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Remarks

# Remarks by President Trump in State of the Union Address

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THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, Members of Congress, the First Lady of the United States, and my fellow Americans:

Less than one year has passed since I first stood at this podium, in this majestic chamber, to speak on behalf of the American people and to address their concerns, their hopes, and their dreams. That night, our new administration had already taken very swift action. A new tide of optimism was already sweeping across our land.

Each day since, we have gone forward with a clear vision and a righteous mission — to make America great again for all Americans. (Applause.)

Over the last year, we have made incredible progress and achieved extraordinary success. We have faced challenges we expected, and others we could never have imagined. We have shared in the heights of victory and the pains of hardship. We have endured floods and fires and storms. But through it all, we have seen the beauty of America's soul, and the steel in America's spine.

Each test has forged new American heroes to remind us who we are, and show us what we can be.

We saw the volunteers of the Cajun Navy, racing to the rescue with their fishing boats to save people in the aftermath of a totally devastating hurricane.

We saw strangers shielding strangers from a hail of gunfire on the Las Vegas strip.

We heard tales of Americans like Coast Guard Petty Officer Ashlee Leppert, who is here tonight in the gallery with Melania. (Applause.) Ashlee was aboard one of the first helicopters on the scene in Houston during the Hurricane Harvey. Through 18 hours of wind and rain, Ashlee braved live power lines and deep water to help save more than 40 lives. Ashlee, we all thank you. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

We heard about Americans like firefighter David Dahlberg. He's here with us also. David faced down walls of flame to rescue almost 60 children trapped at a California summer camp threatened by those devastating wildfires.

To everyone still recovering in Texas, Florida, Louisiana, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands — everywhere — we are with you, we love you, and we always will pull through together, always. (Applause.)

Thank you to David and the brave people of California. Thank you very much, David. Great job.

Some trials over the past year touched this chamber very personally. With us tonight is one of the toughest people ever to serve in this House — a guy who took a bullet, almost died, and was back to work three and a half months later: the legend from Louisiana, Congressman Steve Scalise. (Applause.) I think they like you, Steve. (Laughter.)

We are incredibly grateful for the heroic efforts of the Capitol Police officers, the Alexandria Police, and the doctors, nurses, and paramedics who saved his life and the lives of many others; some in this room. In the aftermath — (applause) — yes. Yes.

In the aftermath of that terrible shooting, we came together, not as Republicans or Democrats, but as representatives of the people. But it is not enough to come together only in times of tragedy. Tonight, I call upon all of us to set aside our differences, to seek out common ground, and to summon the unity we need to deliver for the people. This is really the key. These are the people we were elected to serve. (Applause.)

Over the last year, the world has seen what we always knew: that no people on Earth are so fearless, or daring, or determined as Americans. If there is a mountain, we climb it. If there is a frontier, we cross it. If there's a challenge, we tame it. If there's an opportunity, we seize it.

So let's begin tonight by recognizing that the state of our Union is strong because our people are strong. (Applause.) And together, we are building a safe, strong, and proud America.

Since the election, we have created 2.4 million new jobs, including — (applause) — including 200,000 new jobs in manufacturing alone. Tremendous numbers. (Applause.) After years and years of wage stagnation, we are finally seeing rising wages. (Applause.)

Unemployment claims have hit a 45-year low. (Applause.) It's something I'm very proud of. African American unemployment stands at the lowest rate ever recorded. (Applause.) And Hispanic American unemployment has also reached the lowest levels in history. (Applause.)

Small-business confidence is at an all-time high. The stock market has smashed one record after another, gaining \$8 trillion, and more, in value in just this short period of time. The great news — (applause) — the great news for Americans' 401(k), retirement, pension, and college savings accounts have gone through the roof.

And just as I promised the American people from this podium 11 months ago, we enacted the biggest tax cuts and reforms in American history. (Applause.)

Our massive tax cuts provide tremendous relief for the middle class and small business. To lower tax rates for hardworking Americans, we nearly doubled the standard deduction for everyone. (Applause.) Now, the first \$24,000 earned by a married couple is completely tax-free. (Applause.) We also doubled the child tax credit. (Applause.) A typical family of four making \$75,000 will see their tax bill reduced by \$2,000, slashing their tax bill in half. (Applause.)

