

*Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2025*

**Remarks Honoring the 2024 Stanley Cup Champion Florida Panthers and an Exchange With Reporters**

*February 3, 2025*

*The President.* Well, thank you very much. Please sit down. We'll enjoy this. We're going to be here for a little while with great champions.

Today we're thrilled to welcome the—and this is really something special because I watched those games, and I was a little bit worried after I watched the three-up—"Well, this is over"—because Vinnie is a friend of mine. And then they lost three, and I said, "Oh, this is going to be a tough loss." That would not—[*laughter*]. I don't know. That would have been bad, but you—that's—real champions can pull it out.

But the 2024 Stanley Cup champions, the Florida Panthers, and it was a tremendous championship and watched by all.

And the entire team, congratulations on your first-ever Stanley Cup win. And you had a clou- —you had a couple of really close calls, and I watched the team get better and better and better, and then they won.

In particular, I want to congratulate your team owner, Vinnie Viola, my friend. His sons John Michael and Michael Thomas. Where are your sons? Where are they?

*Owner Vincent J. Viola.* On the ends.

*The President.* Hi, fellas.

*Mr. Viola.* Raise your hand. The President——

*The President.* Where are they? [*Laughter*]

*Mr. Viola.* Mike, say hi to the President. [*Laughter*]

*The President.* Hi, fellas.

Nice job. [*Laughter*]

And head coach, Paul Maurice, really fantastic. Good job. That's a hell of a ring. [*Laughter*] That's a nice ring. That's a good coach too. General Manager Bill Zito. Bill. Way to go, Bill. And president and CEO, Matthew Caldwell.

We're also pleased to be joined by NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman. Where's Gary? Gary—come here, Gary. You've done a great job. I knew him a long while—right?—when he was in another league. But this has been incredible, the job you've done. Thank you very much.

Senators Rick Scott and Ashley Moody. Rick—Rick, Ashley. Congratulations to Ashley.

And Representatives Byron Donalds. Byron, thank you very much. Gus Bilirakis. Thank you very much, Gus. Michael Haridopolos. Michael—good job, Michael. Anna Paulina Luna. Hi, sweetheart. How are you? Congratulations. Jared Moskowitz—Jared, very good. And Maria Salazar. Thank you, Maria. Thank you very much.

And we have a couple of others. I'm going to get myself in big trouble, because I don't know where you are. I know you're here someplace, but we've got to get on to ice hockey. [*Laughter*]

The Panthers' 2023 and 2024 season was one for the history books. It was really an exciting one. I—everybody was watching it. You secured the Atlantic Division title for the third time, and

after coming up just short of the Stanley Cup the year prior, you gave the fans one of the most riveting comebacks in NHL history, in any sport history.

I don't know anything about a comeback, but they tell me it's very exciting. *[Laughter]* I never viewed mine as a comeback. I never said that—I—this was not a comeback.

Team Captain Aleksander "Sasha" Barkov was crowned the league's best defensive forward after winning his second Selke Trophy. And that was a great honor. It's a big deal to do that. Where is he? Where is he? Come here. Come here. You are fantastic.

*Center Aleksander "Sasha" Barkov.* Thank you.

*The President.* Thought we lost him.

And when facing off against your cross-State rivals, the Tampa Bay Lightning, Matthew Tkachuk's firepower was unmatched, contributing two goals and two assists, and he led the way to a glorious 9–2 victory—9–2 victory? Nine-two victory in one game? *[Laughter]* How many times have people done that? That was——

*Mr. Viola.* Not much. Not much.

*The President.* How the hell did they take you 9–2 victory, and then you—*[laughter]*—you go to seven games? How did that happen? You were surprised too, huh? Setting a franchise record with the Panthers' 11th consecutive win on the road.

And then Anton Lundell also had a memorable season, racking up 35 points—wow—with 13 goals and 22 assists. He won 55 percent of his face-offs, setting an alltime career high while just 22 years old. And congratulations to Anton. Where is he?

*Mr. Viola.* Get your superstar. Where is he?

*The President.* Where is he?

*Mr. Viola.* Handsome kid over there.

