

Press Releases: Interview With Scott Thuman of Sinclair Broadcast Group

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

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QUESTION: Secretary, thank you for the time.

SECRETARY POMPEO: You betcha. Good morning.

QUESTION: Let's start with what the President just said on this. He said: I've asked China to immediately remove all tariffs on our agricultural products. This is very important to me and our great farmers. How critical is it that this end?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So the agricultural community is incredibly important to America and incredibly important to American national security. Every country I travel to I talk to them about how we can sell more American goods there, how we can export our crops, our food products. They're the safest in the world. They're the highest quality in the world. And so when the President talks about getting rid of tariffs and getting rid of barriers, it is certainly deeply in line with what we're trying to do from a national security perspective. A growing farm economy in the United States benefits American national security as well.

QUESTION: We're seeing Chapter 12 bankruptcies as high as we've seen in more than a decade – in the circuit that oversees your state Kansas, some 59 percent over the last 10 years. What's your message to the farmers who are feeling this crunch because of this fight between the administration and China?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, that's not the reason. Remember there's a long history of China not treating our farmers well – frankly, many countries in the world, Europe, too, who put in place barriers that made no sense, right? They used food safety as an excuse not to take our products to protect their own domestic agriculture industry. The State Department, for frankly the first time in a long time, has taken a serious effort at cracking these markets open, and sometimes it's tough. Sometimes you got to go break a little glass to get to the right outcome, and that's what President Trump

intends to do. We're going to reduce these barriers. We're going to let our farmers compete all across the world. And when these competitions take place against the backdrop of free markets and technology and quality, the things that American farmers do really well, I'm very confident that the future for American farmers will be great, but we've got – we've got to go through this. We have to get access to these markets for our – for our farmers.

QUESTION: Well, I know there are many factors involved, but I'm sure you have to hear it from farmers. They say they feel they're caught in the middle between the U.S. and China and that they're suffering as a result.

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's not a conflict with China. We want China to succeed too, but this has to be fair. You hear – you hear discussions about intellectual property and forced technology transfer, the Chinese are stealing our stuff, and often people think of that in the high-tech world, things that would affect Silicon Valley or maybe New York, but the truth is they're stealing our farm tech too. They're stealing our high-end technology the farmers are using. I'm from Kansas. I know that people think of farmers sometimes, they think of a simple production farm. These are scientists. These are engineers. These are technologists delivering this high-yield product, safe and affordable and high quality, and we can't let the Chinese steal that. If they do, these farmers who care so much about the next generation and the generation after that on their family farm – there's a farm in my family that's a century farm, over 100 years old, in Winfield, Kansas. We have to protect this industry for decades to come, and the Trump administration is determined to achieve that.

QUESTION: Will the President walk away from a China deal if it's not a perfect deal?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes. You saw us this past weekend in Hanoi. The President's determined to make sure that he protects his first client, his first obligation to the American people – in this case, the American farmer. This has to work for America. If it doesn't work, we'll keep banging away at it. We're going to get to the right outcome. I'm confident that we will. And I've been around these trade talks with China, things are looking good. I think things are in a good place, but it's got to be right, and we may have to make sure it truly provides a lasting benefit to American farmers.

QUESTION: Some have said that the relationship is near rock bottom with China. Is that fair?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't think it's fair. It is the case that for the first time in a long time you have an administration that's standing up for America, that's not letting China walk in and take our stuff, not letting China walk in and put technology in place that will steal the privacy of American citizens. We are serious at protecting the American people, and sometimes that creates tension. And I think the Chinese have seen that, I think they actually respect it, and I think that's what you see in the trade negotiations, a newfound respect for America standing up for itself.

(Break.)

QUESTION: Regarding the State Department Foreign Service, I know you're also on a bit of a recruiting mission right now to some degree. We've seen applications at the lowest levels since 2008. Why is this happening? Some people believe it may be a morale issue, it may be apprehension about this administration. Why are you seeing these low levels?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I think they're coming back. I think the applications are going to start coming back in droves. We've – we've really reenergized the place, and I'm excited about that. And I want to go tell this story – I'm going to head to Iowa. I want to tell this story in places other than in the salons of Washington and in New York and on the West Coast. We need a diverse workforce, so we need people that – from Drake and from the University of Northern Iowa and from Kansas University, places that don't often consider careers as professional Foreign Service officers. We want them to be part of the team. Representing America requires a diverse set of people working on behalf of America, and I hope to go out and open up some eyes about what a great life it is to be a diplomat for the United States of America. I think we'll be fine, and I think we'll have the workforce that America so richly deserves.

QUESTION: Secretary Pompeo, thank you very much.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much.

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