

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2019

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Vice Premier Liu He of China and an Exchange With Reporters

April 4, 2019

President Trump. Thank you very much. It's a great honor to be with the Vice Premier of China, a highly respected man all over the world. We've had tremendous discussions. We're getting very close to making a deal. That doesn't mean a deal is made, because it's not, but we're certainly getting a lot closer. And I would think with—oh, within the next 4 weeks or maybe less, maybe more—whatever it takes—something very monumental could be announced.

We very much appreciate the letter from President Xi, who—recently, just now I was handed a beautiful letter. I appreciate that. And I also, maybe in particular—I'm very happy to read these headlines that just came out: "China Bans All Types of Fentanyl, Cutting Supply of Deadly Drug to the United States and Fulfilling a Pledge to President Trump." "China Announces New Crackdown on Fentanyl." A terrific thing for the United States.

And a letter from our great Ambassador, Terry Branstad, saying exactly this: that China is reclassifying fentanyl and there will criminal penalties if you sell fentanyl. And, as you know, there weren't any in the past. So this is a very big, big step, and we really appreciate it, from President Xi and from the Vice Premier.

We are rounding the turn. We'll see what happens. We have a ways to go, but not very far. We've made a lot of progress. And I just want to welcome the Vice Premier. We've become friends. We know each other. Many of you got to meet the Vice Premier a couple of months ago, in the same office, the great Oval Office.

And thank you all for being here, and thank you very much for representatives of China being here. We appreciate it. And, Mr. Vice Premier, would you like to say a few words to these extremely lovely people? You may. Thank you very much.

Vice Premier Liu. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you. This is really a great pleasure to me, great President. And I actually—we have made great progress. I do think that because we got direct guidance by two great Presidents—President Xi and President Trump.

President Trump. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Vice Premier Liu. And I will always feel your direct directions—because of your direct involvement, we do have great progress. Although we still have some disagreements, but I think, hopefully, yes, we get a good result. Thank you. Thank you very much.

President Trump. And that was very well done. I could not do that in your language. *[Laughter]* That was very well done. Thank you very much. Beautiful.

So thank you all very much. Again, progress is being made at a very rapid pace. The relationship that we have with China, I will say, is a very good one. Very, very good. And let's see where this all brings us.

But I want to thank Ambassador Lighthizer. And, Steve, I want to thank you. And all of you—Peter, Wilbur—great job. How is the agricultural business coming along, Sonny?

Secretary of Agriculture George E. "Sonny" Perdue. Looking forward to an agreement, Mr. President.

President Trump. Okay. It's really good. But especially Ambassador Lighthizer, that's really—incredible job. He's been working 24 hours a day, along with your representatives. They've been really working very hard. So let's see what it all leads to.

What do you think? Do you have something to say, Bob?

United States Trade Representative Robert E. Lighthizer. Well, I would say we're—you know, we're—we've made a lot of headway. We're working very hard. We have a great—a great partner in the Vice Premier. He's become a good friend. And I think he's—his commitment to reform in China is the reason that this has a chance. And we'll see. There are still some major, major issues left, but we're certainly making more progress than we would've thought when we started. I think that's a fair statement.

President Trump. Steve.

Secretary of the Treasury Steven T. Mnuchin. Sir, we appreciate the hard work on both sides. We appreciate—we've been there, and you've been here now, many times. And we look forward to trying to bring this to closure.

President Trump. Very good. What about Peter?

Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy Director Peter K. Navarro. I think I'll quote my Chinese friends when they said, "The last mile of a marathon is actually the longest and the hardest." So we hope for the best, but we'll see what happens.

President Trump. So the great Larry Kudlow, who's been doing a terrific job, what do you think, Larry?

National Economic Council Director Lawrence A. Kudlow. Thank you, sir. Look, I think making headway is terrific. Making headway is terrific.

President Trump. Good. That's all you have to say? That's the shortest I've ever heard him. [Laughter] I don't think I've ever heard that before. Good. You're learning. [Laughter]

Director Kudlow. Thank you, sir.

President Trump. That's very good.

Director Kudlow. Thank you.

President Trump. Thank you all very much. We're making a lot of progress. Thank you.

Q. Mr. President, what are the sticking points now, sir?

The President's Tax Returns

Q. Are you prepared to tell the Commissioner of the IRS not to disclose to the House Ways and Means Committee your tax returns?

President Trump. They'll speak to my lawyers. They'll speak to the Attorney General.

Q. Will you direct the IRS to do that?

President Trump. They'll speak to my lawyers—[laughter]—and they'll speak to the Attorney General.

Q. Mr. President, what do you want to do about the tariffs?

China-U.S. Trade

Q. [*Inaudible*]*—*a trade deal with China one that lowers the U.S. trade deficit with China? And how soon would it be before we can judge this particular trade deal?

