

# Remarks by President Trump at the White House Opportunity and Revitalization Council Meeting

ECONOMY & JOBS

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Cabinet Room

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THE PRESIDENT: Well, thank you very much. I'm thrilled to welcome everyone to the very first meeting of the White House Opportunity and Revitalization Council.

The Opportunity and Revitalization Council is a very important event in the White House. We've been working long and hard — right, Scott? —

MR. TURNER: Yes, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: — on getting this up and running. And it's something we're very proud of.

The new council will coordinate efforts across the entire federal government to deliver jobs, investment, and growth to America's most underserved. And they really are underserved communities.

And all over the country, we have areas that are, I guess you could say, in some cases, not treated properly. And they are indeed underserved.

We are pleased to be joined by many members of my Cabinet, including Secretary Ben Carson, who leads this very important initiative. Thank you very much, Ben. I appreciate it. Good job. It's been a hard one, right?

SECRETARY CARSON: Absolutely.

THE PRESIDENT: Not been easy to do.

Also joining us is the Council's new executive director, Scott Turner. Scott is a former NFL player — and a very good one — and a state legislator, and a businessman, a leader in his church and his community. Scott, I want to thank you for doing such a good job. But your results, hopefully in a year and two and three, will be very well seen. That's when I'm really going to thank you, right?

MR. TURNER: Yes, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: All right? Thank you, Scott. I appreciate it.

The Council will focus its efforts on economically distressed communities across the country, including Opportunity Zones — which are, as you know, up and running and doing incredibly well, beyond expectation — which we are designated by our nation's governors under a crucial provision of our new tax cuts. That was a part of what we got approved with the tax cut. And I don't know that people talk about it, but it was very important.

We're providing massive tax incentives for private investment in these areas to create jobs and opportunities where they are needed the most. This is all throughout the country.

This Council will further leverage federal resources and authorities to support these communities however possible.

We will work to streamline regulations, improve education, promote affordable housing, reduce crime, and expand jobs and skilled training for Americans all throughout our country.

Our actions will directly improve the lives of countless low-income Americans. It's pretty much aimed at that.

Together we can lift up every forgotten community. And we talked about the forgotten men and women. And a lot of people were forgotten in this country. No longer. And unleash the boundless potential of our people.

I look forward to hearing about all of the incredible progress being made. And I'd like to start, perhaps, with Ben Carson, who is doing a terrific job at HUD. And, Ben, we appreciate it. The whole country appreciates it. You really have. And please say a few words.

SECRETARY CARSON: Well, Mr. President, we're, first of all, thankful for your leadership on this initiative. You know, this whole thing came out of the 2017 tax cuts and jobs bill. That's how Opportunity Zones were invented.

And they provide an opportunity for people to take unrealized capital gains and invest them into the neglected communities of our country.

And some people have criticized this, and they've said, "It's just a mechanism for rich people to get richer." The fact of the matter is, rich people are going to take their money and they're going to invest it in something anyway.

THE PRESIDENT: And they will become richer.

SECRETARY CARSON: Exactly.

THE PRESIDENT: But they're investing in these great areas. So, that's a good thing, not a bad thing.

SECRETARY CARSON: And that's the key: having them invest in areas that have traditionally been neglected. This is what's going to make the big difference.

Because we have this Council here, 13 different agencies — a bunch of federal entities involved and using all of their influence, amalgamating that — we have synergy. And we can really focus, we can target, and coordinate in such a way that federal programs will have their maximum impact here.

So, what the proof in the pudding is going to be: We will see these areas revitalized. I've already visited a number of them, and we haven't even come out with all the rules and regulations yet, where money has been invested.

I was at a foundry in St. Louis last week; it's acting as the nidus for the development in Mississippi. There was a sawmill that was abandoned, had been bought because of the Opportunity Zones. Not only have they revitalized that, but they're hiring a lot of people now. The building industry is coming in and building houses for those people.

These are the kinds of things that make the difference. It's not the rhetoric. It's not talking about — you know, as some political factions over the years have done — "how much you need us." We're not talking about that. We're just going to show people what can happen when we direct the federal resources at taking care of their problems.

And everybody on this Council, all these agencies, are strongly dedicated to making sure that the forgotten men and women of this country, as you said in your Inaugural Address, will no longer be forgotten.

THE PRESIDENT: Good. That's true. That's so true.

Scott, could you say a few words?

MR. TURNER: Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. President. We appreciate your vision and your leadership in creating the White House Council. And I'm very humbled, as I was sharing with the Council before, to be here with several members of my family through the years of coming out of what we call now "Opportunity Zones" and distressed communities. This is very close to my heart.

