

Remarks During a Swearing-in Ceremony for Steven C. Witkoff as United States Special Envoy to the Middle East and an Exchange With Reporters
May 6, 2025

The President. Thank you very much. It's a great honor to be with everybody. We're—this is very important event to me, I will tell you, because we're swearing in my good friend and a great patriot, somebody who's stepped up and done an incredible job, with not a lot of experience in what he was doing here, but he had a lot of brilliance in business and great common sense, and everybody loves him: Steve Witkoff, as assistant to the president, senior adviser, and special envoy to the Middle East.

I've known Steve for 40 years, and he's been with me, more or less, one way or the other, every step of the way, Steve. And he has my absolute confidence and support and trust. And you see how well we're doing with the things we're working on.

We're coming down to the final strokes. And I think we have a real good chance of landing all of them, or a lot of them.

So I want to thank Steve for taking on this immense responsibility, and congratulations on everything that you've already received and all of the success that you've had.

We're pleased to be joined by Steve's mother Lois. Where's Lois? Lois? You look like a young woman. I can't believe it. *[Laughter]* His sons Zach and Alex. My friends also, by the way. Zach, Alex, thank you, fellas.

His girlfriend Lauren, who's a great golfer, I have to tell you—top of the line—and her daughter. Hi, Finley. How are you? Finley, her daughter.

And his brother Robert. Robert, you're much better looking than Steve. *[Laughter]* And his sisters Amy and Susie. Thank you. Thank you both. His daughter-in-law Sophi. Hi, Sophi. His brother-in-law Gary. Oh, there he is. Oh. Hello, Gary. Thank you. And his sister-in-law Elaine.

And also many others. Thank you all very much.

I also want to thank our great Vice President, J.D. Vance; Secretary Marco Rubio. And, Marco, we're having a big day. I think Marco will find out we're having a big—a big period of time. I think that this is a—potentially a great time for our country in solving a lot of problems that we inherited that we should have never had, frankly. Attorney General Pam Bondi, who is incredible, and Senator Lindsey Graham—is Lindsey—oh, Senator Graham. Where are you? Where is Senator Graham? Hello, Lindsey.

Steve is a graduate of some great schools, including Hofstra University, where he studied political science and law. After graduating, he entered the real estate business, cofounding the Stellar Management Company in 1985 and launching a legendary career.

You know, he started off in a law office. In fact, he was one of my young lawyers, and I said, "That guy is smart, but he just started." It was a very smart firm, Dreyer and Traub. Killers. They were total killers. They said, "He's worse than all of them." But people don't know that. They think he's a nice guy, Pam, right? *[Laughter]* He's not that nice, actually. But he is something.

Steve quickly established himself as one of the toughest, smartest, and best negotiators in the business. In 1997, he founded the Witkoff Group, which now owns dozens of the most beautiful and iconic properties in the entire world. He's owned some incredible properties.

As a businessman, he's admired and respected by all. And now Steve is putting his talents to work for America as Special Envoy to the United States and making a lot of progress.

Our country is blessed to have a negotiator of such skill and experience who really selflessly steps up to the plate, puts himself forward all the time. Over the past few months, Steve has already helped negotiate the return of dozens of hostages from Gaza—and they come in and see me, many of them, and they are so thankful to Steve—and, also, hostages from other parts of the globe.

He's met with President Putin, Prime Minister Netanyahu, representatives—Iran and many other places. He is meeting with people that he never really thought he'd ever meet just a few months ago. *[Laughter]* And he's figuring it out.

It takes him about an hour to figure it out. After that, he's brutal. He does a great job.

He's working tirelessly to end the bloody and destructive conflicts and one, in particular, with Russia and Ukraine and—where you're losing 5,000 young people a week on average—Ukrainian soldiers, Russian soldiers, and people in towns and villages that are being killed.

We want to bring it to an end, and we're working—Steve is in the Middle East, where I think we're having some very good success, and you'll be hearing about it as we go. We had tremendous success over the last month. And you know, we're taking the word of the Houthis—but they didn't want anymore, and I understand that—and they have decided that they don't want to do this anymore.

