From:	Bulletin Intelligence
To:	DHS@BulletinIntelligence.com
Subject:	The Homeland Security News Briefing for Saturday, March 04, 2017
Date:	Saturday, March 4, 2017 6:59:19 AM
Attachments:	dhsclips170304.doc

The Homeland Security News Briefing

TO: THE SECRETARY AND SENIOR STAFF

DATE: SATURDAY, MARCH 4, 2017 7:00 AM EST

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Leading DHS News:

TRUMP PRAISES "MERIT-BASED" IMMIGRATION SYSTEMS IN CANADA, AUSTRALIA. USA Today (3/3, Gomez, 5.28M) reports on Friday President Trump praised the Canadian immigration system, which it says "has served as a model for countries around the world because it focuses more on immigrants who can contribute to the economy than those with little more than family ties." Following a segment of Fox & Friends featuring the conservative author Nick Adams, Trump tweeted, "The merit-based system is the way to go. Canada, Australia!" The article notes the tweet also follows Tuesday comments Trump made when addressing a joint session of Congress, in which he also praised the immigration systems in other places, such as Australia.

Administration Still Reviewing Immigration Policy Options. CNN The Situation Room (3/3, 5:06 p.m. EDT, 6:35, Blitzer, 554K) senior White House correspondent Jeff Zeleny reported, "We're ending the sixth week of this Administration here, and we have heard time and time again that the President will be signing a new travel ban," but "That simply is not happening as we are entering the close of business here yet on this Friday." Zeleny said Trump "was scheduled to sign it on Wednesday" but then "said they were going to hold off a bit," and "they are still holding off."

Wolf Blitzer of CNN The Situation Room (3/3, 6:20 p.m. EDT, 20:05, Blitzer, 554K) reported in "some breaking news" that a senior Homeland Security official told "CNN the agency is considering a proposal that would separate women from their children who cross the border together illegally." Rep. Mark Sanford said he "would want to learn more" before commenting on the strategy because the measure "sounds highly unusual, this notion of separating parent and child, and counter to much of what I've seen in terms of immigration policies thus far." Blitzer also asked Sanford about a DHS "intelligence assessment" that "found most of the foreign-born violent extremists in the United States were actually radicalized years after entering the United States," a suggestion that "undercuts President trump's overall

reasoning for a new travel ban." Sanford replied that "we certainly have seen that," but "it still begs this larger question" about "the inability to determine whether one was a friend or a foe in coming from that country to ours."

ABC World News (3/3, story 2, 0:35, Muir, 14.63M) ' senior White House correspondent Cecilia Vega also reported on the "report out today from the Department of Homeland Security pushing back on a key component of that travel ban, basically saying it may be difficult to find and vet the so-called radical Islamic terrorists."

DHS Reviewing Proposal To Separate Migrant Mothers, Children Who Cross Illegally Into US. Reuters (3/3, Ainsley) reports in an exclusive that the Department of Homeland Security is considering a proposal that would allow the agency to separate women and children who cross together illegally into the US. Reuters says the new policy, if adopted, would "allow the government to keep parents in custody while they contest deportation or wait for asylum hearings." The Department of Health and Human Services would take the children into protective custody until either a US relative or guardian can take them. The article says that the purpose of the policy shift is to "deter mothers from migrating to the United States with their children, said the officials, who have been briefed on the proposal."

CSMonitor Analysis: Evangelicals Most Supportive Of Trump Travel Ban. A Christian Science Monitor (3/3, Bruinius, 387K) analysis says that evangelical Christians are the group that have been the most supportive of President Trump's travel ban, with "most worried about what a rise in Muslim immigrants would mean for the nation's identity." The Monitor says that while experts and media observers have noted there is a "seeming cultural chasm between the Manhattan billionaire's past lifestyle and conservative Evangelicals' emphasis on moral character and family values," scholars also noted that Evangelicalism is the religious group that "has maintained both a vivid sense of America as a Christian nation and a deeply-rooted exclusive theology that remains suspicious of those outside the fold."

DOWNES: NOW IS THE TIME FOR CITIES TO DECLARE THEMSELVES "SANCTUARIES." In a New York Times (3/3, Downes, Subscription Publication, 13.9M) Editorial Observer piece, Lawrence Downes writes that it is time for "cities of immigrants" to declare themselves sanctuaries, Downes says that President Trump's "nativist ideology is now fully armed and operational" and that Homeland Security Secretary Kelly "has given his boss a battle plan," which is being carried out by ICE and Border Patrol. While noting that the term "sanctuary city" has caused confusion because it "has no strict definition," he also asserts "cities should seize back the term, defining sanctuaries as places that stand for reason in the face of overreaching, unjust and often lawless federal enforcement."

Immigration and Customs Enforcement:

CTRIBUNE ANALYSIS EXAMINES CHICAGO'S "SANCTUARY-CITY" STATUS. A more than 2,500-word Chicago Tribune (3/3, Pratt, Coen, 2.54M) analysis examines Chicago's "sanctuary" status and the tensions that exist between law enforcement and immigration officials. The Tribune says that Mayor Rahm Emanuel and other local lawmakers "have trumpeted Chicago's status as a place that will welcome and shield those here illegally, including by not having the Chicago Police Department cooperate with ICE." This means, the article says, "ICE agents will get limited if any cooperation from local authorities, including the Police Department and the Cook County sheriff's office, which operates the jail" and that the number of detainer requests ICE has sent to the jail has "dropped precipitously." However, the piece also notes "being a sanctuary city offers limited protection to unauthorized immigrants; Chicago can't prevent immigration agents from raiding businesses in search of workers or detaining immigrants at their homes."

MIAMI JUDGE RULES HOLDING IMMIGRANTS FACING DEPORTATION IN JAILS UNCONSTITUTIONAL. The AP (3/3) reports that Circuit Judge Milton Hirsch in Miami on Friday "declared unconstitutional a recently-adopted policy favored by President Donald Trump that allows Miami-Dade County jails to hold immigrants who face deportation." The policy was ordered by Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Gimenez in the wake of Trump's executive order on sanctuary cities. Hirsch ruled the "policy violates the 10th Amendment's limits on federal power over states."

US ATTORNEY ACCUSING OREGON JUDGE OF HELPING CRIMINAL ALIEN ESCAPE ICE AGENTS. Breitbart (3/3, Huston, 2.02M) reports Judge Monica Heeranz, a "judicial referee" at Portland's Multnomah County Courthouse, was recently "accused of interfering with the apprehension of an illegal alien who had appeared in her court on a drunk driving charge." Breitbart says that US Attorney Billy Williams alleges "Heeranz helped Salazar escape ICE officers by allowing him to escape out of a door usually reserved for use by court officers and employees." Salazar's court-appointed attorney John Schlosser said, "I prepped my client. I said, 'I don't know if they're going to pick you up outside or what, but here's how to prepare.'"

IMMIGRANTS ACCUSE PENNSYLVANIA DETENTION CENTER OF LENGTHY DETENTIONS. Anna Werner of the CBS Evening News (3/3, story 2, 2:40, Pelley, 11.17M) reported, "Dozens of women stood with their children at the fence line of this Berks County, Pennsylvania, detention center in August to protest" the facility's treatment of undocumented immigrants. "They came from Central America seeking asylum, but were held here for months, their lawyers say, without explanation," Werner added. A committee "asked ICE to provide copies of its detention policies," but "the agency refused." Berks "lost its state license a year ago" and "is awaiting a decision on its appeal."

IMMIGRANTS FEARING DEPORTATION SEEK GUARDIANS FOR THEIR US CITIZEN CHILDREN. Reuters (3/3, Cooke, Rosenberg) reports that a number of illegal immigrants who now worry about being deported under the Trump Administration are seeking to "secur[e] care for their children in the event they are expelled from the country." The Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) said they have been receiving roughly "10 requests per day from parents who want to put in place temporary guardianships for their children, said spokesman Jorge-Mario Cabrera." The National Lawyers Guild in Washington D.C. has also issued a call seeking "volunteer attorneys to help immigrants fill out forms granting friends or relatives the right to make legal and financial decisions in their absence." New Jersey immigration attorney Helen Ramirez said, "Their biggest fear is that their kids will end up in foster care."

ARREST OF IMMIGRANT FATHER "ROILS" LOS ANGELES IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY. The Los Angeles Times (3/3, Castillo, 4.52M) reports 48-year-old immigrant Romulo Avelica-Gonzalez was arrested Tuesday morning by ICE agents "wearing jackets that said 'POLICE' on the back" while dropping his 12-year-old daughter off at school. The Times cites ICE officials as noting the "arrest was routine" and that Avelica-Gonzalez had been previously deported. The arrest, however, "has roiled the largely immigrant community north of downtown Los Angeles."

DREAMER ARRESTED BY ICE SAYS "I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ELSE BESIDES BEING HERE." The Wall Street Journal (3/3, Lazo, Subscription Publication, 6.37M) reports 22-year-old undocumented immigrant Daniela Vargas, whose arrest this week by ICE and forthcoming deportation has captured national attention, said on Friday "I don't know anything else besides being here" and that she would "do anything for this country." The Journal notes that her protected status under the DACA program had expired and that her deportation could come within a matter of weeks. In a statement, Vargas said, "I don't understand why they don't want me. I'm doing the best I can. I mean I can't help that I was brought here but I don't know anything else besides being here and I didn't realize that until I was in a holding cell last night for 5 hours. ... I didn't choose to be here. And when I was brought here, I had to learn a whole new country and leave behind the one that I did know. And I barely knew that one."

EL SALVADORAN NATIONAL DEPORTED FOR MINOR OFFENSE. In the CBS Evening News (3/3, lead story, 3:45, Pelley, 11.17M) lead story, Omar Villafranca reported on Jose Escobar, an El Salvadoran native and "father of two" who "has lived in the US for 16 years, had temporary permissions to stay, but missed an immigration hearing, and that temporary status was revoked." Escobar was "detained and deported" two weeks ago, and his "case is the latest in a series of deportations, apparently involving people who committed minor offenses." Villafranca added, "In a statement to CBS News, immigration officials say they are now focusing on people who pose a threat to the public," but "are no longer providing exemptions, and anyone violating immigration law may be deported."

WPOST A1: MEXICO "BRACING" FOR INFLUX OF DEPORTEES UNDER TRUMP ADMINISTRATION. The Washington Post (3/3, Olivo, 11.43M) reports on its front-page that Mexico is

“bracing” for an influx of deportees in the wake of President Trump’s executive order expanding deportations. The Post says “their arrival ... promises to transform Mexican society in the same way their departure did.” Those being sent back include not only those with criminal records but also those without, totaling roughly 500 a day. Mexico City’s labor department secretary Amalia García said, “Many of these people come not knowing how to speak Spanish. ... They come feeling very bitter, very ashamed and very hurt.”

Customs and Border Protection:

JUDGE TENTATIVELY APPROVES $1 MILLION SETTLEMENT TO FAMILY OF MEXICAN MAN KILLED AT BORDER. The Los Angeles Times (3/3, Davis, 4.52M) reports that a Federal judge has tentatively approved a $1 million settlement payment to the five children “of a Mexican man who died after being beaten and shocked with a stun gun at the San Ysidro Port of Entry.” The man, 42-year-old Anastasio Hernandez Rojas “had lived and worked in the US illegally since he was a teen.” His wife, Maria Puga, said on Thursday, “This agreement is not justice. ... My husband’s life does not have a price. The decision had to be taken and it was difficult. We had to turn the page.”

HUNDREDS OF COMPANIES EXPRESS INTEREST IN BUILDING TRUMP’S BORDER WALL. Bloomberg Politics (3/3, Cary O'Reilly,Thomas Black, 201K) report that more than 375 companies have indicated their interest to the Trump Administration to work on the border-wall project. The article says that the presolicitation notice posted to the Federal Business Opportunities website has resulted in responses “pour[ing] in from potential vendors around the world.” A formal solicitation may go out around March 6, which US Customs and Border Protection has said it would like. This early interest, the piece says, “shows the enthusiasm for capitalizing on President Donald Trump’s plan to build a ‘great, great’ wall, which he’d until recently repeatedly vowed to force Mexico to finance.”

In Mexico, “the chairman of a Mexico’s largest cement company said he would ‘gladly’ consider bidding on the project,” the Washington Post (3/3, Schmidt, 11.43M) reports, despite the political resentment the wall project has garnered. Cemex chairman Rogelio Zambrano Lozano said that if asked, his company was provide a quote, but that a request has not come. A spokesman for the company said, “If one of our clients asks us to give prices on materials, we have the responsibility to provide it. ... but it doesn’t imply Cemex would participate in the project.”

Transportation Security Administration:

TSA LOOKING INTO NEW MORE INVASIVE SCREENING METHODS AT AIRPORTS. Bloomberg News (3/3, Bachman, 2.41M) reports that a Transportation Security Administration spokesman has said the agency is moving to using a new physical touching, or “pat-down,” approach to screening those in security lines. The piece says that airport security agents have long had multiple screening options, but those have been eliminated in favor of what the TSA “officially describes as a more ‘comprehensive’ physical screening.”

Correspondent Kris Van Cleave of the CBS Evening News (3/3, story 8, 1:45, Pelley, 11.17M) also reported on new 3-D scanners the TSA is looking into. Coverage highlighted one of the companies developing the technology, Analogic. Van Cleave said, “The TSA plans to begin testing the technology in airports later this year. ... The manufacturer says the CT scanners give off the same amount of radiation as the systems already in use.”

Federal Emergency Management Agency:

WINTER WEATHER SEES RARE BIT OF “NORMAL.” The CBS Evening News (3/3, story 9, 1:30, Pelley, 11.17M) reported on what it calls a bit of “normal” winter weather in what has otherwise been a bizarre weather season. CBS’s Don Dahler said, “In a normal winter, Illinois is blanketed in snow, not batter[ed] by tornadoes.” He noted the lack of “measurable snowfall” in places like Chicago, saying, “This week, instead of shovels, it was volleyball on the beach. And so far, even one of Hawaii’s mountains has

gotten more snow than Denver."

However, NBC Nightly News's (3/3, story 8, 0:50, Holt, 16.61M) Al Roker reported "we've had multiple car accidents in Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania because of the snow and now we've got this arctic low coming out from Hudson Bay, Canada." He noted a "30-degree temperature drop across a good portion of the northeast and mid-Atlantic" through the weekend, which "will l start to see moderation by the early to the beginning of next week."

OKLAHOMA WILDFIRES THREATEN HOMES, LIVESTOCK. ABC World News Tonight (3/3, story 14, 0:15, Muir, 14.63M) reported on mandatory evacuations in Oklahoma, with wildfires threatening "multiple homes and livestock." Firefighters are now battling the blaze.

US Citizenship and Immigration Services:

DURBIN URGES TRUMP TO MOVE ON H-1B VISA REFORM BY END OF MONTH. Bloomberg News (3/3, Brustein, 2.41M) reports Sen. Richard Durbin is losing patience with the Trump Administration with respect to H-1B visa reform. Bloomberg notes that for the last decade, Durbin has advocated reform of the program, seeing it both as necessary for tech companies to hire the experts they need but also as "a boondoggle that outsourcers use to exploit foreign labor." He wrote a letter to Trump on Friday "urging him to follow through on a promised crackdown before the end of the month." The piece says "the urgency comes in part from a looming deadline," which is the start of the H-1B visa lottery that takes place annually in April.

Study Finds Dropping Unemployment Rates In States That Use E-Verify. Breitbart (3/3, McHugh, 2.02M) reports that a new study conducted by the Federation for American Immigration Reform shows that "employment rates dropped during the recession in states which adopted the E-Verify program to screen illegal aliens from jobs." The report says that while many see E-Verify as a "barrier to employment opportunities," findings actually show "that states requiring the use of E-Verify are leading recovery efforts following the worst global recession since World War II." The study highlighted how most states that adopted the E-Verify system in 2008 "saw their unemployment rates drop, even when the national rate increased."

Pew Study Finds Latinos More Concerned With Economic Livelihood, Not Immigration. The Los Angeles Times (3/3, Etehad, 4.52M) reports on a Pew Research Center survey that was released this week, which was conducted prior to President Trump's inauguration and which found that "improving the education system, defending the country from future terrorist attacks and strengthening the nation's economy were the top issues for Latinos in the US." The Times says that despite "the contentious debate over illegal immigration during and after the election," an overarching concern among Latinos is improving economic livelihoods. The report says, "This pattern … has been fairly consistent for a number of years in Pew Research Center surveys."

EU PASSES NON-BINDING RESOLUTION INSTITUTING VISA REQUIREMENTS FOR AMERICANS. The New York Times (3/3, Kanter, Subscription Publication, 13.9M) reports the European Parliament on Thursday passed a non-binding resolution that would reintroduce visa requirements for American citizens. The Times says the resolution comes as part of a "long-running battle over the United States' refusal to grant visa-free access to citizens of five European Union countries." Moreover, the piece says that European lawmakers are "demanding [the] restrictions on American travelers unless the Trump administration lifts travel requirements for citizens of five countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Poland and Romania."

However, the Washington Post (3/3, Murphy, 11.43M) says the resolution "was seen as mostly an attention-grabbing stunt ahead of a June 15 meeting between European and American envoys." The Post says that the European Parliament on its own "does not have the authority to change visa policies" and that "imposing visas for American travelers would likely touch off huge economic disruptions and could force a retaliatory move by the United States."

Immigration:

TRUMP AN ADVOCATE FOR FAMILIES OF VICTIMS OF IMMIGRANT CRIME. The AP (3/3, Galvan) reports that the families of those who have been killed by immigrants illegally in the US "now have a forceful advocate at the highest level with President Donald Trump in the White House." In his Tuesday address before a joint session of Congress, "Trump announced that he would create a new office to serve victims of immigrant crime and their relatives." The AP notes the issue "played an outsized role in the race for the White House," though the actual number of people killed by immigrants is "only a small fraction of the crimes committed daily around the country."

BGlobe Analysis: Trump Sends Mixed Messages On Immigration. A Boston Globe (3/3, Valencia, 1.08M) analysis says that when President Trump addressed a gathering of TV anchors this week, his comments "gave cautious hope to immigrants and their advocates" that he "could support a path to citizenship for thousands of immigrants now in the country illegally, a stark departure from his previous stances." The Globe says, however, that those hopes were dashed "when Trump made no mention of that sentiment in his first address to Congress." Center for Immigration Studies policy studies director Jessica Vaughan said, "He's gone from 'they all have to go,' to 'we're going to focus on the people causing problems. ... I don't think he's lost the part that this needs to serve our national interest."

SOUTH ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES FEARFUL IN WAKE OF KANSAS SHOOTING. The New York Times (3/3, North, Subscription Publication, 13.9M) reports on the rise in violence and harassment targeting Americans of South Asian descent, who the Times says are often, correctly or not, perceived to be Muslim. The Times says that "South Asian Americans are the fastest growing demographic in the United States, according to SAALT," but that "white supremacist groups are also on the rise, and many Americans of South Asian descent are frightened for their safety." SAALT executive director Suman Raghunathan said, "This is yet another reminder for our communities that there is the perception that we do not have a place in this country."

Indian Athlete Initially Denied US Entry Under Travel Ban Charged With Sexual Assault Of Minor. The Washington Post (3/3, Gowen, 11.43M) reports 24-year-old Indian snowshoe champion Tanveer Hussain, who was denied entry into the US following the initial roll out of President Trump's travel ban, has been "arrested and charged with felony sexual abuse and child welfare endangerment." The family of a 12-year-old girl indicated an incident occurred on Monday following "the end of the three-day snowshoe competition, and reported it to local authorities." Chief Charles A. Potthast Jr. said, "There was a moment when the two were alone, and that's when the incident occurred," which the girl noted to be a "passionate kiss" and being touched on top of her clothing.

Secret Service:

SECRET SERVICE AGENT PLEADS GUILTY TO SENDING SEXUAL IMAGES TO MINORS. The Washington Times (3/3, Blake, 272K) report 38-year-old former Secret Service agent Lee Robert Moore on Wednesday pleaded guilty to "one count of enticing a minor to engage in sexual activity and one count of attempting to transfer obscene images" for allegedly sending "sexually explicit messages to underage girls while guarding the White House during the Obama administration." He is facing a life sentence. Prosecutors said Moore used the social media app Meet24 "to communicate with young girls while he worked checking IDs at the White House in 2015."

Terrorism Investigations:

COMEY MEETS WITH JEWISH LEADERS TO DISCUSS WAVE OF BOMB THREATS. The Hill (3/3, Fabian, 1.25M) reports FBI Director Comey on Friday met with Jewish leaders in the wake of "threats against community institutions and the arrest of a man suspected of making some of them." In a statement, the JCC Association of North America said, "The conversation encompassed the current situation and potential strategies for future collaboration." The bureau said in a statement, "The FBI is committed to ensuring that people of all races and religions feel safe in their communities and places of

worship."

Politico (3/3, Lima, 2.46M) reports the agency is calling the recent threats against Jewish community centers a "top priority." FBI spokeswoman Susan McKee said, "Agents and analysts across the country are working to identify and stop those responsible." Politico says the meeting comes amid "a surge in the number of threats in 2017," including 31 called into 23 community centers and schools since the start of the year.

Meanwhile, the Federal Communications Commission is also "granting an emergency temporary waiver to Jewish community centers and telecommunications carriers that serve them to help track down callers who have made threats," Reuters (3/3, Shepardson) reports. FCC chairman Ajit Pai said, "This agency must and will do whatever it can to combat the recent wave of bomb threats against Jewish Community Centers." Sen. Charles Schumer on Wednesday urged Pai to grant the waiver.

AUTHORITIES ARREST MISSOURI MAN FOR MAKING BOMB THREATS AGAINST JEWISH CENTERS. ABC World News Tonight (3/3, story 7, 1:45, Muir, 14.63M) reported on the arrest of Juan Thomas, who is "accused of making eight bomb threats against Jewish community centers across the country." Correspondent Gio Benitez said, "Tonight, investigators believe this man, Juan Thompson, is behind eight of them. Authorities warn this is just one arrest as they investigate 130 threats across the country."

Correspondent Pete Williams of NBC Nightly News (3/3, lead story, 2:30, Holt, 16.61M) added "For months, telephone bomb threats to Jewish centers and schools have alarmed the Jewish community. Now the FBI says this man, 31-year-old Juan Thompson of St. Louis, made eight of those threats, copycat calls, intended to get back at a woman who broke off a romantic relationship with him eight months ago."

The New York Times (3/3, Weiser, Subscription Publication, 13.9M) notes that Thomson made some of those threats in his own name and some in the name of his former girlfriend "in an attempt to intimidate her." He is not thought to be behind the majority of the threats leveled at Jewish Centers across this country.

He has been charged with one count of cyberstalking, the Wall Street Journal (3/3, Ramey, West, Subscription Publication, 6.37M) reports. In a statement, Manhattan US Attorney Preet Bharara said, "Today, we have charged Juan Thompson with allegedly stalking a former romantic interest by, among other things, making bomb threats in her name to Jewish community centers and to the Anti-Defamation League."

The Washington Post (3/3, Berman, Zapotosky, 11.43M) reports Thomson also worked as a reporter and was "fired last year for fabricating quotes." His arrest, however, has not eased anxiety felt among Jewish groups, who "remain on edge about the threats that are still unsolved."

UN SECURITY COUNCIL CALLS ATTENTION TO TERRORISM, HUMANITARIAN CRISES IN AFRICA. The AP (3/3) reports the United Nations Security Council arrived in Cameroon on Friday for "meetings with top officials and an encounter with the multinational force fighting the Nigeria-based Boko Haram extremists." The Council members are scheduled to visit Chad, Niger, and Nigeria as well. British Ambassador Matthew Rycroft told reporters the Council's visit was intended to highlight the humanitarian crisis in Nigeria and Lake Chad region, and "show that this will no longer be a neglected crisis." The UN previously called for $4 billion in aid to address the severe food shortages in Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen.

AL QAEDA-AFFILIATED NEWSPAPER PUBLISHES BANNON'S PICTURE ON COVER. The Washington Post (3/3, Erickson, 11.43M) reports al Qaeda-affiliated newspaper Al Masra featured Chief Strategist Bannon on its front page. In the accompanying article, Al Masra said Bannon believes "the forces of Islam cannot be stopped by peaceful means," and he "lost confidence in secular Europe, and sees Muslim immigrants as partially responsible for the retreat of traditional Christian values." The SITE Intelligence Group said the IS-affiliated al-Minbar Jihadi Media network also wrote, "Trump's win of the

American presidency will bring hostility of Muslims against America as a result of his reckless actions, which show the overt and hidden hatred against them." The Post says these descriptions of the Administration's ideology are "how the terrorist group justifies its violence and its fundamentalist ideology," and underscore how militants use President Trump's rhetoric as "a useful propaganda and recruiting tool." Middle East Media Research Institute's Steve Stalinsky said the sentiments are nothing new, and terrorist sympathizers have always sought "to ignite the ground under America's feet."

Cyber News:

TECH EXPERTS WORRY CIO, CISO VACANCIES TO HURT US CYBERSECURITY INITIATIVES. The Christian Science Monitor (3/3, Lee, 387K) reports President Trump has yet to appoint a White House Chief Information Officer or Chief Information Security Officer, which "is worrying many cybersecurity and tech experts, including" former CIO Tony Scott. He told Passcode, "It's kind of like stopping maintenance in the apartment you own. ... You can bring a lot of money to the bottom line if you stop spending. But if we instead replaced and ran modern platforms, if we invested in the right places, we can save up to half in maintenance – around $30 billion per year." According to the Monitor, "The leadership vacuum makes it harder for the government to update IT infrastructure, which costs $85 billion per year to operate, putting the system at a greater risk and increases the likely hood of a successful breach, some experts say."

NSA'S TOP LAWYER CALLS FOR ONE AGENCY TO SPEARHEAD CYBERSECURITY EFFORTS. The Hill (3/3, Chalfant, 1.25M) reports the NSA's lead lawyer, Glenn Gerstell, recently proposed "creating one federal agency to spearhead the government's cybersecurity efforts." The Hill says this agency would "be unified under one roof instead of dispersed across the departments of Defense, Homeland Security and other agencies." Despite progress made in cybersecurity efforts under the Bush and Obama Administrations, he noted that "glaring gaps remain in our nation's cybersecurity posture."

PENNSYLVANIA STATE DEMOCRATS HIT WITH CYBERATTACK. The Hill (3/3, Uchill, 1.25M) reports on a ransomware attack on Friday that shuttered the IT network of Pennsylvania state Democrats. A statement from the Democratic caucus said, "Officials from the caucus have been in contact with law enforcement to investigate the incident and are working with Microsoft to restore the IT system."

WSJOURNAL A1: AUTHORITIES CONFIRM CYBERATTACK AGAINST EMERGENCY RESPONSE SYSTEM. A more than 5,400-word Wall Street Journal (3/3, A1, Knutson, Subscription Publication, 6.37M) front-page analysis says on thousands of 911 calls that came into dozens of call centers from California to Texas to Florida on a Tuesday night last October. The Journal reports that for 12 hours, operators were overwhelmed by calls in what investigators are now confirming to have been a cyberattack to the country's emergency response system.

National Security News:

UN-SPONSORED SYRIAN PEACE DISCUSSIONS END WITHOUT RESOLUTION. The Wall Street Journal (3/3, Abdulrahim, Subscription Publication, 6.37M) reports United Nations-sponsored Syrian peace talks in Geneva ended on Friday after more than a week of UN envoy Staffan de Mistura's separate discussions with the Syrian government delegation and the opposition's main delegation, the High Negotiations Committee. The talks ended with little progress made; opposition representatives reiterated their demand for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's removal, but the Syrian government delegation, led by Ambassador Bashar al-Jaafari, insisted that the agenda should focus on defeating terrorism.

Russia Claims Major Role In Syrian Government's Recapture Of Palmyra. Reuters (3/3, Andrew Osborn;) reports that on Friday, senior Russian Defense Ministry official Lt. Gen. Sergei Rudskoi told reporters in Moscow that Russian military advisers had planned and overseen the Syrian government's successful recapture of the ancient city of Palmyra from ISIS. Rudskoi said more than a thousand militants were killed or wounded in the operation.

Syrian antiquities chief Maamoun Abdulkarim told Reuters (3/3, Makieh, Francis) that a video of the

UNESCO World Heritage site depicted less damage than archaeologists expected. “Really, our hearts had been overwhelmed with fear of a complete explosion of the theater,” Abdulkarim explained, but “The general situation is reassuring.” He said preliminary photographs and video footage revealed almost no further damage to the site.

Russian Official Says Kremlin Welcomes Closer Cooperation With US. Bloomberg Politics (3/3, Meyer, 201K) reports Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov said the Kremlin “would like to see an active U.S. role” in Syria, and acknowledged that the US “is one of the most important players here.” He added that Russia “strongly believes” Iran should play a larger role in the fight against terrorism and would welcome its involvement if President Trump agreed to cooperate with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad against ISIS. “If there will be any common ground for cooperation with the United States in bringing stability in Libya, of course we would be open to all contacts,” Gatilov also asserted. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov reiterated on Friday that there was “no movement” toward closer US-Russian cooperation against terrorism or on the issue of Syria.

The Kremlin also indicated that Trump’s proposed $54 billion increase in defense spending was an internal US matter that did not concern Russia, unless that military buildup disrupted the current strategic balance of power, Reuters (3/3, Dyomkin) reports “Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peso told reporters on Friday.”

RIVAL SYRIAN FORCES VIE FOR US ALLIANCE IN RAQQA. In what the AP (3/3, Mroue) calls “a dramatic reversal of years of the Obama administration’s calls for the ouster of President Bashar Assad,” President Trump “has hinted he might be willing to work with Assad’s army and Russia.” The Pentagon’s “secret plan” to recapture Raqqa, ISIS’ stronghold in Iraq, probably involves “local allies,” but “Syrians are sharply divided over who should enter Raqqa.” Assad’s forces, the Turkish military and its Syrian militia allies, and the US-supported SDF, which consists of Kurdish, Christian, and Arab fighters, “all have their eye on Raqqa” and each unit “vehemently rejects letting the others capture the city and would likely react in anger should the United States support the others.” Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim bluntly warned that SDF’s involvement in Raqqa would harm US-Turkish relations. Air Force Col. John Dorrian said the increased local support would “accelerate the campaign” against ISIS, and the decision to partner with a local unit remains “a subject of ongoing discussions.”

TURKEY’S EFFORTS TO ENHANCE SYRIAN BORDER SECURITY YIELD SMUGGLING, ILLEGAL ENTRY DECLINES. Reuters (3/3, Pamuk) reports the Turkish army “is steadily sealing its frontier with Syria” and has fortified the 566-mile border, “helping to tighten the noose on Islamic State fighters as well as curbing Kurdish rebel groups.” According to infantry colonel Alparslan Kilinc, smuggling attempts have dropped from a peak high of 3,747 incidents in 2014 to only 77 in 2016, and illegal crossing attempts into Turkey have declined from more than 12,000 to 8,531 over the same period. Kilinc said the passage of foreign fighters is also “almost non-existent.”

UN: NEARLY 30,000 WESTERN MOSUL RESIDENTS DISPLACED. The AP (3/3) reports Iraqi special forces recaptured the western Mosul district of Wadi Hajar from ISIS on Friday. The US-backed Iraqi operation launched almost two weeks ago and has thus far displaced about 28,400 people, according to United Nations spokesman Stephane Dujarric. Dujarric estimated that since the operation began, about 4,000 civilians have fled per day. “We think about 750,000 civilians are still trapped inside western Mosul, either sheltering from the fighting or waiting to flee,” Dujarric added. He also warned, “We’re deeply concerned with their well-being and safety and their access to vital resources.”

Reuters (3/3, Chmaytelli, Coles) reports UN High Commissioner for Refugees spokesman Matthew Saltmarsh also commented, “We have noted a significant increase in displacement in last week,” and UNICEF emergency director Bastien Vigneau added that at least 100,000 children are among the total 191,000 Mosul residents displaced since October. The International Red Cross also claimed that within the last 48 hours, it treated five children and two women for burns and injuries caused by chemical agents exposure.

TALIBAN OFFICIAL IDENTIFIES SENIOR COMMANDER KILLED IN SUSPECTED US DRONE STRIKE IN PAKISTAN. The AP (3/3, Gannon) reports a Taliban official confirmed on Friday that a

suspected US drone strike in the Khost region of Pakistan on Thursday killed Qari Abdullah, a top Haqqani network militant commander. Abdullah accompanied Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl in 2014 when he was turned over to US authorities. Earlier on Friday, Pakistani intelligence officials also claimed a suspected US drone strike killed two militants in the Khost tribal region. One Pakistani official also confirmed Abdullah's identity.

PAKISTAN'S ANTI-TERRORISM OPERATION CHALLENGED AS RACIAL PROFILING IN ETHNIC PASHTUN REGION. The Washington Post (3/3, Constable, Khan, 11.43M) reports Pakistan's security forces have in the last month "launched a nationwide anti-terrorist operation" in response to "a spate of suicide bombings." More than 100 suspected terrorists have been detained or killed in the operation. Last week, the military turned its attention to "suspected militant camps on both sides of the border, a rugged region inhabited by Pashtun tribes that has long served as a shelter and staging ground for Islamist militias fighting both the Afghan and Pakistani governments." The ethnic Afghan Pashtun leaders, especially in the Punjab Province, expressed alarm over the harassment, and accused the security forces of using the operation to target their communities and detain "Pashto-speaking men for no reason."

TRUMP, MERKEL TO MEET IN MARCH. The AP (3/3, Pace) reports White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders announced President Trump will host German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Washington on Mar. 14. It is "the first in-person meeting between Trump and the German chancellor since the U.S. election."

Reuters (3/3, Holland) reports Trump and Merkel are expected to discuss "a wide range of issues, including the global economy, trade, the fight against Islamic State, NATO and ties with Russia and China." The two leaders' relationship had "a rocky start" because of "disagreements about trade, Trump's travel ban and his comments about the media."

WPost: European Voters May Not Follow US In Support Of "Populist Insurgency." The Washington Post (3/3, 11.43M) editorializes that President Trump's election win elicited the question of "whether a version of his populist insurgency, and the similar anti-establishment fever that prompted Britain's vote to leave the European Union, will spread to the Netherlands, France and Germany in elections scheduled for the coming months." The Post says pre-election polling results suggest "such an outcome look real," but says for now, "it is looking as if the reaction in Europe to Mr. Trump's victory may be the consolidation of forces that oppose his radical assertion of national sovereignty over multilateralism, and economic nationalism over free trade."

TILLERSON WRITES INTRODUCTORY REMARKS FOR ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT. Secretary of State Tillerson on Friday did not present the State Department's annual human rights report in what the Washington Post (3/3, Morello, 11.43M) describes as "a break with long-standing tradition only rarely breached." Furthermore, no State Department official made "on-camera comments that are typically watched around the world, including by officials in authoritarian countries where abuses are singled out in the report." Tillerson, in "a short written introduction to the report," wrote, "The production of these reports underscores our commitment to freedom, democracy and the human rights guaranteed to all individuals around the world." Members of Congress and human rights advocates criticized Tillerson's absence from the presentation of the report, which differed "little from last year's" and "largely reflects work produced during the Obama administration." A senior Administration official, however, told the Post, "The report speaks for itself," and the facts within it "should really be the story here."

The AP (3/3, Lederman) reports Tillerson has not "spoken about human rights publicly since taking office one month ago," but according to a senior Administration official, Tillerson said during his Senate confirmation hearing that human rights would be a consideration in the Administration's foreign policy. Human Rights Watch director Sarah Margon asserted, "Tillerson's absence from the State Department's annual human rights report release reinforces the message to governments, rights activists, and at-risk minorities that the State Department might also be silent on repression, abuse, and exploitation." The AP notes the report pointed to the Philippines, Turkey, China, and Venezuela as four of the most concerning areas.

Reuters (3/3, Torbati) also reports on Tillerson's absence, and details that the report accused police and vigilantes in the Philippines of killing "more than 6,000 suspected drug dealers and users" since July. It

also warned the number of extrajudicial killings in the Philippines has "increased sharply" in 2016. The report also noted Russia has maintained its "authoritarian political system dominated by President Vladimir Putin."

Analysts Criticize Tillerson's Lack of Visibility. The Los Angeles Times (3/3, Wilkinson, 4.52M) describes Tillerson as "like no other modern secretary" as he "has given no media interviews and has not held a single news conference." The State Department is purportedly "facing deep budget cuts that could significantly curtail Tillerson's ability to conduct the global diplomacy that is the backbone of U.S. foreign policy." Former long-term US diplomat Aaron David Miller said Tillerson is heading an "incredibly shrinking State Department." Miller warned, "A way has to be found to empower Tillerson," or else world leaders will think "the secretary of State does not have a whole lot of weight." In a Wednesday statement, Tillerson reiterated that the State Department "will continue to engage to advance U.S. interests in the world in cooperation with our partners and allies." Analysts predicted Tillerson would ally himself with Defense Secretary Mattis and Homeland Security Secretary Kelly, but Tillerson has instead "faded from view on his debut trim to a G-20 ministerial meeting in Bonn, Germany."

Bloomberg Suggests Tillerson's Actions Signal "Dangerous Shift" In US Foreign Policy. In an editorial, Bloomberg View (3/3, 125K) warns Secretary of State Tillerson's decision not to present the State Department's annual human rights report "is a is a small but telling sign of a more profound and dangerous shift: President Donald Trump's apathy for the values that have long fortified U.S. power and influence." Bloomberg says "this is a fragile moment, for both the administration and the liberal democratic order more generally," and even though President Trump is facing some of the same challenges faced by any president, many of those challenges "are of his own making." Bloomberg stresses that "what Americans need most right now are honesty and reassurance," but "neither the president nor his secretary of state seem very interested in providing them."

FEINSTEIN REJECTS PROPOSED "LIMITED USE" NUCLEAR WEAPONS. In an op-ed for the Washington Post (3/3, Feinstein, 11.43M), Sen. Dianne Feinstein admonishes the idea of "limited use" nuclear weapons, and calls the Pentagon's Defense Science Board's promotion of their development "absolutely unacceptable." Feinstein says the advisory committee's recommendation "is even more problematic given President Trump's comments in support of a nuclear arms race." Feinstein also labels as "a wrongheaded position" the committee's suggestion that "we should consider resuming nuclear testing to have confidence in our nuclear deterrent" because such an approach "would only encourage others to follow suit" and render the world "far less safe." Feinstein concludes, "This latest proposal may lower the threshold for using nuclear weapons," and says Defense Secretary Mattis "would be wise to reject it."

HUMAN RIGHTS EXPERT EXPRESSES ALARM OVER TRUMP'S POSITION ON TORTURE. The AP (3/3) reports British lawyer and United Nations special rapporteur on human rights Ben Emmerson told the Human Rights Council on Friday that he was alarmed by President Trump's position on torture. Emmerson said he heard Trump "extolling the virtues of torture as a weapon in the fight against terrorism," and that Trump's support of the use of torture made his "blood run cold."

Reuters (3/3, Nebehay) reports Emmerson warned Trump's approval of torture "is a state of affairs which lays down the gauntlet, it lays down a precedent" for other nations to follow. "If one of the most powerful nations in the world, a permanent member of the Security Council, is once again prepared to abandon our collective values on the pretext of defending them, then one is left to wonder whether anything at all has been achieved in the last 15 years," Emmerson added. Emmerson also denounced Trump's remarks as evidence of his "staggering level of ill-preparedness to govern." Reuters notes Trump said in January that he "absolutely" felt that water boarding was a useful intelligence-gathering tool but would defer the decision to Defense Secretary Mattis.

NYTimes: Trump's Rhetoric Has Global Consequences. In an editorial, the New York Times (3/3, Subscription Publication, 13.9M) highlights efforts by Cambodian, Russian, and Turkish governments "to crack down on foreign news organizations," and writes that "America's self-imposed role as an arbiter of global behavior, however irritating or hypocritical it may sometimes be, has served as a check on autocrats and nationalists and has provided authority for their opponents." Furthermore, "European

nationalists like France's Marine Le Pen, the Netherlands' Geert Wilders, Britain's Nigel Farage and Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban have found encouragement" in President Trump's anti-immigration rhetoric. The Times cautions that Trump "should know" his critical words about immigrants and the press play "not only to Americans but also to a world that takes his words very seriously."

Cohen: Trump's Actions Conflict With Oath To Defend Constitution. In his column for the New York Times (3/3, Cohen, Subscription Publication, 13.9M), Roger Cohen highlights various incidents that he describes as President Trump's contempt and warns that "there is a deeper contempt, even more treacherous. It is for the Constitution." Cohen writes that "Trump has attacked the freedom of the press enshrined in the First Amendment, and the independence of the judiciary," and adds that Trump's "reckless travel ban raised issues of due process and religious discrimination." Cohen says this particular contempt "was signaled in his inaugural speech when Trump" took an oath to defend the Constitution. The author self-identifies as a naturalized citizen who took an oath to support and defend the Constitution and concludes that his column about Trump's contempt is, "in a way, to fulfillment of that oath."

BRITISH PRIME MINISTER CRITICIZES CALL FOR SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM. The Wall Street Journal (3/3, Gross, Subscription Publication, 6.37M) reports British Prime Minister Theresa May, in a speech to Scotland's Conservative Party members on Friday, criticized the Scottish National Party-led government's renewed calls for independence as "tunnel-vision nationalism" that "sells Scotland short." Scotland's leader, Nicola Sturgeon, accused May of refusing to discuss proposed European Union exit negotiations with Scottish officials; meanwhile, a spokesman for May reiterated the prime minister's disapproval of an independence referendum.

Former British PM Blair Urges Center-Progressives To Unite Against Populism. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, in an op-ed for the New York Times (3/3, Blair, Subscription Publication, 13.9M), describes "rightist populism" movement in both the US and Europe as having "partly economic, but mainly cultural" origins, unlike in the 1980s, when "working-class voters moved to the right because they felt that the left didn't satisfy their aspirations for self-improvement." Today's populist movement, suggests Blair, "is not to reason but to roar," and because "supporters welcome the outrage their leaders provoke," it has polarized the public. "Meanwhile, traditional conservatives feel like strangers in their own land," and these "same dynamics are splintering the left, too." Blair urges progressives on both the right and the left to "reach across the party divide, making a virtue of nonpartisanship," because if liberal democracy is "to survive and thrive, we must build a new coalition that is popular, not populist."

POLL SUGGESTS MACRON WOULD LEAD FIRST ROUND OF FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. Reuters (3/3, Thomas) reports a pre-election Odoxa poll suggested former French economy minister Emmanuel Macron would lead the first round of France's presidential election with 27 percent of the vote, followed by far-right candidate Marine Le Pen with 25.5 percent of the vote and conservative Francois Fillon with 19 percent. If Fillon withdrew, conservative Alain Juppe would, it he ran, lead the first round with 26.5 percent of the vote.

Bloomberg Politics (3/4, Amiel, Viscusi, 201K) reports Fillon is currently under investigation by prosecutors, and he could face charges of embezzlement as early as Mar. 15. Fillon described the judges' motivation as a "political assassination" and has vowed not to withdraw his candidacy. His remaining loyalists, led by senator Bruno Retailleau, urged supporters to gather at a rally at the Eiffel Tower on Monday "to show he's still a force in the 2017 election" and dispel calls for his withdrawal in favor of Juppe, his former rival.

Meanwhile, Le Pen's attorneys told Reuters (3/3, Bon) she refused to attend a summons related to allegations of her misuse of European Union funds. One of her lawyers, Marcel Ceccaldi, cited Le Pen's parliamentary immunity and stated, "Of course she won't go."

TWICE-POISONED RUSSIAN OPPOSITION ACTIVIST HAS "NO DOUBT" OF PUTIN'S INVOLVEMENT. In an exclusive interview with NBC Nightly News' (3/3, story 6, 2:45, Holt, 16.61M) Richard Engel, Russian opposition activist Vladimir Kara-Murza said he believes he was poisoned twice in the last two years "by people with at least with connections to the Russian special services" because of his "involvement in the Russian opposition." In the latest incident, Kara-Murza explained, "It was about

5:00 in the morning and I woke up because my heart was racing. My heartbeat was just getting faster and faster." He asserted, "There seems to be an extremely high mortality rate of among independent journalists and political opponents of Vladimir Putin in the last 17 years. There's no doubt." Kara-Murza also urged "our colleagues and our political leaders in western democracies, including the United States," against helping Putin.

US MILITARY CONDUCTS AIR EXERCISES OVER SOUTH CHINA SEA. Reuters (3/3, Mogato) reports about 30 F-18 fighter jets, helicopters, and other aircraft launched from the USS Carl Vinson in "a dramatic display of American power in the hotly contested South China Sea" on Friday. The USS Carl Vinson has patrolled the South China Sea since Feb. 19, highlighting "some confusion" about the US military's "staying power in the region under a Trump administration with policies skewed heavily towards a domestic agenda." The strike group's commander, Rear Adm. James Kilby, explained to reporters that the US' South China Sea drills are intended "to reassure our friends and allies and our belief in the freedom of navigation and security operations that we always conducted." Yet, "China has been guarded in its response to the latest U.S. mission," and comments by Secretary of State Tillerson and Administration officials have caused "alarm." Notably, Tillerson "suggested during his Senate hearing that China be blocked from accessing the islands it has built and fortified with surface-to-air missiles."

Chinese State-Run Newspapers Criticize Western News' Coverage Of Detained Lawyer. The New York Times (3/3, Hernández, Subscription Publication, 13.9M) reports the ruling Communist Party's flagship newspaper, People's Daily, criticized Western media coverage of Chinese lawyer Xie Yang, who accused Chinese interrogators of torturing him. On Thursday, the Chinese news outlet Xinhua also accused legal activists of using the press to "smear the Chinese government." Adopting President Trump's phrase, Xinhua said Western outlets' "stories were essentially fake news." It also wrote, "Investigations by reporters and an investigative team have showed that the accusations were nothing but cleverly orchestrated lies." On Friday, Chen Jiangang, one of Xie's attorneys, denied Xinhua's accusations and reiterated Xie's account of the torture he endured.

SOUTH KOREA ACCUSES CHINA OF RETALIATING AGAINST DEFENSE SYSTEM. On Thursday, the South Korean conglomerate Lotte Group approved of a land swap that will enable one of its golf courses to be used for the deployment of the US-built Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, System; later that day, the Lotte Group's duty-free shopping website was targeted in a denial-of-service attack, the Wall Street Journal (3/3, Cheng, Subscription Publication, 6.37M) reports. On Friday, South Korean semi-official media outlet Yonhap News Agency accused the Chinese government of calling on its travel agencies to refrain from selling South Korean tour packages, prompting suspicions that Beijing ordered the cyber attack against the Lotte Group to retaliate against the defense system.

MALAYSIAN POLICE ISSUE ARREST WARRANT FOR NORTH KOREAN SUSPECTED IN KIM JONG NAM'S ASSASSINATION. The Wall Street Journal (3/3, Otto, Ngui, Subscription Publication, 6.37M) reports Malaysian police on Friday issued an arrest warrant for 37-year-old North Korean airline employee Kim Uk Il, identified as a suspect in the Feb. 13 assassination of Kim Jong Nam. Earlier on Friday, Malaysian authorities released another North Korean, Ri Jong Chol, because of insufficient evidence to detain him beyond the maximum two-week period.

FORMER NBA PLAYER DENNIS RODMAN ATTENDS USMA PANEL ON NORTH KOREA. The Los Angeles Times (3/3, Demick, 4.52M) reports former NBA player Dennis Rodman, "at an unusual panel held Friday at the United States Military Academy at West Point," discussed his numerous visits to North Korea and with its leader, Kim Jong Un. "It is hard to imagine a more improbable guest at West Point than" Rodman, writes the Times, "But Rodman has probably spent more time with Kim Jong Un than any other American, making his North Korea experiences of keen public interest." According to West Point's Modern War Institute director, Liam Collins, Rodman was open to the idea of serving as a US-North Korean emissary in a manner similar to the "Ping-Pong diplomacy" that reinstated US-Chinese relations. Rodman was purportedly noncommittal on the idea of returning to North Korea, but he "hinted at the possibility of communication between the countries" and repeatedly claimed the Kim is fond of President Trump.

INDIAN GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES TO MEET WITH DALAI LAMA IN DISPUTED REGION.

Reuters (3/3, Miglani, Wilkes) reports Indian officials said government representatives will meet with the Dalai Lama during his April religious trip to Arunachel Pradesh, which China claims as its "South Tibet" state. On Friday, the Chinese Foreign Ministry warned that the meeting would severely damage Chinese-Indian relations, and cautioned the representatives against encouraging anti-China activities in the area. Reuters suggests Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision "to go ahead at a time of strained relations signals Modi's readiness to use diplomatic tools at a time when China's economic and political clout across South Asia is growing." Furthermore, it could also signal Modi's increasingly assertive foreign policy. India has hosted the Dalai Lama since 1959, which "has long irritated Beijing," but for the first time the Dalai Lama's visit will involve Indian government ministers.

LIBYAN MILITIAS SEIZE TWO OIL TERMINALS. Libya's spokesman for the 101 Brigade, Faisal al-Zwei, told the AP (3/3, Musa) that approximately 1,000 militiamen in 200 armed vehicles clashed with Gen. Khalifa Hifter's army over the al-Sidra and Ras Lanuf oil terminals on Friday. At least nine soldiers died in the clashes, and Hifter's army was forced to retreat. The militias consisted of the Benghazi Defense Brigades, which are comprised of IS militants and former Libyan rebels, and militiamen from the western Libyan city of Misrata.

Reuters (3/3, Al-Warfalli) reports the assault occurred just seven months after the Libyan National Army captured and reopened the terminals. The seizure "risks increasing the fighting around the ports and casts new doubt over Libya's attempt to revive its oil production."

STATE DEPARTMENT'S ANNUAL NARCOTICS REPORT RECOGNIZES CUBA'S EFFORTS AGAINST DRUG SMUGGLING. The Miami Herald (3/3, Whitefield, 856K) reports the State Department, in its annual narcotics control report to Congress on Friday, wrote, "Cuba's intensive security presence and interdiction efforts have kept supply down and prevented traffickers from establishing a foothold," and "Cuba concentrates supply reduction efforts by preventing smuggling through territorial waters, rapidly collecting wash-ups, and conducting thorough airport searches." On issues of money laundering and financial crimes, the report added, "The government-controlled banking sector, low internet and cell phone usage rates, and lack of government and legal transparency render Cuba an unattractive location for money laundering through financial institutions." Despite the low risk of money laundering in Cuba, the report identified numerous "strategic deficiencies" in Cuba's anti-money laundering efforts. It recommended transparency increases in Cuba's financial sector and criminal justice system.

ECUADORIAN PRESIDENTIAL FRONT-RUNNER PLEDGES TO EVICT ASSANGE. In an email exchange with the Miami Herald (3/3, Wyss, 856K), Ecuador's front-running presidential candidate, Guillermo Lasso, said if he was elected, "We will ask Mr. [Julian] Assange, very politely, to leave our embassy, in absolute compliance with international conventions and protocols." Lasso also vowed "to take all the steps necessary so that another embassy will take him in and protect his rights." When questioned on whether Assange used WikiLeaks "in Ecuador's razor-tight, first-round vote on Feb. 19, Lasso refused to speculate."

In a separate article, the Miami Herald (3/3, Wyss, 856K) reports that in the first round voting, "Lasso barely survived" against ruling party candidate Lenin Moreno, but recent polling shows Lasso leading with 52 percent of the vote, while Moreno has 48 percent. Lasso is a former banker and, "in a country that still demonizes bankers," he "has struggled to win the hearts of those who were hurt by the crisis, particularly emigrants." Lasso told the Herald in the email exchange that "government propaganda has tried to tie me to the banking crisis," even though an investigation into the nation's financial crisis in 1999 revealed "the true culprits," including officials under current President Rafael Correa. The Herald notes Moreno is Correa's chosen successor.

To keep the email to a manageable size, the national news summary is available on the website.

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PREPARED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY BY BULLETIN INTELLIGENCE WWW.BULLETININTELLIGENCE.COM/DHS

TO: THE SECRETARY AND SENIOR STAFF

DATE: SATURDAY, MARCH 4, 2017 7:00 AM EST

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LEADING DHS NEWS

Trump Renews Praise For Canada's 'Merit' Immigration System

By Alan Gomez

USA Today, March 3, 2017

President Trump heaped new praise Friday on Canada's immigration system, which has served as a model for countries around the world because it focuses more on immigrants who can contribute to the economy than those with little more than family ties.

Trump sent out a Tweet after apparently watching a segment on Fox & Friends that featured Nick Adams, a conservative author who the book Green Card Warrior: My Quest for Legal Immigration in an Illegals' System.

During the segment, Adams spoke against "multi-culturalism" and immigrants who enter the country to "milk us," which drew a salute from Trump who described Adams' book as a "must read."

"The merit-based system is the way to go. Canada, Australia!" he wrote.

That tweet followed Trump's comments during his joint address to Congress on Tuesday, when he praised the system used by Canada, Australia and many other nations during a portion of his speech that called for reforming an "outdated" legal immigration system that hurts American workers.

"Switching away from this current system of lower-skilled immigration, and instead adopting a merit-based system, will have many benefits," Trump said. "It will save countless dollars, raise workers' wages, and help struggling families — including immigrant families — enter the middle class."

Canada has long used immigration as a way to drive its economic engine, and limits the relatives Canadian citizens can bring in.

About 63% of those granted legal permanent residence in Canada — the final step before becoming citizens — are admitted for their economic skills, with only 24% admitted based on having family members living in the country. The U.S. system is reversed: 63% of green cards are given to immigrants with family connections, and only 13% given based on economic reasons.

Canada was also the first country to use a point system to grade economic immigrants — a 100-point scale introduced in the 1960s that rewards foreigners with PhDs and extensive work experience in specialized fields. It became increasingly popular in the 2000s, as countries that included Australia, Denmark, Japan and the United Kingdom adopted versions of it.

"It was very trendy," said Meghan Benton, a senior policy analyst at the non-partisan Migration Policy Institute.

Applicants are given a score on a 100-point scale, with points awarded in six categories:

• 28 maximum points for language skills. The more fluent they are in English and French, Canada's two official languages, the more points they get.

• 25 points for education — 5 for a high school diploma, 19 for a two-year college degree, 25 for a PhD.

• 15 maximum points for work experience — the more skilled the job, and the more years spent doing it, the more points.

• 12 maximum points for age — the younger the applicant, the more points awarded.

• 10 points maximum if they have a current job offer from a Canadian employer.

• 10 points maximum for "adaptability," which includes things like family ties to Canadians or past visits to the country.

Those who score 67 points or higher are eligible to immigrate. Immediate relatives of Canadian citizens do not go through the grading process.

Read more:

Benton said the formula has changed over the years, as Canada has recently put more emphasis on foreigners with standing job offers. Canada and others countries, she said, realized that simply admitting people with PhDs wasn't an economic cure-all, since many couldn't find jobs in their fields and were forced to do work far below their education levels.

"You had scientists working as taxi drivers," she said. "Classic brain waste."

The country also made a major revision in 2015, when it allowed Canadian provinces to sponsor immigrants based

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on labor shortages. The goal was to tie the system more closely to local demands.

The question in the U.S. now is how much Trump wants to emulate Canada's system. "We've been discussing here exactly what he means," Benton said.

Roy Beck, president of NumbersUSA, a group that advocates for lower levels of immigration, interpreted Trump's comments as a call to shift away from an immigration system that places such a high priority on family-linked migration — allowing U.S. citizens to sponsor not just spouses and children, but also extended family members.

Beck said the U.S. also allows in too many refugees and foreigners chosen through the diversity visa program, which allows 50,000 people to enter the U.S. each year from under-represented countries, mostly from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. That amounts to less than 5% of the 1.2 million immigrants admitted to the U.S. in 2015.

"He's very clearly saying we should stop importing poverty," Beck said. "He didn't use that term. But he's saying that we're going to stop bringing in people who do not meet some criteria of merit."

Clarissa Martínez-de-Castro, deputy vice president of the National Council of La Raza, a group that advocates for immigrants in the U.S., said Trump was clearly embracing a proposal by Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., to cut all legal immigration in half. She said Cotton's proposal, and Trump's apparent embrace of that model, show what their true end goal is.

"Many Republicans have been trying to hide behind this veneer of, 'We're not against all immigrants, we're just concerned with illegal immigration,'" Martínez-de-Castro said. "They're trying to eviscerate all of it."

Exclusive: Trump Administration Considering Separating Women, Children At U.S.-Mexico Border

By Julia Edwards Ainsley

Reuters, March 3, 2017

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Why Evangelicals Are Trump's Strongest Travel-ban Supporters

By Harry Bruinius

Christian Science Monitor, March 3, 2017

Why Evangelicals are Trump's strongest travel-ban supporters

Harry Bruinius

3/3/2017

March 3, 2017

NEW YORK

—When President Trump released the first version of his executive order placing a temporary ban on immigrants from seven Muslim "countries of concern" in January, Ernie Sanders gave the president his full support.

As the host of the radio show "The Voice of Christian Resistance" in Ohio and the president of the local tea party chapter in his area, he's been worried for a while that allowing Muslims to enter the US could pose a serious danger the country.

"I'm not so against bringing in refugees," says Pastor Sanders, echoing the concerns of many evangelical leaders since President Trump issued his controversial executive order, which was halted by federal courts in February. "Like Donald Trump says, I'm against bringing in criminals and young jihadists into this country."

Yet even when it comes to refugees, he says he worries that allowing too many Muslims into the country could lead to the establishment of Sharia law in American communities, which he believes is counter to what he sees as America's unique Judeo-Christian heritage.

His views are a window on a larger pattern in America: that among prominent religious groups, evangelical Christians are the most supportive of Mr. Trump on the travel ban policy, and most worried about what a rise in Muslim immigrants would mean for the nation's identity.

On the one hand, it's an anomaly. The deep bond between the Trump administration and white Evangelicals has perplexed scholars and observers in the media, who have noted, again and again, the seeming cultural chasms between the Manhattan billionaire's past lifestyle and conservative Evangelicals' emphasis on moral character and family values.

Yet in other ways, it makes perfect sense, scholars say. Among the religious groups within the US, the culture of Evangelicalism has maintained both a vivid sense of America as a Christian nation and a deeply-rooted exclusive theology that remains suspicious of those outside the fold.

"I think the biggest thing is that Evangelicals have mixed their faith with the state, making a kind of religious nationalism," says Pastor Bob Roberts, head of the 3,000-member NorthWood Church, an evangelical congregation in Keller, Texas. "They see it as 'taking back America,' as stopping the Muslims from taking over America."The exception, in a new poll

The White House says the president will sign a revised executive order attempting to address a federal appeals court's objections soon. And many religious conservatives of all persuasions fully support Trump's reasoning, convinced that the nation's vetting process for refugees has not been up to the task of protecting the American people.

Yet after Trump's initial order was halted by federal courts in February, support for the ban began to wane among most religious groups, according to a survey by the Public

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Religion Research Institute released last week. Support from Catholics, mainline Protestants, and religious minorities have each dropped. The conspicuous exception is white Evangelicals, for whom support is up.

In all, 76 percent of white Evangelicals said they approved of the temporary ban on refugees from these Muslim countries, according to another survey by Pew Research released this week. That compares with 50 percent of mainline Protestants, 36 percent of Catholics of all races, and 10 percent of black Protestants, the survey found. Overall, about 4 of 10 Americans currently approve of the controversial immigration ban.A battle over Evengelicalism

Pastor Roberts has grown concerned by what he sees as Islamophobia among fellow Evangelical Christians.

"There is a battle right now for what Evangelicalism is really all about," says Roberts, who has worked with Muslim leaders around the world to foster interfaith fellowship. "Older Evangelicals supported Trump en masse, but this is not nearly as strong among younger Evangelicals."

For the past decade, Millennials within the politically powerful American subgroup have begun to shift their views during ongoing culture war battles over same sex marriage and racial reconciliation. And, like Roberts, many have developed a willingness to engage their Muslim neighbors with fellowship and even inter-religious worship.

Last month, too, hundreds of Evangelical leaders, many of them involved in overseas Christian ministries helping refugees in Muslim countries, expressed loud objections to the president's temporary ban after he signed it in January. Many had also been vociferous critics of Trump's words and past actions during the campaign.A base of support for Trump

Even so, during last year's election, rank-and-file Evangelicals, who make up about 25 percent of the electorate and have long constituted the Republican Party's most faithful base of support, supported Trump overwhelmingly, and remain among the president's most loyal supporters. More than 8 in 10 voted for Trump, a higher share than supported George W. Bush during his two presidential victories.

Scholars note that this overwhelming support comes with a number of caveats. Though wide, it may not be as deep it may appear, as many Evangelicals voted strategically, with the open Supreme Court seat and an abiding antipathy for Hillary Clinton leading many to choose Trump last year.

Evangelicalism is also diverse. It encompasses staid middle-class Calvinists, members of nondenominational megachurches with flashy TV evangelists teaching a "prosperity gospel," as well as rural, working-class Baptists and Pentecostals.

Sanders, in fact, prefers the term "fundamentalist" to Evangelical. For him, those who compromise conservative principles, like those within liberal mainline denominations, are apostates – or at the very least theologically "spineless." Fundamentalists, he says, "they're the people who are the hard-working ones, they're the ones who get out there, put their boots on the ground, who have a no compromise position.... The apostate church, we look at them as just as much an enemy as we do the radical Muslims."

"And as I told folks on my radio program, I told them, 'Mark those folks, if you see Hillary signs in their yards," he says. "Those people are not your friends, they're your enemies if you're a conservative, God-fearing person."

While Sanders could be considered a part of a long tradition of fundamentalist suspicion and separatism on one end of the Evangelical spectrum, his general suspicion of those outside the fold has deep historical roots, scholars say.Controversy at Wheaton College

Last year, Wheaton College, one of the top Evangelical institutions of higher education in the country, forced out a member of its political science faculty, Larycia Hawkins, after she donned a hijab to express what she calls "embodied solidarity" with Muslims as incidents of violence and prejudice became more common over the past few years. The first black woman to receive tenure at Wheaton, she also said that Christians and Muslims worship the same God, which caused an uproar among alumni and board members, who accused her of violating the college's theological statement, which each faculty member must sign and adhere to.

"The broader response from the evangelical world in the United States to my wearing a hijab was partly a kind of detestation of the notion that someone could put on something that is symbolic of a religion, and put on in religious solidarity, and still maintain my religious purity," says Professor Hawkins, now the Abd el-Kader Visiting Faculty Fellow at the University of Virginia's Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. "My otherness, my blackness, my femaleness – the fact that I'm 'other' already made my body and the picture I posted on Facebook even more anathema to people."

"Really, what I see with the current evangelical retrenchment around immigration –and this willingness not to engage the narrative of Scripture in its totality, including the prophets' and Jesus's words about welcoming foreigners and the strangers in the land – has to do, I think, with the fact that Evangelicals have asserted a white Christianity on top of citizenship," she continues.Historical roots of separatism

For historians of religion, this wariness of outsiders in many ways goes back the country's early Puritan settlers, separatists who wanted to create a kind of utopian society rooted in proper theological and Biblical principles. Add to that, too, American evangelicalism's long ambivalence with regard to race.

"The notion of a nation with more visible Muslim communities doesn't comport with 'the city on a hill' or this notion that America is and always has been a Christian nation," says Randall Balmer, chair of the department of

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religion at Dartmouth College in Hanover, N.H., and a leading historian of Evangelicalism in the US.

"And in some ways, this has happened once before," he says. During the period of urbanization and industrialization near the turn of the 20th century, many Evangelical Protestants reacted to the influx of Catholic, Jewish, and eastern European immigrants with alarm.

"And the response on the part of many Evangelicals was to lapse into apocalyptic language and an interpretation that saw the country on the verge of collapse," Professor Balmer says. "To look around and see the teeming tenements of the Lower East Side of Manhattan – it just didn't look like the precincts of Zion, or the city on a hill."Immigration Act of 1924

Such fears, which extended well beyond America's religious culture and included secular notions of an American exceptionalism, contributed to the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, which severely curtailed the immigration of Asians, southern and eastern Europeans, including Italians and Jews, and others who were seen as dangers to the "purity" of the American Protestant character.

Hawkins notes another trend at that time. The experience of the Scopes "monkey" trial in the 1920s contributed to Evangelicals withdrawing from civic engagement as "modernist" ideas and Darwinian science became cultural norms –and led the emergence of a separatist fundamentalism. It was only until the culture wars that dawned in the 1960s that Evangelicals began to reemerge as a powerful force in politics, culminating in their ardent support for Ronald Reagan and the Republican Party ever since.'There really is a fear ...'

And like many historians, Balmer notes that the rise of the religious right in the 1960s and 1970s had more to do with a reaction to the desegregation of the public school system, and their efforts to establish private Christian academies, rather than issues surrounding abortion or human sexuality.

Many of the cultural controversies over evolution, the role of women, and racial integration, shaped in the 20th century, remain current today, scholars say. Many Evangelicals, for example, have sought to opt out of participating in civic duties surrounding the the legalization of same-sex marriage, seeing this as incursion into their deeply-held religious beliefs – a compromise of their own theological purity and a violation of their religious conscience.

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"Muslims are perceived as a threat from without, coming now within," observes Roberts, the evangelical pastor in Texas. "There really is a fear that … they are taking over America, and that this new wave of immigrants will bring even more Muslims to America."

The threats of terrorism are legitimate and real, he says, but Evangelicals "are more fearful of Muslims getting a larger footprint in America than they already have."

A 'Sanctuary City' Seizes The Moment, And The Name

By Lawrence Downes

New York Times, March 3, 2017

SANTA ANA, Calif. — Cities of immigrants, it's time. Time to declare yourselves sanctuaries. To wear the label proudly, defiantly, even if the White House and its allies threaten you and utter all kinds of falsehoods against you.

President Trump is in power; his nativist ideology is now fully armed and operational. He laid it out with alarming clarity in his "America first" address to Congress this week, painting unauthorized immigrants as vicious criminals, and refugees as dangerous undesirables, using both groups as scapegoats and targets. The homeland security secretary, John Kelly, has given his boss a battle plan. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Border Patrol are carrying it out, combing the country, seizing and terrifying the innocent.

The sweeps, arrests and intimidation share a brutal randomness. A young "Dreamer" gives a news conference after her father and brother are detained — and is arrested herself. ICE stakes out a courthouse to grab a survivor of domestic violence. Border agents ask a planeload of passengers — on a domestic flight — to show their papers.

Many people are confused by the term "sanctuary city," which has no strict definition. Mr. Trump uses it as an epithet to mean immigrant-loving communities that allow alien criminals to roam free. Used that way, the label is false; no city can suspend the rule of law or keep out the feds. But rather than tolerating such slander, cities should seize back the term, defining sanctuaries as places that stand for reason in the face of overreaching, unjust and often lawless federal enforcement.

They should do what Santa Ana, Calif., has done. It is a city of 335,000, in the heart of Orange County, whose City Council has passed one of the boldest and most far-reaching sanctuary ordinances in the state. In a county that has long been known as a haven of white Republicans, Santa Ana is a mixed-race, mixed-income, All-American town. Its population is about 46 percent immigrant, and its mayor and its six City Council members are all Latino.

When the Council gave final approval to its sanctuary ordinance in January, by a 6-to-0 vote, it was the culmination of months of persuasion by residents who feel the force of Mr. Trump's anti-immigrant threats intimately. They argued that Latino and Asian families, including many unauthorized immigrants with citizen children, have fought for a foothold in this country and deserve to live in safety and peace. They pointed out that using the local police as immigration

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enforcers takes them away from their primary responsibility, the safety of the community. It wastes crime-fighting resources. It costs too much. And it's constitutionally dubious for localities to detain people for no other reason than an administrative request from ICE.

The ordinance is duly respectful of the law, in a spirit that honors the Constitution and residents' civil rights. It declares that none of its provisions are to conflict with "any valid and enforceable duty and obligation imposed by a court order or any federal or applicable law." But it also makes clear that the city will not cooperate in any federal immigration dragnet. The feds may do what they will, but Santa Ana wants no part of it. It will not allow the use of city resources or personnel to assist in these efforts unless required by state or federal law. Nor will the city share "sensitive information," protecting the privacy of its residents, whatever their immigration status.

