

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2019

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Prime Minister Leo Varadkar of Ireland and an Exchange With Reporters

March 14, 2019

President Trump. Well, thank you very much. It's a great honor to have the Prime Minister of Ireland. We've become fast friends. We've had some very, very good transactions taking place on trade and other things.

As you know, he's in a very complicated position right now because of Brexit. You're going to have to tell me what's happening. You're going to have to, perhaps, tell the world what's happening because I'm not sure anybody knows.

But very, very special country. So many friends. And you're doing a great job. Very popular man doing a wonderful job. The people love him, and that's very important. And thank you very much for being with us. Thank you, Leo.

Prime Minister Varadkar. Mr. President, just wanted to say thanks very much for meeting us again. It's an enormous privilege for Ireland, as a small country, to have this annual meeting on account of St. Patrick's Day, and it's a chance to make even closer and tighter the bonds between the U.S. and Ireland.

I particularly want to thank you for your help with Aughinish——

President Trump. Right.

Prime Minister Varadkar. ——with the plans in the west of Ireland where hundreds of jobs were threatened as a result of the Russian sanctions. And with the help of the administration, we were able to save those jobs.

President Trump. That's right.

Prime Minister Varadkar. So, thank you very much for that.

President Trump. They don't—they don't know about that.

Prime Minister Varadkar. [Laughter] They do now.

President Trump. They don't know about what I do for other people.

Prime Minister Varadkar. Hundreds of jobs saved. And I look forward to talking to you later about Brexit, giving you our perspective——

President Trump. Good.

Prime Minister Varadkar. ——on it and the real importance of protecting the Good Friday Agreement and the really hard-won peace in Northern Ireland.

And I look forward to talking to you a little bit about immigration——

President Trump. Good.

Prime Minister Varadkar. ——as well, and also about trade and how much I would like to see a trade deal done between the U.S. and the EU. We've done one with Japan. We've done one with Canada. And we'd love to strike a deal with the U.S., too.

President Trump. Okay, well, we'll see. Because the EU, as you know, has been very tough to deal with, and frankly, they've been—it's been very one-sided for many, many years. And so we're changing that around, and we're starting to maybe get somewhere. And if we don't, we'll win anyway. But I do appreciate your saying that. And again, it's a great honor to have you. Fantastic country.

United Kingdom's Withdrawal From European Union

Q. Mr. President, do you support Ireland's position on Brexit?

President Trump. I'm not going to comment on Brexit. I can tell you it's a very complex thing that's going on right now. It's tearing a country apart. It's actually tearing a lot of countries apart. And it's a shame that it has to be that way. But I think we will stay right in our lane.

We're doing fantastically as a country. Our economy is booming. We're the envy of the world. Other economies are not doing well and we're doing record business, so we're very happy about that. And it's really great to have the Prime Minister of Ireland with us.

2020 Democratic Presidential Candidate Robert F. "Beto" O'Rourke

Q. Mr. President, any reaction to Beto O'Rourke? Your reaction to Beto O'Rourke's announcement today, Mr. President?

President Trump. Well, I think he's got a lot of hand movement. I've never seen so much hand movement. I said, "Is he crazy, or is that just the way he acts?" So, I've never seen hand movement. I watched him a little while this morning doing, I assume, it was some kind of a news conference. And I've actually never seen anything quite like it. Study it. I'm sure you'll agree.

2020 Presidential Election

Q. Mr. President, who's the bigger threat: Beto O'Rourke or Joe Biden? Who's the bigger threat, Beto O'Rourke or Joe Biden?

President Trump. I just say, whoever it is, I'll take them on. Okay? Him or her. Whoever it is, I'll take him or her on.

And I think with the economy doing so well, with all of the things we've done with the tax cuts—the biggest in the history of our country—tax cuts; with people having a lot more money in their pocket. With their 401(k)s hitting record numbers, they've never had—they've never been considered great investors by their wives or by their husbands, whatever it may be, and now they're considered great investments.

But the market is hitting almost new highs, and I have all of the records—every single record, I have. Every single record for the stock market.

So I think it's going to be very tough to beat. If you look at African American, if you look at Hispanic or Asian unemployment, we have the best records in history. In the history of unemployment, we have the best records.

So I think it's going to be tough for somebody. But you know what? Whoever it is, it makes no difference to me whatsoever.

Ireland-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President, are you going to visit Ireland this year? Will you visit Ireland this year?

President Trump. I will. I'll be coming at some point during the year. I missed it last time and I would have loved to have been there. And it's a special place. And I have a very warm spot for Doonbeg, I will tell you that. And it's just a great place. Really, a great place.

Grounding of Boeing Aircraft

Q. Mr. President, yesterday you made your decision about the Boeing planes. How long do you think that they will be grounded and——

President Trump. Oh, I hope it's going to be for a short period of time, and I hope it's—look, they have to find out what it is. The biggest thing is they have to find out what it is. I'm not sure that they know. But I thought we had to do it. We had to take a cautionary route. The grounding of the planes yesterday was a big thing, as you know. And you're involved with Boeing also.

