

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks at a Cabinet Meeting

August 16, 2018

The President. Hello, everybody. Thank you very much for being here. I think we'll start with Secretary Pompeo saying a prayer.

Mike.

Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo. Thank you, Mr. President. So I'm going to read a prayer that is from a—long ago in my history. It's called the "Cadet Prayer." You see this little beat-up little book? Every cadet gets one. And if you'll bow your heads, I'll do the prayer:

O God, our Father, Thou Searcher of Men's hearts, help us to draw near to Thee in sincerity and truth. May our religion be filled with gladness, and may our worship of Thee be natural. Strengthen and increase our admiration for honest dealing and clean thinking, and suffer not our hatred of hypocrisy and pretense ever to diminish. . . . Make us to choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong, and never to be content with a half-truth when the whole can be won. Endow us with courage that is born of loyalty to all that is noble and worthy, that scorns to compromise with vice and injustice and knows no fear when truth and right are in jeopardy. . . . Help us to maintain the honor of the [United States] untarnished and unsullied and show—and to show forth in our lives the ideals of [America] in doing our duty to Thee and to our [Nation]. All of which we ask in the name of [our] Great Friend and Master of [men]. Amen.

The President. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for doing a great job too.

Secretary Pompeo. Thank you, sir.

Death of Musician Aretha Franklin

The President. Well, I want to begin today by expressing my condolences to the family of a person I knew well—she worked for me on numerous occasions; she was terrific—Aretha Franklin, on her passing. She's brought joy to millions of lives, and her extraordinary legacy will thrive and inspire many generations to come.

She was given a great gift from God: her voice. And she used it well. People loved Aretha. She was a special woman. So I just want to pass on my warmest, best wishes and sympathies to her family.

National Economy

We meet at a time of great opportunity for our Nation. Our economy is doing better than it ever has before. It was going in the wrong direction when we came onboard, and now it's going better than ever before.

We've created nearly 4 million new jobs since the election, which is an unthinkable number. Nobody would have said that was possible. It's going to go up very substantially from there.

The African American, Hispanic American, and Asian American unemployment rates have all reached their lowest levels in recorded history. And we're creating manufacturing jobs at the

fastest pace in memory. Nobody has any numbers where it's anywhere close to what we're doing. And if you remember, during the campaign, everybody said that it was impossible to create manufacturing jobs.

So the past administration—and I won't say who, but I think you know—made the statement that we're not going to have any manufacturing jobs. And we're doing them by the hundreds of thousands.

Companies are moving back into the United States. That means jobs; it means production; it means taxes. And really, things are great.

Yesterday Larry Kudlow, a man I respected for many years—that voice, that beautiful voice; I've heard it so many years, talking about financial—and he came into my office and he made a statement that was something that was very beautiful, and I'd like to maybe ask him to say a little bit about what he told me last night.

Larry.

National Economic Council Director Lawrence A. Kudlow. Yes, sir. Thank you. Appreciate it. Hi, everybody.

So, look, it's fairly simple thought—most good things are—but I'm looking at the media, and watching various TV and other analysts talk about stuff that baffles me, that's outside my lane.

Here's the key point I made to the President yesterday and I make it to you today, and I hope we all we keep making it: By far—by far—the single biggest event, be it political or otherwise, this year is an economic boom that most people thought would be impossible to generate. Not a rise, not a blip, a genuine economic boom.

[*At this point, Director Kudlow continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

So I'll just end, sir—and I appreciate the time very much—the single biggest story this year is an economic boom that is durable and lasting and that most people thought was impossible. And they were wrong. And you were right, sir.

The President. Thank you, Larry, very much. Larry, I should end on that. This is always a mistake. [*Laughter*] Could I ask you one question? China.

Director Kudlow. Yes.

The President. As you know, China was, for many years—as long as anybody up here, including the media, could remember—China was on a one-way road to becoming the biggest economy and all of that. And we were just going to be left behind.

I'd like you to say how are we doing versus China, and how is China doing. We want them to do well, frankly. And President Xi is a friend of mine. I want them to do well. But how are we doing versus China? How is China doing?