Police chiefs and sheriffs across the country understand such reasoning; 63 of them recently sent a letter opposing Mr. Trump's effort to conscript them for his immigration crackdown.

Santa Ana's decision took courage, given Mr. Trump's heated language about "vicious" immigrant criminals and his threat to rob sanctuary cities of federal funds. It's not clear that he can or will follow through. But for Santa Ana, other financial implications were more immediate: The city had a deal with ICE to house immigrant detainees in its jail for $340,000 a month; that contract has been canceled. The city accepted the hit, realizing how inappropriate it would be to call itself a sanctuary while profiting from Mr. Trump's deportation policies.

Success has encouraged the residents of Santa Ana to consider the next steps. Now that we're a sanctuary city, what else should we do? How about finding lawyers to help people in detention fight deportation? A resolution to examine the issue came before the Council the other night. Students, lawyers and community members waited through hours of legislative minutiae for a chance to testify. At about 12:30 in the morning, the resolution passed unanimously.

The opposition in California to the Trump administration goes well beyond a blue island in historically red Orange County. The State Legislature is considering a strong sanctuary bill, the California Values Act, to prohibit the use of state resources for immigration enforcement. Like Santa Ana's ordinance, the Values Act would have the force of law. Pressure for sanctuary policies is strong in Los Angeles, too, even though its mayor, Eric Garcetti, has at times been wary of the label. Nervous politicians should get over their qualms. While they have been tiptoeing, the Trump administration has been moving.

IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT

How Chicago Sanctuary Status Fends Off ICE Agents As Trump Pushes Deportations

By Gregory Pratt And Jeff Coen

Chicago Tribune, March 3, 2017

On most mornings, the names of people arrested and headed to bond court at Chicago's main criminal courthouse are written on paper lists tacked to a bulletin board in a hallway outside the courtroom. Anxious friends and relatives run their fingers down the sheets to make sure that they're in the right place, but they aren't the only ones scanning those lists.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents go through them by hand to find the names of immigrants who are here illegally and have been swept up into the local criminal justice system, federal officials say. That places them in ICE's crosshairs and potentially on a path toward deportation.

That kind of primitive workaround is a reality for federal agents whose territory is Chicago, one of the largest cities to call itself a sanctuary and to implement policies aimed at defying federal crackdowns on illegal immigration — a movement that has gained steam as some governments in the Chicago area express their opposition to President Donald Trump's plans to increase deportations.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel and other local politicians, saying they value the contributions of immigrants, have trumpeted Chicago's status as a place that will welcome and shield those here illegally, including by not having the Chicago Police Department cooperate with ICE.

"You're going to be safe here," Emanuel said in a message for immigrants. "You are going to be secure here. You're going to be supported here."

Here, sanctuary city status means ICE agents will get limited if any cooperation from local authorities, including the Police Department and the Cook County sheriff's office, which operates the jail. In fact, the number of detainers ICE has issued to the jail has dropped precipitously since the county adopted its sanctuary ordinance, forcing agents to look for the sort of workarounds they employ at the courthouse.

Trump-supporting Illinois town rallies behind detained immigrant

Associated Press

A southern Illinois community that solidly backed President Donald Trump has rallied behind a Mexican restaurant manager who doesn't have legal permission to live in the U.S. and has been detained by immigration officials.

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Letters of support for Juan Carlos Hernandez Pacheco have poured in from...

A southern Illinois community that solidly backed President Donald Trump has rallied behind a Mexican restaurant manager who doesn't have legal permission to live in the U.S. and has been detained by immigration officials.

Letters of support for Juan Carlos Hernandez Pacheco have poured in from... (Associated Press)

Julie Myers Wood, who headed ICE during President George W. Bush's second term, said she expected that the criminal justice system would continue to be a site for conflict and confusion as the federal government tries to implement Trump's new immigration policies.

"Someone is pulled over. What can the officer do? What must the officer do?" she asked. "If ICE wants to talk to that person, will they be allowed into a facility to make a determination about them?"

Other leaders in Cook County have joined the effort to shield immigrants, adding to the obstacles the government faces. Chicago Public Schools officials recently told principals to turn away ICE agents without warrants, and Cardinal Blase Cupich instructed priests in the Archdiocese of Chicago, which covers Cook and Lake counties, to do the same.

But being a sanctuary city offers limited protection to unauthorized immigrants; Chicago can't prevent immigration agents from raiding businesses in search of workers or detaining immigrants at their homes. As a result, neighborhoods have been on edge for weeks amid real detentions at O'Hare International Airport and home visits from ICE agents — as well as unfounded rumors on social media about immigration checkpoints on "L" trains.

"There's a lot of preparation for the worst," said local activist Tania Unzueta, of the national Mijente organization, a group dedicated to Latino organizing and a critic of the Trump administration's immigration policies. "I've already had to have conversations with people (telling them), 'You are a priority. You are in danger. If ICE comes and picks you up, I don't know that I can get you out.' "

Cook County Jail

Antonio Perez / Chicago Tribune

Cook County Jail

Cook County Jail (Antonio Perez / Chicago Tribune)

ICE works without jail help

The Cook County Board enacted its sanctuary ordinance in fall 2011. Commissioner Chuy Garcia, who was elected to the board in 2010, pushed the ordinance after immigrant advocates and clergy told him there were problems with aggressive ICE enforcement in the county. They invited Garcia to a protest against ICE's practice of deporting people "for the most minor infractions of the law."

"People were winding up at Cook County Jail for minor tickets and infractions of the law, mainly from incidents that were occurring in suburban Cook County, where police departments were pulling people over because (of failure to use) a turn signal, in a vehicle that a mom was driving to take a child to school or to the doctor," Garcia said. Sometimes people found themselves transferred to ICE custody "and people wound up getting deported as a result of that."

The city of Chicago also took action, adopting a welcoming ordinance in 2013 that generally prohibits disclosure of an individual's immigration status and bars ICE from city facilities. As a result, police "will never ask an individual's immigration status," said department spokesman Anthony Guglielmi. Department orders do allow information-sharing with ICE on individuals who appear on lists of alleged gang members.

In both instances, local officials sought to send two messages: that immigrants who had come here illegally were nonetheless valued for their contributions to the area, and that local government was reluctant to spend the money or the resources to take on a federal responsibility.

Prior to passage of the sanctuary ordinance, ICE agents regularly worked with county prosecutors using the Law Enforcement Agencies Data System, or LEADS. Agents would thumb through sheets of new defendants' backgrounds, looking for those who could be foreign-born nationals. Those suspected of not having the proper paperwork to live legally in the United States would then be interviewed by ICE agents at the jail's intake area, and a "detainer" would be placed on people ICE wanted held if they were able to post bond.

"We would go at 6 or 7 in the morning to get people released pursuant to detainers, probably about 10 a day," said James McPeek, assistant field office director with ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations in Chicago. "Once the ordinance started, it went to zero."

As Trump signs immigration order, Emanuel vows Chicago will stay sanctuary city

Bill Ruthhart and Hal Dardick

As President Donald Trump signed an executive order Wednesday to cut off some federal funding from sanctuary cities, Mayor Rahm Emanuel vowed Chicago would remain one and continue to protect immigrants from deportation.

"We're gonna stay a sanctuary city," Emanuel said in a news conference after...

As President Donald Trump signed an executive order Wednesday to cut off some federal funding from sanctuary cities, Mayor Rahm Emanuel vowed Chicago would remain one and continue to protect immigrants from deportation.

"We're gonna stay a sanctuary city," Emanuel said in a news conference after... (Bill Ruthhart and Hal Dardick)

The county's ordinance seems to have had a clear effect. In the 11 months before the ordinance went into effect, ICE agents issued more than 1,400 detainers to Cook County Jail. In the most recent 12 months for which statistics are

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available, from October 2015 through September 2016, ICE issued fewer than 70 detainers to the jail.

ICE data for the six-state region of Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri and Wisconsin show that 11,786 deportation orders were issued in the year before the ordinance, and 2,326 in 2016, a decrease that could reflect national shifts in policy.

One agency that does co-operate with ICE is the Illinois Department of Corrections. From Jan. 1, 2012, through Dec. 31, 2016, the department released nearly 4,000 inmates to ICE, records show. Most — 2,456 — were from Cook County.

Trump has set his sights on boosting deportations. Days after he was sworn into office, he signed executive orders promising 10,000 new ICE officers and broadening the agency's directives. A later Department of Homeland Security order directed agents to remove "aliens" convicted of, charged with or even suspected of committing crimes, potentially including offenses like shoplifting or entering the country illegally.

The executive orders differed from Obama administration priorities. Under Obama, ICE focused on immigrants here illegally who had been convicted of serious crimes, were considered threats to national security or had recently crossed the border.

Now facing broader orders to deport individuals, ICE agents in Chicago are still hamstrung by a lack of cooperation and must come up with ways to identify those they want to detain.

At Cook County's Leighton Criminal Court Building in Chicago, agents run names from posted bond sheets in the corridors and no longer get cooperation from prosecutors. Those names are fed into a system that cross-references criminal information such as fingerprints with data on everyone DHS has ever come in contact with, including those who entered the United States legally or someone abroad who applied for a visa.

Chicago's history as a sanctuary city

Kori Rumore

In late January, as President Donald Trump signed an executive order to cut off some federal funding to cities, counties and states that refuse to detain and turn over to federal authorities people who are living in the U.S. illegally, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel reiterated the city's commitment...

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If a foreign national in the criminal justice system is identified, ICE still issues a detainer even though Cook County will not cooperate and hold anyone for them, agency leaders said. What's more, agents also are not notified by prosecutors or Sheriff Tom Dart's office when someone they are targeting is released on bond, breaking with past practice, meaning they have to run names through computers available to the general public.

Those who are identified by ICE's checks often are prioritized based on their crimes. If agents learn that someone they would like to detain has bonded out of the Cook County system, they can attempt to find them at home or somewhere else in the field, which ICE contends can potentially create more dangerous arrest situations.

McPeek said agents are frustrated by a system in Chicago that, from their perspective, makes little sense.

"We could have someone we removed for assault or robbery, who served time in state custody, and we deported them," McPeek said. "And then he illegally re-entered the United States and gets arrested for a low-level offense, and Cook County says, 'Oh well, that's a very low-level offense. We're not going to honor that detainer.' "

"I mean, they don't honor any of them, but that's one they wouldn't honor even though he had a prior criminal conviction that was egregious and he got deported previously," he said.

Offering Protection

As it has ramped up immigration enforcement, the Trump administration has issued vague threats to punish municipalities that don't aid deportation efforts. Trump also ordered the federal Office of Management and Budget's director to look into all federal grant money currently received "by any sanctuary jurisdiction."

In a Fox News interview, Trump said he's prepared to strip federal dollars from California, for instance.

"If we have to, we'll defund," he said.

It's unclear where the federal government would cut funding, but programs such as the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program, which helps reimburse local jurisdictions for the cost of incarcerating immigrants, could be vulnerable, according to experts.

Garcia said he believes the county will hold firm against Trump's threats. The county will, however, honor warrants, a court order that someone be held as opposed to a detainer, which is an ICE request to hold someone to determine their immigration status.

"We uphold the Constitution," Garcia said. "We do not hold people but for probable cause. Any warrant presented by ICE will be honored in Cook County by the sheriff."

The county's ordinance notes that cooperating came with a cost — $43,000 a day for Cook County to hold all of the people on ICE detainers. Requests to hold people would be declined without a written agreement for reimbursement.

San Francisco sues Trump over 'sanctuary city' funding cuts

Tribune news services

FOIA CBP 000957

San Francisco sued President Donald Trump on Tuesday over his move to cut funding to immigrant-protecting "sanctuary cities," calling the executive order unconstitutional, a severe invasion of the city's sovereignty and downright un-American.

The U.S. government cannot "put a gun to the head of...

San Francisco sued President Donald Trump on Tuesday over his move to cut funding to immigrant-protecting "sanctuary cities," calling the executive order unconstitutional, a severe invasion of the city's sovereignty and downright un-American.

The U.S. government cannot "put a gun to the head of... (Tribune news services)

Officials said the question of expense is not expected to alter the county's position on the matter. Frank Shuftan, a spokesman for County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, noted that, in 2012, then-ICE Director John Morton offered to reimburse the county for costs incurred by the sheriff.

"President Preckwinkle respectfully declined the offer," he said. "It was then, and continues to be, our position that immigration enforcement is a responsibility of the federal government, not local jurisdictions or local law enforcement. Simply, the county is not mandated to serve as an immigration enforcement officer on behalf of ICE."

Whether the federal government and local municipalities escalate their dispute over sanctuary ordinances remains to be seen. Community groups have pledged to monitor ICE's new push to determine if it has a chilling effect on programs designed to aid immigrants, such as protections offered for younger immigrants by DACA, or the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals order, signed by Obama.

Mark Fleming, national litigation coordinator for the National Immigrant Justice Center, which has been critical of the new administration's immigration policies, said the office is seeing a rise in arrests.

"And we definitely have seen a ramp-up in the apprehension of individuals who have committed a minimal crime or no crime at all," Fleming said.

ICE officials, asked if the new administration's orders were leading to deportations for less serious crimes, said they could not comment beyond pointing to the executive orders themselves.

But from Chicago neighborhoods like Rogers Park to Little Village, organizations are holding talks and passing out leaflets telling residents not to open the doors of their homes to ICE agents without a warrant. Already, activists are seeing an effect of the administration's directives in the community.

Many immigrants who are here without authorization already don't want to call attention to themselves in any way, just out of fear, advocates said, even to the point of not reporting that they were the victim of a crime.

"There are communities that are so vulnerable that people are not willing to do anything that might keep them from staying under the radar," said Bharathi Pillai, a general civil liberties fellow at the ACLU. "They are forced to make a risk assessment."

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Judge: Miami-Dade Deportation Policy Is Unconstitutional

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

MIAMI (AP) – A judge has declared unconstitutional a recently-adopted policy favored by President Donald Trump that allows Miami-Dade County jails to hold immigrants who face deportation.

Circuit Judge Milton Hirsch said in his ruling Friday that the policy violates the 10th Amendment's limits on federal power over states. The county quickly appealed and the scope of Hirsch's decision was not immediately clear.

Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Gimenez ordered the policy after Trump issued an executive order threatening to withhold federal money from local governments considered "sanctuary cities" for immigrants. Previously, the county would not detain immigrants facing deportation by federal authorities.

The ruling came in the case of a Haitian man who challenged the policy when he was held following a series of felony arrests.

County officials say immigration is a federal matter.

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Oregon Judge Who Allegedly Aided Illegal Alien Criminal Escape ICE Agents Exposed

By Warner Todd Huston

Breitbart, March 3, 2017

Oregon Judge Who Allegedly Aided Illegal Alien Criminal Escape ICE Agents Exposed

Warner Todd Huston
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File Photo: John Moore/Getty
by Warner Todd Huston
3 Mar 2017
Portland, OR0 3 Mar, 2017 3 Mar, 2017
SIGN UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER

On Monday, Breitbart News reported that a "judicial referee" at Portland's Multnomah County Courthouse was accused of interfering with the apprehension of an illegal alien who had appeared in her court on a drunk driving charge.

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That court officer has now been identified as Judge Monica Heeranz. It is now being reported that Heeranz allowed 22-year-old Diddier Pacheco Salazar escape the custody of immigration officials after his case in her court was concluded.

According to U.S. Attorney Billy Williams, Heeranz helped Salazar escape ICE officers by allowing him to escape out of a door usually reserved for use by court officers and employees. The incident occurred on January 27, just after President Trump issued his Execute Order to build a wall on the southern border with Mexico. Herranz has the powers of a judge and hears small claims cases, traffic violations, and other low-end cases . She is also on the board of the Oregon Hispanic Bar Association.

It appears that Salazar's court-appointed attorney had a hint that something was up.

"I prepped my client. I said, 'I don't know if they're going to pick you up outside or what, but here's how to prepare,' " attorney John Schlosser told a local newspaper. "After the court appearance, I went out in the hallway and sat. My client never came out. I can't say that I'm surprised he didn't come out, but I gave him his options, and assume he had to have been escorted out some other way."

U.S. Attorney Williams said it was troubling that a person with the powers of a judge would help a criminal escape the law.

"When you're talking about the judicial system — whether it's federal or by state — you have an expectation that people are going to abide by the law and not take steps based on their own motivations, their own politics – whatever the motivation was."

Multnomah County Circuit Court's presiding judge, Judge Nan Waller, reportedly launched an internal investigation into Heeranz' actions. She had previously sent an email to court staffers warning them not to impede federal officials, but she also wrote that she informed federal officials to treat the courthouse as a "sensitive location."

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Big Government, Immigration, Law Enforcement, ICE, Ilegal immigration, illegal alien, Multnomah County, Portland Oregon

Parents Fearing Deportation Pick Guardians For U.S. Children

By Kristina Cooke And Mica Rosenberg

Reuters, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Immigrant Arrested By ICE While Dropping Daughter Off At School, Sending Shockwaves Through Neighborhood

By Andrea Castillo

Los Angeles Times, March 3, 2017

Romulo Avelica-Gonzalez had just dropped off his 12-year-old daughter Tuesday morning at her Lincoln Heights school when two black, unmarked vehicles surrounded his car.

As he pulled away from the school and got back onto the main road, the vehicles' lights flashed. Avelica-Gonzalez, with his wife and 13-year-old daughter in the car, pulled over. Agents for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, wearing jackets that said "POLICE" on the back, detained the 48-year-old father of four.

ICE officials said the arrest was routine, citing a 2014 order for Avelica-Gonzalez's deportation. But amid growing fears of mass deportations under President Trump, the arrest has roiled the largely immigrant community north of downtown Los Angeles.

The arrest so shook the school, a public charter called Academia Avance, that administrators held an assembly Tuesday afternoon to discuss what happened and to ease fears. The school's executive director, Ricardo Mireles, has since ordered his teachers to talk to students whose parents are here illegally about creating a family plan in case they are detained or deported.

"It's unfortunate that we have to have minors now deal with reality," he said. "You need to be ready. 'Have you talked to your parents? Do you have power of attorney?' "

Since Trump took office, immigrant communities have been plagued by rumors — some true, many false. Recent targeted operations by ICE have resulted in hundreds of arrests. Such operations were common during the Obama administration but have garnered new scrutiny in recent months.

ICE has a long-standing policy directing agents to generally avoid conducting enforcement activities at so-called "sensitive locations" such as churches, hospitals and schools. But Avelica-Gonzalez's arrest has sparked new concerns that ICE is loosening that policy — an accusation that federal officials deny.

The arrest this week has garnered widespread attention in part because Avelica-Gonzalez's daughter captured parts of it on video.

Avelica-Gonzalez's family says he was less than two blocks away from the school. ICE officials said he was

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arrested in the 3200 block of Pasadena Avenue, about half a mile from the school.

The 13-year-old, Fatima Avelica, is heard sobbing in the video. The Times matched video from the encounter with Google Maps images, which appear to show that the arrest happened about six blocks from Academia Avance, in the 3200 block of Pasadena Avenue. Another school, Hillside Elementary, is less than three blocks from where the arrest occurred.

Advocates and attorneys say this is the first time they've heard of ICE detaining someone so close to a school.

There have been numerous reports of ICE arrests at schools, forcing officials to separate fact from fiction.

Earlier this week, a rumor surfaced that ICE agents had raided an elementary school in Cerritos. Last week, reports on social media said ICE detained three students at Venice High School. The week before, there were rumors that ICE had raided an Oakland college. The Times checked into those reports, which all turned out to be false.

But national cases have stoked fears. One involved a woman who was detained by ICE agents last month while seeking domestic abuse protection at a Texas courthouse. In Virginia, agents arrested men outside a church warming shelter.

An ICE official who spoke on the condition of anonymity said agents try to arrest people at locations that will involve the fewest bystanders. Historically, that meant arresting people at their residences or in jail, but fewer immigrants have opened their doors in the last few years unless agents have a warrant. Additionally, many jails across the country stopped collaborating with ICE requests to detain immigrants until agents arrive. Because of that, more arrests now happen on the street, said the official.

The official said agents had Avelica-Gonzalez under surveillance, followed him to the school then determined where to safely stop the vehicle. Agents didn't realize his other daughter was still in the car. Because the arrest was not carried out on school grounds, the official said, it does not represent a shift in policy. The official also noted that arrests by ICE's fugitive operations teams, who locate immigrants with deportation orders, have remained flat over the past year.

Avelica-Gonzalez, a citizen of Mexico, has lived in the U.S. for 25 years. His four daughters — the other two ages 24 and 19 — were all born in the U.S.

He has two prior criminal convictions, said Emi MacLean, an attorney for the National Day Laborer Organizing Network. The organization put out a call to action the day he was arrested, asking supporters to tell ICE not to deport him.

MacLean said Avelica-Gonzalez was convicted of misdemeanor DUI and misdemeanor driving without a license in 2008. Another misdemeanor conviction, in 1998, was for receipt of stolen property when he bought a non-DMV-issued vehicle registration tag. Before 2015, immigrants living in California illegally could not get driver's licenses.

In 2013, Avelica-Gonzalez filed paperwork with a "notario." In Latin America, "notarios publicos" are qualified lawyers. In the U.S., people posing as notarios lack licenses and training and prey on immigrants.

The notario ran off with Avelica-Gonzalez's paperwork and money, MacLean said, and he ended up with an order of deportation.

Avelica-Gonzalez is being held at the Adelanto Detention Facility near Victorville. His attorney filed an emergency stay of removal, preventing his immediate deportation, with the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals and expects a decision next week.

Despite Trump's statements about mass deportations, the president's actual immigration policies remain unclear.

Last month, his administration swept aside nearly all restrictions on the removal of 11 million people in the U.S. illegally, a vast expansion of the federal government's deportation priorities. But there have been mixed signals from the White House over the scope of deportations and who would be covered by them.

Trump supporters and others applaud his administration's measures, arguing that immigrants here illegally are a drain on the economy and take jobs away from citizens.

But immigration rights advocates say actions like the Avelica-Gonzalez arrest send a chilling message.

"The bigger issue is this really terrorizes the school community and these families if you think you run the risk of being deported," MacLean said.

Brenda Avelica, 24, said her life has been turned upside down. She worries about how her mother and sisters will get by. Her father brought in the family's only income from his job at a restaurant, she said.

"He came to this country for us," she said.

Illegal Immigrant's Plea: 'I Don't Know Anything Else Besides Being Here'

Daniela Vargas, in statement from her attorney, gives more details of her life in the U.S.

By Alejandro Lazo

Wall Street Journal, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Mexico Prepares To Absorb A Wave Of Deportees In The Trump Era

By Antonio Olivo

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

FOIA CBP 000960

The deportees stepped off their flight from El Paso looking bewildered — 135 men who had left families and jobs behind after being swept up in the Trump administration's mounting effort to send millions of undocumented immigrants back to their economically fraught homeland.

As they filed into Mexico City International Airport last week, government employees handed them free ham-and-cheese sandwiches, Mexican ID cards and information directing them to social services in the capital.

"Welcome back!" a cheerful government worker called out, taking down names and phone numbers.

Then the men, who had spent as many as 20 years in the United States before being caught and held in detention for several weeks, walked out into a Mexico many of them barely remember, where job opportunities are scarce and worries about the worst inflation in a decade await them.

In the wake of new enforcement policies announced by the Trump administration last week that dramatically expand the pool of undocumented immigrants targeted for deportation, Mexico is bracing for an influx of men and women like them. Their arrival — along with a surge of undocumented immigrants leaving the United States voluntarily — promises to transform Mexican society in the same way their departure did.

Since President Trump took office in January, the number of U.S. government flights landing in Mexico City loaded with deportees has jumped from two a week under President Barack Obama to three, Mexican officials said. The arrivals include convicted felons but also many without criminal records.

The numbers of immigrants deported from the United States waned in the final years of the Obama administration, which took steps to focus enforcement on hardened criminals and recent arrivals.

Trump, who made immigration enforcement a centerpiece of his campaign, has been clear that he views illegal immigrants as potential security threats and competitors to Americans for jobs. This week, he told journalists at a private lunch that he might be open to a comprehensive immigration overhaul that includes a path to legal status for those who had not committed crimes.

But Trump did not mention such a plan in his remarks to a joint session of Congress on Tuesday, emphasizing his deportation initiatives instead.

About 500 deported Mexicans, including some who had been picked up when Obama was in office, are arriving here daily.

"Many of these people come not knowing how to speak Spanish," said Amalia García, secretary of Mexico City's labor department, which serves as a point of contact for the deportees. "They come feeling very bitter, very ashamed and very hurt."

More returnees means lower wages for everybody in blue-collar industries such as construction and automobile manufacturing, where competition for jobs is likely to increase, economists say.

Moreover, the loss of remittances from the United States — Mexico's second-largest source of revenue at roughly $25 billion last year — could have devastating effects, particularly in rural areas.

At the same time, though, there will be more English-speaking Mexicans entering the workforce who've honed their skills in the United States, a development that in the long run could position Mexico to be a stronger player in the global economy, analysts say.

"A lot of these people ran businesses in the U.S. and did well," said Andrew Selee, director of the Mexico Institute at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington. "In the same way that in the United States we saw a wave of Mexicans who became part of the American culture and changed it, we're now seeing a wave of Mexicans moving back who are integrating American culture into Mexico."

The Mexican government hopes to tap into that potential — and to diminish the likelihood that deportees will try their luck again across the U.S.-Mexico border, where the Trump administration plans to build a wall.

A federal program launched in 2014, called Somos Mexicanos (We're Mexican), tries to help returning migrants find jobs, start businesses and deal with the emotional trauma many experience after leaving families in the United States.

Under the program, arriving deportees receive food, a medical checkup and bus fare to wherever they plan to live in Mexico. Local case managers then connect them to social services and job leads and, in some cases, help with moving their families back.

"The first thing that many have in mind is: 'I want a job,' " said Gabriela García Acoltzi, director of the Somos Mexicanos program. "We help them identify other areas where they need assistance."

But the government's ability to provide such services to the tens of thousands of returning migrants expected in the coming years is uncertain.

The value of the Mexican peso plunged after Trump took office, prompting worries about the worst inflation in the country since the 2008 global recession. Those fears have heightened as the possibility looms of a trade war with the United States that would affect $1.5 billion in daily cross-border commerce.

Meanwhile, prices for tortillas, meat and other necessities have gone up in response to the federal government's 20 percent hike in gasoline prices last month, hitting poorer Mexicans especially hard.

In dispensing government resources to the returnees, García cautioned, "the important thing is to be flexible in what they're requiring."

FOIA CBP 000961

At the Mexico City airport, many passengers arrived in the same rumpled clothes they were wearing when U.S. immigration authorities grabbed them. Some wore gray detention center pants after serving time in jail.

Not liking their chances here, several of the men made a beeline toward a nearby bus terminal to find a way back to the border.

"The situation here doesn't look good," said Luís Enrique Castillo, 47, adding that he planned to return to his wife, four children and two grandchildren in Chicago, where he lived for 20 years.

Castillo said he was arrested when U.S. immigration officials knocked on his door looking for one of his sons, who had been scheduled for deportation. They didn't find his son and, after checking his ID, picked him up instead.

José Armando López García, 50, is trying to make a life in Mexico after being deported about a year ago. He left a wife and five children in Las Vegas after a routine traffic stop revealed he was using a fake driver's license.

López, a professional carpenter, received a $1,260 government grant through the Somos Mexicanos program that allowed him to start a contracting company out of the home he shares near the airport with his 92-year-old mother.

The money he makes is barely enough to live on, López said. And his depression deepens when he sees other children, who remind him of his own.

"I can't imagine them living here," López said, tears streaming down his cheeks. "There's too much insecurity, and I don't know how it would work with the schools."

Jill Anderson, director of Otros Dreams en Acción (Other Dreams in Action), an advocacy group for former undocumented immigrants who grew up in the United States, said many returning students face problems being admitted to Mexican public schools.

The system for transferring U.S. school credits into Mexican schools is rife with red tape, requiring translated transcripts and other proof, which can take more than a year, Anderson said.

Her group has backed legislation to speed up the process, which President Enrique Peña Nieto recently endorsed. But Anderson also noted the resistance here to doing too much to accommodate a population of returning compatriots who rub many the wrong way with their English and their more aggressive American manner.

"It really interrupts the economic and social norms of Mexico," she said. "They speak English, and they're asking for access to higher education and to employment in ways that their parents were not able to."

When José Manuel Torres, 23, followed his deported father back from Georgia about five years ago, he was denied admission to Mexico City's public university system because he lacked proof of graduating from his middle school outside Atlanta — despite having his high school diploma.

"I told them, 'Dude, if I finished high school, isn't it common sense that I went through middle school?' " said Torres, speaking in English with a Southern twang. "They said, 'Yes, but this is the process.' "

Torres was hired by an international call center in Mexico City — a growing industry filled with younger English-speaking Mexicans who, as their parents did in the United States, tend to socialize in isolated communities where they resist speaking the language of their new home.

He left that job, though, and, through a family connection, found another job as a school-orchestra stage manager at the private National Autonomous University of Mexico. This has allowed him to take classes in software engineering, his real interest.

"This place really beats you up," Torres said about Mexico. "There are so many circumstances here that constantly keep hitting you, pulling you down, and you've got to keep driving through it, grinding and pulling."

It's that spirit — forged for many returning Mexicans during years of living illegally in the United States — that may ultimately benefit Mexico, said economist Luís de la Calle.

De la Calle predicted that, in the short term, average wages will drop as more qualified people enter the country to compete for scarce jobs. But the overall economy is likely to expand in the long run when those people start to succeed, he said.

"We suffered a cost as a nation by sending those hard workers to the U.S., in the sense that we lost a lot of talent," de la Calle said. "When they come back to Mexico and they are properly trained, they will make more than a proportional contribution to Mexico."

CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION

Judge OKs $1-million Settlement In Border Death Case

By Kristina Davis

Los Angeles Times, March 3, 2017

A federal judge has tentatively approved the U.S. government's offer to pay $1 million to the children of a Mexican man who died after being beaten and shocked with a stun gun at the San Ysidro Port of Entry.

The settlement will be dispersed among the five children of Anastasio Hernandez Rojas, 42, who had lived and worked in the U.S. illegally since he was a teen. U.S. Magistrate Judge Louisa Porter, whose approval was needed because two of the children are minors, delayed signing the final order until she was certain the funds didn't need to go through probate.

"This agreement is not justice," Hernandez Rojas' wife, Maria Puga, said after the hearing Thursday. "My husband's

FOIA CBP 000962

life does not have a price. The decision had to be taken and it was difficult. We had to turn the page."

A spokesman for U.S. Customs and Border Protection in San Diego declined to discuss the settlement. The U.S. attorney's office in Phoenix, which handled the case, also declined to make a statement.

"I hope you use the funds so you can have a good life going forward," Porter told Hernandez Rojas' two 10-year-old children, who were at the hearing. The judge said that their father "came to this country to improve his life, and he'd like to see your lives improved by virtue of all the sacrifices he made for you."

The 7-year case shined a spotlight on use of force at the border and what critics say is a lack of transparency at CBP, the nation's largest law enforcement agency.

Because of the family's persistence, said Pedro Ríos of the U.S.-Mexico Border Program at American Friends Service Committee, an immigrant rights group, Customs and Border Protection's use-of-force manual was made public and studies were launched looking at the issue.

Attorney Eugene Iredale, who represented the family, said the case highlighted the critical need for public awareness and involvement to prevent brutality. He lauded the two witnesses who stopped to record the beating on their cellphones.

"Unfortunately, the attitude that was so prevalent in what happened to Anastasio has now received a renaissance because of a new [Trump] administration," Iredale said.

Hernandez Rojas had just crossed the border illegally near Otay Mesa with his brother in May 2010 when they were caught by Border Patrol agents.

According to the lawsuit, an agent told Hernandez Rojas to throw away a water jug he was holding and then slapped it out of his hand when he appeared to misunderstand the command. The agent threw him against a wall and kicked his legs apart, hitting metal pins in his ankle from a previous injury.

Hernandez Rojas requested medical attention and told a supervisor he had been roughed up but was ignored, according to the suit. Authorities later took him to the San Ysidro Port of Entry, where they took off his handcuffs. Hernandez Rojas put his arms down instead of behind his head, prompting agents to try to restrain him.

During the struggle, Hernandez Rojas could be heard on a witnesses' video pleading for help and asking why he was being treated like an animal. He resisted efforts to put him into a vehicle to take him for booking, authorities said. One CBP officer shot him with a Taser and others held him face down and grabbed his legs.

After they discovered that Hernandez Rojas had stopped breathing, they took him to a hospital, where he was put on a ventilator for two days before he died.

An autopsy concluded that Hernandez Rojas had died of a heart attack and listed contributing factors, including methamphetamine intoxication, heart disease, the Taser shocks, the physical exertion and restraints. The autopsy stated that he would not have died if he hadn't been under the influence of drugs, the Justice Department said.

Federal agencies, including the Justice Department and FBI, investigated the death but found there was not enough evidence to justify criminal charges against any of the 12 agents or officers involved.

"It's an embarrassment to this agency to continue to have the 12 agents working, the agents who killed my husband," said Puga, 46, who lives in San Diego with four of her children.

Hundreds Of Companies Raise Their Hands To Build Trump's Border Wall

By Cary O'Reilly,Thomas Black

Bloomberg Politics, March 3, 2017

Hundreds of Companies Raise Their Hands to Build Trump's Border Wall

MENU

Cary O'Reilly,Thomas Black

3/3/2017 6:00:05 AM

Congress hasn't figured out how to pay for it yet, but more than 375 companies have told the Trump administration they're interested in working on the controversial border-wall project.

Responses to what's called a presolicitation notice posted on the Federal Business Opportunities website on Feb. 24 have poured in from potential vendors around the world. Among them: Swiss cement giant LafargeHolcim Ltd.; British construction company Balfour Beatty Plc; and General Dynamics Corp., a U.S. defense contractor that makes submarines and tanks.

The U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency said it would likely put out a formal request on March 6 "for the design and build of several prototype wall structures." That leaves the field wide open – allowing companies to suggest what the structure should look like and be made of.

Those raising their hands by responding to the notice might not end up submitting tenders. But the early interest shows the enthusiasm for capitalizing on President Donald Trump's plan to build a "great, great" wall, which he'd until recently repeatedly vowed to force Mexico to finance.

"We're ramping up pretty fast," said Ralph Hicks, senior vice president of governmental affairs at San Diego-based R.E. Staite Engineering Inc., which is working on a blueprint incorporating electronic-surveillance gear that would set off alarms if it sensed people approaching or tunneling underway.

The administration is moving fast too, considering Congress is just starting to plot out next fiscal year's budget and determine how to carve out money for the edifice. Trump told the Conservative Political Action Conference last week the wall is "way ahead of schedule" and is "going to start soon."

'Vague Process'

Potential bidders have been asked to submit prototypes by March 10. Those that are approved will be required to present full proposals, including prices, by March 24, according to the website. Awards are planned for mid-April.

For all that, it's unclear how the undertaking will roll out. "It's a fairly vague process right now," said Hicks, whose company laid the foundation for the San Diego convention center.

It's too soon, for example, to know how much cement might be required, LafargeHolcim Chief Executive Officer Eric Olsen said in an interview with Bloomberg Television. In fact, the wall might end up being a fence, at least in spots. Right now, fencing lines many of the 654 miles of the roughly 2,000-mile border where the U.S. already has erected barriers.

"We always welcome the opportunity to learn more about potential infrastructure projects," Jocelyn Gerst, a spokeswoman for LafargeHolcim, said in an emailed statement. "Ultimately, we will evaluate our ability to provide superior products and leverage our extensive supply chain network to determine our involvement."

U.S. Concrete Inc. put its name on the list of interested contenders. CEO Bill Sandbrook said the Euless, Texas-based company signed up on the Federal Business Opportunities site to gain the attention of the general contractors that might be hired. The endeavor is likely to be bid out in sections, he said, in the same way that large road construction jobs are.

"This is going to be a very fast-track job, so we want to make sure everyone involved knows of our interest to supply the concrete," Sandbrook said.

General Dynamics might consider a proffer for "sensor elements, including cameras," according to a spokeswoman. Other longtime government contractors responded to the notice include Caddell Construction Co.

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The wall would cut through remote areas between the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, creating challenges in places for delivering material and workers. Sandbrook said U.S. Concrete would be able to set up portable concrete-mixing plants in a week's time and has 120 special trucks, known as volumetric mixers, that could also do the job. The company has had a border-wall contract in the past, he said, having supplied material for a section of an existing structure near El Paso, Texas.

Another cement maker that may want a piece of the project: Mexico's Cemex SAB. Chairman Rogelio Zambrano said the company, which has plants on both sides of the border, would be willing to provide supplies.

A centerpiece of the Trump campaign, and part of a crackdown on immigration, the wall plan has roiled relations with Mexico. President Enrique Pena Nieto canceled a trip to Washington earlier this year after one of his U.S. counterpart's declarations about making Mexico pay for construction.

'Berlin Wall'

Physically sealing off the southern nation has also divided Americans. A Pew Research Center poll last month found 62 percent oppose the idea while 35 percent favor it.

Trump has estimated the structure could be built for anywhere between $8 billion to $12 billion, while congressional Republicans have put the range at between $12 billion to $15 billion. Analysts at Sanford C. Bernstein & Co. have pegged it at possibly as much as $25 billion.

The plan for a concrete barrier "has odors of the Berlin Wall," California Governor Jerry Brown said in an interview with Bloomberg News published Friday. "Who are they locking out and who are they locking in?"

(Corrects to say Bechtel and BL Harbert haven't expressed interest in the project.)

Mexican Cement Company Draws Criticism For Saying It Would 'gladly' Bid On Trump's Border Wall

By Samantha Schmidt

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

President Trump's vows to make Mexico pay for a promised border wall — estimated to cost up to $20 billion — has stirred resentment there, where the country's leader has repeatedly said there will be no such payment.

But the chairman of a Mexico's largest cement company said he would "gladly" consider bidding on the project.

Rogelio Zambrano Lozano, chairman of Mexico-based Cemex, told the newspaper Reforma on Wednesday that if asked for a quote, his company would be willing to offer one. So far, no one has asked, a spokesman confirmed.

"If one of our clients asks us to give prices on materials, we have the responsibility to provide it," the spokesman said in a statement, "but it doesn't imply Cemex would participate in the project."

The Department of Homeland Security will begin soliciting bids to design and build wall prototypes as early as Monday, and well over 300 businesses have already expressed interest in taking part. The agency plans to start awarding contracts by mid-April, according to FedBizOpps.gov, a website for federal contractors.

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Some Mexicans have taken offense at Cemex's stance, saying the company would be prioritizing financial interests over national interests. Others viewed Cemex's potential offer as a logical step that could potentially help a Mexican company to reap profits from the border wall project.

In Trump's joint address to Congress this week, he reiterated that "we will soon begin the construction of a great wall along our southern border. It will be started ahead of schedule and, when finished, it will be a very effective weapon against drugs and crime," Trump said.

He also reiterated his core principle is to "buy American and hire American."

Some analysts have predicted for months that Cemex could see an opportunity in the border wall. The company has six integrated cement plants within a 200-mile radius of the border, more than a number of its U.S. rivals.

Research firm Bernstein wrote in a July study that Cemex would be one of the companies best-positioned to profit from a wall. The United States is Cemex's biggest market, representing a fifth of its revenue last quarter.

"If The Wall does go ahead, it will almost certainly be built from concrete," analysts wrote in the Bernstein report. "What is less clear at this stage is whether U.S.- or Mexico-based suppliers will benefit. In fact, despite arguments concerning which government will pay for construction, the large quantities of materials required may necessitate procurement from both sides of the border. Cemex appears best positioned regardless, with cement, RMX and aggregates facilities throughout the border region."

The company has seen a positive uptick since Trump was elected, with its shares rising 4 percent, analysts say. Cemex climbed 4.3 percent to 17.74 pesos Wednesday in Mexico City after advancing as much as 4.6 percent, for the biggest gain within a day in a month, Bloomberg reported. The company had sales of $13.4 billion last year.

Yet, despite the profitable potential for the project, some analysts say any profit that would come from the wall wouldn't compensate for a possible negative effect on Mexican sales, the Wall Street Journal reported. Participating in border wall construction could damage Cemex's image in Mexico and even lead to a boycott of the company, they said. Mexico still accounts for 38 percent of Cemex's operating cash flow.

Manuel Bartlett, a senator from Mexico's Labor Party, told Bloomberg in a January interview that it seemed "dishonorable" for Mexican companies to participate in the project.

"They would be putting money above national interests," Bartlett said. "Obviously the wall construction is an offense to Mexico."

In an interview on "Good Morning America" on Wednesday, Vice President Pence emphasized that Mexico would pay for the proposed border wall.

"One of the things people saw last night is that the candidate Donald Trump is the President Donald Trump, and he spoke about those priorities," Pence said. "We're going to build a wall. We're going to enforce the laws of this country."

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TRANSPORTATION SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

U.S. Airport Pat-Downs Are About To Get More Invasive

The TSA reacts to a study that found weapons making it past security.

By Justin Bachman

Bloomberg News, March 3, 2017

While few have noticed, U.S. airport security workers long had the option of using five different types of physical pat-downs at the screening line. Now those options have been eliminated and replaced with a single universal approach. This time, you will notice.

The new physical touching—for those selected to have a pat-down—will be be what the federal agency officially describes as a more "comprehensive" physical screening, according to a Transportation Security Administration spokesman.

Denver International Airport, for example, notified employees and flight crews on Thursday that the "more rigorous" searches "will be more thorough and may involve an officer making more intimate contact than before."

"I would say people who in the past would have gotten a pat-down that wasn't involved will notice that the [new] pat-down is more involved," TSA spokesman Bruce Anderson said Friday. The shift from the previous, risk-based assessment on which pat-down procedure an officer should apply was phased in over the past two weeks after tests at smaller airports, he said.

The TSA screens about 2 million people daily at U.S. airports. The agency doesn't track how many passengers are subject to pat-down searches after they pass through an imaging scanner. People who decline to use this screening technology are automatically subject to physical searches.

While passengers may find the process more intrusive, the new screening procedure isn't expected to increase overall airport security delays. However, "for the person who gets the pat down, it will slow them down," Anderson said.

The change is partly a result of the agency's study of a 2015 report that criticized aspects of TSA screening procedures. That audit, by the Department of Homeland Security's Inspector General, drew headlines because airport officers had failed to detect handguns and other weapons. An additional change prompted by the report was the TSA's decision to end its "managed inclusion" program, by which some everyday travelers were allowed to use PreCheck lanes to speed things up at peak times.

Physical screening has long been one of the traveling public's strongest dislikes regarding airport security protocols. The TSA has all pat-downs conducted by an officer of the same sex as the traveler, and allows a passenger to request a private area for the screening, as well as to have a witness present. Likewise, the traveler can request that the pat-down occur in public view.

The new policy also applies to airline pilots and flight attendants, classified as "known crewmembers" who generally receive less scrutiny at checkpoints. The TSA conducts occasional random searches of these employees, and airlines this week inquired as to whether their employees would be subject to more frequent pat-downs. The number of random searches for airline crews isn't changing and will remain a "very small percentage" of the total, Anderson said. But airport employees may face more random checks.

The random searches also vary by airport, depending on the screening program, Anderson said. "Sometimes it's random, sometimes they're consistent, based on the door you enter," he said of the searches given workers with airport ID badges. "Sometimes, those measures call for a pat-down."

In their notice, Denver airport officials said employees are subject to search at random locations: "If a pat down is required as part of the operation, badged employees will be required to comply with a TSA officer's request to conduct a full body pat down."

In December, a CNN political commentator, Angela Rye, posted an article online describing her "humiliation" during a TSA agent's search. Rye wrote in graphic detail about the pat down of her genitals during a search at the Detroit Airport before a flight to New York.

TSA officials didn't immediately address whether the new universal pat-down protocol will mandate touching of passenger genitals.

US CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES

A Major Proponent Of H-1B Visa Reform Loses Patience With Trump

By Joshua Brustein
Bloomberg News, March 3, 2017

For a decade, U.S. Senator Richard Durbin has wanted to reform a program that is alternatively seen as a necessary way for technology companies to hire technical experts and a boondoggle that outsourcers use to exploit foreign labor. Durbin, a high-ranking Democrat, is no fan of Donald Trump, but he saw November's election as a sign that changes were imminent. Now, six weeks into the Trump administration, he's losing patience.

On Friday morning, the senator from Illinois wrote a letter to the president urging him to follow through on a promised crackdown before the end of the month.

The urgency comes in part from a looming deadline. Every year in early April, employers enter a lottery to secure special "H-1B" visas allowing them to hire guest workers. There are 85,000 available, 20,000 of which are set aside for people with advanced degrees, and demand for these visas far outpaces supply. Tech giants like Microsoft Corp., Facebook Inc., Alphabet Inc.'s Google, and Amazon.com.Inc. apply for thousands, but the largest recipients are IT firms that pay relatively low wages and often displace American workers.

The H-1B visa has become a key issue in the tense relationship between U.S. technology companies and the new White House. The industry wants access to smart immigrant workers, while Trump wants to prioritize American workers. When he signed an executive order prohibiting entry by people from seven majority-Muslim nations for 90 days, many tech companies argued against it in court and thousands of Google employees protested.

Durbin has repeatedly introduced legislation to overhaul the H-1B program. A bill he introduced this year with U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley, an Iowa Republican, would prioritize employers that pay higher wages and hire workers with advanced science and engineering degrees from U.S. universities.

On Friday, Durbin asked Trump to take the same approach when considering this year's crop of visa applications, which could be done through an executive order.

"If you do not take action in the next few weeks, outsourcers will secure the right to import tens of thousands of low-wage foreign guest workers to replace American workers," Durbin wrote in the letter.

White House spokesman Michael Short said the H-1B visa program "is an issue we are closely and carefully looking at." He also pointed to comments Reed Cordish, an adviser to Trump on tech initiatives, made to The Wall Street Journal.

While the administration believes there have been "flaws" in the visa program for high-skilled workers, changes can be made "in a way that supports what these [high-tech] companies currently need," Cordish told the newspaper in February.

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Durbin seems aware of the awkward position he's putting himself in by calling for a crackdown from a Republican president with tough views on immigrants. His letter scolds the president for poisoning the immigration debate with "cruel and un-American" policies. A spokesperson for Durbin says the senator hasn't directly discussed immigration policy with the White House before this point.

This isn't the first suggestion that the Trump administration do something about this year's H-1B lottery system while Congress works on a more permanent solution. Lobbyist Bruce Morrison, who helped create the H-1B program as a member of Congress, met with Trump's transition team to suggest how to use executive actions immediately upon taking office to change the system.

An earlier attempt at H-1B reform created a separate category for companies with higher proportions of H-1B workers, putting additional requirements on those firms. Morrison proposed that the White House give priority to companies that don't fall into that category.

"Effectively, dependent companies wouldn't get any visas, which is fine because that's where the outsourcers are," he said. One exception would be Facebook, the most prominent U.S. technology firm that is officially an H-1B dependent company, with more than 15 percent of its U.S.-based staff in the program.

The Trump administration seems receptive. The fear of Americans losing their jobs to international competition is a cornerstone of the president's message.

"The H-1B program is neither high-skilled nor immigration: these are temporary foreign workers, imported from abroad, for the explicit purpose of substituting for American workers at lower pay," said Trump in a statement last spring. "I will end forever the H-1B as a cheap labor program, and institute an absolute requirement to hire American workers first for every visa and immigration program."

Some companies have held off on preparing H-1B applications for this year's lottery out of fear that Trump would somehow undermine the program, says Dick Burke, Chief Executive Officer of Envoy Global Inc., which helps about 1,000 companies navigate the U.S. immigration system.

Michael Hayes, government affairs manager for the Consumer Technology Association, expressed concern that the White House could undermine more permanent reform by rushing out an executive order on the program.

Even if this year's H-1B lottery proceeds unchanged, there's support in Congress to overhaul the program. On Thursday, three House members introduced a bill that mirrors Durbin and Grassley's proposal. Two other bills introduced this year would tweak the program to punish outsourcing firms while trying to protect U.S. tech companies.

Similar proposals have floated around Washington for years. Much to the frustration of people like Durbin, they've rarely gotten much further than that.

Study: Fewer Jobless In States Where Employers Must Screen Illegals From Job Interviews

By Katie McHugh

Breitbart, March 3, 2017

Study: Fewer Jobless in States Where Employers Must Screen Illegals from Job Interviews

Fewer Jobless in States Where Employers Must Screen Illegals from Job Interviews

Katie McHugh 3 Mar 20170

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"Many opponents of E-Verify portray the system as a barrier to employment opportunities," the report explains. "To the contrary, this study finds that states requiring the use of E-Verify are leading recovery efforts following the worst global recession since World War II," said the report, which added:

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Millions of American citizens would find gainful employment if they did not have to compete against unauthorized workers who undercut local wage rates. E-Verify plays a critical role in alleviating unfair competition against unauthorized workers; and states utilizing the program are experiencing positive job growth that outpaces national averages in the majority of cases.

The E-verify program is built around a website which allows employers to check the identity documents of job-seekers, so helping exclude illegal aliens. The free service is used by at least 600,000 employers, but immigration reformers say employers should be required to use the system to check all prospective employees.

According to the new study,

… this report examines the U-6 unemployment rate in states one year after instituting or expanding E-Verify requirements. The U-6 unemployment rate includes discouraged job-seekers who have stopped searching for employment and those who are working part time for purely economic reasons – as opposed to those who may be working part time by choice.

Accordingly, U-6 data provides a better representation of those who are genuinely unemployed than the number that is commonly reported by the mainstream media. The most frequently reported number—the U-3 unemployment rate—only includes those who are completely out of work and still actively searching for employment…

All states that enacted or expanded E-Verify after 2008, save one, saw their unemployment rates drop, even when the

national rate increased. More impressively, 12 of the 15 states that passed new measures experienced a drop in unemployment larger than the national average. Furthermore, states that made E-Verify mandatory for all employers, public and private, experienced the most pronounced decrease in their unemployment rates.

Enforcing immigration law and easing pressure on American workers is highly popular with voters. A poll released on election day found 59 percent believed the first step taken towards controlling illegal immigration should be requiring all U.S. employers to verify the legal status of their employees.

Breitbart News has also reported 75 percent believe unemployed Americans should be first in line to receive U.S. jobs—compared to only three percent who think the U.S. should import more foreigners to fill them. Another 61 percent said politicians "who would rather import foreign workers to take jobs rather than give them to current U.S. residents [are] unfit to hold office."

Since the housing recession began in 2007, 8.7 million additional migrants have arrived and settled in the U.S. while Americans struggled to find work. There are some 42.4 million foreign-born immigrants, illegal aliens, contract workers, students, refugees residing in the U.S. as of 2014, comprising 13.3 percent of the population.

Each year, roughly four million young Americans enter the job market—and the federal government provides work permits to about one million new legal immigrants and to almost one million temporary contract-workers.

Illegal and legal immigration flood the labor market, imposing a $500 billion tax on working Americans and established immigrants by transferring billions of dollars to employers, investors and newly-imported foreign workers, says a September report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine.

Mass immigration from the Third World is crippling workers in the economy, as Breitbart News reported in July. White, working-class men have been hit particularly hard by relentless levels of migration and unrestricted trade: 41 percent have abandoned work, according to the Economist.

E-Verify will empower American workers and protect them from being underbid by illegal aliens, FAIR said, recommending every state, plus the federal government, makes E-Verify mandatory.

"E-Verify ensures that only authorized workers gain employment opportunities in the states where it's being used. As a result, American jobs are going to authorized workers, many of whom had abandoned their job hunt altogether and had given up hope of ever again finding employment," said FAIR's President Dan Stein in a statement accompanying the report.

E-Verify will also discourage illegal aliens from seeking work in the U.S., since the widespread tax fraud and identity theft required to gain employment will no longer be ignored by authorities. Many will simply return home if they are unable to find American jobs.

For All The Sound And Fury Over Illegal Immigration, It's Not A Top Concern For Most Latinos, Survey Finds

By Melissa Etehad

Los Angeles Times, March 3, 2017

Debbie Briano sat down in her restaurant, El Rancho Grande, on Olvera Street in downtown Los Angeles.

Despite it's grandiose name and touristy location, most of the seats were empty on this weekday afternoon and the business' future seemed hazy. Briano is worried about competition from online delivery services, rent hikes and the increasing cost of food.

Some days she worries that she might lose the restaurant that has been passed down in her family for 87 years.

"The city is raising the rent in July and I haven't had enough business recently because of the rain. No one wants to come out," she said last week.

Briano, whose family emigrated from Zacatecas, Mexico, to the United States in the early 20th century, said that more than any other issue, her primary concerns revolve around preserving her restaurant.

Her worries about her economic livelihood are typical among Latinos, who cite economic stability and other issues as their top priorities despite the roiling, high-profile debates over illegal immigration and the Trump administration's talk about stepped-up deportations, according to a Pew Research Center survey released last week.

The survey, which was conducted before President Trump's inauguration, explored how Latinos — whether American-born or immigrants — viewed their status in the U.S. and expectations they had about the Trump presidency.

Despite the contentious debate over illegal immigration during and after the election, the Pew study found that improving the education system, defending the country from future terrorist attacks and strengthening the nation's economy were the top issues for Latinos in the U.S.

"This pattern … has been fairly consistent for a number of years in Pew Research Center surveys," the report said.

As Carlos Mayoral ate lunch outside a downtown building during his break on Thursday, he recalled how little he cared about school when he was growing up. Now a construction worker in L.A. and a father of three, Mayoral said his priorities have shifted.

"I want my kids to do better than me. I'm working hard so that they can go to college. A good education for them is what's on my mind," Mayoral said.

FOIA CBP 000968

His oldest child is 18 years old and will graduate from North Hollywood High School this year and plans to pursue computer science in college, Mayoral said.

Although this and other findings in the survey correlate with what researchers have said in previous years, there was one finding that especially stood out: Latinos in the U.S. were split about what Trump's presidency meant for their place here.

The survey found that 41% of Latinos worried about their future after Trump's election, and 54% felt confident about their situation; how they responded strongly correlated to their legal status in the U.S.

Immigrants in the country illegally and legal residents who are not U.S. citizens expressed more pessimism about their situation.

By contrast, 34% of Latinos who are U.S. citizens said they were concerned about their status in the country.

The survey also found that a growing share of Latinos felt worse about how they stand now compared with a year earlier than in previous surveys.

"The share today that says the group's situation has worsened is about double the share that said the same in 2013," the report said.

For some Latinos, immigration was very much a top concern.

Alejandro Cazares worries that he will be torn away from his wife, Pestrella Cazares, and his five kids. Cazares has been living in the U.S. for 22 years after coming here illegally and said that he has had to adjust his lifestyle since Trump became president.

"I can't work and I'm scared to go out alone these days. I only go out if my family is with me," Cazares said Thursday as he, his wife and children took a walk on Broadway near Grand Central Market.

Pestrella Cazares, worried about how she would raise her five children if her husband were to be deported.

"I'm scared. I could become a single mom any day now," she said.

About half of Latinos surveyed said they worried about the possibility of increased deportations under Trump.

The survey also found that 47% of Latinos worried to some extent that they or a family member or close friend could be deported.

Briano employs five people at her restaurant and said that some of them worry that they will be deported under Trump.

"'Will they take me?' some ask. I tell them that I think they'll be OK," she said.

Latinos held similar views regarding deportations in 2013, according to the Pew survey.

But there was an easing of concerns after President Obama issued a series of executive orders that protected some immigrants from deportation.

Immigration could rise as a priority for Latinos in future surveys conducted after Trump's ascension to the White House.

Last month the Trump administration swept aside almost all restrictions for the removal of 11 million people in the U.S. illegally, opening the door to a major expansion of the federal government's deportation priorities.

This article was updated with comments from Los Angeles residents.

This article was originally published at 11 a.m., Feb. 23.

What We Know About Illegal Immigration From Mexico

Pew Research Center, March 2, 2017

What we know about illegal immigration from Mexico

Unauthorized Immigration

3/2/2017 9:30:36 AM

There were 11.7 million immigrants from Mexico living in the U.S. in 2014, and about half of them were in the country illegally, according to Pew Research Center estimates. Mexico is the country's largest source of immigrants, making up 28% of all U.S. immigrants.

With President Donald Trump's administration taking steps to reduce the number of unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. — including through the construction of a wall at the southern border — here's what we know about illegal immigration from Mexico:

1The number of Mexican immigrants living in the U.S. illegally has declined by more than 1 million since 2007. In 2014, 5.8 million unauthorized immigrants from Mexico lived in the U.S., down from a peak of 6.9 million in 2007. Despite the drop, Mexicans still make up about half of the nation's 11.1 million unauthorized immigrants (52% in 2014).

2More non-Mexicans than Mexicans were apprehended at U.S. borders in fiscal year 2016 for the second time on record (the first was in fiscal 2014.) In fiscal 2016, 192,969 Mexicans were apprehended, a sharp drop from a peak of 1.6 million apprehensions in 2000. The decline in apprehensions reflects the decrease in the number of unauthorized Mexican immigrants coming to the U.S.

3Mexicans were deported from the U.S. 242,456 times in 2015 – up from 169,031 in 2005, but down from a recent high of 309,807 in 2013. The increase over the past decade is due in part to a 2005 shift in policy that increased the chances of being deported following apprehension in the border region. Prior to that change, many unauthorized immigrants were returned without a formal deportation order.

4Mexican unauthorized immigrants are more likely to be long-term residents of the U.S. As of 2014, 78% had lived in the U.S. for 10 years or more, while only 7% had been in the country for less than five years. By comparison, 52% of unauthorized immigrants from countries other than Mexico

FOIA CBP 000969

had lived in the U.S. for at least a decade as of 2014, while 22% had lived in the U.S. for less than five years.

5Unauthorized immigrants from Mexico make up at least 75% of the total unauthorized immigrant population in three states. This is the case in New Mexico (91%), Idaho (87%) and Arizona (81%). In California, Mexicans make up 71% of the state's unauthorized immigrant population, and they numbered more than 1.6 million in 2014 – the highest total of any state.

Note: This post was originally published July 5, 2015, and has been updated.

Topics: Immigration, Immigration Trends, Mexico, Unauthorized Immigration

E.U. Lawmakers Call For End To Visa-Free Travel For Americans

By James Kanter

New York Times, March 3, 2017

The European Parliament has passed a nonbinding resolution calling for the reintroduction of visa requirements for American citizens, raising the stakes in a long-running battle over the United States' refusal to grant visa-free access to citizens of five European Union countries.

In the vote on Thursday, European lawmakers played tit-for-tat in their dispute with the United States, demanding restrictions on American travelers unless the Trump administration lifts travel requirements for citizens of five countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Poland and Romania.

"You're talking about citizens from countries like Poland, with a major diaspora" in the United States, said Claude Moraes, the British lawmaker who leads the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs in the European Parliament, in a telephone interview on Friday. "You're really seeing frustration and anger, and without any timetable, this is becoming increasingly seen as second-class treatment."

The resolution, while nonbinding, was an important political signal, and it increases pressure on the European Commission, the bloc's executive body, to confront the new administration in Washington, even though it may prove to be as intransigent on the matter as the Obama administration, if not more.

The European Parliament also warned that it could take the further step of bringing the European Commission to court if it continues not to stand up to Washington.

"Only when the U.S. fully gets that the European Commission is going to act are we going to get any kind of timetable from the United States," Mr. Moraes said. "At the moment, the U.S. just believes the commission is not going to act but stick with the pragmatic argument that doing so would create damage that's just too great."

He continued, referring to Washington, "There's no denying heightened concern about the current administration, but that's more about uncertainty about who's in charge and how the State Department is working."

Mr. Moraes said the cvil liberties committee could still recommend within two months that a case against the Commission's failure to act be brought to the bloc's highest tribunal, the Court of Justice of the European Union.

"It's a question of using what options are open to us," he said, explaining the possible resort to litigation.

In the vote on Thursday, the Parliament gave the European Commission two months to take legal measures to impose visas for American travelers to the European Union unless the Americans offered reciprocity to all citizens from the bloc, a move that would almost certainly prove damaging for travel and trade.

European officials in Brussels have balked at making travel to Europe more difficult for Americans, saying doing so would have an economic cost and would most likely not even resolve the hurdles facing citizens of the five affected countries.

Parliament's measure was approved in a show of hands and was not expected to worsen the standoff with the United States. But in the event that the court in Luxembourg were to rule in favor of Parliament, the commission might be forced to impose visa requirements on Americans.

The Trump administration, finding itself in a tit-for-tat battle over access, would then almost certainly do the same for travelers from the European Union.

In 2014, the European Commission was notified that the United States and four other countries — Australia, Brunei, Canada, Japan — were failing to provide reciprocal, visa-free travel to citizens of some European Union countries.

Australia, Brunei and Japan have resolved differences with the European Union, and an agreement with Canada is expected to take effect in December for all citizens of Bulgaria and Romania, according to a statement from the European Parliament.

Margaritis Schinas, the chief spokesman for the commission, appeared to tamp down any expectations that it would impose visa requirements on Americans within two months, as outlined in the Parliament resolution. Instead, he said he advocated "continued engagement and patient diplomatic contacts" with Washington.

The commission would issue a progress report on discussions with the United States, he added, but not before the end of June.

European Lawmakers Threaten Visa Rules For Americans In Spat Over Travel Policies

By Brian Murphy

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

FOIA CBP 000970

The European Parliament has drawn a tough line with Washington in a dispute over visa-free travel, demanding that the United States extend the privileged status to all 28 European Union nations or risk having it pulled for Americans visiting Europe.

The vote Thursday by E.U. lawmakers — calling to end the visa waiver for Americans — was seen as mostly an attention-grabbing stunt ahead of a June 15 meeting between European and American envoys.

But it also runs up against tighter border-control policies by the Trump administration and could leave Europe in a political bind if Washington refuses to bend.

Passport holders from all but five E.U. nations can travel to the United States without seeking an advance visa. The entire European Union gives the same welcome mat to Americans.

The European Parliament, however, insists that the United States should give the visa-free allowance to the five left out: Poland, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania and Cyprus.

The European Parliament does not have the authority to change visa policies on its own. Also, imposing visas for American travelers would likely touch off huge economic disruptions and could force a retaliatory move by the United States.

But the vote suggests growing frustration with Washington in a running spat that began in 2014.

What remains unclear is whether the Trump administration would be in the mood to open its European visa policies. Officials have already urged greater border checks and seek to reimpose a court-blocked travel ban that originally covered seven Muslim-majority nations.

One sticking point in the past has been U.S. concern about potentially lax passport-issuing rules in some of the five E.U. countries outside the visa-free list.

IMMIGRATION

Victims Of Immigrant Crime Now Have Advocate In White House

By Astrid Galvan

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

PHOENIX (AP) – Two years ago, Steve Ronnebeck's son was gunned down at work in a Phoenix-area convenience store over a pack of cigarettes. The man accused of pulling the trigger was an immigrant who was in the country illegally and had been released by federal authorities.

The suspected killer, captured on camera calmly stepping over the body of 21-year-old Grant Ronnebeck to grab a few more packs, faced deportation but was free on bond.

Ronnebeck and other families who have lost loved ones to crimes committed by immigrants now have a forceful advocate at the highest level with President Donald Trump in the White House. During his speech to Congress on Tuesday, Trump announced that he would create a new office to serve victims of immigrant crime and their relatives.

Although immigrants are responsible for only a small fraction of the crimes committed daily around the country, the issue played an outsized role in the race for the White House. Trump repeatedly invoked such crimes at rallies and frequently appeared with victims on the campaign trail, pointing to case after case in which people were killed by immigrant assailants who slipped through the cracks.

Many of the families have doggedly pressed for changes in the immigration system for years, lobbying lawmakers in Washington and even disrupting congressional hearings to make their point.

"To lose a child, especially when it was preventable, you know there's no coming back from that. You don't ever recover, but to have a president that is putting Americans first and putting the victims' families first, it's amazing," Ronnebeck said. "Finally we're being heard. My family feels like we actually matter again."

The man charged in Grant Ronnebeck's slaying has pleaded not guilty to murder, armed robbery and other charges. Adolfo Altamirano is scheduled to go to trial Sept. 18 in Maricopa County.

Trump's new agency will be the office of Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement, or VOICE, and will be part of the Department of Homeland Security. Department Secretary John Kelly described the agency's planned work in a memo last month.

Under President Barack Obama, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency protected information about immigration cases from public inspection, including from victims. It also created a public advocate position in 2012 that helped immigrants facing deportation and answered complaints or offered explanations about the agency's work.

Opponents criticized the administration for using government money to advocate for immigrants in the country illegally.

Don Rosenberg said an office like VOICE would have been useful when he was trying to navigate the judicial system after an immigrant named Roberto Galo killed his 25-year-old son, Drew, in a car collision after striking the law student's motorcycle in San Francisco in late 2010.

Rosenberg struggled to keep track of hearings and did not know what his rights were as the father of a victim.

Galo did not have a driver's license and was in the country illegally, although he had temporary protected status, meaning he was shielded from deportation. He was sentenced to six months in jail but was let out after 43 days, Rosenberg said.

FOIA CBP 000971

He was eventually deported to Honduras.

Rosenberg became vocal against policies protecting immigrants. He was detained by U.S. Capitol police in July 2015 after getting into an argument with another man at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing examining the Obama administration's approach to immigration. Rosenberg said he got loud but not violent while arguing with a man. He was not charged.

Several studies have concluded that immigrants are less likely to commit crime than native-born U.S. citizens. A 2014 study published in the journal Justice Quarterly concluded that immigrants "exhibit remarkably low levels of involvement in crime across their life course."

Not all relatives of crime victims agree with Trump.

Andy Ostroy, of New York, said it's wrong for the president and others to demonize a group of people based on the actions of a few.

Ostroy's wife, Adrienne Shelly, was an actor and filmmaker with a young daughter. She was killed in 2006 by an Ecuadorean immigrant who was working in construction without legal status. Diego Pillco strangled Shelly and staged her death as a suicide. He confessed, pleaded guilty to manslaughter and was sentenced to 25 years in prison.

Ostroy said a program such as VOICE will fuel anti-immigrant rhetoric.

"Let's just work on crime, period," he said. "Let's not go down a dark, dangerous path of demonizing whole segments of our population."

Mary Ann Mendoza is the mother of a Mesa, Arizona, police sergeant killed in 2014 in a head-on collision with a drunken driver who was suspected of being in the country illegally. The driver, Raul Silva Corona, who had been driving the wrong way, was killed in the crash.

Mendoza said she has been working with members of the Trump administration as they create VOICE and is grateful for the president's actions.

"So many times families are left grieving the loss of their loved ones, and they're left wondering what happened in the system," she said. "I wish we had leadership in our state that stood up for Americans and would reach out to our families."

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Mixed Messages From Trump On Immigration

By Milton J. Valencia

Boston Globe, March 3, 2017

Remarks that the president made to a gathering of TV anchors this week briefly gave cautious hope to immigrants and their advocates that Trump could support a path to citizenship for thousands of immigrants now in the country illegally, a stark departure from his previous stances.

But hours later, those hopes were dashed when Trump made no mention of that sentiment in his first address to Congress.

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It was the latest twist in an evolving discussion of immigration that has kept policy watchers guessing.

Trump has "been kind of all over the map on legal immigration," said Jessica Vaughan, director of policy studies for the Center for Immigration Studies, a research group that favors limits on immigration. But Trump has remained consistent in his focus on immigrants who have committed crimes, she said.

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"He's gone from 'they all have to go,' to 'we're going to focus on the people causing problems," she said. "I don't think he's lost the part that this needs to serve our national interest."

Yet another version of a piece of Trump's immigration crackdown is expected any day, when he releases a revised executive order designed to hold up in court.

It would revise one of the three executive orders on immigration he signed in January. The first two called for stepped up border security and enforcement of immigration laws, and broadened the pool of immigrants to target for deportation, leading to more arrests and detentions. The third order temporarily barred people from seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the US. The White House promised to replace that order after it was halted by a federal court, but the replacement has not yet been introduced.

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In his speech before Congress Tuesday, Trump said the time may be ripe for immigration reform, and suggested that the country should have a "merit-based immigration system," which would prioritize the admission of immigrants with specific skills.

