

Press Releases: Interview With Laura Rice of Texas Standard

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Via Teleconference
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QUESTION: U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo joins us now. Secretary Pompeo, thank you for your time.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, Laura. It's great to be with you.

QUESTION: The U.S. has recently become the world's largest oil producer and new reports say it could soon be the largest oil exporter. I understand your address today will focus on how this strengthens our national security. How is that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I wanted to come to Texas today to talk about that very fact. This is a game-changer for American national security. As America's most senior diplomat, I travel the world, and boy, there's not a country I go to where energy isn't at the top of their list, and what this does – what all of this success here in American domestic energy production does for me and for Americans, to keep them safe – is it permits us to share with those countries our wealth, our resources, to cut deals that support their energy security in places as far off as Vietnam and the Philippines and Europe.

And it permits them too to wean themselves from energy that they're taking from adversaries, countries that want to do their country harm. This is a big deal for American national security. It gives us lots of power throughout the world, and our capacity has increased during the Trump administration. We intend to – intend to continue to do that, not only to create wealth for and jobs here in the United States, but to enhance America's national security posture around the world as well.

QUESTION: The big news today again is Venezuela. One statistic you mentioned in a press conference yesterday is that Venezuela's oil production is down by half since Nicolas Maduro took power. You accuse Cuba's involvement as being about oil. Is oil also at the center of U.S. interest in Venezuela?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Only in the sense that we want the Venezuelan people to

have access to their own wealth and not the corruption – the corruption that has followed the Maduro regime, this oil wealth being stripped away by the kleptocrats of the Maduro regime, taken for their personal benefit and not shared with the Venezuelan people. The Cubans have done the same. This isn't what the Venezuelan people deserve, it's not what they want, and America's efforts to restore democracy and the rule of law, and to help feed and have medicine for the Venezuelan people – that's the purpose of our efforts in Venezuela. And when we get this right, when Maduro is gone and there's fair and free elections and democracy is restored, the oil wealth of Venezuela will be returned to its people.

QUESTION: Along with Cuba, you point to Russia as helping to support Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro. You just announced you're withdrawing all diplomatic staff in Venezuela. In a tweet, you said, "The presence of U.S. diplomatic staff at the embassy has become a constraint on U.S. policy." How do you mean?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We decided yesterday that it was important that we keep American diplomats safe, and so we made the decision that we would withdraw the remaining personnel there in Caracas and bring them back to the United States. So we'll do that over the days ahead. Anytime you're dealing with a situation that is deteriorating as fast that it is – as it is in Venezuela today, decisions you make are always encumbered by the fact that you know there's real risk to your own people, people that you've sent into harm's way. We wanted to get them back, we wanted to get them out of the country so that we could move forward in a way that provided that opportunity.

We have 200 metric tons of food sitting in the region, trying to deliver into Venezuela to feed the hungry and to provide medicine for the sick. We want to make sure that as we continue to work in the region alongside of our partners, we don't have any constraints on action that we might need to take in order to achieve that.

QUESTION: That food that is waiting to support Venezuelan people, I assume part of the State Department budget goes out to pay for programs and food like that. What do you do with the Trump administration's new budget proposal, which includes \$13 billion in proposed cuts? Does that mean that support like this for places like Venezuela is lessened?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh, in fact just the opposite. Contained in the President's budget request is up to \$500 million, an enormous amount of resources that the Trump budget is proposing to provide to assist the Venezuelan people when the time is right. This budget will serve America well, America's national security interests, because we're prepared to help the Venezuelan people with real resources. The American taxpayers have been most generous, and President Trump has led that charge.

QUESTION: So as Trump's budget decreases the spending for the State Department and also includes more military spending, should Americans be worried about policy shifting from diplomacy to boots on the ground?

SECRETARY POMPEO: You can take a look at the first two years of the Trump

administration to see the effectiveness of our foreign policy. Our capacity to deliver really solid, really sound diplomatic outcomes – to build coalitions in a way that, frankly, the previous administration just chose not to do – a global coalition to put sanctions on North Korea, to hopefully get them to denuclearize. The world has come together – 50-plus nations – to recognize that Maduro’s time had come. A big, global coalition to take down the caliphate – over 80 countries in the Defeat-ISIS Coalition. We have worked diplomatic – incredibly successfully in the President’s first two years, and I’m very confident that we’ll have the resources, and I know we have the talent to deliver good outcomes for the American people in the days and weeks and months ahead as well.

QUESTION: You mentioned North Korea. The proposed cuts to the State Department come soon after a second summit between President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, where no agreement was made. Where do we stand now in that situation?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I’ve personally been working on this alongside the President for my entire time as the Secretary of State, and in fact even just a bit before. In Singapore, in June of last year, Chairman Kim made a historic commitment to denuclearize his country, and in exchange the United States and President Trump made a commitment to provide peace and security and stability on the Korean Peninsula and a brighter future for the North Korean people. Our Japanese partners, our South Korean partners are working alongside us to achieve each of those goals from Singapore.

We didn’t make as much progress as we would have hoped in Hanoi, but the conversations continue. And meanwhile, there are not missile tests being conducted, there aren’t nuclear tests being conducted. We’ve made progress. Obviously more needs to be done. This has been a problem of a long standing, and we continue to march down the path, hopefully leading to a place where the threat of nuclear weapons from North Korea will be enormously diminished.

QUESTION: U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Houston today for the energy conference known as CERAWEEK. Secretary Pompeo, thanks again for your time.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, Laura. You have a great day.

QUESTION: You too.

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