Director Kudlow. You know, sir, the latest batch of numbers from China, spanning a good 6 months now, 9 months—their economy is just heading south. Retail sales, business—business investment is collapsing in China, according to the numbers. Industrial production has fallen and now is plateauing at a low level. People are selling the currency; there may be some manipulation. But mostly, I think investors are moving out of China because they don't like the economy, and they're coming to the U.S.A. because they like our economy.

I'm not a China expert, although I'm boning up as fast as I can. I will just say, right now, their economy looks terrible.

The President. Okay, thank you. Thank you very much, Larry.

Director Kudlow. Thank you, sir.

The President. I'd like to ask Ryan Zinke, Secretary, who actually I watched this morning. He was giving a rundown on the horrible fires that are taking place mostly in California. And I thought what he said was so true and, actually, rather incredible—people don't hear it—they don't hear it like it is. There are things you can do about those fires before they start, and you wouldn't have nearly the damage and the problems.

We're spending a fortune in California because of poor maintenance and because, frankly, they're sending a lot of water out to the Pacific to protect the smelt. And by the way, it's not working. The smelt is not doing well. But we're sending millions and millions of gallons, right out into the Pacific Ocean, of beautiful, clean water coming up from the north—or coming down from the north.

And I thought Ryan was great this morning. So before we start on a couple of other things we'll be discussing today, including, very importantly, schools and education, I would ask you to give maybe a little recap of what you said this morning on television.

Secretary of the Interior Ryan L. Zinke. Well, thank you, Mr. President. And first, our firefighters—which there are 30,000 of them—are doing spectacular things. We've had six deaths related. And we forget that firefighters, while they're in the frontline, their homes and families are in jeopardy, and our hearts and prayers need to be with our frontline firefighters that are out there every day.

[*Secretary Zinke continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

But sound active management, Mr. President, is the path that you have laid. And it's clear: This is unacceptable that year after year we're watching our forests burn, our habitat destroyed, and our communities devastated. And it is absolutely preventable. And public lands are for everybody to enjoy and not just held hostage by these special interest groups.

Mr. President.

The President. And Ryan was saying it's not a global warming thing, it's a management situation. And one of the elements that he talked about was the fact we have fallen trees. And instead of removing those fallen trees—which get to be extremely combustible—instead of removing them—gently removing them, beautifully removing them—we leave them to burn and, actually, in many cases, catch fire much easier than a healthy tree, a healthy, growing tree.

Could you just discuss that for a second?

Secretary Zinke. Well, Mr. President, we import lumber in this country, and yet there are billions of board feet that are on the forest floor rotting. Rotting. And whether you're a global warmist advocate or denier, it doesn't make a difference when you have rotting timber, when housing prices are going up, when a lot of Americans are right at that border of affording a house, and yet we are wasting billions of board feet for not being able to bring them to a local lumber mill. It is unconscionable that we would do that to our citizens.

And so, Mr. President, we are actively engaged. We have signed secretarial orders. Secretary Perdue and I went out to California. We are joined at the hip to make sure we

actively manage our forest, remove the dead and dying timber, replant diversity of species. And on the salvage operations—5.7 million acres—a lot of that can be salvaged if we get to it in the first year. And we're going to do it, Mr. President.

The President. And just to add, just to conclude, especially when Canada is charging us a lot of money to bring their timber down into our country. It's so ridiculous. Here we have it. We're not even talking about cutting down trees, which in certain areas we can do. We're talking about lying on the floor, creating a tremendous hazard and a tremendous fire hazard and death trap.

So I thought they were great points. Thank you very much, Ryan. Appreciate it.

We're also working to reduce violent crime and to help our great law enforcement, including the very brave men and women of ICE, who have been absolutely abused. They are tremendous people. They're brave. They're strong. They're tough. And they're good. They're good people.

And you think you're going to send just regular people in to take care of MS-13 and these gangs? Not going to happen. So I just want to thank ICE and everybody in law enforcement for the incredible job they've done and are doing.

Our families prepare, and they are in the process of preparing for the new school year. My administration is working closely with State and local authorities to protect our schools and to protect our children. Our hearts continue to grieve for the victims of the horrific shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, that we all know too well about what they went through. Incredible people. And Santa Fe High School in Texas, same thing.

