THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker, Mr. Vice President, members of Congress, the First Lady of the United States — (applause) — and my fellow citizens:

Three years ago, we launched the great American comeback. Tonight, I stand before you to share the incredible results. Jobs are booming, incomes are soaring, poverty is plummeting, crime is falling, confidence is surging, and our country is thriving and highly respected again. (Applause.) America’s enemies are on the run, America’s fortunes are on the rise, and America’s future is blazing bright.

The years of economic decay are over. (Applause.) The days of our country being used, taken advantage of, and even scorned by other nations are long behind us. (Applause.) Gone too are the broken promises, jobless recoveries, tired platitudes, and constant excuses for the depletion of American wealth, power, and prestige.

In just three short years, we have shattered the mentality of American decline, and we have rejected the downsizing of America’s destiny. We have totally rejected the downsizing. We are moving forward at a pace that was unimaginable just a short time ago, and we are never, ever going back. (Applause.)

I am thrilled to report to you tonight that our economy is the best it has ever been. Our military is completely rebuilt, with its power being unmatched anywhere in the world — and it’s not even close. Our borders are secure. Our families are flourishing. Our values are renewed. Our pride is restored. And for all of these reasons, I say to the people of our great country and to the members of Congress: The state of our Union is stronger than ever before. (Applause.)

The vision I will lay out this evening demonstrates how we are building the world’s most prosperous and inclusive society — one where every citizen can join in America’s unparalleled success and where every community can take part in America’s extraordinary rise.

From the instant I took office, I moved rapidly to revive the U.S. economy — slashing a record number of job-killing regulations, enacting historic and record-setting tax cuts, and fighting for fair and reciprocal trade agreements. (Applause.) Our agenda is relentlessly pro-worker, pro-family, pro-growth, and, most of all, pro-American. (Applause.) Thank you. We are advancing with unbridled optimism and lifting our citizens of every race, color, religion, and creed very, very high.

Since my election, we have created 7 million new jobs — 5 million more than government experts projected during the previous administration. (Applause.)

The unemployment rate is the lowest in over half a century. (Applause.) And very incredibly, the average unemployment rate under my administration is lower than any administration in the history of our country. (Applause.) True. If we hadn’t reversed the failed economic policies of the previous administration, the world would not now be witnessing this great economic success. (Applause.)

The unemployment rate for African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans has reached the lowest levels in history. (Applause.) African American youth unemployment has reached an all-time low. (Applause.) African American poverty has declined to the lowest rate ever recorded. (Applause.)

The unemployment rate for women reached the lowest level in almost 70 years. And, last year, women filled 72 percent of all new jobs added. (Applause.)

The veterans unemployment rate dropped to a record low. (Applause.) The unemployment rate for disabled Americans has reached an all-time low. (Applause.)

Workers without a high school diploma have achieved the lowest unemployment rate recorded in U.S. history. (Applause.) A record number of young Americans are now employed. (Applause.)

Under the last administration, more than 10 million people were added to the food stamp rolls. Under my administration, 7 million Americans have come off food stamps, and 10 million people have been lifted off of welfare. (Applause.)

In eight years under the last administration, over 300,000 working-age people dropped out of the workforce. In just three years of my administration, 3.5 million people — working-age people — have joined the workforce. (Applause.)

Since my election, the net worth of the bottom half of wage earners has increased by 47 percent — three times faster than the increase for the top 1 percent. (Applause.) After decades of flat and falling incomes, wages are rising fast — and, wonderfully, they are rising fastest for low-income workers, who have seen a 16 percent pay increase since my election. (Applause.) This is a blue-collar boom. (Applause.)

Real median household income is now at the highest level ever recorded. (Applause.)

Since my election, U.S. stock markets have soared 70 percent, adding more than $12 trillion to our nation’s wealth, transcending anything anyone believed was possible. This is a record. It is something that every country in the world is looking up to. They admire. (Applause.) Consumer confidence has just reached amazing new highs.

All of those millions of people with 401(k)s and pensions are doing far better than they have ever done before with increases of 60, 70, 80, 90, and 100 percent, and even more.

Jobs and investments are pouring into 9,000 previously neglected neighborhoods thanks to Opportunity Zones, a plan spearheaded by Senator Tim Scott as part of our great Republican tax cuts. (Applause.) In other words, wealthy people and companies are pouring money into poor neighborhoods or areas that haven’t seen investment in many decades, creating jobs, energy, and excitement. (Applause.) This is the first time that these deserving communities have seen anything like this. It’s all working.

Opportunity Zones are helping Americans like Army veteran Tony Rankins from Cincinnati, Ohio. After struggling with drug addiction, Tony lost his job, his house, and his family. He was homeless. But then Tony found a construction company that invests in Opportunity Zones. He is now a top tradesman, drug-free, reunited with his family, and he is here tonight. Tony, keep up the great work. Tony. (Applause.) Thank you, Tony.

Our roaring economy has, for the first time ever, given many former prisoners the ability to get a great job and a fresh start. This second chance at life is made possible because we passed landmark criminal justice reform into law. Everybody said that criminal justice reform couldn’t be done, but I got it done, and the people in this room got it done. (Applause.)

Thanks to our bold regulatory reduction campaign, the United States has become the number one producer of oil and natural gas anywhere in the world, by far. (Applause.) With the tremendous progress we have made over the past three years, America is now energy independent, and energy jobs, like so many other elements of our country, are at a record high. (Applause.) We are doing numbers that no one would have thought possible just three years ago.

Likewise, we are restoring our nation’s manufacturing might, even though predictions were, as you all know, that this could never, ever be done. After losing 60,000 factories under the previous two administrations, America has now gained 12,000 new factories under my administration, with thousands upon thousands of plants and factories being planned or being built. (Applause.) Companies are not leaving; they are coming back to the USA. (Applause.) The fact is that everybody wants to be where the action is, and the United States of America is indeed the place where the action is. (Applause.)

One of the biggest promises I made to the American people was to replace the disastrous NAFTA trade deal. (Applause.) In fact, unfair trade is perhaps the single biggest reason that I decided to run for President. Following NAFTA’s adoption, our nation lost one in four manufacturing jobs. Many politicians came and went, pledging to change or replace NAFTA, only to do so, and then absolutely nothing happened. But unlike so many who came before me, I keep my promises. We did our job. (Applause.)

Six days ago, I replaced NAFTA and signed the brand-new U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement into law. The USMCA will create nearly 100,000 new high-paying American auto jobs, and massively boost exports for our farmers, ranchers, and factory workers. (Applause.) It will also bring trade with Mexico and Canada to a much higher level, but also to be a much greater degree of fairness and reciprocity. We will have that: fairness and reciprocity. And I say that, finally, because it’s been many, many years that we were treated fairly on trade. (Applause.)

This is the first major trade deal in many years to earn the strong backing of America’s labor unions. (Applause.)

I also promised our citizens that I would impose tariffs to confront China’s massive theft of America’s jobs. Our strategy has worked. Days ago, we signed the groundbreaking new agreement with China that will defend our workers, protect our intellectual property, bring billions and billions of dollars into our treasury, and open vast new markets for products made and grown right here in the USA. (Applause.)

For decades, China has taken advantage of the United States. Now we have changed that, but, at the same time, we have perhaps the best relationship we’ve ever had with China, including with President Xi. They respect what we’ve done because, quite frankly, they could never really believe that they were able to get away with what they were doing year after year, decade after decade, without someone in our country stepping up and saying, “That’s enough.” (Applause.) Now we want to rebuild our country, and that’s exactly what we’re doing. We are rebuilding our country.

As we restore — (applause) — American leadership throughout the world, we are once again standing up for freedom in our hemisphere. (Applause.) That’s why my administration reversed the failing policies of the previous administration on Cuba. (Applause.)

We are supporting the hopes of Cubans, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans to restore democracy. The United States is leading a 59-nation diplomatic coalition against the socialist dictator of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro. (Applause.) Maduro is an illegitimate ruler, a tyrant who brutalizes his people. But Maduro’s grip on tyranny will be smashed and broken.

Here this evening is a very brave man who carries with him the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of all Venezuelans. Joining us in the Gallery is the true and legitimate President of Venezuela, Juan Guaidó. (Applause.) Mr. President, please take this message back to your homeland. (Applause.) Thank you, Mr. President. Great honor. Thank you very much.

Please take this message back that all Americans are united with the Venezuelan people in their righteous struggle for freedom. Thank you very much, Mr. President. (Applause.) Thank you very much.

Socialism destroys nations. But always remember: Freedom unifies the soul. (Applause.)

To safeguard American liberty, we have invested a record-breaking $2.2 trillion in the United States military. (Applause.) We have purchased the finest planes, missiles, rockets, ships, and every other form of military equipment, and it’s all made right here in the USA. (Applause.)

We are also getting our allies, finally, to help pay their fair share. (Applause.) I have raised contributions from the other NATO members by more than $400 billion, and the number of Allies meeting their minimum obligations has more than doubled.

And just weeks ago, for the first time since President Truman established the Air Force more than 70 years earlier, we created a brand-new branch of the United States Armed Forces. It’s called the Space Force. (Applause.) Very important.

In the Gallery tonight, we have a young gentleman. And what he wants so badly — 13 years old — Iain Lanphier. He’s an eighth grader from Arizona. Iain, please stand up.

Iain has always dreamed of going to space. He was the first in his class and among the youngest at an aviation academy. He aspires to go to the Air Force Academy, and then he has his eye on the Space Force. As Iain says, “Most people look up at space. I want to look down on the world.” (Laughter and applause.)

But sitting behind Iain tonight is his greatest hero of them all. Charles McGee was born in Cleveland, Ohio, one century ago. Charles is one of the last surviving Tuskegee Airmen — the first black fighter pilots — and he also happens to be Iain’s great-grandfather. (Applause.) Incredible story.

After more than 130 combat missions in World War Two, he came back home to a country still struggling for civil rights and went on to serve America in Korea and Vietnam. On December 7th, Charles celebrated his 100th birthday. (Applause.) A few weeks ago, I signed a bill promoting Charles McGee to Brigadier General. And earlier today, I pinned the stars on his shoulders in the Oval Office. General McGee, our nation salutes you. Thank you, sir. (Applause.)

From the pilgrims to the Founders, from the soldiers at Valley Forge to the marchers at Selma, and from President Lincoln to the Reverend Martin Luther King, Americans have always rejected limits on our children’s future.

Members of Congress, we must never forget that the only victories that matter in Washington are victories that deliver for the American people. (Applause.) The people are the heart of our country, their dreams are the soul of our country, and their love is what powers and sustains our country. We must always remember that our job is to put America first. (Applause.)