*The President.* He's a good-looking young guy. *[Laughter]* That's great, Anton. Don't worry, you'll get beat up in life a little bit. *[Laughter]*

Your team's many successes were the result of incredible performances across the board. And I'm sure you agree that your coach deserves a lot of credit. He's a great coach. Nobody knows hockey like Paul. He's the league's second alltime leader in games coached and holds the record for the most wins in Florida's Panthers history, and I assume he's going to be around for a long time, right? He's—you're not—he's not going anywhere. Coach—I want to be your agent, Coach. *[Laughter]*

Under Paul's leadership, the Panthers have become a finely tuned machine with a rock-solid defensive and offensive—I mean, your offense is great. Your defense is great. The whole thing, it's very tough to beat.

And I will tell you, I looked at your current record. You're doing pretty well, right?

*Mr. Viola.* We really are.

*The President.* You are nicely positioned.

*Mr. Viola.* Started roll—we're starting to roll now.

*The President.* Yes. You know the expression "he's nicely positioned"?

I love all these ties. This is so cute. These people—*[laughter]*—look at them. I walked in, I said, "I think they like Trump." *[Laughter]* I like them.

And you aren't just great protectors of the net. You're also known as the biggest brawlers on ice. Wow.

I was with a man named Wayne Gretzky the other day. Do you know Wayne Gretzky? Did you ever hear of Wayne Gretzky, huh? The great one. And he was telling me about a gentleman that protected him named Marty McSorley. Do you know that? You ever hear of him? I don't know if he was a good hockey player, but they say he was very tough. *[Laughter]* And Wayne was saying he was great, as far as he was concerned.

You're tough cookies.

All of the team's hard work led up to big showdowns last June, where you defeated the Edmonton Oilers in an unforgettable—and it was—seven-game series. The Panthers, as I said, started strong with a three-to-nothing lead. This—it was over. It was over. In fact, I didn't watch the last—next two games because I said, "This is not going to be too exciting." And then I said, "Uh-oh, this is not good." *[Laughter]* Then I really said, "Uh-oh." Right?

It went to a game seven, but the Oilers made impressive recoveries and really amazing, actually, the way they played too. They evened the score and forced a decisive game seven. The series was a battle from start to finish. It made it actually much more interesting.

Goalie Sergei Bobrovsky—and he was incredible. Oh, I've got to see him. Where is he?

How good is he? You were—you were, I mean——

*Goalie Sergei Bobrovsky.* Thank you.

*The President.* Hall of Fame.

*Mr. Bobrovsky.* Thank you.

*The President.* And even—how old are you?

*Mr. Bobrovsky.* Thirty-six.

*The President.* Boy, I tell you, you were unbelievable. What a—what an amazing job you did.

And there was a lot of pressure. And I mean it. That deal—that game seven, you guys had to be like—man, and you played great. That was a great, great job you did.

On behalf of everybody that watched, thank you, Bob. It was nothing short of phenomenal.

During the finals, in the first 40 minutes of game one, Bob made an astounding 25 saves. He's—wow. He's the first goalie to get a shutout in game one of the Stanley Cup in 13 years, and his 23 saves in game seven were absolutely crucial to securing a very, very tight victory.

And Bob started his career as an undrafted free agent and is now a Stanley Cup champion and will go down as one of the great goalkeepers in alltime history. It's really—really a big—a big honor for you, especially what—you were undrafted, so he made a good deal, in other words, huh? *[Laughter]* That's the best deal. You'd like to find more like that, huh? *[Laughter]*

So it's—what a great achievement, Bob. Congratulations.

But the title couldn't have been won if you didn't have a man named Carter Verhaeghe—Carter Verhaeghe. Where's Carter? I could only—I could only pronounce that name because I heard it so many times during the—during the series. *[Laughter]*

*Mr. Viola.* Look at the head of hair on him.

*The President.* I heard—nice head of hair is right. *[Laughter]*

I—I heard that name so much: Verhaeghe. A scoring champion, and he's—the scoring and you—really, the opening goal of that game was very important, wasn't it? That put you in a position where got your—the butterflies out a little bit. *[Laughter]* Way to go. Congratulations. That's a great job, everybody.

Carter skillfully directed a shot past the Oilers' goalie and gave the Panthers your first lead in the series since game three.