Steve Kropper, co-chair of the Massachusetts Citizens for Immigration Reform, said Trump has so far introduced only "attention-grabbing" proposals, rather than initiatives that could lead to lasting change in the immigration system. It won't be long, he said, until Trump gives up, and perhaps even offers amnesty to those in the country illegally.

"I doubt that Trump has the stamina for the long slog that is meaningful changes in immigration," Kropper said.

Advocates for immigrants say that the arrests of immigrants happening across the country, including two

separate arrests of young people who were previously protected under Barack Obama's program for immigrants brought to the US as children, have many people fearful, no matter what Trump may say now.

"It's hard to tell whether the public backlash has actually had an affect on the administration's policy, or if they're trying to create more confusion and chaos," said Laura Rotolo, a lawyer with the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts who focuses on immigration. "What's happening on the ground is, there continues to be a true sense of confusion of what the policies are."

For example, said Zoila Gomez, an immigration lawyer, a lawful permanent resident from the Dominican Republic who federal officials want to deport was arrested at his home this week and is being detained while he awaits deportation proceedings, even though he had been allowed to remain free since 2014 as his case moved through the process.

"What is the point of picking him up, and putting him in jail, when he is already in the system and complying?" Gomez said.

In trying to understand the seeming mixed messages from the White House, policy observers said that it's possible that the president is now listening to Cabinet members and other members of his administration and immigration advocates on the issue.

"I do think his position has evolved, and I definitely see the influence of people now in his cabinet in refining what his agenda is on immigration," Vaughan said.

She and others added, though, that such proposals are nothing more than proposals.

ERIK S. LESSER/EPA

President Donald J. Trump returned to the White House on Thursday.

"He wants to indicate he's open to something, but being open to talk to someone is different than having a plan," she said. "If he were to embark on a big legalization program at this point in time, he would really upset a lot of his supporters."

Vaughan said the president has authority to enforce existing immigration laws in a way that protects the country, for instance by ordering the deportations of criminals, but she said that any true reform will need Congressional action, something that hasn't happened since 1990.

In his speech Tuesday, Trump called on Congress to come to a compromise and take action.

"I believe that real and positive immigration reform is possible, as long as we focus on the following goals: to improve jobs and wages for Americans, to stengthen our nation's security, and to restore respect for our laws," Trump said.

Congressional Democrats and immigration advocates were not swayed. One group, the National Immigration Law Center, released a statement saying that Trump has already "spread fear among immigrant communities."

"Actions speak louder than words," Kamal Essaheb, policy and advocacy director, said in the statement.

Ira Mehlman, of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, said in an interview that he does not believe the president has wavered or changed course, even after Tuesday's speech, but instead has followed through on the campaign promises he made, to target criminals and create a "merit-based" immigration system. There really shouldn't be any confusion, he said.

"You have to listen to what the president said, and until you hear otherwise, that's the president's position," he said. "It all seems to indicates he believes our immigration laws need to be enforced, and our legal immigration system needs to be overhauled."

"As far as we're concerned, that's the policy of the administration," he said.

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After Kansas Shooting, A Community In Fear

By Anna North

New York Times, March 3, 2017

This Week in Hate highlights hate crimes and harassment around the country since the election of President Trump.

For many Americans of South Asian descent, the shooting in Olathe, Kan., last month of two immigrants from India was part of a disturbing pattern. Even as South Asian American communities grow around the country, their members are increasingly victims of harassment and violence. Often, they are perceived, correctly or not, to be Muslim.

Harmann Singh, a Harvard Law School student who was born and raised in Buffalo, N.Y., was talking on his cell phone to his mother in a Cambridge, Mass., store when a man swore at him and called him a Muslim. Mr. Singh tried to walk away, but the man followed him around the store, demanding to know what country he was from.

Though Mr. Singh is Sikh, not Muslim, he saw the incident as an opportunity to take a stand against Islamophobia. "It's really important that we all come together," he said, to "fight against injustice against anyone and not just our own communities."

Violence and harassment against Americans of South Asian descent have risen in the last year, according to the group South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT). The group reported 140 incidents of violence and harassment between November 2015 and November 2016, compared with 76 between January 2011 and April 2014.

FOIA CBP 000973

South Asian Americans are the fastest growing demographic in the United States, according to SAALT. But white supremacist groups are also on the rise, and many Americans of South Asian descent are frightened for their safety. In the wake of the Kansas shooting, said Suman Raghunathan, the executive director of SAALT, some families are afraid to send their children to school. "This is yet another reminder for our communities that there is the perception that we do not have a place in this country," she said.

Although South Asian Americans practice a variety of religions (or no religion), people who hold racist or Islamophobic views tend to conflate them with Muslims and people of Middle Eastern descent. "All of our communities are essentially lumped together as being un-American," Ms. Raghunathan said. Ninety-four percent of the incidents SAALT tracked last year were motivated by anti-Muslim bigotry.

Statements by President Trump and others may be helping to stir up that bigotry. Researchers at California State University, San Bernardino, have found a connection between anti-Muslim statements by politicians and hate violence. For example, there was an 87.5 percent rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes in the days following a 2015 speech by Donald Trump, then a candidate, calling for a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States." Now, Ms. Raghunathan said, "the xenophobic political rhetoric of Trump as a candidate" is turning into real policies like the executive orders on immigration.

She is heartened that the F.B.I. is now investigating the Olathe shooting as a hate crime, and called for hate crime statutes in the five states that have yet to pass them.

The bureau began tracking hate crimes against Sikhs and Hindus in 2015, and data on violence against these groups could help law enforcement fight the problem. For instance, police departments can train officers to investigate crimes in which Sikh men are targeted for wearing turbans, said Harsimran Kaur, the legal director of the Sikh Coalition, a civil rights group.

While Mr. Singh, the Harvard Law student, was initially shaken by his experience, and heartbroken by the Olathe shooting, he maintains "a sense of optimism" that Americans can come together to fight bigotry. In particular, he said he believes people should step in if they see that someone else is being harassed, even if it means "just being there for them, talking to them and making sure they feel comfortable and they feel safe."

Meanwhile, he wishes his harasser "had a chance to get to know me," he said. "My faith preaches love and acceptance and, for me, makes me a stronger American."

If you have experienced, witnessed or read about a hate crime or incident of bias or harassment, you can use this form to send information about the incident to This Week in Hate and other partners in the Documenting Hate project. The form is not a report to law enforcement or any government agency. These resources may be helpful for people who have experienced harassment. If you witness harassment, here are some tips for responding. You can contact This Week in Hate at weekinhate@nytimes.com.

Indian Athlete Who Got High-Level Help For U.S. Visa Now Accused Of Sexual Assault

By Annie Gowen

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

It was a long journey for Indian snowshoe champion Tanveer Hussain and his team manager to the World Snowshoe Championships in Saranac Lake, N.Y., last weekend.

The two men were initially denied visas to travel to the United States in the chaotic days following the Trump administration's travel ban. The reasons for the rejections remain unclear — India is not among the seven countries named in Trump's executive order — but after the intervention of Saranac Lake's mayor and the office of Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.), the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi reversed its decision.

Hussain and team manager Abid Khan arrived Feb. 23 in the bucolic Adirondacks town, which had been following their visa ordeal and extended them a hero's welcome. Locals offered congratulations and free lodgings at an inn that in the snow looked like a "fairy tale scene from a movie," Khan said in a Facebook post.

The "fairy tale" was shattered Wednesday, when Hussain, 24, was arrested and charged with felony sexual abuse and child welfare endangerment, police said.

The parents of the 12-year-old girl allegedly involved said the incident happened Monday, after the end of the three-day snowshoe competition, and reported it to local authorities.

Chief Charles A. Potthast Jr. of the Saranac Lake Village police force said the girl was playing pool Monday afternoon with other young people at the inn where Hussain was staying.

"There was a moment when the two were alone, and that's when the incident occurred," Potthast said. The girl told police there was a "passionate kiss" and that Hussain touched her in an intimate area on top of her clothing.

Hussain remains jailed on $10,000 bond. Khan said the athlete told him he had done nothing wrong.

Muddasir Mir, the president of the SnowShoe Federation of India, said the next court hearing is set for Monday.

"It's an unfortunate situation, both for the community there in the U.S. who supported us and the federation," Mir said. "We have full faith in the American law and as there is a

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court proceeding going on, that is going to be my only comment."

Hussain hails from the Indian side of the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir, which is predominantly Muslim. He placed in the top 50 at the World Snowshoe Championships last year in Italy, Mir said, though he failed to place in the top 100 this year.

Hussain's brother, Yunus Ali, said the family has not been able to speak to Hussain since his arrest.

"In Kashmir, we have a tradition of showing love to children. We hug and kiss a child here, and our society doesn't see it as a crime," he said.

Hussain and Khan claimed they were indirect victims of the U.S. travel ban when their first attempt to procure visas was turned down in late January, the first business day after Trump's travel ban was put in place. Khan told the BBC that an employee at the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi told them they were being rejected because of " current policy."

U.S. officials said at the time that the denials were not connected to the travel ban. The embassy in New Delhi had no comment.

Saranac Lake Mayor Clyde Rabideau, a key supporter of the men, said in a statement that the community was "understandably shocked" by the allegations against Hussain.

Mir had said that the visa would not have been issued without the "personal efforts" of Schumer and New York's other Democratic senator, Kirsten Gillibrand. On Feb. 25, Schumer celebrated Hussain's "rock star" welcome in a Facebook post, saying that the United States is "Still a country that welcome athletes from across the globe to compete in our stadiums, our snow-covered fields and everywhere in between."

A spokesman for Schumer said the senator had helped with the visa process at the request of Saranac Lake and described the charges against Hussain as "extremely troubling."

Gillibrand did not respond to a request for comment.

During their time in Saranac Lake, Hussein and his coach were honored with a special reception by the mayor and also gave a talk about Kashmir at Saranac Lake Middle School, where students had waged a letter-writing campaign on their behalf. "Pack your bags. Next year you are coming to Kashmir," Hussain told them, according to one of Khan's Facebook posts.

SECRET SERVICE

Former Secret Service Agent Pleads Guilty To Sexting With Minors

By Andrew Blake

Washington Times, March 3, 2017

A former Secret Service officer sent sexually explicit messages to underage girls while guarding the White House during the Obama administration, he told prosecutors Wednesday.

Lee Robert Moore, 38, pleaded guilty in Florida federal court Wednesday to one count of enticing a minor to engage in sexual activity and one count of attempting to transfer obscene images. He faces up to life in prison when he's sentenced at a later date, Florida's Sun Sentinel newspaper reported.

Prosecutors claimed Moore used a social media app, Meet24, to communicate with young girls while he worked checking IDs at the White House in 2015. For two months Moore used the app to send images, voice and text messages to an account holder he believed to be a 14-year-old girl, but was actually conversing with detectives working undercover on behalf of the Delaware Child Predator Task Force, according to charging documents.

"A number of the online chats between Moore and the undercover officers posing as a female minor were sexual in nature and on several occasions Moore sent pictures of himself, including one sexually explicit image," prosecutors said.

Moore was arrested in November 2015 and later told authorities he used the app to speak with roughly 10 individuals he believed to be underage girls, including teenagers in Florida, Missouri and Texas with whom he swapped sexually explicit images. Investigators later found "hundreds and hundreds" of explicit conversations he had with children, authorities and adult women, some of which occurred while he guarded the White House.

In one message cited by prosecutors, Moore told an undercover officer he was "[sitting] at box office style booth checking ID's for entrance into building." In another he told the purported teenager he was wearing "black tactical pants, a long sleeve polo and my vest."

Moore was fired after his arrest in 2015 and has been in federal custody ever since. He was already charged by federal prosecutors in Delaware, but the case was transferred to the Southern District of Florida where authorities said one of his teenage victims resided.

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TERRORISM INVESTIGATIONS

FBI Head Discusses Bomb Threats With Jewish Groups

By Jordan Fabian

The Hill, March 3, 2017

FBI Director James Comey met with Jewish leaders Friday to discuss the wave of threats against community

institutions and the arrest of a man suspected of making some of them.

"The conversation encompassed the current situation and potential strategies for future collaboration," the JCC Association of North America said in a statement.

"All the organizations in attendance expressed the deep gratitude of the entire community for the extraordinary effort that the FBI is applying to the ongoing investigation," the organization added.

Comey and members of his senior leadership team assured the community representatives that "the investigation is a top priority for the FBI" and that "agents and analysts across the country" are working on the case.

"The FBI is committed to ensuring that people of all races and religions feel safe in their communities and places of worship," the agency said in a statement.

The meeting came after federal authorities announced it arrested a former journalist who is suspected of making at least eight threats against Jewish community centers, museums and schools.

Juan Thompson, 31, is accused of making the threats in an attempt to frame an ex-girlfriend, whom he was also charged with cyberstalking.

Authorities believe Thompson is not behind all of the threats. Nearly 100 institutions across 33 states have received bomb threats since the beginning of the year. Vandals have desecrated at least Jewish cemeteries nationwide, raising fears of a rise in anti-Semitism.

Comey Meets With Jewish Community Leaders To Discuss Threats

By By Cristiano Lima

Politico, March 3, 2017

The Federal Bureau of Investigation on Monday called recent bomb threats against Jewish community centers a "top priority" following a meeting between religious leaders and bureau officials, including Director James Comey.

"Agents and analysts across the country are working to identify and stop those responsible," said bureau spokeswoman Susan McKee. "The FBI is committed to ensuring that people of all races and religions feel safe in their communities and places of worship."

The meeting comes as Jewish organizations around the U.S. have seen a surge in the number of threats in 2017. On Monday, according to JCC, 31 threats were called in to 23 community centers and schools, the latest wave of threats since the beginning of the year. Threats were also received on Jan. 9, Jan. 18, Jan. 31 and Feb. 20, with 30 JCCs threatened in 17 states on Jan. 18, totaling 100 across 33 states this year.

Earlier Friday the Federal Communications Commission moved to grant Jewish community centers and their communications carriers an emergency temporary waiver to help isolate anonymous callers making threats.

The JCC Association of North America, meanwhile, met with Department of Homeland Security officials Wednesday, praising Secretary John Kelly's pledge to heighten support for religious centers throughout the U.S.

"DHS has promised that its protective security advisors, stationed in all 50 states, will be in contact with JCCs within the next week, offering their expertise on protective measures, threat reporting and security awareness," the group said in a statement Thursday. "We look forward to working with DHS through this unparalleled level of assistance, which comes as very welcome at an extraordinarily stressful time for JCCs and the diverse communities they serve."

A Missouri man was arrested in connection with at least eight threats against Manhattan Jewish organizations Friday morning, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office. Juan Thompson, 31, a former journalist, was charged with cyberstalking a woman whom he allegedly sought to cast as the perpetrator of the acts.

Asked about the arrest Friday, White House deputy press secretary Sarah Sanders said it was too soon to comment, but added, "the process worked," according to a press pool report.

The Intercept, an online news outlet from which Thompson was fired for fabricating sources and quotes, condemned the threats in light of the writer's arrest.

"We were horrified to learn this morning that Juan Thompson, a former employee of The Intercept, has been arrested in connection with bomb threats against the ADL and multiple Jewish Community Centers in addition to cyberstalking," the outlet said in a statement Friday, adding that they had no further details about the case. "These actions are heinous and should be fully investigated and prosecuted."

President Donald Trump spoke out against the religious threats during his Tuesday address to Congress.

"Recent threats targeting Jewish community centers and vandalism of Jewish cemeteries, as well as last week's shooting in Kansas City, remind us that while we may be a nation divided on policies, we are a country that stands united in condemning hate and evil in all of its very ugly forms," he said.

FCC Approves Waivers To Track Jewish Center Threats

By David Shepardson

Reuters, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

St. Louis Man Charged With Making Bomb Threats Against Jewish Sites

By Benjamin Weiser

New York Times, March 3, 2017

The federal authorities have charged a St. Louis man with making more than half a dozen bomb threats against Jewish community centers, schools and a Jewish history museum, an unsealed court document shows.

The man, Juan Thompson, made some of the threats in his own name and others in the name of a former girlfriend, apparently in an attempt to intimidate her, according to a federal complaint filed by the United States attorney's office in Manhattan and unsealed on Friday.

In one threat, made on Feb. 1 against a Jewish school in Farmington Hills, Mich., the complaint said, Mr. Thompson claimed that he had placed two bombs in the school and was "eager for Jewish newton," an apparent reference to the December 2012 school massacre in Newtown, Conn., in which a gunman killed 20 students and six school employees.

A news website, The Intercept, confirmed in a statement on Friday that Mr. Thompson worked for the publication for a little over a year, until he was fired in January 2016 after it was discovered that he had fabricated sources and quotes in his articles.

The arrest comes amid heightened tension involving more than 100 threats that have been made against Jewish groups in dozens of states since the beginning of the year, which has led to a broad federal investigation. The threats, combined with recent vandalism at Jewish cemeteries in some states, have prompted fears of an increase in anti-Semitism.

Mr. Thompson is not believed to be responsible for the majority of threats made against Jewish centers around the country, according to F.B.I. officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the investigation was continuing. Investigators are still trying to identify the person responsible for those threats, who the F.B.I. officials say is using sophisticated technology to mask personal details, like identity and the origin of the internet-based calls.

Mr. Thompson, 31, made his threats "as part of a sustained campaign to harass and intimidate" the former girlfriend, and that harassment appeared to have begun shortly after their relationship ended last July, according to the complaint, which was signed by Christopher Mills, an F.B.I. special agent.

Mr. Thompson made at least eight threats against Jewish centers nationwide as part of his campaign, the complaint said, citing Jewish community centers and schools in Dallas, Farmington Hills, New York and San Diego.

According to the complaint, one threat, on Feb. 22, was made in a phone call to the Anti-Defamation League in New York. The caller, using an untraceable phone number and a tool that disguised his voice, said that there was C-4, an explosive material, in the group's New York office, and that it would be "detonated within one hour." The office was immediately swept and no explosives were found, the complaint said.

Mr. Thompson, who was arrested Friday morning, was charged with one count of cyberstalking and was expected to be presented in federal court in St. Louis later on Friday, the office of Preet Bharara, the United States attorney for the Southern District of New York, said in a news release.

"Threats of violence targeting people and places based on religion or race — whatever the motivation — are unacceptable, un-American and criminal," Mr. Bharara said in a statement. "We are committed to pursuing and prosecuting those who foment fear and hate through such criminal threats."

Man Arrested In Threats Against Jewish Institutions

Federal prosecutors in Manhattan say Juan Thompson blamed some threats on a former girlfriend

By Corinne Ramey And Melanie Grayce West

Wall Street Journal, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Former Journalist Arrested, Charged With Threats Against Jewish Facilities

By Mark Berman And Matt Zapotosky

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

A former journalist allegedly carried out at least some of the recent bomb threats against Jewish institutions across the country, according to the FBI, which described the menacing calls as part of the man's campaign to harass a woman.

Law enforcement officials said Friday that they do not believe the man they arrested — Juan Thompson, 31 — is responsible for all of the calls to scores of Jewish centers and schools in recent months, nor do they think he was behind the vandalism of headstones at Jewish cemeteries in Missouri, Pennsylvania and, most recently, upstate New York.

The arrest of a onetime reporter, fired last year for fabricating quotes, was a bizarre twist in the threats against Jewish facilities, which have forced people from dozens of Jewish Community Centers, schools, offices and daycares, contributing to heightened anxiety about anti-Semitism nationwide. Even after Thompson was taken into custody in St. Louis, Jewish groups and officials remained on edge about the threats that are still unsolved.

"There are many more JCC bomb threats that have not been solved, and communities are hurting," Evan Bernstein, the New York regional director at the Anti-Defamation

FOIA CBP 000977

League, told reporters Friday. “We hope all law enforcement will continue to be diligent.”

The FBI on Friday called its ongoing investigation into the threats “a top priority” for the bureau.

“Agents and analysts across the country are working to identify and stop those responsible,” the bureau said in a statement. “The FBI is committed to ensuring that people of all races and religions feel safe in their communities and places of worship.”

FBI Director James Comey met Friday morning with Jewish community leaders to discuss the threats. In a statement, the Jewish groups said they “expressed the deep gratitude of the entire community for the extraordinary effort that the FBI is applying to the ongoing investigation.”

Federal agents arrested Thompson on Friday morning, according to the U.S. Attorney’s Office in the Southern District of New York. Thompson — whose Twitter page is full of rants about white people and President Trump — was charged with cyberstalking and is accused of communicating at least eight threats to Jewish Community Centers, which an FBI complaint said were “part of a sustained campaign to harass and intimidate” a woman with whom he had been romantically involved.

Thompson previously drew national attention when he was fired a little more than a year ago from the Intercept, an investigative journalism website, for fabricating quotes and misleading colleagues to cover his tracks. In an editor’s note, the publication said Thompson had engaged in “a pattern of deception” and wrote that he created fake email accounts to impersonate people.

“We were horrified to learn this morning that Juan Thompson, a former employee of The Intercept, has been arrested in connection with bomb threats against the ADL and multiple Jewish Community Centers in addition to cyberstalking,” Charlotte Greensit, the Intercept’s managing editor, said in a statement Friday. “These actions are heinous and should be fully investigated and prosecuted.”

Thompson appeared in federal court Friday wearing handcuffs and leg chains along with a faded blue denim shirt and beige jeans. He was accompanied by a U.S. marshal and a public defender. His mother, along with several other family members and friends, sat in the galley.

After the hearing, Thompson was remanded to federal custody. When approached by a reporter, his mother and other relatives declined comment.

An FBI spokeswoman said Thompson is not believed to be responsible for all of the threats to Jewish Community Centers across the country. Thompson was arrested in St. Louis, not far from a Jewish cemetery in suburban University City, Mo., where 150 headstones were recently vandalized, but the spokeswoman said agents do not think he is responsible for that incident.

Doron Krakow, chief executive of the Jewish Community Center Association of North America, said the group is “gratified” by Thompson’s arrest, though they hope officials will find those responsible for the other threats.

“It’s a good thing they got this guy, but this indictment brings us no closer to identifying the source of the broader campaign aimed at Jewish centers, with around 100 threats still unaccounted for, not to mention the numerous incidents of vandalism,” J.M. Berger, a fellow with the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism at The Hague and an expert on extremism, wrote in an email Friday.

According to the complaint, after Thompson’s relationship with the woman ended, he began sending defamatory emails and faxes to her workplace, falsely reporting that she was involved in criminal activity and making threats to the Jewish centers in her name.

Last year, speaking to the Riverfront Times, an alt-weekly in St. Louis, Thompson disputed the Intercept’s characterization of his firing and said he would “come through on this.” The story described Thompson as a young, handsome journalist who is “maddeningly elusive” and acted cagey when asked for evidence of claims about having cancer and being accepted to law school.

The Intercept’s account of Thompson’s fabrications is echoed in the criminal complaint filed Friday. The complaint says that after he and the woman he dated broke up in July 2016, Thompson began emailing and faxing her company defamatory messages about her.

In one, for example, a person claiming to be a TV producer for a national news organization said the woman had been pulled over for drunk driving and was being sued for spreading a sexually transmitted disease. The woman also received a series of bizarre texts and emails related to Thompson from someone claiming to be his friend. One said — falsely — that Thompson had been the victim of a robbery and shooting, and was on life support.

The woman obtained a protective order against Thompson in August 2016 and renewed it in October and December. Law enforcement confronted Thompson in November 2016, after someone from his IP address reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that the woman possessed child pornography. A New York police detective eventually got in touch with Thompson — who claimed his email accounts had been hacked — and told him he should not attempt to contact the victim.

Attempts to reach the woman Friday were not successful.

In the months that followed, Thompson began making threats to Jewish Community Centers, sometimes in the woman’s name and sometimes in his own, though he claimed the woman was trying to frame him, according to authorities.

“People can leverage a climate of hate to have much more magnified effect than they otherwise could’ve,” Andrew

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Rehfeld, president of the Jewish Federation of St. Louis, said in an interview Friday.

Thompson seemed to be aware of the news coverage of threats. Using an apparently hacked email address, he sent a message to the Anti-Defamation League in February 2017 saying the woman was "behind the bomb threats against jews. She lives in nyc and is making more bomb threats tomorrow."

The next day, the ADL received a call that said someone would detonate an explosive at the group's New York headquarters. Police searched and did not find a bomb.

Similar threats were relayed in various ways toward Jewish centers in Dallas and San Diego, a Jewish school in Farmington Hills, Mich., as well as the Jewish History Museum in Manhattan. A Jewish school in Manhattan received two separate threats, one of which said Thompson wanted "to create Jewish newtown tomorrow," a reference to the mass shooting of 20 children at a school in Newtown, Conn.

Thompson claimed on Twitter that the woman was stalking and harassing him, and that law enforcement had questioned him unfairly because of her. He also tweeted about the threats, seeming to condemn them. "Another week, another round of threats against Jewish ppl. In the middle of the day, you know who's at a JCC? Kids. KIDS."

Oren Segal, director of the ADL's Center on Extremism, said in a conference call with reporters Friday that while he could not speculate about what was in Thompson's mind, "threatening Jewish institutions is an anti-Semitic act."

The criminal complaint filed in federal court points to his Twitter page, where he rails about an ex-girlfriend he describes as a "nasty/racist #whitegirl." Thompson's page also expresses disdain for Trump and white people generally. "White folk are trash," he wrote in a tweet about the Oscars. He praised black women for their opposition to Trump "The only person to call Trump a fascist in the #dncdebate is a black woman," he wrote. "Of course. Black women are the root of left mvmnts."

Earlier this week, Trump condemned the recent anti-Semitic threats and vandalism, his second such condemnation, but in a meeting with attorneys general he also questioned who was behind it. His remarks appearing to suggest that it may have been the work of his political opponents disturbed some of those in the room.

Trump said that while the threats were reprehensible, sometimes it's "the reverse," according to two attorneys general at the meeting. He also said last month that some bigoted public sentiments could be traced to his opponents and "it won't be my people," but will be done to make his supporters look bad.

ADL leaders said Friday that law enforcement officials informed them that the arrest was made in the case of a bomb threat against its offices as well as "several other" facilities.

"The defendant allegedly caused havoc, expending hundreds of hours of police and law enforcement resources to respond and investigate these threats," James P. O'Neill, the New York police commissioner, said in a statement. "We will continue to pursue those who peddle fear, making false claims about serious crimes."

Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly recently pledged additional support to Jewish communities after "unacceptable and escalating threats and actual harassment directed at faith-based communities around the country, with a particular focus on threats to Jewish Community Centers."

In a statement, Kelly had said he was directing the agency "to heighten our outreach and support to enhance public safety." As part of that, a branch of Homeland Security spoke with executive directors of the JCC association to offer more help with training and protective measures, he said.

The ADL said Thursay that at least 16 headstones were toppled at a cemetery in Rochester, N.Y., that has been used by the Jewish community there for nearly a century, the third such act of vandalism in recent weeks.

"A number of headstones were recently vandalized and toppled over at Waad Hakolel Cemetery in Rochester," New York Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo (D) said in a statement. "Given the wave of bomb threats targeting Jewish community centers and disturbing vandalism at Jewish cemeteries nationwide, I am directing the state police to immediately launch a full investigation into this matter."

Julie Tate in Washington and Kurt Shillinger in St. Louis contributed to this report, which has been updated.

Further reading:

'Stand together against this bigotry': Another Jewish cemetery vandalized and again Muslims reach out to help

Jewish schools in the Washington region receive bomb threats

UN Security Council Begins Africa Trip Focused On Boko Haram

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

YAOUNDE, Cameroon (AP) – The U.N. Security Council on Friday kicked off a visit to spotlight Africa's worst humanitarian crisis as millions face hunger amid the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region.

"We came in order to show that this will no longer be a neglected crisis," British Ambassador Matthew Rycroft told reporters.

One question in the aid response is the United States, which pledged no funding for the Nigeria crisis at an international conference in Oslo last week co-hosted by the United Nations. The U.S. is the world's largest humanitarian donor, but U.S. officials have said the Trump administration is

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proposing a 37 percent cut to diplomacy and foreign aid budgets to help pay for increased military spending.

The U.N. has launched a $4 billion aid appeal for the Nigeria crisis and similar ones in South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen. It was not clear how much the U.S. has pledged.

The U.S. has indicated it is "very ready to donate" under Trump, U.N. humanitarian chief Stephen O'Brien said during a visit to Kenya on Friday, and he suggested it may not have pledged yet because of its budgetary cycle. The Trump administration's budget plan is expected this month.

The Security Council began its visit in Cameroon with meetings with top officials and an encounter with the multinational force fighting the Nigeria-based Boko Haram extremists.

Council members also plan to go to Chad and Niger, then on to Nigeria, where they are expected to visit a camp for people displaced by Boko Haram.

On Friday, officials said three suicide bombers killed themselves and set fuel tankers ablaze in Maiduguri, the birthplace of Boko Haram and the center of Nigeria's military efforts to counter the group.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram's seven-year uprising has killed more than 20,000 people and driven 2.6 million from their homes. Now the group has moved into neighboring countries.

At the Oslo conference, the U.N. humanitarian chief said 14 countries had pledged $672 million over the next three years to prevent a famine in the four countries around the Lake Chad basin.

Security Council members who pledged were France with $14 million, Italy with $31 million, Japan with $48 million and Sweden with $31 million.

Associated Press writer Tom Odula in Nairobi, Kenya contributed.

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Al-Qaeda Likes Steve Bannon So Much, They Put Him On The Cover Of Their Official Newspaper

By Amanda Erickson

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

The way al-Qaeda tells it, the West is locked in an existential war with Islam. This is how the terrorist group justifies its violence and its fundamentalist ideology. And now it has found a Westerner to back them up — top Trump adviser Steve Bannon.

Bannon graced the cover (above the fold!) of the most recent al-Qaeda-linked Al Masra newspaper. That prominence, University of Oxford researcher Elisabeth Kendall told Quartz, is "striking."

The piece focused on Bannon's views of Islam, saying he believes that "the forces of Islam cannot be stopped by peaceful means." The paper cited a conversation Bannon had with a Danish journalist in May 2016. It also claimed that Bannon believes that the struggle is really between Christianity and Islam, not just Islam and the West. And it suggested that Bannon has "lost confidence in secular Europe, and sees Muslim immigrants as partially responsible for the retreat of traditional Christian values."

Like other Trump advisers (and former advisers), Bannon has spoken publicly about these beliefs. In 2014, he gave a speech to the Vatican via Skype in which he said, "We're now, I believe, at the beginning stages of global war against Islamic fascism." On other occasions, he's suggested that the "Judeo-Christian West" is at war with "expansionist Islamic ideology."

On his radio show in 2015, he called for a complete halt to allowing Muslim immigrants into the United States. ("Why even let 'em in," he asked Ryan Zinke, then a Republican congressman representing Montana). And as my colleagues have reported:

On one of the first Breitbart Radio shows, in early November 2015, Bannon praised the growing movement in Britain to exit the European Union. He said that the British had joined the E.U. merely as a trading federation but that it had grown into a force that had stripped Britons of sovereignty "in every aspect important to their own life." Bannon has been supportive of similar movements in other European countries to pull out of the union.

"The fact that [Al Masra] would put this so prominently on the front page — as lead article — indicates it has traction, that this is a way to win support. It plays entirely into their narrative that they were right about the West's war on Islam all along," Kendall said. "It shows us how much al-Qaeda is trying to capitalize on some of the policies of the Trump administration."

It's true that Islamist militants have a soft spot for Trump — his rhetoric, they say, is a useful propaganda and recruiting tool. On Election Night, Muslim extremists around the world celebrated Trump's win, suggesting that it might usher in a civil war. "Rejoice with support from Allah, and find glad tidings in the imminent demise of America at the hands of Trump," said the Islamic State-affiliated al-Minbar Jihadi Media network, according to the SITE Intelligence Group. "Trump's win of the American presidency will bring hostility of Muslims against America as a result of his reckless actions, which show the overt and hidden hatred against them."

Al-Qaeda and Islamic State supporters said Trump's win exposed America's "hatred of Muslims," SITE director

Rita Katz told USA Today. They likened it to Brexit and suggested that it will lead to the downfall of the West.

Since then, America has featured much more prominently in jihadi media. Al Masra, in particular, has been tracking developments in America quite closely since November. Kendall noted that a February 2017 Al Masra issue mentioned America twice as often as one from January 2016.

"Trump has created an upsurge in militant jihadist attention on America — it was previously on America but also on many other targets like Shiites in Yemen, Iraq and even Syria — but this has really refocused attention on America itself," Kendall told ThinkProgress.

And indeed, there's been no shortage of things to cover — data from jihadi discussion forums suggest that Islamic State supporters backed the travel ban, because it could be used to reinforce the idea that Islam is under attack by the West. "It's far more potent than any video or other piece of propaganda," Charlie Winter, a senior fellow at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence at King's College in London, told CNN.

But Steve Stalinsky, who runs the Middle East Media Research Institute, says that terrorist sympathizers have been making the same argument — that the West hates Islam — for decades.

People are saying that Trump shows America's true colors, he said. But it's nothing new. These same sentiments existed under Obama, they say, even though his rhetoric was less inflammatory. "They'd rather Trump than Obama, a snake who hides what he's doing," Stalinsky said. Terrorists sympathizers say, "We're grateful to have Trump removing Obama's mask."

The message, Stalinsky says, is this: "There's a new fool in the White House." But he's just replacing an old fool. And the goal — "to ignite the ground under America's feet" — remains the same.

CYBER NEWS

White House Tech Vacancies May Threaten Cybersecurity Advances

By Seung Lee

Christian Science Monitor, March 3, 2017

White House tech vacancies may threaten cybersecurity advances

Seung Lee

3/3/2017

March 3, 2017

—Last June, the government technology trade publication MeriTalk launched a petition regarding then-US Federal Chief Information Officer Tony Scott. The petition was not demanding Mr. Scott's resignation but rather asked the next president to keep him on after the election.

"Tony Scott has made countless contributions to government IT through his strong leadership, continued efforts to improve existing initiatives and initiate new ones, as well as his fearless pursuit of federal excellence," MeriTalk wrote. "When the current administration ends early next year, we don't want to see this effective leader leave his post."

More than 500 government officials and private IT professionals signed the petition, according to a MeriTalk spokesperson. But despite Scott's wide popularity in the tech community and his expressed desire to continue working as chief information officer, President Trump did not bring back Scott nor his right-hand man, Chief Information Security Officer Greg Touhill.

Over a month has past since Inauguration Day, but neither the CIO or the CISO position has been nominated by Mr. Trump, despite not needing a Senate vote to confirm the nominee. Acting CIO Margie Graves currently fills the role.

The absence of a CIO for more than a month with no progress in sight for a permanent replacement is worrying many cybersecurity and tech experts, including Scott.

"It's kind of like stopping maintenance in the apartment you own," he told Passcode. "You can stop painting walls or stop replacing the water heater. You can bring a lot of money to the bottom line if you stop spending. But if we instead replaced and ran modern platforms, if we invested in the right places, we can save up to half in maintenance – around $30 billion per year."

Indeed, the leadership vacuum makes it harder for the government to update IT infrastructure, which costs $85 billion per year to operate, putting the system at a greater risk and increases the likely hood of a successful breach, some experts say.

"The federal government is a very big ship to steer," says Todd Helfrich, a vice president at the cybersecurity firm Anomali. "I would hate to see moments lost because the steer is so big and change comes so slow. I am afraid momentum can be lost without a leader in charge."

Scott, a former CIO for Microsoft and VMWare, became the third US CIO in February 2015. Soon after he joined, the government discovered the Office of Personnel Management breach that exposed the sensitive personal information of 21 million government employees and their families.

Two months later, in June 2015, Scott initiated a 30-day Cybersecurity Sprint to improve resiliency across the IT infrastructure that made a significant improvement on its resiliency from hackers.

"In terms of upgrading cybersecurity infrastructure, you didn't see much progress on anything until Tony Scott did the 30-day Cyber Sprint," says James Scott, a senior fellow at Institute for Critical Infrastructure Technology. (No relation to

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Tony Scott.) "It takes a ton of leadership to push stuff like that. It was very high-impact."

Tony Scott and Mr. Touhill – a retired brigadier general who joined Scott's team in September 2016 as the first-ever US CISO – continued to advance basic cybersecurity initiatives before their time was up. One of the last efforts was to push the percentage of federal agencies using multifactor authentication by the end of 2016 to nearly 100 percent.

Touhill says they reached 98.6 percent, a very significant jump from just 20 percent earlier in the year. "We raised the cost for the adversaries to access us and our information," he says.

So far in the Trump administration, little has been done for cybersecurity. Trump planned to sign an executive order in January to improve departments' cyber defenses and commission an administration-wide review to assess hacking risks but was scrapped last minute. At the annual RSA cybersecurity conference in San Francisco in mid-February, Trump's administration was a no-show.

At a Passcode event during the conference, however, former White House Homeland Security Adviser Lisa Monaco said there are signs the Trump administration may follow the Obama playbook on cybersecurity issues. She also noted that she briefed her successor, Tom Bossert, on digital security policies and ongoing efforts in the White House to improve the government's cybersecurity posture.

Mr. Bossert joins the White House from the Atlantic Council think tank in Washington where he was a fellow in the organization's Cyber Statecraft Initiative. He was also national security aide in the George W. Bush administration.

Before moving into the White House, Trump appointed former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani as a cybersecurity advisor. He also has Paypal founder Peter Thiel at his helm as a technology confidant. Both Messrs. Giuliani and Thiel, however, remained mum since the inauguration regarding cybersecurity issues in the US government.

Thiel, Giuliani, and the White House did not respond to Passcode's request for comment.

One possible sign of progress in appointing a CIO and CISO came Feb. 16, when the Senate narrowly confirmed Republican congressman Mick Mulvaney as the director of the Office of Budget and Management (OBM). Mr. Mulvaney made a reputation as a hardline fiscal conservative who hoped to significantly cut military spending and Social Security. Within the White House command chain, both the CIO and CISO report directly to the director of the OBM, who report to the President.

While it is unclear Mulvaney will gut the $85 billion the government spends on IT, Scott warned that a short-term cut will likely backfire in the long term. Budget for IT will not be altered until October, when the 2018 fiscal year starts.

Despite the new administration letting them go, both Scott and Touhill hoped Trump would nominate an experienced, astute veteran in the IT industry that can remain apolitical in a politically charged environment.

"A good IT is good IT, regardless if there is a D or a R in the back," says Scott.

NSA Lawyer Advocates For One Agency To Handle Cyber

By Morgan Chalfant

The Hill, March 3, 2017

The National Security Agency's (NSA) lead lawyer in a recent speech made the case for creating one federal agency to spearhead the government's cybersecurity efforts.

Glenn Gerstell, the NSA's general counsel, proposed that federal cybersecurity activities be unified under one roof instead of dispersed across the departments of Defense, Homeland Security and other agencies during remarks at Duke Law School over the weekend that were released by the NSA on Thursday.

While Gerstell acknowledged progress made on cybersecurity by the George W. Bush and Obama administrations, he said that "glaring gaps remain in our nation's cybersecurity posture."

"One obvious and affirmative strategy, and the one that I think may have the most potential for achieving real gains, would be to unify the government's cybersecurity activities by establishing a new lead department or agency for cybersecurity," Gerstell said.

He noted that the agency could be modeled after Britain's National Cyber Security Centre, which has been operational for months but only officially opened in February.

Gerstell's argument echoed statements made by retired Gen. Keith Alexander, a former NSA director, before a Senate panel on Thursday. Alexander told lawmakers that government agencies focusing on cybersecurity are too "stove-piped" to effectively defend the nation from cyber threats.

"What you have is people acting independently, and with those seams, we will never defend this country," Alexander told the Senate Armed Services Committee, suggesting that the agencies responsible for cybersecurity be brought together under one framework.

During his speech, Gerstell explored potential drawbacks to consolidating cyber activities under one roof, saying that it "misses an opportunity to marry cyber expertise with the unique insights and understanding of requirements possessed by each agency in their own fields."

He also said that key questions would need to be answered in the overhaul, such as how the new agency would be afforded the power to protect computer networks across the federal government.

There has been lively debate on Capitol Hill about how to reform the government's cybersecurity efforts, especially in

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the wake of the Office of Personnel Management data breach and the more recent Russian cyberattacks related to the presidential election.

Rep. Michael McCaul (R-Texas), who chairs the House Homeland Security Committee, has pushed to reform the Department of Homeland Security by codifying its cyber activities under one component department.

Cyberattack Hits Democrats In Pennsylvania State Senate

By Joe Uchill

The Hill, March 3, 2017

The IT network used by Pennsylvania's state Senate Democrats was shuttered early Friday morning after a ransomware attack.

Ransomware is malicious software that prevents systems from working properly, often by encrypting files, until a ransom is paid. It is frequently spammed with no specific victim or even explicit knowledge of its potential targets.

"Officials from the caucus have been in contact with law enforcement to investigate the incident and are working with Microsoft to restore the IT system," the Democratic caucus said in a written statement text-messaged to reporters as its email system had fallen victim to the ransomware.

"There is currently no indication that the caucus system was targeted or that any data has been compromised."

The Democrats are currently the minority party in the statehouse.

All caucus offices remained open, despite the networks going offline.

The Night Zombie Smartphones Took Down 911

By Ryan Knutson

Wall Street Journal, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

NATIONAL SECURITY NEWS

Syria Peace Talks End With Little Progress

By Raja Abdulrahim

Wall Street Journal, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Russia Says Its Military Advisers, Special Forces Behind Palmyra Recapture

By Andrew Osborn;

Reuters, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Less Damage To Ancient Palmyra Than Feared, Syrian Antiquities Chief Says

By Kinda Makieh, Ellen Francis

Reuters, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Russia Urges Trump To Help Fix Syria, Libya Crises Amid Setbacks

By Henry Meyer

Bloomberg Politics, March 3, 2017

Russia is urging U.S. President Donald Trump to help it resolve conflicts in Syria and Libya, where the Kremlin is finding it tough going after seizing the initiative in a bid to act as a leading power in the region.

"We would like to see an active U.S. role" in Syria, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov said in an interview in Geneva. "The United States is one of the most important players here. "

Russia is ready to work with the U.S. in Libya, Gatilov said, even as the Kremlin has shown frustration at Trump's failure so far to make good on his promise to mount a joint fight against Islamic State. Russia has backed Khalifa Haftar, a powerful eastern military commander, saying he must have a role in the Libyan leadership. It hosted his rival, Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj, who's recognized by the United Nations, for talks on Thursday in Moscow as it seeks to broker a solution.

Russia's growing role in Libya comes after it mounted a push to end Syria's civil war following successful military intervention in support of President Bashar al-Assad against mostly Islamist rebels, as it seeks to rebuild Soviet-era influence in the Middle East and wider region. But the Kremlin has discovered it needs U.S. help to succeed.Needs U.S.

"We are interested in stabilizing the situation in Libya and Syria but we need to cooperate with the U.S. in this field," said Irina Zvyagelskaya, a senior fellow at the Kremlin-linked Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Oriental Studies.

Russia's hopes of an entente with the U.S. have met with disappointment as the Trump administration faces a continued storm in Washington over alleged Kremlin interference in the election.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Friday there has been "no movement" on anti-terrorism cooperation with the U.S. and no substantive contacts about Syria.

Russia this week fought to keep UN-led peace negotiations on Syria on track. The Kremlin is trying to

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advance a political settlement to secure an exit strategy for its Syrian military campaign, but is struggling to reconcile this goal with the interests of its ally Assad and his other main patron Iran. A cease-fire brokered in December by Russia and Turkey, a key rebel backer, is holding shakily. Russia also needs to ensure the U.S. and its allies help pay for the costly future post-war reconstruction of Syria, a senior Western diplomat said.

The conflict has killed at least 300,000 people, sent millions more fleeing to neighboring countries and Europe, and allowed Islamic State to seize a swath of territory from which to wage global attacks. While Trump has previously called for an alliance with Russia to fight the jihadists, he's also branded Iran as the "No. 1 terrorist" threat, putting himself at odds with the Kremlin.

Russia "strongly believes" that Iran should have a role in fighting terrorism and would welcome it if Trump cooperated with Assad in defeating Islamic State, Gatilov said.

In Libya, where the collapse in order has allowed Islamic State to claim a foothold though it's now on the defensive after losing its last major holdout in December, the path to an agreement between Russia and the U.S. may be easier.

"If there will be any common ground for cooperation with the United States in bringing stability in Libya, of course we would be open to all contacts," he said.

In addition to Russia, Haftar's also backed by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. "For us, General Haftar is the real power and he shouldn't be ignored in the political process," Gatilov said.

A one-time ally of former Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi, Haftar, 73, controls a large swath of Libya's territory and most of its oil fields.

Kremlin Says U.S. Military Boost Should Not Disrupt Balance Of Power

By Denis Dyomkin

Reuters, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Rivals In Syria Race To Assault Militants' 'Capital' Raqqa

By Bassem Mroue

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

BEIRUT (AP) – After the battlefield of Iraq's Mosul, the next major campaign against the Islamic State group will be to take its de facto capital, the Syrian city of Raqqa. The Pentagon has drawn up a secret plan to do that, likely leaning on local allies with stepped up American support.

The question is: In the tangled mess that is Syria's conflict, who are those local allies?

Syrian government forces, Turkish troops and their Syrian militia allies, and U.S.-backed Kurdish forces all have their eye on Raqqa. Each vehemently rejects letting the others capture the city and would likely react in anger should the United States support the others. And it is not clear that any has the resources to take the city on its own.

"Raqqa is more of an abstract goal: everyone wants it in principle, but no one is willing to commit the resources and bear the risks necessary," said Faysal Itani, an analyst at the Washington-based Atlantic Council.

The fall of Raqqa, the Islamic State group's de facto capital and largest remaining stronghold, would be the biggest defeat for the militants in Syria since they captured the northern city on the banks of the Euphrates River in January 2014.

President Donald Trump has vowed to "obliterate" the group. "We will work with our allies, including our friends and allies in the Muslim world, to extinguish this vile enemy from our planet," he told Congress on Tuesday.

The top U.S. commander in the campaign against IS, Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend, has said he believes Raqqa and Mosul will be taken within six months. So far, the offensive on Mosul has been underway four months, with only half the city captured from the militants in ferocious street-to-street urban combat. And that is using a relatively intensively trained and united military, backed by heavy U.S. firepower and commandos on the ground – a contrast to the comparatively undisciplined and fragmented forces the U.S. has to choose from as allies in Syria.

Raqqa is a smaller city than Mosul, but the militants are believed to have dug in with powerful fortifications there.

In Syria, U.S-backed predominantly Kurdish fighters known as the Syria Democratic Forces, or SDF, remain Trump's best bet. Aided by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes and some 500 U.S. special forces troops deployed in an advisory role, the force has been marching toward Raqqa since November. Closing in on the city from different directions, it is now stationed some eight kilometers (five miles) north of the city.

The U.S. military recently provided a small number of armored vehicles to the U.S.-backed force to give better protection from small arms fire and roadside bombs as they get closer to Raqqa.

Further aid to the rag-tag group, however, raises sensitive questions over how to deal with Turkey, a NATO ally with much at stake in Syria. Turkey considers the main Kurdish militia in Syria – known as the YPG, and an affiliate of the U.S.-backed SDF – a terrorist organization, and has vowed to work with Syrian opposition fighters known as the Free Syrian Army to liberate Raqqa.

In a dramatic reversal of years of the Obama administration's calls for the ouster of President Bashar Assad, Trump has hinted he might be willing to work with Assad's army and Russia, whose year-and-a-half military intervention has propped up Assad's government.

Assad's forces are preoccupied with other battles, however, and would likely need significant U.S. military involvement to take on Raqqa. On Wednesday, the Syrian military recaptured the central town of Palmyra, a city located in the desert south of Raqqa that has gone back and forth between control of the military and the extremists several times. The government forces have also clashed with the Turkish-backed Syrian fighters, who block their path to Raqqa.

Syrians are sharply divided over who should enter Raqqa. Many opposition supporters consider the SDF, which maintains a tacit non-aggression pact with Assad's forces, to be a hostile group. There are also fears of tensions if Raqqa, home to a nearly 200,000 mainly Arab population, is taken by the SDF, a coalition of Kurdish, Arab and Christian fighters.

"Let us be frank that any force that will liberate Raqqa, other than the Free Syrian Army, is going to be a new occupation force with different flags and banners," said Mohammed Khodor of Sound and Picture Organization, which tracks atrocities by IS in Iraq and Syria.

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim was even more blunt, warning that if the SDF enters Raqqa, it will hurt relations between Ankara and Washington.

"We have said that a terror organization cannot be used against another terror organization," the Turkish leader told the state-run Anadolu news agency.

The Kurds reject that notion and insist that only forces fighting under the SDF banner will liberate Raqqa.

"Turkey is an occupation force and has no legitimate right to enter Raqqa," said SDF spokeswoman Cihan Sheikh Ehmed. In a text message exchange from northern Syria, she said the SDF has the experience in fighting IS to finish the operation.

Battlefield victories by the SDF against the Islamic State group have brought growing Western support. Asked if adding more U.S. troops or better arming Syria's Kurds were options, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said he will "accommodate any request" from his field commanders.

In Mosul, the U.S.-led coalition is playing a greater role than ever before in the fight against IS and coalition forces have moved closer to front-line fighting.

U.S. Air Force Col. John Dorrian says the increased support is an effort to "accelerate the campaign" against the Islamic State group, noting that launching simultaneous operations in both Mosul and Raqqa "puts further strain on the enemy's command and control."

"It is a complicating factor when you don't have a partner government to work with," conceded Dorrian, adding that whoever the coalition partners with in the fight for Raqqa is "a subject of ongoing discussions."

Wladimir van Wilgenburg, a Middle East analyst at the Jamestown Foundation who closely follows Kurdish affairs, says the U.S.-led coalition wants to have a quick end to IS in Raqqa, from which external operations against the West are planned. That means it would prefer to work with the Kurdish-led SDF forces "since they are able to mobilize manpower unlike the Turks," he said.

In any case, the battle for Raqqa is sure to be a long and deadly one. It took the SDF nearly 10 weeks to capture the northern Syrian town of Manbij from IS last year. It took Turkish forces and allied groups more than three months to retake the town of al-Bab, a costly battle that killed dozens of Turkish soldiers and many civilians.

Raqqa is much larger than either Manbij or al-Bab. Some Syrian opposition activists say the extremists dug a trench around it to make it difficult for attackers to storm it.

"It would be difficult for any troops," said Itani of the Atlantic Council.

"Witness the slow and ugly progress in Mosul as well. Raqqa would be tough," he said.

Associated Press writer Susannah George in Mosul, Iraq, contributed to this report.

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Walls, Drones And Mines: Turkey Tightens Border As Syria Incursion Deepens

By Humeyra Pamuk

Reuters, March 3, 2017

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Thousands Flee Iraq's Mosul Overnight, As Fighting Rages On

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

MOSUL, Iraq (AP) – Thousands of civilians fled Mosul overnight as Iraqi forces advanced north of a sprawling military base near the city's airport on Friday.

Iraq's special forces pushed into the Wadi Hajar district in western Mosul and retook the area from the Islamic State group Friday, according to Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool, spokesman of the Joint Military Operations.

Special forces Brig. Gen. Haider al-Obeidi said clearing operations were ongoing in the area and his forces were close to linking up with the militarized federal police forces who were pushing up along the western bank of the Tigris river.

Iraqi forces, including special operations forces and federal police units, launched an attack on the western part of Mosul nearly two weeks ago to dislodge IS. Since the offensive began, more than 28,000 people have been displaced by the fighting, according to the United Nations.

Nahla Ahmed, 50 fled Mosul late Thursday night, walking more than five kilometers (three miles) from her home in the Shuhada neighborhood.

"All the families were hiding behind a wall," she said, explaining how they escaped an IS-held part of the city. "We gave the children valium so they wouldn't cry and (the IS fighters) wouldn't catch us."

Ahmed, like most of the civilians who have escaped Mosul in the past week, fled through Mamun neighborhood. The district is partially controlled by Iraq's special forces.

Maj. Saif Ali, who is stationed in Mamun, said huge crowds of civilians began pouring into the area from neighboring districts just after midnight. Ali said civilians in western Mosul are becoming increasingly desperate as food and water supplies begin to run out.

"In total 7,000 people fled through this area last night," he said. "We were up all night trying to control the crowds."

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Friday "the latest figures we have of people recorded leaving western Mosul is 28,400 and that's since operations in west Mosul started on Feb. 19. However we're also tracking down reports thousands more people are on the move."

He said that on average about 4,000 people a day have been fleeing since the beginning of the operation.

"We think about 750,000 civilians are still trapped inside western Mosul, either sheltering from the fighting or waiting to flee," Dujarric said. "We're deeply concerned with their well-being and safety and their access to vital resources."

By late morning nearly all the families had been moved out of Mamun. The neighborhood was littered with discarded clothing and blankets piled up in empty lots and on street corners.

Iraqi forces deployed east of Mamun advanced into Wadi Hajar, a neighborhood north of the Ghazlani military base.

The U.S.-led coalition dropped more than 15 munitions in Mosul on Friday, Ali said, saying they targeted car bombs, sniper positions and small IS mortar units.

Brig. Gen. Wathaq al-Hamdani, Nineveh province's police chief, said IS targeted the Al Jazair District in western Mosul with "Katyusha launchers with missiles carrying chlorine gas" in at least two separate incidents over the past few days. He added that five civilians had been taken to a nearby hospital to be treated for asphyxiation.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said in a statement Friday that seven patients likely exposed to a toxic chemical agent were currently being treated at Rozhawa hospital, close to Mosul, where fighting is ongoing.

"During the past two days, the hospital has admitted five children and two women showing clinical symptoms consistent with an exposure to a blistering chemical agent," said the ICRC's Regional Director for the Middle East, Robert Mardini, adding "We strongly condemn any use of chemical weapons, by any party, anywhere."

At a screening center south of the city, hundreds of women and children were gathered on the cement ground of an old gas station as men were screened in a parking lot next door. An Iraqi intelligence officer walked with an informant past the rows of men and boys sitting on the ground before they had their names checked against a database.

Muthana Younis also fled Mosul late Thursday night.

"We waited until all the IS fighters left the streets," he said, his track suit covered in mud from the journey. Younis walked for hours, crossing more than five kilometers (three miles) with his mother, father, brother and sister.

"There were mortars and we could hear gunfire," Younis said. He said explaining his younger siblings were so scared at times he had to carry them. "But we had to flee, we had run out of food."

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Mosul Victims Treated For Chemical Agents As Displacement Accelerates

By Maher Chmaytelli And Isabel Coles

Reuters, March 3, 2017

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Taliban Say Senior Commander Dies In Suspected US Strike

By Kathy Gannon

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

ISLAMABAD (AP) – A Taliban official said Friday that a suspected U.S. drone strike the previous day killed a top commander of the militant Haqqani network – the man who in 2014 accompanied U.S. Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl when he was handed over to U.S. authorities.

The Taliban official identified the man as Qari Abdullah, saying he died in the "area of Khost."

Pakistani intelligence officials had earlier said a suspected U.S. strike hit in Pakistan's lawless tribal region bordering Afghanistan's Khost, a Haqqani stronghold, killing two militants.

The Taliban official wouldn't confirm it was the same strike. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to talk to reporters. A senior Pakistani official also confirmed Abdullah's identity but asked that his name not be used because he was not authorized to discuss drone strikes.

Abdullah escorted Bergdahl to the U.S. military helicopter that was sent to pick him up.

Bergdahl, who faces a court martial hearing on charges of desertion and misbehavior in front of the enemy, was freed in exchange for five Taliban who had been held at the U.S prison on Guantanamo Bay, Cuba since 2002.

Bergdahl is accused of endangering his comrades when he walked off his post in Afghanistan in 2009. He is scheduled for trial in April and could face life in prison.

On Feb. 24, a U.S. military judge dismissed a request from Bergdahl's defence lawyers to drop the charges. His lawyers argued that comments made by President Donald Trump during the presidential election campaign in which he blasted Bergdahl as a "traitor" prejudiced the trial.

The freed Taliban were sent to the Middle Eastern state of Qatar where the Taliban has established its political office. Since their freedom they have kept a low profile.

They are: Mohammed Fazl, former Taliban chief of army staff and deputy defense minister; Abdul Haq Wasi, who served as the Taliban deputy minister of intelligence; Mullah Norullah Nori, described as one of the most significant former Taliban officials held at Guantanamo. He has been accused of ordering the massacre of thousands of Shiite Muslims. Khairullah Khairkhwa was the Taliban governor of Herat province, the largest and most important province in western Afghanistan, as well as a friend of former Afghan President Hamid Karzai, and Mohammed Nabi, who worked as a radio operator for the Taliban's communications office in Kabul.

Pakistan's tribal regions have been the scene of CIA drone strikes and Pakistani army operations in recent years as militants fleeing from Afghanistan set up sanctuaries there. Thousands of foreign and domestic militants have also been killed there since Islamabad became an ally of Washington in the war on terror.

After a 2014 offensive, Pakistan said it regained control of the area, which had also served as the headquarters of the Taliban and al-Qaida. However, both Afghanistan and Pakistan accuse the other of harboring militants on their territory.

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Pakistan Targets Afghan Pashtuns And Refugees In Anti-Terrorism Crackdown

By Pamela Constable And Haq Nawaz Khan

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

When the army and police trucks prowl through affluent areas in this sprawling garrison city, headlights flashing and riflemen at the ready, residents breathe a sigh of relief.

But when the trucks enter certain shabbier neighborhoods, home to a mix of Afghan refugees, migrants and ethnic Afghan Pashtuns, children scatter and adults wonder who may be taken away next.

Since the Pakistani security forces launched a nationwide anti-terrorist operation in Februaryafter a spate of suicide bombings, Pashtun leaders have complained vociferously that their communities are being targeted for harassment and racial profiling, especially here in Punjab Province.

Traditionally based in the northwest region bordering Afghanistan, Pashtuns who migrate or flee south to the Punjabi heartland have often been viewed as suspect outsiders, disdained by some as backward tribal people or war refugees with a penchant for crime and violence.

Now they have been further tarred by the Afghan and Pashtun origins of the militants who claimed most of the recent bombings, which took more than 125 lives; one blast ripped through a crowded public square in Lahore, the Punjab capital.

"The authorities think every Pashto speaker is a refugee or a terrorist. We are being targeted, but we, too, suffer from these blasts," said Anwar Khan, 40, a fruit seller in an open-air market who migrated from the northwest a decade ago. He pulled up his trouser cuff to reveal a row of metal pins in his leg, the result of a 2014 bombing in the market that killed 23 people. "May God destroy those who do this," he said.

After the recent bombings, police swept through many Pashtun communities in Punjab and elsewhere, combing markets and going house to house. Nationwide, more than 100 people were killed and hundreds detained as terrorism suspects. Many were said to be Afghans, including a man whom officials described as the "Afghan handler" of the Lahore attacker.

Meanwhile, the army shelled suspected militant camps on both sides of the border, a rugged region inhabited by Pashtun tribes that has long served as a shelter and staging ground for Islamist militias fighting both the Afghan and Pakistani governments.

Last week, after the military operation got underway, Pashtun leaders began receiving numerous complaints of harassment, especially in Punjabi cities such as Rawalpindi that are full of migrants and people displaced by fighting in the northwest. Residents said security forces were rounding up and detaining Pashto-speaking men for no reason.

"They were really angry after these blasts. They took away my grandfather and said he didn't have his identification, but we have been here for many years," said Jamal Khan, 16, who lives in a warren of alleys known as Army Village. "The elders had to rush over and get him out of the police station."

Like other Pashtun neighborhoods near the city's vast fruit and vegetable market, the narrow streets of Army Village were swarming with children and lined with sidewalk stands. The street signs were in Urdu, the dominant language of Pakistan, but the conversations were all in Pashto.

Many old men had lengthy beards and wore turbans; the few women on the streets were covered with billowing, mocha-colored burqas. Some residents complained that troops had entered and searched their homes, an affront to conservative Pashtun tradition in which women are kept secluded.

Other complaints came from the open-air markets and bazaars where many Pashtun migrants work. In one market, a circular appeared urging people to report anyone who wore Pashtun dress, spoke Pashto or sold items such as dried fruit. A photo of the notice flooded the Internet, and Punjab police officials finally tweeted that it was inappropriate and did not "reflect police policy."

As reports continued to pour in, Pashtun legislators and other leaders spoke up forcefully. On Monday, the northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial assembly unanimously passed a resolution condemning the "racial profiling" of Pashtuns on the pretext of fighting terrorism. Social media was flooded with even more vituperative criticisms.

"Hundreds of Pashtuns are being arrested and harassed in the name of terrorism," said Sayed Zaffer Shah, a northwest legislator. "We never said all Punjabis are terrorists, though Punjabi Taliban were involved in bombings. This discrimination will only spread hatred."

Some critics even raised the specter of federal disintegration along ethnic lines, a highly sensitive subject in Pakistan. The country was violently dismembered in 1971 after the marginalized Bengali group seceded and the country of Bangladesh was created.

Protests came from non-Pashtun groups, as well. At a protest rally in the northwest city of Peshawar on Sunday, Mushtaq Ahmad of the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami party declared angrily that "Pashtuns don't need any patriotic certificate from the Punjab and Sindh governments. Such hate campaigns must stop."

In Army Village and other targeted communities, though, some people said that the raids were almost routine in areas where many people are refugees or have no government identification cards. They also suggested that the new crackdown was mostly aimed at soliciting bribes.

"This has been going on for a long time; it only accelerated after the latest blasts," said a fruit market worker named Atiqullah, 21. His parents were Afghan war refugees; he was born in Pakistan but has no ID card. "Whenever something happens, they pick me up. This time they asked me if I was making bombs, but they were not serious," he said. "After two days I gave them $20, and here I am."

Trump To Host Germany's Merkel At The White House

By Julie Pace

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

President Donald Trump will meet with German Chancellor Angela Merkel (AHN'-geh-lah MEHR'-kuhl) at the White House later this month.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders says the meeting will take place on March 14. It will be the first in-person meeting between Trump and the German chancellor since the U.S. election.

Trump frequently criticized Merkel during his presidential campaign, accusing her of "ruining Germany" by taking in large numbers of refugees. Merkel, who wields significant sway in Europe, was critical of Trump's refugee and immigration travel ban, which was blocked by the courts.

Sanders did not offer details on what the two may discuss.

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Germany's Merkel To Visit Washington March 14

By Steve Holland

Reuters, March 3, 2017

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Trumpism May Fall In Europe

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

Since the election of President Trump, the biggest question in Western politics has been whether a version of his populist insurgency, and the similar anti-establishment fever that prompted Britain's vote to leave the European Union, will spread to the Netherlands, France and Germany in elections scheduled for the coming months. If it does, the European Union could be buckled by further withdrawals and the West as an identifiable collective based on liberal values

could crumble — something that some in Mr. Trump's administration, if not the president himself, would apparently welcome.

The chances for such an outcome look real: Polls show the leading candidates in the Netherlands and France have included Geert Wilders and Marine Le Pen, both of whom share Mr. Trump's anti- immigrant and anti-Muslim agenda, along with antipathy toward the European Union and, in the case of Ms. Le Pen, admiration for Russia's Vladi-mir Putin. In Germany, the Alternative for Germany party peddles a similar agenda, though its chances to enter government are slight.

Yet in both France and Germany, recent weeks have seen a refreshing surge by candidates who are perceived as outsiders, yet are committed to mainstream policies and institutions. In Germany, Social Democratic Party candidate Martin Schulz, a former president of the European Parliament, has suddenly appeared to challenge Chancellor Angela Merkel; dubbed a "politically correct populist," Mr. Schulz has made no secret of his disregard for Mr. Trump and has adopted the slogan "Make Europe Great Again."

Even more significantly, Ms. Le Pen's chances of sweeping to victory may have been checked by the rise of Emmanuel Macron, a charismatic 39-year-old former banker who describes himself as a radical centrist and who this week took over first place in a poll . Mr. Macron, who founded his own party called En Marche, or "Forward," has assaulted the certainties of the French political establishment, such as its reliance on statist ecomomic policies, and championed social liberalism, including religious freedom. As The Post's James McAuley reported, he infuriated the traditional left by attacking the 35-hour workweek even as he angered the traditional right by calling France's colonization of Algeria a "crime against humanity."

Not surprisingly, Mr. Macron's sensible if unconventional liberalism has made him a target for Russia's state propaganda apparatus, which having done its best to tip the U.S. election to Mr. Trump is now attempting to empower Ms. Le Pen. According to Mr. Macron's campaign manager, Moscow's Internet cadres have conducted "hundreds and even thousands" of hacking attacks against the party, and outlets such as RT and Sputnik are spewing fake news about the candidate, such as claims that he is secretly gay.

It would be foolish to suppose that this campaign, and the demagogic appeals of Ms. LePen, cannot succeed. For now, however, it is looking as if the reaction in Europe to Mr. Trump's victory may be the consolidation of forces that oppose his radical assertion of national sovereignty over multilateralism, and economic nationalism over free trade. If so, that will be a victory for all who still believe in a liberal democratic West.

Rex Tillerson Skips State Department's Annual Announcement On Human Rights, Alarming Advocates

By Carol Morello

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who during his confirmation hearings repeatedly vowed to promote human rights as a core American value, alarmed human rights advocates when he did not appear in person to present the State Department's annual human rights report, released Friday.

In a break with long-standing tradition only rarely breached, Tillerson's remarks were limited to a short written introduction to the lengthy report. Nor did any senior State Department official make on-camera comments that are typically watched around the world, including by officials in authoritarian countries where abuses are singled out in the report.

Instead, a senior administration official talked to reporters by phone and only on the condition of anonymity.

"The report speaks for itself," the administration official said. "We're very, very proud of it. The facts should really be the story here."

But Tillerson's absence underscored how the former ExxonMobil executive remains more comfortable with an aloof, corporate style of governance than the public diplomacy practiced by his predecessors.

Tillerson drew fire from some members of Congress and advocates who said his decision not to personally unveil the report suggested the Trump administration places a low priority on advancing human rights.

"While the U.S. commitment to human rights has been imperfect, it has always been one of the key pillars of foreign policy," said Sarah Margon, the Washington director for Human Rights Watch. "That seems to be under dramatic threat right now. The fact he's not personally involved makes it much easier for other governments to ignore its findings."

The report itself — a year's work by embassy employees around the world and distilled by almost 100 editors — differs little from last year's. Given that the Trump administration has been in office for only six weeks, it largely reflects work produced during the Obama administration.

There do not appear to be any substantive changes to sections on countries like Iran, which the administration has taken a hard-line position on, or Russia, a country which President Trump has said he wants a warmer relation with.

In the past, secretaries of state have taken the attitude that their presence in unveiling the report lends weight to its findings. John F. Kerry delayed its release twice because he was traveling and wanted to present it himself. Kerry, Hillary Clinton and Madeleine Albright all showed up for the release in their first year in office. Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice

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missed the first year but made personal appearances in subsequent years.

Whenever previous secretaries did not make it, the report was always made public on camera by a senior State Department official who answered questions about it.

"This is historically seen as one of easiest ways for a secretary of state to demonstrate a commitment to this part of the department's agenda," said Tom Malinowski, who stepped down on Jan. 20 as the assistant secretary for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and presented last year's report.

Tillerson, who has held no news conference since he arrived a month ago and has read only two public statements during trips to foreign countries, called promoting human rights and democratic governance a "core element of U.S. foreign policy" in the seven-paragraph introduction to this year's report.

"Our values are our interests when it comes to human rights," the introduction said. "The production of these reports underscores our commitment to freedom, democracy and the human rights guaranteed to all individuals around the world."

During his confirmation hearing, Tillerson was questioned by senators probing his commitment to human rights. Tillerson assured them he would speak out forcefully.

"Supporting human rights is essential to showing the watching world what America stands for," he said.

"Should I be confirmed as secretary of state," he said at another point, "I would be charged with promoting American values on the world stage, and that means standing for universal human rights and fighting for the dignity of every person."

Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, on Thursday night tweeted his concern that Tillerson would not show up for the first report on his watch.

"For 1st time in a long time @StateDept #humanrights report will not be presented by Secretary of State. I hope they reconsider," he tweeted.

Some human rights advocates said their concerns are heightened by reports of budget cuts impacting humanitarian aid and Trump's campaign remarks that he supports waterboarding and worse.