The next step forward in building an inclusive society is making sure that every young American gets a great education and the opportunity to achieve the American Dream. Yet, for too long, countless American children have been trapped in failing government schools. To rescue these students, 18 states have created school choice in the form of Opportunity Scholarships. The programs are so popular that tens of thousands of students remain on a waiting list.

One of those students is Janiyah Davis, a fourth grader from Philadelphia. Janiyah. (Applause.) Janiyah’s mom, Stephanie, is a single parent. She would do anything to give her daughter a better future. But last year, that future was put further out of reach when Pennsylvania’s governor vetoed legislation to expand school choice to 50,000 children.

Janiyah and Stephanie are in the Gallery. Stephanie, thank you so much for being here with your beautiful daughter. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

But, Janiyah, I have some good news for you, because I am pleased to inform you that your long wait is over. I can proudly announce tonight that an Opportunity Scholarship has become available, it’s going to you, and you will soon be heading to the school of your choice. (Applause.)

Now I call on Congress to give one million American children the same opportunity Janiyah has just received. Pass the Education Freedom Scholarships and Opportunities Act — because no parent should be forced to send their child to a failing government school. (Applause.)

Every young person should have a safe and secure environment in which to learn and to grow. For this reason, our magnificent First Lady has launched the BE BEST initiative to advance a safe, healthy, supportive, and drug-free life for the next generation — online, in school, and in our communities. Thank you, Melania, for your extraordinary love and profound care for America’s children. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

My administration is determined to give our citizens the opportunities they need regardless of age or background. Through our Pledge to American Workers, over 400 companies will also provide new jobs and education opportunities to almost 15 million Americans.

My budget also contains an exciting vision for our nation’s high schools. Tonight, I ask Congress to support our students and back my plan to offer vocational and technical education in every single high school in America. (Applause.)

To expand equal opportunity, I am also proud that we achieved record and permanent funding for our nation’s historically black colleges and universities. (Applause.)

A good life for American families also requires the most affordable, innovative, and high-quality healthcare system on Earth. Before I took office, health insurance premiums had more than doubled in just five years. I moved quickly to provide affordable alternatives. Our new plans are up to 60 percent less expensive — and better. (Applause.)

I’ve also made an ironclad pledge to American families: We will always protect patients with pre-existing conditions. (Applause). And we will always protect your Medicare and we will always protect your Social Security. Always. (Applause.)

The American patient should never be blindsided by medical bills. That is why I signed an executive order requiring price transparency. (Applause.) Many experts believe that transparency, which will go into full effect at the beginning of next year, will be even bigger than healthcare reform. (Applause.) It will save families massive amounts of money for substantially better care.

But as we work to improve Americans’ healthcare, there are those who want to take away your healthcare, take away your doctor, and abolish private insurance entirely.

AUDIENCE: Booo —

THE PRESIDENT: One hundred thirty-two lawmakers in this room have endorsed legislation to impose a socialist takeover of our healthcare system, wiping out the private health insurance plans of 180 million very happy Americans. To those watching at home tonight, I want you to know: We will never let socialism destroy American healthcare. (Applause.)

Over 130 legislators in this chamber have endorsed legislation that would bankrupt our nation by providing free taxpayer-funded healthcare to millions of illegal aliens, forcing taxpayers to subsidize free care for anyone in the world who unlawfully crosses our borders. These proposals would raid the Medicare benefits of our seniors and that our seniors depend on, while acting as a powerful lure for illegal immigration. That is what is happening in California and other states. Their systems are totally out of control, costing taxpayers vast and unaffordable amounts of money.

If forcing American taxpayers to provide unlimited free healthcare to illegal aliens sounds fair to you, then stand with the radical left. But if you believe that we should defend American patients and American seniors, then stand with me and pass legislation to prohibit free government healthcare for illegal aliens. (Applause.)

This will be a tremendous boon to our already very strongly guarded southern border where, as we speak, a long, tall, and very powerful wall is being built. (Applause.) We have now completed over 100 miles and have over 500 miles fully completed in a very short period of time. Early next year, we will have substantially more than 500 miles completed.

My administration is also taking on the big pharmaceutical companies. We have approved a record number of affordable generic drugs, and medicines are being approved by the FDA at a faster clip than ever before. (Applause.) And I was pleased to announce last year that, for the first time in 51 years, the cost of prescription drugs actually went down. (Applause.)

And working together, Congress can reduce drug prices substantially from current levels. I’ve been speaking to Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa and others in Congress in order to get something on drug pricing done, and done quickly and properly. I’m calling for bipartisan legislation that achieves the goal of dramatically lowering prescription drug prices. Get a bill on my desk, and I will sign it into law immediately. (Applause.)

AUDIENCE: H.R.3! H.R.3! H.R.3!

With unyielding commitment, we are curbing the opioid epidemic. Drug overdose deaths declined for the first time in nearly 30 years. (Applause.) Among the states hardest hit, Ohio is down 22 percent, Pennsylvania is down 18 percent, Wisconsin is down 10 percent — and we will not quit until we have beaten the opioid epidemic once and for all. (Applause.)

Protecting Americans’ health also means fighting infectious diseases. We are coordinating with the Chinese government and working closely together on the coronavirus outbreak in China. My administration will take all necessary steps to safeguard our citizens from this threat.

We have launched ambitious new initiatives to substantially improve care for Americans with kidney disease, Alzheimer’s, and those struggling with mental health. And because Congress was so good as to fund my request, new cures for childhood cancer, and we will eradicate the AIDS epidemic in America by the end of this decade. (Applause.)

Almost every American family knows the pain when a loved one is diagnosed with a serious illness. Here tonight is a special man, beloved by millions of Americans who just received a Stage 4 advanced cancer diagnosis. This is not good news, but what is good news is that he is the greatest fighter and winner that you will ever meet. Rush Limbaugh, thank you for your decades of tireless devotion to our country. (Applause.)

And, Rush, in recognition of all that you have done for our nation, the millions of people a day that you speak to and that you inspire, and all of the incredible work that you have done for charity, I am proud to announce tonight that you will be receiving our country’s highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. (Applause.)

I will now ask the First Lady of the United States to present you with the honor. Please. (Applause.)

(The Medal of Freedom is presented.) (Applause.)

Rush and Kathryn, congratulations. Thank you, Kathryn.

As we pray for all who are sick, we know that America is constantly achieving new medical breakthroughs. In 2017, doctors at St. Luke’s Hospital in Kansas City delivered one of the earliest premature babies ever to survive. Born at just 21 weeks and 6 days, and weighing less than a pound, Ellie Schneider was a born fighter. Through the skill of her doctors and the prayers of her parents, little Ellie kept on winning the battle of life. Today, Ellie is a strong, healthy two-year-old girl sitting with her amazing mother Robin in the Gallery. Ellie and Robin, we are glad to have you with us tonight. (Applause.)

Ellie reminds us that every child is a miracle of life. And thanks to modern medical wonders, 50 percent of very premature babies delivered at the hospital where Ellie was born now survive. It’s an incredible thing. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

Our goal should be to ensure that every baby has the best chance to thrive and grow just like Ellie. That is why I’m asking Congress to provide an additional $50 million to fund neonatal research for America’s youngest patients. (Applause.)

That is why I’m also calling upon members of Congress here tonight to pass legislation finally banning the late-term abortion of babies. (Applause.) Whether we are Republican, Democrat, or independent, surely we must all agree that every human life is a sacred gift from God.

As we support America’s moms and dads, I was recently proud to sign the law providing new parents in the federal workforce paid family leave, serving as a model for the rest of the country. (Applause.)

Now I call on the Congress to pass the bipartisan Advancing Support for Working Families Act, extending family leave to mothers and fathers all across our nation. (Applause.)

Forty million American families have an average $2,200 extra thanks to our child tax credit. (Applause.) I’ve also overseen historic funding increases for high-quality child care, enabling 17 states to help more children, many of which have reduced or eliminated their waitlists altogether. (Applause.) And I sent Congress a plan with a vision to further expand access to high-quality child care, and urge you to act immediately. (Applause.)

To protect the environment, days ago I announced that the United States will join the One Trillion Trees Initiative, an ambitious effort to bring together government and private sector to plant new trees in America and all around the world. (Applause.)

We must also rebuild America’s infrastructure. (Applause.) I ask you to pass Senator John Barrasso’s highway bill to invest in new roads, bridges, and tunnels all across our land.

I’m also committed to ensuring that every citizen can have access to high-speed Internet, including and especially in rural America. (Applause.)

A better tomorrow for all Americans also requires us to keep America safe. That means supporting the men and women of law enforcement at every level, including our nation’s heroic ICE officers. (Applause.)

Last year, our brave ICE officers arrested more than 120,000 criminal aliens charged with nearly 10,000 burglaries, 5,000 sexual assaults, 45,000 violent assaults, and 2,000 murders.

Tragically, there are many cities in America where radical politicians have chosen to provide sanctuary for these criminal illegal aliens.

AUDIENCE: Booo —

THE PRESIDENT: In sanctuary cities, local officials order police to release dangerous criminal aliens to prey upon the public, instead of handing them over to ICE to be safely removed.

Just 29 days ago, a criminal alien freed by the sanctuary city of New York was charged with the brutal rape and murder of a 92-year-old woman. The killer had been previously arrested for assault, but under New York’s sanctuary policies, he was set free. If the city had honored ICE’s detainer request, his victim would still be alive today.

The state of California passed an outrageous law declaring their whole state to be a sanctuary for criminal illegal immigrants — a very terrible sanctuary — with catastrophic results.

Here is just one tragic example. In December 2018, California police detained an illegal alien with five prior arrests, including convictions for robbery and assault. But as required by California’s Sanctuary Law, local authorities released him.

Days later, the criminal alien went on a gruesome spree of deadly violence. He viciously shot one man going about his daily work. He approached a woman sitting in her car and shot her in the arm and in the chest. He walked into a convenience store and wildly fired his weapon. He hijacked a truck and smashed into vehicles, critically injuring innocent victims. One of the victims is — a terrible, terrible situation; died — 51-year-old American named Rocky Jones.

Rocky was at a gas station when this vile criminal fired eight bullets at him from close range, murdering him in cold blood. Rocky left behind a devoted family, including his brothers, who loved him more than anything else in the world. One of his grieving brothers is here with us tonight. Jody, would you please stand? Jody, thank you. (Applause.) Jody our hearts weep for your loss, and we will not rest until you have justice.

Senator Thom Tillis has introduced legislation to allow Americans like Jody to sue sanctuary cities and states when a loved one is hurt or killed as a result of these deadly practices. (Applause.)

I ask Congress to pass the Justice for Victims of Sanctuary Cities Act immediately. The United States of America should be a sanctuary for law-abiding Americans, not criminal aliens. (Applause.)