And the team that we've assembled here, not just at this table, but those that have been assisting along the way, is a tremendous team. And I've been blessed to play on a lot of teams throughout my career, but as I was telling the Council before, this is possibly the greatest team that I've been involved with because we have an opportunity to make a generational impact. And for that, I'm grateful. So, thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, thank you very much, Scott. And we have tremendous faith in you and your leadership. We chose you for a very good reason. You're an outstanding young man. You're still a young man. (Laughter.) I'm a little older than you. Just a little bit. But we have tremendous confidence in you, Scott.

MR. TURNER: Thank you, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: So go out there and do it.

MR. TURNER: Will do.

THE PRESIDENT: Wilbur, would you like to say a few words?

SECRETARY ROSS: Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. President, for hosting us today. We look forward to leading the Economic Development workstream of this council. We're taking some innovative steps at Commerce to encourage private investment in the Zones, and our Economic Development Administration and Minority Business Development Agency are working to direct the funds where they're supposed to go.

Specifically, EDA has already issued a Notice of Funding Opportunity for public works and economic adjustment assistance programs to make all entities within the qualified Opportunity Zones generally available for EDA funds. Those will supplement the funding of the Opportunity Zone program itself.

And as we look to the future, we anticipate that state and local communities will take advantage of this opportunity. Part of the process will include finding new and innovative ways to communicate the Opportunity Zone programs to state and local leaders and to potential

investors. Since fiscal year '18, EDA has already invested in 16 small Opportunity Zone projects, and these will help make the Zones more attractive to investors in the tax-oriented program.

I look forward to discussing how to leverage private investment and future meetings. Our Minority Business Development Agency is planning Opportunity Zone summits in a number of cities throughout the country to reach that community. The first one was held last month in Philadelphia; it had 189 attendees. So there's tremendous interest and enthusiasm, including in some of the very storm-ravaged areas, such as North Florida. And Florida has 427 Opportunity Zones, and the state economic development team has now agreed to plan the rollout of the Opportunity Zones as a master tool to encourage investment in those communities. Mississippi and other states are doing very similar things.

THE PRESIDENT: Right. Thank you.

SECRETARY ROSS: So it's got a lot of momentum.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Wilbur. That's great. Appreciate it.

How about the great Larry Kudlow?

MR. KUDLOW: Yes, sir. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: The market is way up today, Larry.

MR. KUDLOW: Yep.

THE PRESIDENT: So today, you're great. (Laughter.) When the market goes down — when it's down, he's not so great. But it's been mostly up, I have to say.

MR. KUDLOW: I'm only as good as my last trade, sir. (Laughter.)

Just briefly, to summarize what Ben is doing and Scott: This will help. Through the use of tax incentives and deregulation, we'll use private investment capital to help spread the prosperity we're enjoying to every nook and cranny of the economy. I think that's the key part. Every single area of the economy will benefit from this as you rebuild the overall economy. And I think this is a terrific thing, and I think we've got to promote it and message it and do whatever Secretary Carson says.

But it's my honor to be part of the group. And, Scott, you're terrific. You're a (inaudible) great American. Did you play for the New York Giants? Did we ever get you — the New York Giants?

MR. TURNER: No, sir. Washington Redskins, Denver Broncos, and San Diego Chargers.

THE PRESIDENT: Good. That's great. Thank you. Thank you, Larry, very much.

Sonny Perdue. So the top representatives of China are here right now. We're going to meet with them later. They're going to be buying a lot of product from us. You know that.

MR. TURNER: That's good news.

THE PRESIDENT: More than anybody would believe for your farmers. Do you have anything to say, Sonny?

SECRETARY PERDUE: Well, certainly. Forty percent of these economic zones are in rural areas, Mr. President. And USDA has a prime objective in helping to raise them as well.

I would submit to you that this may be the sleeper provision of your tax cuts. We've already seen the growth of GDP and jobs and employment and economic prosperity. But I believe this may be, as Scott said, the generational provision of that that many people have ignored.

So I look forward to working here with this group to make sure that happens — not just for today, not just for your administration, but in the future, raising these communities.

THE PRESIDENT: Very good. Thank you.

Rick?

SECRETARY PERRY: Mr. President, in the energy sector — and I want to — I got a little cross-purpose going on here. Earlier in the week, you had a great event here at the White House on FIRST STEP — a concept that you championed, that you pushed through Congress, that you signed into law — and to these prison reform reentry programs that are going to be able to bring people who — because of the program that you championed and that you passed on FIRST STEP — to give these people coming out of prison the opportunity to go into an Opportunity Zone.

