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The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Sa'ad al-Hariri of Lebanon

July 25, 2017

President Trump. Thank you very much. Please. I'm very happy to announce that, with zero of the Democrats' votes, the motion to proceed on health care has just passed, and now we move forward towards truly great health care for the American people. We look forward to that. This was a big step.

I want to thank Senator John McCain, very brave man. He made a tough trip to get here and vote. So we want to thank Senator McCain and all of the Republicans. We passed it without one Democrat vote. And that's a shame, but that's the way it is, and it's very unfortunate.

But I want to congratulate American people because we're going to give you great health care. And we're going to get rid of Obamacare which should have been, frankly, terminated long ago. It's been a disaster for the American people.

Thank you very much.

Good afternoon and thank you all for being here. It is my honor to welcome Prime Minister Sa'ad Hariri of Lebanon to the White House.

The Prime Minister and I have just concluded an extensive conversation about the challenges and opportunities facing Lebanon and its neighbors. Lebanon is on the frontlines in the fight against ISIS, Al Qaida, and Hizballah. The Lebanese people, of all faiths, are working together to keep their country—and you know this, and we've been discussing this at great length—their country safe and prosperous. They love their country, and they're going to keep it safe and prosperous.

Mr. Prime Minister, I want to commend you and your people for standing up for humanity in a very troubled part of the world. The ties between our two countries stretch back more than a century. Long, long relationships.

In 1866, American missionaries founded the American University of Beirut. Now, more than 150 years later—and with ongoing American support—this university continues to educate generations of leaders in the region.

Today, our two countries seek to strengthen our relationship in many ways, including the pursuit of stability, mutual prosperity, and peace. What the Lebanese Armed Forces have accomplished in recent years is very impressive. In 2014, when ISIS tried to invade northern Lebanon, the Lebanese Army beat them back. Since that time, the Lebanese Army has been fighting continually to guard Lebanon's border and prevent ISIS and other terrorists—of which there are many—from gaining a foothold inside their country.

The United States military has been proud to help in that fight and will continue to do so. America's assistance can help ensure that the Lebanese Army is the only defender Lebanon needs. It's a very effective fighting force.

Threats to the Lebanese people come from inside as well. Hizballah is a menace to the Lebanese state, the Lebanese people, and the entire region. The group continues to increase

its military arsenal, which threatens to start yet another conflict with Israel. Constantly fighting them back.

With the support of Iran, the organization is also fueling the humanitarian catastrophe in Syria. Hizballah likes to portray itself as a defender of Lebanese interests, but it's very clear that its true interests are those of itself and its sponsor, Iran.

I have repeatedly emphasized that Syria's neighbors in the Middle East must take responsibility for helping Syrian refugees until they can return home and rebuild their country. The Lebanese people have led the way, accepting more Syrian refugees per capita than any other nation. It's not even close.

I want to thank the Prime Minister and the Lebanese people for giving shelter to those victimized by ISIS, the Asad regime, and their supporters and sponsors, and pledge our continued support to Lebanon.

Since the start of the Syrian crisis, the United States has helped Lebanon support Syrian refugees with clean water, food, shelter, and health care. Our approach—supporting the humanitarian needs of displaced Syrian citizens as close to their home country as possible—is the best way to help most people. America is proud to stand with those who have the courage to stand up to terrorism and take responsibility for affairs in their own region.

The reliance and resilience of the Lebanese people in the face of war and terror is extraordinary. We honor the citizens of Lebanon who are working to secure a future of peace, stability, and prosperity for their children.

Mr. Prime Minister, I'm grateful that you're here today. It's a big day in our country because of the vote that you just heard about. [*Laughter*] We stood and watched the results on television before coming out, and you found it very interesting, I hope——

Prime Minister Hariri. Yes, I did.

President Trump. ——and very important. I look forward to working with you to strengthen our partnership and the enduring friendship between the American and Lebanese peoples.

Thank you very much. Mr. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Hariri. Thank you. Good afternoon. I had the honor and pleasure—and the pleasure to hold a very good meeting with President Trump. I appreciate his leadership and the United States leadership in the world today. We discussed the situation in our region and the efforts we, in Lebanon, are making to safeguard our political and economic stability, while combating terrorism.

I thanked President Trump for his support to our army and security agencies, as well as his support to UNIFIL maintaining peace and stability along our southern border, where our government is committed to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701, as well as all resolutions.