In March, I established the Federal Commission on School Safety to address the tragedy of violence in our classrooms. Since that time, the Commission has held nearly a dozen public meetings and listening sessions with educators, administrators, law enforcement, State and local leaders, survivors, and families generally.

We've signed two critical forms and—reforms into law. One is STOP School Violence Act. It's a very important thing. People said we probably wouldn't be able to get it through. We got it through. It provides grants to schools to improve safety. And the Fix NICS Act, which strengthens background checks for firearms purchases. It very much strengthens. A lot of people didn't want to report on that, because probably, it was too good to report about it. It's very important thing. It strengthens that background checks for firearm purchases.

Today Education Secretary Betsy DeVos and others and various Commission leaders will provide an update on their work. We're going to have a lot of people in this room involved, even people that aren't involved that much with education. But they're very smart people sitting around this wonderful desk, or table.

Secretary Azar, Nielsen, and Sessions—a lot of other people are being—joining. A lot of people have asked me if they could join. Ben—Ben Carson is one. A lot of people have asked me if they could join. They consider the schools to be so important in education and now so important in safety.

We want to harden our schools against attack, improving communications between law enforcement, school officials, mental health professionals, and counselors; training school personnel so they better protect our students, including allowing qualified personnel to be armed. As you know, in Florida, they went in with a bill that didn't have that, and they came

out with a bill where the legislature wanted it. So that's up to the community, not up to the Federal Government. That's up to the community.

Improving our early warning system to make sure schools, families, and law enforcement can identify red flags and respond quickly. We want a very rapid response. Some of the response has been incredible, and some of the response has not been good, obviously. You saw that very well. And frankly, you reported it very well.

We want to strengthen our mental health laws and procedures. So important. I think it's probably the most underrated element of what we're doing, but it might be the most important. Mental health—the laws and procedures.

Keeping guns—we want to keep them out of the hands of those who pose a threat to themselves and to, more importantly, frankly, others. And we want to foster a culture that celebrates life, and forms real and meaningful human connection so that we can see not only in terms of education, but we can see if something is going wrong with somebody, we can do something about it.

In Florida, there were a lot of red flags. I guess they said there were 28 to 38 red flags, where everybody knew this was a sick person. And nobody did anything about it. And that's what you end up with.

So I look forward to today's discussion. And we will make our schools not only very safe—we think they're already safe—but we're going to have the finest school system anywhere. So I want to thank you. Thank you all for being here.

Betsy, maybe we could start with you. And we'll go over your little section, and then we'll hear from Secretary Azar, Attorney General Sessions, and a couple of others.

If you'd like, you could stay. Or if you'd like, you can also leave. *[Laughter]* Don't forget: freedom of the press. *[Laughter]*

Go ahead.

Secretary of Education Elisabeth P. DeVos. Well, thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, after the tragedy in Parkland, Florida, you took swift action. No parent should fear for their child's life when they go to school. And no student, no teacher should ever have to worry about their safety at school.

[Secretary DeVos continued her remarks, concluding as follows.]

Each of my fellow Commissioners have led other field and Commission meetings during the course of our work. So now I'd like to ask Secretary Azar to talk about the work of HHS in the context of the Commission.

The President. Thank you, Betsy.

Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex M. Azar II. Well, Mr. President, thank you for the opportunity to be on the School Safety Commission. And I'd like to thank Secretary DeVos for her tremendous and tireless leadership of the Commission and fellow Commissioners, the Attorney General and Secretary Nielsen.

[Secretary Azar continued his remarks, concluding as follows.]

We look forward to highlighting areas that we can improve our delivery, through the work of the Commission and our report. And we're just grateful to the President for his leadership to help our children have a safe, healthy, happy school environment.

Thank you, sir.

The President. Well, thank you very much, and I appreciate it. But I do want you to bring up something that you and I have been working on very hard, and that's prescription drug prices.

So, as everybody knows, Pfizer, last week, raised substantially the price of their drugs, and I wasn't happy about it—Novartis, also, and others. And we made some phone calls, and they brought it back down to what the price was. And I think you're going to see a reduction in drug price. And that's the first time that's ever happened, I believe, ever. But I was not happy about it, and it wasn't great. And we're working on very much getting rid of the middleman.