For instance, at the Department of Energy, because of what we're seeing and the growth in the energy industry, a truck driver that — we need a great deal of truck drivers in the Bakken or in

Louisiana or over in the Permian Basin — those truck drivers being able to shift over from a year ago being in prison, to — through one of these reentry programs, into an Opportunity Zone, a job driving a truck, making \$100,000 a year, Sonny. I mean, that's — you talk about transformational for a family. That's what we're looking at here.

And you couldn't have had any better. I've worked with this man, Mr. President. Scott Turner is a stud. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Very good. That's great. I wish we got more media coverage on the whole thing that we're doing with criminal justice reform. For whatever reason, the media chose not to cover that very strongly. They don't like that image for me with helping people getting out of prison. They don't like that image of Trump, and so they wanted to keep that nice and low key. They didn't cover it very much, which is unfair, because they cover other things. Look at the media. Look at all of them. But that one they chose not to cover too much.

But you know what? I feel very happy about it — criminal justice reform. And because of the great economy, people getting out of prison are really, for the first time — really, for the first time in the history of our country, they're getting jobs and they're doing a fantastic job, for the most part. Some problems. And you have problems with everybody. But they're doing a phenomenal job, and employers are really happy.

So perhaps you people can cover that because I think it's a very important subject. I mean, the important thing is that the employers are so happy with what's taking place. It's an incredible thing that's happening.

Elaine Chao, please.

SECRETARY CHAO: Well, at the Department of Transportation, we have 10 grants that are a total of \$2.3 billion, and we are incorporating the principles of the Opportunity Zones into these grants so that recipients will think more about these grants and how to incorporate the Opportunity Zones into what they're doing.

THE PRESIDENT: That's good. We're proud of you. You're doing a great job.

Alex?

SECRETARY ACOSTA: Mr. President, there are about 35 million Americans living in these Opportunity Zones. The unemployment rate within them is, on average, about one and a half times the national level. And so this is an opportunity for all of them to find jobs, but it's also an opportunity for us to grow our economy because we have 1 million more open jobs right now than individuals looking for jobs.

And so, as with other agencies, the Department of Labor — we're adding preference points to all our grants where we're legally able to do so to focus those work development opportunities on Opportunity Zones.

And I want to highlight two examples. You mentioned criminal justice reform. One example: our efforts on the reentry, providing workforce development dollars to individuals that are reentering. And we've added preference points on those.

This is a wonderful opportunity for individuals that are leaving prison to learn skills, to hold a job. And those investors that are going to look to these Opportunity Zones are going to want to know that there are individuals that have the skills to actually work at these factories that are going to be built.

And so, across the board, we're doing it for reentry programs. Homeless veterans — we have veterans that are homeless, and for whatever reasons, whether it's addiction issues, whether it's not having the right skill, we have workforce development programs for them. And so we're adding these preference points to our programs and we're focusing them on these Zones.

THE PRESIDENT: And you just think of it: From the founding of our country until a year ago — because this really started happening a year ago — people getting out of prison couldn't get jobs. Couldn't get them. The stigma, the problem, whatever. And now they're being sought, actually.

SECRETARY ACOSTA: That's right.

THE PRESIDENT: They're being — they're having a choice. Like we got Choice for our vets; that's a different kind of a choice. We get choice — they have choice now in terms of jobs. Never happened before. Never happened in our country's history. And again, the employers — the feedback has been extraordinary, not just good. It's been extraordinary.

I've spoken to a couple that said, "Why didn't I do this years ago?" But they couldn't get jobs and so they'd end up back in prison. They'd have to — they were forced to do other things that weren't so good in some cases, and they'd end up back in prison. And this is the first that that's happened since the founding of our country. A lot of it has to do with the great economy. And I think a lot of it has to do with the mindset that we're helping to create.

So, you're doing a fantastic job. All of you. Such a — such an important thing.

Andrew, please.

ADMINISTRATOR WHEELER: Thank you, Mr. President, for your leadership on the Opportunity Zones, and Secretary Carson's and Mr. Turner's.

This summer, EPA will announce more than \$15 million in grants to revitalizing strong — struggling communities. We've included the Opportunity Zone designation as a tie-breaking criteria in the application process. This means you're helping them take advantage of our many infrastructure loans and grant programs.