In April, this will be the last time you will ever file under the old and very broken system, and millions of Americans will have more take-home pay starting next month — a lot more. (Applause.)

We eliminated an especially cruel tax that fell mostly on Americans making less than \$50,000 a year, forcing them to pay tremendous penalties simply because they couldn't afford government-ordered health plans. (Applause.) We repealed the core of the disastrous Obamacare. The individual mandate is now gone. Thank heaven. (Applause.)

We slashed the business tax rate from 35 percent all the way down to 21 percent, so American companies can compete and win against anyone else anywhere in the world. (Applause.) These changes alone are estimated to increase average family income by more than \$4,000. A lot of money. (Applause.)

Small businesses have also received a massive tax cut, and can now deduct 20 percent of their business income.

Here tonight are Steve Staub and Sandy Keplinger of Staub Manufacturing, a small, beautiful business in Ohio. They've just finished the best year in their 20-year history. (Applause.) Because of tax reform, they are handing out raises, hiring an additional 14 people, and expanding into the building next door. Good feeling. (Applause.)

One of Staub's employees, Corey Adams, is also with us tonight. Corey is an all-American worker. He supported himself through high school, lost his job during the 2008 recession, and

was later hired by Staub, where he trained to become a welder. Like many hardworking Americans, Corey plans to invest his tax cut raise into his new home and his two daughters' education. Corey, please stand. (Applause.) And he's a great welder. (Laughter.) I was told that by the man that owns that company that's doing so well. So congratulations, Corey.

Since we passed tax cuts, roughly 3 million workers have already gotten tax cut bonuses — many of them thousands and thousands of dollars per worker. And it's getting more every month, every week. Apple has just announced it plans to invest a total of \$350 billion in America, and hire another 20,000 workers. (Applause.) And just a little while ago, ExxonMobil announced a \$50 billion investment in the United States, just a little while ago. (Applause.)

This, in fact, is our new American moment. There has never been a better time to start living the American Dream.

So to every citizen watching at home tonight, no matter where you've been, or where you've come from, this is your time. If you work hard, if you believe in yourself, if you believe in America, then you can dream anything, you can be anything, and together, we can achieve absolutely anything. (Applause.)

Tonight, I want to talk about what kind of future we are going to have, and what kind of a nation we are going to be. All of us, together, as one team, one people, and one American family can do anything.

We all share the same home, the same heart, the same destiny, and the same great American flag. (Applause.)

Together, we are rediscovering the American way. In America, we know that faith and family, not government and bureaucracy, are the center of American life. The motto is, "In God We Trust." (Applause.)

And we celebrate our police, our military, and our amazing veterans as heroes who deserve our total and unwavering support. (Applause.)

Here tonight is Preston Sharp, a 12-year-old boy from Redding, California, who noticed that veterans' graves were not marked with flags on Veterans Day. He decided all by himself to change that, and started a movement that has now placed 40,000 flags at the graves of our great heroes. (Applause.) Preston, a job well done. (Applause.)

Young patriots, like Preston, teach all of us about our civic duty as Americans. And I met Preston a little while ago, and he is something very special — that I can tell you. Great future. Thank you very much for all you've done, Preston. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

Preston's reverence for those who have served our nation reminds us of why we salute our flag, why we put our hands on our hearts for the Pledge of Allegiance, and why we proudly stand for the National Anthem. (Applause.)

Americans love their country, and they deserve a government that shows them the same love and loyalty in return. For the last year, we have sought to restore the bonds of trust between our citizens and their government.

Working with the Senate, we are appointing judges who will interpret the Constitution as written, including a great new Supreme Court justice, and more circuit court judges than any new administration in the history of our country. (Applause.)

We are totally defending our Second Amendment, and have taken historic actions to protect religious liberty. (Applause.)

