

REMARKS

Remarks by Vice President Pence After Touring an Opportunity Zone | Columbia, South Carolina

ECONOMY & JOBS

Issued on: February 21, 2019

The Meeting Place Church
Columbia, South Carolina
12:42 P.M. EST

THE VICE PRESIDENT: (Laughs.) Record must have skipped. (Laughter.) Thank you, all. Thank you for the warm welcome. Please be seated. It is a real joy to be with each and every one of you. And to Bishop Freeman, and to all of the wonderful people at the Meeting Place Church — he told me 19 years ago he had a Bible and a barstool and three people, and now you are transforming this community for your members and for everyone in [northeast] Columbia. (Applause.) Thank you. Thank you so much.

We're just so inspired by the example of the Meeting Place Church. And I want to thank you all for coming out today. Thanks for coming out and helping us all collectively celebrate what Columbia and what South Carolina are doing in partnership with local businesses, in partnership with this great ministry, and in partnership with leaders at the state and local level. It's truly inspiring.

And I'm here with some of my favorite people. Chief among them is my wife of 33 years. She's a Marine Corps mom. She's an advocate for military families and spouses all across the nation. And she actually teaches art at a Christian school. Bishop, my wife, Karen Pence, is with us today, the Second Lady of the United States. (Applause.) She had to be here.

And it's also a real joy — I think you can probably tell from the way we talk about each other — the bond that I have come to share with your senator. I first met him when he was a state legislator and I had made my way down to South Carolina. I sensed his quality. I sensed his integrity and his faith from the first time that we spoke. Little did I know that we would serve together in the United States House of Representatives. And you can imagine how inspired I was to see him take his role and be reelected as the junior senator for the great state of South Carolina. Would you stand up and join me in thanking Senator Tim Scott for his presence and his great leadership? (Applause.)

I can honestly say I was for Tim Scott before it was cool. (Laughter.) And I hope you people in South Carolina know that his leadership inspires not only people all across this state, not only in Washington, D.C., but all across the nation. And we're all grateful for your support for him.

And as we get started today — speaking of friends of mine, let me bring greetings from another friend of mine. The Senator and I spoke to him on the way here, and he was excited to hear that we were coming to see one of the Opportunity Zones that he signed into law become a reality. I bring greetings from a great champion of opportunity for every American, the 45th President of the United States of America, President Donald Trump. (Applause.)

I was excited to be here with you today, and particularly to be here this month, to see the way this community is pulling together the extraordinary entrepreneurial energy that's gathered here, the way your political leadership at the national level has rallied around making new opportunities available for people all across northeastern Columbia.

And it's also meaningful to be here, in this community, particularly since it's Black History Month. It's a month, each and every year, where Americans pause to celebrate the extraordinary accomplishments and contributions of African Americans to the life of this nation, from business to the arts, to sciences, to politics, to armed forces, to law enforcement, and every field and endeavor.

As President Trump said in issuing his proclamation this year, and I quote, "The examples of heroism, patriotism, and enterprise" of African Americans throughout our history "have given people of all backgrounds courage, confidence, and faith to pursue their dreams." And we celebrate Black History Month with all of you. (Applause.)

And in this time, it's incredibly exciting to be here not only, Bishop, to see the growth in this community, but to see a growing American economy. It's inspiring to think that, since Election Day 2016, businesses large and small have created 5.3 million new jobs all across the United States. Wages are rising at a faster pace than any time in decades. They're growing fastest for blue-collar workers across the country. And in this rising economy, in just two years, nearly 5 million Americans have lifted themselves off food stamps. This economy is growing. (Applause.) And it's the result of the energy of our people and the policies we've advanced.

And South Carolina is no exception to this boom. South Carolina has added nearly 80,000 jobs over the last two years, and South Carolina is now enjoying the lowest unemployment rate in the history of the great state of South Carolina. (Applause.) And it is incredible to see it.

But as Senator Scott knows, and I expect many of you appreciate, it's been a result of — not of good timing, but it's been a result of good policies from the outset of this administration, under President Trump's leadership, with your senator's strong support. We've been cutting taxes, rolling back regulation, unleashing American energy, negotiating better and fairer trade deals, opening up opportunities for American exports as never before.

And in the midst of all of those reforms, we passed legislation that included what has come to be known as "Opportunity Zones" that's expanding opportunities here in northeast Columbia and all across America. And Senator Tim Scott was the champion of this transformational reform. (Applause.) It's true.

One of the things Senator Scott and I bonded on early on is our affinity for a guy by the name of Jack Kemp, who was a mentor of mine. And he actually was Secretary of Housing and Urban Development during the first Bush administration. And it was then that he first began to talk about this concept.

But your senator managed to bring it to the floor of the United States Senate. And when tax reform rolled through the Congress of the United States — historic tax reform — I mean to tell you, he was in there every step of the way making sure that when tax reform would come, that it would benefit every American and every community. And, Senator Tim Scott, this community, this state, and this nation are in your debt. Thank you so much. (Applause.)