Now, could you talk about how we're reducing drug prices, and how it's starting to really take effect? And maybe talk about the fact that we appreciate very much what Pfizer and Novartis and the others did. We really do; we really appreciate it.

Secretary Azar. That's correct. So just for the media and others, I have said that I have never once had a discussion with President Trump where we have not discussed drug pricing, and we continue battling a thousand here today. He is adamant about bringing drug prices down, and it has come through the hundred days of work that we have gone through since the President released his blueprint on reducing drug prices and putting American patients first.

[*Secretary Azar continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

So it's not going to change overnight. This is a \$400 billion segment of the economy. We are not driving for any kind of cheap gimmicks or quick solutions. We're doing things the right way; we are structurally rebuilding this entire segment of the economy to lead to enduring, lower prices that are sustainable and support innovation.

The President. Thank you very much. And as you know, the pharmaceutical industry is said, for many years, to have the most powerful lobby. The good news is, I don't need their money. So we're doing the right thing.

And frankly, I think the drug companies, actually, in the long run—I really believe this, Secretary—I think they're going to benefit also. But the middleman is not going to be benefiting. Somebody and—some very rich people out there that do nothing, make a lot of money. Very rich people. I don't know who they are; I don't want to know who they are. But they don't like me too much right now, I would say. Wouldn't you say?

Secretary Azar. You and me. [*Laughter.*]

The President. So congratulations. Thank you very much. This is—in terms of prescription drugs and drugs, nothing like this has ever happened before in our country. And I will say that the Democrats heard about it. They're very happy about it, or so they tell me. I'm sure they won't tell you, but they can't believe what's happening. So—because they want to see that too. They want to see drug prices come down. And nobody has ever seen where they raise the prices 10 percent, and the following day, they announce that they were just kidding. But that's what happened.

So thank you very much, Secretary. Fantastic job. You're doing a fantastic job.

Jeff.

Attorney General Jefferson B. Sessions III. Well, thank you. On drugs, you directed us to reduce opioids by 30 percent. We believe that is achievable. We believe there is at least that

much abuse in the opioid prescriptions. And DEA just announced today, reducing the number that lawfully can be produced, as we've indicted 170 physicians who have been prescribing, unlawfully, to people who are addicted to drugs.

[Attorney General Sessions continued his remarks, concluding as follows.]

Just in addition, I attended a school in Arkansas. They've been allowing their administrators to have guns for years. Parents, teachers, people who have graduated from the school—all favored that—would not want to change it. It's just another example that we don't need to micromanage our schools on how they protect the safety of their children.

The President. Okay. Thank you very much. I'd also like to ask you to bring a major lawsuit against the drug companies on opioids. Some States have done it, but I'd like a lawsuit to be brought against these companies that are really sending opioids at a level that it shouldn't be happening. It's so highly addictive. People go into a hospital with a broken arm; they come out, they're a drug addict. They get the arm fixed, but they're now a drug addict.

And I'd like us to look at some of the litigation that's already been started with companies. Rather than just joining them, I'd like to bring a Federal lawsuit against those companies.

I'd also like to have you take a look at the fentanyl that's coming out of China and Mexico. And whatever you can do from a legal standpoint—whether it's litigation, lawsuits, for people and companies. But, in China, you have some pretty big companies sending that garbage and killing our people. It's almost a form of warfare. And I'd like to do whatever you can do legally to stop it from China and from Mexico. And if you could look into that, I'd appreciate it.

Attorney General Sessions. We absolutely will. We're returning indictments now against distributors from China. We've identified certain companies that are moving drugs from China, fentanyl in particular. We have confronted China about it—Secretary Pompeo has. You have personally raised it with them.

The President. Yes. I have.

Attorney General Sessions. And we have not achieved as much advantage as we would like. Most of it is going to Mexico and then crossing the border unlawfully from Mexico. We're going to work on that.

You've made clear you want us to sue and use legal process against drug companies that are abusing the law for some time now. We've joined with the States, and we are looking at various, different legal avenues to go after abusive companies.

The President. Good. Good. I'd be very, very firm on that, because what's happening with drugs in this country—and throughout the world, but in our country, it's a disgrace, and we can stop it. We can certainly make a big dent.

Thank you very much.

