

REMARKS

## Remarks by President Trump at the Opportunity Zone Conference with State, Local, Tribal, and Community Leaders

ECONOMY & JOBS

Issued on: April 17, 2019



Eisenhower Executive Office Building  
South Court Auditorium

2:15 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. Please, sit down. Please. It’s a great honor. I want to thank Larry. He’s been fantastic. We’ve had a lot of good luck together over the years, and he’s been — really, he stepped up to the plate. And we’re zooming and our country is doing well.

We’re the hottest economy in the world. We’re, by far, the biggest economy in the world. We weren’t when I first came. It was heading in the wrong direction and now we’re in the right direction.

Our trade deal with China is moving along and it’s moving along nicely. And we’re asking for a lot of things. And I have a feeling we’ll be successful, and it’ll be good for both countries. But that’s moving along quite well. You’ll be hearing about it very, very shortly.

Today, we are proud to be joined by state and local leaders from both parties, including mayors and county commissioners — people I know very well, in some cases. In some cases — I hate to say it; probably shouldn’t admit it — people I’ve dealt with in my pre-life. (Laughter.) And there are a lot of professionals, I will tell you. I know very well what you do and there’s great professionals. Not easy. Economic development offers — officers and tribal leaders and entrepreneurs and faith leaders.

Paula White, thank you very much. You’ve been so helpful. Thank you, Paula. Pastor Paula. She’s fantastic.

Thank you all for pouring your heart and your soul into rebuilding our communities and restoring hope in every part of our great land. It’s what’s happening.

We’re here to celebrate Opportunity Zones. And who would have thought this was going to be so successful? Who would have thought? When we first proposed the idea, they said, “Well things like this have been talked about but it never happened.” But

the numbers are incredible — what's happened in a very short period of time. It's really a crucial part of our new tax law to help low-income Americans.

As you know, this vital provision gives businesses a massive incentive to invest and create jobs in our nation's most underserved communities.

I want to thank Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Secretary Ben Carson, who were right here. And they are. (Laughter.) They're waving to me through the door. (Laughter.) And that's okay. Just stay there, fellas. They've already heard from me. (Laughter and applause.) And they're doing a great job, those two. And for their tireless work on behalf of nearly 35 million Americans living in Opportunity Zones. Tremendous community.

Since we passed our historic tax cuts and reforms just over one year ago, wages are rising fast, and they're rising most quickly for the lowest-income Americans. You know, you keep hearing about "for the wealthy." It's not the wealthy. It's for — frankly, if you look at it, blue-collar workers, lower-income people are rising the fastest.

African American unemployment, Hispanic American unemployment, Asian American unemployment have reached the lowest levels in the history of our country. (Applause.) That's great. Right?

New jobless claims are the lowest in 50 years. Private employers have added an average of more than 6,500 jobs every single day. Think of that. It's amazing. (Applause.)

And something I'm very proud of and worked very hard with Jared and everybody on was judicial reform. And to give inmates a second chance at life, we passed the bipartisan criminal justice reform. So many things have happened since that's happened. (Applause.)

And very interestingly, one of the things that we've done that has helped this so much — prisoners coming out, people don't want to hire them — they just don't want to hire them. It's got something — a stigma. Call it whatever you want. They weren't being hired. This is for — I would say, since our founding, very hard for prisoners. This is the best they've ever done, by far.

They're coming out and they're having not only job offers, but they're having choice. And employers are coming back, and we sample them — I know some — and they are so thrilled with what they're getting. And I can't say in every case, because that's not the case no matter who you hire. But they are thrilled.

I had one gentleman tell me — a man I know; a businessman — he said, "I've hired some people coming out of prison. I never thought I'd be doing it. I'm doing it, and they're some of the best employees I have."

And that was done because the economy is so strong. Because, frankly, they're having a hard time getting people. And now they're taking people that they wouldn't have liked and they would have never taken, and they're putting them in and they're finding them to be phenomenal.

So it's never happened before like it's happening now. People coming out of prison are getting a second and, in some cases, a third chance.

I've also signed the single-largest bill to combat the opioid crisis to help free Americans from the scourge of addiction. There's never been anything like it. Over the last 10 years, what's going on is incredible. And we're stopping them much more so at the border. We will — as soon as the wall is built, it will have a tremendous impact.

And Border Patrol has been incredible. Kevin is doing a great job. We have an amazing group of people along the — on the border, and Homeland Security, generally. ICE has been incredible, what they're doing. They're taking MS-13 out by the thousands, who came into our country. The gangs, rough people — they're getting them out. So, ICE has been unbelievable. And law enforcement, generally, has been just unbelievable, the job. You know, our numbers are way down, meaning, in a positive way. Crime is down very substantially from even a year ago.

And we want all Americans to share in our great economic renewal. That's why governors in all 50 states and the territories have designated 8,700 neighborhoods as Opportunity Zones. Hard to believe: 8,700.

