Press Releases: Remarks to the Future Farmers of America

Remarks
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Secretary of State

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SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, good afternoon, everyone.

AUDIENCE: Good afternoon.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Are you ready to have some fun?

AUDIENCE: Yes.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I have a rule, no boring speeches, so you let me know if I get it or if I don't, all right?

Chase, Grace, thank you so much for those great introductions. I get a chance to give three other sets of remarks today while I'm here in Iowa, but I have been looking forward to this one the entire time. So tell your parents this was the one I was really looking forward to. (Laughter.)

Some of you may not have heard of me before, frankly may not know much about what the State Department does. And I want to spend a little bit of time talking about that. I'm America's most senior diplomat. I spend my days talking to foreign leaders around the world to make sure they know what America stands for, the things that we are looking for, and how they can partner alongside of us.

I also get the job every day of talking with President Trump and doing my best to provide him with my wisdom, my advice, the advice from my team. You see your former governor, Ambassador Branstad, here with us today. (Applause.) He serves in America's embassy, one of 190 around the world. He serves in our embassy in Beijing representing us in China, telling our American story.

I spend a lot of time on airplanes. I flew out here last night. Most of the time you would see me, if you saw me on TV, I'm traveling to a foreign

country. I know Iowa is not a foreign country – (laughter) – in case some of you thought maybe I was a little confused. But I want to talk to you about why I'm here, why I'm at this beautiful, gorgeous high school today talking to young people from around Iowa, FFA members.

First, I know I have a lot of friends in FFA. I represented south central Kansas, Wichita and 17 counties around there, a pretty rural place. My family had a farm in a little place called Winfield. My uncle was – it was my Uncle Jim's farm. I spent a lot of summers there. I know it very well. I know how hard that work is. I know how glorious it is. I know that there's good years and bad years. But I also know that these are places that have the value set that represents the best of America, that values family, that keeps their faith and works really, really hard. And so I wanted to come out and get a chance to talk with you, and I'll talk about why in just a little bit, very selfish.

I just came back from Vietnam, from Hanoi, and I also traveled to the Philippines, to Manila, on that trip. Did anybody watch the President in Hanoi working to try and get the nuclear weapons out of North Korea? Did you all see on TV? We made some progress. We didn't get to where we had hoped to be, and I think there's a lesson in that. I think there's a lot more work to do there. But the threat, the threat that's posed to the United States, to the next generation of Americans from North Korea's nuclear weapons is a serious threat, and my ambition as America's top diplomat is to try and convince them that they don't need their nuclear weapons, that they ought to change strategic course, they ought to begin to give up those weapons systems in a way that will allow the North Korean people to flourish and would reduce the risk here in America.

Last month I was in the Middle East, actually next week I'll travel back out. I'll travel to Beirut, Lebanon and to Israel and then to Kuwait.

You see all of this. This is American diplomacy at work. When I go, all the people from the embassy will have already begun to do the work to convince these countries to work alongside America.

But what some of you may not know is that we also work really hard supporting communities just like yours. In fact, it's you. It's America, American citizens, that are the first client of the United States Department of State. We work hard to support American agriculture as well. We have diplomats in every corner of the world who are working to make sure that markets – so that you all can sell pork and beef, and Kansas can sell their wheat, and corn from Iowa, soybeans from here, and manufacturing, all the things that America makes so wonderfully – that we have access to those markets.

We are very focused on making sure that the opportunity for you all when you leave here and after you're finished with school – the opportunity for you to be successful in the way that you choose is out there and that America is well represented.

I want to also talk a little bit about the State Department. And how many of you have ever considered working for the State Department? A few of you.

That's good. That's why I'm here. I want every hand to go up by the time I'm done. We have an amazing workforce. Foreign Service officers – they speak languages, they travel the world, they represent the best of America telling the American story.

And if you haven't taken a look, go to state.gov, check it out. You can study anything you want when you go on to school, when you go on to college. You can study language. You can study science. We have engineers. We have agricultural specialists. We have political officers who have studied international relations. It's a broad range of skill sets that we bring to bear wherever it is that we travel and wherever America has an embassy.

We do this for a reason. American success around the world, our vision of freedom and the respect for every human being, and the capacity for Americans to continue to live their lives the way we want to, depends on our effective diplomacy.