Attorney General Sessions. We've never seen the deaths that we are seeing today. It's unprecedented in American history.

The President. Right. Thank you very much.

Secretary Nielsen.

Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen M. Nielsen. I guess I'd just like to start by, of course, adding my thanks to the other Commission members. We've all been working hard and we thank you, sir, for your leadership. This is currently an example where young lives depend

on our ability to take bold action. So I'm very confident that the report that Secretary DeVos is pulling together will do just that. And so I look forward, first, to be able to share that with you.

[Secretary Nielsen continued her remarks, concluding as follows.]

Today we're going to have another meeting. I'll be joined by my Commissioners. We'll look at best practices. We'll look at active shooter. We're having some practitioners come. We do this always as a school-based approach. Secretary DeVos has a great slide in our book of all the many, many States that we've all interacted with. We're really trying to get that input from Nation.

So thank you for your leadership. I think you'll be very pleased with what we're able to come up with, working with our communities.

The President. Could you say something that, despite the horrible immigration laws that we have to live with—with catch-and-release and all of the horror show—it's a horror show. It's a disgrace, frankly. We'll get it changed.

But having a lot of problem with the other party. Because they don't want to change for, I guess, political reasons; it can't be common sense. Could you say how we're doing in terms of—we're breaking records at the border—law enforcement records. Could you maybe just give a little update on that?

Secretary Nielsen. Sure. We are.

The President. Despite the horrible laws, we're doing very well.

Please.

Secretary Nielsen. We are, in three different ways. In conjunction with our partners at the Department of Justice, continually the headlines show that we interdict more and more drugs at the border each month. And that is great. So every time we have a new record, a couple weeks later, we surpass it with the amount of drugs we're able to interdict.

[Secretary Nielsen continued her remarks, concluding as follows.]

So we're working with countries to the south of us to help them understand other options for migrations flows to protect their communities at the beginning of that journey so they don't pay smugglers. There's a whole variety of Cabinet members here that are working on the fight against TCOs. We're having a lot of success against that type of a crime and criminal as well.

So it's good news. We are doing everything we can within executive power, but we have to get Congress to act.

The President. We're setting records at the border with terrible laws. So if we had the right laws, we could really be doing something special. And there are consequences. When people come up—and I'll say it—when people come up, it's very tough. It's very tough for them. And it's very sad. But we can't handle it. The country can't handle it. You know, we're one country; we cannot handle what's happening. And nobody could. And we don't want to have to be able to handle it, frankly. It's not fair. It's not fair to our taxpayers, to our workers.

And so we are very, very tough at the border. We're setting records despite horrible, horrible immigration laws that the Democrats do not want to fix, and I think that's going to hurt them very badly at the polls come November. That's my opinion.

So I want to thank you very much.

I'd like to ask, Mike, if you could talk a little bit about North Korea, where we are with North Korea.

Secretary Pompeo. Yes, sir, Mr. President. So we're now many months with no additional missile tests, many months with no additional nuclear testing from the North Koreans. We're continuing to engage in conversation with them about a path forward to a brighter future for the North Koreans.

We have 55 sets of remains that have been returned. The Department of Defense is working on the next work that will, hopefully, lead to the retain—returns of not dozens, but hundreds of the remains of our soldiers that were killed in North Korea.

So continuing to make progress and hoping that we can make a big step here before too long.

The President. And the relationship seems very good. I think it's probably hurt a little bit by China because China isn't really happy with what I'm doing on trade, but we have no other choice as a country. And they understand that. So I think we're probably being hurt a little bit with respect to North Korea, having to do with China. But really, we have no choice on that. We had to do something.

It was—the money that was being drained out of our country and going to China. We rebuilt China. We rebuilt. Five-hundred billion dollars a year, for years and years and years. And we had to do something about that. They understand that.

In fact, I think they're in a state of shock that they've been able to get away with it for so long, so many decades. So we just have to do something, and we did it.

Could I ask Secretary Mnuchin—Turkey, they have not proven to be a good friend. They have a great Christian pastor there. He's a very innocent man. I'd like to know—unrelated to the pastor—I just think it's a terrible thing that they're holding him. We got somebody out for him. He needed help getting somebody out of someplace; they came out. They want to hold our wonderful pastor. Not fair. Not right.

