

Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters in Morristown, New Jersey

August 13, 2019

The President. The stock market continues to do very well. We have very, very strong numbers. We have a lot of artificial numbers from other countries, because they're all devaluing their currencies. They're really doing things that aren't very good for their countries, in my opinion. But short term, it's very good for their countries. Long term, possibly not.

And we're not following suit. We have a Fed that decides not to cut interest rates, which is a very bad thing. Because right now we have to follow suit; we should be following suit. But we have a very powerful country, a very strong economic and military country. We've never been better. The stock market is way up today for various reasons, including tariffs.

I just see where we've collected close to \$59 billion in tariffs so far. And, in my opinion, the consumer has not paid for it, because of the devaluation by China. They devalued, and they pumped a lot of money into their system. So it's really been an amazing—it's been an amazing period of time.

Yes.

China-U.S. Trade

Q. Why did you make the decision on the tariffs, to delay the implementation of the tariffs?

The President. Only to help, I think, a lot of different groups of people. And we had a very good talk yesterday with China, very, very productive call. I think they want to do something. I think they'd like to do something dramatic. I was not sure whether or not they wanted to wait until a Democrat has a chance to get in. Hopefully, that's not going to happen, because the economy would go to hell in a handbasket very fast.

But they really would like to make a deal. The call itself was very productive. I'm not sure if it was the tariffs or the call, but the call was very productive. Again, they've said this many times; they've said they're going to buy farm products. So far, they've disappointed me with the truth. They haven't been truthful, or let's say, they've certainly delayed the decision. But it's their intention to buy a lot of farm product.

And we did—we had a very good call with China. I mean, they would really like to do—as you know, they have a problem in Hong Kong, but they would like very much to do something.

U.S. Tariff Structure on Chinese Imports

Q. Would you consider moving the tariffs, even? Delaying them even further, past December 15?

The President. No, we're doing this for Christmas season, just in case some of the tariffs would have an impact on U.S. customers, which, so far, they've had virtually none. The only impact has been that we've collected almost \$60 billion from China, compliments of China. But just in case they might have an impact on people, what we've done is, we've delayed it so that they won't be relevant for the Christmas shopping season.

Death of Financier and Alleged Child Sex Trafficker Jeffrey E. Epstein in Federal Prison

Q. Mr. President, can you please explain your decision to retweet that comment about Jeffrey Epstein and the——

The President. Yes, he's a very highly respected, conservative pundit. He's a big Trump fan. That was a retweet. That wasn't from me; that was from him. But he's a man who has half a million followers. A lot of followers. And he's respected.

And as you know, Bill Barr wants to do an entire investigation of the whole Epstein matter, what happened. He's been going on for a long—that's been going on for a long time, the whole Epstein episode. And I know it's under investigation by Attorney General Barr, and I'm sure he's going to be handling it.

The retweet, which is what it was—it was a retweet—was from somebody that's a very respected, conservative pundit. So I think that was fine.

Yes.

Q. But is it appropriate for you to be spreading that kind of conspiracy theory? I presume you don't know that that's true.

The President. No, basically, what we're saying is, we want an investigation. I want a full investigation, and that's what I absolutely am demanding. That's what our Attorney General—our great Attorney General—is doing. He's doing a full investigation.

Political Demonstrations in Hong Kong

Q. Hong Kong, sir: Are you concerned about what you're seeing in Hong Kong? Do you want China to exercise restraint?

The President. Well, the Hong Kong thing is a very tough situation. Very tough. We'll see what happens. But I'm sure it will work out. I hope it works out for everybody, including China, by the way. I hope it works out for everybody.

Q. Mr. President——

Political Demonstrations in Hong Kong

Q. Have you seen the gathering of military troops, apparently close to protesters? And there's worries about that.

The President. Oh, it's a very tricky situation. I think it'll work out. And I hope it works out for liberty. I hope it works out for everybody, including China. I hope it works out peacefully. I hope nobody gets hurt. I hope nobody gets killed.

China-U.S. Trade

Q. Mr. President, are you more optimistic now that there's a chance of getting a deal between China on trade?

The President. Well, I've always been optimistic. My only question is whether or not they were willing to wait and take the chance on winning the election and deal with somebody who's weak and ineffective and doesn't know what he's doing or she's doing, like they've had in the past.

This should have been done 25 years ago. It should have been done 10 years ago or 5 years ago. This should have been done a long time ago. This should have been done by Biden and Obama. China is taking out \$500 billion a year, and much more than that, if you include the theft of intellectual property. What I'm doing now should have been done many years ago.

Immigration Reform

Q. On another issue: Ken Cuccinelli today said, on NPR, that maybe there ought to be a different poem on the Statue of Liberty that says immigrants who come should stand up for themselves and take care of themselves. Do you think that should be changed?

The President. Well, I don't think it's fair to have the American taxpayer—you know, it's about America first. I don't think it's fair to have the American taxpayer paying for people to come into the United States.

So what we've done is institute what took place many, many years ago, at our founding, virtually. But we are just reinstituting it. And I think it's long overdue. I am tired of seeing our taxpayer paying for people to come into the country and immediately go onto welfare and various other things. So I think we're doing it right.

CNN Anchor Christopher C. Cuomo

Q. And, Mr. President, you tweeted about a word that Chris Cuomo found racially offensive. Even Sean Hannity defended him. Is that appropriate for you to tweet about that?

The President. I think that what Chris Cuomo did was horrible. His language was horrible. He looked like a total, out-of-control animal. He lost it. And frankly, I don't think anybody should defend him, because he spews lies every night. So I don't know why anybody would defend him. But Chris Cuomo was out of control. I watched it. I thought it was terrible.

