

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2020

Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters Prior to Departure for Bethesda, Maryland

March 3, 2020

The President. Hello, folks. So I'm going to the National Institute of Health. We're having a roundtable. Things are going very well, as you see. It's been very strong. Mike Pence and the entire group are doing an excellent job.

And do you have any questions?

Q. Mr. President, what are your thoughts——

Coronavirus Prevention Efforts in the U.S.

Q. Mr. President, do you believe it's inevitable that the coronavirus will spread across the country? And is it possible that we may need to take more stringent measures to contain it?

The President. Well, it's—anything can happen, but I wouldn't say inevitable at all. No. I wouldn't say—we've really—we've done a good job by doing it and combating it so early. We have the best people in the world. And I think we're getting a lot of credit for having made that early move. So no, I don't think that's inevitable at all.

Q. Mr. President——

Emergency Appropriations for Coronavirus Prevention Efforts

Q. What do you need to see from Congress right now?

The President. Well, I think Congress—we're working along well with Congress to get the various fundings that we're looking for. That's important in terms of stopping what we're doing.

Some countries have some very big problems. We're working with them to help them. They're really unaware of—they've never done this before. We do it very well. And we're working with other countries, and that's very important.

Q. Mr. President, what——

2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, Japan

Q. On the Olympics, do you believe the Olympics should still be held in Japan? Are you comfortable with U.S. Olympic athletes going to Japan?

The President. Well, I think I'm going to leave that to Prime Minister Abe. He's a friend of mine. He's built a beautiful venue. It's a very sad thing if that would happen, because the venue is incredible. They've spent billions of dollars. But I'll leave that up to Japan. That's up to them.

Q. So, Mr. President, what do you say——

Q. Mr. President——

Federal Reserve System

Q. What should the Fed's funds rate be?

The President. I would say that the Fed funds rate—the rate, as you would call it, is too high. It should be eased down so that we're competitive.

Look, we have the greatest country in the world. We have the strongest country in the world. It's our dollar that the world relies on. We should have the low rate, but we have a Fed that doesn't agree with that. I disagree with them.

Q. What do you say to your critics——

Afghanistan/Reconciliation Efforts

Q. Did you speak with the leader of the Taliban today?

The President. Say it?

Q. Did you speak with the leader of the Taliban today?

The President. I did. I spoke to the leader of the Taliban today. We had a good conversation. We've agreed there's no violence. We don't want violence. We'll see what happens. They're dealing with Afghanistan, but we'll see what happens. Okay?

We had, actually, a very good talk with the leader of the Taliban, yes.

Q. What about President Sisi?

2020 Democratic Presidential Candidates Senator Bernard Sanders and Former Vice President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.

Q. Do you believe that the Democratic establishment is trying to take it away from Bernie Sanders?

The President. Well, I think there's no question, the establishment—the Democrat establishment—is trying to take it away from Bernie Sanders. There's no question about that in my mind.

Now, look, a lot is going to be learned tonight. We'll see how well Biden does. We'll see how well Sanders does. I would have said, 2, 3 days ago, Biden was not looking too good. Now he's looking better. But a lot is going to be known by a certain time tonight—you tell me the time—by, you know, California, we're a little bit—we're a little delayed. So probably by 9 or 10 o'clock tonight, we're going to have some big answers.

Q. Mr. President, what about your call to President Sisi?

Q. Mr. President, what do you say to critics in your own party who say that——

Health Insurance Coverage for Coronavirus Patients

Q. What should happen, sir, for patients without insurance? For patients who don't have insurance, Mr. President, what should happen? Will you—will your administration help those people?

The President. We're looking at that whole situation.

Q. How so?

The President. There are many people without insurance. So we're looking at that situation for those people.

Q. So what do you say to——

2020 Presidential Election

Q. Who would make an easier opponent for you, Biden or Sanders?

The President. Whoever it is, I don't care. I really don't care. Whoever it is, we will take them on. Hey, the job we've done—we've rebuilt the military, we have the strongest economy we've ever had. All of the things we've done. I will take on anybody.

Go ahead.

Q. Sir, what do you say to critics in your own party——

2020 Presidential Election

Q. So you'll debate any of them?

The President. Any of them. Very gladly. Very gladly. [Laughter]

Q. Mr. President—[inaudible]—Sisi?

The President. Go ahead, John [John Roberts, Fox News].