But unrelated to that, how are you doing with sanctions on Turkey? And as you know, we doubled up the tariffs on steel and aluminum. Aluminum will happen very shortly. How are you doing with sanctions? Please.

Secretary of the Treasury Steven T. Mnuchin. Sir, we're doing well. As you know, we were very clear with our counterparts there—both Secretary Pompeo and myself—on the release of the pastor. We've put sanctions on several of their Cabinet members. Working with you, we have more that we're planning to do if they don't release him quickly.

I'll also just comment on the rollout of the Iran nuclear sanctions is going extremely well. We're working closely with Secretary Pompeo. Strongest sanctions in preventing things there.

And continue to be very focused on implementing the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. Just rolled out the passthrough regs—lowest rates we'll have for small business and passthroughs since the 1930s. And a big part of—

The President. Great.

Secretary Mnuchin. —what Larry Kudlow talked about, in terms of the economic growth.

The President. Great. Good. Thank you. Great job. Thank you very much.

Secretary Wilkie, so we got Choice passed for our vets so our vets don't have to wait on line for six weeks and end up with a simple condition that's terminal because they can't get to a doctor. I'm very proud of Choice, and we're talking a lot of the things we've done for the vets.

But could you give us a little—how are you doing with Choice? You've had it now for a couple of months. How is that moving along?

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert L. Wilkie, Jr. Sir, it's moving along well, but I would start with something else. We are experiencing, with the economic boom, lowering rates of vets unemployed, probably the best trends that we've seen in many, many years.

The President. Of vets unemployed. That's great. That's great.

Secretary Wilkie. And that is a boon for our warriors across the country.

In terms of the MISSION Act, the Director and I—Director Mulvaney and I will be talking about it tomorrow. We have the opportunity to do what has not been done in many years, and that is widen the aperture when it comes to the health choices available to veterans across the country.

No longer in States like Montana, where Secretary Zinke is from, will they have to travel four- or five-hundred miles round trip. They can do this at home. We're making advances with MISSION in the area of telehealth, which is a way to impact the mental health issues that many of our veterans face.

So for the first time, we had a comprehensive and strategic way forward in making the lives of our veterans better. And it is—it's a wonderful thing.

The President. Thank you very much.

Secretary Wilkie. Thank you.

The President. I hear you're doing great. And congratulations.

Secretary Wilkie. Thank you.

The President. Just got through. Just got passed. [*Laughter*] So congratulations. You are going to be there for a long time, and you're going to do a fantastic job.

It's the first time a Secretary has really had a chance to do a fantastic job. Because without Choice, I think it would have been impossible. So we have Choice now, and our vets are taken care of. And just make sure they go see the right doctor. Right? When they need it. Sometimes, they won't need it because you have plenty of great doctors at the VA.

If I could ask Secretary Acosta a little bit about your association health care plan, which has been now completed. It's in service. How are you doing with it?

Secretary of Labor R. Alexander Acosta. That's correct, Mr. President. Just in the past week—there were newspaper articles—a number of chambers of commerce around the country have reported that they've started these plans. They're in the process of offering it to their small businesses. You're seeing chambers in Nevada, in Texas; we're talking to some in Iowa, up in the Minnesota area as well. Associations here in Washington that represent businesses across the country are looking at them.

[*Secretary Acosta continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

The U.S. Chamber had a call with the member chambers of commerce. And initially, they weren't going to do the call because it's August and things are very quiet, but they decided to

do the call anyhow. And they had a near-record number of local chambers call in, onto the call, to learn how they can go about doing this. So there is a quite a bit of energy and excitement.

The President. That's fantastic. I appreciate that. And also, Secretary Acosta, you're moving very nicely on your health care plans too.

And one of the big things is, the individual mandate is gone. We got rid of that. That was from Obamacare. That was, by far, the most unpopular thing in Obamacare. We actually got rid of Obamacare, except for one vote. But we essentially have—so we're doing it piecemeal, and it's going to be gone pretty soon.

So, a fantastic job. I heard great things about the health care plan. And a lot of people are signing up; a lot of associations are signing up, far ahead of what we even projected. So that's good.

Secretary Acosta. That's right. That's correct. Yes.

