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Remarks in an Exchange With Reporters in Elko, Nevada
October 20, 2018

The President. We had a great time in Nevada. It was really terrific. We had a very special couple of hours. I think we're going to have a big success with Dean Heller, with Adam Laxalt. Really a good time.

Any questions? Yes.

Death of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi

Q. Mr. President, you said yesterday you were looking to talk to MBS. When do you plan on talking to him? Today?

The President. I'll be speaking to him. Soon. Very soon. Could be today. But I will be speaking to him. A lot of progress is being made. We'll have an answer by probably Tuesday or so.

Q. Does that include sanctions? You're looking—you're going to propose sanctions?

The President. It may. And I'm going to work also with the Senate, with the House. We'll be working with Congress, because, you know, they're very involved, and I wanted to keep them involved, much as I did with Justice Kavanaugh. I wanted to keep them involved. I think it's important.

Death of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi

Q. Mr. President, do you have any sense of where the body is?

The President. No, we don't. Nobody seems to know. Somebody knows, but nobody of the various investigation groups at this moment know. But we'll find out.

Q. Is that a concern that they haven't identified that from Saudi?

The President. It's a concern. We'd like to find out where it is and what happened. And I think we're inching our way there.

Death of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi

Q. And has anyone in the U.S. Government heard audio or seen video from the consulate?

The President. No, we haven't. Mike Pompeo has not, Secretary of State. Somebody came out with a false report; I think it was ABC. It was totally false. He has not seen that, has not heard that. And I would tell you if he had. So far, we've heard about it, but nobody has seen it.

Q. Not even at the CIA or NSA?

The President. Not that we know of.

Death of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi

Q. Have you seen a transcript of it? Have the Turks turned over any——

The President. We have not gotten a transcript either. We've heard all about it. We're hearing about it just like you're hearing about it, probably from the same people. We have not seen it yet.

Death of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi/Border Security/United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement

Q. Do you think it's possible that the Crown Prince didn't know about any of this?

The President. It's possible. You don't know that, but it's possible.

We've had a tremendously positive development with Mexico. I just want to say, on behalf of the American public, that we appreciate what Mexico is doing. They've really stepped up, and it will not be forgotten. We just signed our new trade deal with Mexico and with Canada, the USMCA. And now I'm very happy that we signed it.

I really appreciate—and they've had some people that were very badly injured. Six people at least. And we really appreciate what Mexico has done on the border. We appreciate it. First time this has ever happened. And hopefully, it's because they respect the leader of the United States. But they have never done that before. And I will tell you that I appreciate what Mexico has done.

Death of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi/U.S. Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia

Q. Mr. President, you said yesterday that it was a good first step what Saudi had said. Are you satisfied that some of them have been fired?

The President. No, I'm not satisfied until we find the answer. But it was a big first step. It was a good first step. But I want to get to the answer.

With all of that being said though, we have $450 billion, $110 billion of which is a military order. But this is equipment and various things ordered from Saudi Arabia—$450 billion. I think it's over a million jobs. That's not helpful for us to cancel an order like that. That hurts us far more than it hurts them.

For the military equipment, they go to China, they go to Russia, and they don't have great equipment like we do—nobody does. But they can buy their equipment from other people. So that would hurt us far more than it would hurt them.

But there are other things that can be done, including sanctions.

Border Security

Q. Back on Mexico, have you ever considered completely sealing off the U.S. border with Mexico?

The President. So if it doesn't work out on the border, what I want the Democrats to do—the beautiful thing of what's happening is, the Democrats are watching, on television, in this case, probably better than reading it—because you visually see what's going on at the border. And all of the Democrats that have made it impossible—they've obstructed, and they've resisted—they've made it impossible to do anything, because the immigration laws are so bad.

And I could sit down with Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi, and in 1 hour, I could have an agreement done that would solve all of the things that you're watching that are so vicious and violent, where soldiers from Mexico are being injured, badly, by these—by people. And I could solve this in 1 hour with Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer. But they don't want to, but I think now they do, because I think it's a terrible political point for Democrats.

Q. Would you ever consider completely sealing off the border, like having no one be allowed to—[*inaudible*]?

The President. I would call in the military, and I would seal off the border. I would close up the border. If that happens, and if that continues to move forward, the caravan we're talking about—which is, I think, a manmade caravan, if you want to know the truth; I think some bad people started that caravan. More importantly, or maybe almost as importantly, you have some very, very bad people in the caravan. You have some very tough criminal elements within the caravan.

But I will seal off the border before they come into this country, and I'll bring out our military, not our Reserves. I'll bring out our military.

Former Vice President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.

Q. Mr. President, any response to Vice—former Vice President Biden's appearance? You mentioned him on stage. You watched his rally. He had some harsh words for you earlier today.