Last year, we distributed more than \$2 billion in loans to six cities with Opportunity Zones. And last week, we announced availability of \$6 billion in water infrastructure loans. Last month, we gave a loan to the city of Baltimore. And tomorrow, I'll be in Miami to announce another loan

—  
THE PRESIDENT: Great.

ADMINISTRATOR WHEELER: — to help them with their water infrastructure.

And then, finally, we're helping struggling areas of the country meet their Nonattainment Air Quality Standards. When a city in urban areas are "nonattainment" for the air quality, it detracts with the amount of business that they can attract to their city.

THE PRESIDENT: Right.

ADMINISTRATOR WHEELER: This week, we are announcing that Cleveland is now meeting their standards for a particular matter, which should allow Cleveland to attract new business and expand existing businesses.

THE PRESIDENT: That's terrific. I love hearing that about Cleveland. I like Cleveland. You know why, right? (Laughter.) We had a very good day in Cleveland. A couple of days.

David, please.

SECRETARY BERNHARDT: So, Mr. President, with the leadership of this group, we've worked very hard to focus on some of our Native American communities. There's lots of opportunity that can attract investment there with this as a supporting effort.

Also, small rural communities that are surrounded by federal lands, this can be attractive for critical mineral development and some other opportunities. So we have some grant programs designed to attract.

THE PRESIDENT: Right. You're doing great. Thank you. Appreciate it.

Betsy?

SECRETARY DEVOS: Thanks, Mr. President, and thanks for hosting this day.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

SECRETARY DEVOS: Opportunity Zones hold great promise for education and workforce development. In Opportunity Zones, one fifth of the residents do not have a high school diploma. And many of those that do are ill prepared for the careers available.

Two specific areas that we can be most helpful in is the development of charter schools. Currently, 70 percent of the Opportunity Zones do not have a charter school. We can help private investors help with facilities, and we will incentivize grant competitions to help encourage that. Also, career and technical education development for facilities, equipment, technology.

And then this partners very well — Opportunity Zones partner very well with our Education Freedom Scholarships initiative —

THE PRESIDENT: Right.

SECRETARY DEVOS: — to really provide families more options and opportunities right in their backyard. So I'm very thankful for this opportunity to work on this with the group here and for your leadership on this.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Betsy. I appreciate it.

SECRETARY DEVOS: Thank you, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: So this is a very important day and I wish everybody good luck. And in particular, Scott, I have no doubt you're going to do a fantastic job.

MR. TURNER: Thank you, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: Just, good luck.

MR. TURNER: Thank you very much. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Okay, thank you very much, everybody. Thank you very much, everybody.

Q How is China (inaudible)?

THE PRESIDENT: Trade is coming along well. We're having a big meeting this afternoon. I think you folks are going to be at it for a little while, at least. The Vice Premier is here and lots of top people from China. They very much want to make a deal. We'll see what happens. It's got to be a good deal. Got to be a good — it's got to be a great deal. It's got to be great.

Look, we've been losing, over many years, four, five, six hundred billion dollars year. We're losing, a few years ago, two hundred, routinely, to China. We can't do that. We're going to turn it around. It's got to be a great deal. If it's not a great deal, we're not doing it.

But it's going very well. Top officials are here. And, you know, we're very well along on the deal. It's a very complex deal. It's a very big deal. It's one of the biggest deals ever made. Maybe the biggest deal ever made. It will be a great deal for our farmers. Technology, intellectual property theft — everything is covered. There's not a thing that's not covered.

We could have made a quickie, but we're in a very good position. Our economy is way up. China is not way up. And we're — could either make a very good deal or we're not going to make a deal at all. But I think it looks like the deal is moving along very nicely.

So I think you're going to meet me in — we're going to say hello to the media for a little while, sometime after 2 o'clock. Okay?

Thank you, everybody.

Q (Inaudible) Mexico?

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah, a lot of good things are happening with Mexico. Mexico understands that we're going to close the border or I'm going to tariff the cars. I'll do one or the other. And probably start off with the tariffs. That will be a very powerful incentive, because Mexico has the strongest immigration laws anywhere in the world. They don't have courts like we do. We have a stupid system of courts. It's the craziest thing in the world. We could be the only country that has it. If you put a foot on the property, you put a foot into the United States:

“Congratulations. Go get Perry Mason to represent you.” You end up with a court case.

And then they release you, and you come back four, five years later but nobody comes back. Two percent come back. The not-so-smart ones come back. It's the most ridiculous system anyone has ever seen.

