

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2019

Remarks During a Meeting With Representative Jefferson H. Van Drew and an Exchange With Reporters

December 19, 2019

The President. Well, thank you very much. We have a very big announcement, to me. I think it's been many years—I hear 10 years, maybe more—where Jeff Van Drew, highly respected—in fact, I didn't know, as a Democrat, how you could have won in that district. I know the district very well. But that is a great tribute to you. But Jeff will be joining the Republican Party.

And we were very fortunate he voted our way yesterday, as you probably know. And we had a totally unified party. I don't think there's ever been a time where the Republican Party was so united. But Jeff will be joining the Republican Party. And I really—to me, it's a very exciting announcement. I think, Kevin, you said it was about 10 years since that's happened.

House Minority Leader Kevin O. McCarthy. Yes.

The President. And I don't even know who the last one was. It would seem to me it was even more than that. But it's a big deal.

Leader McCarthy. It's a very big deal because he's going from the majority to the minority, and it normally doesn't go that way.

The President. Right. Yes, but he's very smart, because he knows it's not going to be the minority for long. I have a feeling we're going to do very well in 2020 and November—November 3d, to be exact. Get out and vote.

But, Jeff, thank you very much. It's a great honor. Thank you.

Rep. Van Drew. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you. Please. Would you like to say something?

Rep. Van Drew. Thank you. So I have a few words. And I usually never, ever—I don't read speeches. And this won't be very long——

The President. Sure.

Rep. Van Drew. ——I promise you, Mr. President. But I had a few bullets. There's a few points I really wanted to make today.

And I would start with how this started. I've been a Democrat for a lot of years. And I actually had a meeting with somebody about 2 weeks ago, I guess it was. And the individual was a local county chairman in the Democratic Party. And he sat down, and he says, "I just want to tell you something." And he said, "I want to tell you that you can't vote against impeachment."

I said, "What do you mean I can't vote against impeachment?" He says: "You can't vote against impeachment. You will not"—I have eight counties in my district.

The President. Right.

Rep. Van Drew. "You will not get the line. You will not get the county. I will do everything to prevent that from happening and everything to destroy you." This is a pretty young guy too, so it was pretty gutsy.

The President. Yes. A wise guy.

Rep. Van Drew. And it kind of hurt because, for years, I have given everything that I could to my people and my district.

And you know, Mr. President, you asked why I win. Truthfully, because I'm a crazy man, and when people have a problem, when they need something, when we want to help them—I had the best staff in the world, good people around me, and we do everything that we can to make it better.

And that kind of hurt.

The President. Right.

Rep. Van Drew. And it kind of made me think a little bit: Is this what I really want to do? Because there were other times in my life, when I thought about this. I thought about it when I did legislation. And actually, it was in the State Senate.

And I don't know if this is going to be relatable or not, but I want to say it anyhow because I've always wanted to just mention this because I think it's important, in a way. This is not—it was not a complex bill. It was not something that was, you know, very difficult to understand. It isn't intellectually stimulating to some people, I understand. But I did two bills, and one of them—it's unusual for New Jersey—would allow, in any public or private building, to have "In God We Trust" on the wall. And the second one was that you could fly the American flag wherever you wanted to, however you wanted to, as long as it was respectful.

And I thought these were wonderful bills. I mean, I thought everybody was going to be, "This is just a great thing." And I had some very progressive—and not all Democrats—but these were really progressive Democrats that came to me and said, "We're really disgusted with you." And I said, "Why?" "Making such a big deal about the flag. The flag is just not that big a deal."

The President. Yes.

Rep. Van Drew. "'In God We Trust' is not that big deal."

The President. That's where they're going.

Rep. Van Drew. "And you shouldn't even mention His name." And I was shocked. I was shocked. We put them up anyhow, and we did want we wanted to do. But it really——

The President. That's a very Republican thing, by the way. *[Laughter]*

Rep. Van Drew. I know. I know.

The President. You're not going to find any one of us that—I can tell you, Kevin, Mike, I think you're okay with it, right? *[Laughter]*

Rep. Van Drew. And I think most folks should be okay with it.

The President. The whole country should be okay with it.

Rep. Van Drew. You're right.

I talk about American exceptionalism. This is the greatest country on the face of the Earth. I started out as not a wealthy kid, had the opportunity to work hard, got into dental school, graduated, and my God, I'm sitting here next to the President of the United States. That's unbelievable. That's America.

