

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks on the Nomination of Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Michael R. Pompeo To Be Secretary of State, the Termination of Rex W. Tillerson as Secretary of State, and the Nomination of Gina C. Haspel To Be Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and an Exchange With Reporters Upon Departure for San Diego, California

March 13, 2018

The President. I've worked with Mike Pompeo now for quite some time. Tremendous energy, tremendous intellect. We're always on the same wavelength. The relationship has been very good, and that's what I need as Secretary of State.

I wish Rex Tillerson well. Gina, by the way, who I know very well, who I've worked very closely, will be the first woman Director of the CIA. She's an outstanding person who also I have gotten to know very well.

So I've gotten to know a lot of people very well over the last year, and I'm really at a point where we're getting very close to having the Cabinet and other things that I want.

But I think Mike Pompeo will be a truly great Secretary of State. I have total confidence in him. And as far as Rex Tillerson is concerned, I very much appreciate his commitment and his service, and I wish him well. He's a good man.

Former Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson/Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Michael R. Pompeo

Q. Mr. President, what did you tell Rex Tillerson? Mr. President, what did you say to Rex Tillerson?

The President. Rex and I have been talking about this for a long time. We got along, actually, quite well, but we disagreed on things. When you look at the Iran deal, I think it's terrible. I guess he felt it was okay. I wanted to either break it or do something, and he felt a little bit differently. So we were not really thinking the same. With Mike—Mike Pompeo—we have a very similar thought process. I think it's going to go very well.

Rex is a very good man. I like Rex a lot. I really appreciate his commitment and his service. And I'll be speaking to Rex over a long period of time.

Former Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson

Q. Mr. President—[inaudible].

The President. I can't hear you.

Q. [Inaudible]

The President. No, I really didn't discuss it very much with him, honestly. I made that decision by myself. Rex wasn't, as you know, in our—in this country. I made the North Korea decision with consultation from many people, but I made that decision by myself.

Q. Did you and Rex Tillerson—[inaudible]?

The President. I actually got along well with Rex, but really, it was a different mindset. It was a different thinking.

*Former Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson/Director of the Central Intelligence Agency
Michael R. Pompeo*

Q. Did you fire him because he called you a moron?

Q. Why is Mike Pompeo the right man right now?

The President. What?

Q. Did you fire him because he called you a moron?

Q. Why is Mike Pompeo the right man right now, Mr. President?

The President. Say it again.

Q. Why is Mike Pompeo the right man right now?

The President. I respect his intellect. I respect the process that we've all gone through together. We have a very good relationship for whatever reason—chemistry, whatever it is; why do people get along. I've always—right from the beginning, from day one, I've gotten along well with Mike Pompeo.

And frankly, I get along well with Rex too. And you know, I wish Rex a lot of good things. I think he's going to do—I think he's going to be very happy. I think Rex will be much happier now, but I really appreciate his service. But with Mike, we've had a very good chemistry right from the beginning.

Poisoning of Former Russian Spy Sergei Viktorovich Skripal in Salisbury, United Kingdom/Border Security

Q. [Inaudible]

The President. Well, it sounds to me—I'm speaking to Theresa May today—it sounds to me like it would be Russia, based on all of the evidence they have. I don't know if they've come to a conclusion, but she's calling me today.

As you know, now we're going to the wall. We're going out to the wall. We're going to be looking at the prototypes, which is very important for our country.

But Theresa May is going to be speaking to me today. It sounds to me like they believe it was Russia, and I would certainly take that finding as fact.

Poisoning of Former Russian Spy Sergei Viktorovich Skripal in Salisbury, United Kingdom

Q. Mr. President, do you believe there should be a response from the United States?

The President. Yes, as soon as we get the facts straight—and we're going to be speaking with the British today; we're speaking with Theresa May today. And as soon as we get the facts straight, if we agree with them, we will condemn Russia or whoever it may be. But I have not spoken to her. I'll speak to her sometime today.

Russia's Interference in 2016 Presidential Election

Q. [Inaudible]

The President. We're very happy with the decision by the House Intelligence Committee saying there was absolutely no collusion with respect to Russia. And it was a very powerful decision, a very strong decision, backed up. I understand they're going to be releasing hundreds of pages of proof and evidence.

But we are very, very happy with that decision. It was a powerful decision that left no doubt. So I want to thank the House Intelligence Committee and all of the people that voted so strongly.

CNBC Commentator Lawrence A. Kudlow/National Economic Council Director

Q. [Inaudible]—Kudlow?

The President. I'm looking at Larry Kudlow very strongly. I've known him a long time. We don't agree on everything, but in this case, I think that's good. I want to have a divergent opinion. We agree on most. He now has come around to believing in tariffs as also a negotiating point. You know, I'm renegotiating trade deals, and without tariffs, we wouldn't do nearly as well.

But Larry has been a friend of mine for a long time. He backed me very early in the campaign—I think the earliest. I think he was one of my original backers. He's a very, very talented man, a good man. And I think Larry Kudlow has a good chance. I'm also speaking to many others, but I think Larry has a very good chance.

Thank you all. I'll see you at the wall. I'll see you at the wall.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:15 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House prior to boarding Marine One. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Theresa May of the United Kingdom.

Categories: Appointments and Nominations : Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, nomination, remarks; Appointments and Nominations : Secretary of State, nomination, remarks; Interviews With the News Media : Exchange with reporters :: White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Haspel, Gina C.; Kudlow, Larry; Kudlow, Lawrence A.; May, Theresa; Pompeo, Michael R.; Tillerson, Rex W.

Subjects: Central Intelligence Agency; Commerce, international : Free and fair trade; Congress : House of Representatives :: Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence; Iran : Nuclear program, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action; Mexico : Border with U.S., infrastructure and security; North Korea : International diplomatic efforts; Russia : 2016 U.S. elections, interference; Russia : Attempted assassination of former intelligence operative in Salisbury, United Kingdom; State, Department of : Secretary; United Kingdom : Attempted assassination of former intelligence operative in Salisbury; United Kingdom : Prime Minister.

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