

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2019

**Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President Iván Duque Márquez of Colombia
and an Exchange With Reporters**

February 13, 2019

President Trump. Thank you very much. It's a great honor to be with President Duque of Colombia. We've been working very closely. And it's so nice to meet your wife, First Lady. And you have a brilliant reputation. And thank you for coming. We very much appreciate it. I think, Melania, you're both going to have lunch afterwards and get to know each other.

First Lady Maria Juliana Ruiz Sandoval of Colombia. We are. And I'm sure we're going to enjoy it.

President Trump. I know you're going to enjoy it. Thank you. Thank you.

First Lady Ruiz. Thank you.

President Trump. Thank you so much.

We're working on many things together: eradication of drugs in Colombia and outside of Colombia; and obviously, Venezuela; the military; so many different elements, including trade. But I think today a lot of it will be devoted to discussing Venezuela and what's happening in Venezuela. We have a very close picture. It's in turmoil right now. People are being treated very badly. And it's a very sad thing to witness, especially since we're so close.

We fight all over the world, and then you look at what happens right at our front door. So I don't like seeing it; I'm not happy about it. Let's see how it all ends up.

But the President has been very helpful. A lot of people from Venezuela have gone to Colombia, and you're treating them well. We're sending a lot of supplies, because in many cases, these people are starving or close to starving. And the people within Venezuela themselves are, in many cases—I mean, they're in bad shape. They're very hungry. I've seen what's going on, and they're very hungry.

So I just want to thank the President for working with us. And we're working together. Our militaries are very focused and working together. And let's see how it all turns out. We're going to make things turn out well. That's what we do. We make things work.

So thank you very much for being here with us. Appreciate it.

President Duque. Thank you so much, Mr. President. And I would also like to, first of all, express our gratitude for being here. The U.S. and Colombia have been long-term friends and we have received a lot of support from your administration in the tasks that we have before us: to fight drugs, to fight terrorism, to promote economic growth, and obviously, to strengthen trade.

But there's something very important to highlight today, and it's that we share values on democracy. And we want to work together to put an end to the brutal dictatorship that has been affecting the Venezuelan people. I am very happy that the diplomatic blockade is working like no time before, and I think the days for this dictatorship are about to end. And we have to continue working in those lines.

So thank you, Mr. President, for hosting us. Thank you, Madam First Lady, for inviting us to your house. And I'm very pleased that we will continue strengthening the relationship between Colombia and the U.S. Thank you, Mr. President.

President Trump. Well, thank you very much, Mr. President. I appreciate it. Thank you.

One thing I might add: We have tremendous support—Colombia—but we have tremendous support all over South America, all over the world, really. We have a tremendous number of countries, not only that have joined, but want to do whatever they can do to help with the situation in Venezuela. So we'll be seeing a lot over the next few weeks. Let's see what happens. Okay?

Thank you. Thank you very much.

Venezuela/Interim President Juan Gerardo Guaidó Márquez of Venezuela

Q. Mr. President, how much longer is the United States—will be able to tolerate the presence of Nicolás Maduro in the Palacio de Miraflores?

President Trump. Right, yes. Sure.

Q. Because currently, there is a new President that you recognized as official President. But he's living in Miraflores. How much longer will you let that—

President Trump. Well, I have great respect for the man that most people—many people—think is the real President of Venezuela. He's very brave. It's a very brave situation what's he doing, as you know. I've seen what's happened in the streets, and I've seen what's happened with executions, so I really give him a lot of credit. And I think it's going to work out very well.

Q. Do you still consider any military solution for Venezuela?

President Trump. Well, I think there are a number of solutions, a number of different options. And we look at all options.

Q. And are you considering sending troops to Colombia, like—

President Trump. I never talk about that.

President Duque. Let me add something on the first question that was raised by Vanessa [Vanessa de la Torre Sanclemente, El País]. President Guaidó, who is the person about to lead this transition in Venezuela, has a strong support. And we need to give him even stronger support. I think what happened with the EU has been very important. We will host the Lima Group next week in Bogotá, and we will—all the countries in the hemisphere—give him the stronger support he needs to lead the transition in Venezuela.

Venezuela

Q. President Trump, if President Maduro stays in power, do you have a plan B?

President Trump. I always have plan B and C and D and E and F. [Laughter] I have great flexibility. I probably have more flexibility than any man that's ever been in this office. So we'll see. But there are many plans, and we'll see where we go.

Right now we're in an incredible period. I saw the tremendous numbers of people yesterday. You know, you're talking about during the week, millions—just numbers that you rarely see anything like it—the protests.

So we'll see what happens. A lot of things are happening in Venezuela that people don't know about. And there's a lot of support for what we're doing and for the people that we're talking to. A lot of support, tremendous support.

Q. Mr. President, will you sign the funding bill? Will you sign the funding bill?

President Trump. What?

Go ahead.

Venezuela

Q. [*Inaudible*]*—*aid at the border now with Venezuela, what is the plan? How is it going to get into the country?

President Trump. Well, they have to be able to let the food in. And, in many cases, it's getting in. They blocked one of the bridges, but they haven't been able to block the others. They'd like to try. I think he's making a terrible mistake by not allowing that to happen. It's showing bad things.

And really, we're trying to get food to people that are starving. You have people starving in Venezuela, and it just shows what can happen with the wrong government. You have the wrong government; bad things happen. But you have many, many people that are in, really, trouble for just hunger.

And so we are delivering, and we're sending tremendous amounts of food and other things, supplies.

