

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2019

Remarks at the National Governors Association Dinner

February 24, 2019

Thank you very much, everybody. This is an honor. Fifty-nine Governors. Think of that. But we actually have—we added a few from the islands, so we broke it down to 49. But we love to exaggerate just a little bit. *[Laughter]*

This has been a—really, a great couple of days. We've had a lot of fun together. And it's been, you know, very special. We've gotten to know each other. We've gotten to like each other, in almost all cases. Let's see, one or two cases. Every case, I would say. *[Laughter]* Every single case.

I just want to thank Vice President Mike Pence and our Second Lady, Karen. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mike, very much. And I especially want to thank our really great Cabinet for being here. We have most members of the Cabinet and our great new Attorney General. And, Bill Barr and Mrs. Barr, thank you very much. Thank you.

I can say this: Our country is doing very, very well. We are doing record business. We're doing record employment. Right now we have the most people working in our country than ever in the history of our country, close to 160 million people. And that's a big thing.

And I'll give you a little advance information. I see Steve Mnuchin is here, and Ambassador Lighthizer. We just left a big meeting with China, and we just put out a statement, and we're doing very well with China. It was a long weekend. They decided to stay for 2½ more days. They'll probably be leaving late tonight; they're going back. And if all works well, we're going to have some very big news over the next week or two.

And it's really been terrific, I tell you. That whole relationship has been outstanding. We put ourselves into a position of strength for the first time in about 35 years or probably a lot more than that.

But China has been terrific. We want to make a deal that's great for both countries. And that's really what we're going to be doing. And I think it's going to—as Governors—most of you, or many of you are Governors, and doing an incredible job. And so many have come up and said, "How are you doing with China?" Which is a very unusual question for people to come and ask—almost every one. "Sir, how are you doing with China?" Because it affects your States so much. China is everywhere. And I think you'll be very—really amazed with what you see. Maybe. Let's see what happens. We still have a little ways to go. Would you say that's correct, Mr. Ambassador? We have a little bit.

But I want to thank you, Bob. You've been working 24 hours around the clock. And I will say this publicly: When I was able to be lucky enough to win the Presidency, I called Bob Lighthizer, because, for years, people have known he's the greatest trader that we have on this type of trade. We have many different types of trade. And I really understand now why. Thank you very much. Fantastic job. And Steve. Great job.

And also, I was going to leave very early tomorrow, but now I'm going to do it a little bit later. I had an option to do it at 6 in the morning or 11. *[Laughter]* And I chose 11. And this way we can spend a little bit of time with you tomorrow morning, because you're having a breakfast. And I'll come to the breakfast. But literally, I said: "What kind of an option is that? I

can leave at 6 in the morning or 11?" They said, "You can leave at 6 or anywhere between 11 and 12." I said, "I'll take 11 to 12." [Laughter] But you're having a breakfast tomorrow, so I'll be with you at the breakfast.

But we'll be leaving for Hanoi, Vietnam, and we'll be meeting with Kim Jong Un. It's a very interesting thing to say, but I've developed a very, very good relationship. We'll see what that means. But he's never had a relationship with anybody from this country and hasn't had lots of relationships anywhere. And I always say—you know, the media sometimes will say, "Well, what have they given up?" We've given up nothing. The sanctions are on. Everything is on. But we have a special feeling, and I think it's going to lead to something very good, and maybe not. I think ultimately it will, but maybe not.

And I'm not pushing for speed, but we're not removing the sanctions. And we're going to have, I think, a very interesting 2½ days in Vietnam. And we have a chance for the total denuclearization of an area of the world that was very dangerous.

When I first came in, or really, more particularly, at the end of the last administration, there were rockets going up; there were missiles going up. There were bombs going off. There were massive cannons being tested. If you ever saw the picture of the beach, I've never seen anything like it, where you had, literally, thousands of cannons on the beach, shooting out into the waters. And there was nuclear testing. In fact, they thought it was earthquakes. They said they were massive earthquakes, and then they realized it was North Korea. They said, "Wow, I think it's maybe not an earthquake." Now there's no testing, there's no rockets. There's no nuclear testing. And we get along well. Very well.

So it will be very interesting to see. And as I tell Chairman Kim, he has a chance to have a country that is so vibrant, economically. Maybe one of the most in the world. He's got a location that's unbelievable. As a real-estate person, I've always done very well with location. But he's right between China, Russia, and then on the other side, South Korea. So they can't touch each other unless they go through North Korea.

And I say, "You have one of the greatest locations." They have incredible people, hard-working people, smart, energetic. And I think it can be, really, one of the great—one of the great financial and economic countries anywhere in the world. So I tell him that. I said: "But you can't do that if you're going to keep nuclear. If you do nuclear, that can't ever happen."

And we see eye to eye, I believe. But you'll be seeing it more and more over the next couple of days, one way or the other. What's going to happen? I can't tell you. I think eventually it would, but I can't tell you. And I'm not in a rush. I don't want to rush anybody. I just don't want testing. As long as there's no testing, we're happy.

And so we've done really something, I think, very special with respect to North Korea. And it's a long flight, and I'll be back at the end of the week. But we have two very interesting days planned, and I think it's a very important thing.

Prime Minister Abe of Japan said he can't believe what's happened in such a short period of time, because rockets were being fired over Japan—rockets and missiles, both. And now that hasn't happened in a long time—16 months, 17 months. No more testing. No more rockets. No more checking to see whether or not this stuff works.

So you'll be seeing it, and I think it's going to be very interesting for people to see. But there's a chance to do something very, very special. It's very exciting. And likewise, if we can do the great economic deal, it would be the largest trade deal ever made, by far, if you look at it,

it's—our deal with China. And we truly are very close. So those are a couple of very interesting things.

But our country is doing incredibly well, economically. We've picked up, in terms of value, worth, \$18 trillion. Now, China—and I don't want this—but China has lost about \$24 trillion. So they were catching us, catching us, catching us. And now we've zoomed out. And I can say this: As long as I'm President, they're not going to catch us, and they're going to do well. But I want them to do well, but they're not going to catch us.

So I just want to give a toast to the incredible people in this room and to our unbelievable country. We have a very, very special country. I want to thank our First Lady for having done—this is a such a beautiful job. So, Melania, I just want to thank you very much. I want to thank you. *[Applause]* Thank you.

And I would like to ask Governor Bullock to come up please, from a very special place that I like very much, for the obvious reason. And perhaps you could give a toast. Please. Thank you, Governor. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:42 p.m. on the State Floor at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Christine Barr, wife of Attorney General William P. Barr; U.S. Trade Representative Robert E. Lighthizer; and Gov. Stephen C. Bullock of Montana, in his capacity as chair of the National Governors Association.

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