The President. And maybe I could just—I'll finish off with Secretary Perdue. The farmers—we love the farmers. And you know, our farmers are brave, and they're great patriots. And as you know, China sort of attacked our farmers by trying not to buy from our farmers. They know the farmers like Trump, and I like them. I love them.

And they are, I hear—despite everything—they're starting to do well. They got out there—like they are. They're incredible patriots, but they're incredible entrepreneurs. And they're selling the corn—the corn, and they're selling the soybean, and they're selling everything at levels that are soon going to be pretty good levels.

And you know, our farmers have been hurt for 15 and 20 years. They've been—a lot of bad things were happening. And I talk about soybeans, where, prior to my election—if you go 5 years back, soybean prices were cut by 50 percent. So this was happening long before us. And markets are closed. Canada charges us for dairy products, 275 percent—tariffs of 275 percent—which makes it ridiculous and impossible. But we're taking care of that situation pretty easily.

But I'd like to just ask, how are the farmers doing? I'm hearing it's starting to really pick up.

Secretary of Agriculture George E. "Sonny" Perdue. The farmers are resilient, Mr. President. They are—embody the American values and spirit of entrepreneurship, risk-taking, hard work, and those American values.

[*Secretary Perdue continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

I applaud what Ambassador Lighthizer is doing, the conversations that we're having on various fronts. And we think you've got the attention and leverage of the international community regarding the abuse that American farmers have taken in many places, both tariffs and nontariff measures, in the EU and in China and many other places. And we think these will be rectified very soon.

The President. Well, the word "abuse" is a good word, because this country was abused by other countries, both friend and foe. You know, our allies, frankly, did better than many of our enemies when it came to trade. It was—terrible thing happened for many years. And we're changing that around.

In fact, what I will do is I will speak to one more, because I'd like to have Bob Lighthizer just give us a little update, quickly, on where we are with NAFTA and the various trade deals. I can say this: We're doing very well. I'm in no rush. We want to make the right deal. NAFTA has been a disaster for our country. Mexico and Canada were—if you think about making, or if you think about deficits—we had a deficit of \$135 billion a year on NAFTA.

You look at New England; you look at different places where factories are still empty, they still haven't recovered. But now companies are moving back.

So we're going either going to do a good NAFTA—a fair NAFTA for us—or we're not doing NAFTA at all.

Where are we, Bob?

United States Trade Representative Robert E. Lighthizer. Well, I would say, first of all, Mr. President, I would just underline what you say, and that is that we have an \$800 billion trade deficit, something that's not sustainable over a long period of time. And I appreciate the opportunity to go out and negotiate these deals one at a time.

In terms of NAFTA, right now we're meeting with the Mexicans, literally, as we sit here. And I'm hopeful that in the next several days we'll have a breakthrough. There's still some difficult issues to work on. Those are always hard at the end. I know you—

The President. And by the way, Bob, if we don't, that's okay. That's okay. If you don't have breakthrough, as you call it, don't do the deal, because it's a lousy situation for the United States. We have much better alternatives than that. You understand.

Ambassador Lighthizer. Yes, sir.

The President. So if you can't make the right deal, don't make it. All right?

Ambassador Lighthizer. Yes, sir.

The President. I only tell him that every day.

Ambassador Lighthizer. It is—yes, sir. I'll attest—[*laughter*—I'll attest to the fact that he tells me that every day.

The President. Like the other day. [*Laughter*]

Ambassador Lighthizer. He also tells me what the alternatives are. So—but I think in this particular case, the best alternative may be to get a good agreement.

The President. It's okay.

Ambassador Lighthizer. And I think there's a possibility of that. I'm hopeful with Mexico. And then I hope once we get one with Mexico, that Canada will come along.

[*Ambassador Lighthizer continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

Korea, as you know, that agreement is finished. And I think that's a step in the right direction. And then, we have Europe, where you started an initiative that Larry Kudlow and I are working on. And that is where—I mean, that's a major initiative, and it's something that we're in the process of putting together the kind of team we need to negotiate on tariffs, but on barriers and, hopefully, open up a lot of new opportunities for American products to be sold in Europe.