Prime Minister Varadkar. Yes. We've done the same. Yes.

President Trump. The grounding was a big thing. And it's a great company. It's a truly great company. And hopefully they'll figure it out very quickly.

It was a big decision. It's also one of our largest exporters, one of our—you know, truly—one of the truly great companies of the world. They have to figure it out fast. They know that. They're under great pressure.

Q. Why did you make that decision so much later than other countries?

United Kingdom's Withdrawal From European Union

Q. Mr. President, you were a great supporter of Brexit initially. Are you still a great supporter of Brexit given how things are playing out?

President Trump. Well, I was. It wasn't that I was a supporter. I predicted it was going to happen, and I was right. And people laughed when I predicted it, and they won by about two points. And I was standing out on Turnberry, and we had a press conference, and people were screaming. That was the day before, if you remember. I think you were there.

Q. I was.

President Trump. And people were screaming, and I said, "No, I think it's going to happen." And people were surprised I made the prediction because President Obama made the opposite prediction. And I was right. And I will tell you, I'm surprised at how badly it's all gone from the standpoint of a negotiation.

But I gave the Prime Minister my ideas on how to negotiate it. And I think you would've been successful. She didn't listen to that, and that's fine. I mean, she's got to do what she's got to do. But I think it could've been negotiated in a different manner, frankly. I hate to see it being—everything being ripped apart right now. I don't think another vote would be possible because it would be very unfair to the people that won. They'd say, "What do you mean you're going to take another vote?" So that would be tough.

But I thought it would happen. It did happen. And both sides are very, very—you know, they're cemented in. It's a tough situation. It's a shame. Frankly, it's a shame. There was no reason for that to happen. They could've had the vote, and it should've gone smoothly. Unfortunately, it didn't. Very complicated issue. And actually, the issue on the border of Ireland is one of the most complex points.

Q. Absolutely.

United Kingdom's Withdrawal From European Union/European Union-U.S. Trade

Q. Do you think it should be extended to get more time to get a deal?

President Trump. Well, I think they're going to probably have to do something because right now they're in the midst of a very short period of time, the end of the month. And they're not going to be able to do that. So it's going be—[inaudible].

But I'd like to see—I would like to see——

Q. [Inaudible]

President Trump. Excuse me. I'd like to see that whole situation with Brexit work out. I'd like to see—so, you know, we're talking to them about trade. And we can do a very big trade deal with the UK. We're also renegotiating our trade deal with the European groups and, you know, literally, individual nations, and also with the whole.

But it's very sad to see what's happening there. And there was no reason—and I'm sure—Leo, I'm sure you agree with that. Do you have any feeling on—would you like to express your feelings on Brexit?

Prime Minister Varadkar. Yes, well——

President Trump. Maybe I should not let you do it. I'll just get you in trouble. [Laughter]

Prime Minister Varadkar. Yes, well, we have a different opinion, President. I regret that Brexit is happening. And the UK was a really important part of the European Union. But they're going now, and that's their decision. But the most important thing for us in Ireland is that their decision to leave shouldn't cause any problems in Northern Ireland, where people actually voted to stay, and that we shouldn't have a hard border or anything to disrupt the peace process. And also, we want to make sure that we still have frictionless trade between Britain and Ireland, because I believe in free trade.

And I think it will be a few years until the United Kingdom sorts itself out, but in the meantime, the European Union is available to talk trade with the U.S.

President Trump. Right. And we're talking about trade with the European Union. They've been very, very tough over the years. They were unwilling to negotiate with the Obama administration, and they were unwilling before that, to be honest. I'm not just blaming President Obama.

But they're willing to talk to us. And if they don't talk to us, we're going to do something that's going to be pretty severe, economically. We're going to tariff a lot of their products coming in. Because the European Union treats us very, very unfairly, I have to say that. Very, very. They treat the United States—and they have been for many years—for decades, they've treated us very unfairly.

So it will probably work out. They're negotiating. They want to see if they can get—otherwise, we're going to do something that's going to be good for the United States.

The President's National Emergency Powers/Border Security

Q. Mr. President, considering the vote today in the Senate, will you consider your—reconsider your national emergency?

President Trump. No, no. I don't know what the vote will be. It doesn't matter. I'll probably have to veto, and it's not going to be overturned. And we're going to have our whole thing—it's been—the legal scholars all say it's totally constitutional.

It's very important. It's really a border security vote. It's—pure and simple, it's a vote for border security, it's a vote for no crime. See, we have a border situation also, but it's slightly different than yours. Ours is not actually complex. We have very, very bad laws that are archaic, that were put in by Democrats. And the Republicans didn't fight hard enough at the time. That was a long time before me. But we have catch and release, and we have chain migration, and we have all sorts of things that are horrible. And the world is laughing at the laws that were passed with respect to us.

And we are going to have a very strong border very soon. We're building a lot of wall. There's a lot of wall going up. I don't know if you see it. I don't know if you want to see it. But we're building a lot of wall, and there's a lot of contracts being let out, actually tomorrow and over the next week, for additional many, many miles of wall. And we're going to have hundreds of miles of wall up fairly soon, and it's going to make a very big difference.