And we have catch and release and we have chain migration, where somebody comes in and brings the whole family. “Bring them all: your grandparents, your brothers, your sisters, your cousins.” The craziest thing I’ve ever seen. Put in by Democrats.

And the Democrats are going to straighten it out. And if they don’t straighten it out — and I predicted this. I mean, I hate to see it, but at least I can say I was right. I told everybody. This is — you have a national emergency at our border and nobody even talks about drugs — the drugs that are flowing in.

So for the last four days — and you actually have covered it to a very minor extent — Mexico has been capturing people and bringing them back to their countries at their southern border. They’ve been taking people under their very powerful laws — they have the right to do it — and they’re bringing them back to where they came from. That’s about three days now, I guess, since — frankly, since they heard I was going to close the border.

But before I close the border, if Mexico — and we love Mexico. We love the country of Mexico. We have two problems: We have the fact that they allow people to pour into our country. We have to stop them. Border Patrol has been incredible. ICE has been incredible. Law enforcement has been incredible.

And the other problem is drugs. Massive amounts of — a large — most of the drugs — much of the drugs coming into our country come through the southern border in all different ways. Much of it where we don’t have walls.

The wall is under construction, by the way — large sections. We’re going to be meeting, I think, on Friday at a piece of the wall that we’ve completed, a big piece. A lot of it is being built right now. A lot of it is being signed up right now by different contractors. It’s moving along very nicely. But we need the wall, but we need lots of other things.

So we need help from Mexico. If Mexico doesn’t give the help, that’s okay, we’re going to tariff their cars coming into the United States.

The other thing is — because Mexico is such a big source of drugs, unfortunately — unfortunately — now we have China sending fentanyl to Mexico so it can be delivered into the United States. It’s not acceptable.

So the second aspect of it is, which you haven’t heard before, is that if the drugs don’t stop — Mexico can stop them if they want — we’re going to tariff the cars. The cars are very big. And if that doesn’t work, we’re going to close the border. But I think that’ll work. So it’s massive numbers of dollars.

So if we don't see people apprehended and brought back to their countries, if we see these massive caravans coming up to our country, right through Mexico — coming right through Mexico, like nothing. Busses are even given to them. For the last three days, it hasn't happened, since I said we're closing the border. The only thing, frankly, better but less drastic than closing the border is to tariff the cars coming in. And I will do it, just like — you know I will do it. I don't play games. I'll do it.

So we're doing it to stop people. We're going to give them a one-year warning. And if the drugs don't stop, or largely stop, we're going to put tariffs on Mexico and products, in particular cars. The whole ballgame is cars. It's the big ballgame. With many countries, it's cars. And if that doesn't stop the drugs, we close the border. Because Mexico, last year, and over — for many years — just like China, except China numbers are even bigger.

And I don't blame China and I don't blame Mexico, if they can get away with it. I blame the people that used to sit in this seat, because they should have done something about it. And I'm not just talking about President Obama; I'm talking about many Presidents. They should've done something about it.

So if Mexico doesn't do what they can do very easily — apprehend these people coming in — and they can do it in a much more humane fashion. Why should they walk up 2,000 miles and then be brought back? They can stop them right at their southern border, right where they come into Mexico. And they have unbelievable immigration laws where they have the right to do it. The most powerful in the world. As good as you can have. And they're going to do it. And if they don't do it, we're going to tax the cars. And if that doesn't work, we're going to close the border.

But we're also going to do something having to do with tariffs on drugs. Because not only are hundreds of thousands of lives a year being ruined in our country, but numbers of people are dying that you wouldn't believe. I mean, we'll lose one military personnel and it's a front-page story. And yet, we have 100,000 people. People don't even know the number. They say 77,000; they say 72,000. Any number they give, you can guarantee to raise it. And if the drugs don't stop, we're going to put tariffs on. It also costs our country at least \$500 billion through our southern border — \$500 billion.

So we will put tariffs on if they don't apprehend, and ultimately we're going to give a period of time. But if, in a year from now, drugs continues to pour in, we're going to put tariffs on.

Now, we have a deal: USMCA. It's all done. They're going to have to live with it, okay? They're going to have to live with it. I'm not trying to be unfair. They're going to have to live with it. The USMCA is a great deal for everybody. But this is more important to me than the USMCA, so they're going to have to live with it.

Thank you very much.

Q Mr. President, can you get the USMCA passed by Congress?

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Thank you. I'll tell you one thing: It's a great deal. If they don't pass it, it's purely political, that's all. The USMCA, everybody wants to see it passed. But we'll see. Whatever they want to do is okay with me.

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12:24 P.M. EDT