I'm sure some of you have considered entering the military, a noble profession. I was a soldier once a few years back myself. If America's State Department does its job well, then fewer of our young men and women will have to travel into harm's way.

I hope many of you will consider it. We have patriotic, smart leaders who are very mission-driven who come and work for us. And then you'll see – I've got a team around here. If you like – if you like firearms, we've got a big security team. (Laughter.) Being someone who grew up in a place where I loved the right that Americans have under the Second Amendment, we have a great team that keeps all of us safe as we travel the world.

Lastly, I'm going to open it up and take questions. You should know I'll answer almost any question. I used to say any, but now I say almost any question. I've grown wiser as I've gotten older. So there's the infomercial for the State Department. There's a little bit about what we do. Who's got some questions? Who's got something they'd like to ask me?

QUESTION: Hi, I'm Caitlyn Winkler and I'm a JHS student. Teddy Roosevelt was a staunch conservationist, a champion of the environment, and also a Republican. In contrast, our current administration's stance on climate change is oppositional to the general scientific consensus. Why do you feel the modern Republican Party has given up its historical commitment to the environment?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you. Thanks for the question. I don't think we remotely have. I was a congressman some time ago. I now serve in a Republican administration. We have a deep commitment to the environment. Whether you talk to the Secretary of Interior or the Secretary of Homeland Security or me as America's diplomat, we're working all across the world on important environmental issues. I was in Iceland, now three weeks ago, talking about how we can have Iceland succeed while still protecting whales and the environment on the coast of Iceland.

When I travel to countries around the world who have much less advanced

systems to keep our air and water safe, we work on how America might provide technology and assistance, sometimes in the form of grants, sometimes in the form of people to come teach them how they can do their mission and get the energy that they need while putting less carbon into the air, operate their commercial systems in ways that don't pollute waterways. Our administration is deeply committed to that.

But I want to address your point, too. The President did make the decision to pull of the Paris climate agreement, that's absolutely true. I was not directly involved in that decision, but I think it was the right one, too. One of the things I think we all need to remember is it's one thing to write your name on a piece of paper, it's another thing to actually make a difference. And the Paris Agreement itself was going to cost you all, people here in Iowa, an awful lot of money, and, in our judgment, not do hardly any good for the environment. If you take a look at the biggest polluters in the world – and they're part of the Paris climate agreement, but have done almost nothing to actually reduce their greenhouse blueprint – what you need to see are real actions. America has done that. We have it with our fuel standards, we have it with all kinds of different tools we use. Growing economies get better and better over time at reducing their environmental harm, right. We have cleaner water waste today in the United States than we've had in an awfully long time.

I grew up in Los Angeles in a time that you all wouldn't remember. We couldn't go outside because there were smog alerts a number of times a week. We've really done a good job here in America over the past years, and that comes with successful economies. If you look at the economies that pollute the least on a per-person basis, it's almost always those countries that have enough material wealth to actually perform their economic activity in a way that's less harmful to the environment. It's very important. It's an important part of my job as a Secretary of State. It's important for our government to get this right. And I think the Republican Party and the Democratic Party both take this very, very seriously.

Did that answer your question at least – (Applause.)

QUESTION: My name is Emma Hay, and I'm from the Southeast Polk FFA chapter. In 10 days, a group of our students from our chapter will be going on an international learning opportunity to China. What advice do you have for us in learning about international agriculture on our trip, and what ways do you see agriculture playing a role on international relations?

SECRETARY POMPEO: That sounds like a lot of fun. Good luck to you. Safe travels. I hope you all have a fantastic trip.

Boy, where to begin? So when I travel and meet with foreign leaders, there's often talks about security issues and weapons systems and all the things that we think of as traditional security issues. I don't know that I've traveled through very many countries during my time as Secretary of State and haven't talked about food and agriculture. It's an – and energy that's related to that production of that food and agriculture product.

I think when you go to China, and I think the ambassador would share my view, you'll get a chance to see a country that has hundreds of millions of consumers, and people who are going to move up the income curve over the next 5, 10, 25 years. So a huge opportunity for American companies to sell their products. And you all know this. We have the most innovative, committed, high-tech food production industry anywhere in the world. It's truly unrivaled. Our agrobusinesses, our farmers, our ranchers are truly scientists working on the cutting edge of high-yield, low-resource-demand crops.