So I don't want anybody to ever tell me that there isn't American exceptionalism. I don't want anybody to ever say that this is the same as every other country in the world, because it is not. It is not. And you know that, and I know that. And hopefully, everybody in this room knows that.

And, again, from certain groups of people that represented certain parts of the party, I was criticized. And they said this country is the same as every other country, and there is no such thing as American exceptionalism.

I'm a capitalist. Socialism, in my opinion, has no place in the United States of America. And I think everyone should know that. I believe that this country can afford people opportunity and give them that opportunity so that they can succeed. And we all should know that as well.

I love bipartisanship. Do you know that I have even had times, quite frankly, being a Democrat—again, not from all folks; there's some middle-of-the-road folks—but from some of these extreme folks that they said, "Bipartisanship is a bad thing."

The President. Yes.

Rep. Van Drew. "It's a bad thing, because it's going to make you more like a Republican." Again, I don't believe that. I don't think you do. I believe in what you're doing with the economy. It's a better, stronger economy. I believe it's going to be even better.

The President. A new record today, by the way. It's up 125 points today. So your 401(k)s are way up. But a new record today, Jeff. So that's great.

Rep. Van Drew. And thank you for that. I believe in—the New Green Deal is something that we should never, ever even think about doing. I don't even know how anybody could bring that up. We can have a strong and good environment, and we can have a good economy at the same time. And that's something that I think Republicanism represents.

Lower taxes, balancing the budget, honoring our police, our fire, our rescue, our veterans, our soldiers—these men and women.

I want to tell you one quick story. Chris will have a picture of it. He's—like I said, he's a marine. An older gentleman. Is he a marine too, that stood out there?

Participant. [Inaudible]

Rep. Van Drew. He's a marine, right? An older gentleman, when he heard I announced—in the cold—came in front of my office and stood out there holding the American flag for 12 hours in honor of it.

The President. That's great. Wow.

Rep. Van Drew. It's—it was an amazing thing. And not quite the length of time people wait for you, but—

The President. That's okay. [Laughter]

Rep. Van Drew. —that was still pretty neat. [Laughter]

The President. That's okay. They won't do that if you're a Democrat, I can tell you right now. Wouldn't go well.

Rep. Van Drew. So I guess what I say is, I believe that this is just a better fit for me. This is who I am. It's who I always was, but there was more tolerance of moderate Democrats, of Blue Dog Democrats, of conservative Democrats. And I think that's going away.

Two more things I want to say: One, you have my undying support.

The President. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Rep. Van Drew. And always.

The President. And by the way, same way.

Rep. Van Drew. Thank you.

The President. I'm endorsing him. Okay? We're endorsing him. I can't speak for these two gentlemen, but I can say, "I'm endorsing him."

Rep. Van Drew. Thank you.

The President. How do you feel about that, Mike? Are you okay?

Vice President Michael R. Pence. You have my support and gratitude, Congressman.

Rep. Van Drew. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Vice President.

Leader McCarthy. You have my support as well.

Rep. Van Drew. Thank you, Leader.

The President. We're together. Thank you.

Rep. Van Drew. And the last thing I will say: One of my heroes—and he's always hung in my office; I have a bipartisan wall that has a lot of different people on there—Ronald Reagan. And when he said: "I didn't leave my party. My party left me."

The President. That's true. That's what he said.

Rep. Van Drew. And I'm saying the same thing.

The President. He was a Democrat, and he moved over. And he said exactly those words. That's fantastic. Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

Rep. Van Drew. Thank you.

The President. It's really good. Beautifully done. It's beautifully done. Thank you.

Mike, do you have anything to say?

Vice President Pence. Well, I just want to say: Welcome to the Republican Party.

Rep. Van Drew. Thank you.

Vice President Pence. Congressman, it's an honor to share this moment with you, with the President of the United States, and with the Republican leader, with your team and their family, as well as, I know, another public official from New Jersey that will be following your lead.

The President. That's right.

Vice President Pence. But as I told you before, I also—I just want to tell you how grateful we are for your voice of reason and common sense in the days leading up to your decision. You showed personal and political courage. And I know the people of your district will be as grateful as we are today for your leadership and for the decision you've made.

And we look forward to serving with you together and working with you on behalf of New Jersey and America for many years to come.