In the last three years, ICE has arrested over 5,000 wicked human traffickers. And I have signed nine pieces of legislation to stamp out the menace of human trafficking, domestically and all around the globe. My administration has undertaken an unprecedented effort to secure the southern border of the United States. (Applause.)

Before I came into office, if you showed up illegally on our southern border and were arrested, you were simply released and allowed into our country, never to be seen again. My administration has ended catch and release. (Applause.) If you come illegally, you will now be promptly removed from our country. (Applause.)

Very importantly, we entered into historic cooperation agreements with the governments of Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. As a result of our unprecedented efforts, illegal crossings are down 75 percent since May, dropping eight straight months in a row. (Applause.) And as the wall rapidly goes up, drug seizures rise, and the border crossings are down, and going down very rapidly.

Last year, I traveled to the border in Texas and met Chief Patrol Agent Raul Ortiz. Over the last 24 months, Agent Ortiz and his team have seized more than 200,000 pounds of poisonous narcotics, arrested more than 3,000 human smugglers, and rescued more than 2,000 migrants. Days ago, Agent Ortiz was promoted to Deputy Chief of Border Patrol, and he joins us tonight. Chief Ortiz, please stand. (Applause.) A grateful nation thanks you and all of the heroes of Border Patrol and ICE. Thank you very much. Thank you. (Applause.)

To build on these historic gains, we are working on legislation to replace our outdated and randomized immigration system with one based on merit, welcoming those who follow the rules, contribute to our economy, support themselves financially, and uphold our values. (Applause.)

With every action, my administration is restoring the rule of law and reasserting the culture of American freedom. (Applause.) Working with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell — thank you, Mitch — (applause) — and his colleagues in the Senate, we have confirmed a record number of 187 new federal judges to uphold our Constitution as written. This includes two brilliant new Supreme Court justices, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh. Thank you. (Applause.) And we have many in the pipeline. (Laughter and applause.)

My administration is also defending religious liberty, and that includes the constitutional right to pray in public schools. (Applause.) In America, we don’t punish prayer. We don’t tear down crosses. We don’t ban symbols of faith. We don’t muzzle preachers and pastors. In America, we celebrate faith, we cherish religion, we lift our voices in prayer, and we raise our sights to the Glory of God.

Just as we believe in the First Amendment, we also believe in another constitutional right that is under siege all across our country. So long as I am President, I will always protect your Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms. (Applause.)

In reaffirming our heritage as a free nation, we must remember that America has always been a frontier nation. Now we must embrace the next frontier, America’s manifest destiny in the stars. I am asking Congress to fully fund the Artemis program to ensure that the next man and the first woman on the Moon will be American astronauts — (applause) — using this as a launching pad to ensure that America is the first nation to plant its flag on Mars. (Applause.)

My administration is also strongly defending our national security and combating radical Islamic terrorism. (Applause.)

Last week, I announced a groundbreaking plan for peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Recognizing that all past attempts have failed, we must be determined and creative in order to stabilize the region and give millions of young people the chance to realize a better future.

Three years ago, the barbarians of ISIS held over 20,000 square miles of territory in Iraq and Syria. Today, the ISIS territorial caliphate has been 100 percent destroyed, and the founder and leader of ISIS — the bloodthirsty killer known as al-Baghdadi — is dead. (Applause.)

We are joined this evening by Carl and Marsha Mueller. After graduating from college, their beautiful daughter Kayla became a humanitarian aid worker. She once wrote, “Some people find God in church. Some people find God in nature. Some people find God in love. I find God in suffering. I’ve known for some time what my life’s work is, using my hands as tools to relieve suffering.” In 2013, while caring for suffering civilians in Syria, Kayla was kidnapped, tortured, and enslaved by ISIS, and kept as a prisoner of al-Baghdadi himself. After more than 500 horrifying days of captivity, al-Baghdadi murdered young, beautiful Kayla. She was just 26 years old.

On the night that U.S. Special Forces Operations ended al-Baghdadi’s miserable life, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, received a call in the Situation Room. He was told that the brave men of the elite Special Forces team that so perfectly carried out the operation had given their mission a name: “Task Force 8-14.” It was a reference to a special day: August 14th — Kayla’s birthday. Carl and Marsha, America’s warriors never forgot Kayla — and neither will we. Thank you. (Applause.)

Every day, America’s men and women in uniform demonstrate the infinite depth of love that dwells in the human heart.

One of these American heroes was Army Staff Sergeant Christopher Hake. On his second deployment to Iraq in 2008, Sergeant Hake wrote a letter to his one-year-old son, Gage: “I will be with you again,” he wrote to Gage. “I will teach you to ride your first bike, build your first sand box, watch you play sports, and see you have kids also. I love you son. Take care of your mother. I am always with you. Daddy.”

On Easter Sunday of 2008, Chris was out on patrol in Baghdad when his Bradley Fighting Vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb. That night, he made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. Sergeant Hake now rests in eternal glory in Arlington, and his wife Kelli is in the Gallery tonight, joined by their son, who is now a 13-year-old and doing very, very well. To Kelli and Gage: Chris will live in our hearts forever. He is looking down on you now. Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you very much. Thank you both very much.

The terrorist responsible for killing Sergeant Hake was Qasem Soleimani, who provided the deadly roadside bomb that took Chris’s life. Soleimani was the Iranian regime’s most ruthless butcher, a monster who murdered or wounded thousands of American service members in Iraq. As the world’s top terrorist, Soleimani orchestrated the deaths of countless men, women, and children. He directed the December assault and went on to assault U.S. forces in Iraq. Was actively planning new attacks when we hit him very hard. And that’s why, last month, at my direction, the U.S. military executed a flawless precision strike that killed Soleimani and terminated his evil reign of terror forever. (Applause.)

Our message to the terrorists is clear: You will never escape American justice. If you attack our citizens, you forfeit your life. (Applause.)

In recent months, we have seen proud Iranians raise their voices against their oppressive rulers. The Iranian regime must abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons; stop spreading terror, death, and destruction; and start working for the good of its own people.

Because of our powerful sanctions, the Iranian economy is doing very, very poorly. We can help them make a very good and short-time recovery. It can all go very quickly, but perhaps they are too proud or too foolish to ask for that help. We are here. Let’s see which road they choose. It is totally up to them. (Applause.)

As we defend American lives, we are working to end America’s wars in the Middle East.

In Afghanistan, the determination and valor of our warfighters has allowed us to make tremendous progress, and peace talks are now underway. I am not looking to kill hundreds of thousands of people in Afghanistan, many of them totally innocent. It is also not our function to serve other nations as law enforcement agencies. These are warfighters that we have — the best in the world — and they either want to fight to win or not fight at all. We are working to finally end America’s longest war and bring our troops back home. (Applause.)

War places a heavy burden on our nation’s extraordinary military families, especially spouses like Amy Williams from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and her two children — six-year-old Elliana and three-year-old Rowan. Amy works full-time and volunteers countless hours helping other military families. For the past seven months, she has done it all while her husband, Sergeant First Class Townsend Williams, is in Afghanistan on his fourth deployment in the Middle East. Amy’s kids haven’t seen their father’s face in many months. Amy, your family’s sacrifice makes it possible for all of our families to live in safety and in peace, and we want to thank you. Thank you, Amy. (Applause.)

But, Amy, there is one more thing. Tonight, we have a very special surprise. I am thrilled to inform you that your husband is back from deployment. He is here with us tonight, and we couldn’t keep him waiting any longer. (Applause.)

AUDIENCE: USA! USA! USA!

THE PRESIDENT: Welcome home, Sergeant Williams. Thank you very much.

As the world bears witness tonight, America is a land of heroes. This is a place where greatness is born, where destinies are forged, and where legends come to life. This is the home of Thomas Edison and Teddy Roosevelt, of many great generals including Washington, Pershing, Patton, and MacArthur. This is the home of Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Amelia Earhart, Harriet Tubman, the Wright Brothers, Neil Armstrong, and so many more. This is the country where children learn names like Wyatt Earp, Davy Crockett, and Annie Oakley. This is the place where the pilgrims landed at Plymouth and where Texas patriots made their last stand at the Alamo — (applause) — the beautiful, beautiful Alamo.

The American nation was carved out of the vast frontier by the toughest, strongest, fiercest, and most determined men and women ever to walk on the face of the Earth. Our ancestors braved the unknown; tamed the wilderness; settled the Wild West; lifted millions from poverty, disease, and hunger; vanquished tyranny and fascism; ushered the world to new heights of science and medicine; laid down the railroads, dug out the canals, raised up the skyscrapers. And, ladies and gentlemen, our ancestors built the most exceptional republic ever to exist in all of human history, and we are making it greater than ever before. (Applause.)

This is our glorious and magnificent inheritance. We are Americans. We are pioneers. We are the pathfinders. We settled the New World, we built the modern world, and we changed history forever by embracing the eternal truth that everyone is made equal by the hand of Almighty God. (Applause.)

America is the place where anything can happen. America is the place where anyone can rise. And here, on this land, on this soil, on this continent, the most incredible dreams come true.

This nation is our canvas, and this country is our masterpiece. We look at tomorrow and see unlimited frontiers just waiting to be explored. Our brightest discoveries are not yet known. Our most thrilling stories are not yet told. Our grandest journeys are not yet made. The American Age, the American Epic, the American adventure has only just begun.

Our spirit is still young, the sun is still rising, God’s grace is still shining, and, my fellow Americans, the best is yet to come. (Applause.)

Thank you. God Bless You. And God Bless America. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

*The President.* Madam Speaker, Mr. Vice President, Members of Congress, the First Lady of the United States, and my fellow Americans: We meet tonight at a moment of unlimited potential. As we begin a new Congress, I stand here ready to work with you to achieve historic breakthroughs for all Americans.

Millions of our fellow citizens are watching us now, gathered in this great Chamber, hoping that we will govern not as two parties, but as one Nation. The agenda I will lay out this evening is not a Republican agenda or a Democrat agenda. It's the agenda of the American people.

Many of us have campaigned on the same core promises: to defend American jobs and demand fair trade for American workers; to rebuild and revitalize our Nation's infrastructure; to reduce the price of health care and prescription drugs; to create an immigration system that is safe, lawful, modern, and secure; and to pursue a foreign policy that puts America's interests first.

There is a new opportunity in American politics, if only we have the courage, together, to seize it. Victory is not winning for our party, victory is winning for our country.

This year, America will recognize two important anniversaries that show us the majesty of America's mission and the power of American pride.

In June, we mark 75 years since the start of what General Dwight D. Eisenhower called the Great Crusade, the Allied liberation of Europe in World War II. On D-day, June 6, 1944, 15,000 young American men jumped from the sky, and 60,000 more stormed in from the sea, to save our civilization from tyranny. Here with us tonight are three of those incredible heroes: Private First Class Joseph Reilly, Staff Sergeant Irving Locker, and Sergeant Herman Zeitchik. Please. Gentlemen, we salute you.

