

Press Releases: Interview With Cynthia Fodor of KCCI

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Des Moines, Iowa
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QUESTION: Good morning, Eric. The Secretary arrived here shortly and he is with us right now. And we are so excited to have you here in Des Moines, Iowa. Mike Pompeo, thank you for joining us and –

SECRETARY POMPEO: Cynthia, it's great to be with you.

QUESTION: Of all the hot spots in the world right now – we have Syria, Iran, Venezuela, you just got back from Hanoi and dealing with the North Korea – Mr. Secretary, why are you here in Des Moines, Iowa this morning on a record cold day?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I have lots of great reasons to be here. First, I think it's important to share with the American people who is the first client of the United States Department of State, what it is we do, why we do it, how we are important to American national security, keeping Iowans safe, and I want to talk with them about that.

I'm going to get a chance to spend a lot of time with the agricultural community today. I want to talk about the State Department's role in promoting and assisting in success of people here in the heartland who are growers and farmers and ranchers. And then finally, I want a diverse workforce at the State Department, and I want to see if I can't convince a few young Iowans that being a diplomat on behalf of the United States of America is a noble calling and to come join the team.

QUESTION: Well, we certainly have a lot of Iowans who have – who are now on the national stage or have been, and Governor Branstad is one – Ambassador Branstad now is one of those, and he is back with you. And I understand you will be talking about China today. Of course, you know how important this is to Iowa agriculture and farmers, and we are hearing this morning reports that we are fairly close to a trade deal with China. How close are we, and where do those negotiations stand right now?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I can't tell you exactly how close we are, but real progress has been made for sure. Ambassador Branstad has been a great asset for the United States working in Beijing helping the Chinese understand that we have to have free, fair, reciprocal trade. Iowa farmers, Kansas farmers – the place that I'm from – have to have the opportunity to sell their products, and they can't do it in a way that presents risks that the Chinese are going to steal their intellectual property or take trade secrets from our amazing, innovative companies that do lots of hard work and invest lots of money in R&D. Ambassador Branstad has taken that message to the Chinese, and we are very hopeful that we'll get a good trade deal laid down in the days and weeks ahead.

QUESTION: Does it seem somewhat imminent? I know on Friday President Trump asked for – asked the Chinese to lift the tariffs on ag commodities. What has their response been to that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I haven't seen any formal response to them yet – from them yet, but remember, that's the mission set. When the Trump administration came in, agriculture companies all across the country, including here in Iowa, couldn't sell most of their products into these countries. There were tariffs; there were non-trade tariff barriers as well. And President Trump has taken on the task of pushing back, saying that's not fair, that's not fair to the people of Kansas, the people of Iowa, the people of Nebraska, who work so hard. They could sell their products here, but we couldn't sell our products there, and so we're trying to get that rectified, get that fixed, make it fair and reciprocal. I think we're on the cusp of doing that, and I hope all those tariffs will go away, all those barriers. And then when Iowa farmers compete on a level playing field, I know how that goes; America will be very successful.

QUESTION: Yeah, they have said all along that we want trade, not aid.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Amen.

QUESTION: Do you think the markets will fully rebound for American farmers?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I've been around ag markets a long time, and there's – I wasn't a farmer myself, but family's got a farm down in Winfield, so I know there's the cyclical pricing. Prices move. What Iowa farmers depend on, and they ought to be able to count on from America and American leaders, is that we will fight for them, we will work for them, we'll get them a fair shot at competing, and then I know they'll take it the rest of the way. They'll take risks, they'll work their tails off, and they'll get it done.

QUESTION: Now I understand this afternoon you're going to be speaking to ag leaders and hundreds of farmers at the World Food Prize voting, and you're going to be making a major policy announcement. Can you give us a preview?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I can't say much, but I've been looking forward to this now for weeks since we've got it all set. I'm going to get to not only speak there, but this morning with a bunch of young farmers from the FFA –

QUESTION: And what's your message to them?

SECRETARY POMPEO: My message to them is the Trump administration is going to make sure that their farm is there for them and for their children and grandchildren. Generational farming, family farming, is something that I know so well is important to President Trump, and we're going to take on the challenges, the challenges not only from China but other countries who treat us unfairly, and make sure that generations of farming can emanate from places like Kansas and Iowa, and we'll still be feeding the world 20, 40, 60 years from now.

QUESTION: So it's a message of optimism. And farmers tell me all the time they have to be optimistic if they're going to be a farmer. Thank you very much for joining us today.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Cynthia, thank you, ma'am.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, we hope you have a wonderful day here in Iowa.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you.

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