And we are serving our brave veterans, including giving our veterans choice in their healthcare decisions. (Applause.) Last year, Congress also passed, and I signed, the landmark VA Accountability Act. (Applause.) Since its passage, my administration has already removed more than 1,500 VA employees who failed to give our veterans the care they deserve. And we are hiring talented people who love our vets as much as we do. (Applause.)

And I will not stop until our veterans are properly taken care of, which has been my promise to them from the very beginning of this great journey. (Applause.)

All Americans deserve accountability and respect, and that's what we are giving to our wonderful heroes, our veterans. Thank you. (Applause.)

So, tonight, I call on Congress to empower every Cabinet Secretary with the authority to reward good workers and to remove federal employees who undermine the public trust or fail the American people. (Applause.)

In our drive to make Washington accountable, we have eliminated more regulations in our first year than any administration in the history of our country. (Applause.)

We have ended the war on American energy, and we have ended the war on beautiful clean coal. (Applause.) We are now very proudly an exporter of energy to the world. (Applause.)

In Detroit, I halted government mandates that crippled America's great, beautiful autoworkers so that we can get Motor City revving its engines again. And that's what's happening. (Applause.) Many car companies are now building and expanding plants in the United States — something we haven't seen for decades. Chrysler is moving a major plant from Mexico to Michigan. Toyota and Mazda are opening up a plant in Alabama — a big one. And we haven't seen this in a long time. It's all coming back. (Applause.)

Very soon, auto plants and other plants will be opening up all over our country. This is all news Americans are totally unaccustomed to hearing. For many years, companies and jobs were only leaving us. But now they are roaring back. They're coming back. They want to be where the action is. They want to be in the United States of America. That's where they want to be. (Applause.)

Exciting progress is happening every single day. To speed access to breakthrough cures and affordable generic drugs, last year the FDA approved more new and generic drugs and medical devices than ever before in our country's history. (Applause.)

We also believe that patients with terminal conditions, and terminal illness, should have access to experimental treatment immediately that could potentially save their lives.

People who are terminally ill should not have to go from country to country to seek a cure. I want to give them a chance right here at home. It's time for Congress to give these wonderful, incredible Americans the right to try. (Applause.)

One of my greatest priorities is to reduce the price of prescription drugs. (Applause.) In many other countries, these drugs cost far less than what we pay in the United States. And it's very, very unfair. That is why I have directed my administration to make fixing the injustice of high drug prices one of my top priorities for the year. (Applause.) And prices will come down substantially. Watch.

America has also finally turned the page on decades of unfair trade deals that sacrificed our prosperity and shipped away our companies, our jobs, and our wealth. Our nation has lost its wealth, but we're getting it back so fast. The era of economic surrender is totally over. From now on, we expect trading relationships to be fair and, very importantly, reciprocal. (Applause.)

We will work to fix bad trade deals and negotiate new ones. And they'll be good ones, but they'll be fair. And we will protect American workers and American intellectual property through strong enforcement of our trade rules. (Applause.)

As we rebuild our industries, it is also time to rebuild our crumbling infrastructure. (Applause.)

America is a nation of builders. We built the Empire State Building in just one year. Isn't it a disgrace that it can now take 10 years just to get a minor permit approved for the building of a simple road? (Applause.) I am asking both parties to come together to give us safe, fast, reliable, and modern infrastructure that our economy needs and our people deserve. (Applause.)

Tonight, I'm calling on Congress to produce a bill that generates at least \$1.5 trillion for the new infrastructure investment that our country so desperately needs. Every federal dollar should be leveraged by partnering with state and local governments and, where appropriate, tapping into private sector investment to permanently fix the infrastructure deficit. And we can do it. (Applause.)

Any bill must also streamline the permitting and approval process, getting it down to no more than two years, and perhaps even one. Together, we can reclaim our great building heritage. (Applause.)

We will build gleaming new roads, bridges, highways, railways, and waterways all across our land. And we will do it with American heart, and American hands, and American grit. (Applause.)

We want every American to know the dignity of a hard day's work. We want every child to be safe in their home at night. And we want every citizen to be proud of this land that we all love so much. We can lift our citizens from welfare to work, from dependence to independence, and from poverty to prosperity. (Applause.)

