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Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Houston, Texas
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QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thanks for sitting down with us. Let's start with kind of the news of the day, and that is the decision to withdraw personnel from Venezuela. What can you tell us about that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So Jason, it's great to be with you, thanks for your time today. We made the decision last night that the situation in Venezuela changed, that the risk to American diplomats was too great. And so we've decided that we'll have them all return to the United States. Keeping them safe is our first priority. We also found that it was constraining some of the things that we think we're going to need to work on over the next weeks. We wanted to make sure we had the capacity to do that, so they'll be coming home the next couple or three days.

QUESTION: What's the biggest challenge in regards to Venezuela?

SECRETARY POMPEO: The devastation that Maduro has wrought on the Venezuelan people is truly horrific. They've got food and water shortages. We've seen over the past days the electrical outages that they can't get fixed. This is really horrible. The American people have been very generous, have delivered over 200 metric tons of food aid into the region, but the Maduro regime won't let it in. They won't allow food for starving people or medicine for the sick to come in and take care of their people. And it's what we, along with our partners in the region — Brazil, Colombia, all the neighbors of Venezuela — are working on to try and fix. We want a better life, we want democracy restored in Venezuela.

QUESTION: Obviously you travel the globe from country to country, crisis to crisis — North Korea, China, Venezuela, name it. As far as the Trump administration is concerned right now, what's the most concerning or biggest global issue for you personally and/or the administration?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So it's always hard to pick the top issue. We've certainly focused on North Korea, trying to convince Chairman Kim to honor the

commitment he made this past June to denuclearize. The President's focused on the border as well; that matters here in Texas. It's a national security issue, too. The long-term threat that China poses to the United States is real, and we continue to work on that each and every day. And then I'm here, I'm here in Texas this week to talk about energy and American energy security. So the things we do domestically, the fact that we're going to become the world's largest producer and exporter of crude oil, is a big deal globally. It helps us make friends around the world and take pressure off some of those countries who have been relying on energy from countries they'd frankly rather not do business with.

QUESTION: There's a new poll out this morning — Monmouth, I think — 57 percent of Americans supposedly wanting a new president in 2020. What is the Secretary of State's role on the political side? Is there one?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I'm in charge of working to be America's senior diplomat and keep Americans safe. I suppose if we do that, the American people will be more likely to be happy, but it's not what I'm focused on. What I'm focused on is making sure that each and every day, my team — that numbers in the tens of thousands that's all around the world — is doing its job to project American values, the rule of law, the intrinsic greatness of the United States of America that helps keep Americans safe. I think we're winning; I think we're making real progress there. And I'm very proud of the work that this administration has done around the world.

QUESTION: A lot of Americans may not realize all the rank and file people who are doing day in and day out jobs in your department, many other departments, no matter what political crisis or drama is going on, right?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Everyone who gets a passport is interacting with an employee of the United States Department of State. We have a big task around the world. President Trump has enabled us to do really remarkable work. I'm very proud of our team, and I'm glad to be in Texas today to talk about what it is we do, how we recruit young people to come be American diplomats, and why I want Texans to come be part of the State Department as well.

QUESTION: The new budget proposal has a big chunk of money, obviously, for the border wall. You mentioned it a little earlier. What are the chances of that happening?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Sorry, I don't do political predictions. I'm kind of out of that business. But I think there's a bipartisan consensus that there's real risk, that there's a crisis down at our border. I hope they will provide the resources, that Congress will provide the resources that Americans are demanding along that border so that we can keep Americans safe. It's not only about keeping people — and knowing who's coming in, but we need to know what contraband's passing along that border as well. I've seen this. We need to know who and what is coming across our southern border, and President Trump is firmly committed to achieving that.

QUESTION: CERAWeek, a lot of people realize it's a big energy conference. What is the main message you're going to deliver today?

SECRETARY POMPEO: The greatness of America and the importance of American energy to America's national security, how it is the case that if we get it right at home, if we keep winning in the energy world here at home, that folks that live in San Antonio or Houston or Longview – I know Texas well – that the people of Texas will be safer and more secure, and that we'll do a good turn for the rest of the world as well.

QUESTION: That it? Thank you, sir.

SECRETARY POMPEO: All right, Jason, thank you very much. It's great to be with you.

QUESTION: Pleasure to meet you.