Ask these hard questions of the folks – of the people in China. If you go look at Chinese agriculture, it is very different. It is not as advanced as we are. You ought to ask them about that. You should ask them why it's the case that we can't sell our products there, and why it is that they've made the decision to not allow U.S. products to be sold there without enormous barriers, taxes and tariffs that they put on the products. I think you'll have a lively discussion. You'll find an amazing people there in China who want to develop and move further along their production lines as well. I think you'll have a fantastic trip. It is a central component of what the State Department does, is to both ensure that American companies, food companies, agriculture producers have opportunity to sell their products, but also to help these countries grow their own domestic capabilities so that between those two they can feed all of their people.

The food insecurity in pockets around the world is of staggering proportions, and something the State Department works very hard to reduce every place that we work. Thanks for your question. (Applause.)

QUESTION: Hi. My name's Cory Tracy. I'm from JHS. About one month ago, the United States filed a lawsuit against Chinese tech giant Huawei, including, among other things, the theft of technology. With the corporation now firing back at the government with its own lawsuit, what will the government and the State Department be doing about theft of technology, and patent theft, and foreign powers such as China that may not respect U.S. or international patent laws?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So for an awfully long time, a number of countries – China perhaps the foremost amongst them – has stolen our intellectual property, amounting to hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars of your money, your parents' money, our nation's money that had been invested in technology and innovation. We'd obtained patents or had proprietary product, and the Chinese just flat-out stole it. So did other countries. That's just not right. It's not fair. It's one of the things President Trump has taken on very, very seriously, trying to find a mechanism to convince the Chinese and other countries as well to enforce these basic property rights. It's certainly part of what the State Department does. We talk to countries all the time about this. We impose costs on them in terms of – we make decisions about foreign aid based on how well they enforce U.S. rights.

You talk about Huawei. That's a piece of it, it's the high profile, it's in the news these days. Huawei has at least two things that threaten the United States. One is that they – there's a risk that they'll steal American technology, and frankly, use those systems to invade your privacy. That is,

they do telecommunications equipment that provide backbone services for networks, handsets all throughout the IT infrastructure and soon will be moving across the entire world with their new 5G rollout of their equipment.

But second, Huawei also presents a more traditional national security threat. It's very different from in America. If you're working with AT&T or a U.S. telecom provider, a Microsoft or an IBM who's providing IT services or products, it's a private company doing its own thing, trying to make money, trying to grow its business. Huawei is owned by the state of China and has deep connections to their intelligence service. That should send off flares for everybody who understands what the Chinese military and Chinese intelligence services do. We have to take that threat seriously.

I've traveled the world now. I brought it up in Manila. I brought it up in Warsaw. Every place that I go, countries that are considering putting Huawei technology into their government infrastructure, acknowledging that those countries have every right to make their own decision about how to proceed but making sure they understand the risks of putting that technology inside of their government's IT structure. There's a real risk, though, that the Chinese will use this for purposes that aren't commercial, that aren't for private gain, but rather for the state's benefit. And it's a risk I think these countries ought to very, very carefully consider before they move forward. (Applause.)

All right. We've got a bunch of questions. I'll try and talk less. Here we go.

QUESTION: Hi, my name is Neil Longblade. I attend JHS. My question is: What is your plan to help Iowa farmers with the Beijing retaliation tariffs?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, well, it's the President's plan, not mine.

QUESTION: Yeah.

SECRETARY POMPEO: (Laughter.) But I'm certainly part of it. Look, these are hard fights, but it's not fair. I ran a small business in Kansas for a decade-plus. When I wanted to invest in a company in China, I frankly couldn't. If they wanted to invest in my company in Wichita, Kansas, they could have. That's not right the same way these tariffs aren't fair, right? If we – if they're selling something here to the United States, to consumers something that you won't purchase and we don't charge them any tariff, probably the way it should be. When we try to sell a product to a consumer in China, there shouldn't be a tariff either. To get rid of those is not easy. China had a true protectionist bent for a very long time.

In previous administrations – this isn't political, it spans Democratic and Republican both – they just didn't want to take it on because it's a hard fight, and there's challenges when you engage in that, right? Other countries respond. They respond by increasing their tariffs or by taking some other action against the United States of America.