As tax cuts create new jobs, let's invest in workforce development and let's invest in job training, which we need so badly. (Applause.) Let's open great vocational schools so our future workers can learn a craft and realize their full potential. (Applause.) And let's support working families by supporting paid family leave. (Applause.)

As America regains its strength, opportunity must be extended to all citizens. That is why this year we will embark on reforming our prisons to help former inmates who have served their time get a second chance at life. (Applause.)

Struggling communities, especially immigrant communities, will also be helped by immigration policies that focus on the best interests of American workers and American families.

For decades, open borders have allowed drugs and gangs to pour into our most vulnerable communities. They've allowed millions of low-wage workers to compete for jobs and wages against the poorest Americans. Most tragically, they have caused the loss of many innocent lives.

Here tonight are two fathers and two mothers: Evelyn Rodriguez, Freddy Cuevas, Elizabeth Alvarado, and Robert Mickens. Their two teenage daughters — Kayla Cuevas and Nisa Mickens — were close friends on Long Island. But in September 2016, on the eve of Nisa's 16th Birthday — such a happy time it should have been — neither of them came home. These two precious girls were brutally murdered while walking together in their hometown.

Six members of the savage MS-13 gang have been charged with Kayla and Nisa's murders. Many of these gang members took advantage of glaring loopholes in our laws to enter the country as illegal, unaccompanied alien minors, and wound up in Kayla and Nisa's high school.

Evelyn, Elizabeth, Freddy, and Robert: Tonight, everyone in this chamber is praying for you. Everyone in America is grieving for you. Please stand. Thank you very much. (Applause.) I want you to know that 320 million hearts are right now breaking for you. We love you. Thank you. (Applause.)

While we cannot imagine the depths of that kind of sorrow, we can make sure that other families never have to endure this kind of pain.

Tonight, I am calling on Congress to finally close the deadly loopholes that have allowed MS-13, and other criminal gangs, to break into our country. We have proposed new legislation that will fix our immigration laws and support our ICE and Border Patrol agents — these are great people; these are great, great people — that work so hard in the midst of such danger so that this can never happen again. (Applause.)

The United States is a compassionate nation. We are proud that we do more than any other country anywhere in the world to help the needy, the struggling, and the underprivileged all over the world. But as President of the United States, my highest loyalty, my greatest compassion, my constant concern is for America's children, America's struggling workers, and America's forgotten communities. I want our youth to grow up to achieve great things. I want our poor to have their chance to rise.

So, tonight, I am extending an open hand to work with members of both parties, Democrats and Republicans, to protect our citizens of every background, color, religion, and creed. (Applause.) My duty, and the sacred duty of every elected official in this chamber, is to defend Americans, to protect their safety, their families, their communities, and their right to the American Dream. Because Americans are dreamers too. (Applause.)

Here tonight is one leader in the effort to defend our country, Homeland Security Investigations Special Agent Celestino Martinez. He goes by "DJ" and "CJ." He said, "Call me either one." So we'll call you "CJ." Served 15 years in the Air Force before becoming an ICE agent and spending the last 15 years fighting gang violence and getting dangerous criminals off of our streets. Tough job.

At one point, MS-13 leaders ordered CJ's murder. And they wanted it to happen quickly. But he did not cave to threats or to fear. Last May, he commanded an operation to track down gang members on Long Island. His team has arrested nearly 400, including more than 220 MS-13 gang members.

And I have to tell you, what the Border Patrol and ICE have done — we have sent thousands and thousands and thousands of MS-13 horrible people out of this country or into our prisons.

So I just want to congratulate you, CJ. You're a brave guy. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

And I asked CJ, "What's the secret?" He said, "We're just tougher than they are." And I like that answer. (Laughter and applause.) Now let's get Congress to send you — and all of the people in this great chamber have to do it; we have no choice. CJ, we're going to send you reinforcements, and we're going to send them to you quickly. It's what you need. (Applause.)