In 2019, we also celebrate 50 years since brave young pilots flew a quarter of a million miles through space to plant the American flag on the face of the Moon. Half a century later, we are joined by one of the *Apollo 11* astronauts who planted that flag: Buzz Aldrin. Thank you, Buzz. This year, American astronauts will go back to space on American rockets.

In the 20th century, America saved freedom, transformed science, redefined the middle class, and when you get down to it, there's nothing anywhere in the world that can compete with America. Now we must step boldly and bravely into the next chapter of this great American adventure, and we must create a new standard of living for the 21st century. An amazing quality of life for all of our citizens is within reach.

We can make our communities safer, our families stronger, our culture richer, our faith deeper, and our middle class bigger and more prosperous than ever before. But we must reject the politics of revenge, resistance, and retribution, and embrace the boundless potential of cooperation, compromise, and the common good.

Together, we can break decades of political stalemate. We can bridge old divisions, heal old wounds, build new coalitions, forge new solutions, and unlock the extraordinary promise of America's future. The decision is ours to make. We must choose between greatness or gridlock, results or resistance, vision or vengeance, incredible progress or pointless destruction. Tonight I ask you to choose greatness.

Over the last 2 years, my administration has moved with urgency and historic speed to confront problems neglected by leaders of both parties over many decades. In just over 2 years since the election, we have launched an unprecedented economic boom, a boom that has rarely been seen before. There's been nothing like it. We have created 5.3 million new jobs and, importantly, added 600,000 new manufacturing jobs, something which almost everyone said was impossible to do. But the fact is, we are just getting started.

Wages are rising at the fastest pace in decades and growing for blue-collar workers, who I promised to fight for. They're growing faster than anyone else thought possible. Nearly 5 million Americans have been lifted off food stamps. The U.S. economy is growing almost twice as fast today as when I took office. And we are considered, far and away, the hottest economy anywhere in the world. Not even close.

Unemployment has reached the lowest rate in over half a century. African American, Hispanic American, and Asian American unemployment have all reached their lowest levels ever recorded. Unemployment for Americans with disabilities has also reached an alltime low. More people are working now than at any time in the history of our country: 157 million people at work.

We passed a massive tax cut for working families and doubled the child tax credit. We virtually ended the estate tax—or death tax, as it is often called—on small businesses, for ranchers, and also for family farms. We eliminated the very unpopular Obamacare individual mandate penalty. And to give critically ill patients access to lifesaving cures, we passed, very importantly, "right to try."

My administration has cut more regulations in a short period of time than any other administration during its entire tenure. Companies are coming back to our country in large numbers thanks to our historic reductions in taxes and regulations. And we have unleashed a revolution in American energy. The United States is now the number-one producer of oil and natural gas anywhere in the world. And now, for the first time in 65 years, we are a net exporter of energy.

After 24 months of rapid progress, our economy is the envy of the world, our military is the most powerful on Earth, by far, and America is again winning each and every day. Members of Congress: The state of our union is strong.

*Audience members.* U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

*The President.* That sounds so good. [*Laughter*]

Our country is vibrant, and our economy is thriving like never before. On Friday, it was announced that we added another 304,000 jobs last month alone, almost double the number expected. An economic miracle is taking place in the United States, and the only thing that can stop it are foolish wars, politics, or ridiculous, partisan investigations. If there is going to be peace and legislation, there cannot be war and investigation. [*Laughter*] It just doesn't work that way.

We must be united at home to defeat our adversaries abroad. This new era of cooperation can start with finally confirming the more than 300 highly qualified nominees who are still stuck in the Senate, in some cases, years and years waiting. Not right. The Senate has failed to act on these nominations, which is unfair to the nominees and very unfair to our country. Now is the time for bipartisan action. Believe it or not, we have already proven that that's possible. In the last Congress, both parties came together to pass unprecedented legislation to confront the opioid crisis, a sweeping new farm bill, historic VA reforms. And after four decades of rejection, we passed VA Accountability so that we can finally terminate those who mistreat our wonderful veterans.

And just weeks ago, both parties united for groundbreaking criminal justice reform. They said it couldn't be done. Last year, I heard, through friends, the story of Alice Johnson. I was deeply moved. In 1997, Alice was sentenced to life in prison as a first-time nonviolent drug offender. Over the next 22 years, she became a prison minister, inspiring others to choose a better path. She had a big impact on that prison population and far beyond.

Alice's story underscores the disparities and unfairness that can exist in criminal sentencing and the need to remedy this total injustice. She served almost that 22 years and had expected to be in prison for the remainder of her life.

In June, I commuted Alice's sentence. When I saw Alice's beautiful family greet her at the prison gates, hugging and kissing and crying and laughing, I knew I did something right. Alice is with us tonight, and she is a terrific woman. Terrific. Alice, please. Alice, thank you for reminding us that we always have the power to shape our own destiny. Thank you very much, Alice. Thank you very much.

Inspired by stories like Alice's, my administration worked closely with members of both parties to sign the First Step Act into law. Big deal. It's a big deal. This legislation reformed sentencing laws that have wrongly and disproportionately harmed the African American community. The First Step Act gives nonviolent offenders the chance to reenter society as productive, law-abiding citizens. Now States across the country are following our lead. America is a nation that believes in redemption.

We are also joined tonight by Matthew Charles from Tennessee. In 1996, at the age of 30, Matthew was sentenced to 35 years for selling drugs and related offenses. Over the next two decades, he completed more than 30 Bible studies, became a law clerk, and mentored many of his fellow inmates. Now Matthew is the very first person to be released from prison under the First Step Act. Matthew, please. Thank you, Matthew. Welcome home.

Now Republicans and Democrats must join forces again to confront an urgent national crisis. Congress has 10 days left to pass a bill that will fund our Government, protect our homeland, and secure our very dangerous southern border. Now is the time for Congress to show the world that America is committed to ending illegal immigration and putting the ruthless coyotes, cartels, drug dealers, and human traffickers out of business.

As we speak, large, organized caravans are on the march to the United States. We have just heard that Mexican cities, in order to remove the illegal immigrants from their communities, are getting trucks and buses to bring them up to our country in areas where there is little border protection. I have ordered another 3,750 troops to our southern border to prepare for this tremendous onslaught.

This is a moral issue. The lawless state of our southern border is a threat to the safety, security, and financial well-being of all America. We have a moral duty to create an immigration system that protects the lives and jobs of our citizens. This includes our obligation to the millions of immigrants living here today who followed the rules and respected our laws. Legal immigrants enrich our Nation and strengthen our society in countless ways. I want people to come into our country in the largest numbers ever, but they have to come in legally. Tonight I am asking you to defend our very dangerous southern border out of love and devotion to our fellow citizens and to our country. No issue better illustrates the divide between America's working class and America's political class than illegal immigration. Wealthy politicians and donors push for open borders while living their lives behind walls and gates and guards.

Meanwhile, working-class Americans are left to pay the price for mass illegal immigration: reduced jobs, lower wages, overburdened schools, hospitals that are so crowded you can't get in, increased crime, and a depleted social safety net. Tolerance for illegal immigration is not compassionate; it is actually very cruel.

One in three women is sexually assaulted on the long journey north. Smugglers use migrant children as human pawns to exploit our laws and gain access to our country. Human traffickers and sex traffickers take advantage of the wide-open areas between our ports of entry to smuggle thousands of young girls and women into the United States and to sell them into prostitution and modern-day slavery.

Tens of thousands of innocent Americans are killed by lethal drugs that cross our border and flood into our cities, including meth, heroin, cocaine, and fentanyl.

The savage gang, MS-13, now operates in at least 20 different American States, and they almost all come through our southern border. Just yesterday an MS-13 gang member was taken into custody for a fatal shooting on a subway platform in New York City. We are removing these gang members by the thousands. But until we secure our border, they're going to keep streaming right back in.

Year after year, countless Americans are murdered by criminal illegal aliens. I've gotten to know many wonderful Angel moms and dads and families. No one should ever have to suffer the horrible heartache that they have had to endure.

Here tonight is Debra Bissell. Just 3 weeks ago, Debra's parents Gerald and Sharon were burglarized and shot to death in their Reno, Nevada, home by an illegal alien. They were in their eighties and are survived by 4 children, 11 grandchildren, and 20 great-grandchildren. Also here tonight are Gerald and Sharon's granddaughter Heather and great-granddaughter Madison.

To Debra, Heather, Madison, please stand. Few can understand your pain. Thank you. And thank you for being here. Thank you very much. I will never forget, and I will fight for the memory of Gerald and Sharon that it should never happen again. Not one more American life should be lost because our Nation failed to control its very dangerous border.

In the last 2 years, our brave ICE officers made 266,000 arrests of criminal aliens, including those charged or convicted of nearly 100,000 assaults, 30,000 sex crimes, and 4,000 killings or murders. We are joined tonight by one of those law enforcement heroes: ICE Special Agent Elvin Hernandez. When Elvin—[*applause*]—thank you. When Elvin was a boy, he and his family legally immigrated to the United States from the Dominican Republic. At the age of 8, Elvin told his dad he wanted to become a Special Agent. Today, he leads investigations into the scourge of international sex trafficking.

Elvin says that "If I can make sure these young girls get their justice, I've really done my job." Thanks to his work, and that of his incredible colleagues, more than 300 women and girls have been rescued from the horror of this terrible situation, and more than 1,500 sadistic traffickers have been put behind bars. Thank you, Elvin. We will always support the brave men and women of law enforcement, and I pledge to you tonight that I will never abolish our heroes from ICE. Thank you.

My administration has sent to Congress a commonsense proposal to end the crisis on the southern border. It includes humanitarian assistance, more law enforcement, drug detection at our ports, closing loopholes that enable child smuggling, and plans for a new physical barrier, or wall, to secure the vast areas between our ports of entry.

In the past, most of the people in this room voted for a wall, but the proper wall never got built. I will get it built. This is a smart, strategic, see-through steel barrier, not just a simple concrete wall. It will be deployed in the areas identified by the border agents as having the greatest need. And these agents will tell you: Where walls go up, illegal crossings go way, way down.

San Diego used to have the most illegal border crossings in our country. In response, a strong security wall was put in place. This powerful barrier almost completely ended illegal crossings.

The border city of El Paso, Texas, used to have extremely high rates of violent crime, one of the highest in the entire country, and considered one of our Nation's most dangerous cities. Now, immediately upon its building, with a powerful barrier in place, El Paso is one of the safest cities in our country. Simply put: Walls work, and walls save lives. So let's work together, compromise, and reach a deal that will truly make America safe.

As we work to defend our people's safety, we must also ensure our economic resurgence continues at a rapid pace. No one has benefited more from our thriving economy than women, who have filled 58 percent of the newly created jobs last year.