Household income in these communities is 37 percent less than the median income in a state as a whole. So it's 37 percent down, and we're catching them fast.

In order to revitalize these areas, we've lowered the capital gains tax for long-term investment in Opportunity Zones all the way down to a very big, fat, beautiful number of zero. (Applause.) Zero. That's why they're looking and they're saying, "No, I don't want to go there. Maybe I don't love the location. I don't want to go." And then they hear about the zero, and they'll say, "I think I'm going to go there." (Laughter.) And then they start liking the location, right? Our great football player. You are some player, huh? I'll never fight you, I promise. That'll never happen. Great player. Scott.

Our goal is to rebuild homes, schools, businesses, and communities that need it the most. And we have just — I don't know, we've hit something that's very unusual. This is a very surprising thing to everybody — even to me, to a certain extent. You know, you do things. Nobody thought it was going to catch on like it's caught on.

So, here with us today is the Mayor of Vicksburg, Mississippi, George Flaggs, who over the last year has worked with private investors to save and create more jobs in his city. Where's George? George, stand up. Please, George. (Applause.) Thank you very much. Thank you, George.

Mayor Flaggs, I want to thank you for your tremendous partnership. You've really helped inspire us, I must say. And you have done an incredible job. And it wasn't easy. It wasn't easy all the way.

And I'd like to ask, if I could — and I'll get you up a second time, because I'd like to ask Mayor Flaggs to come up and say a few words about what this has meant. And he really has been; he's been a great leader. And we appreciate your knowledge, giving us some of that knowledge. Please, Mayor Flaggs. (Applause.)

MAYOR FLAGGS: Thank you very much. Mr. President, thanks for the honor to be here this day. And I will say first that I think we was the first Opportunity Zone that was created as a result of your tax cut and your — the other opportunities.

But let me just say this: As a mayor of a city and former legislator for 25 years, I've never seen any piece of legislation that allows more collaboration between federal, state, and local government.

And just to tell you what we was able to do: In Vicksburg, we have created — 54 percent of our new jobs and the new jobs in the state of Mississippi was created in Vicksburg, Mississippi, because of the economic opportunity we share here today.

But the other thing is that — I will never forget. It was a plant that was built in 1889, and we was able to save that plant because technology had just worked its way out. But it's now called the Vicksburg Forest Products because of the fact we was able to go come to the White House and the state government and local government, and collaborate — use these Opportunity Zones, check all the boxes, and be able to put money in ourselves. The City of Vicksburg — 24,000 people, rural as you get. But, at the same time, we was able to save 125 jobs for the city of Vicksburg. And let me tell you, that's bread on the table. That's meat in somebody's kitchen. (Applause.) And so we was able to do that.

So, Mr. President, we thank you. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Mayor. Fantastic job. Fantastic job. Thank you, Mayor.

Across the country, our tax cuts have kicked off a race to invest in Opportunity Zones beyond anything that anybody in this room even thought. In counties with heavy concentration of Opportunity Zones, wages have risen by now — it seems that we were talking about 8 percent, but it looks like it's going to be a much higher number than that.

Property sale prices in Opportunity Zones, if you have a home, have already skyrocketed by more than 20 percent. Secretary Mnuchin estimates that private businesses will invest \$100 billion in Opportunity Zones, and that's going to be in a fairly short period of time.

To further support these communities, I recently established the White House Opportunity and Revitalization Council, chaired by Secretary Carson — who, by the way, is doing a fantastic job at HUD. He's really doing a fantastic job at HUD. (Applause.) Its mission is to marshal 16 federal agencies and coordinate dozens of existing federal programs to provide maximum support to Opportunity Zones.

And here with us today is a man who I knew through watching him on television, and he was a great football player. He's a businessman, he's a former state legislator, and retired from the NFL after about 10 or 12 years or something. Huh?

PARTICIPANT: Nine years.

THE PRESIDENT: Nine years. That's not bad. Nine years. Not bad. That's a long time in the NFL.

Scott Turner — a special man and a man who is really out there. He's working 25 hours a day. He's doing an incredible job. Everybody loves him and they respect him. They respect him a lot. Come on up, Scott. Come on up. (Applause.)

MR. TURNER: Well, good afternoon. Thank you, Mr. President. I appreciate your vision and your leadership on this. And I just — a couple quick things I want to say. You know, I have a lot of joy in my heart and a lot resolve in my spirit. Joy because, as I look out on the room, what a great representation of our country, of the true heart of America and the culture of America. And that brings me great joy.

I'm humbled to be here not because of the position, but because of the mission, because of the purpose that's been set forth by the President and our great team here.

And I have a lot resolve because this is a big job. There's a lot of work to do. As you can see, we're all here. There's big ways — big things to do, but I know that if we set our face like flint, we can do it. And together we can do it. This is the greatest team. I've been able to play on a lot of teams — San Diego, Washington, Denver — but this is the greatest team because we have the opportunity to make a generational impact, us together.