Over the next few weeks, the House and Senate will be voting on an immigration reform package. In recent months, my administration has met extensively with both Democrats and Republicans to craft a bipartisan approach to immigration reform. Based on these discussions, we presented Congress with a detailed proposal that should be supported by both parties as a fair compromise, one where nobody gets everything they want, but where our country gets the critical reforms it needs and must have. (Applause.)

Here are the four pillars of our plan: The first pillar of our framework generously offers a path to citizenship for 1.8 million illegal immigrants who were brought here by their parents at a young age. That covers almost three times more people than the previous administration covered. (Applause.) Under our plan, those who meet education and work requirements, and show good

moral character, will be able to become full citizens of the United States over a 12-year period. (Applause.)

The second pillar fully secures the border. (Applause.) That means building a great wall on the southern border, and it means hiring more heroes, like CJ, to keep our communities safe. (Applause.) Crucially, our plan closes the terrible loopholes exploited by criminals and terrorists to enter our country, and it finally ends the horrible and dangerous practice of catch and release. (Applause.)

The third pillar ends the visa lottery, a program that randomly hands out green cards without any regard for skill, merit, or the safety of American people. (Applause.) It's time to begin moving towards a merit-based immigration system, one that admits people who are skilled, who want to work, who will contribute to our society, and who will love and respect our country. (Applause.)

The fourth and final pillar protects the nuclear family by ending chain migration. (Applause.) Under the current broken system, a single immigrant can bring in virtually unlimited numbers of distant relatives. Under our plan, we focus on the immediate family by limiting sponsorships to spouses and minor children. (Applause.) This vital reform is necessary, not just for our economy, but for our security and for the future of America.

In recent weeks, two terrorist attacks in New York were made possible by the visa lottery and chain migration. In the age of terrorism, these programs present risks we can just no longer afford. (Applause.)

It's time to reform these outdated immigration rules, and finally bring our immigration system into the 21st century. (Applause.)

These four pillars represent a down-the-middle compromise, and one that will create a safe, modern, and lawful immigration system.

For over 30 years, Washington has tried and failed to solve this problem. This Congress can be the one that finally makes it happen.

Most importantly, these four pillars will produce legislation that fulfills my ironclad pledge to sign a bill that puts America first. (Applause.) So let's come together, set politics aside, and finally get the job done. (Applause.)

These reforms will also support our response to the terrible crisis of opioid and drug addiction. Never before has it been like it is now. It is terrible. We have to do something about it. In 2016, we lost 64,000 Americans to drug overdoses — 174 deaths per day; 7 per hour. We must get much tougher on drug dealers and pushers if we are going to succeed in stopping this scourge. (Applause.)

My administration is committed to fighting the drug epidemic and helping get treatment for those in need, for those who have been so terribly hurt. The struggle will be long and it will be

difficult, but as Americans always do — in the end, we will succeed. We will prevail.  
(Applause.)

As we have seen tonight, the most difficult challenges bring out the best in America. We see a vivid expression of this truth in the story of the Holets family of New Mexico. Ryan Holets is 27 years old, an officer with the Albuquerque Police Department. He's here tonight with his wife Rebecca. (Applause.) Thank you, Ryan.

Last year, Ryan was on duty when he saw a pregnant, homeless woman preparing to inject heroin. When Ryan told her she was going to harm her unborn child, she began to weep. She told him she didn't know where to turn, but badly wanted a safe home for her baby.

In that moment, Ryan said he felt God speak to him: "You will do it, because you can." He heard those words. He took out a picture of his wife and their four kids. Then, he went home to tell his wife Rebecca. In an instant, she agreed to adopt. The Holets named their new daughter Hope. Ryan and Rebecca, you embody the goodness of our nation. Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you, Ryan and Rebecca.

As we rebuild America's strength and confidence at home, we are also restoring our strength and standing abroad.

Around the world, we face rogue regimes, terrorist groups, and rivals like China and Russia that challenge our interests, our economy, and our values. In confronting these horrible dangers, we know that weakness is the surest path to conflict, and unmatched power is the surest means to our true and great defense.

For this reason, I am asking Congress to end the dangerous defense sequester and fully fund our great military. (Applause.)