Q. You love him.

Restrictions on Foreign Travel to the U.S.

Q. Do we need to have more stringent containment measures to stop the virus from spreading in this country?

The President. Well, we're being very stringent. But we're now looking at other countries that have been badly affected, and we're thinking about doing something we may have to do. We don't want to do that, but we're looking at other countries, and we're being very stringent.

Q. Like European countries?

The President. Now, I'm going but I'll be back, and I'll see you over there.

Go ahead.

Q. Mr. President, what do you say to——

Potential Travel Restrictions Within the U.S.

Q. Mr. President, are you considering restricting domestic travel?

The President. Say it?

Q. Are you going to restrict domestic travel?

The President. We're not looking at that at all, no. There's only one hotspot, and that's also pretty much in a very—in a home, as you know—in a nursing home.

Global Coronavirus Outbreak/Domestic Containment Efforts

Q. Do you regret downplaying the coronavirus initially?

The President. No, not at all. No, not at all. But we're doing a fantastic job. The professionals are doing a great job. We're really happy with the job they're doing. They have—they have been just ahead of it. And we're ahead of it by having stopped so much earlier than—nobody wanted us to cut off access to our country, and I did it early. By doing that, that was a big step.

Q. A follow-up to that——

The President. Otherwise, many more people would be infected.

Q. Sir, your campaign——

National Collegiate Athletic Association Events

Q. Mr. President, the NCAA is now preparing to say "no fans in the stands." Are—do you think that's the right move? And would you consider doing that——

The President. That's a tough move.

Q. ——for your rallies to the conventions?

The President. When did they announce that? A little while ago?

Q. Yes.

The President. That's a tough move. No, I'm not prepared for that. But let them do what they want to do. I'm hearing more and more about that. I don't think it would be necessary, no. That's too bad.

Jeff [Jeff Mason, Reuters], go ahead. Question?

Restrictions on Foreign Travel to the U.S.

Q. Mr. President, are you considering tighten—or cutting off travel to and from Italy and South Korea as well? You already put some restrictions in place. Are you going to make them tighter?

The President. We're watching Italy very closely, South Korea very closely, even Japan very closely. And we'll make the right determination at the right time. We've cut it off, as you know, with numerous other countries, okay?

Q. Why is John——

Q. What other countries are you considering?

The President. Say it?

Q. Any other countries you're considering cutting off travel to?

The President. They are the hotspots right now.

Stock Market Volatility

Q. On the markets, sir—are you concerned about what markets are doing today?

Q. Sir, the 10-year treasury just——

The President. No.

Q. Mr. President, on the coronavirus, do you anticipate anything this week?

Q. Mr. President, can I ask about your call to President Sisi? Can I ask about your call to President Sisi?

Federal Reserve System

Q. Mr. President, what did you think of the Fed's press conference, sir?

The President. What?

Q. What did you think of the Fed press conference, sir? Did you watch that? Do you have a reaction to it?

The President. I didn't watch it. No, I didn't watch it, but the Fed is very disappointing to me. They have to lead, not follow. They are following, not leading. They're very disappointing.

Q. Mr. President, your call with——

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:04 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House prior to boarding Marine One. In his remarks, he referred to Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban's top political leader in Afghanistan. A reporter referred to President Abdelfattah Said Elsisí of Egypt.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Abe, Shinzo; Baradar, Mullah Abdul Ghani; Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Pence, Michael R.; Sanders, Bernard.

Subjects: Afghanistan : Former regime; Afghanistan : Reconciliation efforts; Armed Forces, U.S. : Funding; Budget, Federal : Appropriations :: Emergency supplemental; Communications : News media :: Presidential interviews; Congress : Bipartisanship; Diseases : Coronavirus, domestic prevention efforts; Economy, national : Improvement; Elections : 2020 Presidential and congressional elections; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Immigration and naturalization : Foreign nationals and refugees, U.S. admission policy; Italy : Coronavirus outbreak; Japan : 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo; Japan : Coronavirus outbreak; Japan : Prime Minister; Reserve System, Federal; South Korea : Coronavirus outbreak; Sports : Olympic Games; White House Office : Vice President.

DCPD Number: DCPD202000122.