So I'm proud to have him as a friend. Steve is a very fantastic guy. I picked him out of a lot of people. I had a lot of choices. But I said, "We need somebody with two things: a great personality and somebody that could negotiate." And he's got both of them in spades. He's also really smart.

So I want to thank everybody for being here. And I want to—very, very importantly, I want to say to Marco Rubio that you're swearing in a very important person. And Steve reports to Marco. I said: "Steve, you'd better do a good job or Marco will fire—he will fire you so violently. You have no idea." *[Laughter]*

But, Marco, if you could administer the oath. Thank you very much, Marco.

Thank you, Steve.

Special Envoy Witkoff. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you.

Special Envoy Witkoff. Thank you.

Secretary of State Marco A. Rubio. Let's stand in front of here so you can—right here.

Raise your right hand.

I, state your name.

Special Envoy Witkoff. I, Steve Witkoff.

Secretary Rubio. Do solemnly swear.

Special Envoy Witkoff. Do solemnly swear.

Secretary Rubio. That I will support and defend.

Special Envoy Witkoff. That I will support and defend.

Secretary Rubio. The Constitution of the United States.

Special Envoy Witkoff. The Constitution of the United States.

Secretary Rubio. Against all enemies.

Special Envoy Witkoff. Against all enemies.

Secretary Rubio. Foreign and domestic.

Special Envoy Witkoff. Foreign and domestic.

Secretary Rubio. That I will bear true faith and allegiance.

Special Envoy Witkoff. That I will bear true faith and allegiance.

Secretary Rubio. To the same.

Special Envoy Witkoff. To the same.

Secretary Rubio. That I take this obligation freely.

Special Envoy Witkoff. That I take this obligation freely.

Secretary Rubio. Without any mental reservation.

Special Envoy Witkoff. Without any mental reservation.

Secretary Rubio. Or purpose of evasion.

Special Envoy Witkoff. Or purpose of evasion.

Secretary Rubio. And that I will well.

Special Envoy Witkoff. And that I will well.

Secretary Rubio. And faithfully.

Special Envoy Witkoff. And faithfully.

Secretary Rubio. Discharge the duties of the office.

Special Envoy Witkoff. Discharge the duties of the office.

Secretary Rubio. On which I am about to enter.

Special Envoy Witkoff. On which I am about to enter.

Secretary Rubio. So help me God.

Special Envoy Witkoff. So help me God.

Secretary Rubio. Congratulations.

The President. Do you have any—good job. Thank you, Marco. Any questions for Steve?

India/Pakistan

Q. Mr. President, do you have any reaction to the attacks between India and Pakistan?

The President. No, it's a shame. We just heard about it just as we were walking in the doors of the Oval. Just heard about it. I guess people knew something was going to happen based on a little bit of the past. They've been fighting for a long time. You know, they've been fighting for many, many decades.

Q. Any message to the parties?

The President. And centuries, actually, if you really think about it.

No, I just hope it ends very quickly.

Q. President Trump—President Trump——

Gaza, Palestinian Territories/The President's Travel to the Middle East

Q. Mr. President, are you considering adding a stop in Israel during next week's trip to the Middle East? And also, what's your reaction to Israel's plan to reoccupy Gaza if there is no ceasefire deal—[inaudible]?

The President. Well, the plan, we haven't talked about. But we're not planning on stopping in Israel. But we will be doing it at some point, but not for this trip.

United Kingdom–U.S. Trade

Q. President Trump, there's a report that the U.K. is offering various trade concessions. What's your response to that? And also——

The President. That who? What?

Q. The United Kingdom.

The President. Yes.

Q. And can you also say if you were discussing tariffs with Mr. Arnault?

The President. And what about the United Kingdom?

Q. They're offering various trade concessions, apparently—cars, steel, digital services.

The President. They're offering us concessions?

Q. Yes.

The President. I hope so. I hope so.

[*At this point, several reporters began asking questions at once.*]

They do want to make a deal very badly, yes.

Q. And could you say, your guests here, are you discussing tariffs or business?

The President. No, I think that United Kingdom, like every other country, they want to—they want to be—go shopping in the United States of America. China wants to—very much wants to make a deal. They all do.

But yes, I would say that every country wants to make a deal, and not the ones they had in the past, where we were like—look, we were being ripped off by every country, practically without exception, in the entire world. And those days are over. Those days are over.