Human Rights First said Tillerson's decision to forgo a public rollout suggests U.S. leadership on the issue is waning.

"Such a decision sends an unmistakable signal to human rights defenders that the United States may no longer have their back, a message that won't be lost on abusive governments," said Rob Berschinski, a senior vice president at Human Rights First and a former State Department official in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

US Says Free Expression, Association On Decline Worldwide

By Josh Lederman

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

WASHINGTON (AP) – Basic freedoms of expression and association are on the decline around the world, the United States said Friday in a report that warned of worsening conditions for opposition groups and human rights activists.

In a departure from past practice, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson declined to announce the report in-person or to speak about it publicly as his predecessors have done. Human rights groups and some lawmakers decried that decision and said it raised concerns that the U.S. was backing away from its traditionally vocal advocacy on human rights.

Corruption, use of torture and discrimination against minorities have gotten worse in some parts of the world, the report said. It laid out concerns about sexual abuse of women, growing crackdowns on the media and internet freedom, suppression of political opposition groups and the inability of people to choose their own governments.

Tillerson, in a letter to Congress about the report, did not address any specific human rights concerns, but said promoting rights and democracy is "a core element of U.S. foreign policy."

"These values form an essential foundation of stable, secure, and functioning societies," Tillerson wrote. "Standing up for human rights and democracy is not just a moral imperative but is in the best interests of the United States in making the world more stable and secure."

Still, Tillerson did not appear before cameras to promote the report, nor has he spoken about human rights publicly since taking office one month ago. A senior administration official noted Tillerson had said in his Senate confirmation hearing, before becoming secretary, that human rights are a consideration in U.S. foreign policy. The official briefed reporters on a conference call on condition of anonymity even though President Donald Trump has said reporters shouldn't be allowed to use anonymous sources.

Yet Human Rights Watch, whose research is cited by the State Department in its human rights reports, said the Trump administration's commitment to human rights is already in question due to his policies related to Muslims and his plan to drastically cut the foreign aid budget.

"Tillerson's absence from the State Department's annual human rights report release reinforces the message to governments, rights activists, and at-risk minorities that the State Department might also be silent on repression, abuse, and exploitation," said the group's Washington director, Sarah Margon.

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., also took issue with Tillerson's decision and urged him on Twitter to reconsider.

Though the report doesn't rank or compare countries, its sections on some individual countries indicate areas of the most concern:

-Philippines: The report notes a sharp increase in extrajudicial killings in the Philippines – more than 6,000 suspected drug dealers and users killed by police and unknown vigilantes in the second half of 2016. Despite President Rodrigo Duterte's claim that authorities would investigate actions taken outside the rule of law, the report says there were "significant concerns about impunity" of government and local officials.

-Turkey: The report says Turkey's government has imprisoned tens of thousands of people accused of supporting last year's failed coup attempt, often without much evidence. The Turkish government has also suspended some due process protections as part of the state of emergency enacted after the coup and later extended, the report says. It also details concerns about media freedoms and the high number of journalists arrested.

-China: "Repression and coercion" of those involved in civil and political rights remains "severe," the report says. It adds that tens of thousands of political prisoners remained incarcerated despite the government's denial it holds any. Other serious human rights abuses included arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life, executions without due process, illegal detentions at "black jails," torture and coerced confessions of prisoners, and detention and harassment of journalists, lawyers, dissidents and petitioners.

-Venezuela: The report warns of "systematic, politicized use of the judiciary" to undermine the legislative branch and to intimidate and prosecute critics of the government. It says "indiscriminate" police action has led to torture and limited press freedoms. The report also notes that the media and other groups have reported extrajudicial killings and torture by police and other security forces.

Associated Press writer Matthew Pennington contributed to this report.

Reach Josh Lederman on Twitter at http://twitter.com/joshledermanAP

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U.S. State Department Criticized Over Quiet Release Of Human Rights Report

By Yeganeh Torbati

Reuters, March 3, 2017

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Secretary Of State Rex Tillerson Largely Disappears In The Trump Cabinet

By Tracy Wilkinson

Los Angeles Times, March 3, 2017

More than a month after he became America's top diplomat, Rex Tillerson is like no other modern secretary of State: He's largely invisible.

He has given no media interviews and has not held a single news conference. He has made two brief trips abroad — and was overshadowed both times by other Cabinet officials. His news releases are chiefly independence day greetings to other nations.

The White House blocked him from appointing his choice for a deputy, so he still has none. Dozens of assistant secretary positions, the diplomats who head bureaus for specific regions and issues, also are unfilled.

Tillerson only occasionally meets President Trump or his staff at the White House, and he has been conspicuously absent from key meetings and conversations with foreign leaders.

Foreign governments that previously studied the near-daily State Department briefings for guidance on U.S. policy on matters large and small have little to go on. The last public briefing was on Jan. 19, the day before Trump took office; they are set to resume on March 6, but on an irregular schedule.

The State Department is said to be facing deep budget cuts that could significantly curtail Tillerson's ability to conduct the global diplomacy that is the backbone of U.S. foreign policy.

Opposition to deep cuts appears strong on both sides of the aisle. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said this week that sharp cuts to foreign aid and the State Department are unlikely to clear the Senate.

It's not clear whether Tillerson's under-the-radar style reflects his personality, or if he is following a script from a White House that has taken control of foreign policy in the Middle East and with Mexico, and has stressed a robust military buildup over diplomacy and foreign aid.

Previous secretaries of State — John F. Kerry, Hillary Clinton, Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, among others — were global celebrities.

It might be argued how much power each ultimately wielded, but all were highly visible, frequently seen at his or

her president's side or in top-level encounters with world leaders.

Aaron David Miller, a former U.S. diplomat who served under six secretaries of State, described a marginalized Tillerson heading an "incredibly shrinking State Department."

Miller said Tillerson appears to be competing for influence at the White House with Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, and Stephen Bannon, the president's chief strategist.

"A way has to be found to empower Tillerson," Miller said. "Without that, it takes five seconds for allies or adversaries to understand that the secretary of State does not have a whole lot of weight."

Other foreign policy experts worry that the administration has been so slow to fill scores of policy and operational positions at State, leaving acting appointees in charge.

"Some are very good, but it still means none have any authority," said Henri Barkey, a former State Department official who now heads the Middle East program at the non-partisan Wilson Center think tank.

"There is no policy out there, and it is not clear Tillerson knows what he's supposed to do," he added.

In Washington, foreign diplomats and organizations that routinely work with the State Department say it appears rudderless.

"There is no one under him," said a Western diplomat who asked not to be identified because the diplomat's embassy must deal with the State Department. Visiting delegations "have meetings but find everyone in listening mode."

"Clearly no one below Tillerson is making any decisions, and people are trying to figure out what he wants," said the representative of an advocacy group who also asked not to be identified because the group is partially funded by the State Department.

At a news conference this week, White House spokesman Sean Spicer defended Tillerson's relationship with Trump, saying the president regularly seeks and receives the diplomat's input "in terms of foreign policy interaction."

Stephen Hadley, former national security advisor for President George W. Bush, said the new secretary is moving carefully in a challenging new environment.

"He's an engineer and engineers learn the facts and follow where they lead," Hadley said. "He's a systems guy, a step-by-step guy… He's starting out slow as he learns the job. People need to give him some time."

As a CEO of the global energy conglomerate Exxon Mobil before he joined the administration, Tillerson preferred flying to global capitals with a small entourage, swooping in to make deals. He answered only to a board of directors and shareholders.

With the FBI and several congressional committees investigating whether the Trump team had improper contacts with Russian authorities, perhaps it's not surprising that Tillerson — who was close to Russian President Vladimir Putin several years ago — has kept his head down.

But his semi-disappearing act at State after decades of high-profile, globe-trotting secretaries of State has far-reaching implications for America's position in the world.

Since taking office, Trump has alarmed allies by deriding the role of international institutions and trade pacts, squabbling with leaders of Mexico and Australia, challenging decades of policy with China and announcing a neo-isolationist "America First" policy toward the rest of the world.

"My job is not to represent the world," Trump said Tuesday night in his first speech to Congress. "My job is to represent the United States of America."

Tillerson felt compelled to weigh in the next day, issuing a statement that seemed aimed at salvaging his role as well as America's use of soft power and military might, around the world.

The State Department "will continue to engage to advance U.S. interests in the world in cooperation with our partners and allies," Tillerson said. "American foreign policy must promote our core values of freedom, democracy, and stability."

Tillerson's defenders say he is methodical in his approach to diplomacy and not concerned about making what he views as media splashes.

The silver-haired Texan prefers not to make pronouncements unless he "really [has] something to say," according to a senior State Department official familiar with his thinking.

But he also appears cut out of the White House loop at times.

When Michael Flynn, then the national security advisor, announced last month that the administration was putting Iran "on notice" for testing a ballistic missile, Tillerson had not been consulted on what would normally be a State Department matter.

Early in the administration, analysts had predicted that Tillerson would join forces with Defense Secretary James Mattis and Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly, both retired generals, in creating a troika of steady hands to help guide the inexperienced president and his team.

Instead, Tillerson faded from view on his debut trip to a G-20 ministerial meeting in Bonn, Germany. While he was there, Mattis and Vice President Pence drew global attention when they spoke to a high-profile security conference in Munich.

Tillerson brought only a skeleton staff to Bonn. A photograph showed him beside Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, where the Russian was flanked by numerous aides while Tillerson sat with three.

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So far, Mattis has been far more outspoken than Tillerson in explaining administration policy in Europe and Asia, where allies worry about Trump's policy shifts.

Tillerson's other trip was an overnight visit with Kelly to repair a diplomatic rift with Mexico City about Trump's insistence that Mexico pay to build a border wall. Mexican officials have flatly refused.

But Kelly grabbed the headlines when he announced that Homeland Security would not carry out mass deportations or use the U.S. military to enforce immigration laws — hours after Trump had boasted of a military-style roundup of undocumented immigrants.

Neither Tillerson nor Kelly took questions from a salon full of U.S. and Mexican reporters, some of whom had flown from Washington and who waited hours for what turned out to be the reading of prepared statements.

Rex Tillerson: Show Up For Human Rights

Bloomberg View, March 3, 2017

In another year or another administration, the absence of a cabinet official at a press conference would merit no comment. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's decision not to attend Friday's release of the department's annual human rights report, however, is a small but telling sign of a more profound and dangerous shift: President Donald Trump's apathy for the values that have long fortified U.S. power and influence.

"My job is not to represent the world," Trump said in his address to Congress last month. "My job is to represent the United States of America." While it's hard to argue with this statement literally, it's also hard to take it seriously. Representing the U.S. means standing up for its principles as well as its interests, and the two are less divisible than Trump seems to think. However flawed in practice, America's avowed commitment to democracy and human rights – two concepts that were absent from his speech – has always been a wellspring of its strength, which has grown when both have spread.

Unfortunately, Trump's proposed 37 percent cut in the State Department's budget will gut its ability to advance either America's interests or values. Stopping terrorism, for instance, requires diplomats on the ground to manage allies and report threats. As Defense Secretary James Mattis once bluntly put it: "If you don't fully fund the State Department, then I need to buy more ammunition."

The same logic goes for opening markets and vetting visa applicants, to name two of Trump's other top priorities. And that's not even mentioning the many other tasks today's diplomats perform, from watching over Americans overseas and monitoring elections to protecting the environment and U.S. intellectual property.

Trump has tapped into the skepticism that many Americans have of more "pay any price, bear any burden" calls for U.S. global leadership, especially on behalf of a liberal world order that they see providing diminishing returns. The answer to their doubts and fears, however, is to fix the system, not try to turn back the clock to the 1920s, with its tariff walls, immigration restrictions, and competing economic and ethnic nationalisms. At the same time, champions of liberal internationalism can't simply fall back on empty slogans about the righteousness and benefits of globalization.

It almost goes without saying that this is a fragile moment, for both the administration and the liberal democratic order more generally. Some of the challenges Trump is facing would confront any U.S. president; some are of his own making. Regardless, what Americans need most right now are honesty and reassurance – about the pitfalls of this new world and the plan for avoiding them. So far, neither the president nor his secretary of state seem very interested in providing them.

There's No Such Thing As 'Limited' Nuclear War

By Dianne Feinstein

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

Dianne Feinstein, a Democrat, represents California in the U.S. Senate.

Last month, it was revealed that a Pentagon advisory committee authored a report calling for the United States to invest in new nuclear weapons and consider resuming nuclear testing. The report even suggested researching less-powerful nuclear weapons that could be deployed without resorting to full-scale nuclear war. This is terrifying and deserves a swift, full-throated rebuke.

The report comes from the Defense Science Board, a committee made up of civilian experts. The board recommended "a more flexible nuclear enterprise that could produce, if needed, a rapid, tailored nuclear option for limited use."

Let me be crystal clear: There is no such thing as "limited use" nuclear weapons, and for a Pentagon advisory board to promote their development is absolutely unacceptable. This is even more problematic given President Trump's comments in support of a nuclear arms race.

As Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work testified in 2015, "Anyone who thinks they can control escalation through the use of nuclear weapons is literally playing with fire. Escalation is escalation, and nuclear use would be the ultimate escalation."

Nuclear weapons present us with a paradox: We spend billions of dollars building and maintaining them in the hope that we never have to use them. The sole purpose of nuclear weapons must be to deter their use by others. Designing new low-yield nuclear weapons for limited strikes dangerously lowers the threshold for their use. Such a recommendation

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undermines the stability created by deterrence, thereby increasing the likelihood of sparking an unwinnable nuclear war.

Congress has stopped these reckless efforts in the past. During the George W. Bush administration, attempts to build a new nuclear "bunker buster" weapon were halted thanks to the leadership of then-Rep. David Hobson (R-Ohio).

Today, proponents of building new low-yield nuclear weapons claim that our nuclear arsenal is somehow insufficient to meet evolving threats around the globe. That is simply not true.

First, we already have low-yield weapons: One such bomb, the B61 gravity bomb, is currently being modernized at an estimated cost of as much as $10 billion. Second, our existing arsenal of deployed strategic weapons is more than adequate to deter aggression against us and our allies.

Our nuclear arsenal consists of approximately 4,000 stockpiled warheads, enough to destroy the world several times over. That's roughly the same number of warheads as Russia and almost four times more than all other countries combined.

We currently have two warheads in reserve for every warhead deployed, a "hedge" of 2 to 1. As we modernize our stockpile, we should strive to reduce both hedge and deployed warheads. In fact, a 2013 report by the Defense Department stated that our deployed arsenal could be further reduced by one-third while maintaining deterrence.

The Defense Science Board also suggested we should consider resuming nuclear testing to have confidence in our nuclear deterrent. That is also a wrongheaded position.

The Energy Department has ensured the safety, security and reliability of the nuclear stockpile for decades without conducting nuclear tests. The department's work has taught us more about our stockpile than we could ever learn from relying primarily on explosive testing. In fact, the National Nuclear Security Administration has reported that the country is in a better position to maintain the nuclear arsenal than it was before the testing ban went into effect more than 20 years ago.

Resuming nuclear testing would only encourage others to follow suit. The world is made far less safe if other nations begin testing and continue to pursue new nuclear weapons and capabilities. Instead of following the panel's recommendations, the Pentagon should follow its own 2013 guidance and further reduce our nuclear arsenal in concert with other nations.

To start, we can lead the way by working with Russia to develop a global ban on nuclear-tipped cruise missiles. These weapons are particularly dangerous because they can be mistaken for conventional cruise missiles, increasing the likelihood of an accidental nuclear exchange.

When it comes to nuclear weapons, victory is not measured by who has the most warheads, but by how long we last before someone uses one. This latest proposal may lower the threshold for using nuclear weapons, and the secretary of defense would be wise to reject it.

United Nations Expert Slams Trump Over Stance On Torture

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

GENEVA (AP) – A United Nations human rights expert has slammed U.S. President Donald Trump over his view on torture as a useful counter-terrorism measure.

Ben Emmerson, a British lawyer who is a special rapporteur on human rights, said Friday that hearing Trump "extolling the virtues of torture as a weapon in the fight against terrorism" and confirming his willingness to authorize its use had been enough to make his "blood run cold."

Speaking to the U.N. Human Rights Council, Emmerson expressed alarm that the U.S. president would be prepared for reasons of "jingoistic populism" to revive "what is arguably the single greatest act of lawlessness" perpetrated by the administration of George W. Bush.

Trump said in a television interview in January that he believed torture works.

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Trump Torture Remarks 'Lay Down Gauntlet' For Other States: U.N. Expert

By Stephanie Nebehay

Reuters, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Autocrats See A Green Light

New York Times, March 3, 2017

When the government of Cambodia threatened on Monday to crack down on foreign news organizations that don't "respect the state's power," it cited the example of the White House exclusion of several news outlets from a briefing. Cambodia was not the first country to take advantage of the new signals from the Trump White House.

In Russia, which has devoted huge resources to generating misinformation, the Foreign Ministry has adopted President Trump's use of the term "fake news" for reports critical of him. The ministry has a new feature on its website in which articles critical of the government are stamped with a big red "FAKE." In Turkey, where scores of journalists have been arrested and more than 150 media companies closed

down, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan commended Mr. Trump for putting a CNN reporter "in his place" at a press conference by not taking his question and said such organizations "undermine national unity."

The United States is still the greatest power with potentially the most formidable voice on earth, and the tweets and remarks of a new president are minutely followed everywhere not only for potential shifts in geopolitics, but also for the moral message. The autocrats of the world must be relieved to see how far Mr. Trump has wandered from Ronald Reagan's "shining city upon a hill" and the America of John F. Kennedy, which commanded respect "not only for its strength, but for its civilization."

That does not mean Cambodia, Russia or Turkey will necessarily have good relations with the administration. International relations are, in the end, based on national interests, not friendships. It is noteworthy that foremost among Cambodia's media targets are Voice of America and Radio Free Asia, United States-financed broadcasters intended to counter government-controlled news in foreign countries. And for all the effort Russia purportedly put into Mr. Trump's election, the United States joined Britain and France in pushing a resolution to punish Syria for using chemical weapons that Russia termed "politically biased" and vetoed. Mr. Erdogan has called Mr. Trump's stalled immigration order "frankly disturbing."

But America's self-imposed role as an arbiter of global behavior, however irritating or hypocritical it may sometimes be, has served as a check on autocrats and nationalists and has provided authority for their opponents. In Mr. Trump, by contrast, European nationalists like France's Marine Le Pen, the Netherlands' Geert Wilders, Britain's Nigel Farage and Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban have found encouragement.

Mr. Trump may yet amend his signals. But when he calls media outlets the "enemy of the American people" or spreads false fears about Muslim or Mexican immigrants, he should know that he is playing not only to Americans but also to a world that takes his words very seriously.

Trump's Many Shades Of Contempt

By Roger Cohen

New York Times, March 3, 2017

This is a column about contempt. Let's start with the utter contempt that President Trump has shown for the State Department since taking office six weeks ago. Some 70,000 American patriots across the globe, dedicated to the American idea as a force for good in the world, have been cast adrift.

Rex Tillerson, the secretary of state, is a near phantom. He has no deputy, having seen his first choice nixed by Trump. No State Department press briefing, once a daily occurrence, has been held since Trump took office. The president has proposed a 37 percent cut in the State Department budget. An exodus of senior staff is ongoing. The State Department has taken on a ghostly air.

The message is clear. America has no foreign policy so nobody is needed to articulate it. All we have are the feverish zigzags of the president, who thinks NATO is obsolete one day and glorious the next. There is no governing idea, only transactional hollowness. One midlevel officer told Julia Ioffe of The Atlantic: "It's reminiscent of the developing countries where I've served. The family rules everything, and the Ministry of Foreign affairs knows nothing."

Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, has become the foreign service of the United States of America.

Trump does not buy into the American idea. He buys, if anything, into Vladimir Putin's macho authoritarianism and spheres of influence for the great powers. This amounts to a dramatic break with American policy as superbly articulated last month by one of the departing diplomats, Daniel Fried, who joined the Foreign Service in 1977 and served with great distinction, particularly in central and Eastern Europe.

Fried had this to say in his parting remarks: "Few believed that Poland's solidarity movement could win, that the Iron Curtain would come down, that the Baltic states could be free, that the second of the 20th century's great evils — Communism — could be vanquished without war. But it happened, and the West's great institutions — NATO and the European Union — grew to embrace 100 million liberated Europeans. It was my honor to have done what I could to help. I learned never to underestimate the possibility of change, that values have power, and that time and patience can pay off, especially if you're serious about your objectives. Nothing can be taken for granted, and this great achievement is now under assault by Russia, but what we did in my time is no less honorable. It is for the present generation to defend and, when the time comes again, extend freedom in Europe."

Donald Trump, our ahistorical Russophile president, should frame these words and hang them in the Oval Office as his first history lesson.

Fried noted America's long-held opposition to spheres of influence, a recipe for war, and made this critical point: "We are not an ethno-state, with identity rooted in shared blood. The option of a White Man's Republic ended at Appomattox. On the contrary, we are 'a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.' " And so, "that rough sense of equality and opportunity, embedded in us, informed the way that we brought our American power to the world, America's Grand Strategy. We have, imperfectly, and despite detours and retreat along the way, sought to realize a better world for ourselves and for others, for we understood that our prosperity and our values at home depend on the prosperity and those values being secure as far as possible in a sometimes dark world."

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There could be no finer rebuke to Trump's dangerous contempt.

But there is a deeper contempt, even more treacherous. It is for the Constitution. Trump has attacked the freedom of the press enshrined in the First Amendment, and the independence of the judiciary. His reckless travel ban raised issues of due process and religious discrimination. Serious questions exist as to whether "aid or comfort" was given by the Trump entourage to an American enemy — in this case Russia — during the presidential campaign and after his victory on Nov. 8.

This contempt was signaled in his inaugural speech when Trump said, "The oath of office I take today is an oath of allegiance to all Americans." No, the president's oath is to "preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States." It is to the law not the "volk."

Barnett Rubin, a political scientist and Afghanistan expert who served at the State Department, recalled to me in an email how he never thought of the oath he took to defend the Constitution "against all enemies, foreign and domestic," even when confronting the Taliban, but these days the words have acquired meaning.

I know what Rubin means. I am a naturalized American, and so I took the oath to "support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic."

This column about contempt amounts, in a way, to fulfillment of that oath.

British Leader Theresa May Talks Down Scotland's Exit As Brexit Looms

By Jenny Gross

Wall Street Journal, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Against Populism, The Center Must Hold

By Tony Blair

New York Times, March 3, 2017

Outrage is easy; strategy is hard. Outrage provides necessary motivation. But only strategy can deliver victory.

The emotional response to the rightist populism sweeping the West is one of protest and dismay. But if there is to be an effective fightback, there has to be a cool analysis of what is happening, why and what can be done.

Politics is being reshaped, and this phenomenon is the same whether it is in the United States or in Europe. At stake in the forthcoming elections in France and Germany will be the future of Europe and, possibly, of European liberal democracy.

The rightist populism, on both sides of the Atlantic, is intent on blowing up traditional conservative politics and replacing it with a new coalition, comprising traditionally left-leaning supporters in working-class communities who feel left behind by globalization and traditionally right-leaning supporters who hate liberalism. Both constituencies believe that traditional culture is at risk from immigration and "political correctness." Both believe in the nation-state as opposed to international alliances. Both feel let down by the so-called elites and think that the solution is an authoritarian figure strong enough not to care what a biased establishment thinks about him.

This is a revolution that is partly economic, but mainly cultural. The new coalition differs from the old Reagan-Thatcher one, though it has some similarities. Back in the 1980s, working-class voters moved to the right because they felt that the left didn't satisfy their aspirations for self-improvement. That was a cultural issue, of course; but it was primarily an economic one. It was not so much that they felt fearful as that they felt held back.

Today is different. The modus operandi of this populism is not to reason but to roar. It has at times an anarchic feel. Yet it has also mobilized a powerful media behind it. Its supporters welcome the outrage their leaders provoke. This polarizes public discourse and enhances their sense of belonging, so that even when they're in government, they act as if they were excluded from it.

Meanwhile, traditional conservatives feel like strangers in their own land. They are unsure whether to play along with the new order on the basis that it will soon pass or to accept that this is a revolution aimed at overturning their authority and fight it.

The causes of this movement are the scale, scope and speed of change. This is occurring economically as jobs are displaced and communities fractured, and culturally as the force of globalization moves the rest of the world closer and blurs old boundaries of nation, race and culture.

The same dynamics are splintering the left, too. One element has aligned with the right in revolt against globalization, but with business taking the place of migrants as the chief evil. They agree with the right-wing populists about elites, though for the left the elites are the wealthy, while for the right they're the liberals.

This leftist populism is a profound error. It has no chance of matching the populist appeal of the right, and it dangerously validates some of the right's arguments. This only fuels a cynicism that depresses support for the more progressive parts of the left's program.

But this left tendency has gained from the seeming paralysis of the center. The parties and politicians of the center have become the managers of the status quo in an era when people want change. So, the center — in both its center-right and center-left camps — is marginalized, even despised.

The question is, will this be a temporary phase, perhaps linked to the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and Sept.

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11, and will politics soon revert to normal, or has a new political age begun?

The party structures on both sides of the Atlantic have their origins in the Industrial Revolution and the debates engendered by that epoch about socialism and capitalism, the market and the state. These parties have endured because the roots they put down were very strong. But now, there are different distinctions than those simply of traditional right and left.

When I was growing up, people like my dad were conservative; and that meant economically and socially. Today, many such voters don't fit that old stereotype. They may be pro-private enterprise and conservative on economics in traditional terms, but they're also socially liberal — in favor, for instance, of gay rights. And there are those who used to vote left, but who are culturally illiberal and now don't mind voting for parties of the wealthy.

Today, a distinction that often matters more than traditional right and left is open vs. closed. The open-minded see globalization as an opportunity but one with challenges that should be mitigated; the closed-minded view sees the outside world as a threat. This distinction crosses traditional party lines and thus has no organizing base, no natural channel for representation in electoral politics.

Politics in most European countries, and certainly in the United States, is still dominated by the traditional parties of right and left. Under pressure from radical populism, though, it's shifting more to the extremes, as we're seeing with the British Labour Party and the French Socialists.

So this leaves a big space in the center. For the progressive wing of politics, the correct strategy is to make the case for building a new coalition out from the center. To do so, progressives need to acknowledge the genuine cultural anxieties of those voters who have deserted the cause of social progress: on immigration, the threat of radical Islamism and the difference between being progressive and appearing obsessive on issues like gender identity.

The center needs to develop a new policy agenda that shows people they will get support to help them through the change that's happening around them. At the heart of this has to be an alliance between those driving the technological revolution, in Silicon Valley and elsewhere, and those responsible for public policy in government. At present, there is a chasm of understanding between the two. There will inevitably continue to be a negative impact on jobs from artificial intelligence and big data, but the opportunities to change lives for the better through technology are enormous.

Any new agenda has to focus on these opportunities for radical change in the way that government and services like health care serve people. This must include how we educate, skill and equip our work forces for the future; how we reform tax and welfare systems to encourage more fair distribution of wealth; and how we replenish our nations' infrastructures and invest in the communities most harmed by trade and technology.

Progressives must reach across the party divide, making a virtue of nonpartisanship. Those who feel dispossessed within existing party structures should make common cause, and do so unashamedly. This is exactly what those of us are doing in Britain who are making the case for staying in a reformed European Union.

The politics of the progressive center has not died, but it needs reinventing and re-energizing. For liberal democracy to survive and thrive, we must build a new coalition that is popular, not populist.

France's Macron Moves Into First Round Lead In Presidential Vote: Poll

By Leigh Thomas

Reuters, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

A Rally At The Eiffel Tower May Be Fillon's Last Stand As Key Allies Flee

By Geraldine Amiel And Gregory Viscusi

Bloomberg Politics, March 4, 2017

Francois Fillon's bid to be the next president of France is running on empty.

Cornered by prosecutors, abandoned by his team, the Republican candidate's remaining loyalists are asking supporters to gather opposite the Eiffel Tower at 3 p.m. Sunday to show that he's still a force in the 2017 election. With demands multiplying for Fillon to step aside in favor of his former rival Alain Juppe and reports of party grandees meeting to discuss his future, the rally will be an acid test of his credibility.

"I call on all those who don't want this election stolen to come and protest at the Trocadero," Republican senator Bruno Retailleau and one of Fillon's closest allies said Friday on Europe 1 radio. "This affair is without precedent."

Fillon was the front-runner in the French presidential election as little as two months ago but his campaign has been swamped by an investigation into his wife's job as a parliamentary aide after a newspaper reported that she took her public salary without doing any work. The Republican's meltdown has left the independent Emmanuel Macron as the main challenger to the anti-euro candidate Marine Le Pen.Ides of March

A survey by Odoxa Friday showed Macron leading Le Pen for the first time in polling for the initial round of voting on April 23. Every recent survey has shown that Macron would beat Le Pen by a wide margin in the runoff on May 7.

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Fillon could be charged with embezzlement as soon as March 15, when he's due to be questioned for a second time. The right-wing candidate has questioned the motives of the judges leading the probe, labeling it a "political assassination" and has vowed to stay in the race.

His intransigence has failed to keep many of his party in line however and he's been deserted by a stream of grandees and lawmakers over the past few days as calls for an alternative candidate have multiplied.

Fillon's increasingly provocative rhetoric provoked a slap from President Francois Hollande this week. Hollande, a Socialist who opted not to run for a second term, warned against undermining the independence of the courts.

"There can't be any protest in our country which could call into question the institutions of justice," Hollande said Thursday.Holding Firm

Even some Fillon supporters are uncomfortable with Sunday's rally.

"In a fragile country like ours, it's not wise to call a protest against the institutions," former Republican primaries contender Jean-Frederic Poisson said on RMC radio Friday. "You demonstrate for something, not against the institutions of the republic."

For now though, Fillon isn't flinching. Though his poll numbers have suffered, he remains in touch with the leaders with seven weeks still to go before the first round. He said Thursday he'd do without those who left his campaign, insisting the base is holding and has planned media appearances after the weekend, including an hour-and-a-half-long interview on Europe 1 radio on Monday morning.

All the same, reports are circulating that former prime minister Alain Juppe, who lost to Fillon in November's primary, may be preparing to step in. If Fillon was replaced by Juppe, the new Republican candidate would be on track to lead in the first round of voting, according to Odoxa. He'd then be likely to face a runoff against Macron.

France's Le Pen Refused To Be Questioned By Judges In EU Jobs Affair: Lawyer

By Gerard Bon

Reuters, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

U.S. Carrier Puts On Show Of 'Commitment', Not Power, In South China Sea

By Manuel Mogato

Reuters, March 3, 2017

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China's Response To Reports Of Torture: 'Fake News'

By Javier C. Hernández

New York Times, March 3, 2017

"FAKE NEWS," a Twitter post declared. "Prejudice-based," another said. "Cleverly orchestrated lies," a news article asserted.

President Trump's harangues against the American news media appear to have inspired a new genre of commentary in China's state media, whose propagandists spiced up social media posts and news articles with Trumpian flourishes this week.

People's Daily, the flagship newspaper of the ruling Communist Party, mimicked Mr. Trump's characteristic bluster — and his fondness for capital letters — on Friday in denouncing Western news coverage of a Chinese lawyer and human rights advocate who said he had been tortured.

An article on the topic a day earlier by Xinhua, the state-run news agency, had accused the foreign news media of "hype" and suggested that legal activists were manipulating the press to "smear the Chinese government."

"The stories were essentially fake news," Xinhua wrote, adopting a phrase that Mr. Trump has embraced.

The Chinese government has long denounced Western news organizations as biased and dishonest — and in Mr. Trump, Beijing has found an American president who often does the same.

The irony in China's criticism is apparent, given Beijing's history of obscuring facts and censoring stories that officials deem a threat to the party.

Experts said on Friday that Mr. Trump's continuing attacks on the news media would help lend credibility to Chinese efforts to undermine Western ideals and foreign journalists.

"Trump's attacks on the media will offer a good excuse for Chinese officials to step up their criticism of Western democracy and press freedom," said Qiao Mu, a journalism professor at Beijing Foreign Studies University. "China can turn to Trump's attacks to say Western democracy is hypocrisy."

Some of Mr. Trump's remarks about the news media would not seem out of place in some of China's leading broadsheets, where commentators regularly denounce independent reporting by foreign news outlets on delicate subjects like Taiwan or religious persecution.

Rights advocates said Mr. Trump had given China an opportunity to further distort the boundaries of journalism.

"If the Chinese version of journalism, which is really only propaganda, is considered mainstream, it will challenge the understanding of what real journalism should be," said Patrick Poon, a researcher for Amnesty International in Hong Kong.

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The heated commentary in the Chinese news media came in response to foreign coverage of a Chinese lawyer, Xie Yang, whose account of torture at the hands of interrogators was widely reported in January, including in The New York Times. The reports about Mr. Xie, who is still in custody, were based on transcripts of his interviews with his lawyers.

Xinhua's report suggested that the account of the torture of Mr. Xie, who was formally arrested last year on a charge of inciting subversion of state power, was fabricated.

"Investigations by reporters and an investigative team have showed that the accusations were nothing but cleverly orchestrated lies," the report said.

Xinhua said Jiang Tianyong, a prominent human rights lawyer, had invented the story and shared it with foreign activists.

One of Mr. Xie's lawyers, Chen Jiangang, denied that on Friday. In a statement, Mr. Chen reiterated that Mr. Xie had provided the account of his torture, describing in detail the meeting at which he had done so.

Chinese officials routinely block efforts to report on topics that the government deems delicate. On Friday, the BBC reported that its journalists had been harassed by the authorities in a village in Hunan Province while trying to interview a woman who says her family's land was stolen. The BBC said that its journalists were assaulted during the encounter, and that a crowd in the village had smashed the crew's cameras.

South Korean Jitters Grow Over Chinese Retaliation For Antimissile Array

By Jonathan Cheng

Wall Street Journal, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Arrest Warrant Issued For Employee Of North Korea's Air Koryo In Kim Jong Nam Case

By Ben Otto And Yantoultra Ngui

Wall Street Journal, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Want To Know About North Korea? Dennis Rodman Shares His Thoughts At West Point

By Barbara Demick

Los Angeles Times, March 3, 2017

So here's an out-of-the-box suggestion for dealing with the North Korea conundrum.

Send Dennis Rodman to negotiate a meeting between President Trump and dictator Kim Jong Un.

Only half-kidding, the idea was raised at an unusual panel held Friday at the United States Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., in which the former NBA star discussed his many visits to North Korea.

It is hard to imagine a more improbable guest at West Point than the tattooed, body-pierced, bad-boy sports celebrity, but the irrepressible Rodman has a way of wriggling himself into unlikely situations. This out-of-control celebrity got invited to visit the world's most controlled country in 2013 at the behest of Vice News.

Rodman helped arrange an exhibition basketball game with the Harlem Globetrotters for Kim, who happens to be a basketball fan. That visit was followed by others in which Rodman ate and drank, smoked cigars, played basketball and sailed on a yacht with Kim. He even held Kim's baby daughter, who he gave a jersey emblazoned with 91, his number with the Chicago Bulls.

He ended up calling Kim a "friend for life."

"To me he is just a normal guy. He told me, 'I would love to come to America to go to a New York Knicks game.' He actually said that to me," Rodman said Friday, speaking from the podium of an auditorium in front of uniformed cadets. "Obviously, he can't come here or he would be dead."

Rodman, 55, said he was awed by the adulation that North Koreans have for their leader.

"To see that much power in one man's hand, to see how much people love that little guy when he walks in the door," said Rodman, recalling his visit to a stadium in the capital of Pyongyang where 150,000 people were in attendance. "People were standing for a half-hour just clapping. They were crying."

It is easy to scoff at Rodman's observations about the North Korean leader, a man who has made himself international public enemy No. 1 through his country's nuclear tests, missile tests and an abysmal human rights record. South Korean officials have accused North Korea of ordering the assassination of Kim's half brother, Kim Jong Nam, who died last month, apparently by poisoning.

But Rodman has probably spent more time with Kim Jong Un than any other American, making his North Korea experiences of keen public interest.

For the occasion of his visit to West Point, Rodman dressed conservatively — a baseball cap, black jacquard jacket, T-shirt, white canvas trousers, and sneakers and sunglasses, which he didn't remove during the appearance.

Rodman seldom speaks in public or to the press about his North Korea experiences because the trips engendered so much criticism. He was denounced as a dupe and a traitor in 2014 when he organized a game of retired players for Kim's birthday and actually sang "Happy Birthday" in the arena.

"I sang 'Happy Birthday,' and people tripped out in America.…He's supposed to be this bad guy," said Rodman,

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clearly still stung by the criticism. "Our friendship is about sports. It's not about politics.''

Liam Collins, the director of the Modern War Institute at West Point, who had issued the invitation to Rodman, asked directly whether Rodman thought he had a role to play as an emissary between the United States and North Korea in the same way that "ping-pong diplomacy" opened doors with China.

His agent, Chris Volo, was enthusiastic. "Dennis would do anything for President Trump.… He would go back there in a second, if it ended up helping our nation, helping our president,'' said Volo.

"You don't get more American than Dennis Rodman,'' he added, referring to the body piercings and tattoos, the flamboyant individualism. "The fact that [the North Koreans] saw their leader accept him is such a big step for both countries.''

Rodman himself was noncommittal about returning to North Korea. "Sports is the one thing on the planet that could actually heal things at least for a day, two days or a week."

Nevertheless, Rodman hinted at the possibility of communication between the countries. He said repeatedly that Kim likes Trump, and that Trump has expressed at least a curiosity about visiting North Korea.

"I was in [Trump's] office, and he said, 'I want to go.' That's the first thing he said,'' recalled Rodman, who appeared on Trump's reality television show "Celebrity Apprentice.''

The cadets listened respectfully, rushing up afterward to pose for photographs and get autographed basketballs.

"We are always told North Korea is the big threat,'' said David Stanford, a 25-year-old senior, after Rodman's talk. "It got me thinking there are other things than force to open doors.''

India To Host Dalai Lama In Disputed Territory, Defying China

By Sanjeev Miglani And Tommy Wilkes

Reuters, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Libyan Militias Seize Control Of Major Oil Terminals

By Rami Musa

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

BENGHAZI, Libya (AP) – Libyan militias occupied major oil terminals on Friday after clashes with armed forces based in the east and commanded by army chief Gen. Khalifa Hifter, military officials said, amid fears the facilitates could sustain serious damage if the clashes escalate. At least nine soldiers were killed.

Faisal al-Zwei, the spokesman for the 101 Brigade, based at the so-called oil crescent region, told The Associated Press that some 1,000 militiamen in 200 vehicles clashed with the eastern armed forces over the oil terminals of al-Sidra and Ras Lanuf on Friday, forcing the army units to retreat. He said the militias were joined by fighters loyal to eastern militia commander Ibrahim Jedran, the secessionist fighter who took over and oversaw the terminals until Hifter's forces seized them last year. Mohammed al-Basit, the brigade's commander, confirmed the report.

The militias, known as Benghazi Defense Brigades, are comprised of Islamic militants and former rebels who were recently defeated by Hifter's forces in Benghazi, Libya' second largest city. They were joined by militiamen from the western city of Misrata.

Al-Zwei said that the militias advanced on four fronts, despite airstrikes waged by Hifter's air forces. Hifter's army is allied to the internationally-recognized parliament based in eastern Libya. The internationally-recognized government based in the capital Tripoli- which is opposed to Hifter- condemned the fighting and said it has no role in it, according to a statement released by the so-called Presidency Council – the United Nations-brokered body tasked to form the government and which enjoys presidential powers.

Army spokesman Ahmed al-Mosmari said that the forces' decision to retreat was taken to avoid destruction of the oil facilities.

The commander of the oil guards Mufah al-Megarif said that a total of nine soldiers were killed in the fighting. Al-Mosmari said one of the wounded soldiers was shot to death by the militias.

Libya has descended into chaos since the 2011 civil war, which ended with the killing of longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi. The country has been split into two competing parliaments and governments, each backed by a set of militias, tribes and political factions.

This is not the first time the oil terminals have changed hands in the past three years, heavily impacting the oil production that was finally increasing as it reached 700,000 barrels a day in February.

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Armed Faction Enters Major Libyan Oil Ports, Putting Output At Risk

By Ayman Al-Warfalli
Reuters, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

U.S., Cuba Have Increased Cooperation On Fighting Illicit Drug Trafficking

By Mimi Whitefield
Miami Herald, March 3, 2017

Although Cuba sits in close proximity to Caribbean drug lanes and the U.S. market, the U.S. State Department's annual narcotics control report found that it's not a major consumer, producer or transit point for illegal narcotics, and drug consumption on the island remains low.

The report to Congress, which was released Friday, discusses the record of countries around the world in combating the global drug trade. It is the first time since 2008 that the report was rolled out to the media.

It comes at a time that William Brownfield, assistant secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, says the United States is experiencing "perhaps the worst drug crisis that we have seen in the United States of America since the 1980s, and the worst heroin and opioids crisis that we have seen in the United States in more than 60 years."

But it is also a time when Cuba and the United States have begun to work more closely on combating the drug trade. A new U.S.-Cuba drug accord was signed in July 2016, and there is a U.S. Coast Guard liaison in the U.S. Embassy in Havana to coordinate with Cuban law enforcement. Direct communications between the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and Cuba's National Anti-Drug Directorate began in July.

The Coast Guard and Cuban authorities have been sharing tactical information on vessels transiting Cuban waters that are suspected of trafficking and are coordinating responses.

"Cuba's intensive security presence and interdiction efforts have kept supply down and prevented traffickers from establishing a foothold," said the report. "Cuba concentrates supply reduction efforts by preventing smuggling through territorial waters, rapidly collecting wash-ups, and conducting thorough airport searches."

Cuba's intensive security presence and interdiction efforts have kept supply down and prevented traffickers from establishing a foothold.

State Department report

The most recent maritime seizure of drugs by Cuban authorities occurred in 2015. That year, the Cuban government seized 906 kilograms of illegal drugs, including 182 kilos of cocaine, 700 kilos of marijuana and 24 kilos of hashish oil. That same year, Cuban authorities detected the incursions of 48 suspicious go-fast boats along the island's southeastern coast.

In July 2016, Cuban authorities sentenced 11 Cubans to 15 to 30 years in prison for smuggling marijuana from Jamaica through Cuba to the Bahamas, the report said. During the case, the principal organizer was extradited from Jamaica, a country with which Cuba also shares real-time information on suspected trafficking.

The report also looked at money laundering and financial crimes around the world.

"The government-controlled banking sector, low internet and cell phone usage rates, and lack of government and legal transparency render Cuba an unattractive location for money laundering through financial institutions," the report said.

Although the risk of money laundering is low in Cuba, the report said Cuba has a number of "strategic deficiencies" in its anti-money-laundering regime. Among suggestions were that Cuba increase the transparency of its financial sector as well as in criminal investigations and prosecutions.

Ecuador Frontrunner Offers Glimmer Of Hope For WikiLeaks' Assange

By Jim Wyss
Miami Herald, March 3, 2017

WikiLeaks Founder Julian Assange may be able to keep a diplomatic safe haven after all.

Guillermo Lasso, the front-runner in Ecuador's presidential election, says he intends to evict Assange from that country's London embassy if he wins the April 2 runoff against ruling party candidate Lenín Moreno.

But he also said he will work with other governments to find Assange a new home — which may keep the controversial free-speech advocate from being extradited.

"We will ask Mr. Assange, very politely, to leave our embassy, in absolute compliance with international conventions and protocols," Lasso said in an email exchange with the Miami Herald. However, "we vow to take all the steps necessary so that another embassy will take him in and protect his rights."

Even if another government were willing to provide Assange shelter, it's unclear how he would be transferred. In the five years since he's been holed up in the embassy, the Rafael Correa administration hasn't been able to figure out how to move him to Ecuador, amid heavy police scrutiny in London.

Assange took refuge in Ecuador's cramped London embassy in 2012 fighting extradition to Sweden where he is wanted on sexual misconduct allegations. Assange and his legal team fear that the Swedish charges are a ploy to have him extradited to the United States.

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Read More: Ecuador votes in race with international implications

Lasso also noted that Assange had volunteered to leave the embassy if Chelsea Manning, who is serving a 35-year-sentence for giving WikiLeaks hundreds of thousands of secret and confidential U.S. diplomatic cables, were to be pardoned.

On his way out of office, President Barack Obama commuted Manning's sentence, and she will be released May 17. But Assange argued that a commutation wasn't a pardon and hunkered down at the embassy. Cable-gate

The Assange-Ecuador connection goes back to 2010, when WikiLeaks published Manning's diplomatic cables. In one of them, Heather Hodges, the U.S. ambassador to Ecuador at the time, talked about alleged corruption in the Ecuadorean police force.

As a result, Correa in 2011 declared Hodges "persona non grata" and revoked her credentials. He initially offered Assange a job and residency in the small Andean nation, but it never materialized.

In 2012, as Assange was fighting extradition to Sweden, he took refuge in Ecuador's embassy in Knightsbridge, where he has been living with his tweeting cat and occasionally getting visits from Bay Watch star Pamela Anderson.

The ruling party's Moreno has said he would continue Correa's policy of letting Assange stay at the embassy. Clinton connection

Assange and WikiLeaks played prominent roles during the U.S. election, as the website published thousands of emails from Hillary Clinton's campaign. Clinton and others accused the website of being a Russian mouthpiece, saying Moscow had obtained the emails in hopes of throwing the race for now-President Donald Trump.

Assange has always denied that the documents came from the Russians.

Asked whether he thought Assange might have played a role in Ecuador's razor-tight, first-round vote on Feb. 19, Lasso refused to speculate.

"We have no indication, or comment, about that," he said.

A recent survey by the closely-watched Cedatos polling company gives Lasso, a former banker and politician, 52 percent of the vote versus Moreno's 48 percent ahead of next month's runoff.

Lasso Takes Lead In Ecuador Race, Talks Fraud Fears And Exiles

By Jim Wyss

Miami Herald, March 3, 2017

Guillermo Lasso barely survived the first round of Ecuador's presidential race on Feb. 19, as ruling party candidate Lenín Moreno came within a hair of winning the election outright.

But now that the opposition has rallied around Lasso, a one-time banker and politician, the April 2 runoff looks like Moreno's to lose.

Quito-based Cedatos, which produces one of the more closely watched polls, has Lasso winning 52 percent of the vote versus Moreno's 48 percent.

As he kicked off a new cycle of campaigning this week, Lasso, 60, answered questions about what his presidency might mean for Ecuadorian exiles in Miami, how he's going to win the elusive diaspora vote and his fears of potential fraud. Decade of change

Ecuadorians are going to the polls to replace Rafael Correa, a charismatic populist whose socialist "Citizens Revolution" has dominated the country for a decade. While Correa has been praised for building schools, roads and hospitals, the country has also become weary of his hostile attitude, and there are fears that his entrenched power is providing cover for corruption.

But Lasso is entering the race with baggage of his own. He was a member of the economic cabinet of former President Jamil Mahuad (1998-2000) during a financial meltdown that decimated people's savings and forced millions to emigrate — though his time in Mahuad's cabinet doesn't appear in his official campaign biography.

As a former banker in a country that still demonizes bankers, Lasso has struggled to win the hearts of those who were hurt by the crisis, particularly emigrants. During the first round of the election, Correa's chosen successor, Moreno, won twice as many votes from the Ecuadorian diaspora as Lasso did.

In an email exchange, Lasso acknowledged the perception problem, but said it was largely a false image promoted by his opponents.

"During the last 10 years, government propaganda has tried to tie me to the banking crisis," he said. "Nevertheless, at the beginning of Correa's administration, they conducted an investigation into the 1999 financial crisis, in which they identified the true culprits, and among them were several Correa officials."

While people implicated in the crisis (including Mahuad and banker Pedro Delgado) fled the country amid charges, Lasso said he has nothing to hide.

"I walk free in Ecuador because I had absolutely nothing to do with the events that sparked the crisis or the measures that were taken as a result of the crisis," he said.

Lasso said he hopes to lure Ecuadorians living abroad back to the small South American country by generating jobs — he's promised one million over four years — and encouraging new business ventures by cutting taxes and red tape.

In a country where the legislature and judiciary are perceived to be under the sway of Correa, Lasso is promising more autonomy. He's also pledged to do away with draconian media laws that free-speech groups say have neutered the press.

"We will also be the government that respects the rule of law, institutions and freedom of speech," he said. "Ecuadorians abroad will be able to come back to a brighter future in their own country."

Along with the outflow of economic migrants, Correa's decade in power has produced a handful of political refugees.

Among those who have been granted asylum in the United States are Roberto and William Isaías, two brothers and bankers who were convicted in Ecuador of embezzling hundreds of millions of dollars from their failed institution in the midst of the financial crisis. Ecuador has asked for their extradition, but the U.S. government has denied the petition and ruled that the charges in Ecuador are without merit.

Asked if the brothers would be welcome back in Ecuador, Lasso was noncommittal.

"A president cannot interfere in the judicial system," he said. "However, I will promote and respect due process. Our proposal is to depoliticize [the judiciary] and ensure the independence of institutions."

There can be "no more political calculations" when it comes to judicial rulings, he said.Tense vote

The first round of Ecuador's election was a nail-biter. Moreno needed 40 percent of the vote to win outright, and two days after the last ballot had been cast, the National Electoral Council (CNE) said it was still to close to call.

Amid social-media-fueled warnings and rumors that fraud might be in the works to push Moreno over the threshold, hundreds of people gathered outside the electoral body to defend their vote.

Even as international observers reported no evidence of systemic fraud, Lasso said the CNE had lost the trust of Ecuadorians as an impartial judge.

"Historically, the CNE has favored the administration," he said.

As an example, he said the CNE had approved five government-backed referendums in the last decade (including one doing away with term limits for incoming presidents), while it has rejected five referendums proposed by the opposition.

The first round of the election was "hurt by the lack of transparency," Lasso added.

"The fact that the CNE recognized that there would be a second round, a full four days after the end of voting, was a civic victory," he said.

Although Lasso didn't win the first round outright, he said it's clear the nation is hungry for change. The majority of the votes were split among the seven opposition candidates running against Moreno.

"Sixty percent of the people voted to change the government," Lasso said.

Whether or not Lasso can harness that change remains to be seen.

"What we are committed to," he said, "is that Ecuadorians who yearn for a prosperous future will be able to find it in Ecuador."

NATIONAL NEWS

Trump, Hitting Back, Accuses Schumer Of Putin Ties

By Jonathan Lemire

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

NEW YORK (AP) – President Donald Trump, his administration under siege for contacts with Russian officials, is calling for "an immediate investigation" into Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer's own ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Trump's evidence? A 14-year-old photo of Schumer and Putin holding coffee and doughnuts in a New York City gas station.

The president on Friday tweeted a photo of the two men, calling for a probe into Schumer's "ties to Russia and Putin" and called the New York senator "A total hypocrite!" Trump did not say where the photo came from, but Schumer quickly pointed out that it was taken in 2003 when Putin ventured to New York to celebrate the opening of a Russian-owned Lukoil gas station on Manhattan's west side.

Several news organizations covered that event, which drew far more political star power than the average gas station opening.

Schumer, in his own tweet, said he would "happily talk" under oath about his meeting with Putin, which took place "in full view of press and public." He then challenged Trump to do the same. And, a short time later, he posted a follow-up in which he further poked fun at the photo, noting "And for the record, they were Krispy Kreme donuts."

On the same trip to the United States in 2003, Putin traveled to Camp David, Maryland, where he met with Republican President George W. Bush and the two held a joint news conference.

Trump's tweet came just hours after the conservative website Drudge Report made the photo its lead image. And that was a day after the photo was unearthed by the pro-Trump blog Gateway Pundit, which ran it with the headline "Where's the outrage?"

Trump targeted congressional Democrats for their encounters with Russians over the years even though the party's criticism of Attorney General Jeff Sessions centered on his failure to acknowledge his meetings when questioned

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at his Senate confirmation hearing and in written responses to the Judiciary Committee.

"I think he was asked a pretty straightforward question at his committee hearing and I do think he should resign," Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., said in an interview.

Trump also tweeted Friday about House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, who was among the first to call for Sessions to resign.

In his tweet, Trump linked to a 2010 photo in which Pelosi and other lawmakers, including Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, now the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, are shown meeting with Russian officials, including then-President Dmitry Medvedev and Ambassador Sergey Kislyak.

Trump demanded an investigation of the House minority leader. Pelosi had initially denied ever meeting Kislyak; her spokeswoman later clarified that they never had a one-on-one meeting.

Pelosi then needled Trump by saying he didn't "know the difference" between an official meeting photographed by the press and a "secret" meeting that Sessions "lied about under oath."

It is not improper for elected officials to meet with foreign diplomats.

Trump's White House has been battered by questions about his links to Russia, quashing any sort of political momentum he had earned from his highly praised address to Congress earlier this week.

Sessions on Thursday said he would recuse himself from Russia probes after it was revealed that he had conversed with Russia's ambassador twice during last year's campaign, a contradiction of his testimony during his Senate confirmation hearings. But that move has not satisfied many Democrats, who have called for Sessions' resignation. They also demand an independent investigation into the Trump campaign's ties to Russia.

Several other Trump allies have also faced questions about their ties to Russia, including former national security adviser Michael Flynn, who was ousted last month for misleading White House officials about his conversations with Kislyak before Trump took office.

Donna Cassata contributed reporting from Washington.

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Trump Trolls Pelosi On Russia Photo Mishap

By By Nolan D. McCaskill

Politico, March 3, 2017

President Donald Trump on Friday needled House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi for claiming she had never met with the Russian ambassador, calling for an "investigation" into her Russia "ties," after ribbing Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer earlier in the day for eating doughnuts with Vladimir Putin.

The California Democrat told POLITICO Playbook on Friday morning that she had never met with the current Russian ambassador to the U.S., Sergey Kislyak. A file photo from Pelosi's 2010 meeting with then-Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, however, shows Kislyak at the table across from her.

"I hereby demand a second investigation, after Schumer, of Pelosi for her close ties to Russia, and lying about it," the president's personal account tweeted on Friday afternoon, flubbing the spelling of "hereby" twice before nailing it on the third try.

Caroline Behringer, Pelosi's deputy communications director, said the Democratic leader's response "was clearly about private, one-on-one meetings" and added that Kislyak's presence was "incidental."

"Clearly, one needs to remind that Attorney General Sessions lied under oath about a secret meeting amidst Russia's hacking of our election, which he also didn't disclose in a written questionnaire," she said.

Pelosi herself suggested in a tweet that there's a big difference between her situation and that of Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who came under fire this week for not disclosing two meetings he had last year with Kislyak during his confirmation hearing. "@realDonaldTrump doesn't know difference between official mtg photographed by press & closed secret mtg his AG lied about under oath," she wrote.

Trump shared a link to POLITICO's report in his tweet, which was sent from an iPhone, indicating that it likely came from a staffer rather than the president himself. And that post followed an earlier call for a swift probe into Schumer.

"We should start an immediate investigation into @SenSchumer and his ties to Russia and Putin," Trump tweeted, also via iPhone. "A total hypocrite!"

That tweet included a 2003 Associated Press image of Schumer having coffee and Krispy Kreme doughnuts with Russian President Vladimir Putin in New York. According to the caption, Putin was visiting the first New York gas station of Lukoil, a Russian company.

Schumer shot back on the president's preferred platform that he would "happily talk" about his contact with Putin and the Russian leader's associates.

It "took place in '03 in full view of press & public under oath," he said. "Would you &your team?"

Trump's entire presidency has been dogged by questions, leaks and reports regarding possible ties to Russia, including the intelligence community's assessment that Russian officials sought to elevate Trump's chances of winning the White House by conducting cyberattacks that targeted Democrats.

The Justice Department declined to comment about whether it was taking the president's tweets seriously.

The Russia narrative, which Trump has dismissed as "fake news," sparked the resignation of Michael Flynn, his first national security adviser, and a recusal from Sessions in any investigations related to presidential campaigns.

Flynn had misled Vice President Mike Pence and the American people about his conversations with Kislyak, whom Sessions met with twice last year, despite telling senators he had no contact with Russian officials during the campaign.

President Trump Demands Investigation After Nancy Pelosi Lies About 2010 Meeting With Russian Ambassador

By Penny Starr

Breitbart, March 3, 2017

President Trump Demands Investigation After Nancy Pelosi Lies About 2010 Meeting With Russian Ambassador

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by Penny Starr

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SIGN UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER

After tweeting on Friday morning that Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) should be investigated for meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2003, President Donald Trump tweeted that a second investigation into Pelosi's past should be launched.

SIGN UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER

"I hereby demand a second investigation, after Schumer, of Pelosi for her close ties to Russia, and lying about it," Trump tweeted on Friday.

"Not with this Russian ambassador, no," Pelosi told Politico's Jake Sherman and Anna Palmer during a Playbook interview, when asked if she'd ever met with the Russian envoy.

"But a file photo from Pelosi's 2010 meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev shows Kislyak at the table across from Pelosi — then House Speaker — and Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.)," Politico reported. "Medvedev had been in the country for a meeting with President Barack Obama a day earlier and stopped in on Capitol Hill to meet with congressional leaders as well."

"Asked to square Pelosi's comments with the photo of the meeting, a spokesman said that Pelosi had simply meant she never had a solo meeting with Kislyak," Politico reported.

"Of course, that's what she meant," Pelosi's spokesman Drew Hammill said. "She has never had a private one-on-one with him."

Politico reported:

Pelosi's explanation is similar to one offered by Sen. Claire McCaskill Thursday, after she swiped at Attorney General Jeff Sessions for privately meeting with Kislyak in 2016 and failing to disclose it when asked about communications with Russians during his confirmation proceedings in January. Sessions has emphasized that meetings with ambassadors are common for lawmakers and that he met with Kislyak in his capacity as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

McCaskill tweeted that in her 10 years serving on the Armed Services Committee she had never "ever" met with Kislyak, but walked back her comment by using the same reasoning as Pelosi, saying she had never met with him one-on-one. Read More Stories About:

Big Government, Hoyer, Pelosi, Russia, Trump, Twitter

Trump Mocks Schumer For Eating Doughnuts With Putin

By By Nolan D. McCaskill

Politico, March 3, 2017

President Donald Trump suggested "an immediate investigation" Friday into Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer's ties to Russia, appearing to make light of ongoing investigations into possible contacts between Trump associates and Kremlin officials.

"We should start an immediate investigation into @SenSchumer and his ties to Russia and Putin," Trump tweeted. "A total hypocrite!"

The post — which came via an iPhone, indicating that it came from a staffer rather than the president himself — included a 2003 Associated Press image of Schumer having coffee and Krispy Kreme doughnuts with Russian President Vladimir Putin in New York. According to the caption, Putin was visiting the first New York gas station of Lukoil, a Russian company.

Schumer fired back at Trump via Twitter, saying he would "happily talk" about his contact with Putin and the Russian leader's associates. It "took place in '03 in full view of press & public under oath," he said. "Would you &your team?"

— Chuck Schumer (@SenSchumer) March 3, 2017

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) March 3, 2017

According to a reverse image search, reports of the picture began resurfacing on Thursday, the same day Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced that he would recuse himself from any Justice Department investigations related to presidential campaigns.

"I have recused myself in the matters that deal with the Trump campaign," he told reporters Thursday, adding in a DOJ statement that his recusal goes for "any existing or future investigations of any matters related in any way to the campaign for president of the United States."

Schumer had called on Sessions to resign from his post as the nation's chief law enforcement officer after reports emerged Wednesday that the then-Alabama senator had failed to disclose two prior meetings last year with the Russian ambassador to the U.S. during his confirmation hearings.

A Trump aide tweeted the AP image on Thursday in response to a Schumer tweet in which the New York Democrat said "we have an obligation to get to the truth" and "must evaluate the scope of Russia's interference in our election."

Dan Scavino, the White House's social media director, tweeted back the shot of Schumer and Putin, adding the commentary: "do it over a donut and coffee."

Trump's tweet was blasted out shortly before he landed in Florida. The president is scheduled to participate in a meet-and-greet at Saint Andrew Catholic School in Orlando. He will also tour the school and participate in a "parent-teacher conference listening session."

In a statement released by the White House late Thursday, Trump said Sessions is an "honest man" who did nothing wrong.

"He could have stated his response more accurately, but it was clearly not intentional," he said. "This whole narrative is a way of saving face for Democrats losing an election that everyone thought they were supposed to win. The Democrats are overplaying their hand. They lost the election, and now they have lost their grip on reality."

He concluded by calling the "real story … all of the illegal leaks of classified and other information." The outcry over Sessions' undisclosed meetings with the Russian ambassador, he said, "is a total 'witch hunt!'"

Trump Tweets Photo Of Schumer, Putin Eating Doughnuts Together: 'Total Hypocrite'

By S.a. Miller

Washington Times, March 3, 2017

President Trump tweeted Friday a photograph of Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer having a drink with Russian President Vladimir Putin, calling the New York Democrat a "total hypocrite."

Mr. Trumpsent out the tweet the day after Mr. Schumer demanded a special prosecutor or independent counsel to investigate an alleged Trump campaign conspiracy with Russian spies during the presidential race.

"We should start an immediate investigation into @SenSchumer and his ties to Russia and Putin. A total hypocrite!" Mr. Trump said in the tweet.

The photograph shows Mr. Schumer and Mr. Putin smiling and holding what appear to be cups of coffee and doughnuts.

Mr. Schumer retweeted the photo with a response about his meeting with Mr. Putin occurring in public.

"Happily talk re: my contact w Mr. Putin & his associates, took place in '03 in full view of press & public under oath. Would you &your team?" he tweeted.

Accusations of ties to Russian intelligence agents have dogged Mr. Trump since the campaign, despite no evidence presented that implicates the president or his team in Russian interference with the U.S. presidential election.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused himself Thursday from the Justice Department investigation into Russian meddling in the election, citing his prominent role in the Trump campaign as a potentially giving the appearance of a conflict of interest.

Mr. Sessions came under fire this week for failing to disclose at his confirmation hearing that he had met in his capacity as a U.S. senator with the Russian ambassador during the campaign.

Capitol Hill Democrats, including Mr. Schumer, have called on Mr. Sessions to resign over the Russian contact and failure to disclose it.

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Donald Trump's Attempt To Shift Russia Focus To Chuck Schumer Is More Than A Little Desperate

By Sam Levine

Huffington Post, March 3, 2017

Donald Trump's Attempt To Shift Russia Focus To Chuck Schumer Is More Than A Little Desperate

Sam Levine

3/3/2017 2:21:13 PM

President Donald Trump

attempted to call out Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) on Friday by highlighting a meeting over a decade ago between Schumer and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Trump tweeted the image after it appeared in a Reddit thread Thursday

and was shared by a number of conservative pundits, including an editor-at-large

for Infowars.com, a site that promotes conspiracy theories

. The picture also appeared on Gateway Pundit, which has also promoted conspiracies, as well as on conservative site, The Drudge Report

.

The photo appears to be from 2003, when Putin made a public appearance at a New York City gas station that had recently been bought by Russia's Lukoil. Schumer responded to Trump by highlighting the absurdity of his comparison, noting that Sessions denied having contact with Russia's ambassador while he was under oath.

Trump's tweet comes after several separate reports detailing that several of the president's top advisers, including Attorney General Jeff Sessions, former National Security Adviser Mike Flynn and son-in-law Jared Kushner, met with Russia's ambassador to the United States before Trump was president. Flynn discussed sanctions imposed by the Obama administration at the end of last year in retaliation for the hacking, but initially denied doing so. Trump has denied that members of his staff were in contact with the Russians during the campaign.

U.S. intelligence agencies concluded last year that Russia had interfered in the election with the goal of helping Trump win. The FBI is investigating ties between Trump associates and Russia.

Sessions said Thursday he would recuse himself from any potential investigation of ties between Trump and Russia, but many Democrats have called on Sessions to resign over his failure to disclose the meetings during his confirmation hearing.

Schumer continued, by clearing up some other aspects of his Putin meeting.

Schumer Responds To Trump: I'll Talk About My Putin Meeting, Will You?

By Jordain Carney

The Hill, March 3, 2017

Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) is firing back at President Trump after Trump tweeted a photo of Schumer with Vladimir Putin, saying he's perfectly willing to talk about his meeting with the Russian leader and challenging the president's team to do the same.

"Happily talk re: my contact w Mr. Putin & his associates, took place in '03 in full view of press & public under oath. Would you &your team?" the Senate minority leader wrote.

Happily talk re: my contact w Mr. Putin & his associates, took place in '03 in full view of press & public under oath. Would you &your team? https://t.co/yXgw3U8tmQ— Chuck Schumer (@SenSchumer) March 3, 2017

Moments before, Trump called Schumer a "total hypocrite" for demanding a probe into the Trump campaign's potential ties to Russia, tweeting a 2003 photo of Schumer and Putin eating doughnuts during Putin's trip to New York to attend the opening of a Russian gas company's station.

"We should start an immediate investigation into @SenSchumer and his ties to Russia and Putin. A total hypocrite!" Trump tweeted.

We should start an immediate investigation into @SenSchumer and his ties to Russia and Putin. A total hypocrite! pic.twitter.com/Ik3yqjHzsA— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) March 3, 2017

The photo resurfaced late Thursday on the pro-Trump blog Gateway Pundit — asking "Where's the outrage?" — before being used as the lead image on the the conservative website Drudge Report Friday.

Schumer and other Democrats have repeatedly called for an independent investigation into ties between Trump's presidential campaign and Russia.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions on Thursday said he would recuse himself from Russia probes after it was revealed that he spoke with Russia's U.S. ambassador twice during last year's presidential race, then denied speaking with Russians during his Senate confirmation hearings. Sessions's has since maintained that he spoke with the diplomat as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, not Trump's campaign.

But Schumer quickly said that the recusal isn't enough, arguing that "DOJ regulations clearly require the appointment of a special prosecutor and the administration shouldn't ignore clear regulations a second time."

Pelosi Slams Trump's Call For 'Investigation' Into 2010 Russia Meeting

By Max Greenwood

The Hill, March 3, 2017

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi on Friday pushed back against a tweet by President Trump that called for an "investigation" into the California Democrat's "close ties to Russia."

"@realDonaldTrump doesn't know difference between official mtg photographed by press & closed secret mtg his AG lied about under oath," Pelosi tweeted.

.@realDonaldTrump doesn't know difference between official mtg photographed by press & closed secret mtg his AG lied about under oath. https://t.co/YRFCuJkjLA— Nancy Pelosi (@NancyPelosi) March 3, 2017

Pelosi responded after Trump tweeted that he would demand a probe of Pelosi after a photo emerged of the former Speaker meeting with Russian ambassador to the U.S. Sergey Kislyak and other Kremlin officials in 2010.

The photo emerged after Pelosi told Politico on Friday that she never met with Kislyak. Once the photo emerged, her office clarified that the lawmaker meant that she had not met one-on-one with the ambassador and that Kislyak's presence at the 2010 meeting was "incidental."

"Leader Pelosi's answer to the question today was clearly about private, one-on-one meetings, which she has never had with Ambassador Kislyak," Caroline Behringer, Pelosi's deputy communications director, said in a statement.

"The Ambassador was incidental to the 2010 meeting between then-Russian President Medvedev and then-Speaker Pelosi," she continued.

"Clearly, one needs to remind that Attorney General Sessions lied under oath about a secret meeting amidst Russia's hacking of our election, which he also didn't disclose in a written questionnaire."

After the photo emerged, Trump tweeted, "I hereby demand a second investigation, after Schumer, of Pelosi for her close ties to Russia, and lying about it."

I hereby demand a second investigation, after Schumer, of Pelosi for her close ties to Russia, and lying about it. https://t.co/qCDljfF3wN— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) March 3, 2017

Earlier in the day, Trump floated launching an "investigation" of Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (N.Y.) over a photo of the Democratic senator eating doughnuts and drinking coffee with Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2003.

"We should start an immediate investigation into @SenSchumer and his ties to Russia and Putin. A total hypocrite!" he tweeted.

We should start an immediate investigation into @SenSchumer and his ties to Russia and Putin. A total hypocrite! pic.twitter.com/Ik3yqjHzsA— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) March 3, 2017

The back-and-forth between Trump and Pelosi on Friday came a day after Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused himself from government investigations of Russian election meddling and Trump's potential ties to Moscow.

