

U.S., China resume trade talks to thrash out structural agreements

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The top U.S. and Chinese trade negotiators resumed high-level talks on Thursday to hash out a deal that could end their trade war, just over a week before a U.S.-imposed deadline to reach agreement expires and triggers a new round of tariffs.

Reuters reported exclusively on Wednesday that the two sides are starting to sketch out what an agreement on structural issues might look like, drafting language for six memorandums of understanding on proposed Chinese reforms.

If the two sides fail to reach an agreement by March 1, U.S. tariffs on \$200 billion worth of Chinese imports are set to rise to 25 percent from 10 percent. Tit-for-tat tariffs between the world's two largest economic powers have disrupted international trade and slowed the global economy since the trade war started seven months ago.

During a photo opportunity to mark the start of their talks on Thursday, U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Chinese Vice Premier Liu He faced each other silently across a table in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building next door to the White House.

At their sides were U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, People's Bank of China Governor Yi Gang and other cabinet-level officials from the two countries. They did not answer reporters' questions.

It is unclear whether the latest round of talks, which are due to conclude on Friday, may be extended into next week, and where those future negotiations might occur. U.S. President Donald Trump, who has embraced an "America First" policy as part of an effort to rebalance global trade, has said the March 1 deadline could be extended if enough progress is made.

Sources familiar with the negotiations told Reuters the memorandums would cover forced technology transfer and cyber theft, intellectual property rights, services, currency, agriculture and non-tariff barriers to trade.

The two sides remain far apart on demands by Trump's administration for China to end practices on those issues that led Trump to start levying duties on Chinese imports in the first place.

Chinese President Xi Jinping would need to undertake difficult structural economic reforms to meet U.S. demands. The United States is offering no real concessions in return, other than to remove the tariff barriers Trump has imposed to force change from China.

PEN TO PAPER

One of Trump's demands that is easier to fix for Beijing is to reduce the trade imbalance between the two nations. The U.S. trade deficit with China reached a record \$382 billion through the first 11 months of 2018.

The two sides have reached consensus on how to alleviate the trade imbalances, several Chinese government sources said. Washington and Beijing are looking at a 10-item list for that, including additional Chinese purchases of agricultural produce, energy and goods such as semiconductors.

U.S., China sketch outlines for trade deal

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue called China's pledges to purchase U.S. agricultural produce premature.

"Those proposals are all contingent upon a grand deal," he said on the sidelines of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's annual forum in Washington.

"The real issue is structural reforms regarding intellectual property, enforceability of those types of provisions."



U.S.-China trade delegations hold trade talks at the White House in Washington

The United States could quickly recover its lost agricultural markets in China if a deal is struck, he said.

agricultural export, worth around \$12 billion in 2017.

Perdue has overseen \$12 billion in federal aid to U.S. farmers for losses they have sustained because of the trade war. China had all but halted purchases of U.S. soybeans, which were the single biggest U.S.

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Editor's Choice



Rochelle Washington, lawyer Gloria Allred and Latresa Scaff speak at a press conference to make accusations against singer R. Kelly in the Manhattan borough of New York City



Rochelle Washington, lawyer Gloria Allred and Latresa Scaff speak at a press conference to make accusations against singer R. Kelly in the Manhattan borough of New York City



A model dressed in an outfit made with chocolate presents a creation at the "Le Salon du Chocolat - Chocoladesalon" chocolate fair, in Brussels,



FILE PHOTO: Some of the newer housing where mold has been found is seen at Tinker Air Force Base



A migrant from Central America feeds his daughter at an improvised shelter in Ciudad Juarez



Migrants from Central America queue for food at an improvised shelter in Ciudad Juarez



A model dressed in an outfit made with chocolate presents a creation at the "Le Salon du Chocolat - Chocoladesalon" chocolate fair, in Brussels



Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman walks with officials during his visit to Great Wall of China in Beijing, China February 21, 2019. Bandar Algaloud/ Courtesy of Saudi Royal Court/Handout via REUTERS

Federally Approved Cannabis Drug Offers Hope For Patients And Marijuana Advocates

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



Brian and Piper Lindeen aid their son, Zach, as he experiences an epilepsy seizure Sunday, Dec. 2, 2018, in Sugar Land. The first FDA approved cannabis-based medication is available to U.S. patients through a prescription, but its high cost, \$32,500 a year, puts it out of reach of several patients.

sible,” Menendez said.

Yet advocates are also concerned that so much pressure on Epidiolex may backfire if the drug ultimately fails to generate enough positive results.

As the Lindeens have learned through years of treating Zach, what may work for one patient doesn't work for all.

“[Epidiolex] is something that's standardized and reproducible and some people do well with that,” Piper Lindeen said, “but some people need variability.”