But the President concluded, I think rightly so, that it's time, that we need

to be serious about that, that we ought to do this in a professional way, engage in deep communications and negotiations with the Chinese about this so that we can get to a place where Americans can sell their goods on a fair, simple, reciprocal ideal that says if you have no tariffs, no barriers, we'll have none either, we'll all go compete. But I'm convinced – you should know I'm convinced if – I am convinced that if Americans get a chance to compete on a level playing field, we'll crush it every time. Thanks. (Applause.)

QUESTION: My name is Grace Long and I'm from the Ballard High School in Huxley. What are the obstacles to the USMCA, essentially the NAFTA reboot, getting approved here in the U.S.? And are there any obstacles in Mexico with the new administration there?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. So the – I think the USMCA is going to make it. So you can write this down: The Secretary of State made a prediction today. I could be wrong, but I don't see that many obstacles. I've worked closely with the new Mexican Government. My counterpart is a fellow named Marcelo Ebrard, the foreign minister of Mexico. I think they're going to push through and follow through on what the Pena Nieto government had done. They think it makes sense for Mexico as well. Inside the United States, we've still got to get this through our Congress, so tell your congressman they should support it if you think that they should. I think both parties – I don't think this'll become a political struggle. I remain very optimistic that there's a large consensus that this makes sense for American workers and we'll get it passed. I hope I'm right.

QUESTION: Hello. My name is Osef Ajeba and I'm a student at Johnston High School. So the U.S. prides itself on being a leader for other countries. We provide useful humanitarian aid to destabilized countries and often military technology to ensure the safety of our allies, yet last year, the U.S. announced its withdrawal from the UN Human Rights Council. As a moral authority, how does the U.S. still maintain its part in supporting human rights globally without being on this council?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, so it's a fantastic question, too. This kind of gets to the same question about the Paris climate agreement. Being part of something called a human rights council doesn't necessarily mean that you're doing everything you can for human rights. If you look at the other members of the Human Rights Council, none of you – not a single person in this room – would believe that those countries actually all cared about human rights. You have countries like Iran, you have countries that are deeply engaged in flawed – of the worst kind of human rights condition sitting on the Human Rights Council. And then you stare at the actions of the Human Rights Council. They spend 60 percent of their time passing resolutions about a single country, Israel. Surely Israel isn't 60 percent of the human rights problem in the world.

And so the United States made a decision. We said we no longer can participate in this organization that is not truly focused on human rights in the same way I think every American values human rights. As Ambassador Haley said when she and I announced this decision, when the Human Rights Council comes back to being actually about human rights, we are happy to rejoin it.

But in the meantime – in the meantime, the United States stands at the forefront of working for human rights all around the world. I was in the Philippines, talking about human rights in the Philippines. When I travel to the Middle East, I make sure and let every country – and these are friendly countries, but we let them know if we don't think they're making the standard, we tell them. We say this is the way we think about it, this is how we think you ought to. And we often make decisions about how we interact with countries based on their human rights activity.

Indeed, next week I will issue a report called the Annual Human Rights Report from the United States Department of State. It's a really long treatise. If you're interested in human rights, you ought to read it. It is a fascinating annual account of the human rights status of nearly every country in the world. And we call them out, friend and foe alike. We talk about where they're getting it right, we talk about where they've improved, we talk about countries that have gone backwards, and it is a factual assessment of what we observe in the world in terms of human rights and forms the basis for what a lot of human rights organizations – nongovernmental organizations – do around the world.

Having spent a lot of time with President Trump, it is at the center of how we think about how we interact in the world. We make it a priority. We don't always get it right either. We're humble enough to acknowledge that too, but it's a real focus for me and my team at the State Department. (Applause.)

QUESTION: My name's Amanda MacIntosh with the Bondurant-Farrar FFA chapter. The first line of the FFA creed states, "I believe in the future of agriculture." In your opinion, what does the future of agriculture look like in terms of international agriculture, and what career should we preparing ourselves for us to keep up with that future?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Good question. I answered this a little bit already. So in Winfield, Kansas, there's a sign that says it's a – know what a century farm is? So there's a – it's a family farm, my – Jim – my uncle's, a hundred years in the family. And if you watch the history of that farm, I think it answers your question. If you look at how they farmed 60 years ago or 80 years ago, it is radically different than what they do today. The food is safer, for sure. It causes less damage to the environment than it did, and the crop yields are orders of magnitude larger than they were 20, 40, 60 years ago.