The President. No, look, Biden is a man that he—number one, he can't draw a crowd. He had almost no—you see what we have. And we had thousands of people that couldn't get in today. Many thousands.

No, look, I wish Biden the best. I hope he's going to be the nominee, actually. I mean, "One-Percent Joe." I just hope they pick somebody good, somebody that's going to represent their interests. If it's Biden or Elizabeth Warren—I think she's been very badly damaged by what happened over the last couple of days—or a man that ran Newark, New Jersey, into the ground. There are a lot of people. But I don't see it yet. But we'll see what happens. We'll see what happens.

Anything else?

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty

Q. What's Ambassador Bolton's message to the Russians going to be?

The President. Ambassador Bolton?

Q. His message to the Russians. Is he going to pull out of that——

The President. You've got to talk louder.

Q. His message to the Russians. Is he going to pull out of the arms control treaty?

The President. Yes, Russia has violated the agreement. They've been violating it for many years. And I don't know why President Obama didn't negotiate or pull out. And we're not going to let them violate a nuclear agreement and go out and do weapons, and we're not allowed to.

We're the ones that have stayed in the agreement, and we've honored the agreement. But Russia has not, unfortunately, honored the agreement. So we're going to terminate the agreement; and we're going to pull out.

Q. That's the INF?

The President. Yes. The INF.

Potential Successor to U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Nikki R. Haley

Q. Any update on your pick for U.N. Ambassador?

The President. No, we'll have somebody great. Nikki is a friend of mine. She's going to work on the campaign. But she's been doing it for a long time, and we're going to pick somebody very quickly.

Potential Successor to U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Nikki R. Haley

Q. Would you prefer it to be a woman?

The President. Say it?

Q. Would you prefer it to be a woman?

The President. Yes.

Q. Why?

The President. I'm going to pick the best person. I think it would be good. I think she's done an excellent job, a great job. And I would love to see—and I'll tell you, I'm interviewing three women and two men. We have five people: three women, two men. I think I might prefer that, but we'll see. Okay?

Tax Cuts

Q. Mr. President, you've said you're going to do more on taxes. Do you expect to do something more in the next couple months? And what should we expect to see?

The President. In what? With respect to what?

Q. With respect to tax legislation, the next piece?

The President. We are looking at putting in a very major tax cut for middle-income people. And if we do that, it'll be sometime just prior, I would say, to November.

Q. A major what again?

The President. A major tax cut. We are going to be putting in—and are studying very deeply right now, around the clock—a major tax cut for middle-income people. Not for business at all; for middle-income people.

Now, the last was for middle income and for business, and our business is now coming back because of it. But we are looking at—and Kevin Brady is working on it. Paul Ryan is working. We're all working on it. And we're looking at a major tax cut for middle-income people who need it.

Q. And what was your timeframe for that?

The President. I would say sometime around the 1st of November, maybe a little before that.

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty

Q. Sir, if I could—sorry, if I can follow up on the INF real quick. You intend to terminate the agreement. Does that mean that you plan on developing those weapons and just, kind of, deploying them once again?

The President. We'll have to develop those weapons, unless Russia comes to us, and China comes to us, and they all come to us, and they say, "Let's really get smart, and let's none of us

develop those weapons." But if Russia is doing it and if China is doing it, and we're adhering to the agreement, that's unacceptable.

So we have a tremendous amount of money to play with in our military, $700 billion plus $716 billion. So Russia has not adhered to the agreement, so we are going to terminate the agreement, and we are going to develop the weapons.

If they get smart—and if others get smart—and they say, "Let's not develop these horrible nuclear weapons," I would be extremely happy with that. But as long as somebody is violating that agreement, then we're not going to be the only one to adhere to it. I think you understand that.

Okay? We'll see you on the plane. Thank you. Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:54 p.m. on the tarmac at Elko Regional Airport prior to departure for Washington, DC. In his remarks, he referred to Nevada Republican senatorial candidate Sen. Dean A. Heller; and Nevada Republican gubernatorial candidate State Attorney General Adam P. Laxalt; Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia; Sens. Elizabeth A. Warren and Cory A. Booker; and National Security Adviser John R. Bolton.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: Elko, NV.

Locations: Elko, NV.

Names: Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Bolton, John R.; Booker, Cory A.; Brady, Kevin P.; Haley, Nikki R.; Heller, Dean A.; Kavanaugh, Brett M.; Khashoggi, Jamal; Laxalt, Adam P.; Muhammad bin Salman bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud, Crown Prince; Obama, Barack; Pelosi, Nancy; Pompeo, Michael R.; Ryan, Paul D.; Schumer, Charles E.; Warren, Elizabeth A.

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