President Trump. Well, I think a trade deal with China is good for the world. It's good for us and China, but it's good, also, for the world. I think it's very important. And we'll see if it happens. We've never done a deal like this with China. And it's a very unique set of circumstances.

But it's a massive deal. It could be one of the—I guess it is, if you think about it, the biggest deal ever made. There can't be a deal like this—no matter where you look, there can't be a deal like this. This is the granddaddy of them all. And we'll see if it happens. It's got a very, very good chance of happening. I think that it will be great for both countries.

Q. Mr. President—

President Trump. But it will be a much fairer deal for us, because, over the years, we've lost a lot of money to China. China has done very well. And I don't blame China. I say it all the time: I don't blame China; I blame the people that sat right at this desk. They should have never allowed that to happen.

So it will bring a lot of things back. I think it will be great for the United States. I think it's going to be, hopefully, really good for China too. It's going to be good for everybody.

Yes.

Q. Mr. President—

China-U.S. Trade

Q. Mr. President, what is still left to agree to, sir? What are the open areas that you haven't pinned down?

President Trump. Well, we have things. We have things. We're talking intellectual property protection and theft. We're talking about certain tariffs. It's very important that certain elements of the tariff that is in discussion right now.

We have a number of things. But we've also agreed to far more than we have left to agree to. And in fact, I would say—I think I can say—that some of the toughest things have been agreed to. I think we have some things that are actually easier right now that we're doing. But it's a very, very—using a word that I don't like using too often—but it's a very, very "comprehensive" deal. It's very complete. We discuss everything. We talk about everything.

When we first started, people would say: "Well, you'll never talk about intellectual property. You'll never talk about a vast array of elements." Every one of them is not only talked about, but highly negotiated. And whether it's our farmers or our technology people, all of them will be really happy. And I think China is going to be very happy too.

Q. Mr. President, what kind of benefit comes with—

China-U.S. Trade

Q. What's your plan right now on tariffs? What would you like to see happen with tariffs?

President Trump. Well, I don't want to say that to you, but I'm going to be discussing that with the Vice Premier in about 5 minutes, as soon as you leave. But just a lot of good things are happening. A lot of really great things are happening.

And I think very important is: The relationship with China is very strong, probably the strongest it's ever been, in a sense. And yet we're negotiating a strong deal. But I think our relationship is at a point that's about at the highest it's been. And that's not a bad thing; that's a very good thing.

Q. If there is a deal, what kind of benefit will it bring——

China-U.S. Trade

Q. Is there any deadlines for the negotiation? Is there any deadlines for the negotiation? And do you plan—when to plan to remove all the tariffs to respond to the—[inaudible]—concern?

President Trump. Well, when you say "negotiation," he's a really tough negotiator, and so is President Xi.

But, I mean, it's so nice when I see the fentanyl, because that's been so—we lost 77,000 people due to fentanyl. And that was a very important thing, and I really appreciate it. And this is before the deal was done; this is something that China is doing before the deal is done. And I think you're going to see a big impact, a tremendous impact.

Yes, ma'am.

China-U.S. Trade

Q. Mr. President, if the deal is to—is reached, what kind of benefit will it bring for both countries?

President Trump. Say it again.

Q. If there is a deal, what kind of benefit will it bring for both countries?

President Trump. Well, I think it's going to be great for China, in that China will continue to trade with the United States. I mean, otherwise, it would be very tough for us to allow that to happen. And we are China's—by far—biggest trading partner. They're our—you know, they are a tremendous trading partner, and the other way too, from our standpoint.

But it will be a great deal from—for China, because we're going to continue to deal. We're going to continue to have a relationship, in terms of trade. Otherwise, it would be very tough to do that in a large way, as we have in the past. We—because it was a very one-sided thing.

From our standpoint, we love dealing with them. They have certain products that are tremendous. They have certain pricing advantages that we take advantage of. A lot of advantages. And I think just the relationships between the two countries are very—you know, that's very strong. And that's an important element of what we're doing: having that—maintaining the great relationship, which perhaps we would maintain anyway, but certainly, we maintain that with a deal like this.

This will be a really terrific, very unique—you know, this is an epic deal, historic, if it happens. We'll see what happens.

Q. What about the summit? When will the summit be?

Q. [*Inaudible*]—on the border?

Federal Reserve System

Q. Are you sending Herman Cain to the Fed, sir? And are you looking for people who are——

President Trump. I've recommended Herman Cain. He is a very terrific man, a terrific person. He's a friend of mine. I have recommended him highly for the Fed. I've told my folks that that's the man. And we'll—he's doing some prechecking now, and I would imagine he'd be in great shape. I find Herman to be an outstanding person, a truly outstanding individual. I would think he would do very well there.

