Kerik. Good morning, Mr. President. You know, in 2013, me and Van Jones went to the White House. We were in the White House five times—four or five times with President Obama and a number of people, trying to get this done.

[*Mr. Kerik continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

And my last thanks has to go to Jared, who I have this constant dialogue with. He's done a tremendous job. I can't say enough about what he's done, and the rest of the people in this room.

The President. Thank you very much.

Mr. Kerik. Thank you, sir.

Former Ohio Secretary of State J. Kenneth Blackwell. Mr. President, thank you for your leadership. Thank you, Vice President Pence. Thank you, Jared.

The holocaust survivor, Professor Wiesel, was fond of saying that the miracle of life was not just in its beginning, but the capacity to begin again. It is that understanding that belief that people can turn their lives around if given the proper environment and encouragement that this legislation represents. Thank you for having the courage to taking this first step.

The President. Thank you.

Special Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs Ja'Ron K. Smith. Mr. President, it's been an honor to serve you in this White House. [*Laughter*] And you know, it's just—it's very humbling, you know, to see the courage that you really put in your team, in your staff, and let us be able to go and negotiate this on your behalf. Coming from a single-parent household in Cleveland, Ohio, I never imagined being able to serve my country in the White House.

[*Mr. Smith continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

And so thank you for allowing me to be a part of that and to work with this wonderful coalition. This is the first step, and I hope we can continue to move the football down the field and help make America great again.

The President. We will.

Ms. King. I want to kind of be fast, but do you all remember when this gentleman said we will say "merry Christmas" again? [*Laughter*] And so what a Christmas present.

[*Ms. King continued her remarks, concluding as follows.*]

Prison reform—and it's been said so well by everyone in here. But I remember, it was a long, hot summer, it was August, we were in your office, and some bad words were said about you. But you were focused. And he said, "I want to help people." And everybody has said that wonderfully—his children, all of us. So we thank you.

The President. Thank you.

Ms. King. And the women have talked about even the little babies and all of that, all the way to those who were in jail too long.

[*Sen. Grassley spoke into the President's ear.*]

Sen. Grassley. [*Inaudible*—since 1993. [*Laughter*]

Ms. King. Thank you. So we want to say thank you for caring about all Americans. And one more point: They asked this man when he was candidate, "What are you going to about race and racism?" He said: "We're Americans. We all believe the same. We need for people to be safe, secure, blessed—working if they need to." And so I just want to say thank you. You keep your promises. So keep going, sir. Whoa!

The President. I will.

Chuck Grassley just said, "Sir, there's a vote going on in the Senate, and I haven't missed a vote since 1993." Is that true? Get out of here, Chuck. [*Laughter*] Go ahead. Go.

Participant. Sign it! Sign it!

The President. 1993? [*Laughter*]

Sen. Grassley. Yes. I've been here 3 hours waiting for this. [*Laughter*]

Sen. Lee. I'll bet they'll hold that vote open for us.

[*The President signed the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2018 and handed the pen to Sen. Grassley.*]

The President. That's great, Chuck. Here you go.

Here you go, Chuck. Chuck, you go to the vote. [*Laughter*] Great guy.

Mr. Jones. Worth the wait, worth the wait.

[*The President signed the First Step Act of 2018 and handed the pen to Mr. Jones.*]

The President. There we go.

Thank you, everybody. That's great. Why don't we pass these around, folks?

Potential Federal Government Shutdown

Q. Mr. President, how long will you be willing to let the Government be shut down?

The President. Excuse me? [*Laughter*]

Gov. Bevin. Celebrate the moment.

The President. I'll be honest with you: This is such an incredible moment, what we've just done—criminal justice reform—that I just don't think it's appropriate to be talking about anything else.

Thank you. But in 5 minutes, we'll be talking about other things. [*Laughter*] Here, folks, spread them around, okay?

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:12 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to House Speaker-designate Nancy Pelosi; Speaker of the House of Representatives Paul D. Ryan; Senate Majority Leader A. Mitchell McConnell; Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer; Memphis, TN, resident Alice Marie Johnson, whose lifetime prison sentence was commuted by the President on June 6; and Texas Democratic senatorial candidate Rep. Robert F. "Beto" O'Rourke. Sen. Lee referred to Sen. Richard J. Durbin. Ms. Sam referred to Charles Kushner, father of Senior Adviser Kushner. Mr. Koufos referred to Assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Affairs Brooke L. Rollins Brooke L. Rollins, in her former capacity as chief executive officer and president of the Texas Public Policy Foundation. He also referred to H.R. 695, H.R. 6964 and S. 756, approved December 21, were assigned Public Law Nos. 115–385 and 115–391, respectively.

Categories: Bill Signings and Vetoes : First Step Act of 2018; Bill Signings and Vetoes : Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2018, signing remarks; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Bevin, Matthew G.; Bevin, Matthew K.; Blackwell, J. Kenneth; Canterbury, K. Charles; Cell, Paul M.; Collins, Douglas A.; Cruz, R. Edward "Ted"; Deroche, Craig; Foxx, Virginia A.; Goodlatte, Robert W.; Graham, Lindsey O.; Grassley, Charles E.; Hopwood, Shon R.; Jackson, Jessica; Johnson, Alice Marie; Jones, Van; Kerik, Bernard B.; King, Alveda C.; Koufos, John; Kushner, Jared C.; Lankford, James P.; Lee, Michael S.; McCarthy, Kevin O.; McConnell, A. Mitchell; Nolan, Patrick J.; O'Rourke, Robert F. "Beto"; Pelosi, Nancy; Pence, Michael R.;

Reed, Ralph E., Jr.; Ryan, Paul D.; Sam, Topeka K.; Schumer, Charles E.; Scott, Robert C.; Scott, Timothy E.; Smith, Ja'Ron K.; Trump, Ivanka M.; Whitehouse, Sheldon.

Subjects: ; Armed Forces, U.S. : Funding; Communications : News media :: Presidential interviews; Congress : Bipartisanship; Congress : House of Representatives :: Majority leader; Congress : House of Representatives :: Speaker; Congress : House of Representatives :: Speaker-designate; Congress : Senate :: Majority leader; Congress : Senate :: Minority leader; Defense and national security : Border security; Drug abuse and trafficking : Illegal drugs, interdiction efforts; Elections : 2018 congressional elections; Government organization and employees : Federal regulations, review; Immigration and naturalization : Illegal immigration; Kentucky : Governor; Law enforcement and crime : Criminal justice system, reform efforts; Law enforcement and crime : Pardons and commutations; Law enforcement and crime : Trafficking in persons, efforts to combat; Legislation, enacted : First Step Act of 2018; Legislation, enacted : Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2018; Legislation, proposed : Further Additional Continuing Appropriations Act, 2019; Mexico : Border with U.S., infrastructure and security; Taxation : Tax relief; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Assistant to the President; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Legislative Affairs, Special Assistant; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Senior Adviser; White House Office : Vice President.

DCPD Number: DCPD201800859.