But we also have to change the laws. Because whether it's visa lottery, whether it's chain migration, whether it's catch and release, or anything else, they are horrible, horrible laws.

I want to just commend our Border Patrol and ICE, what they've been doing. Border Patrol—and our military, by the way, who's been fantastic. We've building—we're building a lot of the barbed wire areas where people were pouring through; they're not going through. They are—they have done a fantastic job. We've built some temporary fencing and we've built some permanent fencing with the military. They have done a fantastic job.

But the Border Patrol, they are capturing, catching, grabbing—they're doing whatever they have to do—thousands of people—thousands of illegal aliens a month. Seventy-five thousand last month. The job they're doing, they're apprehending—you call it whatever you want to use; whatever you'd like to use—but they're apprehending thousands and thousands of people a month.

And we're catching them and we're keeping them. We're not doing release. Now, at a certain point, we're going to have to do some release because we don't have the bed space, we don't have the room, and we don't have the funds to build new space because we have ridiculous laws.

In other countries, Leo, when you have somebody come in illegally, you say, "Sorry, you have to leave." In our country, because the laws are so ridiculous—I mean, so stupid—we have to give them a trial. So we send them into the country and then they're supposed to come back, but they never come back. Very rarely do they come back.

The most ridiculous set of laws. The Democrats' fault. We want to change them. Unfortunately, we need their votes too. And I think it's going to be a great election issue.

Okay, anything else?

Immigration/Border Security

Q. Are your immigration policies cruel?

President Trump. Say it?

Q. Are your immigration policies cruel?

President Trump. No, I don't think they're cruel. I think they're the opposite of cruel. They've become cruel because they're so ridiculous and it hurts people. It actually does the reverse of what they're supposed to be doing. But, no, they're actually meant to be the opposite and they're hurting people. They're really hurting people. A lot of people. And——

Border Security

Q. Is it hurting your reputation—[inaudible]—country's reputation?

President Trump. And—and I think that we have done an incredible job. We're apprehending record numbers of people.

But if we had border security, if we had the wall, if we had a proper wall—which we're building now, as we speak, and we're getting a lot more funding for it, as you know, in what we're talking about in the vote today. Whether it's positive or not, I'm vetoing it unless I don't have to veto. I think that's unlikely. I'll do a veto; it's not going to be overturned.

But we have done a great job at the border through apprehension. But we shouldn't have to be put in a position of apprehending 75,000 people a month. We shouldn't be in that position.

Thank you all very much. I love being with the Prime Minister of Ireland. Thank you very much.

Q. What will the consequences——

China-U.S. Trade

Q. What are the prospects now on the summit with President Xi this month or next month?

President Trump. We're doing very well with China talks. China talks are doing very well. We'll see what happens. If it's not a deal that's a great deal for us, we're not going to make it. But I would say that we're moving along at a very high level. We're getting what we have to get, and I think we're getting it relatively quickly.

So the China talks are moving along. As to whether or not we'll strike a final deal, that I would never want to say. But they're moving along very well.

Q. Mr. President, did you intervene in Jared Kushner's security clearance and Ivanka Trump's security clearance?

President Trump. Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Thank you.

Q. What advice did you give Theresa May that she didn't take?

President Trump. Who?

United Kingdom's Withdrawal From European Union

Q. What advice did you give the British Prime Minister that she didn't take?

President Trump. Well, I just told her what I would do and how I would do it.

Q. But can you tell us what that is?

President Trump. But she has her own way of doing it. She is—she's got her own way of doing it. That's okay.

Thank you, everybody.

Northern Ireland

Q. Would you appoint a peace envoy, Mr. President—a peace envoy for Northern Ireland?

President Trump. We may very well be doing that.

Q. You may very well be doing what?

President Trump. What?

Q. What was that last question?

President Trump. No, you wouldn't be interested. You're Irish.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:55 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Theresa May. Reporters referred to former Vice President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.; White House Senior Adviser Jared C. Kushner; and Adviser to the President Ivanka M. Trump.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Ireland, Prime Minister Varadkar.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: May, Theresa; Obama, Barack; O'Rourke, Robert F. "Beto"; Varadkar, Leo.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; China : Trade with U.S.; Defense and national security : Border security; Economy, national : Improvement; Elections : 2020 Presidential and congressional elections; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment rate; Europe : European Union :: Trade with U.S.; Europe : European Union :: United Kingdom, membership status; Foreign policy, U.S. : Diplomatic efforts, expansion; Homeland Security, Department of : Customs and Border Protection, U.S.; Homeland Security, Department of : Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S.; Immigration and naturalization : Illegal immigration; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Ireland : Prime Minister; Ireland : Relations with U.S.; Law enforcement and crime : Law enforcement officers, service and dedication; Mexico : Border with U.S., infrastructure and security; Presidency, U.S : Constitutional role and powers; Taxation : Tax relief; Transportation, Department of : Travel safety efforts, improvement; United Kingdom : Prime Minister.

DCPD Number: DCPD201900148.