Yes.

Border Security/Mexico-U.S. Trade

Q. Mr. President, is there still an imminent threat of you potentially closing the border? Or is it everything for immigration and drugs that will wait a year?

President Trump. Well, you know, Mexico has been doing a very good job the last 3 or 4 days, since we talked about closing the border, which is very real. But what's more real, initially, is tariffs on the cars coming in, a 25-percent tariff on the cars being made in Mexico, coming in.

You know, Mexico, prior to my becoming President, took close to 30 percent of our car business. Okay? That's a lot. That's a big, big chunk. They did that under NAFTA. And I have all—for years, I've been talking about it. I think NAFTA is one of the worst deals ever made—one of the worst trade deals ever made—maybe the worst. And Mexico took a big chunk of our car business, which I don't like and I haven't liked. And I've spoken about it long and hard, long before I became President, when I was a civilian, so to speak.

And I will say this: that Mexico, in the last 4 days, has really done a great job on their southern border—with Honduras, with Guatemala, with El Salvador—of grabbing and taking and bringing people back to their countries, because they're not going to come to our country. We're not going to allow it.

What's happened on our southern border is a disgrace. And Mexico has brought people back. They've told people, "You can't come in." And that's happened, really, over—they've done, as I understand it, over a thousand today, over a thousand people yesterday, over a thousand people the day before. Before that, they never did anything.

So if we don't—and they have the strongest immigration laws—as strong as there is anywhere in the world. They can do it if they want to do it. They've never really wanted to do it for many, many years. And we've told them: If you don't do that, we're going to close the border. But before we close the border, we'll put the tariffs on the cars.

I don't think we'll ever have to close the border, because the penalty of tariffs on cars coming into the United States from Mexico at 25 percent will be massive.

Border Security

Q. So the border stays open at least for a year?

President Trump. No, I didn't say that.

Q. Okay, what——

President Trump. We're going to—we would start with the tariffs, and we'll see what happens.

But they are removing people out of Mexico on the way up to the United States. And if you take a look, you'll see a big difference. Now, maybe by the end of this news conference or maybe tomorrow, that will stop. And if that stops, we're doing a big tariff deal and that will be fine with me too because you know I like tariffs. I'm one of the people that really like tariffs.

Q. Mr. President—

President Trump. Yes, ma'am. Go ahead. Go ahead.

China-U.S. Relations/Defense Spending

Q. Yeah, President, this year marks the 40th anniversary of U.S. and China relations. What's your comments on this deal or this press—process, yes?

President Trump. You'll really have to speak louder.

Q. What?

President Trump. Louder. Up. Your voice.

Q. Oh, sorry. Sorry. This year marks 40th anniversary of U.S. and China relations.

President Trump. Yes.

Q. What's your comments on this deal or process?

Q. Comments. Comments.

Ambassador Lighthizer. What's the comment—

Q. On the negotiation.

Q. Comments. Sorry. Comments.

President Trump. Comment on what?

Secretary Perdue. On the 40th anniversary of U.S.-China relations.

Q. Oh, okay.

President Trump. Well, my comment is: It is 40 years. It's 40. That's a lot, but not that much. [Laughter] Again, I think could just say what I've already said: The relationship is strong. We hope it's going to get stronger.

Q. Yes.

President Trump. I think we can do a lot of things militarily, also. For instance, they're making a lot of weapons—tremendous weapons—and so are we. We just had \$716 billion approved for military last year. And now we're possibly going to do more this year.

And between Russia and China and us, we're all making hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of weapons, including nuclear, which is ridiculous. And I would say that China will come along and I would say Russia will come along. It doesn't really make sense that we're all doing this.

I think we're the leader. I think we're always going to be the leader. We have to be the leader. I think it's much better if we all got together and we didn't make these weapons. So I

think that's something that could be a phase two after this is done. But, as you know, China is spending a lot of money on military. So are we. So is Russia.

Q. But less than American—[*laughter*].

President Trump. And those three countries, I think, can come together and stop the spending and spend on things that maybe are more productive toward long-term peace.

I don't know if I'm speaking out of turn. We haven't discussed this very much, but I feel that, you know, the military expenditure of you and Russia, us, it's a lot. A lot of money could be put on other things. Would you like to respond to that?

Vice Premier Liu. I think that it is a very good idea.

President Trump. Good. I think so.

Vice Premier Liu. Try to make it better.

Q. Mr. President——

Q. Mr. Trump, the meeting with——

China-U.S. Trade

Q. What about the summit, Mr. President, the summit with President Xi—are you committed to that happening? And when will that happen?

President Trump. Well, if we have a deal, there will be a summit.