Rep. Van Drew. Thank you, Mr. Vice President.

The President. Good. Thank you, Mike.

Kevin.

Leader McCarthy. Well, we just want to welcome you to the party, but more importantly, if there's anybody else that feels like you. If there are other people out there that feel the—this new Socialist-Democrat wing of the party has left them behind, join with us. Because everything you

talked about is an American issue, and it shouldn't have to be debated, whether there's a flag or God or others.

And so we've worked together even when you were on the other side of the aisle, but it's nice to have you on this side now too.

Rep. Van Drew. Thank you.

Leader McCarthy. And you just changed our number to 18. We only need 18 more to be the majority. And I think we'll do that soon.

The President. Yes. We're going to do very well. We're way up in the polls. And we've gone up more, I think, proportionately, than we have ever gone up, in the last 2 weeks. And we're honored.

Now, I understand, they're playing games. They don't want to put in their articles, their ridiculous, phony, fraudulent articles. And I think they're not allowed to do that. I hear it's unconstitutional and a lot of other things. But they don't want to put them in, because they're ashamed of them, because it's a—what they've done is wrong, and it's bad for the country. Very, very bad for the country.

We're trying to get USMCA done. We're going to get that done, I think, pretty quickly.

Leader McCarthy. Exactly.

The President. We have our great deal with China. China has already started to buy, with the farmers and with the manufacturers. Tremendous amounts of money are being spent back in the United States. And the farmers are happy. They had to put up with a lot, but we took care of them out of the subsidies that we were getting out of the tariffs that we were getting. But China is now buying very big in the farm belt and in the manufacturing belt also. They're spending a lot of money. And I said it was going to happen, and it happened.

And we're going to get a lot more. They want to make—they want to keep going. They're still paying tremendous amounts of tariffs, and they'd like to have the tariffs reduced. And we'll see if we can get a second part of the deal. But the USMCA—the combination of those two deals will be the two greatest trade deals. You'll never see anything like it. So we've done very much what we've said.

You know, Jeff, we rebuilt our military. We spent almost \$2½ trillion on the military. When we came in, the military was totally depleted. I will say, the Democrats did not help. They're not into the military at all. And we spent \$2½ trillion. We have new planes. We have new everything right now. Much of it's coming over the next year. But within a year, we'll be in a position that we've never been in, in terms of equipment. And the military will be as strong as it ever was, proportionately, maybe stronger.

So it's been an amazing period of time. And to have you is a tremendous asset for the party.

Rep. Van Drew. Thank you.

The President. And again, thank you very much, my friend.

Rep. Van Drew. Thank you.

The President. We're with you all the way.

Rep. Van Drew. Thank you. Thank you.

The President. Thank you.

Rep. Van Drew. I'm with you.

The President. Tremendous honor. Thank you.

Articles of Impeachment/"Keep America Great" Rally in Battle Creek, Michigan/The President's Accomplishments/National Economy/The Republican Party/2020 Presidential Election

Q. Mr. President, can you speak personally for a moment and just tell us: What does it feel like to be the third President in U.S. history to be impeached?

The President. Well, I don't feel like I'm being impeached, because it's a hoax. It's a setup. It's a horrible thing they did. They happened to have a small majority, and they took that small majority, and they forced people. And you know, they said, "Oh"—I watched Pelosi out there saying: "Oh, no. We don't want to talk to anybody." They put the arm on everybody. They tried to get them to do what they had to do. Many of those people were like Jeff, where they didn't want to vote that way.

But it doesn't feel—to me, it doesn't feel like impeachment. Last night I said it—I—we had a great time last night. The room was packed. Thousands of people couldn't get in. A section that, really, is a pretty much 50-50 section, in terms of Democrat-Republican, we had—every one of those people is voting for Trump/Pence. Every one of them. And it's Michigan, an important State. We brought back tremendous amounts of business, tremendous car companies coming in—everything else.

And I'll tell you, I was up there and I was thinking about—I actually said it: It doesn't feel like impeachment. And you know what? It's a phony deal. And they cheapened the word "impeachment." It's an ugly word. But they cheapened the word "impeachment." That should never again happen to another President.

And I think you'll see some very interesting things happen over the coming few days and weeks.