[*At this point, Democratic Congresswomen joined other Members of Congress, Cabinet members, and attendees in a standing ovation.*]

You weren't supposed to do that. Thank you very much. Thank you very much. [*Laughter*]

All Americans can be proud that we have more women in the workforce than ever before.

[*Democratic Congresswomen joined other Members of Congress and others in another standing ovation.*]

Don't sit yet. You're going to like this. [*Laughter*]

And exactly one century after Congress passed the constitutional amendment giving women the right to vote, we also have more women serving in Congress than at any time before.

*Audience members.* U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

*The President.* That's great. Really great. And congratulations. That's great.

As part of our commitment to improving opportunity for women everywhere, this Thursday we are launching the first-ever Governmentwide initiative focused on economic empowerment for women in developing countries.

To build on—[*applause*]—thank you. To build on our incredible economic success, one priority is paramount: reversing decades of calamitous trade policies. So bad.

We are now making it clear to China that, after years of targeting our industries and stealing our intellectual property, the theft of American jobs and wealth has come to an end. Therefore, we recently imposed tariffs on $250 billion of Chinese goods, and now our Treasury is receiving billions and billions of dollars.

But I don't blame China for taking advantage of us; I blame our leaders and representatives for allowing this travesty to happen. I have great respect for President Xi, and we are now working on a new trade deal with China. But it must include real, structural change to end unfair trade practices, reduce our chronic trade deficit, and protect American jobs. [*Applause*] Thank you.

Another historic trade blunder was the catastrophe known as NAFTA. I have met the men and women of Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, New Hampshire, and many other States whose dreams were shattered by the signing of NAFTA. For years, politicians promised them they would renegotiate for a better deal, but no one ever tried, until now.

Our new U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, the USMCA, will replace NAFTA and deliver for American workers like they haven't had delivered to for a long time. I hope you can pass the USMCA into law so that we can bring back our manufacturing jobs in even greater numbers, expand American agriculture, protect intellectual property, and ensure that more cars are proudly stamped with our four beautiful words: Made in the U.S.A.

Tonight I am also asking you to pass the United States Reciprocal Trade Act so that if another country places an unfair tariff on an American product, we can charge them the exact same tariff on the exact same product that they sell to us.

Both parties should be able to unite for a great rebuilding of America's crumbling infrastructure. I know that Congress is eager to pass an infrastructure bill, and I am eager to work with you on legislation to deliver new and important infrastructure investment, including investments in the cutting-edge industries of the future. This is not an option, this is a necessity.

The next major priority for me, and for all of us, should be to lower the cost of health care and prescription drugs and to protect patients with preexisting conditions. Already, as a result of my administration's efforts, in 2018, drug prices experienced their single largest decline in 46 years.

But we must do more. It's unacceptable that Americans pay vastly more than people in other countries for the exact same drugs, often made in the exact same place. This is wrong, this is unfair, and together, we will stop it, and we'll stop it fast.

I am asking Congress to pass legislation that finally takes on the problem of global freeloading and delivers fairness and price transparency for American patients, finally. We should also require drug companies, insurance companies, and hospitals to disclose real prices to foster competition and bring costs way down.

No force in history has done more to advance the human condition than American freedom. In recent years, we have made remarkable progress in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Scientific breakthroughs have brought a once-distant dream within reach. My budget will ask Democrats and Republicans to make the needed commitment to eliminate the HIV epidemic in the United States within 10 years. We have made incredible strides. Incredible. Together, we will defeat AIDS in America and beyond.

Tonight I am also asking you to join me in another fight that all Americans can get behind: the fight against childhood cancer. Joining Melania in the gallery this evening is a very brave 10-year-old girl, Grace Eline. Every birthday—[*applause*]. Hi, Grace. [*Laughter*] Every birthday since she was 4, Grace asked her friends to donate to St. Jude's Children's Hospital. She did not know that one day she might be a patient herself. That's what happened.

Last year, Grace was diagnosed with brain cancer. Immediately, she began radiation treatment. At the same time, she rallied her community and raised more than $40,000 for the fight against cancer. When Grace completed treatment last fall, her doctors and nurses cheered—they loved her; they still love her—with tears in their eyes as she hung up a poster that read: "Last day of chemo." Thank you very much, Grace. You are a great inspiration to everyone in this room. Thank you very much.

Many childhood cancers have not seen new therapies in decades. My budget will ask Congress for $500 million over the next 10 years to fund this critical lifesaving research.

To help support working parents, the time has come to pass school choice for Americans' children. I am also proud to be the first President to include in my budget a plan for nationwide paid family leave so that every new parent has the chance to bond with their newborn child.

*Audience member.* Yes!

*The President.* There could be no greater contrast to the beautiful image of a mother holding her infant child than the chilling displays our Nation saw in recent days. Lawmakers in New York cheered with delight upon the passage of legislation that would allow a baby to be ripped from the mother's womb moments from birth. These are living, feeling, beautiful babies who will never get the chance to share their love and their dreams with the world. And then, we had the case of the Governor of Virginia where he stated he would execute a baby after birth.

To defend the dignity of every person, I am asking Congress to pass legislation to prohibit the late-term abortion of children who can feel pain in the mother's womb. Let us work together to build a culture that cherishes innocent life. And let us reaffirm a fundamental truth: All children—born and unborn—are made in the holy image of God.

The final part of my agenda is to protect American security. Over the last 2 years, we have begun to fully rebuild the United States military, with $700 billion last year and $716 billion this year.

We are also getting other nations to pay their fair share. Finally. [*Applause*] Finally. For years, the United States was being treated very unfairly by friends of ours, members of NATO. But now we have secured, over the last couple of years, more than $100 billion of increase in defense spending from our NATO Allies. They said it couldn't be done.

As part of our military buildup, the United States is developing a state-of-the-art missile defense system.

Under my administration, we will never apologize for advancing America's interests.

For example, decades ago, the United States entered into a treaty with Russia in which we agreed to limit and reduce our missile capability. While we followed the agreement and the rules to the letter, Russia repeatedly violated its terms. It's been going on for many years. That is why I announced that the United States is officially withdrawing from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, or INF Treaty. Perhaps—[*applause*]—we really have no choice. Perhaps we can negotiate a different agreement, adding China and others, or perhaps we can't, in which case, we will outspend and outinnovate all others by far.

As part of a bold new diplomacy, we continue our historic push for peace on the Korean Peninsula. Our hostages have come home, nuclear testing has stopped, and there has not been a missile launch in more than 15 months. If I had not been elected President of the United States, we would right now, in my opinion, be in a major war with North Korea. Much work remains to be done, but my relationship with Kim Jong Un is a good one. Chairman Kim and I will meet again on February 27 and 28 in Vietnam.

Two weeks ago, the United States officially recognized the legitimate Government of Venezuela and its new President, Juan Guaidó. We stand with the Venezuelan people in their noble quest for freedom, and we condemn the brutality of the Maduro regime, whose socialist policies have turned that nation from being the wealthiest in South America into a state of abject poverty and despair.

Here in the United States, we are alarmed by the new calls to adopt socialism in our country.

*Audience members.* Boo!

*The President.* America was founded on liberty and independence and not Government coercion, domination, and control. We are born free, and we will stay free.

*Audience members.* U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

*The President.* Tonight we renew our resolve that America will never be a socialist country.

*Audience members.* U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

*The President.* One of the most complex set of challenges we face, and have for many years, is in the Middle East. Our approach is based on principled realism, not discredited theories that have failed for decades to yield progress. For this reason, my administration recognized the true capital of Israel and proudly opened the American Embassy in Jerusalem.

Our brave troops have now been fighting in the Middle East for almost 19 years. In Afghanistan and Iraq, nearly 7,000 American heroes have given their lives. More than 52,000 Americans have been badly wounded. We have spent more than $7 trillion in fighting wars in the Middle East.

As a candidate for President, I loudly pledged a new approach. Great nations do not fight endless wars. When I took office, ISIS controlled more than 20,000 square miles in Iraq and Syria, just 2 years ago. Today, we have liberated virtually all of the territory from the grip of these bloodthirsty monsters. Now, as we work with our allies to destroy the remnants of ISIS, it is time to give our brave warriors in Syria a warm welcome home.

I have also accelerated our negotiations to reach—if possible—a political settlement in Afghanistan. The opposing side is also very happy to be negotiating. Our troops have fought with unmatched valor. And thanks to their bravery, we are now able to pursue a possible political solution to this long and bloody conflict.

In Afghanistan, my administration is holding constructive talks with a number of Afghan groups, including the Taliban. As we make progress in these negotiations, we will be able to reduce our troop's presence and focus on counterterrorism. And we will indeed focus on counterterrorism. We do not know whether we'll achieve an agreement, but we do know that, after two decades of war, the hour has come to at least try for peace. And the other side would like to do the same thing. It's time.

Above all, friend and foe alike must never doubt this Nation's power and will to defend our people. Eighteen years ago, violent terrorists attacked the USS *Cole*. And last month, American forces killed one of the leaders of that attack.

We are honored to be joined tonight by Tom Wibberley, whose son, Navy Seaman Craig Wibberley, was one of the 17 sailors we tragically lost. Tom, we vow to always remember the heroes of the USS *Cole*. Thank you, Tom.

My administration has acted decisively to confront the world's leading state sponsor of terror: the radical regime in Iran. It is a radical regime. They do bad, bad things. To ensure this corrupt dictatorship never acquires nuclear weapons, I withdrew the United States from the disastrous Iran nuclear deal. And last fall, we put in place the toughest sanctions ever imposed by us on a country.

We will not avert our eyes from a regime that chants "Death to America" and threatens genocide against the Jewish people. We must never ignore the vile poison of anti-Semitism or those who spread its venomous creed. With one voice, we must confront this hatred anywhere and everywhere it occurs.

Just months ago, 11 Jewish Americans were viciously murdered in an anti-Semitic attack on the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. SWAT Officer Timothy Matson raced into the gunfire and was shot seven times chasing down the killer. And he was very successful. Timothy has just had his 12th surgery, and he is going in for many more. But he made the trip to be here with us tonight. Officer Matson, please. Thank you. We are forever grateful. Thank you very much.

Tonight we are also joined by Pittsburgh survivor, Judah Samet. He arrived at the synagogue as the massacre began. But not only did Judah narrowly escape death last fall, more than seven decades ago, he narrowly survived the Nazi concentration camps. Today is Judah's 81st birthday.

[*Audience members sang "Happy Birthday."*]

*The President.* [*Laughter*] Great.

