

ANDREW MARR SHOW

2ND JUNE 2019

WOODY JOHNSON

AM: Welcome Mr Ambassador. Can I ask first of all, if everything goes well – assuming everything goes well, how would you like this visit to be remembered?

WJ: I think everything is going to go great. I think the stressing of the special relationship our two countries share, and looking back 75 years ago to D-Day and commemorating these young men and women who accomplished the impossible on D-Day, really.

AM: A highly emotional moment, really.

WJ: Highly emotional. And I've been putting myself back in those shoes, trying to put a – reading contemporaneous accounts of what happened back then, and it will get your hair standing.

AM: Now, I said in the introduction, you've known President Trump since, I think, the 1980s, thereabouts.

WJ: The '80s, yeah.

AM: Just tell us something about President Trump that most people watching don't know.

WJ: President Trump, or Donald J. Trump has not changed since I've known him. He's been an authentic person. Always had just an uncanny ability to have a sense of the pulse of what was happening in New York City, where we both lived. And I've watched him progress, I've known his children as they were young and went to the same schools. And you know, just been impressed what kind of father he is as well.

AM: We see his volatility and his controversial nature and all the rest of it all over the screens all the time. What is it that allows him to keep him going? I mean, there must be something there that we don't see that keeps him.

WJ: I think a lot of the issues he talks about now he's talked about for years. For instance, China. This is not a new subject for him. I think he wants to change it and give the US a fairer place in the world. Negotiating better deals around the – rather than getting, you know – having these agreements go on and on and on to the detriment of the US.

AM: I think perhaps what we didn't expect this morning is to have the President of the United States, not endorsing but offering his warm support to one candidate, in particular Boris Johnson, in this Conservative election. And he says also that lots of other people have been asking for his endorsement as well. Has there been a little queue of people at the back of Winfield House knocking on the door hoping to get in touch with Donald Trump?

WJ: Not that I'm aware of at Winfield House. But he has known Boris for a long time, so I think what he's commenting on is just his knowledge of Boris as a person and all the meetings he's had with Boris rather than – I don't think he – and he said it's not an endorsement.

AM: Do you think Boris Johnson would be a good prime minister?

WJ: That's up for you guys to decide. I mean, you're going to have an election now, so –

AM: Only Tory members, but yeah.

WJ: Yeah, Tory members. Your public is going to have to decide, you know, who the final two are and sort it out.

AM: Now, looking at the President's interview today, do you think that we should leave on October 31st deal or no deal?

WJ: You know, once again that's up to you. And we're going to have a great relationship with your country regardless of what happens. But yeah, I mean, I think, from what my travelling around the country indicates people are ready to go and move on. Even though the economy is doing reasonably well, it could do a lot better once this Brexit is finished.

AM: You've done an interview yourself in the Express in which you say there's an extraordinary trade deal waiting for Britain, a very, very big, generous trade deal waiting for Britain, and President Trump says that could be done very, very fast. So what's the nature of that trade deal and how quickly could it be done after we leave?

WJ: I think the fact that it's on the President's desk day one the minute you leave and we can negotiate – we're already negotiating. I mean, we're already looking at the terms and conditions that will allow a successful negotiation. I think it'll be done – with the President looking at it, it will be done as expeditiously as any agreement we ever had.

AM: So you're negotiating already?

WJ: I would say, not negotiating, probably the wrong term. I think we're looking at all the components of the deal and trying to get everything lined up so when the time comes we're ready to go.

AM: Now, the President, one thing that you know about him, he's a deal maker, and any deal is give and take. So can I ask you, two areas that have worried a lot of British people about this potential deal. One is agriculture, farming, food standards and so on. Does Britain have to accept American agricultural standards and American food standards in order to get that deal?

WJ: No.

AM: No?

WJ: No. No. I think there's going to have to be some deal where you give the British people a choice, and American products would come over and be allowed to come over. Agriculture is extremely important to the President, and any President, because there's agriculture in all 50 states, so there's 50 Senators. But you give the British people a choice. If they like it they can buy it. If they don't want it they don't have to buy it.