As part of our defense, we must modernize and rebuild our nuclear arsenal, hopefully never having to use it, but making it so strong and so powerful that it will deter any acts of aggression by any other nation or anyone else. (Applause.)

Perhaps someday in the future, there will be a magical moment when the countries of the world will get together to eliminate their nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, we are not there yet, sadly.

Last year, I also pledged that we would work with our allies to extinguish ISIS from the face of the Earth. One year later, I am proud to report that the coalition to defeat ISIS has liberated very close to 100 percent of the territory just recently held by these killers in Iraq and in Syria and in other locations, as well. (Applause.) But there is much more work to be done. We will continue our fight until ISIS is defeated.

Army Staff Sergeant Justin Peck is here tonight. Near Raqqa, last November, Justin and his comrade, Chief Petty Officer Kenton Stacy, were on a mission to clear buildings that ISIS had rigged with explosive so that civilians could return to that city hopefully soon, and hopefully safely.

Clearing the second floor of a vital hospital, Kenton Stacy was severely wounded by an explosion. Immediately, Justin bounded into the booby-trapped and unbelievably dangerous and unsafe building, and found Kenton, but in very, very bad shape. He applied pressure to the wound and inserted a tube to reopen an airway. He then performed CPR for 20 straight minutes during the ground transport, and maintained artificial respiration through two and a half hours and through emergency surgery.

Kenton Stacy would have died if it were not for Justin's selfless love for his fellow warrior. Tonight, Kenton is recovering in Texas. Raqqa is liberated. And Justin is wearing his new Bronze Star, with a "V" for "valor." Staff Sergeant Peck, all of America salutes you. (Applause.)

Terrorists who do things like place bombs in civilian hospitals are evil. When possible, we have no choice but to annihilate them. When necessary, we must be able to detain and question them. But we must be clear: Terrorists are not merely criminals. They are unlawful enemy combatants. (Applause.) And when captured overseas, they should be treated like the terrorists they are.

In the past, we have foolishly released hundreds and hundreds of dangerous terrorists, only to meet them again on the battlefield — including the ISIS leader, al-Baghdadi, who we captured, who we had, who we released.

So today, I'm keeping another promise. I just signed, prior to walking in, an order directing Secretary Mattis, who is doing a great job, thank you — (applause) — to reexamine our military detention policy and to keep open the detention facilities in Guantanamo Bay. (Applause.)

I am asking Congress to ensure that, in the fight against ISIS and al Qaeda, we continue to have all necessary power to detain terrorists, wherever we chase them down, wherever we find them. And in many cases, for them, it will now be Guantanamo Bay. (Applause.)

At the same time, as of a few months ago, our warriors in Afghanistan have new rules of engagement. (Applause.)

Along with their heroic Afghan partners, our military is no longer undermined by artificial timelines, and we no longer tell our enemies our plans. (Applause.)

Last month, I also took an action endorsed unanimously by the U.S. Senate just months before. I recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. (Applause.)

Shortly afterwards, dozens of countries voted in the United Nations General Assembly against America's sovereign right to make this decision. In 2016, American taxpayers generously sent those same countries more than \$20 billion in aid.

That is why, tonight, I am asking Congress to pass legislation to help ensure American foreign-assistance dollars always serve American interests, and only go to friends of America, not enemies of America. (Applause.)

As we strengthen friendships all around the world, we are also restoring clarity about our adversaries.

When the people of Iran rose up against the crimes of their corrupt dictatorship, I did not stay silent. America stands with the people of Iran in their courageous struggle for freedom. (Applause.)

I am asking Congress to address the fundamental flaws in the terrible Iran nuclear deal.

My administration has also imposed tough sanctions on the communist and socialist dictatorships in Cuba and Venezuela. (Applause.)

But no regime has oppressed its own citizens more totally or brutally than the cruel dictatorship in North Korea. North Korea's reckless pursuit of nuclear missiles could very soon threaten our homeland. We are waging a campaign of maximum pressure to prevent that from ever happening.

Past experience has taught us that complacency and concessions only invite aggression and provocation. I will not repeat the mistakes of past administrations that got us into this very dangerous position.