We also discussed the pressures Lebanon is facing as a result of 1.5 million Syrians displaced in our country. I outlined to the President Trump my government's vision for dealing with this crisis with the support of the international community. We also discussed economic prospects in Lebanon and our government's effort to jumpstart inclusive economic growth with a particular emphasis on job creation.

I thank President Trump and the United States of America for their support to the Lebanese people, striving to keep their country a model of moderation, dialogue, coexistence, and democratic governance in our region.

Thank you.

President Trump. Thank you very much.

Margaret Talev [Bloomberg News], please.

Q. Thank you.

President Trump. Hello, Margaret.

Attorney General Jefferson B. Sessions III

Q. Hi. Hi, Mr. President. Mr. Prime Minister, I'll have a question for you also in just a second, if you'll bear with me.

You spoke earlier today to the Wall Street Journal—we've all seen those comments—but I think everybody here probably is hoping that you could talk a little bit more about this. You have called your Attorney General "beleaguered." You've criticized his decision to recuse himself on the Russia matters. And your, kind of, catchphrase or motto before the White House was, "You're fired." So I'm wondering if you would talk to us a little bit about whether you've lost confidence in Jeff Sessions, whether you want him to resign on his own, whether you're prepared to fire him if he doesn't, and why you're, sort of, letting him twist in the wind rather than just making the call for him. Thank you.

President Trump. Well, I don't think I am doing that, but I am disappointed in the Attorney General. He should not have recused himself almost immediately after he took office. And if he was going to recuse himself, he should have told me prior to taking office, and I would have, quite simply, picked somebody else. So I think that's a bad thing not for the President, but for the Presidency. I think it's unfair to the Presidency. And that's the way I feel. Thank you.

Q. Thank you. Mr. Prime Minister, could you tell us what you think about the Saudi-led blockade of Qatar? This is something that has been of great concern to the U.S. also in terms of resolving. Do you think that Qatar is doing enough on terror? And if so, would you like to see President Trump increase the pressure on the Saudi coalition to ease its blockade?

And, Mr. President, if you would give us any more of your thinking on, going forward, the path with Attorney General Sessions, and maybe your timeline for making a decision, that would be great. Thank you.

President Trump. You don't give up. That's okay. [*Laughter*]

Prime Minister Hariri. Thank you. I think there is an effort by the Kuwaitis. They're leading this effort. I think—and I think they made some progress. We believe that dialogue is the best way in improving this relationship between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. I believe that maybe the United States also could help in this—in solving this issue in the Gulf.

Denise [Denise Rahme Fakhry, MTV Lebanon].

Syria/Hizballah Political-Paramilitary Organization

Q. I have one question for the President and also for Prime Minister. Congress introduced additional sanctions against Hizballah last week. What is your position towards these sanctions and on the role of Hizballah is playing in the region and Syria?

President Trump. I'll be making my position very clear over the next 24 hours. We're going to see what is exactly taking place. I have meetings with some of my very expert military representatives and others, so I'll be making that decision very shortly. Okay? Thank you.

Q. And about his role in Syria and the region?

President Trump. Whose role?

Q. Hizballah's role.

President Trump. I'll be talking about that tomorrow.

Q. Prime Minister——

[*At this point, the reporter asked a question and Prime Minister Hariri responded in Arabic, and no translation was provided. President Trump then spoke as follows.*]

President Trump. Blake Burman [Fox Business Network]. Thank you. Hello, Blake.

Attorney General Jefferson B. Sessions III/Leaking of Information by U.S. Intelligence Agencies/Health Care Reform Legislation

Q. President Trump, hello. Thank you. Indulge us here for a second. Just to pick up where Margaret left off, the American people, I think, would like to know: Do you feel that the Attorney General should indeed stay? Should he resign? Do you intend on firing him? Why should he remain as the Attorney General?

And secondly, on a separate topic, with the health care vote that just came about, there is a still long ways to go. At what point do you feel that Republicans, if they can't get something done, should just say, you know what, we gave it a go, let's move on to tax reform instead? Thank you.

President Trump. I want the Attorney General to be much tougher on the leaks from intelligence agencies, which are leaking like rarely have they ever leaked before, at a very important level. These are intelligence agencies. We cannot have that happen. You know many of my views in addition to that, but I think that's one of the very important things that they have to get on with.