Why is that? I think there's three reasons. One, my Uncle Jim worked his tail off, just like everybody who works in the industry does. Second, he was operating in a place where there's innovation and creativity, and where profit can drive people to make good decisions for themselves and in turn for the products that they produce. And finally, he was blessed to be working in the United States of America, a place with infinite capacity for the next generation to reinvent itself and continue to grow.

I watch when I go to these farms – these are high-tech places. I mean, you look at combines, you look at planting cycles, you look at decisions about which fertilizer to use and which seed to use, you will notice better than I do this is science at its finest. People think when they think of tech – if

you went to Washington, D.C. and talked to somebody about high tech, they'd think of Silicon Valley, you'd think of the Boston Corridor. I think of Winfield, Kansas. I see the technology that goes into successful, profitable agribusinesses.

So if I were to give you some wisdom, I'd say study hard, work hard, make sure that you and those around you are developing that technology in a way that's going to serve your particular piece of the agriculture community well. And when you do that, State Department will be out making sure you've got a place to sell your products around the world, and together, we'll give you the real opportunity to knock it out of the park.

QUESTION: Hi, my name is Maddie Stout, and I'm with Des Moines Central Campus and the Des Moines FFA. How do you try to find a common ground, negotiate on behalf of the United States?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So the question's how do I find a – try to find a common ground? I don't. I want to win every argument. (Laughter.) That's actually true. So if you take a look at the most complex problems – what's a good example? The debate to try to figure out how to get Middle East peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians, or in the news recently, the longstanding battle in Kashmir between the Indians and the Pakistanis. The work that we do as diplomats is to try and find places where there's common ground. There are places where there's – you all do this too in your everyday life. There's clearly things that are different. In some cases, you see value sets that are different. In some cases, there's territorial disputes. In some case, the arguments arise out of faith. Sometimes they're fighting over resources, right, not just land, but wealth, whether that's oil underground or natural gas or water, whatever it may be.

So those are what drive the conflict and the fight. Our effort is to figure out the places where there's real overlap, and then it is to convince those – sometimes we're in the middle of it, sometimes we're just trying to help bring resolution to a problem or to reduce violence in a particular conflict – it's to make the case that nobody's going to get everything. This is – was my joke at the beginning – in that indeed each party's going to have to accept something less than perfection, something that frankly they think they deserve and just not going to end up with, but convince them that over some extended period of time, that the outcome that everyone's looking for – if they can find a way to work together to achieve it – will deliver better outcomes for each of them. May not be perfection, but it will be better.

It's interesting, I was in the car on the way over here and saw a quick note. I have a team on the ground right now trying to negotiate with the Taliban terrorists in Afghanistan, trying to find a way to achieve an Afghanistan that's not at war, that's not engaged in violence, that doesn't present a threat to the United States of America, that will respect fundamental basic rights for every Afghan citizen – women, children – across the full spectrum. That is a complicated problem, and if you add in the regional players – Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, China, Russia, all who have an interest in Afghanistan – it's an incredibly complicated negotiation.

But Ambassador Khalilzad, the leader of our effort, is there today on the ground trying to do exactly what I just described, to find pockets where there's sufficient agreement that everyone can begin to move forward, take all the various complex pieces and bring them together to hopefully get an agreement. And what's important to keep in mind – and I've talked to you about this twice already, but I think it's really important – not just a piece of paper – that there'll be a big ceremony or a ribbon cutting or we'll announce victory that falls apart, but one – but an agreement that's based on fundamental understandings about different interests and incentives that the parties have so that this agreement will hold and it will stay.

In this case, if we could do this, if we could pull off a resolution in Afghanistan, boy, the good that we could do for the world. I hope Ambassador Khalilzad makes progress. I'm hoping he makes enough progress I can travel there in a couple weeks and help move it along a little bit myself. So I appreciate that question. It's at the center of what we do, and if any of you think that sounds fun to you, come join the team. We need good negotiators, people who are willing to help others find good, positive outcomes, who can compromise. Thanks. (Applause.)