The recusal from any federal investigations into Russia's intervention in the 2016 presidential election came amid revelations that Sessions twice spoke with Kislyak during Trump's presidential campaign.

Questions about Trump and his associates' ties to the Kremlin have roiled his young administration. His former national security adviser Michael Flynn resigned last month after it was revealed that he discussed U.S. sanctions with the Russian ambassador in the month before Trump took office.

Other Trump aides have met with Kislyak as well, including his son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner.

Updated: 5:22 p.m.

Leaks From Obama Loyalists 'Dangerous Politicization Of Intelligence'

By John Hayward

Breitbart, March 3, 2017

Leaks from Obama Loyalists 'Dangerous Politicization of Intelligence'

John Hayward3 Mar 20170

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"The Democrats have lost touch with reality," he said. "It's not just fake news. It's

very

fake news. The whole Russia story is a non-story the Democrats cannot cope with, and their facilitators in the mainstream media, simply, psychologically, cannot cope with the reality that the American people didn't choose Hillary Clinton."

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Gorka said they were using this "non-story of ties to Russia" as a "coping mechanism."

"The fact that it's the

last

administration that had the most disturbing ties to Russia –

that's

what the newspapers should be reporting," he said.

SiriusXM host Alex Marlow noted that Gorka produced an extensive body of work for Breitbart News that was very far from "pro-Russian." He worried that fake news stories about Russia controlling the Trump administration could interfere with the war against global jihadism, in which Russia is clearly a significant player, no matter what one thinks of the Putin regime.

"I think that there are probably people, constituencies, forces that would like that to happen, but I can assure you, it will

never

happen," Gorka replied. "I have to go back to the man who is the commander-in-chief. There was, if you recall, I think it was his last press conference from Trump Tower when he turned the ground floor into a giant press conference facility. In the Q&A, they asked him bluntly, one of the reporters said, 'So what about your links to Vladimir Putin? What about relations in the future with Moscow?' And the president was unequivocal. He said, 'Look, I'd like to be able to have good relations with Putin and the Kremlin. It doesn't really look very likely, and if that's the case, so be it.'"

"We are pragmatists. We're not ideologues," he declared. "My friend Monica Crowley said something very, very important: Our president must be understood as not an ideological candidate, our future president is an

attitudinal

one. That's the important thing to understand. That attitude is about making America great again. That's all we care about: national security and returning America to a place of leadership. The fake news will not be allowed to distort our understanding of the U.S. national interest and how we're going to realize that for all Americans, whatever newspapers they read, Alex."

Marlow asked which top priorities the White House feels are not receiving the coverage they deserve because the media is so busy with fake news attacks.

"I think that the biggest ones remain the two versions of the Caliphate," Gorka replied. "I love to quote the line that Bibi Netanyahu used in front of Congress where he said, 'If you want to understand the Middle East, the chaos in the world today, it's basically a Game of Thrones for who's going to control and have the crown of the Caliphate.'"

"We focus on ISIS. We

will

obliterate ISIS, as the president said in his joint address. But there's another version of the Caliphate, and that's the Iranian version that they've been exporting, their theocratic version of the Caliphate that they've been exporting since 1979. That's a very, very serious threat – especially if you look at how the last administration empowered Iran through billions of dollars, through the JCPOA, the Iran deal, and the threat of a nuclear Iran," he said.

"On top of that, there's a subtler one, and that's what has happened to the armed forces of America under the last eight years – the underfunding, the being thinly stretched, the operational tempo especially of our Tier 1 units," he continued. "We are going to rebuild the military because if you don't have strength, you can't have peace."

Marlow asked about

reports

that Iran is preparing for a weapons "shopping spree" after existing U.N. resolutions expires.

"This is just another example of the ticking deadlines expiring on certain limits to what Iran can do," Gorka said. "Here we have not quite a sanction, but it is a moratorium that will expire and allow the mullahs to access the technologies that they haven't been able to do before. If you compare this to how they responded to the lifting of U.S. sanctions recently, or sanction measures – unfortunately, these things are all done in the expectation that there will be better behavior afterwards from Tehran, and in every single case, we've seen exactly the opposite."

"We release the billions. We pay the ransoms. The pallets of cash are shipped over to Iran. What happens? Our naval vessels are harassed. There's a ballistic missile test. Our friends are fired upon," he said.

"So again, the most important thing to understand here is not the idealistic attitudes of the multilateral institutions; it's that there are nations out there – Iran included – that are fundamentally anti-status-quo powers, who do not share the same interests of America and her allies, who need to start toeing the line, and that's why they were put on notice. We need to see better behavior out of Tehran before any similar measures are implemented, either multilaterally or unilaterally," he declared.

Marlow cited

another recent report

that suggested the Obama administration moved data from the investigation of alleged ties between the Trump campaign and Russian government to a lower level of classification, to facilitate "easier sharing." He called this revelation "troubling and strange."

"Well, it looks quite transparent," Gorka said. "Just a matter of days before the Trump administration took control, there was a decision made inside the White House that certain special types of intelligence, certain types of signals intelligence, certain types of intelligence related to Russia could be promulgated, could be shared across the whole intelligence community in ways that had never been possible before. The reasoning for that is very, very hard to determine, unless there was some kind of political motivation."

"Why, days before we come into office, after dozens and dozens of fake news reports about potential connections to Russia, would we wish to downgrade this information and make it more shareable across the intelligence community – unless you're hoping that somehow it will leak and be used for political purposes?" he asked.

"If you want to have an investigation on Russia, don't look at AG Sessions; look at the Obama administration's decisions to do things like this," he suggested, "because it smacks of a very, very dangerous thing: the politicization of intelligence."

Marlow applauded the Trump White House's firm stand with the United Nations, most recently with a much-needed demand for the Human Rights Council to

end its "obsession with Israel."

"We try to keep our promises," Gorka said. "I think you'll agree that the last six weeks have produced what in other administrations would have taken six months."

He counted "dealing with the attitude of multilateral organizations like the U.N." as one of those rapid accomplishments.

"We want to cooperate if it's in the interests of the United States, but the constant bashing and the ideologically driven actions of individual states and states coming together in various committees of organizations like the United Nations to hammer again and again and again our closest ally in the Middle East is just unacceptable. It's simply unacceptable," Gorka stressed.

"We have, as the president has said, an unbreakable bond with Israel, and the idea that

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they

are in the crosshairs of the U.N. repeatedly, when around them you see

true

human rights abuses happening on a massive scale that the U.N. somehow forgets or doesn't see – if you wish to see American leadership in the world again, assisting the United Nations to do the good that it was originally meant to do, then these kinds of, again, politically motivated attacks must decrease and hopefully stop," he insisted.

Breitbart News Daily airs on SiriusXM Patriot 125 weekdays from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. Eastern.

LISTEN:

Senate Judiciary Committee Won't Recall Attorney General Jeff Sessions

By Kevin Johnson

USA Today, March 3, 2017

WASHINGTON — The chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee has no plans to recall Attorney General Jeff Sessions to testify about his failure to disclose contacts with the Russian ambassador to the United States during the former Alabama senator's January confirmation hearing.

A spokeswoman for Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley said Friday that he will accept a written clarification of Sessions' testimony, despite mounting calls from Democrats for the attorney general to explain under oath why he did not acknowledge two separate meetings last year with Russian envoy Sergey Kislyak.

Public disclosures of those meetings earlier this week prompted Sessions to recuse himself Thursday from overseeing the ongoing FBI investigation into Moscow's attempts to intervene in the U.S. elections. Federal investigators also are reviewing communications between associates of President Trump and Russian government officials.

Grassley spokeswoman Beth Levine said Friday that the chairman has not been moved by demands for Sessions to submit to questioning by members of the same committee that weighed his contentious confirmation.

In his January testimony, Sessions told Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn., that he had no communications with Russian government officials. He provided a similar response in writing to Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., as part of the confirmation process.

Sessions, facing a wave of criticism following the disclosure of the meetings, some of it coming from members of his own party, said Thursday that he did not intend to mislead the committee. He said the meetings with the Russian envoy were taken in his capacity as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and not as a campaign surrogate for then-candidate Donald Trump.

At the time of the meetings, the FBI was deep into its investigation of Russian intervention into the U.S. elections.

"My answer was honest and correct as I understood it," Sessions said.

Read more:

Democrats, including Sens. Leahy, Tim Kaine of Virginia and Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, have all demanded that the attorney general return to the committee.

"He must appear in public before the Senate Judiciary Committee to explain why he twice gave misleading testimony under oath and why he failed to disclose such false testimony until prompted by news reports,'' Leahy said. "Such conduct is unacceptable from our nation's top law enforcement official.''

Kaine went further, saying that if Sessions refuses to return to the committee, "I will call for his resignation.''

Late Friday, California Sen. Dianne Feinstein, the Judiciary Committee's ranking Democrat, also called on the Justice Department's inspector general to review Sessions' recusal decision and his communications with the White House and government ethics officials during his deliberations prior to recusal.

"Attorney General Sessions said that his decision followed the recommendation of (Justice) ethics officials, though he has not explained why he failed to to come forward and correct his sworn testimony before reports of his contacts with the Russian ambassador became public,'' Feinstein said in a letter to Inspector General Michael Horowitz. The letter was co-signed by four other committee Democrats.

Next week, the same committee will consider the nomination of Maryland U.S. Attorney Rod Rosenstein, Trump's pick to serve as Sessions' top deputy, who would inherit oversight of the Russia probe.

Until his confirmation is resolved, the inquiry is being managed by acting Deputy Attorney General Dana Boente, a former Virginia U.S. attorney appointed by President Barack Obama. Boente was thrust into the national spotlight last month when Trump abruptly fired acting Attorney General Sally Yates, an Obama administration holdover, when she directed Justice lawyers not to defend the president's controversial executive order, suspending travel from seven majority Muslim countries.

In a Thursday night interview on Fox News, Sessions further described his meetings with Kislyak as benign contacts that had nothing to do with the then-senator's influential role in the Trump presidential campaign.

He characterized the recent firestorm resulting from those meetings as "hyped beyond reason.''

Since his confirmation as attorney general early last month, Sessions has been guarded in his public comments about the Russian inquiry, to the point of declining to acknowledge the investigation.

Yet when asked in the Fox News interview whether he believed the Russian government's efforts during the election favored Trump's candidacy — a conclusion reached by U.S. intelligence officials — Sessions' response appeared to depart from the U.S. position.

"I have never been told that,'' he said.

Majority Rule Means The Power To Stop, Not Just Start, An Investigation

By Carl Hulse

New York Times, March 3, 2017

When Richard J. Durbin joined the Senate in 1997, his junior status relegated him to an unenviable task: serving in the minority on the Governmental Affairs Committee as the Republican-led panel exhaustively examined claims of an insidious Chinese plot to help President Bill Clinton in the 1996 elections.

"We went on for months in public hearing," said Mr. Durbin, Democrat of Illinois, who does not remember the highly partisan sessions very fondly. "Months and months."

Republicans abruptly abandoned the inquiry when polls suggested the public was turning against it, and the investigation was generally regarded as a bust.

But the ability of Republicans to convene a summerlong media spectacle unfavorable to the White House underscores a fundamental truth as relevant today as it was then: Being in the majority matters, both in starting an investigation and, sometimes as important, in stopping one.

Despite new questions about contacts between Attorney General Jeff Sessions and a top Russian diplomat, House and Senate Republicans remain unwilling to budge from their opposition to a special bipartisan inquiry into the extent of Russian meddling in the 2016 election, and into any connections to President Trump or those close to him. Changing their mind would probably require significant revelations of the sort that would make their current stance politically untenable.

Even as Mr. Sessions recused himself on Thursday from any such investigation by the Justice Department, his former Republican colleagues on Capitol Hill were adamant that any improper conduct — and they remain very skeptical that there was any — was best investigated by the Senate Intelligence Committee, which has already begun its work.

"The Senate Intelligence Committee is the best place to determine the facts regarding Russian involvement in our elections," said Senator Roy Blunt of Missouri, who sits on the panel and has been more aggressive than other Republicans in calling for a thorough inquiry.

"In my opinion, it would take at least six months for any new investigation to get to where the Intelligence Committee is today, and the ability to work with the intelligence community would never equal the daily communications of our bipartisan committee," said Mr. Blunt, who added that he intended to visit C.I.A. headquarters in the next week to personally review relevant documents.

Democrats say there is another reason Republicans favor the Intelligence Committee: Its work is conducted mainly behind closed doors, sparing Mr. Trump and his allies on Capitol Hill from a regular parade of witnesses swearing to tell the truth before sober-faced senators — all of it televised live on cable news and C-Span.

From the McCarthy hearings through Watergate, Iran-contra and the Clinton impeachment, the American public has become quite familiar with the tableaux of the congressional investigation and the serious business that can be involved.

Republicans would like to avoid such a scene to the extent possible. Pursuing an investigation through the Intelligence Committee arms them against complaints that they are looking the other way about the allegations, while potentially limiting the fallout for them and the new administration.

But rapid-fire developments — such as confirmed reports of previously unknown meetings between Mr. Sessions and the Russian ambassador to the United States, Sergey I. Kislyak (meetings he denied at his Senate confirmation hearing), followed by his quick recusal — may erode Republicans' ability to hold off demands for a wider and more public investigation. Such disclosures have a cumulative effect.

Though most of Mr. Sessions's former colleagues stood solidly behind him before his recusal announcement, there were prominent cracks. Senator Rob Portman of Ohio, a respected voice among Senate Republicans, issued a statement urging Mr. Sessions to step aside from any Russia-related investigation by the Justice Department. Senator Ben Sasse, Republican of Nebraska, issued his own statement urging the intelligence panel to get on with it.

"Attorney General Sessions's recusal is the right decision, and the Senate Intelligence Committee should accelerate its work," Mr. Sasse said, warning that the Russian president, Vladimir V. Putin, was trying to undermine public confidence in American institutions. "The American people deserve a comprehensive, top-to-bottom investigation of Putin's Soviet-style meddling in self-government at home and across the West."

Their positions, and more private expressions of increasing nervousness by other lawmakers, show that Republican unity on how to respond to Russia's meddling in the election is not a given, and that further disclosures could bring about more defections from the party line that no investigation beyond the intelligence community is warranted.

Most Democrats knew full well that their impassioned demands that Mr. Sessions resign would not be met. But they want to keep as much pressure as possible on Republicans and chip away at their resistance to a special committee. Any

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confidence they had in the intelligence committees of the House and Senate was severely undercut by recent revelations that the Republican chairmen of both panels had, at the request of the White House, called reporters to try to undermine a story about contacts between Russians and Trump allies.

Earlier, Mr. Durbin had reluctantly agreed to cede much of the investigative responsibility to the Intelligence Committee, but he has abandoned that stance.

"This is a national security crisis, and we cannot afford to allow this process to be compromised further," he said Thursday. "We need an independent commission to investigate now."

That investigation won't happen now, but it could happen later if disclosures continue to pile up.

Pressure Mounts On GOP Leaders To Back Special Counsel

By Alexander Bolton

The Hill, March 3, 2017

Pressure is growing on Republican leaders to support a special prosecutor to investigate contacts between Donald Trump's presidential campaign, transition team and Russian intelligence agents.

Some Republican lawmakers say a special prosecutor may be warranted, depending on what facts emerge regarding ties between the Trump campaign and the Russian government.

They say evidence indicating that Trump advisers broke the law may necessitate special counsel – but so far nothing has reached that threshold.

Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), a member of the Judiciary Committee, floated the possibility of a special prosecutor at a CNN town hall on Wednesday night.

"There may be nothing there," Graham said. "But if there is something there that the FBI believes is criminal in nature, then for sure you need a special prosecutor."

Sen. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.) said it might make sense to bring in a special prosecutor should more facts come to light.

"We'll let the facts speak for themselves," he said, adding that the Trump administration needs to be sensitive to appearances of conflict of interest.

"You just want to nip that because we don't want this to be a distraction at the expense of so many things that need to be corrected at the Department of Justice," Tillis said.

Democrats are turning up the heat, arguing that no one at the DOJ who answers to the president could be expected to act with complete impartiality.

"The Justice Department must immediately appoint a special prosecutor," Senate Democratic Leader Charles Schumer (N.Y.) told reporters Thursday morning.

He said that person should be "beyond reproach, completely impartial, without any significant ties to either political party."

Schumer noted that Justice Department guidelines call for a special prosecutor when a standard of investigation "would present a conflict of interest for the department or other extraordinary circumstances."

"The most important thing we must do is ensure the integrity of the investigation," he said.

"Has it already been compromised? What can we do to ensure it moves forward in a way that ultimately leads to the unvarnished truth?" he asked.

Other Democratic lawmakers, including Sens. Patrick Leahy (Vt.), Jack Reed (R.I.), Martin Heinrich (N.M.) and Gary Peters (D-Mich.) echoed the call for a special prosecutor.

Former Obama administration Labor Secretary Tom Perez, the newly elected chairman of the Democratic National Committee, said, "Trump's Department of Justice has proven incapable of pursuing an independent investigation" into possibly improper ties between the administration and Russia.

Sessions held a press conference Thursday afternoon to announce that he would follow the recommendations of staff and recuse himself from any investigation into Russian ties to the administration.

Justice Department guidelines state that no employee may participate in a criminal investigation or prosecution if he or she has a personal or political relationship with the subject of the probe or prosecution.

Sessions was the first senator to endorse Trump and advised his campaign.

His statement of recusal came hours after several prominent Republicans on Capitol Hill urged him to step aside, following a Wednesday night Washington Post report that he had two meetings with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak.

Sessions testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee in January that he "did not have communications with the Russians." Those statements, which Sessions tried to explain at his press conference, prompted Democratic accusations that he misled Congress and may have perjured himself.

With Sessions on the sidelines, lawmakers are now turning to the tricky question of who should handle the investigation.

The recusal puts Acting Deputy Attorney General Dana Boente, whom President Obama appointed twice to U.S. attorney jobs, in charge of the Justice Department — at least in the short term.

Democrats argued it would unacceptable for Boente to oversee the investigation, arguing he is still in the "chain of

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command" at the Justice Department and could be subject to political influence from the White House.

"While Mr. Boente doesn't have the long political ties to President Trump, he is still in the President's chain of command and could be fired at will by the President, who has already fired the first person in this position," Schumer said in a statement after Sessions recused himself.

"The DOJ regulations clearly require the appointment of a special prosecutor and the administration shouldn't ignore clear regulations a second time," he added.

Trump's deputy attorney general nominee, Rod Rosenstein, faces the Judiciary Committee next week and may ultimately make decisions about a DOJ probe once confirmed. Democrats have yet to discuss the possibility of Rosenstein taking over the probe.

If Boente declines to follow Democrats' exhortations, they say they will pressure Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) to support legislation that would empower a panel of judges to choose a special prosecutor.

Congress passed the Independent Counsel statute as part of the reforms enacted after the Watergate scandal that led to President Richard Nixon's resignation.

The law required the attorney general to conduct preliminary investigations into allegations against high-level government officials and to refer to the case to a three-judge court to appoint an independent counsel if deemed necessary.

It expired in 1999, after Democrats felt that independent counsel Ken Starr abused his power during his investigation into President Bill Clinton.

Schumer said if Boente doesn't appoint a special counsel, Democrats will ask Republicans to pass a new version of the law with safeguards to prevent the kind of runaway investigation that many Democrats thought Starr was guilty of in the 1990s.

The issue is likely to surface Tuesday at the Senate Judiciary Committee hearings on Rosenstein, the current U.S. attorney for Maryland.

The committee is also expected to consider Rachel Brand, Trump's pick to serve as associate attorney general.

Both nominees require Senate confirmation and Democrats could use that as leverage to push for the appointment of a special prosecutor.

Senate Dems Request DOJ Watchdog Probe Sessions Recusal

By Jordain Carney

The Hill, March 3, 2017

Senate Democrats are asking the Department of Justice's (DOJ) top watchdog to investigate Attorney General Jeff Sessions's decision to recuse himself from investigations involving Russia and Donald Trump's presidential campaign.

Judiciary Committee ranking member Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Sens. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) and Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii) on Friday sent a letter to Michael Horowitz, DOJ's inspector general.

The five Democratic senators want Horowitz to "conduct a thorough investigation" into Session's decision.

"We ask that you consider whether and when the Attorney General consulted with ethics officials or others regarding his involvement in these investigations, his contacts with Russian officials, and his testimony before our Committee during the confirmation process," the senators wrote.

The senators also want him to examine any communications between Sessions and the White House about the recusal or any investigation, as well as if, and to what extent, Sessions was previously involved in the investigations.

"Please recommend appropriate action to address any problems that you discover," they added.

The Washington Post reported on Wednesday night that Sessions spoke to Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak during the presidential campaign but denied any such meetings during his confirmation hearing when he was under oath.

The five Democrats argued that his statements to the Judiciary Committee were "at best ... incomplete and misleading."

Sessions announced on Thursday that he would recuse himself from any current or future investigations, but stressed that his decision wasn't an acknowledgment of wrongdoing. He also said that his staff had been reviewing, prior to the Washington Post story, if he should step back from any investigation involving the Trump campaign.

But Sessions's decision has done little to abate Democratic criticism. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) reiterated after his announcement that she believes he should resign, while Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) is calling for a special prosecutor.

Blumenthal and Sen. Dick Durbin (Ill.) — the Senate's No. 2 Democrat — said separately on Thursday that they believe Sessions should have to come back before the Judiciary Committee to explain his conversations with Kislyak.

Democrats, who have a minority in both Houses, have limited leverage within Congress either bring Sessions back to testify or force an independent commission.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) said Thursday that he was glad Sessions was sending the committee a letter but didn't signal that he would recall the former GOP senator to testify.

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"I appreciate that he will be sending a letter to the committee, as I asked him to do, to clear up any confusion regarding his testimony so we can put this issue to bed once and for all," Grassley said.

Schiff: Sessions' Explanations On Russia Meetings 'Not Credible'

By By Aidan Quigley

Politico, March 3, 2017

Rep. Adam Schiff said Friday morning that Attorney General Jeff Sessions' explanations of why he didn't disclose two meetings with the Russian ambassador to the Senate are "not credible."

"You don't, I think, treat a visit in your office by the Russian ambassador as something casual, something not memorable," the California Democrat said on MSNBC's "Morning Joe." "And when you're asked about your contacts with Russians in the Senate, that should have been disclosed. I think he knew it should have been disclosed."

Sessions met twice with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak in 2016 but said he "did not have communications with the Russians" during his confirmation hearing. The attorney general recused himself Thursday afternoon from any investigation involving the Trump campaign's alleged ties to Russia.

Schiff, one of many Democrats to call for Sessions to resign Thursday, said although perjury has a high standard, that is not the standard to evaluate Sessions' ability to do his job.

"The standard is, can he carry out these responsibilities with the cloud hanging over him, with the breadth of the Russian investigation that reaches many parts of the department," Schiff asked. "I don't think he can."

Schiff said the recusal is "not enough," partially because it covers only correspondence between Trump associates and Russians before the election. For example, former national security adviser Michael Flynn's discussion with Kislyak, which he misled Vice President Mike Pence about and eventually led to Flynn's resignation, occurred after the election.

"I don't think we'll have the confidence of the decisions being made," he said.

Democrats Criticize James Comey Over Russian Hacking Probe

By Siobhan Hughes And Aruna Viswanatha

Wall Street Journal, March 3, 2017

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Next In Line To Lead Russia Probe: Rosenstein Has Respect

By Eric Tucker

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

WASHINGTON (AP) – Some Democrats worry the appointment of a Jeff Sessions subordinate to oversee an investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election won't be a clean enough break from the embattled attorney general.

But the veteran prosecutor in line for the job may be uniquely politically palatable.

Rod Rosenstein, who faces his confirmation hearing next week for the role of deputy attorney general, was appointed top federal prosecutor in Maryland by George W. Bush and remained in the post for the entire Obama administration. That staying power, extraordinary for a position that routinely turns over with changes in the White House, lends weight to the reputation he's cultivated as an apolitical law enforcement official.

"He is so well-respected. He cannot be influenced, he cannot be bought, he cannot be pressured because of outside political forces," said Baltimore criminal defense attorney Steven Silverman, who has known Rosenstein for years.

Sessions recused himself from any Trump-Russia investigation Thursday after the Justice Department acknowledged he had spoken twice with the Russian ambassador last year and had failed to disclose the contacts during his Senate confirmation process. Sessions said he had not tried to mislead anyone but could have been more careful in his answers.

The new attorney general's recusal handed authority for an investigation – for now – to his deputy, Dana Boente, another longtime federal prosecutor who has the post in an acting capacity. Boente was appointed U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia in 2015 by Barack Obama and was elevated to acting attorney general in January after Trump fired Obama holdover Sally Yates. When Sessions won confirmation, Boente stepped to the No. 2 position.

Once Rosenstein is confirmed, he'll take over responsibility for any probes touching the Trump campaign and Russian meddling.

He arrives at the Justice Department with experience in politically freighted investigations, having earlier in his career been part of the Clinton-era Whitewater independent investigation.

When he was a U.S. attorney, his office also led the leak prosecution of Thomas Drake, the former National Security Agency official who pleaded guilty to a minor misdemeanor after more serious charges of mishandling documents were dropped. He more recently oversaw the probe of James Cartwright, the former Joint Chiefs of Staff vice chairman who admitted making false statements during a separate leak investigation and was ultimately pardoned by Obama.

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"It's hard to imagine a more challenging environment in which to come in as the deputy attorney general than what we have now," said Jason Weinstein, who served under Rosenstein in the U.S. attorney's office in Maryland. "Having said that, I can't imagine a better person for the job right now than Rod."

Regardless, the Sessions recusal did little to assuage demands from some Democrats that the investigation be removed entirely from the Justice Department and given to an outside prosecutor.

Rep. Adam Schiff of California, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, called the Sessions recusal "deeply inadequate" and said he was troubled by the number of Trump associates who he contended have either made misleading statements or concealed communications with Russia.

"I also think for the public to have confidence that any prosecutorial decision is made truly independent of the administration, that the extra remedy of a special counsel is really warranted here," Schiff said in an interview.

There is precedent for the selection of a special counsel by the Justice Department for especially sensitive investigations, though there's no indication yet that federal officials are planning to seek such an appointment.

One prominent example was in 2003, when the Bush Justice Department turned to Patrick Fitzgerald, then the top federal prosecutor in Chicago, to investigate who leaked the identity of Valerie Plame, a covert CIA officer. That appointment was made by James Comey, who at the time was deputy attorney general and now is director of the FBI.

"I think if the decision is made to bring someone in from the outside, it's not because the department can't do it and can't do it well," said Weinstein, now a Washington lawyer. "It's because in this politicized environment, the public's faith in the integrity of the investigation is so important and the department will want to bend over backward to put in place measures to ensure that the results of the investigation weren't questioned."

Follow Eric Tucker on Twitter at http://www.twitter.com/etuckerAP

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With Sessions's Recusal, Official Poised To Oversee Probe Into Russian Interference In 2016 Race

By Sari Horwitz

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

When former attorney general Eric H. Holder Jr. came under fire for leaks of classified information about the Obama administration's role in authorizing cyberattacks against Iran, he turned to a veteran federal prosecutor — a Republican — to help head his investigation into who was leaking.

That same federal prosecutor, Rod J. Rosenstein, is being tapped again, this time by President Trump's attorney general, to oversee another high-profile case, the FBI's investigation into Russian meddling and any links between Russian officials and Trump's associates.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused himself Thursday from the investigation and designated his acting deputy attorney general, the second-highest-ranking official in the Justice Department, to oversee the probe. But the responsibility is expected to soon fall to Rosenstein, 52, the longest-serving U.S. attorney, whose Senate confirmation hearing to become deputy attorney general is set for Tuesday.

Rosenstein, the sole holdover U.S. attorney from the George W. Bush administration, is widely respected by Democrats and Republicans for his experience working on sensitive cases in the face of political pressure, according to attorneys he has worked with during his nearly three decades in the department.

"I cannot imagine a more challenging environment in which to be the deputy attorney general than what we have now," said Jason M. Weinstein, a former Justice Department official who worked with Rosenstein during the administrations of Bush and Obama. "And I cannot imagine a better person for the job at this time than Rod. He is not political at all. In every decision he makes — and I've seen him make some very difficult ones — the only question he really cares about is what is right and what is just."

A Philadelphia native, Rosenstein began working as a trial attorney in the public integrity section of President George H.W. Bush's Justice Department after graduating from Harvard Law School, where he was an editor of the Harvard Law Review, and clerking for Judge Douglas H. Ginsburg of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit.

Soon afterward, President Clinton's deputy attorney general hired Rosenstein to be his counsel. During the Clinton administration, Kenneth W. Starr tapped him to be his associate independent counsel on the investigation into the business dealings of the Clintons and their associates in the Whitewater Development Corp.

Rosenstein stayed on into the George W. Bush administration and in 2005, Bush appointed him U.S. attorney for the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland, where he remained through the Obama administration.

"He came in under one administration, stayed under another and is now being elevated under yet another," said George J. Terwilliger III, the former deputy attorney general and acting attorney general under George H.W. Bush. "That tells you everything about the consummate professional that he is."

Beneath Rosenstein's mild-mannered demeanor is a tough determination, his current and former colleagues say. As the Baltimore U.S. attorney, for example, Rosenstein successfully prosecuted then-Prince George's County executive Jack Johnson for corruption.

Johnson was sentenced to seven years in prison in 2011 after an investigation in which he was heard on a wiretap ordering his wife, Leslie, to flush a $100,000 check from a developer down the toilet and hide $79,600 in cash in her underwear as FBI agents were knocking on their door with a search warrant.

Earlier this week, Rosenstein announced indictments against seven Baltimore police officers in a racketeering conspiracy.

Rosenstein is also credited with turning around a troubled U.S. attorney's office.

"He's calm, deliberative, analytical and — as they used to say on the kindergarten report card — he works and plays well with others," said former attorney general Michael Mukasey.

It was that reputation that led Holder to tap Rosenstein in 2012 to be one of two U.S. attorneys to oversee the investigations into the leaking of classified national security information. The probe resulted in the former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. James "Hoss" Cartwright, to plead guilty to one felony count of lying to the FBI.

"He ran that investigation effectively, vigorously and without any respect for partisanship," said Robert S. Litt, former general counsel of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence in the Obama administration. "After all, he was going after the guy who was reported in the press to be Obama's favorite general at a time when Obama was president."

If he is confirmed, Rosenstein — who lives with his wife, an attorney, and two teenage daughters in Bethesda — will be responsible for the day-to-day running of the sprawling Justice Department, which has 113,000 employees across the country. The heads of the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives will report directly to him.

And as of Thursday, he will also take on the oversight of all federal investigations into Russia and the 2016 presidential election.

Russia Investigations A 'Witch Hunt'? Not According To Polls

There's much confusion about the Trump-Russia issue, but general consensus that it merits more investigation.

By By Steven Shepard

Politico, March 3, 2017

President Donald Trump insists questions about once-hidden contacts between his inner campaign circle and Russian officials are a "witch hunt." Public-opinion polls suggest Americans don't agree.

While the public still has considerable confusion about what, precisely, individuals connected to the Russian government did — and how they might have been connected to the Trump campaign — there is general consensus that whatever happened, it merits further independent investigation.

Over the past few months, public opinion on Russia — its involvement in the election and possible connection to Trump — has begun to solidify. And while much of that hardening falls along partisan lines, there are hints that sentiment is tilting against the president.

The public, by and large, doesn't think Trump has done anything illegal. But they are less-than-comfortable with Trump's coziness with Russia, and they want to know more about it.

An NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll released this week asked Americans if they believe that Trump's relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin is "too friendly" or not. A 38 percent plurality called the Trump-Putin relationship too friendly, more than the 29 percent who said it wasn't too friendly. Nearly a third, 32 percent, didn't have an opinion.

When it comes to the Trump-Russia issue, there are two parallel trends that should raise red flags for the White House. First, as Americans have formed opinions on the issue, it has been to Trump's detriment. Since December, the percentage of undecided Americans on the Trump-Putin relationship has declined from 44 percent to 32 percent. At the same time, the percentage who view Trump as too friendly with the Russian leader has risen from 31 percent to 38 percent.

Moreover, while nearly two-thirds of Democrats feel Trump is too friendly with Putin, only half (52 percent) of Republicans feel he isn't too friendly with his Russian counterpart. Independents are unsure about Trump's relationship with Putin — but more feel they are too friendly (35 percent) than think they aren't (27 percent).

That fits a general pattern: As last year's presidential campaign developed — and Putin's regime apparently worked to undermine Democrat Hillary Clinton — some Republicans warmed to the former KGB operative. A Gallup survey last month showed the percentage of self-identified Republicans who had a favorable opinion of Putin rose 20 points from 2015 to 2017. And significantly more Republicans

had a favorable opinion of Russia (35 percent) than did Democrats (16 percent).

It's worth noting that another February poll, from Quinnipiac University, did not show nearly the same levels of support among Republicans for Putin. But Quinnipiac did ask voters if they think Trump views Putin favorably — and the vast majority, 70 percent, said he does.

Voters were split along partisan lines, however, on the issue's significance. Overall, just under half of voters, 47 percent, said alleged Russian involvement in the election is "very important," while a further 18 percent said it is "somewhat important." Nine-in-10 Democratic voters called it either very or somewhat important, but only 35 percent of Republicans agreed. Among independents, 63 percent agree it is very or somewhat important.

Forty percent of Republicans said it isn't important at all.

More broadly, the Trump administration's relationship with Russia doesn't rate among the public's most important issues facing the country. The Russia issue didn't even register in Gallup's tracking of the most important problem facing the U.S. last month.

Still, multiple surveys show widespread support for new and continued investigations into Trump's connections with Russia, despite the president's assertions that the controversy is contrived by the media to obscure the much-reported fact that Trump won last year's election.

In the NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll, majorities think the Congress should investigate both whether or not there was contact between Russian officials and individuals in Trump's campaign (53 percent) and whether the Russian government interfered with the election (54 percent).

The Quinnipiac poll omitted any reference of Congress and asked voters if they "support or oppose investigations into the potential links" between Trump advisers and the Russian government. Those probes earned even more backing: 72 percent of voters support those investigations, and only 23 percent oppose them. Even 52 percent of Republicans support investigations into the Trump campaign's contact with Russian officials.

But voters remain hesitant to accuse Trump of direct wrongdoing. Just 20 percent of voters in a McClatchy-Marist poll last month said they thought Trump has done something illegal in his dealings with Putin and Russia, while another 28 percent said they thought Trump has done something unethical but not illegal.

On the other side, 41 percent of voters said they didn't think Trump has done anything wrong, and 10 percent were undecided. Democratic voters are skeptical of Trump — but they aren't convinced he has acted criminally. Just a third said he's done something illegal, while another 44 percent thought he's done something unethical.

And Republicans — in control of both chambers of Congress and weighing how strenuously to investigate and potentially rebuke Trump's administration — will take note of this figure: The vast majority of GOP voters, 82 percent, didn't think Trump has done anything wrong. Only 2 percent of Republicans thought Trump has acted illegally, and 7 percent thought he's acted unethically.

The Web Of Relationships Between Team Trump And Russia

By Philip Bump

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

In the most abstract sense, there is nothing noteworthy about a government official meeting with an ambassador from a foreign country. When such an interaction becomes important is when that official is an ally of a presidential campaign that's got a complex set of possibly inappropriate relationships with other representatives of that ambassador's country — and when that official while under oath says he did not have communications with representatives of that country.

What we're going to endeavor to do here is to parse out that complex set of relationships, using the information we have at hand. In this case, as you've hopefully ascertained, the country at issue is Russia and the campaign is that of President Trump. The official, of course, is Attorney General Jeff Sessions. And the ambassador is, at this point, the linchpin of a lot of the interactions between Trump and the rest of his team.

We'll consider three Russian entities.

Ambassador Sergey Kislyak. Russia's man in Washington.

The Russian government. Kislyak is part of this government, of course, but we'll use this as a shorthand for interactions with President Vladimir Putin or other government agencies (who may or may not be known). Included here is RT, the Russia-backed and -based television network.

Russian business interests. This encompasses everything from Rosneft, the Russian oil giant, to sketchy Russian oligarchs.

As for the American side, let's start at the top and move outward through Trump's network.

Donald Trump, president. Trump's connections to Russian business interests are murky, thanks to his decision not to release his tax returns during the campaign. We know that the Miss Universe pageant was hosted in Moscow when Trump owned it and that he earned millions of dollars for doing so. We know, too, that he's repeatedly explored real estate deals in the country. It's not clear whether Trump has met Kislyak, though the ambassador attended a foreign policy speech Trump gave last spring and the reception that

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preceded it. We know now that Trump has been in communication with Putin — but he also claimed to have been in contact with representatives of the Russian president (and Putin himself) before the campaign.

Jeff Sessions, attorney general. Sessions's relationship with Kislyak is well-established by now. This is a good point at which to note, though, that the existence of that relationship does not in any way imply wrongdoing by Sessions. It's just part of the network we're establishing.

Jared Kushner, adviser. Trump's son-in-law (Ivanka's husband) also met with Kislyak during the period between Election Day and the inauguration, according to the New York Times. Kushner also has some loose connections to Russian business interests, according to the Times, including an investment from tech investor Yuri Milner in a real estate investment company and a friendship with the wife of oligarch Roman Abramovich. (She was invited to the inauguration as Ivanka Trump's guest.)

Michael Flynn, former national security adviser. Flynn had a number of contacts with Kislyak after Election Day, including attending that meeting between the ambassador and Kushner. (Flynn was forced to resign his position after it was revealed that his comments about the content of those meetings to Vice President Pence were falsehoods.) After resigning from the Defense Intelligence Agency in 2014, Flynn was invited to give a paid speech at a celebration of RT. He did so and joined Putin's table for a related banquet.

Donald Trump Jr., son. The younger Trump visited France last October to speak to an obscure Russian group. In 2008, Don Jr., who works for the Trump Organization, famously told a real estate conference that "Russians make up a pretty disproportionate cross-section of a lot of our assets" and that "we see a lot of money pouring in from Russia."

Paul Manafort, former campaign manager. Manafort's links to Russian interests are well established. New revelations that emerged during the campaign prompted Trump to demand Manafort's resignation. Manafort is one of the Trump campaign staffers who reportedly made contact with Russian interests during the campaign.

Rex Tillerson, secretary of state. Before he was confirmed to serve as the head of the State Department, even Republicans questioned Tillerson's relationship to Putin. As the head of ExxonMobil, Tillerson helped negotiate a massive agreement between the Russian government and ExxonMobil-Rosneft, a partnership between the two companies. Tillerson was subsequently awarded the "Order of Friendship" by Putin.

Wilbur Ross, secretary of commerce. Ross's connections to Russian business interests are less obvious than Tillerson's. During the Clinton administration, Ross served on the board of the U.S.-Russia Investment Fund, an effort to bolster businesses in post-Cold-War Russia. During his confirmation, questions arose about his ownership of a bank on Cyprus that, in the words of McClatchy's Kevin Hall, "caters to wealthy Russians."

Roger Stone, longtime adviser. Stone's connection to Russia is murky. During the campaign, he drew attention for seeming to have inside knowledge on the Wikileaks document releases — releases that have been linked to Russian interests by the government. More directly, the Times reports that Stone is possibly under investigation by the U.S. government for his links to Russia.

Carter Page, former adviser. Page is included in that alleged investigation as well, but his links to Russia are more clear. Page pretty clearly met with Kislyak last year during the Republican convention in Cleveland, as he admitted to MSNBC's Chris Hayes on Thursday night. He also has repeatedly addressed Russian business groups in that country, including twice in 2016. Over a decade ago, he worked in Russia as an investment banker.

J.D. Gordon, former adviser. Page is far in the outer orbit of Trump's circle, serving briefly as part of Trump's national security advisory team. He's joined there by Gordon, a onetime Pentagon spokesman who also served as an adviser to the campaign. Gordon, like Page, reportedly spoke with Kislyak in Cleveland.

This document should be considered a work in progress. As more information is released, it (and the graphic) will be updated. Again, none of the relationships above are intended to show misbehavior by those involved. The broad question at stake is the extent to which Russia sought to interfere in the 2016 election and, if it did, the extent to which it may have leveraged relationships with Trump's team to that end. That much-bigger question is much harder to evaluate.

Trump, Russia, And The Seriousness Of Smoke

By Peter Grier

Christian Science Monitor, March 3, 2017

Trump, Russia, and the seriousness of smoke

Peter Grier

3/3/2017

March 3, 2017

—When it comes to Trump and Russia, "the smoke IS the fire."

That's what an unnamed Republican recently told Axios co-founder and columnist Mike Allen.

Mr. Allen took that to mean that all the warning signs and unanswered questions surrounding the Trump team's relationship with Russian officials have themselves become a full-on political problem. Taking the metaphor a bit farther, it's also possible that the substance revealed so far about

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Trump-Russia connections is indicative and troubling in and of itself.

In part, all this is because President Trump's own denials about the connection have been belied by events.

Mr. Trump has long hit back hard at press reports of any Russian connection. He's repeatedly called them "fake news."

On Feb. 13, his first national security adviser, retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, was forced to resign due to evasions concerning the nature and number of his conversations with Russia's ambassador to the US. Following that, an obviously frustrated Trump told reporters that Mr. Flynn was the only problem, as far as he knew.

"I have nothing to do with Russia. To the best of my knowledge no person that I deal with does," said Trump at the time.

Since then, Trump's Attorney General Jeff Sessions has had to recuse himself from any investigations into Russia's involvement in the 2016 election campaign following a Washington Post revelation that he met twice with that same Russian ambassador in the campaign, and did not disclose that information during his confirmation hearing.

The New York Times has reported that Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner met with the ambassador at Trump Tower in December. Flynn was at this meeting, which was intended to set up a line of communication between the incoming administration and Moscow.

Two other Trump campaign officials, J. D. Gordon and Carter Page, met with the (apparently indefatigable) Russian envoy at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, according to USA Today.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump Jr. was likely paid $50,000 for an October speech to a French foreign policy group with alleged Kremlin ties, according to The Wall Street Journal. Other stories have continued to detail the lucrative work former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort did for pro-Russian political factions in Ukraine.

There's nothing wrong with campaign or transition officials meeting with Russian diplomats. That has happened all the time in US politics, even at the height of the cold war. Nor have there been many indications that improper subjects were discussed. (Flynn did discuss US sanctions on Russia with Ambassador Sergey Kislyak, though it's unclear whether he told Mr. Kislyak to be patient and await friendlier treatment from the incoming Trump administration.)Counterattack, Trump-style

For Trump, the problem is that he appears to take mention of the subject as a personal attack, and a jab against his perceived political legitimacy. That's led to blanket denials and fierce rhetoric in response.

"The real story is all of the illegal leaks of classified and other information. It is a total witch hunt!" said Trump in a statement on the Sessions situation issued Thursday night.

As the rising smoke of news continues, fairly or not, this creates the appearance that the administration is trying to hide something.

"I want to know what the Russians have on Donald Trump," said House minority leader Nancy Pelosi in February.

In truth, the issue may be much broader than Trump's personal standing. Even if all the connections between team Trump and Russian representatives are fully innocent and legal, their number and breadth suggests that Moscow wants to learn all it can about a new and potentially friendly force in American politics. That's an intelligence-gathering effort in a wide, open sense. The Trump administration may not be interested in Russia so much as Russia is interested in them.A wider credibility problem

Meanwhile, the continued revelations about contacts previously denied make the Trump administration appear somewhat hapless. Why didn't Mr. Sessions just mention his meetings with Kislyak during his Senate confirmation hearing? They could be minimized as a common occurrence between a top lawmaker and a diplomat.

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GOP lawmakers, to this point largely united in their opposition to a wider inquiry on the matter, are beginning to waver in their support. A number of them called upon Sessions to recuse himself, which he has now done.

The question is whether this crack in the Republican wall will widen into a bipartisan call for a special prosecutor to conduct a wide-ranging inquiry on the entire issue of Russia's interference in the 2016 vote.

Despite Early Denials, Growing List Of Trump Camp Contacts With Russians Haunts White House

By Rosalind S. Helderman

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

Two days after the presidential election, a Russian official speaking to a reporter in Moscow offered a surprising acknowledgment: The Kremlin had been in contact with Donald Trump's campaign.

The claim, coming amid allegations that Russia had interfered with the election, was met with an immediate no-wiggle-room, blanket denial from Trump's spokeswoman. "It never happened," Hope Hicks told the Associated Press at the time. "There was no communication between the campaign and any foreign entity during the campaign."

In fact, it is now clear it did happen.

The past few days have brought a growing list of confirmed communications between Trump campaign aides and Russian officials, with each new revelation adding to a

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cloud of suspicion that hangs over the White House as critics demand an independent investigation.

Trump's team has offered various explanations for the meetings: Some encounters, they have said, were brief, no more than casual, polite introductions. Others involved the routine diplomacy common for officials surrounding a candidate for the nation's highest office.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who was an early Trump campaign adviser, said his two interactions with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak, first reported this week by The Washington Post, came in his role as a senator, not as a campaign surrogate.

It is unclear why the White House has consistently denied contacts with Russian officials if the meetings that took place were innocuous.

As a result, the confirmations of the encounters have trickled out through a series of news stories that have proved increasingly damaging to the Trump administration, with some Trump associates appearing to shift their accounts over time.

Already, Michael Flynn was forced to resign as national security adviser as a result of his post-election contacts with Kislyak. This week, the White House confirmed that those conversations included a brief meeting alongside Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser, Jared Kushner, at Trump Tower in New York in December. White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders on Friday termed that discussion merely a "courtesy meeting."

Sessions has now recused himself from oversight of any investigation of Trump's ties to Moscow and is facing calls to step down as a result of his statement, during his January confirmation hearing, that he had not had any contacts with the Russians.

On Friday, Sanders dismissed the brewing questions. "The big point here is the president himself knows what his involvement was, and that's zero," she said.

Nevertheless, the recent revelations have made the post-

election comments from the Russian official newly relevant.

Those comments came from Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, who told the Interfax news agency in November that "there were contacts" with Trump's aides.

"Obviously," Ryabkov said, "we know most of the people from his entourage."

As the Trump campaign rejected the assertion, other Russian officials said any communications would have been routine and offered to Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton's campaign as well — a contention denied at the time by a Clinton aide.

Nearly all of the contacts that have emerged so far were with Kislyak, the affable Russian ambassador in Washington who is known as a consummate networker.

Kislyak appears to have worked to cultivate a relationship with the Trump campaign, starting his outreach even before Trump was thought likely to win the GOP nomination.

In April, Kislyak popped up at the Mayflower Hotel, where he was seated in the front row at one of Trump's first major foreign policy addresses. During the speech, Trump offered a forceful promise that he would seek better relations with Russia.

"I believe an easing of tensions and improved relations with Russia — from a position of strength only — is possible, absolutely possible," he said.

The event's host, Dimitri K. Simes, president of the Center for the National Interest, a foreign policy think tank, said Kislyak was one of four ambassadors who attended as guests of his group. Simes said he introduced Trump and Kislyak in a receiving line at a reception before the event, which was also attended by Sessions and Kushner, among other Trump aides.

Simes, who is Russian American and favors warmer relations with Moscow, said it is common practice for foreign diplomats to try to get to know important advisers, like Sessions, to presidential candidates. "Let me put it more bluntly: They would be derelict in their duty if they didn't try to get to know him," Simes said.

Kislyak was also in attendance at the Republican National Convention, where he briefly met Sessions after a July 18 Heritage Foundation event attended by dozens of diplomats.

Two days later, Kislyak met with Trump advisers Carter Page and J.D. Gordon after a convention-related Global Partners in Diplomacy event at Case Western Reserve University.

In an email, Gordon said he briefly spoke to Kislyak in a group of diplomats there and also at an evening reception. Gordon called it a "brief, informal conversation," during which he repeated public Trump statements about improving relations with Russia.

Page also confirmed his interaction with Kislyak at the event to MSNBC on Thursday. Last month, he told PBS that he had held "no meetings" with any Russian officials during the campaign.

Those meetings at the Republican convention came as questions about Trump's stance on Russia started to seriously enter campaign trail conversation.

At the time, some GOP delegates were questioning an amendment to the party platform that had been quietly engineered the previous week and appeared to shift party policy in a direction Moscow would appreciate. A provision supporting Ukraine in its fight against Russian-backed rebels had been softened, and it was unclear whether the Trump camp had played a role.

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Then-campaign manager Paul Manafort, who previously was a paid adviser to a pro-Russian Ukrainian president, told NBC in August that the change "absolutely did not come from the campaign."

But this week, Gordon, the Trump campaign adviser, offered a different explanation. He said he had advocated for the change, believing it to match Trump's views. In an email, he said he had consulted about the matter with "campaign policy colleagues" before arriving in Cleveland.

Page's participation in the July meeting came 13 days after he drew scrutiny for a July 8 speech he delivered in Moscow in which he was critical of U.S. foreign policy.

Page has denied holding substantive meetings with Russian officials during that trip but told The Post in September that he briefly met and shook hands with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich after his address. Page told MSNBC on Thursday that he held "no material discussions" during the trip.

Russia's alleged interference in the U.S. election exploded as a public issue a few days after Page and Gordon met with Kislyak. On July 22, WikiLeaks posted thousands of emails hacked from the Democratic National Committee, causing recriminations in the party on the eve of its national convention.

Rather than condemning the possible intervention in the election by a foreign power, Trump playfully called on the Russians to hack Clinton's private server and locate emails she had deleted. "Russia, if you're listening, I hope you're able to find the 30,000 emails that are missing," he announced at a July 27 news conference.

Sessions met with Kislyak in his office on Capitol Hill on Sept. 8, as U.S. officials were growing more concerned about Russia's role in the election. He said Thursday that the meeting came in his role as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, noting that it was one of many such meetings he took with diplomats.

Sanders, the White House spokeswoman, told reporters Friday that suspicions about the meeting were "pretty unfair" given that Sessions's senatorial duties put him in touch routinely with diplomats.

But a survey by The Post of all 26 members of the committee showed that Sessions was the only one to meet one-on-one with Kislyak in 2016. And a Polish diplomat who met with Sessions in late spring said he did so at Sessions's request, at least in part because of Sessions's role with Trump.

"I was aware that Sessions was a senator and at the same time somebody close to Donald Trump. I just wanted to hear what he wanted to say — any message, communication, questions," said Ryszard Schnepf, who was ambassador at the time and has since retired. He declined to say what he and Sessions discussed, except to say the issues would have been "of interest to a senator at the same time as [a surrogate] for somebody who is running for president."

In a brief interview last month, Kislyak told The Post that he had also had communications with Flynn before the election. He declined to detail them. "It's something all diplomats do," he said.

Greg Miller contributed to this report.

Trump Defiant As New Russia Ties Emerge

AFP, March 3, 2017

Trump defiant as new Russia ties emerge

3/3/2017

AFP / NICHOLAS KAMM US President Donald Trump boards Air Force One at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland on March 3, 2017 as he departs for Florida where he will spend the weekend

An avalanche of new revelations about ties between Donald Trump's aides and Russia forced the White House back on the offensive Friday, overshadowing a presidential weekend trip to Florida and his well-received major speech.

Before arriving at his Mar-a-Lago resort for the fourth time in five weeks, Trump accused his political foes of conducting "a total witch hunt" into links with Moscow, which he denies.

The angry accusation came as Attorney General Jeff Sessions – a close Trump confidant and the US government's top law enforcement official – was forced to recuse himself from any Russia-related inquiries.

AFP / Christopher HUFFAKER, Paz PIZARRO Trump-Russia connections

After Sessions told senators under oath that "I didn't have – did not have communications with the Russians," journalists uncovered he had actually met the Russian ambassador twice in the months before taking office.

The meetings have raised red flags for Democrats, who have called for Sessions to resign and be investigated for perjury.

Trump said he had "total" confidence in Sessions, who "could have stated his response more accurately" but "did not say anything wrong."

Trump lashed out at leading Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer.

Trump tweeted an old picture of the senator with Russian President Vladimir Putin along with the caption: "We should start an immediate investigation into @SenSchumer and his ties to Russia and Putin. A total hypocrite!"

He later demanded a "second investigation" into House Democrat Nancy Pelosi.

AFP / Nicholas Kamm US Attorney General Jeff Sessions speaks during a press conference at the Justice Department in Washington, DC on March 2, 2017

Since US intelligence took the unprecedented step of publicly accusing Russia of trying to swing the November

election in Trump's favor, questions have swirled about whether some in Trump's campaign colluded with Moscow.

Trump has repeatedly denied any personal ties to the Kremlin, and his aides have variously denied or played down contacts with Russian officials.

But it has now emerged that a slew of associates aside from Sessions and already fired national security advisor Michael Flynn met Moscow's envoy to Washington, Sergey Kislyak, before Trump took office.

– Multiple probes –

US media reported that advisors JD Gordon and Carter Page met Kislyak and, separately, that Flynn and Trump's son-in-law and senior White House aide Jared Kushner met Kislyak at Trump Tower in New York last December.

Graphics/AFP / Jeff Sessions served as a US Senator for Alabama from 1997-2017

Sessions' own meetings with the envoy took place much earlier, in July and September, just as accusations of Russian interference in the election were mounting, according to The Washington Post.

According to officials, US intelligence agencies and the Federal Bureau of Investigation continue to investigate just how and how much Moscow intruded into US politics.

Four congressional committees have opened probes into the issue, although Democrats fear Republicans will seek to bury their investigations to protect Trump's young administration.

Trump's White House has lobbied the FBI, reportedly the CIA and two Republicans who head committees leading investigations into Russia's election meddling to knock down media reports on the alleged links.

– Travel ban still on hold –

The latest furor has come at a terrible time for Trump's White House.

AFP/File / Brendan SMIALOWSKI Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak, pictured at President Donald Trump's address to Congress, is at the center of a political storm over the US administration's contacts with Moscow

Earlier this week, Trump delivered his maiden address to Congress, a speech that was well received and offered an opportunity to turn the page on 40 tumultuous days in office.

His address was widely praised – he adopted a more measured tone, which rounded the sharper edges of his nationalist rhetoric.

Trump could have expected a bounce in the polls.

His approval rating currently stands at 43 percent, according to Gallup – a historic low for a modern president this early in his term.

Apart from dealing with allegations about Russia ties, much of the last month has been spent dealing with a contentious travel ban on citizens from seven majority Muslim countries.

Trump's first order was knocked down by the courts and a second order has been repeatedly delayed.

The latest expected deadline – Wednesday – came and went.

"When the president has made a decision about something that he's ready for us to announce, we'll announce it, but we're not there yet," spokesman Sean Spicer said Thursday.

Three Trump Associates Who Changed Their Story On Russia

By Wilson Andrews And Karen Yourish

New York Times, March 3, 2017

Three people associated with Donald J. Trump's presidential campaign or administration amended earlier denials related to contacts they had with Sergey I. Kislyak, the Russian ambassador to the United States. The F.B.I. is conducting an investigation into Russia's meddling in the 2016 election.

Jeff Sessions

Attorney General

Mr. Sessions, one of Mr. Trump's earliest and most prominent supporters, said at his confirmation hearing that he had not met with any Russian official during the 2016 presidential campaign. He later admitted he had met with Mr. Kislyak on two separate occasions.

Senate confirmation hearing, Jan. 10

"I have been called a surrogate at a time or two in that campaign, and I didn't have — did not have communications with the Russians."

After reports of the meetings, March 2

"In retrospect, I should have slowed down and said, 'But I did meet one Russian official a couple of times, and that would be the ambassador.'"

Michael T. Flynn

Former National Security Adviser

Mr. Flynn denied that he had any substantive conversations with Mr. Kislyak. He resigned Feb. 13 after it was revealed that he had misled Vice President Mike Pence about the nature of his conversations with the ambassador.

Mike Pence on "Face the Nation," Jan. 15

"What I can confirm, having spoken to him about it, is that those conversations that happened to occur around the time that the United States took action to expel diplomats had nothing whatsoever to do with those sanctions."

Mr. Flynn's Feb. 13 resignation letter

"Unfortunately, because of the fast pace of events, I inadvertently briefed the vice president-elect and others with incomplete information regarding my phone calls with the Russian ambassador."

Carter Page

Former foreign policy adviser to the Trump campaign

Mr. Page told Judy Woodruff on PBS's "Newshour" that he did not have any meetings in 2016 with Russian officials, either in Russia or outside of Russia.

Feb. 15 interview on "Newshour"

"I had no meetings, no meetings."

March 2 interview on MSNBC

"I'm not going to deny that I talked to him," Mr. Page said about his interaction with Mr. Kislyak at the Republican National Convention in July.

Trump Team's Links To Russia Crisscross In Washington

By Scott Shane And Andrew E. Kramer

New York Times, March 3, 2017

During the 2016 campaign, Donald J. Trump's second campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, had regular communications with his longtime associate — a former Russian military translator in Kiev who has been investigated in Ukraine on suspicion of being a Russian intelligence agent.

At the Republican National Convention in July, J. D. Gordon, a former Pentagon official on Mr. Trump's national security team, met with the Russian ambassador, Sergey Kislyak, at a time when Mr. Gordon was helping keep hawkish language on Russia's conflict with Ukraine out of the party's platform.

And Jason Greenblatt, a former Trump Organization lawyer and now a special representative for international negotiations at the White House, met last summer with Rabbi Berel Lazar, the chief rabbi of Russia and an ally of Russia's president, Vladimir V. Putin.

In a Washington atmosphere supercharged by the finding of the intelligence agencies that Mr. Putin tried to steer the election to Mr. Trump, as well as continuing F.B.I. and congressional investigations, a growing list of Russian contacts with Mr. Trump's associates is getting intense and skeptical scrutiny.

Democrats see suspicious connections and inaccurate denials as part of a pattern that belies Mr. Trump's adamant insistence that he and his associates "have nothing to do with Russia." The president's supporters say innocuous encounters, routine for any incoming presidential team, are being treated for political reasons as somehow subversive.

Mr. Trump denounced the furor over Russian connections on Thursday as a "total witch hunt" — but it may not have helped his case that the Russian foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, echoed his words on Friday, saying, "This all looks like a witch hunt."

On Friday, Mr. Trump posted a picture on Twitter of a meeting between Mr. Putin and Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the Democratic leader, and wrote that "we should start an immediate investigation into @SenSchumer and his ties to Russia and Putin."

The issue has already had momentous consequences for the new administration. Michael T. Flynn lasted less than a month as national security adviser before being forced out for mischaracterizing his conversations with Mr. Kislyak. This week, Attorney General Jeff Sessions admitted to having meetings with Mr. Kislyak that he had not disclosed during his confirmation hearing.

Mr. Sessions fended off demands that he resign but agreed to recuse himself from what may be the most important investigation his Justice Department is conducting: of Russian meddling in the election and whether any of Mr. Trump's associates colluded in those efforts. And that did not end the issue; all nine Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee called on Friday for Mr. Sessions to testify about his inaccurate denials that he had met with Russian officials during the campaign.

Part of the problem underlying disputes over such contacts may be Mr. Trump's pugnacious style, which usually leaves little room for nuance. At a news conference last month, he said that he had "nothing to do with Russia," and that "to the best of my knowledge, no person that I deal with does."

In fact, vigorous reporting by multiple news media organizations is turning up multiple contacts between Trump associates and Russians who serve in or are close to Mr. Putin's government. There have been courtesy calls, policy discussions and business contacts, though nothing has emerged publicly indicating anything more sinister. A dossier of allegations on Trump-Russia contacts, compiled by a former British intelligence agent for Mr. Trump's political opponents, includes unproven claims that his aides collaborated in Russia's hacking of Democratic targets.

Current and former American officials have said that phone records and intercepted calls show that members of Mr. Trump's 2016 presidential campaign and other Trump associates had repeated contacts with senior Russian intelligence officials in the year before the election.

Former diplomats and Russia specialists say it would have been absurd and contrary to American interests for the Trump team to avoid meetings with Russians, either during or since the campaign.

John R. Beyrle, the United States ambassador to Moscow from 2008 to 2012, said he feared that "we're beginning to out-Russian the Russians" by treating all contacts as suspicious. When he returns to Russia now, he said, "this real anti-Western, anti-American frenzy" prompts some old acquaintances to refuse to meet him because they worry about being tagged as too friendly to the United States.

"That's the last behavior we should model — that simply meeting with a Russian official is wrong, without any knowledge of what was said," Mr. Beyrle said.

In a possible sign that Mr. Trump hopes to put behind him the impression that he is an uncritical admirer of Mr.

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Putin, he is expected to name Fiona Hill, a respected Brookings scholar, to the top Russia post at the National Security Council, according to administration officials.

Ms. Hill, who served as national intelligence officer for Russia and Eurasia from 2006 to 2009, is viewed as a Putin skeptic, if not as outspoken in her criticism of the Russian leader as are some other academics. Angela Stent, a Russia expert at Georgetown, said Ms. Hill was "realistic about Putin" and praised the 2013 book she wrote with Clifford G. Gaddy, "Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin," as the best biography of the Russian leader.

It might take a Russia scholar to unpack the significance of particular meetings that are now coming to light in the glare of investigations and bare-knuckle politics.

Rabbi Lazar, who has condemned critics of Mr. Putin's actions in Ukraine, is the leader of the Hasidic Chabad-Lubavitch group in Russia, where it is a powerful organization running dozens of schools and offering social services across the country, while maintaining links to a lucrative financial donor network.

Mr. Greenblatt, who handled outreach to Jews for the campaign, said that Rabbi Lazar was one of several Chabad leaders he had met during the campaign. He said the two men did not discuss broader United States-Russia relations and called the meeting "probably less than useful."

Rabbi Lazar said they had spoken about anti-Semitism in Russia, Russian Jews in Israel and Russian society in general. While he meets with Mr. Putin once or twice a year, he said, he never discussed his meeting with Mr. Greenblatt with Kremlin officials.

Joshua Nass, a public relations executive in New York, confirmed arranging the meeting between Mr. Lazar and Mr. Greenblatt.

Mr. Gordon, the former Pentagon official, portrayed his meeting with Mr. Kislyak at the Republican convention — first reported by USA Today — as similarly unremarkable. After a panel discussion, he said, he spoke briefly with "dozens of ambassadors and senior diplomats" including Mr. Kislyak. During a brief chat with the ambassador, Mr. Gordon said, he "repeated some of the points made by the campaign on the importance of improving relations with Russia" but did not get into substantive policy matters.

At a meeting to draft the Republican platform, Mr. Gordon, representing Mr. Trump's views, opposed a delegate who wanted to call for providing "lethal defensive weapons" to Ukraine. Mr. Gordon said that proposal "was soundly defeated by the other delegates in the national security subcommittee meeting."

There was no connection, he insisted, between his chat with Mr. Kislyak and the platform language. "Unfortunately some in the media have repeatedly tried to connect the dots where there was nothing to connect," he said.

The case of Konstantin V. Kilimnik, who was previously the Kiev manager of Mr. Manafort's consulting company, Davis Manafort International, is more complicated. A dual citizen of Russia and Ukraine, Mr. Kilimnik worked years ago as a translator in the Russian military. He was hired by Mr. Manafort in 2005 after he was dismissed from the Moscow office of the International Republican Institute, an American democracy-building group, amid concerns that he was informing on its activities, according to a former employee, who said he could not speak publicly about personnel matters.

From August until December of last year, Mr. Kilimnik was at least formally under investigation in Ukraine on suspicion of ties to Russian spy agencies, according to documents from Ukraine's Parliament and the prosecutor general. A defense lawyer and a former Ukrainian prosecutor characterized the investigation as unserious and politically motivated, and the inquiry closed without charges against Mr. Kilimnik.

Mr. Kilimnik, in an interview in Kiev, said he had never been questioned by Ukrainian law enforcement over connections to Russian spy agencies. "If there were any truth to me talking to any security service in the world, they would arrest me," he said.

In a recent interview, Mr. Manafort said he thought there was no chance Mr. Kilimnik was a Russian agent. In their phone calls last summer, he said, the two men discussed a range of matters — including news media reports that Russia was behind the hacking of Democratic targets. But at the time, he said, he and other Trump campaign officials had no idea who was responsible for the cyberattacks.

Moscow Blames Anti-Russian Hysteria For Sessions's Plight

By David Filipov

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

From Russia's point of view, the turmoil swirling around the Trump administration and its contacts with Russian officials is a "witch hunt" fueled by "fake news" instigated by leading Democrats looking to distract attention from their election defeat and carried out by their lap dogs in the U.S. media.

In other words, Moscow's reaction pretty much mirrors that of President Trump after Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused himself from any investigation into alleged Russian interference in the presidential election. Sessions made the move after The Washington Post revealed that he twice met with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak last year, while still serving as a senator, but did not disclose that during his Senate confirmation hearing in January. Sessions was an

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early backer of Trump's bid for the presidency and served as an adviser and surrogate for his campaign.

Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, said Friday that "all this is very much reminiscent of a witch hunt and the McCarthyism era, which we all thought was long gone."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, commenting on reports that Trump's son-in-law met with Kislyak in December, backed Trump's use of the phrase "witch hunt," saying, "We have nothing to add to President Trump's exhaustive definition."

But despite that convergence, Trump and the Kremlin are speaking out of vastly different contexts.

In the United States, the suggestion that Sessions was not forthcoming at his Senate hearing was enough to force him to step aside from potential probes, regardless of what he and Kislyak discussed.

Moscow's reaction, meanwhile, has deeper roots than the controversy over Trump's ties to Russia. When Russian officialdom speaks, its comments reflect 25 years of growing frustration with the United States.

Moscow has never admitted to interfering in the election, as the U.S. intelligence community accuses it of doing, and sees any and all questions about Trump's ties to Russia as symptoms of what it considers rampant Russophobia in the United States' political and military establishment. Two prominent daily newspapers, Moskovsky Komsomolets and Nezavisimaya Gazeta, have featured commentary citing anti-Russian hysteria in the United States as a primary driver of efforts to oust national security adviser Mike Flynn, who resigned last month, and force Sessions to recuse himself.

In Washington, Trump's warm words for Russian President Vladi-mir Putin, his half-joking call for Russia to hack into Hillary Clinton's emails and the revelation that Flynn discussed U.S. sanctions against Russia with Kislyak before Trump took office have raised concerns that something more sinister is going on. Trump and his administration, though, have resisted accepting the U.S. intelligence community's conclusion that Russia was attempting to help him win the election. Sessions, in an interview Thursday on Fox News, declined to acknowledge that Russia favored Trump over Clinton.

In Moscow, suggestions that Trump colluded with Russian officials on the election or that the Kremlin is blackmailing him into cozying up to Putin are regarded as hangovers from the Obama administration. Officials here mostly saw the Obama White House as trying to relegate Russia to a powerless, servile position, while some on the fringes of Russia's establishment saw the relationship more darkly, suggesting the election of Clinton, President Barack Obama's former secretary of state, to the presidency would lead to nuclear war.

Lavrov expressed umbrage that "our ambassador is accused of meeting with the U.S. politicians who opposed the Obama administration," suggesting that U.S. diplomats do the same with Putin's political opponents.

"If we applied the same principle to [U.S.] Ambassador to Russia [John] Tefft, this would be real fun," Lavrov added.

Moscow also objects to suggestions that Kislyak is anything but a diplomat. Some media outlets have reported that U.S. intelligence officials think the ambassador is a top Russian spy, accusations that Peskov dismissed as "baseless fake-news stories." Peskov, borrowing from Trump's broadsides against leaks, advised reporters to rely "only on official statements by genuine officials."

Russian officialdom and the White House also converge in their view of the U.S. media.

Maria Zakharova, spokeswoman for Russia's Foreign Ministry, characterized stories about Trump this way: "Is this rock bottom? Or can they go even lower?"

U.S. Tensions Over Ambassador Meetings Harm Detente Effort, Russia Warns

By Ilya Arkhipov

Bloomberg Politics, March 3, 2017

Russia warned that efforts to restore relations with the U.S. are being harmed by a "malicious campaign" over meetings between its envoy to Washington and President Donald Trump's administration.

The political controversy over Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak's contacts with U.S. officials is "harming our relations which are already in a bad condition, having been deliberately destroyed by the Obama administration," Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said in an interview Friday in Moscow. "It's clear that the current situation hinders the restoration of these relations on a positive path of development."