*Pittsburgh, PA, resident Judah Samet.* Thank you! [*Laughter*]

*The President.* They wouldn't do that for me, Judah. [*Laughter*]

Judah says he can still remember the exact moment, nearly 75 years ago, after 10 months in a concentration camp, when he and his family were put on a train and told they were going to another camp. Suddenly, the train screeched to a very strong halt. A soldier appeared. Judah's family braced for the absolute worst. Then, his father cried out with joy: "It's the Americans! It's the Americans!" [*Applause*] Thank you.

A second Holocaust survivor who is here tonight, Joshua Kaufman, was a prisoner at Dachau. He remembers watching through a hole in the wall of a cattle car as American soldiers rolled in with tanks. "To me," Joshua recalls, "the American soldiers were proof that God exists, and they came down from the sky." They came down from Heaven. I began this evening by honoring three soldiers who fought on D-day in the Second World War. One of them was Herman Zeitchik. But there is more to Herman's story. A year after he stormed the beaches of Normandy, Herman was one of the American soldiers who helped liberate Dachau. He was one of the Americans who helped rescue Joshua from that hell on Earth.

Almost 75 years later, Herman and Joshua are both together in the gallery tonight, seated side by side, here in the home of American freedom. Herman and Joshua, your presence this evening is very much appreciated. Thank you very much. [*Applause*] Thank you.

When American soldiers set out beneath the dark skies over the English Channel in the early hours of D-day, 1944, they were just young men of 18 and 19, hurtling on fragile landing craft toward the most momentous battle in the history of war. They did not know if they would survive the hour. They did not know if they would grow old. But they knew that America had to prevail. Their cause was this Nation and generations yet unborn.

Why did they do it? They did it for America. They did it for us. Everything that has come since—our triumph over communism, our giant leaps of science and discovery, our unrivaled progress towards equality and justice—all of it is possible thanks to the blood and tears and courage and vision of the Americans who came before.

Think of this Capitol. Think of this very Chamber, where lawmakers before you voted to end slavery, to build the railroads and the highways and defeat fascism, to secure civil rights, and to face down evil empires.

Here tonight, we have legislators from across this magnificent republic. You have come from the rocky shores of Maine and the volcanic peaks of Hawaii; from the snowy woods of Wisconsin and the red deserts of Arizona; from the green farms of Kentucky and the golden beaches of California. Together, we represent the most extraordinary nation in all of history.

What will we do with this moment? How will we be remembered? I ask the men and women of this Congress: Look at the opportunities before us. Our most thrilling achievements are still ahead. Our most exciting journeys still await. Our biggest victories are still to come. We have not yet begun to dream.

We must choose whether we are defined by our differences or whether we dare to transcend them. We must choose whether we squander our great inheritance or whether we proudly declare that we are Americans. We do the incredible. We defy the impossible. We conquer the unknown.

This is the time to reignite the American imagination. This is the time to search for the tallest summit and set our sights on the brightest star. This is the time to rekindle the bonds of love and loyalty and memory that link us together as citizens, as neighbors, as patriots. This is our future, our fate, and our choice to make. I am asking you to choose greatness. No matter the trials we face, no matter the challenges to come, we must go forward together.

We must keep America first in our hearts, we must keep freedom alive in our souls, and we must always keep faith in America's destiny that one Nation, under God, must be the hope and the promise and the light and the glory among all the nations of the world.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless America. Thank you very much. Thank you.

*The President.* Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker, Mr. Vice President, Members of Congress, the First Lady of the United States, and my fellow citizens: Three years ago, we launched the great American comeback. Tonight, I stand before you to share the incredible results. Jobs are booming, incomes are soaring, poverty is plummeting, crime is falling, confidence is surging, and our country is thriving and highly respected again. America's enemies are on the run, America's fortunes are on the rise, and America's future is blazing bright.

The years of economic decay are over. The days of our country being used, taken advantage of, and even scorned by other nations are long behind us. Gone too are the broken promises, jobless recoveries, tired platitudes, and constant excuses for the depletion of American wealth, power, and prestige.

In just 3 short years, we have shattered the mentality of American decline, and we have rejected the downsizing of America's destiny. We have totally rejected the downsizing. We are moving forward at a pace that was unimaginable just a short time ago, and we are never, ever going back.

I am thrilled to report to you tonight that our economy is the best it has ever been. Our military is completely rebuilt, with its power being unmatched anywhere in the world, and it's not even close. Our borders are secure. Our families are flourishing. Our values are renewed. Our pride is restored. And for all of these reasons, I say to the people of our great country and to the Members of Congress: The state of our Union is stronger than ever before.

The vision I will lay out this evening demonstrates how we are building the world's most prosperous and inclusive society, one where every citizen can join in America's unparalleled success and where every community can take part in America's extraordinary rise.

From the instant I took office, I moved rapidly to revive the U.S. economy, slashing a record number of job-killing regulations, enacting historic and record-setting tax cuts, and fighting for fair and reciprocal trade agreements. Our agenda is relentlessly pro-worker, pro-family, pro-growth, and, most of all, pro-American. [*Applause*] Thank you. Thank you. We are advancing with unbridled optimism and lifting our citizens of every race, color, religion, and creed very, very high.

Since my election, we have created 7 million new jobs, 5 million more than Government experts projected during the previous administration. The unemployment rate is the lowest in over half a century. And very incredibly, the average unemployment rate under my administration is lower than any administration in the history of our country. [*Applause*] True. If we hadn't reversed the failed economic policies of the previous administration, the world would not now be witnessing this great economic success.

The unemployment rate for African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans has reached the lowest levels in history. African American youth unemployment has reached an alltime low. African American poverty has declined to the lowest rate ever recorded.

The unemployment rate for women reached the lowest level in almost 70 years. And last year, women filled 72 percent of all new jobs added. The veterans unemployment rate dropped to a record low. The unemployment rate for disabled Americans has reached an alltime low. Workers without a high school diploma have achieved the lowest unemployment rate recorded in U.S. history. A record number of young Americans are now employed.

Under the last administration, more than 10 million people were added to the food stamp rolls. Under my administration, 7 million Americans have come off food stamps, and 10 million people have been lifted off of welfare. In 8 years under the last administration, over 300,000 working-age people dropped out of the workforce. In just 3 years of my administration, 3.5 million people—working-age people—have joined the workforce.

Since my election, the net worth of the bottom half of wage earners has increased by 47 percent, three times faster than the increase for the top 1 percent. After decades of flat and falling incomes, wages are rising fast, and wonderfully, they are rising fastest for low-income workers, who have seen a 16-percent pay increase since my election. This is a blue-collar boom. Real median household income is now at the highest level ever recorded.

Since my election, U.S. stock markets have soared 70 percent, adding more than $12 trillion to our Nation's wealth, transcending anything anyone believed was possible. This is a record. It is something that every country in the world is looking up to. They admire. Consumer confidence has just reached amazing new highs.

All of those millions of people with 401(k)s and pensions are doing far better than they have ever done before with increases of 60, 70, 80, 90, and 100 percent and even more.

Jobs and investments are pouring into 9,000 previously neglected neighborhoods thanks to Opportunity Zones, a plan spearheaded by Senator Tim Scott as part of our great Republican tax cuts. In other words, wealthy people and companies are pouring money into poor neighborhoods or areas that haven't seen investment in many decades, creating jobs, energy, and excitement. This is the first time that these deserving communities have seen anything like this. It's all working.

Opportunity Zones are helping Americans like Army veteran Tony Rankins from Cincinnati, Ohio. After struggling with drug addiction, Tony lost his job, his house, and his family. He was homeless. But then, Tony found a construction company that invests in Opportunity Zones. He is now a top tradesman, drug-free, reunited with his family, and he is here tonight. Tony, keep up the great work. Tony. Thank you, Tony.

Our roaring economy has, for the first time ever, given many former prisoners the ability to get a great job and a fresh start. This second chance at life is made possible because we passed landmark criminal justice reform into law. Everybody said that criminal justice reform couldn't be done, but I got it done, and the people in this room got it done.

Thanks to our bold regulatory reduction campaign, the United States has become the number one producer of oil and natural gas anywhere in the world, by far. With the tremendous progress we have made over the past 3 years, America is now energy independent, and energy jobs, like so many other elements of our country, are at a record high. We are doing numbers that no one would have thought possible just 3 years ago.

Likewise, we are restoring our Nation's manufacturing might, even though predictions were, as you all know, that this could never, ever be done. After losing 60,000 factories under the previous two administrations, America has now gained 12,000 new factories under my administration, with thousands upon thousands of plants and factories being planned or being built. Companies are not leaving; they are coming back to the U.S.A. The fact is that everybody wants to be where the action is, and the United States of America is indeed the place where the action is. One of the biggest promises I made to the American people was to replace the disastrous NAFTA trade deal. In fact, unfair trade is perhaps the single biggest reason that I decided to run for President. Following NAFTA's adoption, our Nation lost one in four manufacturing jobs. Many politicians came and went, pledging to change or replace NAFTA, only to do so, and then absolutely nothing happened. But unlike so many who came before me, I keep my promises: We did our job.

Six days ago, I replaced NAFTA and signed the brand-new U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement into law. The USMCA will create nearly 100,000 new high-paying American auto jobs and massively boost exports for our farmers, ranchers, and factory workers. It will also bring trade with Mexico and Canada to a much higher level, but also to be a much greater degree of fairness and reciprocity. We will have that: fairness and reciprocity. And I say that, finally, because it's been many, many years that we were treated fairly on trade. This is the first major trade deal in many years to earn the strong backing of America's labor unions.

I also promised our citizens that I would impose tariffs to confront China's massive theft of America's jobs. Our strategy has worked. Days ago, we signed the groundbreaking new agreement with China that will defend our workers, protect our intellectual property, bring billions and billions of dollars into our treasury, and open vast new markets for products made and grown right here in the U.S.A.

For decades, China has taken advantage of the United States. Now we have changed that, but, at the same time, we have perhaps the best relationship we've ever had with China, including with President Xi. They respect what we've done, because, quite frankly, they could never really believe that they were able to get away with what they were doing year after year, decade after decade, without someone in our country stepping up and saying, "That's enough." Now we want to rebuild our country, and that's exactly what we're doing. We are rebuilding our country.

As we restore American leadership throughout the world, we are once again standing up for freedom in our hemisphere. That's why my administration reversed the failing policies of the previous administration on Cuba.

We are supporting the hopes of Cubans, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans to restore democracy. The United States is leading a 59-nation diplomatic coalition against the socialist dictator of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro. Maduro is an illegitimate ruler, a tyrant who brutalizes his people. But Maduro's grip on tyranny will be smashed and broken.

Here this evening is a very brave man who carries with him the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of all Venezuelans. Joining us in the Gallery is the true and legitimate President of Venezuela, Juan Guaidó. Mr. President, please take this message back to your homeland. Thank you, Mr. President. Great honor. Thank you very much.