QUESTION: Hi. My name is Logan Mayhan. I go to Johnston High School. This is more of a state of politics question, but the midterm election excitement and now having the most women in Congress ever, do you think there's room for a young conservative women movement not only in Washington but nationally, and how would we go about educating that younger generation of women?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes. Do I think there's room? Absolutely. Come on. Boy, how do you go about educating – I'll give you my experience from my time. I was running a small business in Wichita, Kansas, and was watching the political scene, and I didn't like what was happening. And I just decided I was going to go for it. I did what you do when you start a small business. I did what you do all along the way, right? You go find three friends that are willing to help you, and you ask those three friends to find three friends that are willing to help them, and you build out an organization. You build out a team. You do that all the while holding on to your values, whatever those values may be. You described it as conservative women. Wherever it is you are on the political spectrum, politics matters. To get it right – our founders talked about this. They talked about the Federalist Papers, and we've read little pieces of the Federalist Papers in high school.

They talked about the fundamental freedoms that we have here, and it takes Americans who are willing to go engage, willing to participate in the political process, sometimes at great risk to themselves, but to do so in a way that is in the best and the finest traditions of our freedom and our liberty here.

So if it's something you have an interest in, my wisdom to folks who are thinking about entering politics is really straightforward. The first thing you do is don't enter politics. First, go out and make sure you get a really good education. Make sure you're ready, that you understand what it is you want to do.

Second, I always think coming at it from a set of experiences where you might have been in business and had a chance to take risk with your own money is very valuable for political leaders from wherever they sit in the political spectrum.

And then, when you've done those two things (inaudible) come after. There's lots of room for people all across the political spectrum. It was an exciting election two years ago, and you and I would know this better than just about anybody. I'm sure 2020 will be all of that as well. (Applause.)

QUESTION: Hi. I'm Earlsha Nussbaum. I go to Johnston High School. And I was just wondering, how do you justify sending weapons to Saudi Arabia when you know the effect on Yemeni citizens who are being harmed by the bombing of Yemen?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So a complicated question. The reason we sell weapons to Saudi Arabia is very straightforward: They're an important strategic partner of the United States of America. That helps keep everyone in this room safe and secure. That strategic relationship is absolutely vital to the United States of America.

As for Yemen, it's a complicated place. The Iranians have provided weapon systems to the Houthis there, where they have now built missiles that are landing in Saudi Arabia. No, no, no, America wouldn't tolerate this for a second. If the Iranians had provided missiles to a group that was launching weapon systems into Des Moines, I am confident you would demand that your government stand up and push back against that, in the same way the Saudi Government is pushing back against that.

And so it's pretty straightforward. I've been involved with the UN and Martin Griffiths, who's the – he's the special envoy charged with the negotiations that the UN is running there in Yemen to try and take down the civil war. There's an agreement that was put in place in Stockholm now 90 days ago, I guess. It's mostly holding at this point. The United States has been fully supportive of that along with Britain to take down the violence so that they can resolve the conflicts, the civil war in Yemen.

And you should know too, your parents and some of you – how many of you work? How many of you have a job? So you've paid taxes. You all have used – we have used your taxpayer money to provide more humanitarian assistance in Yemen than any other country – America – in the world, save for Saudi Arabia, who has also provided money. There's a real risk of starvation in Yemen today, and there's a real humanitarian crisis there, in addition to the conflict, in addition to the war. And the Emiratis, the Saudis, the British, and us – and the Americans – have provided a substantial amount of resources to try to make sure that those people have the medical care that they need and the foodstuffs that they need as well. (Applause.)

QUESTION: I'm Joseph Jordan with the Ballard FFA chapter. So you've explained to us that you advocate for the U.S. abroad, outside of our boarders, but also within our boarders. So how would you go around to help bridge the gap between conventional agriculture and nonconventional agriculture? How can we

find a common ground between the two?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Tell me what you mean by that. When you talk about the conflict between the two, tell me what you mean.

QUESTION: There's markets where some people are, yes, let's go conventional agriculture, let's use our technologies, our pesticides, and all of that. Or – and there's also a big battle that we shouldn't use any of this, GMOs are not good for the community, they cause health restrictions and – or health problems. And there's arguments across the sides, and how would you go about it, or how, if you were put in that position, how would you go about to bridge the gap?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. So the good news is that's – I've got lots of problems in the world today. That's not one of mine that's on my agenda most days. (Laughter.) But let me give you a framework for how I think one ought to approach a problem like that.