And you know, I said before in our meeting with the new and very talented Prime Minister of Canada that we have some very big announcement to make. It's not about trade. It's about something else, but it's going to be a truly earth-shattering and positive development for this country and for the people of this country, and that will take place sometime within the next few days.

[*Several reporters spoke at once.*]

Russia/Ukraine

Q. Mr. President, are there any plans for Mr. Witkoff to travel once again to Russia? And as you mentioned in your remarks, he's traveled to Russia on a number of occasions. He's met with

President Putin. What type of progress is being made as it relates to all of those visits that he's made to Russia?

The President. I think a lot, because I think Russia wanted to take all of Ukraine, and they've stopped. That's a lot of progress. You know, it's a small—it's a portion of Ukraine. But no, I think a lot.

I think if we weren't here, they would be right now fighting to take the whole country, and they're not doing that. So I think that's a lot of progress.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

Please.

Q. Mr. President, does it frustrate you that Russia continues to attack civilian areas inside Ukraine without any reservation? It leads to scores of casualties almost on a daily basis.

The President. I don't like anything about that war. It's a war. I don't like anything about it. And I'm not happy with that. No, not at all. Not even a little bit.

Yes.

Yemen/Houthi Rebel Group

Q. Mr. President, you've said the Houthis are backing down. We're seeing conflicting reports that they plan on continuing to attack Israel in support of Gaza. Does that change the equation?

The President. No, I don't know about that, frankly, but I know one thing: They want nothing to do with us, and they've let that be known through all of their surrogates and very strongly.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

Israel/Iran

Q. Mr. President, you said that all hell would break loose if the rest of the hostages weren't released. Is there a hostage deal that's imminent? And are you talking to Netanyahu right now about their plan to level the rest of Gaza?

The President. We're talking to him about a lot of things right now. This is really crunch time, I will tell you, for Iran and for their country. This is a very important time for Iran. This is the most important time in the history of Iran, for Iran, and I hope they do what's right. I'd love to see a peace deal, a strong peace deal. They cannot have a nuclear weapon.

But I would say that this is the single most important period in the history of Iran, which is a long history. And we want it to be a great country. Let it be a tremendously successful, rich country. They have everything you need. The people are incredible. They have vast amounts of oil and assets. We want it to be a successful country. We don't want to do anything that's going to get in the way of that, but they can't have a nuclear weapon. And if they choose to go a different route, it's going to be a very sad thing.

And it's something we don't want to have to do, but we have no choice. They're not going to have a nuclear weapon. They're not going to have a nuclear weapon. Do you understand that? Okay.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

Yemen/Houthi Rebel Group

Q. I know you just announced this a few hours ago, Mr. President, but with regards to the Houthis, has your—have you told the military to stop attacks against the Houthis—

The President. We just—

Q. —as of now, or—

The President. Yes, we just informed them a little while ago, and all action is stopping. Some people probably haven't heard yet. You know, there are various people in various rather strategic locations. But, by this moment, they should just about all know, Marco, I think, that the attacks are going to stop both ways, and that's pretty much it.

But we've just informed everybody just a little while ago.

Houthi Rebel Group

Q. And to follow up on a previous question, if the Houthis continue to attack Israel, which you said you didn't know about—but if they continue to attack Israel, just not attack the U.S.—*[inaudible]*—

The President. Well, I'll discuss that if something happens. Okay? If something happens with Israel and the Houthis.

Yes.

Trade Negotiations/LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton

Q. Mr. President, do you expect to have a trade deal you're able to announce later this week?

The President. Well, I can announce all of them now. I could announce 50 to 100 deals right now, because, you know, I'm the shopkeeper, and I keep the store. And, you know, I know what countries are looking for, and I know what we're looking for. And I can just set those terms, and they can go shopping, or they don't have to go shopping, because everybody wants to shop here. This is like a beautiful store.

This is like one of Bernard Arnault—or maybe I should say Alex, even more importantly—the young, the future. But, Bernard, it's an honor to have you. We have a meeting after this. But he has the greatest stores in the world, and they want to shop.