Russia seeks "practical cooperation in areas where such cooperation is needed" with the U.S., including on counter-terrorism, nuclear non-proliferation, economic investment and a settlement to the Syrian war, Ryabkov said. "We'll continue to work hard" to restore relations, he said.

Controversy over meetings with the ambassador prompted Attorney General Jeff Sessions to recuse himself Thursday from investigations into alleged Russian interference in the U.S. presidential election, and led to Michael Flynn's ouster as national security adviser last month. Following years of confrontation with the U.S. under President Barack Obama, Russian officials saw hope for better ties when Trump took office. They're now growing frustrated over the lack of progress after Trump heaped praise on President Vladimir Putin during the campaign and pledged to work with him, including in fighting terrorism.'Witch Hunt'

The accusations in Washington over contacts with Kislyak "look very similar to a witch hunt or the period of McCarthyism which we thought was long gone in the U.S. as a civilized country," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told reporters in Moscow, referring to anti-communist investigations led by U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s. Applying the same standard to U.S. Ambassador to Russia John Tefft's contacts would produce "a very funny picture," Lavrov said.

Ryabkov and Tefft met Friday in Moscow to discuss "bilateral issues," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement. The ministry's spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, said on Facebook that she told Tefft after the meeting: "You put yourself at risk by talking to Russian diplomats."

Trump on Thursday blamed his Democratic Party opponents for the controversy over Sessions. The Republican president made no mention of Russia or Putin in his first speech to Congress on Tuesday even as he declared that the U.S. is "willing to find new friends, and to forge new partnerships, where shared interests align."

Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin said Tuesday that Trump should make good on his pledge to mount a joint fight against Islamic State in Syria and there'd been "enough talk about it."

Russia: Furor Over Sessions Meetings With Ambassador 'A Witch Hunt'

By Jane Onyanga-Omara

USA Today, March 3, 2017

The Kremlin agreed Friday with President Trump's assertion that the furor over meetings between Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Sergey Kislyak, the Russian ambassador to the United States, was a "witch hunt," Russian state media reported.

The remark by Dmitry Peskov, the spokesman for Russian President Vladimir Putin, came after sharp criticism by Democrats in Congress over Sessions failure to disclose meetings with Kislyak last year, when he was a senator and a Trump campaign adviser.

Trump said Thursday that there was a "total witch hunt" against Sessions.

"Jeff Sessions is an honest man. He did not say anything wrong. He could have stated his response more accurately, but it was clearly not intentional," Trump tweeted.

"The Democrats are overplaying their hand. They lost the election, and now they have lost their grip on reality. The real story is all of the illegal leaks of classified and other information. It is a total "witch hunt!"" he added.

Peskov pointed out Trump's phrasing Friday. "After President Trump's comprehensive definition, we have nothing to add," he said, according to Russia's TASS news agency.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov echoed Trump and Peskov earlier. "I can cite the media that say all this is very much reminiscent of a witch hunt and the McCarthyism era which we all thought was long gone," he said, according to TASS.

In the 1950s, Sen. Joseph McCarthy, a Republican from Wisconsin, led a hunt for alleged communist traitors who he said were working secretly in the government and the army on behalf of the Soviet Union. The Senate later censured him.

"As for accusations against Kislyak and those he met with… Our ambassador is accused of meeting with the U.S. politicians who opposed the Obama administration. This is the essence of the accusations, to be honest," Lavrov added.

Sessions stepped aside Thursday from overseeing the continuing FBI investigation into Russia's interference in last year's election.

Phone conversations between Kislyak and Gen. Michael Flynn before Trump's Jan. 20 inauguration got Flynn fired as national security adviser after less than a month in office.

J.D. Gordon and Carter Page, two other Trump advisers, also spoke with Kislyak at the diplomacy conference connected to the Republican National Convention in July, where he met with Sessions. It's unknown what they discussed.

There have been repeated denials by Trump officials that his campaign had contact with officials representing the Russian government.

Contributing: Steve Reilly, Oren Dorell

Russia Says US Infighting On Sessions Hampers Mending Ties

By Vladimir Isachenkov

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

MOSCOW (AP) – As the drama over Attorney General Jeff Sessions plays out in Washington, the Kremlin is watching with a mixture of frustration and regret how the uproar is blocking progress on pressing issues on the U.S.-Russian agenda.

Despite the dashed hopes for a quick thaw, however, Moscow is voicing its readiness to wait as long as it takes.

Donald Trump had come into office expressing admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin and hoping to mend ties with Moscow, which have sunk to the lowest point since the Cold War over the Ukrainian crisis, the war in Syria and other disputes.

But the allegations by U.S. intelligence agencies of Russian meddling in the election to help Trump defeat Hillary Clinton will likely continue to weigh over his administration and prevent it from launching a meaningful dialogue with the Kremlin any time soon.

In a conference call with reporters, Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov lamented the lack of cooperation with Washington on Syria beyond the U.S. diplomatic presence at peace talks in Kazakhstan's capital of Astana that Russia and Turkey brokered earlier this year.

"Similarly, there has been no movement forward regarding cooperation in the fight against terrorism, which causes regret," he said.

Trump has repeatedly talked of cooperating with Russia in fighting the Islamic State group in Syria. The administration of former President Barack Obama had ruled out such cooperation because of Moscow's support for its longtime ally, Syrian President Bashar Assad.

"Without waiting for these contacts to start, Russia has been consistently contributing to the fight against terrorism and scoring results," Peskov said, pointing to the Russian military's role in driving the Islamic State group from the historic Syrian town of Palmyra.

Other issues on the tense Russian-U.S. agenda leave even less room for compromise.

On Ukraine, any move by Trump to soften the stance on Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and its support for a separatist insurgency in eastern Ukraine would anger his congressional foes and put him in an even more precarious position.

If Trump makes any attempt to ease the sanctions imposed on Russia by the Obama administration, he could face strong resistance in Congress.

On the nuclear arms control, Trump's criticism of the 2010 New START treaty would potentially put him on a collision course with Moscow, which has signaled a desire to extend the deal after it expires in 2021.

But for now, the Kremlin is trying to show patience.

Peskov sought to play down Trump's proposal to raise military spending by 9 percent, saying that's a domestic matter for Washington. "It would hardly concern us until a rise in spending upsets the existing balance of strategic deterrence," he said.

Asked to comment on the developments on Sessions, Peskov cited Trump's description of it as "a total witch hunt" and added: "We have nothing to add to the expansive definition given by President Trump."

Sessions recused himself Thursday from any investigation into communications between Trump aides and Moscow following revelations that as senator, Sessions twice spoke with Ambassador Sergey Kislyak during the 2016 election campaign and failed to say so when pressed by Congress.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov argued that contacts with officials and lawmakers are part of any ambassador's duties. He added that the pressure on Sessions "strongly resembles a witch hunt or the times of McCarthyism, which we thought were long over in the United States as a civilized country."

In the 1950s, Sen. Joseph McCarthy led a hunt for purported communist infiltrators in the U.S. government, often involving unfounded accusations that promoted widespread fear.

Noting Russia won't mimic the U.S., Lavrov added that "if we applied the same principle to Ambassador (John) Tefft's activities in Russia and his contacts, it would have made quite a funny picture."

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov deplored that Russia has become a tool in the U.S. political struggle.

"Regrettably, influential forces in the U.S. are using relations with Russia as an instrument for achieving certain goals or treating our relations as a collateral damage in their internal fighting," he said in remarks carried by Russian news agencies. "It causes a strong regret, but we aren't making a tragedy out of it."

Ryabkov added that Moscow continues to believe that restoring ties "destroyed by Obama's administration" is a daunting but still achievable goal.

"We will work on it on such a pace, with such intensity and succession of steps that would be comfortable for the American side," he said. "We aren't going to artificially rush any processes. We realize that it will take certain time for the current U.S. administration to make all key appointments and determine its policy priorities, including on the Russian track."

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Russians Disheartened By Trump As His Love Affair With Putin Fizzles

By Anna Arutunyan

USA Today, March 3, 2017

MOSCOW — Russian politicians enamored with President Trump's talk of improved relations with Moscow last fall are already disillusioned that he's reversed course because of investigations into Russian meddling in the U.S. election.

Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov said he was surprised Trump started "receding" from his earlier pro-Russian rhetoric about closer cooperation. "Even in the way he talks you can now hear notes of Obama," he said. "And you can hear in his address (to Congress Tuesday): the military budget will be increased by over $50 billion."

"We have to hope for the best, but prepare for the worst," Sergei Mironov, head of the Just Russia party told a

parliamentary round table on foreign policy this week. "The sooner Trump understands that world history is governed by laws and not business schemes, that there are values that are not measured in dollars, the better for Russian-American relations."

Their disappointment follows a tougher line on Russia from Trump's White House. Last month, White House spokesman Sean Spicer said Trump expected Russia to return Crimea, which it annexed from Ukraine in 2014. That is at odds with comments Trump made during the campaign, when he suggested Russia should keep Crimea and that U.S. sanctions imposed after its seizure be lifted.

The Kremlin rejected any intention of returning Crimea. Shortly after, state-run media suddenly stopped its pro-Trump coverage.

In the United States, anti-Russian sentiment has been growing in Congress over intelligence allegations that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered cyberattacks aimed at helping elect Trump, charges both the Kremlin and Trump deny.

Still, the FBI is investigating contacts between Russians and Trump officials before and after the election, and the scandal already has forced Trump to fire his national security adviser, Michael Flynn, over contacts with Russian Ambassador Sergei Kislyak.

The allegations prompted Trump to acknowledge at a news conference last month that he probably can't do business with Russia now because of the political climate.

Some Russians are skeptical of a Kremlin plot to elect Trump. "Whatever silly thing the president does raises the possibility of a Russia connection," said Alina Lobzina, a freelance news producer, who urged Americans to stop blaming Russia. "Seriously, from across the ocean it looks like a House of Cards episode, and not the best one."

Breaking with his earlier praise of Russia and Putin, Trump did not mention either in Tuesday night's speech to Congress.

"There was an atmosphere of positive expectations" in the Kremlin, said Konstantin von Eggert, a political commentator with Russia's independent Dozhd TV station. Now the relationship between the two countries is "toxic," he said.

"The Kremlin is realizing that maybe the best outcome would be to maintain the current level of tensions between Russia and America rather than having something worse," he said.

READ MORE:

The latest sign of U.S. tensions about Russia came Thursday, when Attorney General Jess Sessions recused himself from the election-meddling probe because he had met with the Russian ambassador twice last year, when he was a senator and Trump campaign adviser, but failed to disclose at his confirmation hearing when asked about contacts with Russians. Sessions said the meetings were innocuous and the election never came up.

Putin's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Friday that he agreed with Trump that the examination of innocent contacts with Russia amounted to a "witch hunt."

Peskov said on Wednesday that he saw nothing wrong with Trump's failure to mention Russia in his hour-long address to Congress. "We have patience. We will wait until Trump's statements are backed up by some action that will allow us to understand what we can expect in terms of bilateral Russian-American relations," he said.

Alexei Makarkin, deputy head of the Center for Political Technologies, said Russian officials' expectations about Trump are becoming more realistic.

"There was a sense in the beginning that Trump is our kind of guy, that he will come in and solve everything," he said. "But these sentiments did not take into account the nature of the American political system and the character of the new president, who really does not intend to be Russia's ally."

"Everything will depend on whether they are able to reach an agreement on specific issues, like Ukraine or Syria."

Democratic Senator Calls On Sessions To Testify Over Russia Contacts

By Susan Heavey

Reuters, March 3, 2017

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Everything You Need To Know About Trump And Russia

By Dana Milbank

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

Having trouble following the fast-moving developments about the Trump team's ties to Russia? Here's a primer to get you up to speed:

President Trump got to know Russian President Vladimir Putin "very well," but he doesn't "know Putin."

Putin sent Trump "a present" and they spoke, but Trump has "no relationship with him."

Trump has "nothing to do with Russia," but his son has said "Russians make up a pretty disproportionate cross-section of a lot of our assets" and "we see a lot of money pouring in from Russia."

Russia definitely hacked the Democratic National Committee, unless it was a 400-pound man in his bedroom or a guy in a van down by the river.

U.S. intelligence agencies allege that Putin meddled in the election to try to get Trump elected, but this was all a

"ruse" and a "fake news fabricated deal to try and make up for the loss of the Democrats."

There was "no communication" between Trump's team and Russia during the campaign and transition, except for communication with Russia by Trump's future national security adviser, his future attorney general and his son-in-law and two others.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions "did not have communications with the Russians,"except for the two meetings with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak he neglected to mention under oath.

Sessions then said he never discussed the campaign with Russians, which is not what was alleged.

Sessions had "no idea what this allegation is about" regarding his Russian contacts but had an enough of an idea what it's about to declare "it is false."

Sessions recused himself from the Russia investigation, but this decision is unrelated to the discovery that he spoke twice with the Russian ambassador despite his claims that he had no such meetings.

Sessions cannot confirm the investigation he recused himself from exists or will exist in the future.

Sessions believes that perjury is one of the constitutional "high crimes and misdemeanors" and "goes to the heart of the judicial system," except his false testimony under oath to Congress was not a false statement but a case of speaking too quickly.

Sessions met with the Russian ambassador during the time Sessions was serving as a surrogate for the Trump campaign, but not in his capacity as a surrogate for the Trump campaign.

Sessions remembers nothing of his meetings with the Russian ambassador, except that he remembers clearly talking about terrorism and religion and Ukraine and he's sure they didn't talk about the campaign.

It was a total coincidence that around the same time Sessions was meeting with the Russian ambassador, Trump gave an interview that ended up on Russian state-owned TV saying he didn't believe reports of Russian influence in the U.S. election.

Trump, Trump's press secretary and a broad swath of Republican members of Congress said there is no reason for Sessions to recuse himself from the investigation from which Sessions recused himself.

The incendiary and salacious "dossier" by a former British intelligence official on Trump's involvement with Russia was completely unverified, but U.S. authorities were prepared to pay the man who wrote it.

Carter Page, who has extensive ties to Moscow, had "no role" in the Trump campaign, except that Trump, meeting with The Post's editorial board, listed Page as an adviser.

Reports of the Trump team's ties to Russia are "fake news," yet those who leaked the information for those articles need to be found and punished.

Trump ousted Michael Flynn, his national security adviser, who Trump says did nothing wrong.

Michael Flynn, who spoke several times with Kislyak on the day President Obama announced sanctions against Russia, told Vice President Pence and the FBI that the discussion that intelligence officials heard them having about sanctions was not a discussion about sanctions.

The sanctions that Flynn reportedly discussed with Kislyak, in the conversation he can't entirely remember, were not really sanctions.

Former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort had "absolutely nothing to do and never has with Russia," except for his extensive work for Russian oligarchs and pro-Russia forces in Ukraine.

Manafort declared in the fall that "there's no investigation going on by the FBI that I'm aware of" into his contacts with Russia, months after that investigation began.

Sessions previously asserted that "no one is above the law" and that failure to punish people for being untruthful under oath "will weaken the legal system," and he proclaimed that "I'm very careful about how I conduct myself in these matters." Except when he isn't.

So, now you know everything there is to know about Trump and Russia. This has been a public service announcement.

China Was Bill Clinton's Russia

By Holman W. Jenkins, Jr.

Wall Street Journal, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

What To Do With Jeff Sessions

By Gail Collins

New York Times, March 3, 2017

Donald Trump's team spent so much time with Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak, you'd think he was dating Tiffany.

Really, they couldn't get enough of this guy. It was Kislyak who Michael Flynn, our come-and-gone national security adviser, was chatting with in those phone calls Flynn fibbed about. Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, met with Kislyak at Trump Tower after the election.

This week Carter Page, who was part of the campaign's foreign policy team, swore on MSNBC that he'd never met Kislyak "outside of Cleveland." While Page was referring to the Republican convention, I propose that from now on when members of the Trump administration want to deny any embarrassing-to-indictable past behavior, they just say, "only in Cleveland." We'll get the message.

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And Attorney General Jeff Sessions seems to have, um, misspoken about Kislyak under oath. During the Senate Judiciary Committee's confirmation hearings, Senator Al Franken asked Sessions what he would do if evidence turned up that "anyone affiliated with the Trump campaign communicated with the Russian government" while the campaign was underway. Franken was sort of inviting him to say he'd recuse himself from the investigation.

But Sessions clearly did not want to take his hand off the investigations tiller. Instead, the future A.G. jumped right in and volunteered that he, Jeff, had been a central member of the campaign, "and I did not have communications with the Russians."

It's bad enough to think the nation's chief law enforcement officer would dodge the truth when cornered. But it's worse if he leaps in, waves his hand and lies voluntarily. We now know that Sessions had seen Kislyak at the convention — although, of course, that was in Cleveland. He also had met with the ambassador in his Senate office in September, when the issue of possible Russian interference in the campaign had long been in the news.

Sessions claims he was just confused.

"What do the Russians have on him?" demanded House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi. Earlier, Pelosi had argued that Congress had impeached President Bill Clinton for "far less." You can look at this several different ways, but I think I speak for many Americans when I say that having a debate about whether Bill Clinton or Jeff Sessions is the worse liar is not the way I want to spend my spring.

O.K., people. What do you want to do about Attorney General Jeff Sessions?

A) Fire the sucker.

B) Sic a special prosecutor on him, so he can spend the next four years being tortured with depositions and subpoenas.

C) Both.

D) Let him stay and be the charming little pixie that his friends insist he is.

You think I'm making up the part about friends, right? Just because Sessions started out as an Alabama prosecutor with a record on race so unsavory he couldn't get a judgeship. Followed by a Senate career dedicated to destroying bipartisan immigration reform. But, it's pretty easy to build good relations in Congress if you're reasonably affable and not Ted Cruz. "He was liked in the Senate," said a Democratic senator who asked not to be identified because nobody wants to say anything nice about Jeff Sessions this week. "He has these horrible views, but he's sort of not vicious about them."

After all the news about Sessions's um, erroneous testimony came out, President Trump told reporters he saw no reason whatsoever for his attorney general to recuse himself from any investigations into the campaign in which he played a prominent part. Asked whether he thought Sessions had spoken "truthfully" on the subject of his Russian conversations, the president of the United States said, "I think he probably did." Mull that for a minute.

Meanwhile, Sessions called a press conference to reveal that his staff had been working all along on the question of whether he should recuse himself from any investigations into the Trump campaign. And — talk about coincidences! — the final-decision meeting had been set for that very day. And the answer was to recuse!

"So in the end I have followed the right procedure," he declared. "… just as I believe any good attorney general should do."

Although he needn't have bothered. The president likes him just the way he is.

And what about the whole Russian connection? We have Russian hackers messing with the Democratic National Committee computers during the campaign while the Trump people could not have been chattier with their pals from the Putin government.

"This is maybe the second or third biggest power in the world attacking us and interfering in our elections. The basis of our republic. So yeah, it's kind of troubling," said Franken dryly.

O.K., we need some investigations here. Definitely in Congress. If there were nine over Benghazi, this one would seem to deserve at least 14. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer is also calling for a special investigator, which sounds reasonable. We're in desperate need of knowing who talked to who, where.

Not counting Cleveland.

Jeff Sessions Violated His Oath

By David Leonhardt

New York Times, March 3, 2017

It's important to remember exactly when Jeff Sessions's meeting with the Russian ambassador occurred. The meeting took place on Sept. 8, weeks after Russia's intervention in the presidential campaign had become a huge story.

This timeline makes Sessions's defense — that it was a garden-variety, unmemorable meeting — a little hard to accept. Even if nothing untoward happened during the meeting, Sessions had to have understood how sensitive it was for a top adviser to the Trump campaign to meet with the Russian ambassador.

Yet in January he chose to testify, under oath, that he "did not have communications with the Russians" during the campaign. Now he claims to be the victim of a simple misunderstanding — that his meeting with the ambassador was part of his job as a senator, not a campaign surrogate.

Is there a technical, if friendly, reading of his testimony that suggests he didn't lie under oath? Yes, I think there is.

But I don't see any reading of the testimony that indicates Sessions told the whole truth.

For reference, this was the question that Senator Chuck Grassley asked Sessions at the start of the testimony: "Do you swear that the testimony that you are about to give, before this committee, will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help you God?"

Sessions replied: "I do."

If you want to read more, I recommend:

Richard Painter, the chief White House ethics lawyer under George W. Bush, explains why Sessions should resign in The Times. Ian Millhiser of ThinkProgress explains why Sessions's decision to recuse himself is not sufficient. David Frum, in 21 tweets, explains why Sessions's dishonesty underscores the unique danger of the Trump presidency.

Susan Hennessey and Benjamin Wittes of Lawfare have argued that a select congressional committee is the best and most realistic way to get answers to the Russia scandal. (Lawfare also posted an updated piece on Thursday.)

James Hohmann of The Washington Post has a nice curation of responses to Sessions, and Evan Osnos of The New Yorker looks at what's likely to happen next.

Karen Yourish and Wilson Andrews of The Times created a clarifying timeline. And last week, I set out to explain the motives for the Trump administration's Russia love.

Federal Prosecutors Have Brought Charges In Cases Far Less Serious Than Sessions's

By Philip Lacovara

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

Philip Lacovara was counsel to Watergate special prosecutors Archibald Cox and Leon Jaworski, and also served as deputy U.S. solicitor general responsible for criminal matters, including the "Bronston" case. Lawrence Robbins has been both an assistant U.S. attorney and assistant to the solicitor general. Lacovara is a lifelong Republican; Robbins contributed to and raised money for Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign. The views expressed are their own.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions made a seemingly false statement under oath during his confirmation hearing. Admittedly, not every potential perjury case gets prosecuted, and Sessions may well have defenses to such a charge. But as lawyers at the Justice Department and attorneys in private practice who have represented individuals accused in such cases, we can state with assurance: Federal prosecutors have brought charges in cases involving far more trivial misstatements and situations far less consequential than whether a nominee to be the nation's chief law enforcement officer misled fellow senators during his confirmation hearings.

Sessions's problematic statement involves his response to a question by Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) about what he would do as attorney general "if there is any evidence that anyone affiliated with the Trump campaign communicated with the Russian government in the course of this campaign." Sessions said he was unaware of any such activities, then volunteered, "I did not have communications with the Russians, and I'm unable to comment on it." In fact, then-Sen. Sessions (R-Ala.), a top Trump campaign adviser, met at least twice during the presidential campaign with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak, The Post revealed.

As any number of witnesses have learned the hard way, it is a federal felony to lie to Congress. Under Title 18 of the U.S. Code, Sections 1001 and 1621, perjury before Congress is punishable by up to five years imprisonment. To prove that offense, a prosecutor would have to establish that Sessions's answer was false, that he knew it was false when made and that the subject matter of the answer was "material" to the congressional inquiry in which he was testifying.

Those elements all appear to be present. The element of falsity is established by the conceded fact that he did "have communications with the Russians" during the Trump campaign. And there can scarcely be any doubt that the subject matter of Sessions's answer was highly material to the Senate's consideration of his nomination. Any suggestion that he participated in the suspected interaction between Trump campaign personnel and the Russian government was, and remains, a matter of grave concern.

That leaves one element: Did Sessions know that his answer was false? He says no, asserting that he understood Franken to be asking only whether he had contact with the Russian government in his capacity as a Trump campaign surrogate. While a jury might accept that defense, there are many reasons to reject it: Sessions's answer baldly denied any contact. Moreover, Sessions went out of his way to deny contact in response to a question that did not inquire about that subject. By doing so, he preempted an important line of inquiry that might otherwise have been fruitfully pursued.

Certainly there is precedent for a prosecution in this context. Part of the fallout from Watergate included the special prosecutor's investigation of Richard Kleindienst, who had resigned from his position as attorney general, for alleged false statements during his confirmation hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee. Kleindienst was asked whether the White House had interfered with a Justice Department antitrust action against the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation. He stated, "I was not interfered with by anybody at the White House" — but President Nixon and one of his top aides had each called Kleindienst regarding the case. Kleindienst pleaded guilty to a

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misdemeanor charge for "refus[ing] and fail[ing] to answer accurately and fully" questions at a congressional hearing.

Those facts left no room for any colorable defense on the "knowledge" issue. But when Justice Department officials decide whether to bring a case against Sessions — or, more appropriately, when an independent counsel is appointed and resolves that question — this must be done against the backdrop of other perjury cases that the department has chosen over the years to bring. And the department has prosecuted individuals who advanced defenses very similar to Sessions's arguments here, often where there was far less at stake.

Years ago, for example, one of us (Robbins) represented a defendant named John Patrick Dowd, accused of lying to a grand jury. Dowd was president of a company that had leased a vessel that had dumped 13,500 tons of Philadelphia incinerator ash into the sea. There was no evidence that Dowd was personally involved in the dumping, but his grand jury testimony led to a perjury indictment. Dowd was acquitted of lying to the grand jury when he testified that he didn't know where the ash went. Yet he was convicted for his negative response to the question: "You had no idea?" Thus, even a question and answer far vaguer and more ambiguous than the Franken-Sessions exchange were deemed sufficient to justify prosecution.

Or take the classic case of vague questioning: Bronston v. United States. Samuel Bronston had placed his movie production company into bankruptcy and was being questioned about his and the company's finances. He was asked about, and denied, having any accounts in Swiss banks. Then the obvious follow-up — "Have you ever?" — to which Bronston replied: "The company had an account there for about six months." What Bronston neglected to mention was that he had a large personal Swiss bank account that he closed when he filed to place his company in bankruptcy.

The Supreme Court held that although his responses may have been deceptive and intended to mislead, they did not constitute perjury because they were literally true, and it was the fault of the questioner that he failed to pursue the inquiry further. The Sessions's situation presents exactly the opposite scenario: Sessions's response appears to be both literally false and comprehensive, leaving nothing open for further inquiry regarding the nature of his contacts with the Russian government during the presidential campaign.

A government that has been willing to prosecute relatively small and questionable instances of falsity in connection with matters of comparatively minor importance should have difficulty explaining why Sessions's testimony would receive a free pass.

Time For A Special Counsel In The Russiagate Scandal

By Norman Eisen And Noah Bookbinder
Politico Magazine, March 3, 2017
Time for a Special Counsel in the Russiagate Scandal
POLITICO Magazine
Norman Eisen and Noah Bookbinder
3/3/2017
Getty
In The Arena
Jeff Sessions didn't go far enough.
By
Norman Eisen and
Noah Bookbinder
March 03, 2017

Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced on Thursday that he is recusing himself from "any existing or future investigations of any matters related in any way to the campaigns for president of the United States."

Good for him. But it's not enough.

Story Continued Below

Sessions' announcement, which came after the revelation that he held several conversations with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak during the 2016 campaign without disclosing those meetings to Congress, was a step the attorney general should have taken weeks ago, as we explained in a letter along with a bipartisan collection of two dozen other groups and individuals on Feb. 17.

The question remains, however, whether even with this recusal, we can have confidence that all of the relevant investigations—not just the ones from which Sessions has recused himself—are being conducted to the high standards of independence and professionalism the American people rightfully demand from the Department of Justice.

Without more than Sessions' narrow recusals, we cannot. This DOJ should follow the example of earlier ones, including in the administrations of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, and appoint a special counsel to conduct the investigations. Only with an independent prosecutor exercising the full authority of the attorney general can we be sure that the truth will become known and the interests of the American people protected.

When most people think of an independent prosecutor, they recall what became known as the "Whitewater" investigation. In that case, an independent panel of judges selected an outside individual to act as prosecutor at the attorney general's request. However, the legal authority under which that investigation was conducted—the independent counsel statute—expired in 1999. So, all decisions about appointing counsel to handle particular cases now rest with attorney general (or if he is recused, his deputy).

The DOJ has regulations that govern how and when these appointments should be made. They provide that the attorney general or the acting attorney general can appoint an outside special counsel if he or she determines that it would

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be in the public interest, and that not doing so "would present a conflict of interest for the department or other extraordinary circumstances." The regulations contain some limitations on the authority of the special counsel, including that the attorney general can limit the special counsel's jurisdiction to a certain matter and can override a particular action if the attorney general finds that it is "so inappropriate or unwarranted under established departmental practices that it should not be pursued." In other words, there are ample tools for DOJ to ensure that a special counsel review does not become the "witch hunt" that President Donald Trump fears.

That said, it is important here that the investigation be strictly independent, which may require additional measures. For example, in 2003, Attorney General John Ashcroft recused himself from the investigation of alleged unauthorized disclosure of the identity of a CIA employee. Because Ashcroft recused, then-Deputy Attorney General James Comey (now director of the FBI) had authority over the matter; Comey in turn appointed a special prosecutor, then-United States Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald, to handle it. Comey initially appointed Fitzgerald under the special counsel regulations, but later felt the need to give him even more independence than the regulations provide. So Comey extended Fitzgerald's authority in a pair of letters, one in 2003 and again in 2004.

As to the matters from which Sessions has recused himself, the "acting attorney general" is Dana Boente, the current acting deputy attorney general. Boente is a career DOJ lawyer appointed by President Barack Obama in 2005 as United States attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia. President Trump's nominee for the permanent post of deputy attorney general, Rod Rosenstein, has not yet been confirmed by the Senate. His hearing is coming up next week, and it should be a doozy.

The public needs to have confidence that any investigation into various Trump administration officials' contacts with Russian officials is being carried out vigorously and fairly. Unfortunately, public and private comments by the respective heads of the House and Senate intelligence committee suggest they have already prejudged the results. As for Sessions, he has recused himself only from matters involving the 2016 election, which would presumably include any Russian attempts to meddle in the outcome; but as the attorney general himself emphasized, his recusal relates to matters investigating the presidential campaign. However, as recent revelations demonstrate, the Trump team's Russian connections reportedly continued into the transition, and more investigation may push the timeline even further. It is certainly not a crime to meet with Russian officials. But the public has the right to know if any of these conversations crossed the line by, for example, relating to alleged Russian hacking or other intrusions upon our election processes.

Because of this, Attorney General Sessions and Acting Deputy Attorney General Boente should follow the example set by Ashcroft and Comey before them and appoint a special counsel to handle matters relating to all questions surrounding Russian officials' actions relating to the 2016 presidential election, and also to questions about how that influence effort may have continued past the campaign, and indeed may continue to this day. As then-Special Counsel Patrick Fitzgerald said, "the truth is the engine of our judicial system." It is also the only way to ensure that the government is serving the best interests of the American people—and only the American people.

Norman Eisen is a former ambassador and chair of CREW, a fellow at the Brookings Institution, and was President Barack Obama's ethics czar from 2009-11.

Noah Bookbinder is executive director of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) and is a former federal prosecutor who handled public corruption cases and Senate.

Trump Blasts Military Sequester In Weekly Address

By Lisa Hagen And Ben Kamisar

The Hill, March 3, 2017

President Trump underscored his commitment to lifting budget caps on military spending as he gave his weekly address recorded from the U.S.S. Gerald Ford.

"My vision includes the elimination of the defense sequester, which has imposed steep cuts on our military," Trump, wearing a U.S.S. Gerald Ford hat and Navy jacket, said in the video posted Friday.

"My budget will give America's armed forces the resources they need to achieve full and total military preparedness to meet any and all global challenges and meet them we will. Investing in the military means investing in peace."

The video was released a day after Trump delivered a speech aboard the U.S.S. Gerald Ford, a new aircraft supercarrier, about his proposals to expand the military and increase the country's defense budget by $54 billion.

Sequestration, which created caps on both military and nonmilitary spending, was imposed by the bipartisan Budget Control Act of 2011 after lawmakers failed to reach a compromise spending deal.

The Trump administration, meanwhile, is facing a storm of controversy over Attorney General Jeff Sessions's decision to recuse himself from any investigations of Russia's ties to Trump's presidential campaign.

Democrats and some Republicans called for his recusal after revelations that Sessions spoke with Russia's ambassador to the U.S. twice during the 2016 campaign.

During his confirmation hearing, Sessions said under oath he didn't have any contact with Russian officials.

Trump expressed "total confidence" in Sessions, and White House press secretary Sean Spicer said he didn't need to recuse himself, but the Alabama Republican held a press conference Thursday afternoon saying he believed recusal was the best course of action.

Trump Wants $54 Billion More For Defense. The Military Isn't Sure What That Means.

By Noah Bierman And W.j. Hennigan, Contact Reporters

Los Angeles Times, March 3, 2017

Clad in an olive-green flight jacket, President Trump strode onto the sprawling flight deck of the Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier docked off of Newport News, Va., calling the new $12.9-billion ship an emblem for his plans to pump $54 billion into the military.

"It is a monument to American might that will provide the strength necessary to ensure peace," he told a cheering crowd of uniformed sailors and Marines this week.

Yet even as Trump invokes former President Reagan's "peace through strength" doctrine, few in the military policy community know what Trump really wants to do with the proposed 10% annual budget increase or what vision he holds for the armed forces.

Though Trump repeatedly has called for a military buildup, he spent much of his campaign promising to pull back from the type of expensive commitments and endeavors that would require such a large expansion. He pledged an "America First" policy and complained bitterly that trillions of dollars spent fighting wars in the Middle East could have been used to rebuild the homeland.

"This is a fairly raw grab for money," said Gordon Adams, a senior budget official for national security under President Clinton who worked on the issue for President Obama's transition after the 2008 election. "It is based largely on symbolism."

Trump floated some spending ideas promoted by a conservative think tank during his campaign, including troop increases of more than 100,000. And the military has several costly projects that could put the cash to use. But if Trump really wants to force allies in Europe and Asia to shoulder more of their own defense burden — as he asserted during the campaign — he may not need all these projects, analysts say.

"This is a strategy-budget mismatch within the Trump administration," said Todd Harrison, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "A lot of the rhetoric suggests he wants to do less, but in the budget says he wants to do more. Which is it?"

Trump's discourse on the topic has vexed observers. During the campaign, Trump called the North Atlantic Treaty Organization designed to protect European allies "obsolete" and demanded repeatedly that member nations pay a larger share of their defense expenses. He made similar demands of Japan and other Asian allies. He also criticized both Democrats and Republicans for spending trillions of dollars on operations in the Middle East and southwest Asia.

"If I become president, the era of nation-building will be brought to a very swift and decisive end," he said during an August policy address in Ohio.

At the same time, Trump has called for a bigger military that can "start winning wars again."

Meanwhile, Trump has repeatedly said he wants to limit foreign engagement in order to avoid costly ground wars but believes a more muscular military will deter foes.

"Hopefully, it's power we don't have to use," Trump said aboard the aircraft carrier Thursday, praising the ship's size and strength. "But if we do, they're in big, big trouble."

He backed NATO more strongly in an address to Congress on Tuesday night, adding further complications to his ambitions.

Trump has compared his "peace through strength" mantra to Reagan's. But Reagan engaged deeply in the world stage during the Cold War. And today's threats from Russia, China and non-state terrorist organizations differ from the singular threat posed by the former Soviet Union, which was met by a long-term deterrence strategy. The U.S. already has the world's strongest and costliest military.

"Does a larger military deter ISIS? I don't think so," Harrison said, using an acronym for the Islamic State militant group.

Harrison said that Trump's recent embrace of NATO coupled with his spending plans for the Pentagon could mean that Trump, whose Cabinet is stocked with former generals, is shifting toward more engagement in the world.

Obama, who held a more traditional foreign policy view, also requested more money to rebuild the military, though not as much as Trump, and demanded that it be coupled with increases in domestic spending.

Trump's $54 billion request is viewed by many as an opening bid. Analysts expect Congress will indeed increase the Pentagon's budget, though no one knows the final number.

Hawks in the GOP, led by Arizona Sen. John McCain, have said Trump is not spending enough.

"The U.S. Army has spent the last 16 years fighting terrorists and guerrillas," said Loren Thompson, the chief operating officer of the Lexington Institute, who shares McCain's view. "It just doesn't have the items it needs to fight a tank war or an air war against the Russians in Europe. Its tanks need to be upgraded. Its air defenses need to be better. It needs to be able to counter Russian" cyber-attacks.

The extent of the needs would be the subject of fierce debate under any circumstances. Though many Democrats would also like to spend more on the military, they and many Republicans would be unlikely to go along with Trump's demand that it be paid for with sharp cuts to domestic programs that protect the environment, help local communities and serve the poor. Some conservative Republicans may resist attempts to spend more money on any government programs.

Defense Secretary James Mattis is expected to complete a spending plan outlining specific needs over the next few months. He will have plenty of options.

The Pentagon is headlong into the decade-long process of developing a new stealth bomber, dubbed the B-21 Raider, and replacing the Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine. The Air Force late last yearstarted assessments of a new intercontinental ballistic missile.

The cost of the modernization is estimated to approach $1 trillion over the next 30 years, with much of it coming within the next decade.

The Navy completed an assessment late last year that concluded it needed to increase the current fleet size to 355 in order to meet the rising number of mission requirements across the globe. The Navy would have to spend $25 billion a year for 30 years to reach that goal, according to a Congressional Budget Office report released last month.

The Navy currently has 274 ships in its inventory, which includes 11 carriers once the Gerald R. Ford joins the fleet. It last had 350 ships in 1998, when it also had 12 carriers. The decrease is due in part to advancing technologies and capabilities, but also rising costs of maintaining the ships.

Perez Trolls Trump On Russia

By Mark Hensch

The Hill, March 3, 2017

Democratic National Committee Chairman Tom Perez on Friday mocked President Trump's recent controversies involving Russia.

Perez shared a tweet from White House chief of staff Reince Priebus, who was promoting Trump's weekly address.

"Translated from the original Russian and everything," Perez added.

Translated from the original Russian and everything. https://t.co/dPey5ZAaOG— Tom Perez (@TomPerez) March 3, 2017

During his address, which was recorded aboard the U.S.S. Gerald Ford, Trump vowed he would lift budget caps on military spending. He argued his budget "will give America's armed forces the resources they need to achieve full and total military preparedness."

The video of Trump donning a U.S.S. Gerald Ford hat and a Navy jacket appeared one day after he spoke aboard the new aircraft carrier, reiterating his pledge to increase America's defense budget by $54 billion.

Trump's military-focused appearance comes amid swirling controversy over Attorney General Jeff Sessions's ties to Russia.

Sessions on Thursday recused himself from any federal investigation into Russia's interference in the 2016 presidential race. His decision came amid bipartisan pressure over his contact with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak during the presidential campaign last year.

Reports emerged Wednesday that Sessions and Kislyak spoke twice in 2016 — once in July around the time of the Republican National Convention and another time via phone in September — conversations that Sessions did not disclose during his confirmation hearings in January.

Sessions, then an Alabama senator, testified under oath that he "did not have communications with the Russians." He argued Thursday that he didn't intentionally mislead his fellow senators, since he said he spoke to Kislyak as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, not as a Trump surrogate, though Democrats pounced on the revelations, calling for his resignation.

The controversy over Sessions this week came after reports last month that top aides and allies to Trump's campaign were in recurring contact with senior Russian intelligence officials.

5 Charged In Scheme To Overcharge US For Humvee Parts

By Joe Mandak

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

PITTSBURGH (AP) – Two brothers who own a military-supply business, a civilian Army employee and two others have been charged with a $6 million scheme to overcharge the Defense Department for Humvee window frames, federal prosecutors said Friday.

Thomas Buckner, 65, of Gibsonia, and John Buckner, 67, of Lyndora, scammed the U.S. Army Tank-Automotive and Armaments Command out of the money with the help of a shell company and kickbacks, according to court documents filed Friday by federal prosecutors in Pittsburgh.

The Army agency, also known as TACOM, is based in Warren, Michigan. A civilian employee there, Anthony Shaw, is accused of accepting more than $1 million for helping the scheme, prosecutors said.

The defense attorneys for the five defendants didn't immediately return calls and emails seeking comment.

Prosecutors filed the charges in criminal informations, documents that are typically used when defendants have agreed to plead guilty to the charges.

The scheme worked this way, according to prosecutors' court filing:

The Buckners co-own Ibis Tek, a Butler company that had contracts to supply aluminum window frames for Humvees.

The brothers created another company called Alloy America that was supposed to be manufacturing the window frames that Ibis Tek would then sell to TACOM. But instead of doing that, the Buckners had Alloy American purchase the frames for $20 each from a Chinese firm, then created records to make it appear Ibis Tek paid Alloy America $70 for each frame.

Ibis Tek then passed on the $70-per-frame cost to TACOM. The Buckner brothers also sold scrap aluminum relating to the manufacture of the frames but kept the money. The Buckners and Ibis Tek were supposed to credit the scrap revenue to TACOM as a way of helping the government agency control costs.

The payments to Shaw were funneled through a Michigan motorcycle business, D & B Cycle Parts and Accessories. That business is owned by David Buckner, of Warren, Michigan, who is not related to the Pennsylvania brothers.

Ibis Tek's chief financial officer, Harry Kramer, 55, of Wexford, helped the Buckner brothers carry out the scheme and then filed false tax returns that understated Ibis Tek's income in 2009 and 2010.

It was not immediately clear if Ibis Tek remains a government contractor. Nobody returned a call to the company Friday.

If convicted of major fraud against the government and income tax evasion, the Buckner brothers each face up to 20 years in prison and fines up to $1.5 million, while Kramer faces up to 16 years in prison and a $1.5 million fine.

Shaw, 55, of Rochester Hills, Michigan, faces up to 19 years in prison and a $1.25 million fine if convicted of receiving a gratuity as a public official, tax evasion and making false statements.

David Buckner faces up to three years in prison and a $250,000 fine if convicted of corrupt or forcible interference with the Internal Revenue Service investigation for allegedly funneling the payments from the brothers to Shaw, his friend.

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Trump's Defense Buildup

Wall Street Journal, March 3, 2017

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Officials: Tillerson Eyes State Dept Budget Cut Over 3 Years

By Matthew Lee, AP Diplomatic Writer

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

WASHINGTON (AP) – Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has agreed in principle to a White House proposal to slash foreign aid and diplomatic spending by 37 percent, but wants to spread it out over three years rather than in one dramatic cut.

Officials familiar with Tillerson's response to the proposal from the Office of Management and Budget said Friday that Tillerson suggested the reductions to the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development begin with a 20-percent cut in the next budget year. Tillerson sent his response to OMB director Mick Mulvaney on Thursday, according to the officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the budget publicly until it is presented to Congress.

Tillerson likened his approach to that of landing an airplane safely: a gradual descent rather than a precipitous one-time drop that would have far-reaching consequences for policy as well as political and human costs, according to the officials. The officials cautioned that Tillerson's response was the beginning of a discussion with the OMB that could lead to a different figure, which would then go to Congress, where more changes could emerge. Some lawmakers, including senior Republicans, as well as current and former military commanders strongly object to steep cuts in foreign aid and diplomacy.

The combined State Department/USAID budget this year was $50.1 billion, a little more than 1 percent of the total federal budget. The White House is looking for massive savings across the non-defense portions of the total budget to offset a proposed $54 billion increase in military spending.

One official said Tillerson agreed with "an aggressive scrubbing of the budget" with an eye toward prioritizing programs based on specific achievable results rather than theoretical goals. The official said Tillerson, the former CEO of Exxon Mobil, was seeking a budget that outlines "a clearer vision of what of the end product is."

Even carried out over three years, a 37-percent cut to the foreign affairs budget would be felt deeply across the State Department and foreign development assistance, which is largely overseen by USAID. It would likely require the wholesale elimination of some programs as well as staffing cuts.

One suggestion, which was not contained in Tillerson's response but is under consideration, would be to bring USAID, now a semi-autonomous operation, entirely under the auspices of the State Department to eliminate redundancies between the two agencies. This would reduce USAID's front

and administrative offices by combining those functions with those of regional assistant secretaries of state.

The OMB proposal, which was sent Monday to the State Department, raised concerns about America's ability to promote its values around the world and avert wars, rather than fight them. Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., were among several Republicans voicing objections.

David Petraeus, who headed the CIA after commanding U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, and a group of more than 100 national security experts echoed that sentiment, calling diplomacy "critical to keeping America safe."

However, Trump advisers and top aides to Tillerson believe there is fat to cut from the State Department and USAID budgets and the OMB outline suggested ways to achieve savings.

The officials wouldn't discuss those details but some noted a 37-percent cut would eliminate programs and likely cause staff reductions, including security contractors at diplomatic missions, a matter that became only more sensitive after the deadly 2012 attack on a U.S. compound in Benghazi, Libya. They said some overseas facilities and offices might have to be closed.

The State Department had already been bracing for budget cuts under the Trump administration. Many of its bureaus went through exercises to see how they could function with 20 percent or 25 percent less money, officials said. Buyouts could help reduce the size of the diplomatic corps along with early retirements and layoffs, they found. Eliminating special envoy and special representative positions could also yield savings. Only 11 of 32 special envoy or representative posts that existed during the Obama administration are currently filled.

USAID's operations may be even more precarious. Numerous agency initiatives, including those dealing with global health, climate change and women's issues, could be cut if the proposal is adopted, the officials said. They said they expected most USAID funding to be cut.

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UN Humanitarian Chief: US 'Very Ready To Donate' Under Trump

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

BANDARERO, Kenya (AP) – The U.N. humanitarian chief says he is confident the United States will step up and donate to aid appeals amid concerns of possible foreign aid cuts under President Donald Trump.

The U.S., the world's top humanitarian donor, pledged nothing last week at an Oslo conference on Nigeria's humanitarian crisis. And U.S. officials have said the Trump administration is proposing a 37 percent cut to diplomacy and foreign aid budgets to help pay for increased military spending.

Stephen O'Brien said Friday the U.S. has indicated it is "very ready to donate," and he suggested it may not have pledged yet because of its budgetary cycle.

The Trump administration's budget plan is expected this month.

O'Brien is in Kenya to see the effects of severe drought after a national disaster was declared.

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Trump's Cuts Would Cripple The Country's Diplomats When We Need Them Most

By Nicholas Burns

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

Nicholas Burns, a professor at Harvard University, was U.S. undersecretary of state for political affairs from 2005 to 2008. He advised Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign.

No federal Cabinet agency risks a greater financial hit in President Trump's first budget than the oldest, the most senior and one of the most vital to our national security: the State Department.

The White House this week signaled that it will seek a massive $20 billion reduction in funding for State and the Agency for International Development, out of a budget of over $50 billion — the highest proportional cuts proposed for any department. If enacted, this proposal would cripple the department's career foreign and civil service when we need them most.

It would also endanger Trump's ability to confront the most complex national security agenda in decades. Europe is weaker than at any time since the end of the Cold War, facing Brexit, the refugee crisis, the rise of right-wing populism and an aggressive Vladimir Putin on its borders. The Middle East is in turmoil, with failed states in Libya, Yemen, Iraq and Syria, a still-menacing Islamic State and dangerous Sunni-Shiite tensions dividing the region. China is pushing out in the South and East China Seas. Allies and foes alike are questioning U.S. leadership of the liberal world order. Trump

will surely need our diplomats, as well as our warriors, to meet these challenges.

The State Department, however, has had a rough transition from President Barack Obama to Trump. Several of its most senior diplomats have been involuntarily retired by the Trump team. No deputy secretary or undersecretaries of state have been appointed. The seventh floor in Foggy Bottom, where the secretary of state and senior leaders sit, normally pulsates with energy. On a visit this week, it felt like a ghost ship. State needs greater attention, understanding and love from the White House.

State is much smaller than the Pentagon or Homeland Security. It has few large installations and no costly weapons systems that can be delayed or canceled in service to austerity. Its main resource is its personnel. Reductions of the magnitude under consideration would confront Secretary of State Rex Tillerson with an impossible task — cutting deep into the muscle and bone of a foreign and civil service already stretched to the limits. This is simply not a wise path.

The irony is that the State Department is central to what Trump wishes to accomplish overseas. U.S. diplomats interview all would-be immigrants, those applying for U.S. tourist visas and refugees. They assist the thousands of U.S. citizens who find themselves in medical, financial and legal trouble abroad. They deploy as political advisers with our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and run our highly successful HIV, polio and malaria programs in sub-Saharan Africa. They work directly with U.S. companies to find foreign markets. They negotiate our energy, trade and climate agreements and manage our leadership of the NATO and East Asian Alliance systems so fundamental to the United States' global power.

As a former Foreign Service officer myself, I admit to a clear bias. But, the men and women of the State Department are a national treasure of language, political and economic experts on places critical to our future — China, Russia, the Islamic world, Latin America and beyond. They comprise the finest diplomatic corps in the world.

Trump's budget thus illuminates a larger dilemma in the early, chaotic weeks of his presidency. He rarely mentions diplomacy and has given no indication that he values it. If he continues in this vein, it will be a significant barrier to his success. He is right to argue for greater military spending. But he should shift from an exclusive focus on the military and homeland security and join diplomacy to them in pursuit of the stronger America he seeks. President John F. Kennedy recognized this vital link a half-century ago when he said: "Diplomacy and defense are not substitutes for one another. Either alone would fail."

Trump selected an impressive person in Tillerson, whose life and business experience should translate effectively to diplomacy. The Foreign Service is filled with experienced and capable officers. Given the chance to lead, they will serve Trump with skill, trust and patriotism. But the administration must give them the resources to succeed and plug them into the White House itself. Fortunately, experienced leaders in Congress have already joined the battle on State's side.

After more than a decade of war, Trump needs to let the State Department rank and file know he believes in them. And he needs to turn to diplomacy to cope with the extraordinary global challenges ahead of him. It could well spell the difference between the success or failure of his presidency.

New Interior Secretary 'Not Happy' About Budget Proposal

By Devin Henry

The Hill, March 3, 2017

The new head of the Interior Department told employees Friday he is "not happy" about the agency's upcoming budget request crafted by the White House.

"I looked at the budget," Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke said in his first address to employees. "I'm not happy. We're going to fight about it, and I think I'm going to win at the end of the day."

Zinke told reporters after the speech that he has concerns with certain spending accounts in the White House's proposed budget, noting programs like wildfire management and a property tax reimbursement program for counties with large areas of federal land.

"A lot of it is: new administration comes in, my ability to articulate with the expert staff on why we need to prioritize infrastructure, on why some of the line items of the budget need to be adjusted," he said.

"It's negotiated, so it's not hard. … The president, the White House, is working with us on it, but I've been in the office for one day and I have my priorities and I think my priories are going to match the president's."

Details of President Trump's budget request have rankled some of his incoming Cabinet officials.

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt, a likely ally of Trump's when it comes to undoing Obama-era climate programs, said this week he is concerned about funding proposals for state grant programs, among other items.

The Senate confirmed Zinke to his position at Interior on Wednesday. By Thursday, he had signed two secretary-level orders, including one repealing a ban on lead in ammunition and fishing tackle. He also made headlines by riding a horse to work on his first day.

After his speech at Interior's headquarters on Friday, Zinke said he would reconsider late actions from the Obama Interior Department, including orders blocking drilling in the Arctic Ocean.

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"I'm going to review everything that didn't go through Congress, and then the last-minute policies, the last-minute decisions, tell me that it was not vetted or didn't have a consensus," he said. "I'm going to review everything within my power."

Zinke didn't rule out continuing a review of Interior's coal leasing program, initiated by the Obama administration in 2016. The program, and the royalty rates for mining on federal land, haven't been updated for decades.

Addressing a large group of employees at Interior's headquarters, Zinke said he hopes to reorganize the department's structure. He told reporters that could mean increasing and empowering "frontline" employment like managers and rangers in Interior properties around the country.

"The last time the Department of Interior has been reorganized was about 100 years ago," he told employees.

"The reorganization is now the goal, and look at, just as Teddy Roosevelt did, look out 100 years from now and make sure we're organized to address the challenges of the future."

White House Proposes Steep Budget Cut To Leading Climate Science Agency

By Steven Mufson, Jason Samenow And Brady Dennis
Washington Post, March 3, 2017

The Trump administration is seeking to slash the budget of one of the government's premier climate science agencies by 17 percent, delivering steep cuts to research funding and satellite programs, according to a four-page budget memo obtained by The Washington Post.

The proposed cuts to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration would also eliminate funding for a variety of smaller programs, including external research, coastal management, estuary reserves and "coastal resilience," which seeks to bolster the ability of coastal areas to withstand major storms and rising seas.

NOAA is part of the Commerce Department, which would be hit by an overall 18 percent budget reduction from its current funding level.

The Office of Management and Budget also asked the Commerce Department to provide information about how much it would cost to lay off employees, while saying those employees who do remain with the department should get a 1.9 percent pay increase in January 2018. It requested estimates for terminating leases and government "property disposal."

The OMB outline for the Commerce Department for fiscal 2018 proposed sharp reductions in specific areas within NOAA such as spending on education, grants and research. NOAA's Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research would lose $126 million, or 26 percent, of the funds it has under the current budget. Its satellite data division would lose $513 million, or 22 percent, of its current funding under the proposal.

The National Marine Fisheries Service and National Weather Service would be fortunate by comparison, facing only 5 percent cuts.

The figures are part of the OMB's "passback" document, a key part of the annual budget process in which the White House instructs agencies to draw up detailed budgets for submission to Congress. The numbers often change during the course of negotiations between the agency and the White House and between lawmakers and the administration later on. The 2018 fiscal year starts Oct. 1.

A spokesperson for the Commerce Department declined to comment. A White House official who spoke on the condition of anonymity said that the process was "evolving" and cautioned against specific numbers. The official would not respond to questions about the four-page passback document.

The biggest single cut proposed by the passback document comes from NOAA's satellite division, known as the National Environmental Satellite, Data and Information Service, which includes a key repository of climate and environmental information, the National Centers for Environmental Information. Researchers there were behind a study suggesting that there has been no recent slowdown in the rate of climate change — research that drew the ire of Republicans in Congress.

Another proposed cut would eliminate a $73 million program called Sea Grant, which supports coastal research conducted through 33 university programs across the country. That includes institutions in many swing states that went for President Trump, such as the University of Wisconsin at Madison, the University of Michigan, Ohio State University, the University of Florida and North Carolina State University.

The OMB passback said that the administration wanted to "prioritize rebuilding the military" and would seek "savings and efficiencies to keep the Nation on a responsible fiscal path." It said that its proposed funding cut for the Commerce Department "highlights the tradeoffs and choices inherent in pursuing these goals."

The OMB also said that the White House would come up with ideas to modernize "outdated infrastructure," but it said that agencies should not expect increases in their fiscal 2018 discretionary-spending "toplines" as a result.

On Wednesday, after his confirmation, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said that drawing up a budget would be a top priority. "One of the first steps," he said, "will be securing adequate appropriations from the Congress. In a period of budgetary constraint, that will be a major challenge."

The OMB passback document said that the Commerce Department, like other agencies, should "buy and manage like a business." It urged the department to explore greater

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use of privately owned commercial satellites and commercial cloud services while submitting to the OMB a plan to retire or replace "at least one high priority legacy IT system" beginning in 2018.

Many scientists warned that the deep cuts at NOAA could hurt safety as well as academic programs.

Conrad Lautenbacher, a retired vice admiral who was the NOAA administrator under President George W. Bush, said, "I think the cuts are ill timed given the needs of society, economy and the military." He added, "It will be very hard for NOAA to manage and maintain the kind of services the country requires" with the proposed cuts.

Jane Lubchenco, NOAA administrator under President Barack Obama, said that 90 percent of the information for weather forecasts comes from satellites. "Cutting NOAA's satellite budget will compromise NOAA's mission of keeping Americans safe from extreme weather and providing forecasts that allow businesses and citizens to make smart plans," she said.

Rick Spinrad, a former chief scientist for NOAA, said: "NOAA's research and operations, including satellite data management, support critical safety needs. A reduced investment now would virtually guarantee jeopardizing the safety of the American public."

He said that weather warnings for tornadoes and hurricanes could be compromised and that navigational capacity used to help guide commercial ships and other mariners would suffer, leaving them without the "improved forecasts they need to safely maneuver coastal waters." It could become harder to warn of tsunamis and forecast weather that will cause power outages.

David Titley, a professor of meteorology at Pennsylvania State University who served as NOAA's chief operating officer in the Obama administration, said that "oddly" the White House budget office, despite the president's commitment to building infrastructure, would cut NOAA's budget for ships and satellites. "These cuts will impact good private-sector jobs in the U.S.," Titley said. "The loss of capability will make America weaker both in space and on the sea — a strange place to be for an administration that campaigned to 'make America great again.' "

Chris Mooney and Abby Phillip contributed to this report.

Environmental Programs Face Deep Cuts Under Budget Proposal

By John Flesher, Matthew Daly And Catherine Lucey

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

WASHINGTON (AP) – The Trump administration would slash programs aimed at slowing climate change and improving water safety and air quality, while eliminating thousands of jobs, according to a draft of the Environmental Protection Agency budget proposal obtained by The Associated Press.

Under the tentative plan from the Office of Management and Budget, the agency's funding would be reduced by roughly 25 percent and about 3,000 jobs would be cut, about 19 percent of the agency's staff.

President Donald Trump has said he plans to pay for billions of dollars more for the military by cutting spending on domestic agencies and departments. Trump plans to submit his budget to Congress the week of March 13.

A spokesperson for the EPA declined to comment. The agency had the opportunity to respond to the initial proposal, and any final plan would be subject to congressional approval, which likely is months away at the earliest.

The White House also declined to comment.

The EPA is now under the leadership of Scott Pruitt, a former state attorney general for Oklahoma, who has questioned the scientific consensus that human activities are contributing to global warming and joined lawsuits against the agency's emission curbs.

Proposed cuts include reducing the climate protection budget by nearly 70 percent to $29 million, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative by 97 percent to $10 million and environmental justice programs by 79 percent to $1.5 million.

Also targeted for steep spending rollbacks are the agency's monitoring and enforcement of compliance with environmental laws, as well as regional projects intended to benefit degraded areas such as the Chesapeake Bay, Puget Sound and the Gulf of Mexico. A program dealing with San Francisco Bay that received $4.8 million last year would be eliminated, as would initiatives for reducing diesel emissions and beach water quality testing.

Former EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy called the proposed budget "a fantasy" that ignores the EPA's mission to protect public health.

"It shows the Trump administration doesn't hold the same American values for clean air, clean water and healthy land as the vast majority of its citizens," McCarthy said in a statement. "Our health comes before the special interests of multibillion-dollar industries."

Environmental groups said the proposed cuts would threaten thousands of jobs and could harm health and safety protections for millions of Americans. The proposals would especially affect programs to address climate change and enforce clean air and water laws, they said.

"Instead of working to protect American families, President Trump's plans put the interest of big-money special interests over people," said Nat Mund, legislative director of the Southern Environmental Law Center, a Virginia-based advocacy group.

But the Heartland Institute, a conservative think tank, said the proposal didn't go far enough.

"If Donald Trump and Scott Pruitt are serious about ending the national scandal that is EPA, they will accept nothing less than a 20 percent cut this year and make this year's cut the first step in a five-year plan to replace the organization," said Joseph Bast, the group's president.

The proposal would all but eliminate funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, a wide-ranging cleanup of the world's largest surface freshwater system that has deep bipartisan support across the eight states adjacent to the lakes, from Minnesota to New York. The program has received around $300 million annually from the federal budget during former President Barack Obama's tenure – more than $2.2 billion in all. Under the Trump proposal, it would get only $10 million.

Sen. Debbie Stabenow, a Michigan Democrat, described the proposed cut as "outrageous."

"This initiative has been critical to cleaning up our Great Lakes and waterways, restoring fish and wildlife habitats, and fighting invasive species, like Asian carp," Stabenow said. "I call on President Trump to reverse course on these harmful decisions."

Congress in December authorized continuing the program through 2021 at $300 million a year, although separate annual votes are needed to provide the money. In a Feb. 8 letter to Trump, the 20-member Congressional Great Lakes Task Force called for maintaining current funding. Among House members signing it were Republicans Bill Huizenga of Michigan, Sean Duffy of Wisconsin and David Joyce of Ohio.

EPA staffers are upset about the budget. A Thursday all-hands meeting, organized to calm staff about the budget cuts, only created more anxiety.

Flesher reported from Traverse City, Michigan. Lisa Lerer in Washington contributed to this report.

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Immigration Judges Exempt From Trump's Federal Hiring Freeze

By Mica Rosenberg And Kristina Cooke

Reuters, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Mattis Asks Former U.S. Ambassador Anne Patterson To Take A Top Job At The Pentagon

By Karen Deyoung

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has asked recently retired diplomat Anne W. Patterson to become his undersecretary of defense for policy, the third-ranking policy job at the department.

Patterson and Mattis, the former chief of U.S. Central Command, worked together frequently when she served as ambassador to Pakistan and to Egypt. She retired in January after more than three years as assistant secretary for Near East affairs, the State Department's top official on the Middle East, at the highest rank of career diplomat.

The appointment, which requires Senate confirmation, is still awaiting White House approval, according to people familiar with the discussions. It was first reported by Politico.

Mattis, who reportedly insisted he be able to choose his own team when he accepted President Trump's offer to head the department, has skirmished repeatedly with the White House over appointments. His initial choice for deputy secretary, Michèle Flournoy, withdrew from consideration following meetings with White House officials. Flournoy served as the department's policy undersecretary during the Obama administration.

The current Defense Department deputy, Robert Work, is a holdover from Barack Obama's presidency who has agreed to remain in office for several months until his successor is in place. The deputy slot also remains vacant at the State Department, where Secretary Rex Tillerson's reported choice, Elliott Abrams, was reportedly rejected by the White House.

Hundreds of senior policy positions remain vacant and without nominees across the executive branch six weeks into the Trump administration. Although Patterson retired before the inauguration, top diplomats in most of the State Department's regional and policy offices were effectively fired once Trump took office. Next week, the last remaining regional assistant secretaries — for Africa and the Far East — are stepping down.

In his budget outline this week, Trump proposed sharp cuts at the State Department to help fund a $54 billion increase in defense spending.

Patterson, who has never worked at the Defense Department, also served as top U.S. diplomat in Colombia and El Salvador.

In Egypt, she was ambassador from 2011 to 2013, a period marked by upheaval resulting in the military overthrow of elected president Mohamed Morsi and estrangement between the Obama administration and the Egyptian army general who took power, Abdel Fatah al-Sissi.

Trump has largely dismissed Obama-era criticisms of Sissi's repression of human and civil rights and praised Egypt as an effective counterterrorism ally.

Wilbur Ross: Border-adjustment Tax A 'powerful Mechanism' To Balance Budget

Stops short of endorsing Hill GOP proposal

By David Sherfinski

Washington Times, March 3, 2017

U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross on Friday said a border-adjustment tax like the one being pushed by congressional Republicans would be a "powerful mechanism" to balance the budget but did not endorse the specific proposal they're lobbying for on Capitol Hill.

"We have to balance" the budget, he said on CNBC. "Border adjustable is certainly one powerful mechanism for doing that, but let's see what else evolves."

There has been an intense internal GOP debate over imposing the 20 percent tax on imports in order to raise about $1 trillion over the course of a decade.

"I think there will be something found to fill the trillion-dollar hole. Whether it will be exactly border adjustable — and if it is border adjustable whether it'll be in exactly the same form and size — is an open question," Mr. Ross said.

"I haven't said that we're in accord with anything like a 20 percent border adjustable tax," he said.

Proponents have said the move would end a "made in America" tax and encourage U.S. production, since foreign-made products sold in the U.S. face a lower tax burden than American-made ones.

But opponents say the tax will ultimately get passed on to consumers and wouldn't necessarily strengthen the dollar enough to make the math work.

"The theory of border adjustable is the currencies would re-adjust and therefore it would be a zero-sum game," Mr. Ross said. "I'm a little skeptical about the theory that there's somehow a totally free lunch and that the markets will exactly absorb everything."

"But we do need to do something to fill that hole," he said.

With buy-in from Democrats unlikely, the GOP is counting on that $1 trillion revenue stream to pay for lowering other taxes, and so a failure to come to an agreement could sink the prospect of broader tax reform this year.

Mr. Ross said that given the partisan atmosphere in Washington, Republicans might have to use the reconciliation process to get tax reform through.

Reconciliation is a legislative tool that allows budget-related legislation to be cleared with 51 votes in the U.S. Senate, rather than the 60 votes it typically takes to break a filibuster.

Republicans currently hold an effective 52-48 majority in the Senate, and at least several GOP senators have already expressed skepticism about the tax.

Mr. Ross also talked about a plan to be "aggressive" on trade.

"Because we know that the deals that have been made historically have resulted in the great loss of manufacturing jobs, great amount of closures of manufacturing businesses," he said. "We don't want that to continue."

He said a first emphasis will be on "facilitating U.S. exports to other countries — getting rid of both tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade," Mr. Ross said.

"The other side of that will be preventing illegally subsidized goods from coming in and really enforcing it," he said.

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Mexican Peso Surges After Comments From Wilbur Ross

By Sarah McGregor

Bloomberg News, March 3, 2017

U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross triggered a rally in the peso when he said the currency could recover "quite a lot" if his country can reach a sensible agreement with Mexico on the North American Free Trade Agreement.

"The peso has fallen a lot, mainly because of the fear of what will happen with Nafta," Ross, 79, said in an interview on CNBC on Friday. "I believe that if we and the Mexicans make a very sensible trade agreement, the Mexican peso will recover quite a lot."

The peso surged 1.9 percent on Friday morning New York time in the wake of Ross's comments, paring its depreciation over the past year. The 8.7 percent decline in the currency's value since March 2016 has boosted the cost of imports into Mexico, while making its exports more competitive.

The Commerce secretary said the first trade priority of Donald Trump's administration is to re-negotiate Nafta, which Trump described on the campaign trail as the "worst" trade deal of all time. The administration has indicated that the target of the reforms will be Mexico while only tweaking ties with Canada, though specifics are still scant.

The American priorities in negotiating Nafta will be tightening "quite a bit" the rules of origin, dictating how many goods can come from nations outside Nafta while still receiving the agreement's tariff perks, said Ross. Talks to modernize the trade deal will also address mechanisms to ensure the peso-dollar exchange rate becomes more stable and explore ways for Mexican workers to get better wages and living standards, he said.'Facilitating' Exports

"The first emphasis will be on facilitating U.S. exports to other countries, getting rid of both tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade," said Ross. "The other side of that will be preventing illegally subsidized goods from coming in, and really enforcing it."

The U.S. isn't talking with China yet about trade, said Ross. "The first on our agenda is Nafta because we think it makes sense to solidify your own neighborhood first," he said.

China's trade surplus has largely driven the country's "economic miracle," while Germany has been an "enormous beneficiary" of the weak euro, though it can't be considered manipulation because of the currency union, he said.

You can assume whatever "overt actions" the U.S. takes on trade will receive a "counter-punch" from the affected party, said Ross.

The World Trade Organization "in some ways" is necessary as an arbitrator of global trade, though it needs some fine-tuning, particularly on dispute settlement, said Ross. This week, the U.S. Trade Representative, in the annual 2017 Trade Policy Agenda, said Trump's administration intends to defend its national sovereignty over trade policy and that the U.S. isn't bound by decisions at the WTO.

Ross said no decision has been reached on a border-adjustment tax, a proposal that would place a levy on U.S. companies' imports while excluding their exports from taxable income. "We need to do something to balance the budget," he said. "Given the very partisan atmosphere in Washington now, reconciliation is probably the only way we can get things through, things like tax relief," he said, referring to a special fast-track budget vehicle.

"Border adjustable is certainly one powerful mechanism for doing that," Ross said. "But let's see what else evolves. Let's see what the alternatives are."

White House Fight On Import Tax Puts Congress In Limbo

By Damian Paletta

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

A major split among senior White House officials over whether to effectively create a new tax on imported goods has stalled the broader tax overhaul effort on Capitol Hill, with Republicans looking to the Trump administration for leadership on an issue that has drawn fierce resistance, according to several officials with direct knowledge of the matter.

White House chief strategist Stephen K. Bannon, senior adviser Stephen Miller and National Trade Council director Peter Navarro have all voiced internal support for the creation of a border adjustment tax or something like it. They believe it would incentivize companies to keep jobs in the United States and raise the cost of items that are imported.

But Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and National Economic Council Director Gary Cohn have raised concerns, the officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity because the deliberations are private. They are backed by a number of Senate Republicans who have told the White House they would block any bill that creates a new tax on imports.

The divide has the potential to scuttle one of President Trump's top domestic agenda items — tax reform, which he views as key to boosting the economy and prompting employers to create more jobs in the United States.