A Sense Of Hope

Zach has been prescribed at least eight different pharmaceuticals for the seizures that began when he was about 3 and half years old. They've each worked in varying degrees, but have also left concerning side effects including the risk of losing speech and noticeable aggression.

“He punched the end of his bed one time,”

Brian Lindeen said of his son. “I had never seen him so angry.”



.It wasn't until Zach began taking medical cannabis this year from a dispensary in Austin that the Lindeens began to feel a sense of hope.

Zach managed to go seizure free for about six months —the longest stretch the Lindeens had ever recorded.

Yet in the last few weeks, the seizures returned, about twice a day.

By then their neurologist, Dr. Michael

Newmark at Kelsey-Seybold Clinic, who is registered to prescribe medical cannabis through the state registry, suggested the Lindeens consider Epidiolex as a treatment for Zach's Lennox-Gastaut syndrome.

There was some initial research required, not just of the drug's clinical test results, but also of its cost.

Earlier this year GW Pharmaceuticals listed the drug's weighted average price at \$32,500 for the first year of use. For some patients Medicare and Medicaid may cover the cost, but Stephen Schultz, the company's vice president of investor relations, noted that most patients will rely on a number of private insurance options to make the drug more affordable.

In the case of the Lindeens, a recent switch to a new insurance plan brought their first prescription co-pay to about \$160, which was ultimately covered by co-pay assistance. They've been paying about \$500 a month out-of-pocket for medical cannabis from the state-licensed dispensary, Compassionate Cultivation.

In the case of Cindy Welch in College Station, the out-of-pocket cost for Epidiolex for her 1-year-old granddaughter on Medicaid comes to about \$1,500 a month. They currently pay about \$380 a month to Compassionate Cultivation.

If it hadn't been for the dispensary, Welch said, her family would have had to move to Colorado to get medical access.

Morris Denton, the dispensary CEO, said he's already lost patients like the Lindeens whose insurance makes Epidiolex a more

affordable medical cannabis option than his product, which cannot be covered by any insurance. Yet there are several more who must still check to see if their insurers cover Epidiolex.

Time will tell whether the new federally approved drug negatively impacts business at the state's three existing dispensaries, Denton added. Epidiolex doesn't contain the THC chemical compound allowed at the state dispensaries which can better help some patients than CBD alone. “It's ultimately a good thing to have choice,” Denton said.

More options needed

Choice has been a main driver behind Piper Lindeen's advocacy for marijuana legalization. Treating epilepsy can at times feel like a guessing game, switching medications and doses in and out to find the best fit, she said.



Pharmaceutical options are known to carry harsh side effects and patients can experience physical withdrawals when transitioning between brands.

Anecdotally, no such withdrawals have been reported among patients in legal states switching between cannabis options, Lindeen added.

But she remains frustrated at only having two medical cannabis options in Texas.

“We really need a wide variety of therapeutics,” Lindeen said.

Newmark said in an email that he hopes Epidiolex will reduce the number of Zach's seizures substantially. The neurologist's only concern is a bit of sedation the boy may experience.

“I firmly believe that as more knowledge is obtained about the use of these compounds that there will be much greater acceptance in the future,” Newmark added. “Texas will be unlikely to go against the trend.” (Courtesy the Houston Chronicle)

The cannabis drug arrived at the Lindeen household in a UPS shipping box marked “critical.”

Piper and Brian Lindeen had been monitoring news of Epidiolex for months. The drug meant another chance at treating their 10-year-old son Zach's ongoing seizures, and a possibility for broader medical cannabis access in Texas.

The cannabidiol, or CBD, made by the British company GW Pharmaceuticals, aims to treat epileptic seizures of patients with Dravet syndrome and Lennox-Gastaut syndrome.

Successful clinical trials, including some with Texas patients, helped Epidiolex become the first CBD medication to gain approval earlier this year from both the Food and Drug Administration as well as the Drug Enforcement Administration. Prescriptions for the drug became available in the United States last month.

Currently the only two legal options to get medical cannabis in Texas are through the limited state registry, known as the Compassionate Use Program, and from prescription Epidiolex.

Marijuana advocates, including the Lindeens in Sugar Land, hope Epidiolex's federal approval could sway any state legislators wary of expanding legal access to medical cannabis. Several marijuana-related bills were filed for the next legislative session.



State Sen. Jose Menendez, D-San Antonio, authored Senate Bill 90 for expanding the state medical cannabis program, which formally kicked off this year.

He believes the research that went into the development of Epidiolex, and which helped the drug gain federal approval, could be key to pushing his bill and similar ones next year.