See, revitalization doesn't have a color. It doesn't have a party. Revitalization starts in the heart of every man. (Applause.)

And I'll say that because, if we focus on the true mission and the people — the grandmothers, the grandfathers; the next generation coming out through us; the kids that are truant and now they're working; the single mothers who now have a job — to restore dignity and hope in their family and in the community, that's why I'm here. And I believe that's why you're here. So, Mr. President, thank you. I'm ready. I'm ready to go get it. And I know you are. So God bless you. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: That was great. Wow. (Laughter.) You've done that before, haven't you? Huh? (Laughter.) That's pretty — you might be better at that than football, I think. (Laughter.) I hope. Right? I hope. I think you will.

This new council will streamline existing programs to invest in economic development, workforce training, entrepreneurship, and safety in Opportunity Zones.

For example, the Department of Labor will target Opportunity Zones for prison reentry employment. The Department of Housing and Urban Development is launching a new pilot program to support additional low-income housing in these areas. And the Department of Justice will strengthen its comprehensive effort to address youth violence and crime.

We're giving a very special jolt to making sure these areas are safe. And that's having already a very big effect and it's very important.

Our message to distressed American communities is clear: Your government is 100 percent committed to bringing jobs and safety and opportunity back to where you live. And in many cases, this is where you want to live. You want to be there. Some people were forced out by bad conditions and crime, and you're now able to stay. And you'll stay in the area. You know the people. You love the people. You're with your family. It's, all of a sudden, getting much safer. And a lot of things are happening. Tremendous things are happening.

Today, we're grateful to be joined by Neli Vazquez Rowland. More than 20 years ago, she and her husband started a project called A Safe Haven, which provides people in crisis with housing and drug treatment, workforce training and jobs. Neli has helped more than 100,000 men and women overcome poverty and achieve a better life. It's a very inspirational story.

Neli, please come up and tell us more about the work that you've done with respect to the Opportunity Zones. Thank you, Neli. Hi. (Applause.)

Thank you.

MS. VAZQUEZ ROWLAND: Wow. What an amazing day. My husband and I founded A Safe Haven 25 years ago with this day in mind. I grew up in a poverty-stricken community, and my husband came home from the military, and both of us had encountered challenges in our lives.

And we are grateful that we had the opportunity to get access to good education and to get access to careers and finance, but it was never lost on us how lucky we were to get access to those types of opportunities. So we decided that, after 13 years in financing, we wanted to give back. We wanted to make a difference.

So we started looking at the issues of poverty and specifically looking at the issues of substance abuse. And when we did our research, we realized, back in 1994, that the system was broken. People that were in crisis and ended up in the system we found out had no way out, and we knew that we had to do something about it. We had the financial wherewithal, thank God, and we had the knowledge and the ability to build something.

And we took the risk, and we decided to start investing in Opportunity Zones, in areas that had distressed properties and abandoned buildings. And then we started renovating them, and we started furnishing them. And we started letting people in crisis live there for free, as long as they followed the rules.

And what happened was transformative. As we started to bring people in, we noticed that they started to get their lives back on track. They started to get the treatment, the education, the job training that they'd been needing. And at the end of the day, as the President mentioned, no one would hire them. So what we did is we started businesses.

So, today, we have a landscaping company. For those of you that have come to Chicago, you might recognize those beautiful medians on Michigan Avenue. We employ hundreds of people doing those jobs. We also have a catering business and we have a staffing business. And you're right: The employers are calling us. We cannot fill those jobs fast enough.

So we're grateful to be here today, Mr. President, and to thank you for everything you have done, between the opiate epidemic, the criminal justice reform, and now the Opportunity Zones. Our work at A Safe Haven has just begun. Thank you. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Great. Thank you. Thank you very much. That's exciting. Real entrepreneur too.

At the heart of Opportunity Zones is a belief that every American community is worth cherishing, protecting, and renewing. From rural towns to inner cities, we want to build new schools and factories, new roads and bridges, new hospitals and parks. And that's what's happening all over. We want to see loving homes, safe neighborhoods, and a gleaming Main Street. And above all, we want every family to have the opportunity to live their great American Dream.

To every state, tribal, and community leader with us today — and we have a lot of them — thank you again for your commitment to restoring prosperity, patriotism, and pride across our beautiful nation. God bless you all. And God bless America.

Thank you all very much. (Applause.) Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, everybody.

END

2:34 P.M. EDT



The White House



President Donald J. Trump

Vice President Mike Pence

First Lady Melania Trump

Mrs. Karen Pence

The Cabinet

Administration Accomplishments

News

Remarks

Articles

Presidential Actions

Briefings & Statements

About The White House

Economy & Jobs

Budget & Spending

Education

Immigration

National Security & Defense

Healthcare

Council of Economic Advisers

Council of Environmental Quality

National Security Council

Office of Management and Budget

Office of National Drug Control Policy

Office of Science and Technology Policy

[Copyright](#) [Privacy Policy](#)