Rifts between the White House and Republicans have slowed numerous campaign pledges, including the repeal and replacement of the Affordable Care Act and the creation of a wall on the Mexico border. The tax fight is yet another example of the challenge Trump is facing turning political promises into legislative successes.

Trump has tried to jawbone chief executives into keeping their operations in the United States, including by threatening penalties to those who leave. A border adjustment tax could create such a deterrent.

It would ensure that companies selling imported goods in the United States, such a cars, electronics and clothing, are taxed at a higher rate than they are now. For example, it would prevent them from deducting the cost of their imported goods from taxable profits.

Supporters believe this would lure more companies to stay in the United States because it would become too costly to move overseas and ship things back, but opponents argue that it would drive up the cost of every imported good, hurting the economy.

House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) and House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady (R-Tex.) have also pushed for this type of tax as part of a broader overhaul of the tax code, which House Republicans have said would lower the corporate tax rate from 35 percent to 20 percent. The way House Republicans have sought to reclaim some of the lost revenue from a rate cut that sharp is by creating this border adjustment tax, which they believe could raise as much as $1 trillion over 10 years.

The border adjustment tax would likely change consumer behavior, but it is difficult to determine how profound the impact would be.

This divide has led the White House to twice propose, and then pull back, the border adjustment tax as a policy. Lawmakers are pressing the White House to take a firm position so they can move forward on overhauling the tax code.

"The president and his team are currently deliberating over what his preferred tax reform plan will look like," a White House spokeswoman said. "The most important thing to the president is that our tax system is fair and in the best interests of the American people."

A Treasury spokesman said: "While the administration is still in the deliberative stages of the overall tax-reform discussion, there are both interesting aspects and concerns surrounding the border adjustment tax proposal."

The spokesman added, "Secretary Mnuchin is confident there will be a unified plan between the administration and House and Senate leadership."

House and Senate Republicans have been clamoring for the White House to help them find a unified plan, to no avail. If the White House balks at the creation of a border adjustment tax, GOP lawmakers could pursue the creation of tariffs as a way to accomplish Trump's goal of raising the economic costs of importing into the United States.

Many lawmakers believed Trump had resolved differences among his advisers when he said, in early February, that "we're going to announce something I would say over the next two or three weeks that will be phenomenal in terms of tax."

But White House officials have decided to slow that process, one person familiar with the process said, speaking on condition of anonymity. There could be tax overhaul details in the 2018 budget proposal the Trump administration is expected to release in a few weeks, but it might avoid specifics, the person said. They are now hoping to mobilize support for their tax overhaul plan in several months, hopeful that it can be completed by August.

Sen. Ron Wyden, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, said Friday in a speech that there has been so much disagreement among Republicans on the issue that "it usually promises the movie is not going to end well."

House Republicans want to cut the corporate tax rate from 35 percent to 20 percent, which they say will help the economy grow and lead to more hiring. But such a cut would lead to a large drop in tax revenue, according to budget experts, widening the deficit and further increasing the federal debt.

House Republicans who support the border adjustment tax believe it would offset much of the lost revenue.

The Trump administration has said there needs to be some penalty to discourage companies from manufacturing products in other countries and then importing them into the country. They want to give incentives to companies that manufacture goods in the United States.

But opponents of the border adjustment tax, including many retailers, have argued to the White House and lawmakers that imposing an across-the-board tax on goods would drive up their prices and raise prices for American consumers, hurting the economy. Target and Walmart, for example, are part of a group trying to block the border adjustment tax.

Steve Moore, who was an economic adviser to Trump during the campaign, said he supports the creation of a border adjustment tax but acknowledged that the messaging battle has made it difficult to mobilize support.

"My feeling is the border adjustment tax would be good economics but is lousy politics," he said.

Senate Dem: Border-adjustment Proposal Would Be A 'Gut Punch' For Working Families

By Sylvan Lane

The Hill, March 3, 2017

The top Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee ripped a key tax reform priority for House Republicans on Friday, calling it a "gut punch to working families already struggling to get by."

Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) said House Republicans' border-adjustment proposal, which would tax imports but exempt exports, would dramatically raise the price of basic goods.

Border adjustment is a key part of the House GOP tax reform plan championed by House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) and Ways and Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady (R-Texas). Supporters say border adjustment can bolster American manufacturing while raising more than $1 trillion in revenue over 10 years.

But critics say the tax will force retailers to hike prices on essential goods, forcing middle- and working-class Americans to stretch out already thin budgets.

Wyden, a leading Senate progressive, called border adjustment "a grocery tax" levied to pay for "a trillion-dollar corporate tax cut."

"Republicans want to raise prices on food, clothing and other simple products Americans buy every day," Wyden said at the Urban Institute's Tax Policy Center. "That's not a plan to fix what's broken in our economy today."

Brady told The Hill that "no one can defend our current tax code that favors foreign products over products made in Texas, Oregon and other states across our country."

"The American people also cannot afford a tax code that chases their jobs overseas," said Brady in a statement. "We are open to working with members on both sides of the aisle on pro-growth tax reform that will create jobs and finally level the playing field for American workers."

While popular with House Republicans, border adjustment has divided Senate Republicans and the corporate world, pitting exporters against importers. President Trump initially panned border adjustment, but later said he'd be open to a "border tax," without specifying what that meant.

Wyden also rebuked Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin's promise to complete comprehensive tax reform by August, an ambitious pledge given Republicans' daunting legislative agenda. He said the tax overhaul would only pass by August if Republicans "bulldoze their way to a tax cut for the wealthy that lasts some amount of time."

"You cannot pass a lasting, bipartisan, comprehensive tax reform bill by August that sets our economy on a new course," said Wyden. "That'll only come through bipartisanship."

Updated at 3:07 p.m.

Will The Grand Republican Tax Plan Work?

By Editorial Board

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

ONCE AGAIN, tax reform is on the agenda in Washington, and this time there's a genuinely radical idea under discussion: the House Republicans' plan for a new "border adjustment" corporate income tax. It would, they say, transform the sluggish United States into a much better place to invest and create jobs. Would it work? The answer depends, in part, on who's right — economists or lobbyists.

The House GOP plan would sweep aside the corporate tax system with its 35 percent maximum marginal rate, the highest such rate in the industrialized world but one riddled with loopholes. In its place, there would be a new 20 percent flat rate levied only on income earned in the United States. To offset the huge loss of revenue, the plan eliminates the deductibility of imports as a business expense, as well as a few other large deductions. The net effect is a big reduction in the after-tax cost of doing business within the United States — paid for by foreign exporters.

Economists (at least those who like the idea) believe it creates fresh incentives to locate economic activity — and register ownership of intellectual property — within the United States, to export rather than import, and to finance businesses with equity rather than debt. Other things being equal, that could improve tax efficiency and domestic job creation. To those who fear a sudden hit to import-dependent businesses and their customers, advocates respond that the tax plan would trigger an offsetting rise in the dollar exchange rate. Yes, there would be short-term winners (agricultural exporters) and losers (big retailers of Chinese goods). But America as a whole would be better off, long term.

This is where the lobbyists for interests as varied as Koch Industries (major importers of crude oil), Walmart and the people who sell imported fish to grocery stores weigh in, with a hundred real-world arguments about how the economists' happy scenario might go awry. What if our erstwhile trading partners do not go along with our attempt to get rich at the expense of their export industries, and sue at the World Trade Organization instead? Or what if they respond with retaliatory currency manipulation? Nice as it might be for the United States, a much stronger dollar would hammer developing countries such as Brazil, Chile and Indonesia, which owe hundreds of billions of dollars in U.S.-denominated debt. Yes, yes, we know: America First. But is it really in our national interest to put major emerging markets at sudden risk of bankruptcy?

In truth, neither economists, with their sweeping intellectual constructs, nor lobbyists, with their inherently self-interested takes on the issues, enjoy a reputation for infallible forecasting. Still, this may be one case in which the latter's stake in the actual operation of the U.S. economy creates an advantage, in terms of practical realism. As it happens, there are already proposals to cut corporate rates and close loopholes less radically but also, quite possibly, less disruptively than the border-adjustment proposal. House Republicans and the Obama administration floated them in 2014 and 2012, respectively. Those plans deserve a second look before lawmakers take this leap.

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The Post's View: Trump's proposed tax 'reform' is hardly reform at all

For 3 Indiana Brothers, 'America First' Cuts 2 Ways

By Trip Gabriel

New York Times, March 3, 2017

EVANSVILLE, Ind. — When Alcoa abruptly announced last year that its aluminum smelter near here would close, some longtime workers talked of burning the place down.

The company told Wall Street its unionized plant on the Ohio River, which employed 600, could no longer compete with less expensive aluminum from China.

One of those laid off, Brandon Marshall, 39, said he had never given much thought to where the products he bought were made. But now he goes out of his way to support American jobs.

"If there's a tape measure built in the U.S. for $15 and one from China for $6, I try to catch myself now and pay for the American one," he said. "It hit home."

The blow to America's industrial work force from globalization, and the sometimes xenophobia-tinged anger over trade deals that fueled a political upheaval last year, are not hard to find in southwest Indiana.

Leaving the Evansville airport, one can see a billboard to the right pointedly promising the "best real Mexican food this side of the Wall." The hulking, empty building to the left is a former Whirlpool plant that, six years before Alcoa folded, was moved to Mexico.

As President Trump spoke approvingly of new taxes on imports in his address to Congress on Tuesday night, and as his new commerce secretary, Wilbur L. Ross, seeks to

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renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement, cities like Evansville are where the costs and benefits of those policies will be measured in paychecks, pink slips and household budgets.

It was one of the myriad Midwestern places that turned to Mr. Trump in the election after he promised a river of good jobs from more protectionist trade deals, deporting undocumented workers and cracking down on Chinese imports. Yet the economic picture here and throughout the industrial heartland is not one-dimensional.

Thousands of jobs have been lost to globalization in Evansville, the third-largest city in Indiana. But thousands more have been created by exporting products made in the region, like AstraZeneca's diabetes drugs, Lexan plastics — used in smartphones — and Toyota S.U.V.s.

Should Mr. Trump impose steep import taxes on goods from Mexico and China, economists say it could drive other nations to raise taxes on American exports — at a cost in American jobs.

"If he wants to start a trade war, there'll be a negative impact on Indiana," said Sudesh Mujumdar, chair of the economics and marketing department at the University of Southern Indiana. "You might think you're protecting a class of workers, and end up having an impact on others."

The complex filaments connecting average Americans to the forces of global trade can be seen in the lives of Mr. Marshall, laid off by Alcoa, and his two older brothers: Troy, 46, who works on the factory floor at Toyota in Princeton, Ind., where a map with pins in 20 countries depicts the reach of its exports; and Jeremy, 41, an elementary schoolteacher, who is struggling to maintain his perch in the middle class.

Import tariffs that might have protected Brandon's smelting job could theoretically threaten Troy's job at Toyota, as well as raise the living costs for Jeremy, who finds that even as a member of the white-collar middle class, he needs a second job to make ends meet.

"I'm a teacher, I've got a budget," Jeremy said over dinner at Applebee's with Brandon, while Troy was working the night shift.

Would Jeremy buy a $15 American tape measure — and would he see it as protecting his brothers' jobs?

"I look for the best deal," he said bluntly. "You go to Harbor Freight down the road and all their stuff comes from China. I will go there. They give you tape measures for free."

The Marshall brothers grew up 40 minutes north of Evansville in Oakland City, Ind., the sons of Les Marshall, a coal miner who worked underground for 27 years. He died of a massive heart attack at 62, barely a year after retirement.

"He was pretty adamant about getting your education so you don't have to work these hard, dirty hours," Jeremy said.

Brandon got a bachelor's degree, but hated his time working as a draftsman in an office. "I gained weight; I'd go home and be mentally stressed," he said. "Physical labor, you may hurt muscle-wise, but you're moving around. It's better for you."

When he lost his $85,000 job at the Alcoa smelter, the best work he could find paid $45,000, soldering components at a company that makes broadcast antennas. His wife, Crystal, had to go back to work filing and painting nails to help with the family's expenses.

He has taken the lifestyle adjustment in stride. "I'm not the person to sit back and have a pity party," he said.

There are also some benefits. He has more time for his two young children: "They were big mommy's kids before," he said. "Now that Dad is home more, they'll jump on the couch next to me to watch Dad's TV shows. If I did work 60 hours a week on night shift at Toyota, those moments wouldn't be there."

All three brothers voted for Mr. Trump, embracing his promises to build a wall with Mexico, run the nation as a business and rebuild American manufacturing.

The new administration's trade policies are a work in progress. The president has said he is considering paying for a wall on the southern border by slapping a 20 percent tariff on Mexican imports. But he has yet to endorse the blanket import tax, known as "border adjustment," that House Republicans favor as part of broad tax overhaul.

And of course Mr. Trump has waged a Twitter war to shame American companies into moving manufacturing home. In January, he threatened Toyota that if it did not close a plant it is building in Mexico, it would have to pay "a big border tax."

In response, Toyota's North American president, Jim Lentz, said a border tax would raise the price of every American-made vehicle — ultimately resulting in job losses in the United States — because nearly all of those domestically produced vehicles include parts made abroad.

The Toyota Highlander S.U.V., one of three models made at the Indiana factory, is a good example. Forty percent of its parts are made outside the country, according to government data. When Toyota hired 300 new workers at the plant in 2014, it said the expansion was partly because of foreign sales.

But a combination of higher costs to produce Highlanders and retaliatory tariffs that would slow exports could mean fewer workers in the Indiana factory. Troy Marshall, who is a 15-year Toyota employee, recognizes the risks of a protectionist trade policy.

"Working in manufacturing in the U.S., I understand if people aren't buying your product then I don't have a job," he said.

Nonetheless, he still favors taxing foreign-made goods. He said higher consumer prices would be acceptable if they protected America's industrial workers. Americans, he said, would learn to adjust their lifestyles.

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"In my mind, it's sort of a reset of the American economy," Mr. Marshall said. "It's the right thing to do. I don't think we need all the stuff we buy."

His attitude seems shaped by his confidence that his own job at Toyota, one of the region's best-paying blue-collar employers, would be secure even if the plant were to shed jobs. After several promotions, he is a supervisor of quality assurance, enjoying good wages, a 401(k) plan and other benefits.

Unemployment is low in southwestern Indiana, like the Midwest in general, after a seven-year jobs expansion under President Barack Obama. Still, there are thousands fewer high-paying manufacturing jobs than a decade ago. Factory wages have fallen.

As a result, Evansville's middle class is hollowing out. Household income is flat, compared with strong growth nationally. The dream of a comfortable life with less than a bachelor's degree — a credential held by only one in four Indiana adults — is receding.

"That way of life has really evaporated," said Jonathan Weinzapfel, who was Evansville's mayor the year Whirlpool left, idling 1,100 workers.

And blue-collar workers are not the only members of the middle class being squeezed. Jeremy Marshall, who has a master's degree and earns about $50,000 a year teaching at an elementary school, has long worked a second job — first mowing lawns, now as a home inspector.

After Indiana's Republican legislature rolled back teachers' bargaining rights and tied their pay to student test scores a few years ago, Jeremy said, he missed out on what otherwise would have been an automatic $12,000 raise. He said he voted for Mr. Trump, but in statewide elections he supports Democrats, who are union-friendly.

His workday is longer and more stressful than it used to be, he said. "I go home, and I'm mentally zapped. Everything's data-driven. It's always analyzing data, creating assessments to create more data."

At Applebee's, as the conversation circled around the complexities of trade, Brandon Marshall, once in favor of strict protectionism, seemed to shift his view. He considered how tariffs might strain Jeremy's budget and threaten Troy's job.

"It's hard to say what would happen if we shut the borders off and had to start surviving on our own," Brandon said.

"The thing about Trump, he never had to worry about a $15 tape measure compared to a $6 one," he added. "He's got good intentions. He wants to keep the jobs here. But if all those parts coming for Toyota cost more money to get here, is it going to turn jobs away in the long run?"

NAFTA Needs To Be Modernized: Mexican Economy Minister

By Joe White

Reuters, March 3, 2017

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Mexico's Economy Secretary Opposes Trump Push For Tariffs

By Mike Householder

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

DETROIT (AP) – Mexico's economy secretary says he is looking forward to starting negotiations with the U.S. to update the North American Free Trade Agreement.

But in a speech Friday in Detroit, Economy Secretary Ildefonso Guajardo also said his country does not want to see the imposition of tariffs, which President Donald Trump has said should be placed on goods produced in Mexico.

Trump has threatened to establish a border tax on vehicles imported from Mexico as a way to discourage automakers and others from moving jobs there.

During a question-and-answer session with business leaders at the Detroit Economic Club, Guajardo said tariffs represent "a move to the past" and adding them "makes no sense."

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'Frankenstein' U.S. Border Tax Will Hurt Consumers, Canada Warns

By Josh Wingrove, Andrew Mayeda

Bloomberg Politics, March 3, 2017

'Frankenstein' U.S. Border Tax Will Hurt Consumers, Canada Warns

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Josh Wingrove,Andrew Mayeda

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A proposal by House Republicans to raise taxes on imports would be bad for American consumers and is opposed by Canada, the country's envoy to Washington said.

While the details of House Speaker Paul Ryan's tax plan – and the White House's interest in it – remain unclear, Canada is against any measures to simply tax imports across the board, Ambassador David MacNaughton said in an interview on Friday.

"Any border tariff that punishes imports is a bad idea from our point of view, and we will aggressively present alternatives as opposed to just opposing it," MacNaughton

said from his office in Washington. "The reality is that the notion of simply taxing imports is not a good idea – not a good idea for the Americans, and not a good idea for Canada."

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Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau raised his concerns in a meeting with Ryan last month, but MacNaughton said the appetite for any border tax among the House, Senate and with President Donald Trump remains unclear. Canada is the top buyer of U.S. exports and the second-largest trading partner overall, leaving it highly vulnerable to both a border tax and any pending changes to the North American Free Trade Agreement. For trade moving in the other direction, Canada is the biggest foreign supplier of oil to the U.S.'Frankenstein VAT'

Ryan's "border-adjustment" plan would tax goods based on where they're consumed, rather than produced. The proposal would replace the U.S. corporate income tax of 35 percent and charge U.S. companies' domestic sales and imports at a new 20 percent rate. Exports would be exempted.

The plan would raise more than $1 trillion over 10 years – revenue that Ryan and other supporters say is needed to pay for other tax cuts for U.S. businesses and individuals.

Trump has also floated the idea of a "border tax" as a way to encourage companies to keep production in the U.S. But it's unclear if he means an increase in tariffs, or a tax levied on companies that relocate production off shore.

Ryan has not yet detailed whether there would be exemptions to certain countries or products, MacNaughton said. Canada believes Ryan favors border import tariffs as a revenue tool – to finance other tax cuts – instead of an across-the-board consumption tax, known also as a value-added tax, or VAT.

"They don't want to put in a straight consumption tax because they know they can't get it through" and approved by lawmakers, McNaughton said. "This would all be solved by simply saying, we're going to have a consumption tax. So they've got a half-consumption-tax" that is being proposed by Ryan. MacNaughton called it "kind of a Frankenstein VAT."

The proposal may raise prices of gas and consumer goods, with the Canadian envoy saying those considering the policy should think about people shopping at Wal-Mart. American retailers have spearheaded a publicity campaign against the plan. Canada would propose alternatives to the U.S. and work to find alternatives to a flat border tax, he said.Nafta Impact

"Until we see what they've got in mind, I think it'd be speculation as to what. I'm just saying if there's something that simply taxes imports into the United States, that would be something we would clearly oppose," said MacNaughton.

Canada expects Trump to give notice sooner rather than later on Nafta renegotiations, MacNaughton said. Trump's press for Nafta changes is mostly aimed at Mexico, although the Canadians are optimistic the North American Free Trade Agreement can be preserved, he said.

"I think we will find a way to get to a good place on strengthening the economic relationship between Canada and the United States," along with trade, he said. "But there's going to be bumps along the way. It's not going to be smooth sailing."

EU Awaits 'Solid Outline' Of Trump Trade Goals With Europe

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

BRUSSELS (AP) – The European Union is still waiting for a "solid outline" from the U.S. on its goals for trade with the 28-nation bloc, a senior EU official said after the bloc's trade ministers met Friday, insisting that trans-Atlantic relations must be in both sides' interest.

There is widespread concern in Europe about the possibility of a more protectionist U.S. approach under President Donald Trump and about the administration's wider view of the EU.

One of Trump's first actions as president was to withdraw the U.S. from a trans-Pacific trade agreement. Talks on the long-planned Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership between the U.S. and EU are currently frozen, and that accord also faces opposition in parts of Europe.

"We await to hear a solid outline of the United States' plans and goals for trade with the EU," Economy Minister Christian Cardona of Malta, which holds the 28-nation EU's presidency, said after hosting fellow trade ministers in Valletta.

"There are risks for the multilateral trading system if the United States had to consider any extreme action, as in pulling out of WTO," or World Trade Organization, said Cardona, who spoke in English. He added that trans-Atlantic relations "should be in both the EU and the U.S. mutual interest."

EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom said there is still "a lot of uncertainties" about the new administration's direction.

She added that she was "very encouraged" to hear strong support for the EU's own trade agenda, which includes trade negotiations with Japan, Mexico and South America's Mercosur bloc.

They offer "a possibility for the European Union to show that we can do good trade deals, sustainable trade deals that are win-win," Malmstrom said.

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U.S. Finds China Steel Plate Imports Injure U.S. Industry

By Eric Walsh

Reuters, March 3, 2017

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China Shifts Stance, Letting Dying Firms Go Bankrupt

National People's Congress meets with new will to end practice of bailing out failing companies

By Chuin-Wei Yap

Wall Street Journal, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

In A China Trade War, U.S. Meat Looks Like Dog Food

By Deena Shanker

Bloomberg News, March 3, 2017

As Donald Trump's campaign threats of a trade war with China loom over American industry, executives are left to determine how they might navigate that conflict. For the U.S. meat industry, the answer might be snoring softly next to the food bowl in your kitchen.

The U.S. sells billions of dollars of beef, pork, and chicken to countries all over the world, a mutually beneficial relationship that allows companies to find buyers for cuts of meat Americans shun, like offal and pig ears. If those markets should close, said Tyson Foods Inc. Chief Executive Officer Tom Hayes, such technically edible animal parts will likely land in your dog's breakfast.

"If in fact there was a situation where there wasn't a primary use market, we'd use it for rendering," Hayes said in an interview this week with Bloomberg. "We do a lot of rendering of our products for pet food." Rendering is the process of grinding up giant heaps of raw food and animal material, heating them, and separating them into components like liquid and solid fats for use in soap, explosives—and Fido's kibble. It's a safe and effective way to recycle the approximately 59 billion pounds of what would otherwise be waste produced by the meat, supermarket, and restaurant industries.

"We supply people that make pet food and we have our own pet foods business," Hayes said. Of a trade war with China, he said: "Our view is that things won't get there, but if they do, we have options." He noted that the 82-year-old company has "been through tough times before."

But while American dogs and cats (if they knew what was going on) might be salivating over the possible influx of pig ears, there's a catch for the meat industry: profit. A product sold as the main ingredient in Chinese pig ear salad fetches a higher price than what's destined for a shelf at Petco. "Rendering is often below 10 cents a pound," says Brett Stuart, chief executive of market analysis firm Global Agri-Trends. "A year ago, it was $2.80 a pound for pig ears in China."

And it's not just the ears. The U.S. pork industry exported a total of $791.4 million in "pork variety" in 2016, with Hong Kong purchasing $256.7 million and China buying $245.2 million, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. China is the world's largest pork importer, and, according to an October 2016 USDA report, "remains an important market for U.S. exporters." Between January and August 2015, the country accounted for 6 percent of total U.S. pork shipments. For the same period in 2016, it was 12 percent.

While trade restrictions would mean major changes across the agriculture industry, meat producers will face a particular challenge thanks to international variations in consumption preferences. "Grain is grain is grain," Stuart said. "But once you start talking about meat, there are so many different products and different values in all markets."

For now, though, Hayes is reluctant to alter a company strategy that brought in $4.1 billion in sales from 115 countries last year. "It's really important to the countries that we export to that they continue to have availability of our products," he said.

Stuart echoed the sentiment: "One would hope that we don't hurt through trade restrictions a thriving, globally competitive manufacturing business at home."

Sessions Talks Voting Rights, Police Misconduct With NAACP

By Max Greenwood

The Hill, March 3, 2017

Attorney General Jeff Sessions sat down with NAACP leaders at the Justice Department on Friday to discuss voter protections and police misconduct, the group said in a statement.

The meeting with NAACP president and CEO Cornell William Brooks and the group's general counsel Brad Berry was scheduled by Sessions last month on his first day as the country's top law enforcement official.

"I told him history is upon us. It will be a civil rights crisis in the next few weeks or months. We've been here before

and there's unrest," Brooks told NBC News in an interview after the meeting.

The civil rights group positioned itself as a fierce opponent of Sessions during his nomination to become the nation's top law enforcement officer, staging a protest in the former GOP senator's Alabama office in January.

Civil rights activists and some Democrats feared that Sessions, a staunch conservative, would use his position as attorney general to reverse course on the Obama administration's push for voting rights protections.

The Trump administration indicated on Monday that it would drop the federal government's opposition to a controversial Texas voter ID law, that many advocacy groups and lawmakers accused of being discriminatory against minorities.

The NAACP said in its statement after the meeting with Sessions that Brooks told the attorney general that he was disappointed by that decision.

"The vote represents that sacred sacrament of democracy and any attempts to manipulate, suppress or otherwise reduce the integrity of the vote – whether abroad or domestically – represents a direct threat to our democracy," Brooks said in a statement after the meeting.

The group said Brooks also expressed concerns over Sessions' announcement on Tuesday that the Justice Department would "pull back" from suing local police departments that have a record of civil rights abuses.

N.A.A.C.P. President Has Candid Talk With Sessions About Civil Rights

By Christopher Mele

New York Times, March 3, 2017

On Jan. 3, Cornell William Brooks, the president of the N.A.A.C.P., was arrested after an hourslong sit-in at the Mobile, Ala., office of Senator Jeff Sessions, demanding that he withdraw his name from consideration to become attorney general in the Trump administration.

On Friday — exactly two months later — he met privately with Mr. Sessions, who was confirmed last month as the attorney general, at his Washington office for what Mr. Brooks described as a polite but candid conversation about voter suppression, police misconduct and civil rights.

Mr. Brooks said in an interview on Friday night that the meeting, arranged at the invitation of Mr. Sessions, did not change any minds but was a chance to impress on the attorney general how the civil rights group sees its mission. "The weight of history is on his shoulders and the Department of Justice," he said.

He said the overall tenor of the 35-minute private meeting was wait and see, adding, "It's also wait and work. It's both."

Mr. Brooks called the N.A.A.C.P. a partner in the fight for civil rights, but added that the Department of Justice needs to be active, as well. Referring to his organization, Mr. Brooks said, "The mistake would be to consider it the first responder instead of the primary care physician."

The Justice Department confirmed that Mr. Sessions met with Mr. Brooks on Friday but would not give any details.

Mr. Brooks expressed particular concern with the new administration's stand regarding a contentious voter identification law in Texas.

The Republican-led Legislature in the state passed one of the toughest voter ID laws in the country in 2011, requiring voters to show a driver's license, passport or other government-issued photo ID before casting a ballot. The Obama administration's Justice Department sued the state to block the law in 2013 and scored a major victory last year after a federal appeals court ruled that the law needed to be softened because it discriminated against minority voters who lacked the required IDs.

But the Justice Department under President Trump and Mr. Sessions told a judge on Monday that it was withdrawing its claim that Texas enacted the law with a discriminatory intent.

Mr. Brooks said he understood that a new administration could usher a change in policies or opinions, but he called the Trump administration's position "a change in fact."

"That's very troubling for us," Mr. Brooks said. "The people expect the Department of Justice to be on the side of the victims of voter suppression, not substantiating the mythology of voter fraud."

Mr. Sessions indicated this week that the federal government would back away from monitoring troubled police departments, which was a central strategy of the Obama administration to bring accountability to law enforcement agencies at a time of rising racial tensions.

Mr. Brooks said he told Mr. Sessions that some police agencies have officers who "feel they are not accountable" and that consent decrees are a way to get departments to do the right thing.

He noted that Mr. Sessions was from Alabama and, he believed, would have an appreciation for the civil rights struggles that played out in the South.

"Our people bled, sweated and died," Mr. Brooks said. "I think he understands the depth of our concerns. I think he understands the depth of our resolve."

How Gorsuch The Clerk Met Kennedy The Justice: A Tale Of Luck

By Adam Liptak And Nicholas Fandos

New York Times, March 3, 2017

WASHINGTON — It was a stroke of luck that landed Neil M. Gorsuch in the chambers of Justice Anthony M. Kennedy on a summer day nearly a quarter-century ago.

Then 25 and fresh off a year at Oxford, Judge Gorsuch had been hired by Justice Byron R. White for the most coveted apprenticeship in American law — a Supreme Court clerkship. But because Justice White had retired, Judge Gorsuch was also assigned, by happenstance, to Justice Kennedy, the longtime center of power at the Supreme Court.

His year as a clerk, beginning in the summer of 1993, gave Judge Gorsuch a privileged look at the court's workings and a crash course in its unrelenting caseload and internal politics. As Judge Brett M. Kavanaugh of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, and a fellow law clerk to Justice Kennedy that year, observed, "We were in the middle of everything."

It also produced something else: a lasting bond between an ambitious, already staunchly conservative clerk and a justice, three decades his senior, whose style and temperament appear to have rubbed off on him, even if the justice's more moderate views did not.

Almost 25 years later, as Judge Gorsuch, now 49, awaits his own confirmation to the court, his relationship with Justice Kennedy has become a matter of intense interest, as both Democrats and Republicans look for evidence of how it might shape the court's near future.

The White House hopes the bond matters to Justice Kennedy, too. In choosing Judge Gorsuch to replace Justice Antonin Scalia and floating the names of other former Kennedy clerks for the next Supreme Court vacancy, administration officials have sought to reassure Justice Kennedy, 80, that the court will be in good hands should he choose to retire and open a seat for another, younger justice.

While Judge Gorsuch learned a great deal in Justice Kennedy's chambers, the lessons seem to have been more personal than political.

"There were a lot of ideologues both left and right, and he wasn't one of them," said Stephen F. Smith, who served as a law clerk to Justice Clarence Thomas that same term and is now a law professor at the University of Notre Dame. "He was careful, quiet."

Judge Gorsuch's critics say his own mild and courteous manner masks a fierce commitment to a right-wing agenda, and political scientists say he is likely to vote with the court's most conservative justices rather than with Justice Kennedy. In closely divided cases, Justice Kennedy often holds the crucial vote, and he generally leans right. He wrote the majority opinion, for instance, in the Citizens United campaign finance case.

But in recent years, Justice Kennedy has joined the court's four-member liberal wing in major cases establishing a right to same-sex marriage, protecting abortion rights and upholding affirmative action.

"It's safe to say that little of Justice Kennedy rubbed off on him when it comes to certain critical areas of the law," Nan Aron, the president of the Alliance for Justice, a liberal group, said of Judge Gorsuch.

On the federal appeals court in Denver for more than a decade, Judge Gorsuch has cited Justice Kennedy by name from time to time. But he has been much more likely to cite Justice Scalia.

To his fellow law clerks, Judge Gorsuch was neither particularly dogmatic nor calculating. Instead, interviews with more than a dozen clerks and a review of papers housed at the Library of Congress paint a picture of someone with a dogged work ethic, an understated but appealing presence and a sense of fairness tempered by cautious judgment.

Justice Kennedy taught his law clerks by example, Judge Kavanaugh said, instilling in them an independent frame of mind and a "gentlemanly tone."

"A lot of us have tried to emulate that in our careers," Judge Kavanaugh said. "Neil has exemplified that better than anybody."

Judge Gorsuch arrived at the court in the summer of 1993 in the aftermath of a bruising term. The fallout of a divisive abortion case, Planned Parenthood v. Casey, had left the justices eager to produce a quieter one in its wake.

Judge Gorsuch's term at the court was not without notable decisions; the court issued significant rulings on discrimination in jury selection, protests outside abortion clinics, voting rights, religious schools and copyright infringement for song parodies. But none qualified as a blockbuster.

Though he worked in the chambers of Justice Kennedy as a "step clerk," as well as for Justice White (retired justices remain entitled to a clerk), idiosyncratic hiring practices may have helped him.

"Look, there are a hundred people a year that could do the job adequately," Justice White once said, according his biographer, Dennis J. Hutchinson. "I might as well have someone who's interesting, and that doesn't mean the ones the fancy law professors recommend."

That Justice White was partial to candidates from his home state, Colorado, and who had spent time at Oxford, where the justice had been a Rhodes Scholar, most likely helped Judge Gorsuch's application stand out, said two law clerks who worked for Justice White, David D. Meyer and John C. P. Goldberg.

"Justice White probably would have seen echoes of himself in a way in Neil," said Mr. Meyer, who is now the dean of Tulane University Law School.

Todd C. Peppers, who teaches at Roanoke College and has written extensively about Supreme Court law clerks, said Judge Gorsuch's academic credentials might have glittered just a little less brightly than those of some of the clerks hired by active justices.

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"He did not serve as an editor on The Harvard Law Review," Professor Peppers said. "Moreover, he 'only' graduated cum laude — which suggests that his grades might not have been as high as the typical Supreme Court law clerk."

Even clerks who worked for a single justice remembered a merciless workload. "It was the definition of a 24/7 job," said Landis C. Best, who worked for Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist and is now a partner at Cahill Gordon & Reindel in New York.

Judge Gorsuch cut an impressive, if not particularly ideological, figure. Surrounded by a class of elite law graduates that included a handful of future federal judges and acclaimed academics, his "quiet intelligence" was notable, said Louis Feldman, who clerked for Justice Scalia that year.

"Some people just have that aura around them," Mr. Feldman said. "You know this is someone who has the ability and the personality to go far in the legal world."

Mostly, Judge Gorsuch was affable and unflappable. He was not, by several former colleagues' accounts, a member of the regular pickup basketball games in the Supreme Court's fifth-floor gym, known around the building as the "highest court in the land." But he was a regular at clerk social events and occasional lunches hosted by each of the justices.

"He seemed very calm, measured, thoughtful, polite, gentlemanly — very much like what one notices about him now," said Eugene Volokh, who clerked for Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and now teaches at the University of California, Los Angeles.

"He fit into the place very easily," said Judge Kavanaugh, who is himself on the White House's short list for the next Supreme Court vacancy. "He's just an easy guy to get along with. He doesn't have sharp elbows."

Justice Kennedy, like most justices then and now, assigned his law clerks to a shared labor pool that streamlined the work of reviewing incoming cases to make recommendations about which petitions should be granted.

Judge Gorsuch's memorandums, which are available in the papers of Justice Harry A. Blackmun, were thorough and fair-minded.

In one, there are glimmers of the light touch that would characterize his later writing. In summarizing a petition from a civil servant fired by the Army, Judge Gorsuch seemed to suppress a smile. "Petitioner discusses at length General William Tecumseh Sherman's decision to march through Georgia," he wrote, "and then turns to describe in detail the technology of modern attack helicopters."

Though his conservative political views were already well developed when he arrived at the court, Judge Gorsuch gave little overt indication of his positions as he researched and discussed cases in Justice Kennedy's chambers.

"We had a wide range of views, but we all really got along well," Judge Kavanaugh said of the five clerks that term, who were chosen in part to represent different points on the political spectrum.

When in 2006 Judge Gorsuch joined the United States Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit, Justice Kennedy administered the oath to him in Denver and delivered a reminder of that principle.

Explaining its significance to the judge's two young daughters, Justice Kennedy said, "He's doing it to remind all of us that the first obligation any American has is to defend and protect the Constitution of the United States."

Law Restricting Protests During Supreme Court Proceedings Is Upheld

By Robert Barnes

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

The words "harangue" and "oratory" may not roll off the tongue the way they used to, a federal appeals court acknowledged Friday. But their meanings are clear enough to let anyone know that they cannot interrupt the proceedings of the Supreme Court by making speeches.

A panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit said that a lower court was wrong to find the words so vague as to cast doubt on a law that outlaws protests at the Supreme Court.

At issue is a decades-old statute that states, "It is unlawful to discharge a firearm, firework or explosive, set fire to a combustible, make a harangue or oration, or utter loud, threatening, or abusive language in the Supreme Court building or grounds."

Judge Janice Rogers Brown, writing for a unanimous three-judge panel, said that in context the wording was clear enough that a group of protesters at an April 1, 2015, oral argument should have known that they could not stand up and start making statements.

"It is true, as their dictionary definitions show, that 'harangue' and 'oration' can cover different facets of public speeches — 'orations' can include formal speeches, while 'harangues' can include angry or vehement speeches," Brown wrote. "But we are interpreting a statute, not restating a dictionary."

At the 2015 incident, a string of protesters rose to speak after the courtroom full of spectators had been admonished to remain silent as the oral argument proceeded.

"We rise to demand democracy," said Belinda Rodriguez. After she was removed, Matthew Kresling stood up: "Money is not speech. One person, one vote!" Another demanded the court overturn its campaign finance decision in Citizens United v. FEC.

They were charged with violating the statute against protests in the Supreme Court building, but last year U.S.

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District Judge Christopher R. Cooper agreed with them that the language about harangues and oratory was unconstitutionally vague.

"Congress has not defined these words, nor has their meaning 'evolved over the years from repeated adjudications,' " Cooper wrote. (But he rejected the same vagueness challenge to the word "loud.")

In Friday's ruling, however, Brown said the meaning was clear: "By employing two words that cover public speeches of myriad forms within a statute focused on the Supreme Court's building and grounds, Congress's use of 'harangue' and 'oration' indicates these terms are meant to cover any form of public speeches that tend to disrupt the Supreme Court's operations."

She was joined in the decision by U.S. circuit judges Sri Srinivasan and Stephen F. Williams.

Those latter two judges were also on a unanimous D.C. Circuit panel last year that upheld a related law that restricted protesters from the Supreme Court's plaza. Demonstrations are allowed on the sidewalks that surround the court.

State Lawmakers Respond To Engaged Citizens — By Trying To Shut Them Up

By Editorial Board

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

THE PAST few months have seen an explosion of political protests — and an explosion of state legislative efforts to stop them. Though many of these dissent-stifling bills may not make it past committee, much less survive the scrutiny of a court, the onslaught of legislation is a troubling sign that state lawmakers intend to respond to an engaged civil society by trying to shut it up.

Republican lawmakers in at least 18 states since the election have introduced or considered legislation imposing higher penalties and harsher rules on protesters. The bills range from the restrictive, such as ramping up punishment for highway obstruction, to the ridiculous: an Arizona bill that proposed expanding the state's racketeering laws to include rioting, or an attempt in Tennessee to protect drivers who run over protesters in public rights-of-way from civil liability, as long as they do so accidentally.

Lawmakers present their bills as attempts to curb destructive and dangerous acts, and they are right that window-smashing and limousine-burning bring meager value to the marketplace of ideas. They're also right that the sustained obstruction of major highways can prevent the passage of emergency vehicles, at potentially great cost. But localities already have laws prohibiting that sort of behavior on their books. Scaling up the consequences beyond what's reasonable seems designed to scare people away from peaceful protest.

It also fits a pattern of officials delegitimizing dissent: Lawmakers in some states have complained lately that protesters are "paid" to speak up, parroting claims made by Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah) after hecklers got heated at his town hall and by White House press secretary Sean Spicer after thousands flocked to airports to oppose the president's travel ban.

Many of the bills working their way through the states are of doubtful constitutionality, which may explain why some legislatures have killed them before they could be challenged. Yet that does not mean there is no cause for concern. Legislators should be listening to constituents who care enough about a cause to take to the streets — for their own sake and the sake of the communities they represent. If mass movements of the past are anything to go on, boxing out the opposition will only make polarization greater and some protesters louder. The bills could also have a chilling effect on others who want to make their voices heard.

A Minnesota lawmaker backing one of the recently introduced bills noted that "there is a point where one person's rights end and another's begins." Locating that point requires more care than these legislators have shown.

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The Mob At Middlebury

A mob tries to silence Charles Murray and sends a prof to the ER.

Wall Street Journal, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

UN Official: Tribe Not Properly Heard In Pipeline Dispute

By Blake Nicholson

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) – A United Nations official who visited North Dakota in the wake of months of protests over the disputed Dakota Access oil pipeline believes the concerns and rights of Native Americans haven't been adequately addressed.

North Dakota Republican Gov. Doug Burgum says the state has respected legal protests and that it focused on maintaining peace and protecting the environment. He said his administration is working to restore relations with the Standing Rock Sioux.

The tribe has led the fight against the $3.8 billion pipeline to move North Dakota oil to Illinois. The opposition

became centered at a camp that protesters established on federal land between the tribe's reservation and the pipeline route. It grew at times to thousands of people, many of whom clashed with police, leading to about 750 arrests since August.

"My impression is that there was unnecessary use of force," Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, U.N. special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, told The Associated Press after visiting the area this week at the invitation of Standing Rock Sioux Chairman Dave Archambault. "Anybody has a right to protest and express their opposition to what is happening."

Police say some protesters were violent and took part in riots, and that some targeted police both professionally and personally.

"Through this ordeal, our law enforcement personnel have shown great professionalism and restraint as they faced taunts, verbal abuse, threats, thrown objects and even gunshots," Burgum told the AP.

The main protest camp recently was shut down in advance of spring flooding, and a federal contractor is cleaning up hundreds of tons of trash and debris before it can pollute nearby rivers. Tauli-Corpuz acknowledged the large amount of garbage but said she considered it "not such a huge issue."

"Efforts to clean it up could be undertaken even if people were there," she said.

Burgum said the pollution concern and the cleanup that could cost federal taxpayers up to $1.2 million isn't overblown.

"More than 600 truckloads of garbage, building materials and toxic debris were hauled away from the protest camps. ... Most North Dakotans would agree that's 'a huge issue,' " he said.

Tauli-Corpuz also said she believes the tribe wasn't properly consulted about the pipeline route – an argument the tribe has made in a federal lawsuit against the Army Corps of Engineers and Texas-based pipeline developer Energy Transfer Partners. The defendants dispute that claim.

The tribe says the pipeline threatens its water, sacred sites and religion. The tribe successfully pushed for a full environmental study of the pipeline's crossing under Lake Oahe, a Missouri River reservoir from which it draws water. However, the Corps rescinded the study at the urging of President Donald Trump.

Tauli-Corpuz said she's likely to recommend a full environmental study in a September report to the U.N. Human Rights Council. The report will have no force of law.

She isn't the first U.N. official to weigh in on the pipeline. The U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues last August issued a statement calling for more tribal input. Forum member Edward John visited the camp in late October, saying he found a "war zone" atmosphere, and the group issued a statement in November calling on the U.S. government to protect sacred sites and uphold human rights.

Follow Blake Nicholson on Twitter at: http://twitter.com/NicholsonBlake

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U.N. Human Rights Official Criticizes Federal Relationship With Indian Tribes

By Joe Heim

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

A United Nations human rights official criticized the U.S. government's handling of the Dakota Access pipeline project in a special report on Friday, saying it disregard treaties and ignored the interests of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.

Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, a U.N. special rapporteur examining issues related to Native American tribes in the United States, said in an interview that she was struck by the ineffective communication between tribes and federal and local governments across the country, particularly when it came to development and energy projects on or adjacent to Indian reservations. In her report, she said the federal government has shown a "lack of good faith involvement" of Native tribes in reviewing such projects.

While she acknowledged that there has been progress in the relationship between the federal government and tribal governments, Tauli-Corpuz said there has been widespread failure to adequately communicate and consult with indigenous peoples on issues "affecting their land, territory and resources."

Tauli-Corpuz concluded her 10-day mission to the United States on Friday in Washington where she delivered a preliminary report on her visit to State Department officials. The trip took her to meetings with tribes, politicians and government officials in New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado. She also traveled to North Dakota, where she visited the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, site of a year-long protest by Indians and environmentalists against the Dakota Access pipeline project.

The Standing Rock Sioux tribe has opposed the pipeline because it crosses the Missouri River a mile north of their reservation and, they say, poses a threat to their drinking water. The tribe has argued that it was not adequately consulted about the pipeline route — which it says crosses sacred burial grounds — and not given a chance to participate meaningfully in discussions about the project with

the Army Corps of Engineers and other federal government representatives.

In an interview, Tauli-Corpuz said she was invited to the Standing Rock Sioux reservation by its chairman, David Archambault II, whom she met when he visited the U.N. in Geneva last year to speak about the tribe's plight.

"In a show of disregard for treaties and the federal trust responsibility, the Army Corps approved a draft environmental assessment regarding the pipeline that ignored the interests of the tribe," she wrote in her report. "Maps in the draft environmental assessment omitted the reservation, and the draft made no mention of proximity to the reservation or the fact that the pipeline would cross historic treaty lands of a number of tribal nations. In doing so, the draft environmental assessment treated the tribe's interests as non-existent, demonstrating the flawed current process."

According to Tauli-Corpuz, the experience of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe is shared by many other indigenous communities in the United States. She wrote, "From my conversations with people throughout Indian Country, I have learned that many of the complex issues that Native Americans face in the energy development context today are rooted in a long history of land and resource dispossession."

She urged the government "to undertake meaningful consultations with the indigenous people before any project is brought to their communities."

Tauli-Corpuz will soon return to Geneva and put together a full report that will contain findings, observations and recommendations that she will present at a September session of the U.N.'s Human Rights Council.

"I hope that the United States government will at least look at the report and take into account the recommendations that I have done and see how they can implement them," she said. "And I hope that the indigenous people will also use the recommendations to push the government to implement them."

Oklahoma Native American Tribe Sues Energy Companies For Quake Damage

By Lenzy Krebiel-Burton

Reuters, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Oklahoma Tribe Sues Oil Companies In Tribal Court Over Quake

By Sean Murphy

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) – An Oklahoma-based Native American tribe filed a lawsuit in its own tribal court system Friday accusing several oil companies of triggering the state's largest earthquake that caused extensive damage to some near-century-old tribal buildings.

The Pawnee Nation alleges in the suit that wastewater injected into wells operated by the defendants caused the 5.8-magnitude quake in September and is seeking physical damages to real and personal property, market value losses, as well as punitive damages.

The case will be heard in the tribe's district court with a jury composed of Pawnee Nation members.

"We are a sovereign nation and we have the rule of law here," said Andrew Knife Chief, the Pawnee Nation's executive director. "We're using our tribal laws, our tribal processes to hold these guys accountable."

Attorneys representing the 3,200-member tribe in north-central Oklahoma say the lawsuit is the first earthquake-related litigation filed in a tribal court. If an appeal were filed in a jury decision, it could be heard by a five-member tribal Supreme Court, and that decision would be final.

"Usually tribes have their own appellate process, and then, and this surprises a lot of people, there is no appeal from a tribal supreme court," said Lindsay Robertson, a University of Oklahoma law professor who specializes in Federal Indian Law.

Once a tribal court judgment is finalized, it can be taken to a state district court for enforcement just like any other judgment, Robertson said, but that enforcement action would not subject the judgment to any appeals in state court.

Curt Marshall, one of the attorneys representing the Pawnee Nation, said the lawsuit was filed in tribal court primarily so that the Pawnee Nation could assert its sovereignty.

"The tribe has jurisdiction over civil matters to enforce judgments within its jurisdiction, including judgments over non-Indians," Marshall said.

While experts say major civil judgments against non-Indians in tribal courts are rare, the U.S. Supreme Court last year left in place the authority of Native American courts to judge complaints against people who are not tribal members. In that case, Dollar General Corp. was sued in tribal court for $2.5 million over allegations that the manager of a store on tribal land made sexual advances toward a 13-year-old boy placed in the store by a tribal youth employment program. The case was returned to tribal court for a ruling on the merits.

Scientists have linked the dramatic spike in earthquakes in Oklahoma to the underground disposal of wastewater that is a byproduct of oil and gas drilling. Oklahoma Corporation Commission regulators have directed oil and gas producers to either close injection wells or reduce the volume of fluids they inject.

The quake, located about 9 miles from the center Pawnee, damaged buildings across the north-central

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community of about 2,200 residents. The sandstone facade of some buildings fell, several others were cracked and one man suffered a minor head injury when part of a fireplace fell on him. Oklahoma's governor declared a state of emergency for the entire county.

An attorney for Oklahoma City-based Cummings Oil Company, one of the companies named in the suit, declined to comment until they receive and review the filing. Telephone messages left with an attorney for a second defendant, Tulsa-based Eagle Road Oil, were not immediately returned.

Chad Warmington, the president of the Oklahoma Oil and Gas Association, said that while the tribal jurisdiction is unique, the lawsuit itself is not a surprise.

"The oil and gas industry has been the target of significant litigation over the years, so I wouldn't think it comes as a surprise that there could be potential new litigation," he said.

Among the tribal structures damaged in the September earthquake is the former Pawnee Nation Indian School, a sandstone building on the National Register of Historic Places that now houses the tribe's administrative offices.

"We have extensive cracks throughout all the walls on every single one of these historic buildings, and the cracks run through the entire width of the walls," Knife Chief said. "We had mortar pop. We had roofs sag. We have ceilings that are bowing."

According to the lawsuit, both companies were operating wastewater injection wells on lands within the Pawnee Nation less than 10 miles from the epicenter of the Sept. 3 quake.

From 1980 to 2000, Oklahoma averaged only two earthquakes a year of magnitude 2.7 or higher. That number jumped to about 2,500 in 2014 then to 4,000 in 2015 amid a boom in fracking – the process of injecting a high-pressure mix of water, sand or gravel and chemicals into rock to extract oil and gas. It dropped to 2,500 last year, after Oklahoma restricted volume of wastewater injections, according to a study released this week by the U.S. Geological Survey. The agency reported Wednesday in its annual national earthquake outlook that a large portion of Oklahoma and parts of central California are at the highest risk for a damaging quake this year.

At least four separate class-action lawsuits have been filed by the same group of attorneys against various oil companies in Oklahoma connected to large earthquakes dating back to 2011. Another lawsuit has been filed on behalf of a Prague woman injured when a November 2011 quake toppled a stone chimney in her home.

"We understand the industry is very important to the economy of Oklahoma, and the last thing we want to do is come in and shut the operations down," said Marshall, the tribe's attorney. "But we do want the oil and gas industry to act responsibly environmentally, and we want them to be held accountable for the damage they've created."

Follow Sean Murphy at www.twitter.com/apseanmurphy

This story has been corrected to indicate Andrew Knife Chief is the Pawnee Nation's executive director, not its chief.

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Private Prisons Won Reversal Of U.S. Policy For $350k

By Franco Ordoñez

McClatchy, March 3, 2017

Private prisons won reversal of U.S. policy for $350k

White House

Did companies' donations buy a Trump change in private prison policy?

Franco Ordoñez fordonez@mcclatchydc.com

3/3/2017 7:15:00 PM

What does hundreds of thousands of dollars buy in Washington these days? Potentially a lot of private detention centers by the Trump administration.

That's the accusation two members of Congress have laid at the doorstep of President Donald Trump and two of the nation's biggest private prison companies after newly confirmed Attorney General Jeff Sessions dismissed extensive research into the problems of the private prison industry and – with the swipe of a pen – overturned an Obama administration decision to phase out its use.

"That connection seems suspiciously evil," said Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, D-Mo.

The swift action by Sessions after his confirmation and the rapid blowback from Cleaver and Rep. Luis Gutiérrez, D-Ill., highlight the sensitive concerns about the influence of money in Washington and help explain why government contractors are not allowed to contribute to presidential campaigns.

The White House blasted the Democrats for implying any kind of "pay-to-play" scheme.

"This is just more partisan politics by Democrats who have made clear they intend to ignore the priorities of the American people and launch meritless attacks against this administration at every turn," said White House spokesman Michael Short.

Steve Owen, a spokesman for one of the companies, now known as CoreCivic Co., said the company did not

contribute to any presidential candidate or campaign. He acknowledged that his company had contributed to this year's inaugural events but said it was consistent with past practice. He pointed out that the company doesn't lobby or take positions on proposals or policies that would affect the duration of an individual's detention.

Pablo Paez, vice president of corporate relations for the other company, GEO Group, which is based in Boca Raton, Florida, defended his company's $225,000 donation to a pro-Trump political action committee, saying it was legal because it had been made by a subsidiary, GEO Corrections Holdings Inc., that has no contracts with any governmental agency.

"Our contribution was fully compliant with all applicable federal election laws," Paez said.

That connection seems suspiciously evil.

Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, D-Mo.

Private prisons became an important part of America's corrections system starting in the 1980s, as tough sentencing guidelines were adopted to address the drug wars. The population has since dropped, and private facilities are largely used to detain immigrants.

Forty-six of the roughly 180 facilities in which Immigration and Customs Enforcement holds detainees are privately run, according to ICE. About 60 percent of its 400,000 annual detainees are held in privately operated facilities.

They're being held for alleged crimes, while awaiting deportation or while fighting asylum cases to remain in the country.

The Justice Department announced last August that it was phasing out its use of corporate-run prisons because of cost and safety concerns for inmates.

According to a report by the department's Office of Inspector General, inmates in several private facilities received bad food and poor medical care. Staffing levels were inadequate. The conditions contributed to security problems. The private prisons saw 28 percent more inmate-on-inmate assaults. Eighty-six percent of the private facilities had lock-downs, in which inmates had to be confined to their cells, compared with 43 percent of government-run prisons, the report found.

CoreCivic, then known as Corrections Corp. of America, and GEO Group saw their stock shares plummet when the inspector general's report was published. Advocates hailed the Obama's administration's decision to move away from private prisons as a positive step toward ending mass incarceration.

But that was six months ago, an eternity in a political landscape that changed dramatically with Trump's election.

Trump made campaign statements supporting private prisons, and the companies' stock shot back up after he was elected. Trump then signed an executive order authorizing the construction of a wall along the border with Mexico, the hiring of 15,000 more immigration agents and the detention of everyone who could not be immediately deported.

Then, soon after Sessions was confirmed, the attorney general signed a new memorandum ending the Obama administration's initiative to phase out the use of private prisons.

EDITORS: BEGIN OPTIONAL TRIM

Trump had received little support from major corporations when he was running for the White House, but the GEO Group was a rare publicly traded corporation that made contributions to a pro-Trump super political action committee, according to an analysis of Federal Election Commission reports by Ciara Torres-Spelliscy, a law professor at Florida's Stetson University who's a fellow at the nonprofit Brennan Center for Justice at New York University Law School.

Spelliscy noted that 45 percent of GEO's revenue came from operating 26 prison centers for the federal government.

"From the outside, what you see is what looks like some pay-to-play behavior, where you have spending by someone who is a federal contractor who is interested in a particular policy outcome, spending money in an election and then after the election their winning candidate does the policy that they wanted all along all," Spelliscy said. "It certainly looks suspicious."

Damon Hininger, president and CEO of CoreCivic, noted in an earnings call that Trump's order immediately allocated resources to the construction, operation and control of additional detention facilities.

"When coupled with the above-average rate crossings along the Southwest border, these executive orders appear likely to significantly increase the need for safe, humane and appropriate detention bed capacity that we have available in our existing real estate portfolio, as well as an increased demand for our detention facility design, development and facility maintenance expertise," Hininger said.

GEO Group, which operates 64 correctional facilities in the United States, was named in a complaint to the FEC as violating a prohibition on campaign contributions from government contractors over its $225,000 contribution to the pro-Trump super PAC Rebuilding America.

EDITORS: END OPTIONAL TRIM

Cleaver said he didn't have a problem with CoreCivic and Geo making money. But he said it was unseemly how the government appeared to be partnering with the companies so they could profit by building more detention centers.

Cleaver and Gutiérrez accused the companies of advocating policies that "deprive people of their liberty" to increase profits.

"With the massive increase in deportations and criminalizing people planned by Trump, prisons are looking at a fat windfall from the sorrow of others," Gutiérrez said. "We

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just wanted to put these companies on notice that the American people are watching and that profiting from incarceration has moral consequences."

EDITORS: STORY CAN END HERE

Paez said the company welcomed the opportunity to meet with Cleaver and Gutiérrez "to dispel the myths" about it. He said his company's focus was on helping reduce "recidivism and helping individuals successfully re-enter society."

While the Justice Department conducted an extensive investigation last year before announcing the changes, Sessions didn't give much information about why he was reversing course. In four sentences, he said the Obama policy had changed long-standing policy and practice and had impaired the Federal Bureau of Prisons' ability to meet future needs.

That led groups like Campaign Legal Center, a nonprofit campaign-finance watchdog group, to ask questions and ultimately file the FEC complaint against GEO.

"There is no indication that the reversal of the prior policy was similarly based in any sort of research," said Brendan Fischer, associate counsel for the Campaign Legal Center. "A reasonable person might then start to look at what other factors might have influenced this decision. And $225,000 to a super PAC and additional contributions to the inaugural committee certainly could be factors in that decision."

'Overwhelming' Number Of Lesbians, Bisexual Women Incarcerated

By Andrew Sacks

NBC News, March 3, 2017

'Overwhelming' Number of Lesbians, Bisexual Women Incarcerated

'Overwhelming' Number of Lesbians, Bisexual Women Incarcerated

'Overwhelming' number of lesbians and bisexual women are incarcerated

https://www.facebook.com/NBCNews

3/3/2017

Andrew Sacks / Getty Images

Sexual minorities – particularly lesbians and bisexual women – are disproportionately incarcerated in the U.S., according to a recent study published in the American Journal of Public Health. The findings, which looked at data from the National Inmate Survey (2011-2012), also found lesbians, gay men and bisexuals are at an increased risk for sexual assault and more likely to receive certain types of punishment.

"Sexual minority inmates have very different experiences behind bars … but we haven't ever had really solid data to back it up," Lara Stemple, one of the study's authors and the director of the Health and Human Rights Law Project at UCLA, told NBC Out.

This new study is the first of its kind at the national level to accurately measure the percentage of sexual minorities who are incarcerated, analyzing data from more than 80,000 respondents. The report defines "sexual minority" as anyone identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual, as well as anyone that reported same-sex sexual behavior prior to being incarcerated.

Overrepresentation

Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals are three times more likely to be incarcerated than their heterosexual counterparts, according to the study.

Gay and bisexual men constitute 5.5 percent and 3.3 percent of those in prisons and jails, respectively. This is somewhat higher than the estimated 3.6 percent of gay and bisexual men in the U.S. population. Men who have had sex with another man prior to incarceration – but who do not identify as gay or bisexual – make up an additional 3.8 percent and 2.9 percent of the male population in prisons and jails, respectively.

For women, the overrepresentation is much more pronounced: Researchers found roughly a third of incarcerated women identify as lesbian or bisexual, "a proportion that is about 8 to 10 times greater than the 3.4 percent of lesbian or bisexual women in the U.S. population." When women who engaged in same-sex sexual activity prior to their detention are factored in, sexual minority women account for a staggering 42.1 percent of the female prison population and 35.7 percent of women in jails.

Stemple called the number of incarcerated sexual minority women "overwhelming." She said this means no one "should be doing any work on incarcerated women from this point forward without thinking about how [it] affects sexual minorities."

Limitations of the data make it impossible to speak definitively about the cause of this overrepresentation, according to Stemple. However, she noted, "Thinking about gender theory, women who defy norms of femininity may be more likely to be perceived as aggressive and dangerous."

Stemple also said it is important to take race into account, given the disproportionate number of people of color who are incarcerated.

"Societal perception of masculinities of color as threatening could apply to women. There is already good evidence that it applies to men," she said, adding that the overrepresentation of sexual minority women may be connected to "the over-policing of masculinities of color."

Victimization, Abuse and Punishment

The study also found that sexual minorities, both male and female, were more likely to have suffered sexual victimization prior to incarceration than heterosexual inmates. Once incarcerated, they are again at increased risk. Among

male inmates, sexual minorities were much more likely to be sexually victimized by staff and other inmates than heterosexual male prisoners. Sexual minority women were also at increased risk of sexual assault in prison compared to straight women.

Researchers reported that sexual minorities "were significantly more likely to have experienced administrative or punitive segregation than were straight inmates." These punishments, which include solitary confinement, have severe negative effect on prisoners' wellbeing and are "related to adverse health and mental health outcomes," the study found.

Next Steps

The study does not discuss the situation of transgender prisoners. According to Stemple, this is because the "survey instruments were not good enough to provide definitive data." What is known about transgender experience in prison is that trans prisoners are at "very, very high risk" for abuse and assault. Stemple said the Bureau of Justice Statistics, which conducted the survey, should alter it in the future to be able to accurately track the number of trans people who are incarcerated.

Moving forward, Stemple hopes that the study's findings influence the implementation of the National Standards to Prevent, Detect, and Respond to Prison Rape (PREA). "We want the PREA, as they roll out the standards, to take into account the unique needs of this population."

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Alabama Governor Pushes Prison-Building Plan To Address Overcrowding

Critics say proposal fails to address state's high incarceration rate

By Arian Campo-Flores

Wall Street Journal, March 3, 2017

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Nebraska Prison Scrutinized After 2nd Deadly Riot In 2 Years

By Grant Schulte

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) – Two years after a deadly riot led to promises to fix long-standing problems at a Nebraska prison, officials were struggling Friday to respond to criticism after inmates again seized control of a cellblock in an uprising that left two of them dead.

Some lawmakers and prisoner advocates said Thursday's riot is proof that the governor and corrections officials haven't responded quickly enough to the problems at the Tecumseh State Correctional Institution that were laid bare by the 2015 mayhem. Two inmates died during that 9-hour takeover of the prison, and prisoners caused more than $2 million in damage.

"The horrific conditions of confinement rampant in Nebraska prisons threaten public safety now and into the future," said Danielle Conrad, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Nebraska. Conrad said her group plans to file a lawsuit against state officials to force more changes.

Prison administrators said the new security technology and procedures they've adopted since 2015 kept the riot from spreading. Gov. Pete Ricketts has asked the Legislature to approve $95 million in additional funding to hire officers at Tecumseh and other prisons as well as build a new inmate treatment center that should ease chronic overcrowding.

Department of Correctional Services Director Scott Frakes said the uprising was "significantly smaller" than the 2015 riot, which involved several housing units, and was contained much faster.

"There are multiple opportunities for individuals to make bad decisions and act out violently," Frakes said at a news conference Friday. "Yesterday, they chose to injure and take the lives of other human beings and destroy property."

Officials also said it was still unclear specifically what led to Thursday's riot and that legislators shouldn't jump to conclusions.

But some lawmakers on Friday criticized the department for failing to address staffing shortages and trying to gloss over its problems.

"When we have concerns with the Department of Corrections, they are often downplayed, they are minimized, and I fail to see that the Department of Corrections has taken decisive action," said state Sen. Adam Morfeld, of Lincoln.

State Sen. Matt Hansen, of Lincoln, said the deaths were "unacceptable" and show that lawmakers will need to maintain oversight of the department.

State Sen. Ernie Chambers, of Omaha, said the latest incident showed a lack of competency from prison administrators.

"Ever since Mr. Frakes has been here, things have gone steadily downhill," Chambers said.

The latest riot began around 1 p.m. Thursday when roughly 40 inmates refused to return to their cells in a maximum-security unit that houses 128 prisoners. When staff members realized the situation had become unsafe, they left and isolated the inmates in one housing unit, said Corrections Department spokeswoman Dawn-Renee Smith.

Smith said the unit was "secured" around 4:30 p.m. and wasn't extensively damaged despite fires that were set inside it.

The two inmates who died in Thursday's riot were identified Friday as 39-year-old Damon Fitzgerald and 31-year-old Michael Galindo. Prison officials didn't say how or why they perished.

Galindo was serving a sentence of 12 to 21 years on robbery and other charges. Fitzgerald was sentenced to hundreds of years in prison for crimes including sexual assault.

No prison workers were injured. An unspecified number of inmates suffered injuries that weren't life-threatening, Frakes said.

Two inmates serving time for sex crimes were killed during the May 2015 riot, which lasted roughly nine hours and caused more than $2 million in damage. After the riot, state officials spent $1.9 million to install camera and cell-locking upgrades.

Nebraska's prisons have faced a bevy of other problems in recent years, including the June 2016 escape of two men serving time for sex crimes. In 2014, under a previous administration, prison officials acknowledged that they miscalculated hundreds of inmate sentences and released some of them too early.

Some senators threw their support behind the prison system. State Sen. Steve Halloran said lawmakers should wait for law enforcement to investigate the riot before jumping to conclusions about what caused it.

"So far all I've heard is a lot of posturing from people who seem to think that correction facilities are a preschool," said Halloran, of Hastings. "It's a dangerous job."

Follow Grant Schulte on Twitter at https://twitter.com/GrantSchulte

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Arkansas Rushes To Execute 8 Men In The Space Of 10 Days

By Matthew Haag

New York Times, March 3, 2017

After a 12-year interruption in executions, Arkansas plans an exceptional rush in late April, putting eight men to death over 10 days, before one of the state's lethal injection drugs reaches its expiration date that month.

The governor of Arkansas, Asa Hutchinson, signed proclamations last week in his latest effort to restart the state's capital punishment program, setting four execution dates for the eight inmates on death row, between April 17 and 27. Two men would be put to death on each of the four dates.

If Arkansas follows through with that timetable, it will be carrying out the death penalty at a rate unmatched by any state since the United States resumed capital punishment in 1977, according to the Death Penalty Information Center, a group that opposes capital punishment. In 1997, Texas came close, putting eight inmates to death in May and again in June, but not over such a short number of days, the group said.

The hurried schedule appears to be influenced by the expiration of a lethal injection drug in the state's supply. Arkansas uses three drugs in executions, and its stock of midazolam, a sedative injected to start of the process, expires in April, the state has said. Its supply of potassium chloride, the final drug in the series, expired in January, but the state has said it was confident it could acquire more.

The rush by Arkansas comes as the number of executions nationwide have steadily declined in recent years, as the 31 states with the death penalty have encountered legal and logistical challenges.

Across the country, officials in those states, including Arkansas, have struggled to acquire drugs to carry out executions, as pharmaceutical companies in the United States and Europe have restricted the use of their products in executions.

Some states have considered different combinations. Arizona even went so far as to allow defense attorneys, if they object to the state's lethal injection method, to supply their own drugs for the executions of their clients.

The eight men scheduled for execution are Kenneth Williams, Bruce Ward, Stacey Johnson, Don Williamson Davis, Ledell Lee, Jack Harold Jones, Jason McGehee, Marcel Williams. They are among 34 inmates on death row in Arkansas.

Mr. Hutchinson, a Republican, has tried for years to bring back the state's death penalty, which had been held up since 2005 over legal challenges to the state's laws and the difficulty in acquiring the drugs.

In 2015, he scheduled the execution of eight inmates, including many of the same men set to die next month, saying that they had exhausted all of their appeals. But a state court stopped the executions because of a lawsuit against the state over its then secrecy law and the source of Arkansas' lethal injection drugs. The state was then ordered to disclose information about its supply chain.

Mr. Hutchinson's latest effort to restart executions came after the state's attorney general, Leslie Rutledge, told him that the eight men had no additional legal challenges to their executions.

"This action is necessary to fulfill the requirement of the law, but it is also important to bring closure to the victims' families who have lived with the court appeals and uncertainty for a very long time," Mr. Hutchinson said in a statement, according to The Associated Press.

The governor's office and the Arkansas Department of Correction did not immediately return calls for comment.

US Snuffs Pot Fans' Plans To Party On Indian Land Near Vegas

By Ken Ritter

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

LAS VEGAS (AP) – A federal prosecutor has snuffed out plans by pot fans to celebrate Nevada's new recreational marijuana law by lighting up on an Indian reservation near Las Vegas.

U.S. Attorney Daniel Bogden took a hard line in a letter to organizers of a cannabis festival this weekend, saying that federal law applies and pot smokers could be prosecuted.

The warning raised concerns about a possible Trump administration crackdown on marijuana and said a 2013 Obama administration directive that was seen as relaxing enforcement on tribal lands in states where pot is legal might have been misinterpreted.

Pot is still illegal in Indian Country and on federal land, Bogden said.

Organizers of the High Times Cannabis Cup festival say there will still be music, T-shirts and souvenirs at the event at a Moapa Band of Paiutes festival site.

But spokesman Joe Brezny says it will essentially be just a concert this year.

"We've removed the marijuana," he said. "There will be no smoking area, no edibles competition, no cannabis topicals or lotions."