We should make sure that we have rules. We should make sure that we have facts – real facts about risk, health risks, risk to the environment, all the things that you all know so well. And then we should let a thousand flowers bloom. We should let these companies go and compete. But we shouldn't let people tell smears about different things. We shouldn't let people put false information into the marketplace when real data, real facts, are out there. Some farmers will choose to farm one way. You see this within conventional and nonconventional. Others will choose another.

This is a great thing about America. Different people will make different decisions and their business will succeed or fail based on their own ingenuity, creativity, and willingness to work their tail off. And so I'm not sure the government ought to have any role of getting in the middle of that. Instead, I think we ought to make sure that everybody gets access to markets, everybody gets opportunity, that we're dealing with the same information, and then consumers will choose, right? Consumers will ultimately make decisions about the food that they want to eat. They should do so based on sound science and good information. When they do, game on, let everyone compete. (Applause.)

QUESTION: My name is Ashley McGovern and I go to Johnston High School. On April 12th, 2018, in the nomination hearing to become the Secretary of State, you stated that you believe climate change is likely human-caused. If that is true, then why do you oppose regulations of greenhouse gas emissions that attempt to reverse or slow the damage we have done and prevent environmental degradation that future generations such as the students gathered here will have to face?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I remember that quote well. I still believe it. I think that's right. When you impose a regulation, you are by necessity imposing a cost, right? My view has always been if the costs exceed the benefit, one ought not do that. And so I opposed a number of regulations that I thought had enormous cost and almost no benefit, and I think that made sense. That was usually from my time in Congress. I spend less time on that

now.

But this administration's been very clear we're happy to work on all things that improve safe drinking water, clean air, all of those things. It just doesn't make any sense to put rules in place that don't actually achieve those outcomes. If the rule simply makes us feel good, right, or simply we get to make a political statement that says I'm for the environment but we impose an enormous cost on you all, that wouldn't be right. That's my view as well. (Applause.)

MODERATOR: Secretary Pompeo, as you can see, so many of them came with very thoughtful questions.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes.

MODERATOR: And we appreciate you taking the time to listen. To keep you on schedule, we have time for one more question –

SECRETARY POMPEO: All right.

MODERATOR: – and then at the conclusion of that question, we understand that you'd like an opportunity to mingle with the students on the stage.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I will, would be great.

MODERATOR: We also have a photographer up in the balcony, so we're going to get a large group shot.

SECRETARY POMPEO: That's excellent. That would be great.

MODERATOR: So let's do that final question for the Secretary.

QUESTION: Hi. My name is Renee Piekema. I'm with the Waukee FFA chapter. I was part of the Iowa-Kosovo exchange last November. And I was wondering how the Department of State is encouraging students to go abroad to exchange ideas and solutions in agriculture.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, that's a fantastic question. You all should know that we provide – the opportunity that you described is an example. The State Department's often involved in lots of opportunities for people to travel, not just students but – not just high school students, but college students and others too to travel to make the case for American agriculture across the world. They're great programs.

We also have scholarships, great scholarships that come through the State Department. A lot of people actually go study there, sometimes for their entire time in school, but often for a semester or a year. And then we have fantastic exchange programs that are run through State Department affiliates. I'd encourage any of you who have an interest, pick a country that you love or you're interested in, go check it out, and then see what's available to help underwrite, to help pay for an opportunity to create a real chance for you to go see and visit one of those places.

It is remarkable. As you all get a chance to travel around the world to see other human beings, how they rose to their place in life, how their countries interact, I think you'll see lots of wonderful places. I have met more good friends around the world in this role than you can possibly imagine, but I have also come to see what an enormous blessing I was given to be born here and be a United States citizen. We live in an incredibly unique nation, in my view the greatest in the history of civilization, that gives us so much enormous opportunity. And when I travel and see these people from these other countries, sometimes they like us more than other times, sometimes they get frustrated with us. We have a big economy and we're a very powerful country.

But I will say this: Nearly to a person, they have enormous respect for all of us because we – we're out there as a force for good, trying to make the world just a little bit better in everything that we do, treating every human being with dignity and respect. Those are the hallmarks of the great nation of the United States. So I think your chance to work with the State Department to travel and see and go experience that, I hope you'll come back and realize that you visited a great place, but you got a chance to come home to an even greater one.

So thanks for that question and thanks for your very thoughtful questions today. I really appreciate that. I've been in front of a lot of groups and you all clearly have it going on. So thank you very much for that. (Applause.)