I told you before, I'm very disappointed with the Attorney General, but we will see what happens. Time will tell. Time will tell.

On health care, I'm extremely happy that we got this vote. This is—they say, if you look historically, this is the tough vote to get. Now, we're all going to sit together, and we're going to try and come up with something that's really spectacular. We have a lot of options and a lot of great options. And the Republican Senators really went out there. It's not easy when you have 52 Senators and you have a bloc of 48 voting against you. No matter what it is, no matter how good it sounds, it's very hard to get the kind of numbers that we got. We ended up with 51 votes—51 to whatever. I don't know what it is. Yes, 51 to 50.

So we had two Republicans that went against us, which is very sad, I think. It's very, very sad for them. But I'm very, very happy with the result. I believe now we will, over the next

week or two, come up with a plan that's going to be really, really wonderful for the American people.

Obamacare is a disaster. It's failing on every front. It's too expensive. It gives horrible coverage. It was gotten by a lie, 28 times. It was a lie. You can keep your doctor; you can keep your plan—all lies. And the people are sick of it. And we're going to come up with a great health care that satisfies the needs of the people that we serve, which is the people of the United States.

I will say—and I said it right at the beginning—health care is always difficult, because you have to weed a very, very narrow path, like a quarter of an inch wide, right down the middle. And if you go a little bit too far right, you lose three people on the left. And if you go a little bit too far left, you lose five people on the right. It is a very, very complex and difficult task, but it's something I actually know quite a bit about. I want to just thank some of the Republican Senators, who were really fantastic in getting us here, in particular John McCain for making the trip.

But I think you're going to have a great health care. This is the beginning of the end for the disaster known as Obamacare.

Thank you very much.

Q. And Mr. President——

Prime Minister Hariri. [*Inaudible*]

Syrian Refugees/Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) Terrorist Organization/Syria

Q. Mr. President, how can the United States help Lebanon cope with the massive number of refugees—of Syrian refugees? And is there a way you can help facilitate the refugees' return to their home country?

President Trump. Well, we are helping. And one of the things that we have made tremendous strides at is getting rid of ISIS. We have generals that don't like to talk; they like to do. And we were with General Mattis last night, and the success they've had against ISIS is extraordinary. We've made more progress in the last 4 or 5 months than previous—really, I could say, the previous administration made in 8 years.

And then, we have to see what we have to see. But I will tell you, ISIS in Syria, ISIS in Iraq, ISIS in other locations—we have made tremendous strides. Our military is an incredible fighting force. And as you know, I let the commanders on the ground do what they had to do. Before, they used to have to call in this beautiful house and speak to people that didn't know what was happening: where they were; what locations; practically, probably never heard of the countries they were talking about or the towns. I let the generals do what they had to do. And we have made tremendous plans. We were discussing it just before. We have made tremendous gains with respect to ISIS in Syria, Iraq, and other places.

Prime Minister Hariri. Thank you.

President Trump. Thank you.

Q. What about Bashar al-Asad? What about Bashar al-Asad in Syria?

President Trump. Asad?

Q. Asad.

President Trump. I'm not a fan of Asad, okay? [*Laughter*] He will tell you that, because we hit 58 out of 58, or you could even say, 59 out of 59, when we launched the Tomahawk missiles.

No, I am not a fan of Asad. I certainly think that what he's done to that country and to humanity is horrible, so I have been saying that for a long time. I am not somebody that will stand by and let him get away with what he tried to do. And he did it a number of times when President Obama drew the red line in the sand. And then he should have crossed that red line, because some horrible acts against humanity took place, including gas and the killing through gases. That was a bad day for this country. And I'd go a step further that, had President Obama gone across that line and done what he should have done, I don't believe you'd have Russia and I don't believe you'd have Iran to anywhere near the extent, and maybe not at all, in Syria today. Okay?

Thank you very much.

Q. Mr. President——

[*Prime Minister Hariri had an exchange with reporters in Arabic, and no translation was provided. President Trump then spoke as follows.*]

Q. Mr. President, please, please.

President Trump. Thank you very much, everybody. Appreciate it. Thank you.

Prime Minister Hariri. Thank you so much.

President Trump. Mr. Prime Minister, thank you.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 3:24 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to President Bashar al-Asad of Syria; Sens. Susan M. Collins and Lisa A. Murkowski; and Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization. Prime Minister Hariri referred to United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

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