Brezny said more than 10,000 tickets were sold this week for the two-day event Saturday and Sunday at a site about 35 miles north of the Las Vegas Strip. The concert is headlined by hip-hop artist Ludacris.

Robert Capecchi, federal policies chief at the Marijuana Policy Project advocacy group in Washington, D.C., said a lot of attendees might be disappointed or upset that they can't smoke on site.

But he noted that laws are different in federal areas within the eight states that have legalized recreational marijuana and the 28 states and the District of Columbia where medical marijuana is legal.

"There's a different balance between the federal government and Indian tribes and the federal government and the states," Capecchi said.

Nevada is still getting its enforcement footing after recreational marijuana became legal Jan. 1.

Bogden wouldn't comment Friday beyond the Feb. 16 letter he sent to the Moapa Band of Paiutes that declared, "marijuana remains illegal under federal law."

The sentence in the letter was underlined, along with the warning that "federal investigation and prosecution may still be appropriate."

That was enough to prompt the tribe to declare that its police and event security won't allow smoking, selling or transporting marijuana at its festival grounds near a fireworks stand, liquor outlet and smoke shop just off Interstate 15.

"We hope that attendees enjoy themselves and comply with applicable law," Darren Daboda, chairman of the tribe with about 350 members and a sprawling 112-square-mile reservation, said in a statement.

The festival is modeled after a Cannabis Cup event held since 1988 in Amsterdam, which now has offshoots in pot-friendly states including Washington, California, Oregon, Colorado and Michigan.

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Stop-and-start Federal Review Of Memphis Police Is On Again

By Adrian Sainz

Associated Press, March 3, 2017

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) – After announcing Friday morning it would halt a review and reform process of the Memphis Police Department, the U.S. Justice Department later said the process will continue after all.

City and federal officials agreed to resolve their differences over missed deadlines for submitting paperwork.

The Justice Department's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, or COPS, first said it was stopping its comprehensive review of the department because the parties could not agree on a memorandum of agreement "within a reasonable time period."

Later, the Justice Department and the city both released statements saying the agreement was back in place. Memphis Mayor Jim Strickland signed the memorandum around 10 a.m., before the first Justice Department news release was distributed to media, the city said.

City officials expressed shock at the Justice Department's first announcement, and attributed it to a miscommunication.

The Justice Department later said it has received the signed memorandum.

"The COPS Office is pleased to proceed with collaborative reform and applauds the City of Memphis and Memphis Police Department for their leadership," the department's later statement said. "The COPS Office looks forward to a productive engagement."

Justice Department officials launched the review in October after citizens criticized police use of deadly force and treatment of the black community in this majority African-

American city. Strickland and Memphis Police Director Michael Rallings said at the time that the city invited federal authorities to review the department's policies involving community-oriented policing and the use of deadly force.

The review began after an announcement in September that federal officials found insufficient evidence to file civil rights charges in the July 2015 fatal shooting of a black man by a white officer. The shooting followed a traffic stop that escalated into a fight between 19-year-old Darrius Stewart and Officer Connor Schilling.

Stewart's family is suing the city, accusing the police department of having policies that make it "okay to shoot first and ask questions second." The city is challenging the lawsuit.

A Stewart family attorney is criticizing the police department and the Justice Department.

"The family of Darrius Stewart has little faith in the City of Memphis and the Department of Justice under the embattled Attorney General Jeff Sessions," said Carlos Moore, a lawyer for Henry Williams, Stewart's father. "Neither to date has proven trustworthy but my client Henry Williams continues to hope against hope for not only justice for his son Darrius but for real systemic reform in the Memphis Police Department."

When the review was announced, President Barack Obama was still in office and Edward Stanton III was still the U.S. attorney for West Tennessee. Obama left office in January after Donald Trump won the November presidential election, and Stanton has resigned. An acting U.S. attorney is temporarily replacing him.

Sessions, appointed by Trump, has been criticized by activists for his record dealing with civil rights issues as a U.S. attorney in Alabama.

Like other U.S. cities, Memphis has seen protests related to racial profiling and the use of deadly force against unarmed black men. In July, protesters blocked the heavily-traveled Interstate 40 bridge in Memphis connecting Tennessee and Arkansas, sparking meetings between members of the black community and city leaders.

Criticism of the police department has escalated in recent weeks. Two federal civil rights lawsuits have been filed over a police department list of about 80 people who require a police escort when they visit City Hall. When it was initially released last month, the list included Black Lives Matter protesters, former City Hall employees and people accused of harassment and making threats.

Plaintiffs in both lawsuits claim the list was politically motivated. Rallings has said the list was compiled only for safety reasons.

City officials released a shorter list on Feb. 24, after removing more than 40 protesters from the list contained in the so-called "security book" located at the front desk of City Hall.

Associated Press reporter Jonathan Mattise contributed to this report

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Northern Virginia Gang Activity 'out Of Control,' Says Police Chief

Authorities investigate two bodies found in park linked to gangs

By Andrea Noble

Washington Times, March 3, 2017

Gang activity is "getting out of control" in Northern Virginia and to blame for the deaths of two people whose remains were found in a Fairfax County park, police officials said Friday announcing the gruesome discovery.

The remains of two bodies were located Thursday night in the Holmes Run Park in Lincolnia. Police had yet to identify the victims or say how they were killed — but this isn't the first time authorities have recovered human remains in the park. Two former MS-13 gang members were killed, dismembered and buried in Homes Run Park in 2013 and 2014 after they angered other members of the gang. Thirteen MS-13 gang members were convicted last year of those killings as well as another fatal shooting in Northern Virginia.

"This problem is horrible," said Fairfax County Police Chief Ed Roessler. "This is four murders in this park. Obviously, we've had other murders in the region in the past few weeks. This is getting out of control and we need to stop it."

The chief declined to say whether MS-13 or another gang is responsible for the slayings. While the medical examiner works to identify the bodies, Chief Roessler was also unable to say if the killings are related to other recent Northern Virginia homicides or the gang-related disappearances of two teenage girls who later returned home.

"It's more than likely that the recovery of the remains that we have to date in this active crime scene will be linked to another set of gang murders," Chief Roessler said.

MS-13 is an American-born street gang with roots in El Salvador whose members are known for brutal violence, including slashing victims to death with knives and machetes.

Police have arrested 16 people in connection with recent gang-related homicides in Virginia that reportedly involved MS-13, also known as Mara Salvatrucha. Ten people, including six teenagers, were arrested and charged in

the disappearance and death of Damaris Alexandra Reyes Rivas. The 15-year-old went missing in December and at some point was taken against her will to Lake Accotink Park, where she was assaulted before she was killed and her body left at a nearby an industrial park. Authorities found her body in February after investigating the killing of a 21-year-old man in nearby Prince William County.

Christian Alexander Sosa Rivas was killed in Prince William County in January, his body found along the Potomac River in Dumfries.

Six people have been arrested and charged in connection with his killing, which according to court documents obtained by local NBC affiliate WRC-TV was carried out by MS-13 leaders who didn't like the fact Sosa Rivas had been representing himself as the leader of a local sect of the gang.

Despite the numerous gang-related disappearances and homicides, the FBI Special Agent in Charge of the Washington Field Office said he doesn't think the heightened activity is illustrative of a shift of more gangs into Northern Virginia from the surrounding region.

"I don't know why the heightened activity now," said FBI Special Agent in Charge Timothy Slater. "I think it's always been there. I think you see nationwide hot spots across the nation. This happens to be a current hot spot."

Despite the recent arrests, authorities are still worried about additional gang activity in the region, particularly recruitment of teenagers. Young Central American immigrants who have recently arrived to the area are known to be prime targets for gang recruitment, according to gang intervention specialists.

Chief Roessler warned parents to be on the lookout for signs their children might be associating with gang members.

Through investigation of the bodies found in the park this week, authorities are hoping they are able to tamp down on the recent gang resurgence.

"I think there is a great amount of activity that we are worried about," Mr. Slater said. "We are looking at avenues and ways, especially with this investigation, to have a larger impact on that."

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'I Have Been Set Up': Final Minutes Of 15-year-old Killed In Gang Slaying Described

By Justin Jouvenal

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

The 15-year-old had been lured to the Springfield park on the pretext of smoking pot, but when she was removed from a car by alleged MS-13 members and walked into the woods, she grew alarmed, people familiar with the prosecution's case said.

"I have been set up," Damaris A. Reyes Rivas blurted out that January day.

The Gaithersburg teen would soon be killed in a manner police called "savage and brutal. . . horrific." It is one of a series of overlapping cases involving teens and young people associated with a resurgent MS-13 that have troubled authorities from Virginia to Maryland and resulted in 16 arrests.

The cases also include the slaying of 21-year-old Christian Alexander Sosa Rivas, whose body was found along the Potomac River in Dumfries in January, and the disappearance and return of two Fairfax County girls, 16-year-old Lizzy Rivera Colindres of Springfield and 17-year-old Venus Lorena Romero Iraheta of Alexandria.

Many questions remain about the cases, but interviews with people familiar with Damaris's killing reveal details about her final minutes and possible links between the crimes. The people connected with the cases spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss details that have not been made public yet.

Ten people, including six juveniles, have been charged in connection with Damaris's killing. Her body was discovered near an industrial area not far from Lake Accotink Park on Feb. 11.

Damaris had voluntarily left home about a month before arriving at the park on or about Jan. 8, police said. Maria Reyes, Damaris's mother, said she had previously fallen in with a clique of MS-13 and maintained sporadic contact after leaving home.

Roughly two days before her death, Damaris received Facebook messages that appeared to show she was in danger. "Those suckers want to kill you," said one shared by Reyes. Another said, "They have already given permission to take you out."

People familiar with Damaris's case say authorities believe the teen's killing was approved by MS-13 leaders. They said two juveniles who are charged in connection with Damaris's death and believed to be gang members took her from the car at Lake Accotink and walked her into the woods.

The Washington Post does not generally name juveniles charged with crimes.

Damaris was taken to an MS-13 hangout near a set of train tracks, people familiar with the case said. At that point, a juvenile charged with murder in Damaris's case walked her down an embankment and interrogated her.

The teen asked Damaris whether she had a relationship with Rivas, people familiar with the case said the prosecution's case shows. Reyes has said her daughter dated Rivas. The juvenile who confronted Damaris also knew Rivas, authorities have said.

Damaris asked for forgiveness, but the other teen slashed her with a bowie knife, people familiar with the case said. Fairfax County police later determined that Damaris

died of multiple forms of trauma to the upper body. Video evidence is among the clues in the slaying.

Last week, Prince William County police announced the arrest of six people in connection with Rivas's slaying. Some of the defendants are due in court Friday. Fairfax County police said information gleaned from the probe of Rivas's killing led them to discover Damaris's slaying.

Citing a search warrant that has since been sealed, NBC 4 reported that Rivas may have been targeted by fellow MS-13 members because he was claiming to be the leader of a local clique. The outlet reported that the gang members used social media accounts of female associates to lure Rivas out of his normal routine. The search warrant said Damaris was one of the last people to see him alive.

Fairfax County Commonwealth's Attorney Raymond F. Morrogh declined to discuss the specifics of Damaris's case because it is pending but said, "We are all working hard to bring to justice those responsible for this killing."

Every attorney for those charged in Damaris's killing, except one, declined to comment. Vernida R. Chaney is representing one of the juveniles.

"I think the evidence will show that not all of them are involved in the crime," Chaney said.

Read more:

A Maryland teen, lured to the woods and stabbed 40 times, becomes latest victim of gang-related killings

Family describes mysterious killing of former World Bank economist for first time

Federal officials indict seven Baltimore police officers on racketeering

'When You Come Against Law Enforcement, You Come Against God': Mourners Honor Slain Whittier Police Officer Keith Boyer

By Richard Winton And Brittny Mejia, Contact Reporters

Los Angeles Times, March 3, 2017

After 27 years patrolling the streets of Whittier, Keith Boyer had more than earned the right to a relaxing assignment.

But that wasn't Boyer, a consummate officer who got up each morning happy to interact with the citizens he was sworn to protect, according to those who knew him best. By turns determined and goofy, Boyer could be stone serious while on patrol, but he also carried around a set of fake teeth, rarely missing an opportunity to pop them out for a laugh.

It was that combination that made Boyer especially adept at connecting with children, Whittier Police Chief Jeff Piper said. Two years ago, when Boyer was working as a community schools officer, he came across a young girl who had a strained relationship with her family, Piper said. The young girl wanted to enter a writing contest, but the idea of reading in front of an audience made her nervous.

Boyer promised to provide her with some "backup," and made sure the crowd was dotted with uniformed officers on the day of the contest, Piper said.

"Keith was Mr. Positive," Piper said from the pulpit of Calvary Chapel in Downey on Friday. "He loved his job. He loved his colleagues. He loved his community."

Thousands of police officers, local residents and family members gathered Friday morning to say goodbye to Boyer, a popular and driven police officer who was shot and killed while responding to a car accident Feb. 20. Boyer was at least the fifth officer shot and killed in the line of duty in California in the last six months, but the first Whittier officer to die on duty in 37 years.

"I cannot find the words to adequately describe the magnitude of our loss, which transcends Keith's family, the entire law enforcement community and his friends," Piper said. "In his nearly 27 years as a police officer, Keith remained completely committed to his profession."

Bagpipes wailed early Friday morning as an honor guard escorted Boyer's flag-draped casket into the chapel, where more than 3,000 police chiefs, officers and deputies and other mourners had squeezed into pews.

Whittier police officers removed their hats and bowed their heads as Boyer's coffin came to rest just a few feet away from the gloves and hat he wore on duty.

"As I see the badges out there, I see heroes," Pastor James Kaddis said. "When you come against law enforcement, you come against God."

A drum set was placed on one side of the church, a tribute to the fallen musician who played in several area bands including Mrs. Jones' Revenge, a Temecula-based classic-rock tribute group that performed at wineries and weddings. Piper joked that the officer was kind enough to perform alongside less talented ensembles, like the one in which the chief played guitar.

Boyer's children, who offered their forgiveness to accused killer Michael Mejia, also performed a rendition of "Amazing Grace" during the service, in tribute to their father.

"My father was courageous not only in his final moments but always," said Joseph Boyer, adding that the officer hated sitting behind a desk, preferring instead to be out in his community.

The hardworking family man also had a silly side, often dazzling relatives with magic tricks when they were younger. When his family opened his safe after his death, they found a box filled with the props he used to pull off each gag.

Retired Whittier Officer Mike Karson, a friend of Boyer's for 30 years, described the slain officer as "the kindest, sweetest, most gentle man you'd ever meet."

Boyer, Karson said, was the ultimate team player, always helping others and always working extra hours without complaint.

Boyer and Officer Patrick Hazell were responding to the scene of a car crash Feb. 20 when they came across Mejia, a 26-year-old convicted felon, authorities have said. Prosecutors say Mejia shot and killed his cousin, Roy Torres, in East Los Angeles before fleeing to Whittier, where he was involved in the car crash.

Mejia opened fire on the officers once they ordered him to exit his car, wounding Hazell and killing Boyer. Mejia was wounded by return fire, and has been charged with two counts of capital murder. Prosecutors have yet to decide whether he will face the death penalty.

Boyer joined the department in 1989 as a jailer and dispatcher before being sworn as an officer in 1990. He was the third Whittier police officer slain in the line of duty in the department's 100-year history. The Whittier department includes about 128 sworn officers who patrol the cities of Whittier and Santa Fe Springs in southeastern Los Angeles County.

As Whittier police officers began to arrive Friday, they shook the white-gloved hand of Nicholas Gianesses, a New York City police officer who flew across the country to honor Boyer.

"Thank you," a colleague of Boyer's told the officer, who wore an NYPD dress uniform. "It means so much, brother."

"Even one officer lost is too many," Gianesses replied.

This article has been updated with new details from the funeral.

: This article was updated with additional comments from the Whittier police chief.

: This article was updated with comments from Boyer's family.

This article was updated with comments from the Whittier police chief.

This article was updated with details from the church service.

This article was updated with details from outside the Calvary Chapel.

This article was originally published at 5 a.m.

A previous version of this article said that the suspect, Michael Christopher Mejia, was also suspected of fatally gunning down his cousin, Ray Torres. The cousin's name was Roy.

ATF Sting Operation Accused Of Using Racial Bias In Finding Targets, With Majority Being Minorities

Chicago Tribune, March 3, 2017

Leslie Mayfield was handcuffed in the back of a police wagon when he realized the plan to rob a drug stash house was a setup.

For four years, Mayfield had been struggling to turn his life around after more than a decade in prison. To escape the street life, he moved to Naperville with his fiancee's family and managed to find a full-time job at a suburban electronics facility that paid 12 bucks an hour. It was there that a co-worker lured him into the robbery after weeks of effort, promising a big score.

Now, inside the police vehicle, the sounds of flash-bang grenades still ringing in his ears, Mayfield started to piece it all together. There was no stash house, no cartel drugs or associates to rob. It was a crime dreamed up by federal authorities and carried out with the help of Mayfield's co-worker to reel him in when he was at his most vulnerable.

Eight years later, Mayfield, 48, and dozens of others are at the center of a brewing legal battle in Chicago's federal court over whether the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' signature sting operation used racial bias in finding its many targets.

A team of lawyers led by the University of Chicago Law School is seeking to dismiss charges against more than 40 defendants in Chicago. The undercover probes, a staple of the ATF since the mid-1990s, have ensnared hundreds of defendants across the country.

Chicago prosecutors quietly drop charges tied to drug stash house stings

Annie Sweeney and Jason Meisner

Federal prosecutors in Chicago have quietly dropped narcotics conspiracy charges against more than two dozen defendants accused of ripping off drug stash houses as part of controversial undercover stings that have sparked allegations across the country of entrapment and racial profiling.

The decade-old...

Federal prosecutors in Chicago have quietly dropped narcotics conspiracy charges against more than two dozen defendants accused of ripping off drug stash houses as part of controversial undercover stings that have sparked allegations across the country of entrapment and racial profiling.

The decade-old... (Annie Sweeney and Jason Meisner)

A recently unsealed study by a nationally renowned expert concluded that ATF showed a clear pattern of racial bias in picking its targets for the drug stings. The disparity between minority and white defendants was so large that there was "a zero percent likelihood" it happened by chance, the study found.

The vast majority of those swept up in the stings in Chicago were minorities, and a close examination of the criminal backgrounds of some of those targeted raises

questions about whether they were truly the most dangerous gun offenders that ATF was aiming to remove from the street.

Some had trouble even coming up with guns to do the job — including one crew that after months of preparation managed to find only one World War I-era pistol with a broken handle that could barely fire a round. Others had no history of carrying out high-risk armed robberies — a key provision in the ATF playbook designed to make sure targets were legitimate, defense lawyers argued in recent court filings.

Mayfield, for one, talked on undercover recordings about his experience robbing stash houses, but in reality he had no arrests for robbing drug dealers. The fact that he was lured into the sting while working a full-time job has also been heavily criticized by the appellate courts.

"Criminals do sometimes change and get their lives back on track, and we don't want the government pushing them back into a life of crime," Judge Richard Posner of the 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in Chicago wrote in an opinion supporting Mayfield's argument that he had been entrapped by authorities.

The controversy comes amid a national debate over the treatment of minorities by law enforcement and a scathing report by the U.S. Department of Justice just weeks ago that found that Chicago police routinely violate the civil rights of citizens, particularly African-Americans and Hispanics living on the city's impoverished South and West sides.

Federal Criminal Justice Clinic

Abel Uribe / Chicago Tribune

Judith Miller, left, and Alison Siegler of the Federal Criminal Justice Clinic, which represents most of the defendants in the dozen cases they are seeking to be dismissed.

Judith Miller, left, and Alison Siegler of the Federal Criminal Justice Clinic, which represents most of the defendants in the dozen cases they are seeking to be dismissed. (Abel Uribe / Chicago Tribune)

It could put the Justice Department in the uncomfortable position of defending its own stash house prosecutions against allegations of racist practices while at the same time pushing Chicago police for reforms of similar accusations.

Earlier this month, federal prosecutors filed a lengthy motion vehemently disputing that minorities were unfairly targeted in the stash house cases, saying the expert report filed by the defense was "riddled with false assumptions that were designed to manufacture a racial disparity where none exists."

The dispute sets up what could be an unprecedented hearing at the Dirksen U.S. Courthouse in the coming months involving a panel of district judges hearing the multiple criminal cases at once.

"It's almost like a criminal class action," said Alison Siegler, director of the Federal Criminal Justice Clinic at the University of Chicago Law School, which represents most of the defendants in the dozen cases they are seeking to be dismissed. "Judges are seeing this as a coordinated litigation. It's a very unusual situation."

Out of answers

When Mayfield landed a job in May 2009 at LG Electronics, a sprawling, warehouse-like facility just off 115th Street in Bolingbrook, it seemed to be a stroke of luck. Still on parole for an attempted murder conviction, he checked for defects in cellphones imported from Asia.

Several weeks into his employment, Mayfield was approached by a woman who was one of the only other African-Americans who worked in his group, he said. She flirted with him, he said, on lunch breaks, confiding in him that she wasn't happy in her marriage.

It wasn't long before she introduced him to her husband, Jeffrey Potts, a burly ex-con who worked in another group at LG. Mayfield said he tried to keep his distance, uneasy that Potts' wife was so flirtatious around him, especially since Potts was white. But Potts persisted, and soon they were talking regularly, he said.

"Obviously, he had an objective," Mayfield, who is serving a 27-year sentence, said in an interview at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in the Loop. "When I think back about it now, he immediately started trying to find out about me, about my background."

Naperville man convicted in stash house scheme gets new trial

Jason Meisner

A federal appeals court on Thursday ordered a new trial for a Naperville man who alleged he was goaded into a scheme to rob a phony drug stash house by overzealous federal agents.

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The 8-2 ruling by the 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals was a blow for a series of fake stash house stings by the U.S.... (Jason Meisner)

Potts, who had done prison time for drug distribution and robbery, was secretly working as a federal informant, helping an ATF agent search for possible targets for sting operations, court records show. He was paid for the effort, but not much. Potts later told a private investigator working for Mayfield's defense team that he earned just $200 from ATF for bringing the agency Mayfield's case, according to court records.

A man who claimed to be Potts returned a recent call from a Tribune reporter but said he was too busy to talk and never called back.

Mayfield said that as the weeks wore on, Potts began dropping references to drugs into their conversations. He told Mayfield he had a new drug connection and was making a lot of money and would often ask him if he was looking to get out of the day-to-day drudgery of working at LG, Mayfield said.

"Every day at work he began to make comments such as, 'Cuz, I know you tired of working for this chump change,'" Mayfield wrote in a letter filed in federal court. "'I know you need this money.'"

Mayfield said he told Potts he didn't sell drugs, but Potts "kept on me on a daily basis, saying, 'You're missing out.'"

After awhile, Potts' talk turned to robberies. One day, the two were having a smoke by the parking lot when Potts pointed to his new pickup truck — a red Dodge Ram 1500 with fancy rims, Mayfield said. He told Mayfield he'd made tens of thousands of dollars robbing drug dealers and could bring Mayfield in on an upcoming score.

"He said, 'Man, I hit this lick — 40K and two kilos of cocaine. That's how I got this truck,'" Mayfield said. "I kept saying I wasn't interested. Believe me, there was nothing I wanted less than to go back to jail."

In mid-June 2009, Mayfield suffered a setback that left him desperate. The van he depended on to get to work died on a Chicago-area expressway, leaving him with a huge bill for towing and repairs that he couldn't afford. He missed several days of work before he was able to arrange a ride. When Potts asked him where he had been, Mayfield told him about his car troubles. The next day, Potts walked up to him in the bathroom at LG and slipped him $180 in cash.

"I tried not to take it, but I did need it," Mayfield said. "I felt at the time like he was genuine."

Later, Mayfield said, Potts offered to forgive the debt if he went along with the robbery plan. Flat broke and out of answers, Mayfield finally caved. He told Potts to set up the meeting with his contact, records show.

Potts called his ATF handler, who approved Mayfield as a target, according to court records.

Race and law enforcement

According to the ATF, stash house stings are a key part of the agency's national effort to target people who "show a propensity of doing harm to the public through violent behavior."

Launched in Miami during the cocaine-war days of the early 1990s, the stings have been honed over the years and are run by experienced agents who use a tightly controlled playbook.

They typically begin when an informant provides the ATF information about a potential target who has expressed interest in taking part in a robbery. The informant then introduces the target to an undercover agent who poses as a disgruntled courier for a drug cartel and offers an opportunity to steal large quantities of drugs from a stash house guarded by men with guns.

ATF official wants looser gun restrictions, end to ban on imported assault weapons

Sari Horwitz

The second-highest-ranking official at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives has written a proposal to reduce gun regulations, including examining a possible end to the ban on importing assault weapons into the United States.

The 11-page "white paper" by Ronald B. Turk, associate...

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The 11-page "white paper" by Ronald B. Turk, associate... (Sari Horwitz)

In a series of conversations captured on undercover wire, the target is told if he is interested he must assemble an armed team to commit the robbery. The target and his crew are arrested after they show up on the day of the supposed crime.

"At the time of arrest, the home invasion defendants are poised, at any moment, to invade a stash house, steal kilograms of cocaine guarded by armed cartel members, and in the process, kill or be killed," prosecutors wrote in their recent court filing.

In order to avoid arguments of entrapment in court, the stings are supposed to target only established robbery groups. ATF criteria also require that at least two of the participants have violent backgrounds and that all must be criminally active at the time the investigation is launched.

Not only were the operations a boon for the ATF but the resulting prosecutions also netted eye-popping sentences — sometimes up to life in prison — in part because defendants were criminally liable for the amount of imaginary drugs they believed they were stealing. It didn't matter that the robbery was fake or that no drugs actually existed.

"The reason this scenario exists is because it's realistic," Assistant U.S. Attorney Jeffrey Perconte argued at Mayfield's sentencing in 2011 while seeking up to 37 years in prison. "It certainly was real to Mr. Mayfield."

Spokesmen for both the ATF and the U.S. attorney's office declined to comment for this story, citing the ongoing litigation.

The lengthy sentences were just one pattern that raised red flags for the criminal defense bar. In case after case, the ATF stings seemed to be targeting only minorities.

In early 2013, a handful of private attorneys and assistant federal defenders, all veterans at the Dirksen U.S.

Courthouse, were so troubled by a stash house case they were defending that they asked the U.S. attorney's office for a complete list of all the defendants in similar cases sorted by race. Prosecutors rebuffed this admittedly unorthodox request.

"ATF does not maintain statistics on the nature in question at either the local or national level," Assistant U.S. Attorney Philip Fluhr wrote in response, court records show.

The defense lawyers then asked the judge overseeing the case to order prosecutors to turn over detailed information on how the stash house stings are run and the race of the defendants who had been charged so far. They included their own research showing more minorities were targeted.

Prosecutors strenuously objected. But a few months later, U.S. District Chief Judge Ruben Castillo allowed the discovery to go forward.

More stories: Chicago's Cop Crisis

See the Chicago Tribune's ongoing coverage on problems in the Chicago Police Department.

See the Chicago Tribune's ongoing coverage on problems in the Chicago Police Department.Read more stories

"History has shown a continuing difficult intersection between the issue of race and the enforcement of our nation's criminal laws," wrote Castillo, concluding that the defense team had "made a strong showing of potential bias."

Similar motions in other stash house cases soon followed, but the effort to prove racial bias was being made case-by-case with no coordination. Then in 2014, the University of Chicago's Federal Criminal Justice Clinic agreed to focus all its efforts on the 12 stash house cases and their 43 defendants.

This allowed the defense attorneys to address the alleged racial bias in a coordinated effort, a critical undertaking given the government's massive resources, the attorneys said.

"It's a giant power imbalance if one person decides to go against the government," said Adam Davidson, one of seven U. of C. law students who helped the clinic's three law professors coordinate the cases.

'The real Leslie Mayfield'

On July 23, 2009, Mayfield climbed into a black Cadillac Escalade parked in a Naperville lot to meet with Potts and a purportedly disgruntled cartel drug courier. In a conversation captured on undercover recording, the courier, an undercover ATF agent, laid out the robbery plot, warning that up to 30 kilograms of cocaine would be protected by as many as four armed guards.

When the undercover agent asked if he had ever done a stash house robbery before, Mayfield replied, "Yes, sir," according to a transcript of the recording in court records. Later in the conversation, Mayfield talked about other home invasions he had committed, noting his preference to scout out locations in advance and hit them under the cover of darkness.

Mayfield also told the agent the people he would recruit were experienced and would be excited about the plan once they knew the quantity of drugs involved. It would be enough for everyone to make "a nice li'l piece o' change," Mayfield said, according to the transcript.

Two weeks later, Mayfield brought the crew he'd assembled to meet with the undercover agent and go over the plan. The crew assured the agent that they were up for the danger of the operation and talked about what to do with the armed guards, including killing everyone inside if necessary, according to transcripts of the conversation. Mayfield stressed that their biggest advantage was "the element of surprise."

Seven Baltimore Police officers indicted on federal racketeering charges

Justin Fenton and Kevin Rector

Seven Baltimore police officers who served in a high-profile gun unit were indicted Wednesday on federal racketeering charges — allegations that throw into question scores of cases aimed at getting weapons off the streets.

The officers are accused of shaking down citizens, filing false court paperwork...

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The next night, Mayfield got the call that the robbery was on. He and his crew drove to Aurora in a brown van to meet with the undercover agent, who took them to a nearby storage facility where they would supposedly hide the drugs after the heist, court records show. In a conversation outside the storage facility that was caught on undercover video, the agent gave the crew one more chance to back out, asking them if they felt they were up for the job.

"Yeah, bro!" exclaimed Montreece Kindle, Mayfield's cousin, who stuck out an arm to shake the agent's hand.

As the crew got ready, the video showed Mayfield throw a loaded .357 Magnum handgun into a rear cargo area of the vehicle. Seconds later, the boom of flash-bang grenades and shouting could be heard as a special operations team of agents stormed out of the storage facility to make the arrest.

Records show Mayfield's crew had brought an arsenal to the scene. In addition to the .357, agents found a loaded sawed-off shotgun, a .44-caliber revolver, a semi-automatic pistol, ski masks, bulletproof vests and latex gloves.

Mayfield and all three of his accomplices were convicted at trial. At Mayfield's sentencing hearing in 2011, prosecutors highlighted his previous convictions for burglary and unlawful restraint and incorrectly told the judge that he

had been the shooter in the 1994 attempted murder that had landed him in prison for 11 years.

After his release in 2005, Mayfield had picked up a new charge in Lake County after state police stopped a car he was riding in and found him with a loaded gun, prosecutors said.

"That's the real Leslie Mayfield," Perconte told U.S. District Judge Harry Leinenweber, who imposed a 27-year prison sentence. "From the time he was 18 … he has added nothing to society but danger."

Exaggerated capabilities

Born and raised in Zion, Mayfield had an unstable childhood. He never knew his father, and his mother struggled to make ends meet. In court statements, Mayfield recalled being homeless for long stretches. He spoke of memories of his mother making them bologna sandwiches in the front seat of their car and washing him up in gas station bathrooms because they had nowhere else to go.

Mayfield graduated from eighth grade but never attended high school. In 1994, when he was 26, Mayfield and several others were arrested after the carjacking and shooting of a motorist in Waukegan.

Lake County prosecutors conceded that Mayfield wasn't the gunman, but under the state's "accountability" law, a jury convicted him at trial of attempted murder, armed robbery, armed violence and aggravated battery with a firearm. He was sentenced to 40 years in prison.

An appeals court later reversed the attempted murder conviction, ruling in 1997 that the jury was improperly barred from hearing Mayfield's statement to police that he was angry that his co-defendant had opened fire because he had "no good reason to shoot" the victim.

Prosecutors investigating if corrupt Chicago cop tainted other convictions

Jason Meisner

In an extraordinary move, the Cook County state's attorney's office is investigating whether a former Chicago police sergeant convicted of corruption tainted far more convictions than those of the three defendants he's already been held responsible for framing.

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After his case was sent back to Lake County Circuit Court, Mayfield pleaded guilty to attempted murder in exchange for a seven-year sentence to run consecutive to a 15-year term for the armed violence count, records show. With good behavior, he wound up serving 11 years.

In his interview with the Tribune, Mayfield said he decided to use his time in prison to turn his life around. He earned his high school equivalency certificate and later an associate degree in general college studies. He got a cosmetology license and became a certified tutor. Although he said he never affiliated with a gang on the street, he joined the Gangster Disciples to avoid conflicts in prison. "I did everything I could to remain positive," he said.

After he was released on parole in 2005, Mayfield went back home to Waukegan, but staying away from the violence of the streets proved difficult. A couple years after his release, Mayfield was in a home when a shooting occurred and a family member was wounded in the head, he said.

To protect himself, he started carrying a gun, but that, he acknowledged, turned out to be a huge mistake. That August, state police stopped the car Mayfield was riding in, and he took off running before they could pat him down. After a foot chase, he was ordered to the ground at gunpoint. Police found a loaded .40-caliber pistol in his waistband.

Despite that setback, Mayfield said he was determined to stay on course. He moved with his girlfriend to Naperville, where they lived in a tiny, two-bedroom house with her four teenage children and one grandchild.

Struggling at LG Electronics on $12 an hour, Mayfield described in court records how the family relied on one car and had no money for cellphones or other luxuries. Every Tuesday, Mayfield would stand in line at a local food pantry to make sure the kids had enough to eat.

In his interview with the Tribune, Mayfield said he was coached by Potts to boast to the purported drug courier about past stickups and robberies. At his sentencing six years ago, he denied ever selling or stealing drugs and said he had never shot anyone in his life. Mayfield owned up to his role in the stash house robbery but insisted in a long and emotional plea to the court that the government had exaggerated his capabilities.

"They say I had a drug crew? We couldn't even afford a cellphone," Mayfield told the judge, according to a transcript. "We didn't even have a car when the agent came across me. I tried everything I could to be a better person."

'Absurdly overbroad'

As the movement to fight the stash house cases gathered steam among defense attorneys, the judiciary also weighed in with some key decisions.

In November 2014, the full 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals granted Mayfield a new trial in a rare decision that concluded Potts had "targeted Mayfield at a moment of acute financial need and against a backdrop of prolonged difficulty finding permanent, family-supporting work."

In a 2012 dissenting opinion as the case was winding through the court, appellate Judge Richard Posner had put an even finer point on it, referring to the stings as a "disreputable

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tactic" that used government informants to target people at a vulnerable time in their lives.

Meanwhile, another ruling in July 2015 by the appellate court in Chicago resulted in the government turning over more data on the stash house stings sought by the defense. The ruling allowed the defendants to move ahead with what is believed to be the most thorough analysis of the stings anywhere in the country.

To examine the data, the University of Chicago team hired Jeffrey Fagan, a nationally known specialist in police practices who also examined the New York Police Department's stop-and-frisk program.

Fagan examined 94 defendants in 24 separate stings conducted between 2006 and 2013 and found that 74 of the defendants were black. Fagan also ran three statistical analyses to figure out the likelihood that the proportion of stash house defendants would, by chance, be African-American.

To do that, Fagan created a control group by using ATF criteria for their defendants — having one or more convictions for specific violent offenses identified by the ATF or for narcotics or firearms offenses. The offenses also had to occur in the same geographic area and around the same time the stash house plan arose.

When Fagan compared the two groups, he concluded that minorities were "substantially more likely" than similarly situated whites to be targeted by ATF in the stash house stings, according court filings.

"Each test showed the same pattern: Being black significantly increased a person's chance of being targeted by the ATF," lawyers for the defendants wrote in their filing.

2 Chicago cops still sidelined a decade after police scandal

Dan Hinkel and Jeremy Gorner

A decade after one of the most damaging scandals in Chicago police history broke, two of the officers accused of wrongdoing remain on desk duty at full pay, filing papers or answering phones as they await the outcome of the city's slow-moving and much-criticized disciplinary process.

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A decade after one of the most damaging scandals in Chicago police history broke, two of the officers accused of wrongdoing remain on desk duty at full pay, filing papers or answering phones as they await the outcome of the city's slow-moving and much-criticized disciplinary process.

The two are... (Dan Hinkel and Jeremy Gorner)

But an expert hired by the U.S. attorney's office concluded that Fagan had used an "absurdly overbroad" group to compare to stash house defendants, including people with only minor criminal convictions such as simple drug possession and misdemeanor assault, according to the recent court filing by prosecutors. In all, Fagan's "eligible list" included nearly 300,000 people — a number that equals 10 percent of all males ages 14-49 in the Chicago area, their filing said.

Using such a broad swath of the public in a statistical analysis ignores the realities of how the stash house stings work, prosecutors said.

"ATF agents do not compile a list of citizens with criminal records throughout the district, select people from the list at random, and then cold-call those people and offer them a chance to rob a stash house," prosecutors wrote. "There is no reason the home invasion defendants should resemble Professor Fagan's fantasy home invasion lottery."

Echoing an argument sometimes made by Chicago police, federal prosecutors also said Fagan's report failed to account for the fact that many of the stash house investigations took place in neighborhoods that are more than 90 percent black, naturally leading to targets who are black as well.

The debate is now potentially headed for a court hearing involving all defendants. The outcome could set precedent for judges in other states.

"Courts tend to give law enforcement a lot of leeway," said University of California-Irvine law professor Katharine Tinto, a criminal law expert who has written extensively about the stash house stings. "… The fact that an expert is saying a federal law enforcement agency is discriminating on the basis of race is something everybody should be watching."

'Sentenced with him'

Sharonnette Sholaja first met Mayfield in 2006 when he was doing odd jobs for his cousin after his release from prison. Despite Mayfield's background, she fell for him in part because of his efforts to put his past behind him.

"He was really trying to get himself together," Sholaja said in a recent interview. "I was getting up at 4 or 5 a.m. driving him for all kinds of job interviews because he was determined. He didn't let anything stop him."

Within two years they had moved to Naperville, crammed into a small apartment with her kids and a grandchild, so Sholoja could be close to her work in Woodridge. Mayfield found the job at LG, but money was still tight, she said. For their first holiday in Naperville, they couldn't afford a Christmas tree. With their money going to rent and food, they relied on a food pantry to get by, she said.

Old police 'street files' raise question: Did Chicago cops hide evidence?

Jason Meisner

The homicide files sat untouched for years in the dingy basement at a South Side police station, thousands of aging manila folders locked away in cabinets cataloging seven decades of long-forgotten killings.

Stuffed with manually typed police reports, scribbled detectives' notes, faded lineup cards...

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Stuffed with manually typed police reports, scribbled detectives' notes, faded lineup cards... (Jason Meisner)

When the family car broke down — the event that ultimately drew Mayfield into the stash house sting — they had to borrow $300 from her mom to cover the tow, Sholaja said.

Despite the financial hardships, Mayfield never spoke of violence, carried guns or kept one in the house, Sholaja said. The news that he had agreed to rob a drug stash house shocked and angered her. She lost the apartment after he was locked up, and eventually the stress ripped them apart.

Sholoja, 44, said they still consider each other friends and remain in touch. But she's moved to Arizona to start over.

"I told him I felt like I was sentenced with him," she said. "You know, we would be married had this not happened."

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How Uber Used Secret Greyball Tool To Deceive Authorities Worldwide

By Mike Isaac
New York Times, March 3, 2017

Uber has for years engaged in a worldwide program to deceive the authorities in markets where its low-cost ride-hailing service was being resisted by law enforcement or, in some instances, had been outright banned.

The program, involving a tool called Greyball, uses data collected from the Uber app and other techniques to identify and circumvent officials. Uber used these methods to evade the authorities in cities such as Boston, Paris and Las Vegas, and in countries like Australia, China, Italy and South Korea.

Greyball was part of a broader program called VTOS, short for "violation of terms of service," which Uber created to root out people it thought were using or targeting its service improperly. The VTOS program, including the Greyball tool, began as early as 2014 and remains in use, predominantly outside the United States. Greyball was approved by Uber's legal team.

Greyball and the broader VTOS program were described to The New York Times by four current and former Uber employees, who also provided documents. The four spoke on the condition of anonymity because the tools and their use are confidential and because of fear of retaliation by the company.

Uber's use of Greyball was recorded on video in late 2014, when Erich England, a code enforcement inspector in Portland, Ore., tried to hail an Uber car downtown as part of a sting operation against the company.

At the time, Uber had just started its ride-hailing service in Portland without seeking permission from the city, which later declared the service illegal. To build a case against the company, officers like Mr. England posed as riders, opening the Uber app to hail a car and watching as the miniature vehicles on the screen made their way toward the potential fares.

But unknown to Mr. England and other authorities, some of the digital cars they saw in the app did not represent actual vehicles. And the Uber drivers they were able to hail also quickly canceled. That was because Uber had tagged Mr. England and his colleagues — essentially Greyballing them as city officials — based on data collected from the app and in other ways. The company then served up a fake version of the app populated with ghost cars, to evade capture.

At a time when Uber is already under scrutiny for its boundary-pushing workplace culture, its use of the Greyball tool underscores the lengths to which the company will go to dominate its market. Uber has long flouted laws and regulations to gain an edge against entrenched transportation providers, a modus operandi that has helped propel the company into more than 70 countries and to a valuation close to $70 billion.

Yet using its app to identify and sidestep the authorities in places where regulators said Uber was breaking the law goes further toward skirting ethical lines — and, potentially, legal ones. Some within the company who knew about the VTOS program and how the Greyball tool was being used were troubled by it.

In a statement, Uber said, "This program denies ride requests to users who are violating our terms of service — whether that's people aiming to physically harm drivers, competitors looking to disrupt our operations, or opponents who collude with officials on secret 'stings' meant to entrap drivers."

Dylan Rivera, a spokesman for the Portland Bureau of Transportation, said in a statement: "We're very concerned to hear that this practice continued at least into 2015 and affected other cities.

"We take any effort to undermine our efforts to protect the public very seriously," Mr. Rivera said.

Uber, which lets people hail rides using a smartphone app, operates multiple types of services, including a luxury Black Car offering in which drivers are commercially licensed. But an Uber service that many regulators have had problems with is the company's lower-cost service, known in the United States as UberX.

UberX essentially lets people who have passed a cursory background check and vehicle inspection become Uber drivers quickly. In the past, many cities have banned the service and declared it illegal.

That is because the ability to summon a noncommercial driver — which is how UberX drivers using private vehicles are typically categorized — was often unregulated. In barreling into new markets, it capitalized on this lack of regulation to quickly enlist UberX drivers, who were not commercially licensed, and put them to work before local regulators could stop them from doing so.

After the authorities caught up with what was happening, Uber and local officials generally clashed — the company has encountered legal problems over UberX in cities including Austin, Tex., Philadelphia and Tampa, Fla., as well as internationally. Eventually, agreements were reached under which regulators developed a legal framework for the low-cost service.

That approach has been costly. Law enforcement officials in some cities have impounded or ticketed UberX drivers, with Uber generally picking up those costs on behalf of drivers. The company has estimated thousands of dollars in lost revenue for every vehicle impounded and ticket dispensed.

This is where the VTOS program and the use of the Greyball tool came in. When Uber moved into a new city, it appointed a general manager to lead the charge. Thisperson would try to spot enforcement officers using a set of technologies and techniques.

One method involved drawing a digital perimeter, or "geofence," around the authorities' offices on a digital map of the city that Uber monitored. The company watched which people were frequently opening and closing the app — a process known internally as eyeballing — near such locations as evidence that the users might be associated with city agencies.

Other techniques included looking at a user's credit card information and determining whether the card was tied directly to an institution like a police credit union.

Enforcement officials involved in large-scale sting operations to catch Uber drivers also sometimes bought dozens of cellphones to create different accounts. To circumvent that tactic, Uber employees went to that city's local electronics stores to look up device numbers of the cheapest mobile phones on sale, which were often the ones bought by city officials, whose budgets were not sizable.

In all, there were at least a dozen or so signifiers in the VTOS program that Uber employees could use to assess whether users were new riders or very likely city officials.

If those clues were not enough to confirm a user's identity, Uber employees would search social media profiles and other available information online. Once a user was identified as law enforcement, Uber Greyballed him or her, tagging the user with a small piece of code that read Greyball followed by a string of numbers.

When a tagged officer called a car, Uber could scramble a set of ghost cars inside a fake version of the app for that person, or show no cars available at all. If a driver accidentally picked up an officer, Uber occasionally called the driver with instructions to end the ride.

Uber employees said the practices and tools were partly born out of safety measures for drivers in certain countries. In France, Kenya and India, for instance, taxi companies and workers targeted and attacked new Uber drivers.

"They're beating the cars with metal bats," Courtney Love, the singer and celebrity, tweeted from an Uber car at a time of clashes between the company and taxi drivers in Paris in 2015. Ms. Love said protesters had ambushed her Uber ride and held her driver hostage. "This is France? I'm safer in Baghdad."

Uber has said it was also at risk from tactics used by taxi and limousine companies in certain markets. In Tampa, for instance, Uber referred to collusion between the local transportation authority and taxi companies in fighting ride-hailing services.

In those environments, Greyballing started as a way to scramble the locations of UberX drivers to prevent competitors from finding them. Uber said it remained the primary use of the tool today.

But as Uber moved into new markets, its engineers saw that those same techniques and tools could also be used for evading law enforcement. Once the Greyball tool was put in place and tested, Uber engineers created a playbook with a list of tactics and distributed it to general managers in more than a dozen countries across five continents.

At least 50 to 60 people inside Uber knew about Greyball, and some had qualms about whether it was ethical or legal. Greyball was approved by Uber's legal team, headed by Salle Yoo, the general counsel. Ryan Graves, an early hire who became senior vice president of global operations and a board member, was also aware of the program.

Ms. Yoo and Mr. Graves did not respond to a request for comment.

Outside scholars said they were unsure of the program's legality. Greyball could be considered a violation of the federal Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, or possibly intentional obstruction of justice, depending on local laws and jurisdictions, said Peter Henning, a law professor at Wayne State University, who also writes for The New York Times.

"With any type of systematic thwarting of the law, you're flirting with disaster," Mr. Henning said. "We all take our foot off the gas when we see the police car at the intersection up ahead, and there's nothing wrong with that. But this goes far beyond avoiding a speed trap."

To date, Greyballing has been effective. In Portland that day in late 2014, Mr. England, the enforcement officer, did not catch an Uber, according to local reports.

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And two weeks after Uber began dispatching drivers in that city, the company reached an agreement with local officials for UberX to be legally available there.

Uber Used Secret Tool To Outmaneuver City Officials, Report Says

By Brian Fung

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

It's no secret that Uber has a sometimes tense relationship with policymakers around the world — much of its explosive rise has been attributed to Uber's willingness to defy regulation. But now it seems that in some places, the ride-hailing company has taken extraordinary measures to deceive government officials tasked with monitoring the company's operations.

In what some employees have questioned as an ethically and legally murky maneuver, Uber has mined some customers' geolocation data, credit card information, app usage habits and even social-media profiles to determine whether they may be working for city governments or rival ride-hailing services or intend to physically harm Uber drivers, according to a report by the New York Times.

The program, code-named Greyball, surfaced in 2014 when Portland, Ore., officials posing as regular customers tried to request rides on Uber to gather evidence that the company was operating illegally in the city, according to the Times. But rather than procuring a driver for the "customer," the service went so far as to show officials a fake version of the app with drivers who didn't really exist. Any drivers who did respond would quickly cancel the rides, sometimes through direct intervention from Uber itself via phone calls to a driver who had picked up a fake fare.

"This program denies ride requests to fraudulent users who are violating our terms of service," Uber said in a statement, "whether that's people aiming to physically harm drivers, competitors looking to disrupt our operations, or opponents who collude with officials on secret 'stings' meant to entrap drivers."

The report on Uber's covert activities is the latest blow for a company that has suffered a growing backlash in recent weeks. It adds to accusations of sexual harassment by a former engineer, widespread defections by customers upset over chief executive Travis Kalanick's handling of the company, and an apology by Kalanick after he got into an argument with an Uber driver about driver wages.

Greyball reportedly was started as a tool to flag abusive riders in countries where violence against Uber drivers is common. But the company eventually discovered its utility as a way to identify problematic government officials, the Times says. To determine whether a user warrants special treatment, Greyball reportedly looks at roughly a dozen factors, such as whether a customer who spends a lot of time around government buildings frequently opens and closes the app.

Once it believes it's found an offending user, Uber tags the individual with a bit of code, according to the Times. In addition to regulators, Greyball has also been used to prevent taxi drivers from getting a fix on Uber drivers' locations. The practice was approved by Uber's lawyers, according to the Times.

This is not the first time Uber has covertly taken aim at rivals; the company was also said in 2014 to have engaged in corporate warfare with its U.S. competitor Lyft by secretly poaching its drivers. It has also run grass-roots organizing campaigns designed to influence state legislatures. In other cases, Uber executives have suggested digging up opposition research on journalists, and another information-gathering tool, named God View, allowed Uber to track the location of its users without their knowledge.

In Portland, officials sought to gather evidence for Uber's illegal operations by having the authorities request rides on the app. But, having been flagged by Greyball, law enforcement officials were left hanging as the fake version of the app failed to get them any rides. Soon after, the city began to allow Uber to operate legally in the city.

Security analysts say that with the amount of personal information freely available on the Web, it is almost inevitable that a company such as Uber would move to exploit it.

"Greyballing is an acceptable business risk in the poorly governed realm of cyberspace," said Kenneth Geers, a former analyst at the National Security Agency and a senior research scientist at Comodo, a global cybersecurity firm.

But unlike its other efforts at shaping policy, Uber's Greyballing appears to be a far more technologically sophisticated and systematic approach to outmaneuvering the opposition. And it may be one of Uber's most closely held trump cards.

Now that policymakers are aware of Greyball, other analysts say, they could take steps to make the tool illegal — forcing Uber to adapt again in its push to expand into new markets.

Uber Said To Consider Changes To Employee Stock Compensation

By Katie Benner And Mike Isaac

New York Times, March 3, 2017

Uber has lurched from one blow to its reputation after another. Now it is trying to contain some of the damage to employees.

Uber, the privately held ride-hailing company, is considering ways to make its stock compensation policies more friendly to its workers, according to three people with knowledge of an employee meeting this week where Uber

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executives discussed the issue, and who asked to remain anonymous because the meeting was confidential.

In particular, Uber is discussing how to potentially move away from severe restrictions around its stock so that employees who leave the company can take shares with them more easily, these people said. That would help Uber change the perception that it exerts too much control over stock compensation.

The discussion comes after several recent scandals involving Uber. In January, the company contended with a #deleteUber campaign by riders who perceived Uber as supporting President Trump's immigration ban. Last month, Uber grappled with questions about its workplace culture and a lawsuit over its self-driving cars. This week, it dealt with concerns over the character of its chief executive, Travis Kalanick, after a video of him berating an Uber driver became public.

The events have buffeted employees at Uber's headquarters in San Francisco and elsewhere. Some have said that they plan to leave the company and are shopping their résumés around. Another Uber worker, who declined to be named, said that while some employees may have quit, turnover has not changed much in the last month.

An Uber spokesman declined to comment.

Stock compensation has long been an issue for Uber workers. Early employees, who joined the company several years ago, received stock options — which allow them to buy shares at a low price — as part of their compensation packages.

Yet unlike other technology companies, Uber gives employees only 30 days to buy those shares if they leave. At other companies, departing employees get months or years to buy the shares. If Uber's workers do not buy the shares in the 30-day period, they forfeit the stock back to the company

Buying private company stock like Uber's also creates a tax bill for individuals, a bill that has swelled as Uber's valuation has soared to close to $70 billion. Some Uber employees have said they have been unable to come up with enough money to pay for their stock and a big income tax bill. They said that had left them little choice but to stay at the company and wait for a public offering of stock, or leave and give up stock that could someday be lucrative.

Uber has moved over the years to give workers more financial options with their stock compensation. About two years ago, the company stopped using stock options for compensation and switched to restricted stock units, which do not incur a tax bill if employees leave the company. Uber has also given long-serving employees the opportunity to sell back a percentage of their shares to the company, in a program that was reported earlier by Bloomberg.

The issue of stock options was raised again on Tuesday at an Uber all-hands employee meeting, the people with knowledge of the event said.

At the meeting, one employee asked Mr. Kalanick whether he would consider giving them years after they leave the company to exercise their right to buy the company's stock and not just 30 days.

Mr. Kalanick said the company's board had agreed to let management discuss the issue, though no decision had been made. He also asked Uber's head of human resources, Liane Hornsey, and general counsel, Salle Yoo, to help answer the employee's question. It is unclear when the company may make any decisions about the stock compensation policies.

Treading Water In A Tide Of Homelessness

By The Editorial Board

New York Times, March 3, 2017

Mayor Bill de Blasio gave a major speech on homelessness on Tuesday, promoting a plan he calls "Turning the Tide." This was interesting because, as we know, not even kings can turn tides. If he had called it "Lowering Expectations" or "Treading Water," he might have more accurately conveyed reality, though the speech would have lost some of its aspirational quality.

Mr. de Blasio deserves credit for candor, anyway. He acknowledged that homelessness has reached historic highs on his watch, with more than 60,000 people in shelters and many thousands living visibly and distressingly on the streets and in the subways. And he said he saw no quick end to the problem, which has worsened, on and off, for 35 years. But he promised that with diligent effort, the city could slowly gain control over the crisis and, over time, subdue it.

The core of the effort involves opening 90 new shelters across the city, and enlarging 30 existing ones, over five years. Meanwhile, the city would end the stopgap use of hotel rooms and the private apartments known as "cluster sites," which are notoriously shoddy and unsafe. The new shelters would be run by the city or by reputable nonprofits, and would be placed in neighborhoods in proportion to how many of a given community board's residents use the shelter system.

The mayor said it was only fair that neighborhoods would welcome their own, and noted that shelter residents would benefit from staying closer to home, jobs, relatives and school. That is sound logic, though communities that reflexively oppose social-service sites, or feel burdened by too many of them, may not see it that way.

Mr. de Blasio promises to give neighborhoods at least 30 days' notice before opening a shelter, and be open to their suggestions about alternative sites. That is the least he should do, given the expected ferocity of local resistance.

The mayor will need to summon all of his salesmanship skills to sell what looks like a sensible plan. He will need help from neighbors persuading other neighbors to say yes-in-my-backyard, and also from the City Council, whose "fair share" law on distributing city facilities may complicate his shelter-

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siting priorities. He could use Albany's help as well. Gov. Andrew Cuomo has thrown numbers at the housing problem — $20 billion, 100,000 affordable-housing units, five years — but his lavish promises are far from realized. A promising bill from Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi would create statewide rental supplements for needy families, saving money — and preventing a lot of homelessness.

Mr. de Blasio is committing $300 million in capital spending to expand the 30 shelters, with plans to reallocate the money now spent on hotels and cluster sites for the 90 new shelters. That, plus expanded legal aid to prevent evictions, more mental health services and his long-term affordable housing plan, could go a long way toward containing the problem. Even better would be for the city to devote a greater share of public housing to homeless families and to set aside a higher percentage of new affordable housing for very-low-income New Yorkers.

Some may see the mayor's downbeat speech this week as a moment of surrender. They should remember the perils of overpromising: Mayor Michael Bloomberg said in 2003 that he was going to end homelessness outright in 10 years. Read the news accounts from back then, and today, and you will see how little the core problem has changed. Nor have the main answers: safe shelters, affordable housing and rental support — bricks and mortar and money.

The District Lets A Landlord Run Deplorable Housing — And Even Foots The Bill

By Colbert I. King

Washington Post, March 3, 2017

Recent stories by The Post and Washington City Paper did more than expose the flow of D.C. tax dollars to owners of some of the most deplorable housing in the city. Post reporters Fenit Nirappil, Jonathan O'Connell and Shaun Courtney also unmasked a city government embarrassingly flummoxed by a mess it helped to create. The poor and formerly homeless residents living under wretched conditions described in the story — and D.C. taxpayers who are footing the bill — deserve better.

It's bad enough that landlords such as the owners of Sanford Capital can rack up hundreds of warnings from the city about housing code violations. And it's disconcerting that Sanford owners have not paid all the fines imposed by the city.

What really ought to outrage D.C. taxpayers is the revelation that their government is keeping such landlords in business.

It is the supply of poor and formerly homeless residents showing up in Sanford rental offices with city-provided housing vouchers that keeps money flowing into the owners' coffers — reportedly millions annually in rent subsidies for tenants living in Sanford's 19 apartment buildings concentrated in the city's poorest areas: Wards 7 and 8.

And what does the city have to say for itself?

Laura Zeilinger, director of the D.C. Department of Human Services which oversees homeless programs, whined that her hands are tied. "When you have somebody who controls a large portion of the affordable housing in the city" — Sanford owns 1,300 units — "and we have a problem with them, there's no way that we can say we are never working with that company again," she said.

And what is the city now doing?

Awakened by the glare of the media's spotlight, Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D) has sprung into action. Her first bold move? She ordered inspectors to examine all of Sanford's apartments. Wait a second. Hasn't something like that already happened?

The Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, which is responsible for making sure apartment buildings meet code requirements, has been on Sanford's case.

It has issued more than 200 warnings to Sanford for housing-code violations during the past eight years and levied more than $150,000 in fines.

Madam Mayor, the city and Sanford aren't exactly strangers.

The Post found that among the fines levied against Sanford, the company has yet to pay nearly a third — more than $40,000. The department, The Post also discovered, has stopped short of taking enforcement action with teeth — placing liens on some Sanford buildings with unpaid penalties.

Now, however, the Bowser administration talks as if it is putting on a full-court press. "We are going to make an urgent plan to get a clearer picture of the conditions," Bowser declared. "We will make sure we get all the properties inspected."

Sounds more like a four-corners stall offense.

Because, in truth, Sanford has been given the upper hand. The Post reported that at least 170 previously homeless families and an additional 235 individuals were living in Sanford properties using housing vouchers in 2016. Updating that, Bowser said this week, "There are over 350 people who are using a voucher in Sanford properties."

What happens to them if Sanford leaves the scene?

One tenant, living with rodent infestations and lack of heat, brought her plight to the attention of her Human Services case manager. She said she was warned that the alternative was the city's homeless shelter at the former D.C. General Hospital.

Hence the unpleasant truth: Under the auspices of the D.C. government, and as with the case of dilapidated, vermin-infested D.C. General, families and children with city housing vouchers live in shameful conditions.

Attorney General Karl A. Racine (D) is pushing back, having sued Sanford over conditions at two of its complexes in Southeast Washington. And reportedly Sanford has agreed to court-monitored abatement plans at those buildings. (The Post reported that Sanford's owners declined repeated requests for comment on its stories.)

But Racine's intervention doesn't address the scope of the problem highlighted in the story about subsidized substandard housing: namely, the condition of families and children under the city's care.

Council member Brianne K. Nadeau (D-Ward 1), who chairs a committee that oversees the housing voucher program, said in a email that city housing options "should be safe and dignified, which is the opposite of the conditions in many of these Sanford Capital Buildings." She said she would love to shut it down, but the consequence would be people forced into homelessness. "So we have to do what we can to make Sanford follow the law."

Meanwhile, what about the kids trapped by this system?

Relisha Rudd, the 8-year-old girl who tragically disappeared three years ago this month — March 2014 — also lived under the city's auspices in the D.C. General shelter.

The city knew nothing about her situation until she disappeared. Just as the city knew nothing about the four sisters, age 17, 11, 6 and 5 — also under the city's care — whose murdered and badly decomposed bodies were discovered by chance in a Southeast house nine years ago. Just as D.C. officials were ignorant of conditions — discovered recently by Post reporters — in a subsidized apartment building with a trash- and feces-filled laundry room and unsecured doors used by vagrants and druggies that the city lists as available for poor people with housing vouchers.

Read more from Colbert King's archive.

Read more on this topic:

The Post's View: The District runs into a Catch-22 doing business with an alleged slumlord

David Alpert: A setback for housing in the District

David Madden: Five myths about public housing

The Post's View: The housing crisis is more complex than a few people paying too little in rent

The Pope On Panhandling: Give Without Worry

New York Times, March 3, 2017

New Yorkers, if not city dwellers everywhere, might acknowledge a debt to Pope Francis this week. He has offered a concrete, permanently useful prescription for dealing with panhandlers.

It's this: Give them the money, and don't worry about it.

The pope's advice, from an interview with a Milan magazine published just before the beginning of Lent, is startlingly simple. It's scripturally sound, yet possibly confounding, even subversive.

Living in the city — especially in metropolises where homelessness is an unsolved, unending crisis — means that at some point in your day, or week, a person seeming (or claiming) to be homeless, or suffering with a disability, will ask you for help.

You probably already have a panhandler policy.

You keep walking, or not. You give, or not. Loose coins, a dollar, or just a shake of the head. Your rule may be blanket, or case-by-case.

If it's case by case, that means you have your own on-the-spot, individualized benefits program, with a bit of means-testing, mental health and character assessment, and criminal-background check — to the extent that any of this is possible from a second or two of looking someone up and down.

Francis' solution eliminates that effort. But it is by no means effortless.

Speaking to the magazine Scarp de' Tenis, which means Tennis Shoes, a monthly for and about the homeless and marginalized, the pope said that giving something to someone in need is "always right." (We're helped here by the translation in an article from Catholic News Service.)

But what if someone uses the money for, say, a glass of wine? (A perfectly Milanese question.) His answer: If "a glass of wine is the only happiness he has in life, that's O.K. Instead, ask yourself, what do you do on the sly? What 'happiness' do you seek in secret?" Another way to look at it, he said, is to recognize how you are the "luckier" one, with a home, a spouse and children, and then ask why your responsibility to help should be pushed onto someone else.

Then he posed a greater challenge. He said the way of giving is as important as the gift. You should not simply drop a bill into a cup and walk away. You must stop, look the person in the eyes, and touch his or her hands.

The reason is to preserve dignity, to see another person not as a pathology or a social condition, but as a human, with a life whose value is equal to your own. This message runs through Francis' preaching and writings, which always seem to turn on the practical and personal, often citing the people he met and served as a parish priest in Argentina.

His teaching on divorced and remarried Catholics has infuriated some conservative critics who accuse him, unfairly, of elevating compassion over doctrine. His recent statements on refugees and immigrants are the global version of his panhandler remarks — a rebuke aimed directly at the rich nations of Europe and at the United States.

America is in the middle of a raging argument over poor outcasts. The president speaks of building walls and repelling foreigners. That toxic mind-set can be opposed in

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Washington, but it can also be confronted on the sidewalk. You don't know what that guy will do with your dollar. Maybe you'd disapprove of what he does. Maybe compassion is the right call.

State I.R.A. Plans Are Ready, If Congress Doesn't Interfere

By Richard H. Thaler

New York Times, March 3, 2017

Thirty-nine million Americans work for an employer without a payroll-deduction retirement savings plan, and many of them are saving little or nothing. In the absence of a federal plan for this problem, states including California, Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland and Oregon have taken it upon themselves to create their own solutions.

This flurry of state-level innovation might be cause for celebration, except for one major impediment: Congress may kill the nascent plans. Why? Republicans, who typically call for less regulation, say the state programs won't be sufficiently regulated. You can't make this stuff up.

The backdrop behind this battle is the long struggle that many Americans — even those with workplace retirement plans — are waging to save money. Some people fail to join their company's plan, or if they join, they save too little.

The good news is that by using behavioral economics, we know how to fix those problems: While giving workers the ability to opt out from these arrangements, automatically enroll them in a plan and increase contributions over time, and offer a sensible low-cost default investment fund. All of that makes saving easy and increases workers' savings rates substantially.

I've written about these issues extensively, including in the book "Nudge" with Cass Sunstein, a Harvard law professor. Most large companies now incorporate these features, so there is hope things will improve for many people.

But those whose employers offer no plan are at greater risk. This is the situation for 60 percent of workers in the bottom quarter of the income distribution. Many of them work for smaller firms that don't offer their employees a 401(k) or any other plan.

This is another problem we know how to mitigate using behavioral principles utilizing individual retirement accounts instead of 401(k)s. A 2006 proposal by the Brookings Institution and the Heritage Foundation suggested a basic format for such plans, called the "Automatic I.R.A." The idea is to create a program to make things as easy and inexpensive as possible for both employers and workers.

Basically, firms of a certain size that do not offer a retirement plan would have to enroll their employees in I.R.A.s, allowing them to opt out, of course. The government would engage private-sector portfolio managers to manage the money, and by pooling contributions, fees can be kept low. Britain has rolled out a similar plan over the past few years that is working well — fewer than 10 percent of workers are opting out. New Zealand has had a similar plan since 2006.

The Obama administration included a proposal to create such a program throughout the United States in each of its annual budgets, but it stalled in Congress. As a result, the states have begun to create their own automatic I.R.A. programs. There is a catch, though. Because the new plans are based on I.R.A.s, which haven't traditionally been part of workplace plans, the states asked for guidance from the Labor Department. They sought to confirm that employers offering I.R.A.s under the states' programs would not be subject to the requirements of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (Erisa) and that the state programs themselves would not be seen as attempting to circumvent Erisa. Erisa imposes safeguards, including the requirement that employers meet their fiduciary responsibility to run retirement plans in the best interest of their workers.

The department spent more than a year studying the issue, proposing rules, studying public comments and issuing final regulations in 2016 that accommodated the state plans. In a tiny but crucial change, the new rules said the state plans merely had to be "voluntary" as opposed to "completely voluntary," the requirement for traditional I.R.A.s used in a workplace setting. This shift made it possible to offer the essential automatic enrollment provision, which nudges people to save, and only requires an active choice for those who do not wish to save. Alternatively, where workers have to go out of their way to sign up to save, usage is low, especially for I.R.A.s. The states planning to start their own plans were happy, and other states have been expressing interest in following suit.

So far, so good. Power was devolving to individual states; regulatory burdens were easing; and American workers were being given a chance to easily save for retirement and become part of what President George W. Bush called the "ownership society."

Yet some Republicans in Congress are now trying to override the new rule.

Their tactic uses the obscure Congressional Review Act, which allows Congress to undo recent regulations with a simple majority vote in the House of Representatives and the Senate. By rule, they must do so within 60 "Congressional days" of the issuance of a regulation, defined as days that Congress is in session. The House has already passed a resolution of disapproval revoking the new rules, but the Senate has not yet taken up the issue.

This is odd, considering that giving more power to the states is a traditional Republican mantra, often mentioned as part of plans to replace the Affordable Care Act with local alternatives. What's more, helping people save used to be an

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issue with bipartisan support. The federal Pension Protection Act of 2006, which had wide support from both parties (and from me, too), included rules that encouraged employers to adopt automatic enrollment and automatic savings increases, with opt-out provisions.

Yet in a news release and op-ed piece in The Los Angeles Times, the sponsors of the move to stop the state plans in the House, Francis Rooney, a Republican from Florida, and Tim Walberg, a Republican from Michigan, described the Labor Department's rule as a "last-minute regulatory loophole." That's an interesting choice of words: The rule took about two years to complete.

The news release says "hardworking Americans could be forced into government-run plans," failing to recognize that automatic enrollment includes an easy way to opt out at any time. It works very well for millions of people in 401(k) plans.

Another claim (without any supporting evidence) is that these state plans will discourage firms from offering their own retirement plans. Of course, that is possible, but most successful businesses eventually offer a 401(k) plan because it can allow for employer matching funds and has much higher contribution limits than I.R.A.s, both attractive features for people in top management.

The congressmen also say that the states cannot be trusted to administer the new programs. Certainly, many state-sponsored defined-benefit pension plans have been inadequately funded. However, it is misleading to conflate underfunded defined-benefit plans with I.R.A.-based plans that would be fully funded by employee contributions held by private-sector custodians. States have long administered college saving 529 plans, which have some similar features, without any crises of which I am aware.

One could plausibly argue that these savings plans should be national in scope, and not relegated to the states. If that is the reasoning, the Senate would be better advised to enact legislation enabling a national automatic I.R.A. program. Furthermore, if states are not capable of administering a plan as simple as this, what can be the wisdom of handing off to them a much more complicated problem such as health care, as many Republicans in Congress have proposed?

The savings plan issue will soon come before the Senate. If it votes to override the rule using the strategy made possible by the Congressional Review Act, the state plans will be blocked and the Labor Department will be forbidden from considering new versions. Legislators can help Americans save for retirement by simply doing nothing.

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