“I'm going to use any and every tool pos-

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J&J Moves To Limit Impact Of Reuters Report On Asbestos In Baby Powder

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



J&J rebutted Reuters' report in a lengthy written critique of the article and a video from Gorsky. In the written critique, posted on the company's website here, J&J said Reuters omitted information it supplied to the news organization that demonstrated the healthcare conglomerate's Baby Powder is safe and does not cause cancer; that J&J's baby powder has repeatedly been tested and found to be asbestos-free; and that the company has cooperated with the U.S. FDA and other regulators around the world to provide information requested over decades.



"Since tests for asbestos in talc were first developed, J&J's Baby Powder has never contained asbestos," Gorsky said in the video here. He added that regulators "have always found our talc to be asbestos-free." A Reuters spokeswoman on Monday said the agency "stands by its reporting." Reuters' investigation found that while

most tests in past decades found no asbestos in J&J talc and talc products, tests on Baby Powder conducted by scientists at Mount Sinai Medical Center in 1971 and Rutgers University in 1991, as well as by labs for plaintiffs in cancer lawsuits, found small amounts of asbestos. In 1972, a University of Minnesota scientist found what he called "incontrovertible asbestos" in a sample of Shower to Shower. Other tests by J&J's own contract labs and others periodically found small amounts of asbestos in talc from mines that supplied the mineral for Baby Powder and other cosmetic products into the early 2000s.

The company did not report to the FDA three tests by three different labs from 1972 to 1975 that found asbestos in the company's talc.

The Reuters story drew no conclusions about whether talc itself causes ovarian cancer. Asbestos, however, is a carcinogen. The World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer has listed asbestos-contaminated talc as a carcinogen since 1987. Reuters also found that J&J tested only a fraction of the talc powder it sold. The company never adopted a method for increasing the sensitivity of its tests that was recommended to the company by consultants in 1973 and in a published report in a peer-review scientific journal in 1991.

the company created with "independent studies from leading universities, research from medical journals and third-party opinions."

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The ad J&J ran in newspapers Monday also pointed to an online talc fact page the company created with "independent studies from leading universities, research from medical journals and third-party opinions."

That website has changed since early December, according to a Reuters review of online archives.

The website, for instance, no longer contains a section headlined "Conclusions from Global Authorities" that as recently as Dec. 5 listed organizations including the U.S. FDA, the European Union and Health Canada as among entities that have "reviewed and analyzed all available data and concluded that the evidence is insufficient to link talc use to cancer."

On Dec. 14, the day Reuters published its report, that section of the website had been removed. It is not clear exactly when the online page changed.

The Canadian government released a draft report this month that found a "consistent

and statistically significant positive association" between talc exposure and ovarian cancer. The draft report also said that talc meets criteria to be deemed toxic.

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The draft report put forth proposed conclusions that are subject to a public comment period and confirmation in a so-called final screening assessment, Health Canada said.

If the conclusions are confirmed, Canadian officials will consider adding talc to a government list of toxic substances and implementing measures to prohibit or restrict use of talc in some cosmetics, non-prescription drugs and natural health products, Health Canada said.

A J&J spokeswoman said the company removed the website section after the Canadian government issued the draft report. "We chose to be conservative while that draft is under review," the spokeswoman said.

While J&J has dominated the talc powder market for more than 100 years, the products contributed less than 0.5 percent of J&J's \$76.5 billion in revenue last year. (Courtesy Reuters)

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Johnson & Johnson on Monday scrambled to contain fallout from a Reuters report that the healthcare conglomerate knew for decades that cancer-causing asbestos lurked in its Baby Powder, taking out full-page newspaper ads defending its product and practices, and readying its chief executive for his first television interview since investors erased tens of billions of dollars from the company's market value.

J&J shares fell nearly 3 percent Monday, closing at \$129.14 in New York Stock Exchange trading. That drop was on top of the 10 percent plunge that wiped out about \$40 billion of the company's market capitalization following the Reuters report Friday. J&J also announced Monday that it would be repurchasing up to \$5 billion of its common stock.

Senator Edward Markey, a Massachusetts Democrat on the Environment and Public Works Committee, on Friday sent a letter to the head of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration calling on the agency to investigate the findings in the Reuters report to determine whether J&J misled regulators and whether its Baby Powder products threaten public health and safety.



J&J Chief Executive Alex Gorsky, in his first interview since the Reuters article was published, defended the company during an appearance on CNBC's "Mad Money" with host Jim Cramer on Monday night. J&J knew for decades about the presence of small amounts of asbestos in its products dating back to as early as 1971, a Reuters examination of company memos, internal reports and other confidential documents showed. In response to the report, J&J said on Friday that "any suggestion that Johnson & Johnson knew or hid information about the safety of talc is false."

A Monday full-page ad from J&J — headlined "Science. Not sensationalism." — ran in newspapers including The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal. The ad asserted that J&J has scientific evidence its talc is safe and beneficial to use. "If we had any reasons to believe our talc was unsafe, it would be off our shelves," the ad said.

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