And not to forget Sam Reinhart, who had a legendary shot in game seven. That certainly was a legendary shot, one that's not going to be forgotten.

After securing the puck from Carter, Sam carried it down the ice and flicked a wrist shot—very much like I would do it, if I played—*[laughter]*—right past the Oilers' goalie, beating him and—and beat him on the glove side.

Where are you? How did you feel after that shot? Like, the greatest feeling or one of the greatest in life? You can say it.

*Center Sam Reinhart.* Just a lot of hope. We still had about 25 minutes to play, so not too good. *[Laughter]*

*The President.* You had a long time left, it's true. That's true. You had a little bit to go.

Sam cemented himself as—in Panthers history for shooting the team's first-ever Stanley Cup-winning goal. That was a winning goal.

Both teams showed tremendous willpower and athletic talent—unbelievable talent. But in the end, the Panthers stood the ground and did what you have to do as a champion. You can't be a champion unless you could go through something like that. And I can tell you, it was hell for them, that seventh game. Going to the seventh game had to be hell, because you're either going to win and really be praised, because you came from such a horrible position to being life-threatening. *[Laughter]* Right? I mean, that would have been just unbelievable.

We've seen them. We've seen it happen. Happens a lot, actually, but you didn't let it happen to you. It's an incredible achievement.

And I just want to tell you, you fought for every last point, and it was just something I watched. Mr. Commissioner, I was watching that sucker for maybe the wrong reasons, because of that guy. And I was hooked too, because you—you fell in love with that team—the guts and the courage they had. You really started to really like them. They're great people, and now I see them.

And in fact, I like them so much, I said we'll get rid of the fake news media very soon, and we're going to go to the Oval Office and we're going to take some pictures in the Oval Office. Normally, we don't do that——

*Mr. Viola.* Thank you.

*The President.* ——but we're going to do it for this team and for you.

*Mr. Viola.* Thank you.

*The President.* And we'll take—unless you don't want to go, you can go home a little bit early. *[Laughter]*

So today we honor the three—and these just really great athletes—these are amazing athletes, an amazing team, and their outstanding achievements—their wonderful owner. From underdogs to champions, they proved that dedication and hard work can transform dreams into reality.

So congratulations, once again, to the Florida Panthers on just an unbelievable season and a—really, an unbelievable run, because you've been doing so well and now you continue to do well. We'll be—we'll try and get to one of those games. You know, it's a little tough as President, but I think we can work it out. We'll have to—we'll need a lot of Secret Service. *[Laughter]*

*Mr. Viola.* You'll need a lot.

*The President.* They'll be happy. Well, we're going to—we're going to get to do it.

You've made your State and your fans very, very proud.

And now, I'd like to introduce my friend Vinnie Viola, who's a real champion himself. He's a champion at everything he's ever done. Loves the military.

First thing he did, he—I see him, he said: "You've got to do this with the Army. You've got to move them here. You've got to—*[inaudible]*." He's giving me all the instructions. You love the military. I would have liked him—you know, we should have had you in Afghanistan instead of the characters we had.

We'd have—it would have turned out a little bit different, huh?

Come here. Congratulations. Congratulations. Great, Vinnie. Please.

*Mr. Viola.* Well—well, first, Mr. President, you look fantastic.

*The President.* Thank you.

*Mr. Viola.* So whatever it is you're working so hard at, it's agreeing with you, and I like to see that. And thank you. So——

*The President.* He knows what to say. *[Laughter]*

*Mr. Viola.* ——I—we brought—we brought a cohort—to use a term we used in the military—of champions to visit a champion. And your kindness and the hospitality displayed by your staff is a simple reflection of the excellence that you demand of your people, and we were the beneficiaries of it today. So thank you.

*The President.* Thank you very much. Thank you.

*Mr. Viola.* I want to—I really—I'm going to keep this short because I really don't enjoy this.

Just a couple of points. South Florida—Florida, more broadly, has just been fantastic to us, Mr. President.

We have with us two very special people. They know our team in and out. I have to recognize them: Mark Bogen and Monica Capero from Broward County. They're just two superstars. And it's hard—you know, it's hard to start really—Gary, when we took the team, it was—it was a little tough. And we needed—we really needed the help of the community and the political class and, quite frankly, the private leadership.