Q. No summit before a deal?

President Trump. I would say we'll know over the next 4 weeks. But I think that's correct, Bob. Wouldn't you say?

Ambassador Lighthizer. Yes, sir.

President Trump. And I look forward to seeing President Xi. It will be here. And if we have a deal, then we're going to have a summit. If we don't have a deal, we're not going to have a summit. But there's a very good chance that we'll have the summit.

All right. How about one more? One more.

Q. What are you signaling——

President Trump. Jeff [Jeff Mason, Reuters], you have one? [*Laughter*]

China-U.S. Trade

Q. I would like to follow up on the sticking points, Mr. President. Is enforcement one of the big ones that you're still dealing with?

President Trump. Yes. It is. Enforcement. We have to make sure there's enforcement. I think we'll get that done. We've discussed it at length. I think we're going to get that done.

So just to finish: The deal is coming along really well. We'll probably know over the next 4 weeks. It may take 2 weeks after that to get it papered, but I really think that, over the next fairly short period of time, we're going to know. And it's looking very good. A lot of really good things have been negotiated and agreed to. I would really say, and I say it again, a lot of the most difficult points—points that we didn't think we could ever do or we wouldn't agree to, on both sides—have been agreed to.

We've negotiated out some of the toughest points—really, the tougher points and—but we have some ways to go. And I think we have a very good chance of getting there. I want to thank everybody for being here. And, in particular, I want to thank the Vice Premier and his entire group of very, very talented representatives. Thank you very much.

Vice Premier Liu. Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you so much.

President Trump. Thank you, everybody.

Yemen

Q. Mr. President, what about the House vote on Yemen? The House vote on Yemen, how will you handle that legislation?

President Trump. We'll take a look at it. Yes. I'll look at it.

China-U.S. Trade

Q. Mr. President, the Malaysia Trade Minister recently said the negotiations between U.S. and China would "affect everyone." And he urged the two sides to feel a sense of global responsibility. So what do you think of this issue?

President Trump. I think there is truth to that. A global responsibility. Who did you say said that?

Q. Yes, global responsibilities——

President Trump. Who said that?

Q. ——regarding trade and——

President Trump. No, who said it? Who said it?

Vice Premier Liu. Minister from Malaysia.

Q. Malaysia Foreign Minister—Trade Minister——

Interpreter. Malaysia Trade Minister.

Q. ——Dorell Leiking, yes.

President Trump. Okay. Well, I think it's true. I think the word "global responsibility"—I think those are two nice words. And frankly, maybe we do have a global responsibility between the United States and China.

I think it's actually—actually, it's well brought up. It's true. I think we do have responsibility to the world, both countries. And that's what—I think that's maybe—to a certain extent, that's a big reason here—we're here.

This will be a tremendous thing for the world—forget about China, forget about the United States. This will be a tremendous thing for the world if we get it done. Let's see what happens.

Thank you all very much.

Federal Reserve System

Q. Are you sending any signal to Fed by putting Herman Cain and Steve Moore up?

President Trump. None whatsoever. He's a highly respected man. He's a friend of mine. He's somebody that gets it. And I hope everything goes well. But Herman Cain is a very good guy.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:31 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Commerce Wilbur L. Ross, Jr; and businessman and commentator Herman Cain. He also referred to S.J. Res. 7. Reporters referred to Commissioner of Internal Revenue Charles P. Rettig; Malaysian Minister of International Trade and Industry Ignatius Dorell Leiking; and Stephen Moore, Project for Economic Growth distinguished visiting fellow, Heritage Foundation.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : China, Vice Premier Liu.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Barr, William P.; Branstad, Terry E.; Cain, Herman; Kudlow, Lawrence A.; Lighthizer, Robert E.; Liu He; Mnuchin, Steven T.; Navarro, Peter K.; Perdue, George E. "Sonny"; Ross, Wilbur L., Jr.; Xi Jinping.

Subjects: Agriculture, Department of : Secretary; Armed Forces, U.S. : Funding; China : Counternarcotics efforts, cooperation with U.S.; China : President; China : Relations with U.S.; China : Trade with U.S.; China : U.S. Ambassador; China : U.S. tariff structure, strengthening efforts; China : Vice Premier; Commerce, Department of : Secretary; Commerce, international : Intellectual property law, strengthening efforts; Commerce, international : North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); Drug abuse and trafficking : Opioid epidemic, efforts to combat; Justice, Department of : Attorney General; Mexico : Border with U.S., infrastructure and security; Mexico : Immigration enforcement, cooperation with U.S.; Reserve System, Federal; Trade Representative, Office of the U.S.; Treasury, Department of the : Secretary; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Trade and Manufacturing Policy; White House Office : Economic Council, National; Yemen : Civil war and sectarian conflict.

DCPD Number: DCPD201900206.