We need only look at the depraved character of the North Korean regime to understand the nature of the nuclear threat it could pose to America and to our allies.

Otto Warmbier was a hardworking student at the University of Virginia — and a great student he was. On his way to study abroad in Asia, Otto joined a tour to North Korea. At its conclusion, this wonderful young man was arrested and charged with crimes against the state. After a shameful trial, the dictatorship sentenced Otto to 15 years of hard labor, before returning him to America last June, horribly injured and on the verge of death. He passed away just days after his return.

Otto's wonderful parents, Fred and Cindy Warmbier, are here with us tonight, along with Otto's brother and sister, Austin and Greta. Please. (Applause.) Incredible people. You are powerful witnesses to a menace that threatens our world, and your strength truly inspires us all. Thank you very much. Thank you. (Applause.)

Tonight, we pledge to honor Otto's memory with total American resolve. Thank you. (Applause.)

Finally, we are joined by one more witness to the ominous nature of this regime. His name is Mr. Ji Seong-ho.

In 1996, Seong-ho was a starving boy in North Korea. One day, he tried to steal coal from a railroad car to barter for a few scraps of food, which were very hard to get. In the process, he passed out on the train tracks, exhausted from hunger. He woke up as a train ran over his limbs. He then endured multiple amputations without anything to dull the pain or the hurt. His brother

and sister gave what little food they had to help him recover and ate dirt themselves, permanently stunting their own growth.

Later, he was tortured by North Korean authorities after returning from a brief visit to China. His tormentors wanted to know if he'd met any Christians. He had — and he resolved, after that, to be free.

Seong-ho traveled thousands of miles on crutches all across China and Southeast Asia to freedom. Most of his family followed. His father was caught trying to escape and was tortured to death.

Today he lives in Seoul, where he rescues other defectors, and broadcasts into North Korea what the regime fears most: the truth.

Today, he has a new leg. But, Seong-ho, I understand you still keep those old crutches as a reminder of how far you've come. Your great sacrifice is an inspiration to us all. Please. Thank you. (Applause.) Seong-ho's story is a testament to the yearning of every human soul to live in freedom.

It was that same yearning for freedom that nearly 250 years ago gave birth to a special place called America. It was a small cluster of colonies caught between a great ocean and a vast wilderness. It was home to an incredible people with a revolutionary idea: that they could rule themselves; that they could chart their own destiny; and that, together, they could light up the entire world.

That is what our country has always been about. That is what Americans have always stood for, always strived for, and always done.

Atop the dome of this Capitol stands the Statue of Freedom. She stands tall and dignified among the monuments to our ancestors who fought, and lived, and died to protect her. Monuments to Washington, and Jefferson, and Lincoln, and King. Memorials to the heroes of Yorktown and Saratoga; to young Americans who shed their blood on the shores of Normandy and the fields beyond; and others, who went down in the waters of the Pacific and the skies all over Asia. And freedom stands tall over one more monument: this one. This Capitol — this living monument — this is the moment to the American people. (Applause.)

AUDIENCE: USA! USA! USA!

THE PRESIDENT: We're a people whose heroes live not only in the past, but all around us, defending hope, pride, and defending the American way.

They work in every trade. They sacrifice to raise a family. They care for our children at home. They defend our flag abroad. And they are strong moms and brave kids. They are firefighters, and police officers, and border agents, medics, and Marines. But above all else, they are Americans. And this Capitol, this city, this nation, belongs entirely to them. (Applause.)

Our task is to respect them, to listen to them, to serve them, to protect them, and to always be worthy of them.

Americans fill the world with art and music. They push the bounds of science and discovery. And they forever remind us of what we should never, ever forget: The people dreamed this country. The people built this country. And it's the people who are making America great again. (Applause.)

As long as we are proud of who we are and what we are fighting for, there is nothing we cannot achieve. As long as we have confidence in our values, faith in our citizens, and trust in our God, we will never fail.

Our families will thrive. Our people will prosper. And our nation will forever be safe and strong and proud and mighty and free.

Thank you. And God bless America. Goodnight. (Applause.)

END 10:30 P.M. EST



The White House

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