The President. And I think I can say that we're talking to China. They very much want to talk. They are just not able to give us a deal that's acceptable. So we're not going to do any deal until we get one that's fair to our country.

EU, we're doing very well. They didn't want us to put tariffs on their cars, and they therefore decided that—they were extremely happy with the deal they had. In fact, they told me: "Oh, we'd rather not negotiate. We're very, very happy with the deal we have." Well, they made \$151 billion last year; they should be happy. But I said, "But I'm not happy."

And so we were ready to do tariffs on their cars, but they came—they saw us a week ago, as you know; most of you were here. And I think we're doing well, Bob, with respect to the EU. We're negotiating something that, hopefully, will be fair to them and to us and to everybody. A big difference from what it is now. Right now it's impossible. They have barriers where we can't get anything through.

As far as Mexico and Canada—Mexico, Bob told you about—we're not negotiating with Canada right now. Their tariffs are too high. Their barriers are too strong. So we're not even talking to them right now. But we'll see how that works out. It will only work out to our favor.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:43 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to; Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Benjamin S. Carson, Sr.; Nikolas J. Cruz, suspected gunman in the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL, on February 14; Andrew C. Brunson, pastor, Dirilis (Resurrection) Church in Izmir, Turkey, who was detained by Turkish authorities on October 7, 2016; Ebru Ozkan, a 27-year-old Turkish woman arrested in June at Israel's Ben Gurion International Airport on suspicion of aiding Hamas, the Palestinian political-paramilitary organization that controls Gaza, who returned to Turkey on July 15; and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey. Secretary Wilkie referred to Director of the Office of Management and Budget John M. "Mick" Mulvaney.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Cabinet meetings.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Acosta, R. Alexander; Azar, Alex M., II; Brunson, Andrew C.; Carson, Benjamin S., Sr.; Cruz, Nikolas J.; DeVos, Elisabeth P.; Erdogan, Recep Tayyip; Franklin, Aretha; Kudlow, Lawrence A.; Lighthizer, Robert E.; Mnuchin, Steven T.; Nielsen, Kirstjen M.; Ozkan, Ebru; Perdue, George E. "Sonny"; Pompeo, Michael R.; Sessions, Jefferson B., III; Wilkie, Robert L., Jr.; Xi Jinping; Zinke, Ryan K.

Subjects: Agriculture : Domestic production, strengthening efforts; Agriculture, Department of : Secretary; Business and industry : Domestic investment, promotion efforts; Business and industry : Manufacturing industry :: Improvement; Cabinet, meetings with President; California : Wildfires, damage and recovery efforts; Canada : Trade with U.S.; China : President; China : Trade with U.S.; China : U.S. tariff structure, strengthening efforts; Commerce, international : Aluminum and steel imports, U.S. tariffs; Commerce, international : North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); Deaths : Franklin, Aretha; Defense and national security : Border security; Drug abuse and trafficking : Illegal drugs, interdiction efforts; Drug abuse and trafficking : Opioid epidemic, efforts to combat; Economy, national : Improvement; Education : School security, improvement efforts; Education, Department of :

Secretary; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Environment : Water management policy, improvement efforts; Europe : European Union :: Trade with U.S.; Florida : Shooting in Parkland; Health and Human Services, Department of : Secretary; Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Health and medical care : Individual insurance mandate, tax penalty; Health and medical care : Mental health programs and services; Health and medical care : Prescription drugs, affordability and costs; Homeland Security, Department of : Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S.; Homeland Security, Department of : Secretary; Housing and Urban Development, Department of : Secretary; Immigration and naturalization : Illegal immigration; Interior, Department of the : Secretary; Justice, Department of : Attorney General; Labor, Department of : Secretary; Law enforcement and crime : Criminal background check procedures, strengthening efforts; Law enforcement and crime : Gun control; Law enforcement and crime : Transnational criminal organizations; Natural disasters : Wildfires, prevention and response efforts; North Korea : International diplomatic efforts; State, Department of : Secretary; Texas : Shooting in Santa Fe; Trade Representative, Office of the U.S.; Treasury, Department of the : Secretary; Turkey : President; Veterans : Health and medical care; Veterans : Unemployment and underemployment; Veterans Affairs, Department of : Secretary; White House Office : Economic Council, National.

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