AM: Because there is a big choice here. I mean, you yourself have said in the past that the EU approach prizes history and tradition over innovation and science, and you've called it a kind of museum form of farming and you've slightly pooh-poohed British worries about chlorinated chicken and GMO foods and so on.

WJ: Not pooh-poohing it, but even the EU has taken a position on things like chlorinated chicken and said the American food supply is as safe as anything in Europe. So it's not really pooh-poohing. But that was probably the most interesting public relations campaign to ban American products that I've seen. I mean, if we could put that in reverse we'd all make a lot of money.

AM: So you've said it's a public safety no brainer. It's completely safe to eat.

WJ: Completely safe.

AM: And do you think British people have to accept that as part of the deal?

WJ: No. I don't think they have to accept it. Once again, you can have a choice. We have five million Brits, British people, coming over to the US every year and I've never heard a complaint, one complaint about anything to do with chicken.

AM: Okay. So the other big area, as you know, is the healthcare service. There is a great deal of fondness and enthusiasm for the NHS in this country and lots of people are worried that a big free trade deal with America means American pharmaceutical and medical corporations getting a slice of the NHS.

WJ: Oh I don't think they'd be put in any particular position regarding that. Your national healthcare service is the pride of the country. It's a highly emotionally charged issue.

AM: Do you feel that healthcare has to be part of the deal?

WJ: I think probably the entire economy, in a trade deal all things that are traded will be on the table.

AM: Which includes healthcare.

WJ: I would think so.

AM: Okay. Let's talk about one of the other really big areas here. Something I'm sure the President is going to raise with the Prime Minister, which is Huawei and whether Britain should allow that Chinese company to be heavily involved in its 5G network.

WJ: I think what you've heard from the President and other members of his staff is concern about the risk of allowing your infrastructure to be built by a country that has a totally different setup than we do.

AM: And 5G is different from 4G, as I understand it, because if you're part of the system you have access to almost all the system. Therefore the Chinese are completely in.

WJ: They're completely in. And there's no such thing as the centre, the core or the outlying areas. It's all one big thing. So you can't have, as I understand it, you can't have antennas all over and think that they're not part of it. So you've got a big risk about both security and prosperity in building something with a country where the government can call up and say, 'I want this information, I want it now,' and the company has to respond.

AM: So that's the American worry and we can see why. President Trump, again in his interview this morning, suggests that if Britain sticks with Huawei that will have an implication for security and intelligence arrangements with the United States going forward. Do you agree with that?

WJ: I do. You can also look at your private high tech. This country is known for high tech. You've got a unbelievable group of companies. All that stuff is subject, even the biggest, they're not going to be part of this exclusive network that the military has.

AM: So if Britain goes with Huawei what does that mean for our intelligence arrangements with America?

WJ: I think to be determined. I would go – what I think is happening now, as I understand it, the British have not made a conclusion. Not conclusively said that they'll do it. I think it's – I would caution according to the President and the people that have looked at that from the US side, to move much more slowly.

AM: And in terms of hard policy decisions is that the single most important thing about this visit, do you think, Huawei?

WJ: On the policy side? I don't know if it's the most important. I think he's going to speak in broader terms, you know, about the relationship we share and the whole level of prosperity and security.

AM: Now, a lot of people watching will not know you. You've been here for two years. And of course you move with all the kind of posh nobs in London and all the top people. How do you get to know the British people more generally as an ambassador?

WJ: One of the things I do every week is I travel around the country. So I've been to Northern Ireland, Belfast, Wales – all over Wales and the northern part of this country. Scotland. And just talking to people and finding out –

AM: Literally wander round the streets.

WJ: Wandering around, go to coffee shops. I ask them which coffee shop – I love coffee – where I should go, who I should talk to. And so it's not just the people you described. I want to get their real opinion. What do they feel about how's life, how's it going in Newcastle or Manchester or Birmingham.

AM: So there's the answer. Ambassador thanks very much indeed for talking to us.

(ends)