Please take this message back that all Americans are united with the Venezuelan people in their righteous struggle for freedom. Thank you very much, Mr. President. Thank you very much.

Socialism destroys nations. But always remember: Freedom unifies the soul.

To safeguard American liberty, we have invested a record-breaking $2.2 trillion in the United States military. We have purchased the finest planes, missiles, rockets, ships, and every other form of military equipment, and it's all made right here in the U.S.A.

We are also getting our allies, finally, to help pay their fair share. I have raised contributions from the other NATO members by more than $400 billion, and the number of allies meeting their minimum obligations has more than doubled. And just weeks ago, for the first time since President Truman established the Air Force more than 70 years earlier, we created a brand-new branch of the United States Armed Forces. It's called the Space Force. Very important.

In the Gallery tonight, we have a young gentleman. And what he wants so badly—13 years old—Iain Lanphier. He's an eighth grader from Arizona. Iain, please stand up. Iain has always dreamed of going to space. He was the first in his class and among the youngest at an aviation academy. He aspires to go to the Air Force Academy, and then he has his eye on the Space Force. As Iain says: "Most people look up at space. I want to look down on the world." [*Laughter*]

But sitting behind Iain tonight is his greatest hero of them all. Charles McGee was born in Cleveland, Ohio, one century ago. Charles is one of the last surviving Tuskegee Airmen—the first Black fighter pilots—and he also happens to be Iain's great-grandfather. Incredible story.

After more than 130 combat missions in World War II, he came back home to a country still struggling for civil rights and went on to serve America in Korea and Vietnam. On December 7, Charles celebrated his 100th birthday. A few weeks ago, I signed a bill promoting Charles McGee to Brigadier General. And earlier today I pinned the stars on his shoulders in the Oval Office. General McGee, our Nation salutes you. Thank you, sir.

From the pilgrims to the Founders, from the soldiers at Valley Forge to the marchers at Selma, and from President Lincoln to the Reverend Martin Luther King, Americans have always rejected limits on our children's future.

Members of Congress, we must never forget that the only victories that matter in Washington are victories that deliver for the American people. The people are the heart of our country, their dreams are the soul of our country, and their love is what powers and sustains our country. We must always remember that our job is to put America first.

The next step forward in building an inclusive society is making sure that every young American gets a great education and the opportunity to achieve the American Dream. Yet, for too long, countless American children have been trapped in failing government schools. To rescue these students, 18 States have created school choice in the form of Opportunity Scholarships. The programs are so popular that tens of thousands of students remain on a waiting list.

One of those students is Janiyah Davis, a fourth grader from Philadelphia. Janiyah. Janiyah's mom, Stephanie, is a single parent. She would do anything to give her daughter a better future. But last year, that future was put further out of reach when Pennsylvania's Governor vetoed legislation to expand school choice to 50,000 children. Janiyah and Stephanie are in the Gallery. Stephanie, thank you so much for being here with your beautiful daughter. Thank you very much.

But, Janiyah, I have some good news for you, because I am pleased to inform you that your long wait is over. I can proudly announce tonight that an "opportunity scholarship" has become available, it's going to you, and you will soon be heading to the school of your choice.

Now I call on Congress to give 1 million American children the same opportunity Janiyah has just received. Pass the Education Freedom Scholarships and Opportunities Act, because no parent should be forced to send their child to a failing government school.

Every young person should have a safe and secure environment in which to learn and to grow. For this reason, our magnificent First Lady has launched the "Be Best" initiative to advance a safe, healthy, supportive, and drug-free life for the next generation: online, in school, and in our communities. Thank you, Melania, for your extraordinary love and profound care for America's children. Thank you very much. My administration is determined to give our citizens the opportunities they need regardless of age or background. Through our Pledge to American Workers, over 400 companies will also provide new jobs and education opportunities to almost 15 million Americans.

My budget also contains an exciting vision for our Nation's high schools. Tonight I ask Congress to support our students and back my plan to offer vocational and technical education in every single high school in America.

To expand equal opportunity, I am also proud that we achieved record and permanent funding for our Nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

A good life for American families also requires the most affordable, innovative, and high-quality health care system on Earth. Before I took office, health insurance premiums had more than doubled in just 5 years. I moved quickly to provide affordable alternatives. Our new plans are up to 60-percent less expensive and better.

I've also made an ironclad pledge to American families: We will always protect patients with preexisting conditions. And we will always protect your Medicare, and we will always protect your Social Security. Always.

The American patient should never be blindsided by medical bills. That is why I signed an Executive order requiring price transparency. Many experts believe that transparency, which will go into full effect at the beginning of next year, will be even bigger than health care reform. It will save families massive amounts of money for substantially better care.

But as we work to improve Americans' health care, there are those who want to take away your health care, take away your doctor, and abolish private insurance entirely.

*Audience members.* Boo!

*The President.* One hundred thirty-two lawmakers in this room have endorsed legislation to impose a socialist takeover of our health care system, wiping out the private health insurance plans of 180 million very happy Americans. To those watching at home tonight, I want you to know: We will never let socialism destroy American health care.

Over 130 legislators in this Chamber have endorsed legislation that would bankrupt our Nation by providing free taxpayer-funded health care to millions of illegal aliens, forcing taxpayers to subsidize free care for anyone in the world who unlawfully crosses our borders. These proposals would raid the Medicare benefits of our seniors, and that our seniors depend on, while acting as a powerful lure for illegal immigration. That is what is happening in California and other States. Their systems are totally out of control, costing taxpayers vast and unaffordable amounts of money.

If forcing American taxpayers to provide unlimited free health care to illegal aliens sounds fair to you, then stand with the radical left. But if you believe that we should defend American patients and American seniors, then stand with me and pass legislation to prohibit free Government health care for illegal aliens.

This will be a tremendous boon to our already very strongly guarded southern border where, as we speak, a long, tall, and very powerful wall is being built. We have now completed over 100 miles and have over 500 miles fully completed in a very short period of time. Early next year, we will have substantially more than 500 miles completed.

My administration is also taking on the big pharmaceutical companies. We have approved a record number of affordable generic drugs, and medicines are being approved by the FDA at a faster clip than ever before. And I was pleased to announce last year that, for the first time in 51 years, the cost of prescription drugs actually went down. And working together, Congress can reduce drug prices substantially from current levels. I've been speaking to Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa and others in Congress in order to get something on drug pricing done, and done quickly and properly. I'm calling for bipartisan legislation that achieves the goal of dramatically lowering prescription drug prices. Get a bill on my desk, and I will sign it into law immediately.

*Audience members.* H.R. 3! H.R. 3! H.R. 3!

*The President.* With unyielding commitment, we are curbing the opioid epidemic. Drug overdose deaths declined for the first time in nearly 30 years. Among the States hardest hit, Ohio is down 22 percent, Pennsylvania is down 18 percent, Wisconsin is down 10 percent, and we will not quit until we have beaten the opioid epidemic once and for all.

Protecting Americans' health also means fighting infectious diseases. We are coordinating with the Chinese Government and working closely together on the coronavirus outbreak in China. My administration will take all necessary steps to safeguard our citizens from this threat.

We have launched ambitious new initiatives to substantially improve care for Americans with kidney disease, Alzheimer's, and those struggling with mental health. And because Congress was so good as to fund my request, new cures for childhood cancer, and we will eradicate the AIDS epidemic in America by the end of this decade.

Almost every American family knows the pain when a loved one is diagnosed with a serious illness. Here tonight is a special man, beloved by millions of Americans who just received a stage-4 advanced cancer diagnosis. This is not good news, but what is good news is that he is the greatest fighter and winner that you will ever meet. Rush Limbaugh, thank you for your decades of tireless devotion to our country.

And, Rush, in recognition of all that you have done for our Nation, the millions of people a day that you speak to and that you inspire, and all of the incredible work that you have done for charity, I am proud to announce tonight that you will be receiving our country's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

I will now ask the First Lady of the United States to present you with the honor. Please.

[*At this point, the First Lady presented the Presidential Medal of Freedom to radio show host Rush H. Limbaugh III, who was seated beside her in the House Gallery.*]

*Audience member.* Thank you, Rush! [*Applause*]

*The President.* Rush and Kathryn, congratulations. Thank you, Kathryn.

As we pray for all who are sick, we know that America is constantly achieving new medical breakthroughs. In 2017, doctors at St. Luke's Hospital in Kansas City delivered one of the earliest premature babies ever to survive. Born at just 21 weeks and 6 days, and weighing less than a pound, Ellie Schneider was a born fighter. Through the skill of her doctors and the prayers of her parents, little Ellie kept on winning the battle of life. Today, Ellie is a strong, healthy 2-year-old girl sitting with her amazing mother Robin in the Gallery. Ellie and Robin, we are glad to have you with us tonight.

Ellie reminds us that every child is a miracle of life. And thanks to modern medical wonders, 50 percent of very premature babies delivered at the hospital where Ellie was born now survive. It's an incredible thing. Thank you very much.

Our goal should be to ensure that every baby has the best chance to thrive and grow just like Ellie. That is why I'm asking Congress to provide an additional $50 million to fund neonatal research for America's youngest patients. That is why I'm also calling upon Members of Congress here tonight to pass legislation finally banning the late-term abortion of babies. Whether we are Republican, Democrat, or Independent, surely we must all agree that every human life is a sacred gift from God.

As we support America's moms and dads, I was recently proud to sign the law providing new parents in the Federal workforce paid family leave, serving as a model for the rest of the country. Now I call on the Congress to pass the bipartisan Advancing Support for Working Families Act, extending family leave to mothers and fathers all across our Nation.

Forty million American families have an average $2,200 extra thanks to our child tax credit. I've also overseen historic funding increases for high-quality childcare, enabling 17 States to help more children, many of which have reduced or eliminated their wait-lists altogether. And I sent Congress a plan with a vision to further expand access to high-quality childcare and urge you to act immediately.

To protect the environment, days ago, I announced that the United States will join the 1 Trillion Trees initiative, an ambitious effort to bring together government and private sector to plant new trees in America and all around the world.

We must also rebuild America's infrastructure. I ask you to pass Senator John Barrasso's highway bill to invest in new roads, bridges, and tunnels all across our land. I'm also committed to ensuring that every citizen can have access to high-speed internet, including and especially in rural America.

A better tomorrow for all Americans also requires us to keep America safe. That means supporting the men and women of law enforcement at every level, including our Nation's heroic ICE officers. Last year, our brave ICE officers arrested more than 120,000 criminal aliens charged with nearly 10,000 burglaries, 5,000 sexual assaults, 45,000 violent assaults, and 2,000 murders.

Tragically, there are many cities in America where radical politicians have chosen to provide sanctuary for these criminal illegal aliens.

*Audience members.* Boo!