Q. President Trump—

President Duque. Mr. President, if I may add to that, I think we have to give a very strong message to the dictatorship: Obstructing the access of humanitarian aid is a crime against humanity. And we have to ensure that the humanitarian aid gets to the Venezuelan people. And Colombia is highly committed to receive humanitarian aid from the U.S. and other countries so that it can access Venezuela and help the Venezuelan people face the hunger.

Federal Government Appropriations Bill/Border Security

Q. Mr. President, will you sign the funding bill?

Q. Mr. President, the congressional legislation, will you sign it? On the border—

President Trump. Well, we haven't gotten it yet. We'll be getting it. We'll be looking for landmines, because you could have that, you know. It's been known to happen before to people. But we have not gotten it yet. It will be sent to us at some point, and we'll take a very serious look at it.

We have a lot of things happening right now. We're building a lot of wall right now, with money that we already have. And when people see what we're doing, I think they'll be very surprised. We're doing a lot of work, and we have planned to do a lot of work, but I have not seen it yet.

I appreciate all the work the Republicans have done, because they're really going against a radical left. It's a radical left. And they're going against it very hard, and they're fighting. But we're in very good shape. And we're going to take a look at it when it comes.

I don't want to see a shutdown. A shutdown would be a terrible thing. I think a point was made with the last shutdown; people realized how bad the border is, how unsafe the border is. And I think a lot of good points were made. But I don't want to see another one. There's no reason for it.

And we're going to look at the legislation when it comes, and I'll make a determination then.

Border Security

Q. Mr. President, are you willing to take less money this time than what was on the table just a few months ago?

President Trump. Actually, it will be—regardless of what I do—you know, we already have, as you know, a lot of money where we're building existing wall with the existing funds. But I have a lot of options; just like we do with Venezuela, we have on the border. And we have a lot of options, and a lot of things are happening, very positive things.

You know, the numbers are almost \$23 billion, which you don't report too often. It's about an 8-percent increase over last year. So if you look at the total funding, it's over—it's almost up to \$23 billion. It's about 8-percent higher.

The border area is happening. It's going to happen at a really rapid pace. We're giving out contracts right now. And we're going to have a great wall. It's going to be a great, powerful wall. People will not be able to get through that wall very easily. And I think you see that. I think you see it happening. It's very important.

It will also have technology. It will have drones. It will have everything else we have. If you look at the other elements—ICE funding will be complete. We have other things happening, which people aren't talking about. But we've gotten a lot of funds for a lot of other things.

But, with the wall, they want to be stingy. But we have options that most people don't really understand.

Potential U.S. Troop Deployment to Colombia

Q. Mr. President, are you considering sending 5,000 troops to Colombia?

President Trump. You'll see. You'll see.

Q. What that means? What that means?

President Trump. You'll see.

Q. What that means?

President Trump. Go ahead, any other questions?

Q. [Inaudible]—will the Colombian President allow it?

Q. And would you be willing to go for the—

President Trump. Say it?

Colombia-U.S. Relations

Q. [Inaudible]—trips in the past. When are you visiting Colombia? Because you canceled—

President Trump. I'll be visiting. I really want to. I want to visit Colombia. I look forward to visiting.

President Duque. You're invited to come this year, Mr. President.

President Trump. We're working very, very closely on the drug situation.

Venezuela

Q. Mr. President, would you consider an amnesty to Maduro? For Maduro?

Q. For his side?

President Trump. It's something we haven't thought of. Something we haven't thought of.

Senator R. Edward "Ted" Cruz

Q. Your thoughts on Ted Cruz's proposal to use El Chapo money to pay for the wall?

President Trump. Well, it's always interesting. [*Laughter*] Anything Ted does is interesting. [*Laughter*] So that's certainly an interesting one.

Q. What that means that we are going to know——

Colombia/Drug Trafficking/U.S. Economy/China-U.S. Trade

Q. Mr. President—[*inaudible*]—Colombia's drug policy?

President Trump. Yes. I—we're working together so that Colombia eradicates some of what they're growing in Colombia. I wouldn't say that, at this moment, you're ahead of schedule. But hopefully, you will be at some time in the near future.

President Duque. But let me mention something to that question, Mr. President. In the first 4 months of our administration, we have eradicated 60,000 hectares, more than was eradicated in the previous 8 months. We have a goal—and we will commit to that goal—because it is our moral duty to have Colombia free of illegal crops and free of narcotrafficking.

We have to deliver. We will deliver, because it is our moral duty.

Q. Mr. President, are you going to——

President Trump. I just want to say before you leave: The economy is doing incredibly well. Numbers are really high, really good.

We have a big team of people—very talented people—over in China right now negotiating on the China deal. It's going along very well. We'll see what happens, but I think it's going along very well. They're showing us tremendous respect and—something which a lot of countries didn't used to show the United States. They're showing us respect now. Big difference from the old days, I will tell you that.

So the deal with China is going very well. The economy is doing fantastically. You saw the Gallup poll that came out: Sixty-nine percent or so say they're going to be in better shape next year than even this year. And they're very happy right now. And that's the best numbers they've had in 16 or 17 years. But the economy is strong. We have a lot of companies coming into the United States. They want to come into the United States. So we have a lot of good things happening. And the wall is being built as we speak.

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:15 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A reporter referred to Sinaloa drug cartel leader Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán Loera, who was captured by Mexican authorities on January 8, 2016, and extradited to U.S. custody on January 19, 2017.

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