So I don't know who's defending him. Maybe they didn't see it. Maybe they haven't gotten a full picture. But I think anybody that would have seen Chris Cuomo would have said that was a disgrace. You've never seen me do that.

Q. But he was offended by the word—[inaudible].

CNN Anchor Christopher C. Cuomo

Q. But you wound up tweeting in response to it, saying that maybe he should be flagged by a "red flag" list. Doesn't that sort of undermine the whole argument that's going on right now and the push for that?

The President. Well, I think Chris Cuomo was so out of control that I would not have wanted to see a weapon in his hand. I guess his fist is not a weapon or he would have done something. You know, he talked about it, but he didn't do anything.

But I think Chris Cuomo was very much out of control, actually.

Former White House Director of Communications Anthony Scaramucci

Q. Mr. President, Anthony Scaramucci today is calling on Republicans to challenge you in 2020, saying that you've "gone off the rails." Do you have a response?

The President. Well, Anthony was a guy who worked for me, who really didn't have a clue. He worked for 11 days. He made terrible statements and gestures and everything to people that worked in the office. I think you've heard Mercedes Schlapp talk about it in great detail.

Anthony didn't support me at the beginning; he was with somebody else, and then he went to somebody else. And he only supported me after it was a foregone conclusion that I was going to win.

I'm not a fan of Anthony. I haven't been for a long time. I think Anthony is really somebody that's very much out of control. And he doesn't have what it takes. I mean, he really doesn't.

He wanted to come back into the administration for the last 5 months, begging me to come back in. I said: "Anthony, I can't take you in. I'm sorry." He called so much. He's a nervous, neurotic wreck. He called so much, and I said: "Anthony, I'm sorry. I can't do that. I can't take you in." And I said, "You've got to stop all these phone calls. Too many calls, Anthony." And I wouldn't take his call. And lo and behold, now he feels differently.

But Anthony is upset because he wanted certain things. The main thing he wanted was to come back into the administration. And as you remember better than I do, he was a disaster for the 11 days.

Plastic Waste/Ocean Debris

Q. Mr. President, the factory you're going to today is going to make plastics. Are you—you must be aware of all the reports that say the world is awash in plastic and the last thing it needs is more plastic. What's your feeling on that?

The President. Well, we have tremendous plastics coming over from Asia, from China, and various other—it's not our plastic. It's plastic that's floating over in the ocean and the various oceans from other places.

No, plastics are fine, but you have to know what to do with them. But other countries are not taking care of their plastic use, and they haven't for a long time. And the plastic that we're getting is floating across the ocean from other places, including China.

Senate Majority Leader A. Mitchell McConnell/Gun Control Legislation

Q. How is the progress going on background checks? Are you convinced that Mitch McConnell is going to put that up for a vote?

The President. I am convinced that Mitch wants to do something. I've spoken to Mitch McConnell. He's a good man. He wants to do something. He wants to do it, I think, very strongly. He wants to do background checks, and I do too, and I think a lot of Republicans do. I don't know, frankly, that the Democrats will get us there.

But I spoke with Chris Murphy, Senator. We had a very good conversation. We'll see what happens. But I believe that Mitch—and I can tell you, from my standpoint, I would like to see meaningful background checks. And I think something will happen.

Look, it's very simple: There is nobody more pro-Second Amendment than Donald Trump, but I don't want guns in the hands of a lunatic or a maniac. And I think if we do proper background checks, we can prevent that.

Death of Financier and Alleged Child Sex Trafficker Jeffrey E. Epstein in Federal Prison/Former President William J. Clinton

Q. Back on the tweet question: Do you really think the Clintons are involved in Jeffrey Epstein's death?

The President. I have no idea. I know he was on his plane 27 times, and he said he was on the plane 4 times. But when they checked the plane logs, Bill Clinton—who was a very good friend of Epstein—he was on the plane about 27 or 28 times. So why did he say "four times"?

And then, the question you have to ask is: Did Bill Clinton go to the island? Because Epstein had an island that was not a good place, as I understand it. And I was never there. So you have to ask: Did Bill Clinton go to the island? That's the question. If you find that out, you're going to know a lot.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:53 a.m. at Morristown Municipal Airport. In his remarks, he referred to conservative commentator and comedian Terrence K. Williams; former White House Director of Strategic Communications Mercedes Schlapp; and 2016 Republican Presidential candidates former Gov. Scott K. Walker of Wisconsin and former Gov. John E. "Jeb" Bush of Florida. Reporters referred to Kenneth T. Cuccinelli, Acting Director, U.S. Citizenship and

Immigration Services; Sean P. Hannity, anchor, Fox News's "Hannity" program; and former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: Morristown, NJ.

Locations: Morristown, NJ.

Names: Barr, William P.; Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Bush, John E. "Jeb"; Clinton, William J.; Cuomo, Christopher C.; Epstein, Jeffrey E.; McConnell, A. Mitchell; Murphy, Christopher S.; Obama, Barack; Scaramucci, Anthony; Schlapp, Mercedes; Walker, Scott K.; Williams, Terrence K.

Subjects: China : Political demonstrations in Hong Kong; China : Trade with U.S.; China : U.S. tariff structure, strengthening efforts; Civil rights : Firearm rights; Commerce, international : Intellectual property law, strengthening efforts; Communications : News media :: Presidential interviews; Congress : Senate :: Majority leader; Deaths : Epstein, Jeffrey E.; Economy, national : Improvement; Elections : 2020 Presidential and congressional elections; Environment : Plastic waste and ocean debris; Immigration and naturalization : Illegal immigration; Justice, Department of : Attorney General; Law enforcement and crime : Criminal background check procedures, strengthening efforts; Law enforcement and crime : Gun control; New Jersey : President's visits; Reserve System, Federal.

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