But, to me, all I look at: We have the greatest economy in the history of our country. We've never done so well. Our military being rebuilt. You take a look at the tax cuts. You take a look at the regulation cuts at levels that nobody has ever seen. We're protecting our Second Amendment, which other people won't do.

No, we're doing things that nobody has ever done before. Nobody has ever seen. We have the strongest economy in the history of our country, and our country is doing well.

And you know, the other thing that I really saw from yesterday that—I think you people have been covering politics for a long time. You've never seen a Republican Party—zero negative votes. Zero. That hasn't happened almost ever. Because the Republicans are not necessarily known for that.

We have better policy. They want open borders, the Democrats. They want sanctuary cities. A lot of bad things happen. A lot of other things they have.

We're doing tremendously on health care. The individual mandate—you know, we won yesterday in Supreme Court. You saw that in, well, the appellate division. We won yesterday. Individual mandate is now gone. That's tremendous savings. That was the worst part of Obamacare. We take care of preexisting conditions. They're not going to be able to do that.

We're doing things that nobody has ever done before, and our country has never done better. So we're really happy about it, and we're really happy to have Jeff on board.

And we think, in 2020, based on the polls—I just saw a poll came out in USA Today yesterday where I'm beating every candidate by a lot. I guess most of you saw it. Not that USA

Today is a friend of mine, because they're not. But they had a poll, and it was me against their top candidates on the other side. And I'm beating everybody by a lot. And I think that's where we're going.

I mean, we have the best economy in history. And if you remember the famous quote, "It's all about the economy, stupid." Well, I don't—I never believed it was all about the economy. But the economy is a big thing. When you have 401(k)s where people are up 70, 80, 90—and even more than that—percent, they like Trump, and they like Mike. And we're going to have a good time.

Thank you all very much. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Q. Mr. President, will you apologize to Congresswoman Dingell?

The President. Thank you very much.

Q. Mr. President——

Impeachment Trial in the Senate/Federal Judicial Confirmations/2018 Congressional Elections

Q. Can you tell us about your strategy for the Senate, sir? Can you tell us a little bit about your strategy for the Senate trial?

The President. Uh, we think that what they did is wrong. We think that what they did is unconstitutional. And the Senate is very, very capable. We have great Senators, Republican Senators. We cut your taxes. We cut your regulations. We did things that nobody else would even think about being able to do.

And I think—you know what one of the things, Jeff [Jeff Mason, Reuters], that we've done that nobody wants to talk about: This week, I will have signed the 172d Federal judge, including appellate judges. We'll have 182 by the end of the year. A hundred and eighty-two. It's unheard of.

Now, President Obama was very nice to us. He gave us 142 empty positions. That's never happened before. But, as you know, that's said to be the most important thing that a President has. I happen to think military and defense and all of it is the most important thing, but this is right up there.

We'll have 172 judges. We're going to have 182 by the end of the year or shortly thereafter. And it's the most incredible thing. And two Supreme Court Justices, two great ones.

So with all of the things we've done, and we've done that with the Senate—because what's never said is that, in the last election, we picked up two Senate seats. Nobody talks about that. And we couldn't focus on the House. I couldn't focus on the House. We'll be very focused on the House this time. But I couldn't—other than Andy Barr, who won against the same candidate that's now going against Mitch. And she wasn't very good against Andy Barr, and she won't be very good against Mitch McConnell.

But we've had tremendous success. So I'm going to let them decide what to do. That's going to be up to them.

Thank you all very much.

Q. Mr. President, will you apologize to Congresswoman Dingell?

The President. Thank you, everybody. Thank you.

Q. Mr. President, Congresswoman Dingell, will you apologize to her, Mr. President? Will you apologize?

The President. Thank you.

White House Counsel Pat A. Cipollone/Impeachment Trial in the Senate

Q. Is Pat going to be your lead attorney in the Senate?

The President. I think so, yes. He's doing a great job, Pat.

Q. You think so?

The President. Yes.

Q. Is he going to be your main lawyer in the Senate?

The President. It looks like that. Yes, Pat Cipollone. We have a couple of others that we're going to put in. But Pat has been fantastic as White House Counsel.

Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:01 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Supreme Court Associate Justices Neil M. Gorsuch and Brett M. Kavanaugh; and Republican Democratic senatorial candidate Amy McGrath. Rep. Van Drew referred to Michael Suleiman, chairman, Atlantic County Democratic Committee.

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