Opportunity Zones — those of you not fully aware — are areas of the country that for too long have been left behind. Many of the nearly 35 million Americans who live in these places still struggle to find work, to make ends meet.

Tim and I were talking on the way here of a time that we had both traveled to Philadelphia. We were there for a conference. We were both members of Congress, and — but we were in inner-city Philadelphia, and so we made a time to stop by a local ministry — a homeless shelter.

And I'll just never forget the conversation that I had with an African American man, about my age. I remember he looked at me, and he said, "Mike, you know, it's just not like it was when you and I were growing up." And I said, "Well, how do you mean?" And he just looked — he looked at me and he just said, "Well, you know, when I was growing up," he said, "sure, there were some people that didn't want to work, but you could always find a job if you wanted one." But he looked at me and he said — in 2010, he looked at me and said, "There's just no jobs." He said, "Young people today are faced with a lack of opportunity, not a lack of will." And I have to tell you, we reflected on that experience.

And to see the progress that we've been making in our economy, broadly, but also in this transformational idea of Opportunity Zones, it's all about making sure that, as the American economy expands, it's going to expand for every American. And that's exactly what we've done here.

This program encourages private new investment in areas that start business, rebuild infrastructure, unlock hidden potential. And not like I need to tell the people of this area anything about that, because the men and women of this great congregation and businesses in the area have come together for one of the very first Opportunity Zones to roll out in America since this legislation was signed into law. And after 11 years of abandonment, the Capital 8 theater is a reality. And it's creating jobs and opportunity and energy in this growing community. (Applause.)

I mean, it is amazing to me, Bishop, to think about — think about what you've accomplished here. And the leaders of this church saw that potential and saw the opportunity to put people to work, but also to create a magnet — a magnet for more investment in this area, bringing people into the community and bringing new businesses into the community, and rebuilding it bigger and better than ever before.

The truth is, Opportunity Zones help address unique needs by forming partnerships between the federal government with regard to tax benefits, state and local leaders, and local investors to create that incentive that makes it even more possible for people to invest at the point of the need.

As President Trump said just a few months ago, when he established what came to be known as the White House Opportunity and Revitalization Council — which is going to be coordinating efforts and identifying Opportunity Zones all across the country — as the President said, and I quote, “No citizen will be forgotten, no community will be ignored...no American will be left on the sidelines.” We “must unlock the potential of all our people, not just some of our people.” And that’s what Opportunity Zones are doing right here in Columbia. (Applause.)

The generosity and the dedication, the ingenuity, the entrepreneurial spirit — and not only of Bishop Freeman and this great congregation, but of the businesses that are represented here — is truly inspiring.

You know, one of my wife Karen’s favorite verses is that verse that speaks about how the Lord says He waits in Heaven, ready to pour out blessings — to pour out blessings on His people, until you won’t have room enough to take it all in.

And I truly do believe, looking at what’s happening here, looking at this spectacular facility and the banquet facility, and the theaters that have come together, and looking at the businesses that are coming back to this region, that those blessings have just begun — just begun for northeast Columbia.

And the truth is, after years of a neighborhood that’s been struggling, and because of the vision that Senator Scott brought here, because of the ingenuity and determination of this great community, you’re all coming back.

But I know there’s one other reason that I leave here with a tremendous amount of confidence and enthusiasm about what I’ve seen, and that’s because not only do you have the business acumen to bring this region of northeast Columbia back, not only do you have public officials that understand how to create incentives that will create jobs and opportunities for every American in every community, not only do you have the strong public support, but also it’s evident to me everywhere I’ve gone, since I arrived here at this place, is the faith of the people in this community. It radiates from everybody I’ve spoken to. (Applause.) And it’s deeply inspiring.

And the truth is, you know, unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. And I know that you all are building on a foundation of faith here. And it's on that foundation that, throughout our nation's history, it's always been on that solid foundation that we've been able to bring people together — to bring people together around the point of the need to ensure that opportunities and blessings reach everyone in our community.

And so I want to thank you for your inspiring example. Mr. Freeman, I want to thank you for your warm hospitality today and for the inspirational example of the Meeting Place Church. Senator Scott, I want to thank you for your tenacious advocacy of Opportunity Zones as we debated tax reform just a few years ago.

And lastly, I just want to thank all of you here across the Columbia community and across South Carolina who are gathered here to really celebrate what is great, great progress. But I think it's just the beginning, because I really do believe that with the strong leadership of President Trump, Senator Scott, and your other representatives in both parties in Washington, D.C. championing policies that create opportunities for all; with your strong state and local leadership; with this great business community with such large hearts and generous spirits; and with a community of faith; and with God's help, the best days for northeast Columbia, for South Carolina, and America are yet to come. And they'll be days of opportunity for all.

Thank you very much. God bless you. And God bless America. (Applause.)

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12:56 P.M. EST