*The President.* In sanctuary cities, local officials order police to release dangerous criminal aliens to prey upon the public, instead of handing them over to ICE to be safely removed.

Just 29 days ago, a criminal alien freed by the sanctuary city of New York was charged with the brutal rape and murder of a 92-year-old woman. The killer had been previously arrested for assault, but under New York's sanctuary policies, he was set free. If the city had honored ICE's detainer request, his victim would still be alive today.

The State of California passed an outrageous law declaring their whole State to be a sanctuary for criminal illegal immigrants—a very terrible sanctuary—with catastrophic results. Here is just one tragic example. In December 2018, California police detained an illegal alien with five prior arrests, including convictions for robbery and assault. But as required by California's Sanctuary Law, local authorities released him.

Days later, the criminal alien went on a gruesome spree of deadly violence. He viciously shot one man going about his daily work. He approached a woman sitting in her car and shot her in the arm and in the chest. He walked into a convenience store and wildly fired his weapon. He hijacked a truck and smashed into vehicles, critically injuring innocent victims. One of the victims is—a terrible, terrible situation; died—51-year-old American named Rocky Jones.

Rocky was at a gas station when this vile criminal fired eight bullets at him from close range, murdering him in cold blood. Rocky left behind a devoted family, including his brothers, who loved him more than anything else in the world. One of his grieving brothers is here with us tonight. Jody, would you please stand?

*Audience member.* Jody!

*The President.* Jody, thank you. Jody our hearts weep for your loss, and we will not rest until you have justice. Senator Thom Tillis has introduced legislation to allow Americans like Jody to sue sanctuary cities and States when a loved one is hurt or killed as a result of these deadly practices.

I ask Congress to pass the Justice for Victims of Sanctuary Cities Act immediately. The United States of America should be a sanctuary for law-abiding Americans, not criminal aliens.

In the last 3 years, ICE has arrested over 5,000 wicked human traffickers. And I have signed nine pieces of legislation to stamp out the menace of human trafficking, domestically and all around the globe. My administration has undertaken an unprecedented effort to secure the southern border of the United States.

Before I came into office, if you showed up illegally on our southern border and were arrested, you were simply released and allowed into our country, never to be seen again. My administration has ended catch-and-release. If you come illegally, you will now be promptly removed from our country.

Very importantly, we entered into historic cooperation agreements with the governments of Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. As a result of our unprecedented efforts, illegal crossings are down 75 percent since May, dropping 8 straight months in a row. And as the wall rapidly goes up, drug seizures rise, and the border crossings are down, and going down very rapidly.

Last year, I traveled to the border in Texas and met Chief Patrol Agent Raul Ortiz. Over the last 24 months, Agent Ortiz and his team have seized more than 200,000 pounds of poisonous narcotics, arrested more than 3,000 human smugglers, and rescued more than 2,000 migrants. Days ago, Agent Ortiz was promoted to Deputy Chief of Border Patrol, and he joins us tonight. Chief Ortiz, please stand. A grateful nation thanks you and all of the heroes of Border Patrol and ICE. Thank you very much. Thank you.

To build on these historic gains, we are working on legislation to replace our outdated and randomized immigration system with one based on merit, welcoming those who follow the rules, contribute to our economy, support themselves financially, and uphold our values.

With every action, my administration is restoring the rule of law and reasserting the culture of American freedom. Working with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell—thank you, Mitch—and his colleagues in the Senate, we have confirmed a record number of 187 new Federal judges to uphold our Constitution as written. This includes two brilliant new Supreme Court Justices, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh. Thank you. And we have many in the pipeline. [*Laughter*]

My administration is also defending religious liberty, and that includes the constitutional right to pray in public schools. In America, we don't punish prayer. We don't tear down crosses. We don't ban symbols of faith. We don't muzzle preachers and pastors. In America, we celebrate faith, we cherish religion, we lift our voices in prayer, and we raise our sights to the glory of God.

Just as we believe in the First Amendment, we also believe in another constitutional right that is under siege all across our country. So long as I am President, I will always protect your Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms. In reaffirming our heritage as a free nation, we must remember that America has always been a frontier nation. Now we must embrace the next frontier, America's manifest destiny in the stars. I am asking Congress to fully fund the Artemis program to ensure that the next man and the first woman on the Moon will be American astronauts, using this as a launching pad to ensure that America is the first nation to plant its flag on Mars.

My administration is also strongly defending our national security and combating radical Islamic terrorism.

Last week, I announced a groundbreaking plan for peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Recognizing that all past attempts have failed, we must be determined and creative in order to stabilize the region and give millions of young people the chance to realize a better future.

Three years ago, the barbarians of ISIS held over 20,000 square miles of territory in Iraq and Syria. Today, the ISIS territorial caliphate has been 100 percent destroyed, and the founder and leader of ISIS—the bloodthirsty killer known as al-Baghdadi—is dead.

We are joined this evening by Carl and Marsha Mueller. After graduating from college, their beautiful daughter Kayla became a humanitarian aid worker. She once wrote: "Some people find God in church. Some people find God in nature. Some people find God in love. I find God in suffering. I've known for some time what my life's work is, using my hands as tools to relieve suffering." In 2013, while caring for suffering civilians in Syria, Kayla was kidnapped, tortured, and enslaved by ISIS and kept as a prisoner of al-Baghdadi himself. After more than 500 horrifying days of captivity, al-Baghdadi murdered young, beautiful Kayla. She was just 26 years old.

On the night that U.S. Special Forces Operations ended al-Baghdadi's miserable life, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, received a call in the Situation Room. He was told that the brave men of the elite special forces team that so perfectly carried out the operation had given their mission a name: "Task Force 8–14." It was a reference to a special day: August 14, Kayla's birthday. Carl and Marsha, America's warriors never forgot Kayla, and neither will we. Thank you.

Every day, America's men and women in uniform demonstrate the infinite depth of love that dwells in the human heart. One of these American heroes was Army Staff Sergeant Christopher Hake. On his second deployment to Iraq in 2008, Sergeant Hake wrote a letter to his 1-year-old son, Gage: "I will be with you again," he wrote to Gage. "I will teach you to ride your first bike, build your first sandbox, watch you play sports, and see you have kids also. I love you, son. Take care of your mother. I am always with you. Daddy."

On Easter Sunday of 2008, Chris was out on patrol in Baghdad when his Bradley fighting vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb. That night, he made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. Sergeant Hake now rests in eternal glory in Arlington, and his wife Kelli is in the Gallery tonight, joined by their son, who is now a 13-year-old and doing very, very well. To Kelli and Gage: Chris will live in our hearts forever. He is looking down on you now. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you both very much.

The terrorist responsible for killing Sergeant Hake was Qasem Soleimani, who provided the deadly roadside bomb that took Chris's life. Soleimani was the Iranian regime's most ruthless butcher, a monster who murdered or wounded thousands of American servicemembers in Iraq. As the world's top terrorist, Soleimani orchestrated the deaths of countless men, women, and children. He directed the December assault and went on to assault U.S. forces in Iraq. Was actively planning new attacks when we hit him very hard. And that's why, last month, at my direction, the U.S. military executed a flawless precision strike that killed Soleimani and terminated his evil reign of terror forever. Our message to the terrorists is clear: You will never escape American justice. If you attack our citizens, you forfeit your life.

In recent months, we have seen proud Iranians raise their voices against their oppressive rulers. The Iranian regime must abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons; stop spreading terror, death, and destruction; and start working for the good of its own people.

Because of our powerful sanctions, the Iranian economy is doing very, very poorly. We can help them make a very good and short-time recovery. It can all go very quickly, but perhaps they are too proud or too foolish to ask for that help. We are here. Let's see which road they choose. It is totally up to them.

As we defend American lives, we are working to end America's wars in the Middle East. In Afghanistan, the determination and valor of our warfighters has allowed us to make tremendous progress, and peace talks are now underway. I am not looking to kill hundreds of thousands of people in Afghanistan, many of them totally innocent. It is also not our function to serve other nations as law enforcement agencies. These are warfighters that we have—the best in the world—and they either want to fight to win or not fight at all. We are working to finally end America's longest war and bring our troops back home.

War places a heavy burden on our Nation's extraordinary military families, especially spouses like Amy Williams from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and her two children, 6-year-old Elliana and 3-year-old Rowan. Amy works full-time and volunteers countless hours helping other military families. For the past 7 months, she has done it all while her husband, Sergeant First Class Townsend Williams, is in Afghanistan on his fourth deployment in the Middle East. Amy's kids haven't seen their father's face in many months. Amy, your family's sacrifice makes it possible for all of our families to live in safety and in peace, and we want to thank you. Thank you, Amy.

But, Amy, there is one more thing. Tonight we have a very special surprise. I am thrilled to inform you that your husband is back from deployment. He is here with us tonight, and we couldn't keep him waiting any longer.

*Audience members.* U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

*The President.* Welcome home, Sergeant Williams. Thank you very much.

As the world bears witness tonight, America is a land of heroes. This is a place where greatness is born, where destinies are forged, and where legends come to life. This is the home of Thomas Edison and Teddy Roosevelt, of many great generals including Washington, Pershing, Patton, and MacArthur. This is the home of Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Amelia Earhart, Harriet Tubman, the Wright Brothers, Neil Armstrong, and so many more. This is the country where children learn names like Wyatt Earp, Davy Crockett, and Annie Oakley. This is the place where the pilgrims landed at Plymouth and where Texas patriots made their last stand at the Alamo—[*applause*]—the beautiful, beautiful Alamo.

The American nation was carved out of the vast frontier by the toughest, strongest, fiercest, and most determined men and women ever to walk on the face of the Earth. Our ancestors braved the unknown; tamed the wilderness; settled the Wild West; lifted millions from poverty, disease, and hunger; vanquished tyranny and fascism; ushered the world to new heights of science and medicine; laid down the railroads, dug out the canals, raised up the skyscrapers. And, ladies and gentlemen, our ancestors built the most exceptional republic ever to exist in all of human history, and we are making it greater than ever before.

This is our glorious and magnificent inheritance. We are Americans. We are pioneers. We are the pathfinders. We settled the New World, we built the modern world, and we changed history forever by embracing the eternal truth that everyone is made equal by the hand of Almighty God.

America is the place where anything can happen. America is the place where anyone can rise. And here, on this land, on this soil, on this continent, the most incredible dreams come true.

This Nation is our canvas, and this country is our masterpiece. We look at tomorrow and see unlimited frontiers just waiting to be explored. Our brightest discoveries are not yet known. Our most thrilling stories are not yet told. Our grandest journeys are not yet made. The American age, the American epic, the American adventure has only just begun.

Our spirit is still young, the Sun is still rising, God's grace is still shining, and, my fellow Americans, the best is yet to come.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless America. Thank you very much.