Our country is the greatest store in the world of that kind, and everybody wants a piece of it. And they took advantage of us for years, because we allowed Presidents—our Presidents allowed it to happen. You know, I don't blame China, and I don't blame Vietnam, and I could name every single country all the way up and down the line—South Korea—every single country took advantage of us, without exception.

Japan. These are friends of mine, but they took advantage of this country. They ripped off our country, selling us millions and millions of cars a year, and we sold them none. We weren't allowed to sell them a car. They took advantage of us.

I don't blame them. I blame the people that sat behind that desk that allowed it to happen, but I don't allow it to happen. I didn't in the first term, but this is a much stronger position, because we did—we had the greatest economy in history in our first term. The stock market was up 88 percent, and we had numbers much better than that.

But this is going to be, I think, a much better term. And I think the tariffs are coming in—starting to come in. We're—we were losing \$5 billion-plus a day on trade. Now we're not losing that kind of money, and we'll soon be making a lot of money a day and a year and a month.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

Department of Justice Investigation/New York State Attorney General Letitia James

Q. President Trump, on—President Trump, a question for you and perhaps the attorney general. The Justice Department recently received a criminal referral against New York Attorney General Tish James for fraud. We haven't heard much about it. Could you or the Attorney General give us an update as to what's going on with that investigation?

The President. Well, I don't want to get involved in something that Pamela is involved with. If you'd like to say something, Pam, or——

Attorney General Pamela J. Bondi. Yes, we don't discuss anything pending or not within my office. [*Inaudible*]

The President. I can say, unrelated to that, she's a disaster for New York. She's a horrible, horrible human being. And I think she's a total crook. There's no question about it. But that's just my opinion.

Pam is going to have to do what she wants. [*Laughter*]

She's a very bad person. She's a very, very—a very bad person, who campaigned solely on "I'm going to get Donald Trump" over and over again. She's a sick person.

But that's—has nothing to do with what Pam does. Pam is going to do what's right. She's always does. I've known her a long time.

[*Several reporters spoke at once.*]

Yes, go ahead, behind you.

Gaza, Palestinian Territories

Q. Thank you. On Gaza, you said there's been progress and—progress in the Middle East, but at the moment, as you—as a colleague said, in Israel, Netanyahu is saying he now wants to conquer Gaza. Is there any prospect of any movement on that? And are you happy with what Netanyahu is doing there?

The President. Well, we've gone very slowly, because we want to try and get as many hostages saved as possible, and we've done a good job in that regard.

Two weeks ago, I had 10 hostages come in, and they thanked me profusely. And I said: "You have nothing to thank me about. You"—what they went through is incredible. They lived in a pipe. You know, they keep hearing about caves. It was a pipe 3½ feet high. And they didn't know if they were going to breathe. They didn't know they were going to live to the next day. They lived like hell.

I couldn't believe the stories I was hearing, and—and they weren't grandstanding. These were people that were seriously mistreated. One was in for 512 days. One was in for 361, I guess, days. And one was in for a shorter period of time.

The stories were unbelievable. I said: "How many people are left? How many are left?" They said, "59." I said, "Oh, wow, that's more than I thought." They said, "Well, only 24 are living." But now it's 21. That was a week ago. Now it's 21 are living.

And these are young people. These are—young people don't die. Old people die. Young people don't die under these conditions.

So, of the 59 people—and they said, "59," and I said, "Really?" But they said, "Only 24 are living." And I now correct—I say 21, because, as of today, it's 21. Three have died.

So this is a terrible situation. We're trying to get the hostages out. We've gotten a lot of them out. As the expression goes: There's 21, plus a lot of dead bodies.

You know, parents came up to me on numerous occasions—but a couple, in particular, they came up to me 2 weeks ago, and they said: "Please, sir. My son is dead. Please get us back his body." They wanted his body. He's dead. They know he's dead. They wanted his body as much as you would want the boy if he was alive. It's a very sad thing.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:04 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel; Prime Minister Mark Carney of Canada; Bernard Arnault, chairman and chief executive officer, LVMH Moët Hennessy–Louis Vuitton; and Alexandre Arnault, deputy chief executive officer, Moët Hennessy. The transcript was released by the Office of Communications on May 7. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the audio was incomplete.

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