I could thank every member of the Panthers staff. They are all here. The team—I'm going to bring up a guy that you would really like. He's a—just a tough, talented—his spirit just went right into the team. He's helped define the—his dad was a great player: Keith Tkachuk. I don't know if you remember him.

*The President.* Yes——

*Mr. Viola.* Yes, he was a——

*The President.* ——I do.

*Mr. Viola.* ——big, strong guy. He's like his dad.

Before I do, I want to say one thing, because my brain run—runs all over the place.

Jared Moskowitz, your dad, when I bought this team, spent countless hours with me, driving me all over Fort Lauderdale. I mean, meeting with—right, Monica?—he was a great, great guy. I want you to know he was a great guy, and I want you to know you carry him in your heart every day, and he'd be so proud of you and the public service.

Now, Mr. President, I'm going to ask Matthew Tkachuk, come up. We got a few things for you. I really hope you like them, especially the—is it up there? We framed your—you're the only—listen, we had to go 45 and 47, right? *[Laughter]*

*The President.* That's pretty good.

*Mr. Viola.* And so——

*The President.* That's pretty good. Wow. Thank you very much.

*Mr. Viola.* ——I thought you'd like that.

But instead of a Ranger tab—because we—we designed this like the Ranger battalion. Your tab says, "POTUS"—see?—above the "Florida." See that, Rick? That's pretty cool, right? *[Laughter]*

All right. Matthew, come on up here. You're going to talk to the President about your team.

*The President.* Your father was great.

*Left wing Matthew Tkachuk.* Thank you.

*The President.* Is he still around?

*Mr. Tkachuk.* Yes.

*The President.* He is? Say hello. He was great.

*Mr. Tkachuk.* Thank you. Well, thank you, Mr. President, for having us today. We——

*The President.* Thank you very much.

*Mr. Tkachuk.* We greatly appreciate it. And being one of the few Americans, you know, who loves this country so much, this is such an incredible day for myself.

*The President.* Thank you very much.

*Mr. Tkachuk.* And you know, you wake up every day and really grateful to be an American. So thank you.

But yes, this team and this group of guys is super special. And everybody sees what we do on the ice, but I've built bonds with these guys that'll—you know, I'll have for the rest of my life, and I'm forever grateful for these guys. We're forever champs, and I'll always remember these guys.

*The President.* That's true.

*Mr. Tkachuk.* Yes.

*The President.* That's true. Thank you.

*Mr. Tkachuk.* So, with that said, we've got a few gifts for you. Bark, you want to give me a hand?

*The President.* Wow. Ooh. This is a trick. They say it's really heavy. This is a trick. *[Laughter]* Oh, I'll lift it. No matter what I do, I'll lift it.

*[At this point, the President was presented with a Florida Panthers jersey and hockey stick.]*

Do I get that too?

*[The President pointed at the Stanley Cup.]*

Do I get that? *[Laughter]*

His father was some great player too. Great guy. Genetics, right? *[Laughter]*

Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

*Mr. Viola.* I'll follow you. You're the commander in chief.

*The President.* Okay. Let's go. We're going to the Oval Office. *[Laughter]*

*[The President stepped away from the podium and began to exit the room. He then spoke with reporters as follows.]*

*Prime Minister Justin P.J. Trudeau of Canada/Tariffs*

*Q.* How was your call with Trudeau?

*Q.* How'd the call with Trudeau go?

*The President.* Say it.

*Q.* How did the call with Trudeau go?

*The President.* Very good.

*Q.* Are you still doing the tariffs?

*The President.* It went great.

*Q.* Are you still doing the tariffs tonight?

*The President.* Watch.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:59 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Anton Lundell and Carter Verhaeghe, centers, Florida Panthers; former National Hockey League center Wayne Gretzky, defenseman Marty McSorley, and left wing Keith Tkachuk; and Stuart Skinner, goalie, NHL's Edmonton Oilers. Mr. Viola referred to Commissioner and Vice Mayor Mark D. Bogen and County Administrator Monica Cepero of Broward County, FL.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : 2024 Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, White House.

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