EPA News Highlights 3.16.18

[HYPERLINK \l "_Washington_Free_Beacon"]
NBC's "Meet the Press" host Chuck Todd admitted on Thursday that there is an institutional bias in the media when it comes to environmental issues, which has led to a widely critical stance being taken against Environmental Protection Agency administrator Scott Pruitt. "I think Scott Pruitt's a lightning rod," Todd said. "I think on environmental issues, I think you're right. I think that there is an institutional bias on environmental issues towards climate science and things like that, right? So that is perceived as an ideological bias. So I think that there is an institutional bias when it comes to some of these science studies and things like that on the climate."

[HYPERLINK \l "_Daily_Caller"]
MSNBC anchor Chuck Todd admitted Thursday there's an "institutional bias" in the media against Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) chief Scott Pruitt. Todd told conservative talk show host Hugh Hewitt "there is an institutional bias on environmental issues towards climate science and things like that" regarding Pruitt. He agreed with Hewitt that the "bias" puts reporters on the attack against the EPA head.

[HYPERLINK \l "_Durango_Herald"]
The Environmental Protection Agency has ordered Sunnyside Gold Corp., the company that owned Silverton's last operating mine, to investigate the groundwater around one of its mines. The EPA believes previous mining operations have significantly altered the groundwater system, and as a result, have caused other mines to discharge waste and contaminate the headwaters of the Animas River.

[HYPERLINK \l "_Heartland_Institute"]
Scott Pruitt, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, testified the agency was reexamining California's waiver to impose stricter vehicle emission standards under the 1970 Clean Air Act than federal requirements. If the EPA ends the waivers, litigation will likely follow. Three days after Pruitt's testimony CARB Chair Mary Nichols, speaking at a Bloomberg New Energy Finance conference, reportedly said, "I think there would be a war with many states lining up with California."

National News Highlights 3.16.18

[HYPERLINK \l "_Washington_Post"]
President Trump has decided to remove H.R. McMaster as his national security adviser and is actively discussing potential replacements, according to five people with knowledge of the plans, preparing to deliver yet another jolt to the senior ranks of his administration. Trump is now comfortable with ousting McMaster, with whom he never personally gelled, but is willing to take time executing the move because he wants to ensure both that the three-star Army general is not humiliated and that there is a strong successor lined up, these people said.

[HYPERLINK \l "_Associated_Press"]
In its toughest challenge to Russia to date, the Trump administration accused Moscow on Thursday of an elaborate plot to penetrate America's electric grid, factories, water supply and even air travel through cyber hacking. The U.S. also hit targeted Russians with sanctions for alleged election meddling for the first time since President Donald Trump took office.

[HYPERLINK \l "_Miami_Herald"]
Miami-Dade Fire Rescue workers, homicide detectives, engineers and NTSB workers worked through the slow painstaking process Thursday night of clearing rubble, documenting evidence and trying to remove the dead after a pedestrian bridge over Tamiami Trail collapsed Thursday.

Washington Free Beacon

[HYPERLINK "http://freebeacon.com/culture/chuck-todd-institutional-media-bias-exists-environmental-issues/"]

Chuck Todd: Institutional Media Bias Exists When It Comes to Environmental Issues

By Andrew Kugle, 3/15/18

NBC's "Meet the Press" host Chuck Todd admitted on Thursday that there is an institutional bias in the media when it comes to environmental issues, which has led to a widely critical stance being taken against Environmental Protection Agency administrator Scott Pruitt.

"I think on environmental issues, I think you're right," Todd [HYPERLINK "http://www.hughhewitt.com/chuck-todd-on-the-bell-tolling-for-the-gop-in-november-and-thoughts-on-the-shake-up/" \t "_blank"] radio host Hugh Hewitt on his radio show Thursday morning. "I think that there is an institutional bias on environmental issues towards climate science and things like that, right? So that is perceived as an ideological bias."

Hewitt began the conversation by talking about the rumor that President Donald Trump is considering in firing Attorney General Jeff Session and replace him with Pruitt.

"Now let's talk for a second, the big rumor of the morning is Scott Pruitt to Justice. I always tell people he's my friend. My son works at EPA. I want to get that out there. I kind of throw a flag on the media here," Hewitt said. "Ever since Joy Reid and I were doing the Washington University debate, and a nut menaced her, and I mean, I was going to be the last line of defense, which is no defense at all, because I'm old, slow, and not very good. But this nut just got in her face. And it was really scary. And so they fly him in first class. They put in the cybersecurity things they have to do, and the media goes all over him. And they say he's on thin ice. But in fact, the president's talking to him about being the AG."

Hewitt then asked if the media has become so anti-Trump that they amplify negative stories about Pruitt.

"Do you think that the media has gone so anti-Trump that they're amplifying things like Scott Pruitt's travel?" Hewitt asked.

At first, Todd took issue with Hugh's broad brush in using the term "media."

"Here's the thing: It depends on how you're going to define media. I mean, I just get tired of having to answer– because, you know, exactly. I just sort of, I'm sort of, I throw up my hands at it, and I refuse to do it anymore," Todd said. "And I don't think you can collectively say the media's anything, because you know, who's the most influential media organ on television now? It's Fox News, right? They have the most viewers in the country, so–"

"Actually, it's Rachel. I think Rachel's winning, isn't she?," Hewitt responded.

"Well, Rachel's, well, but my point is, who's got influence over the agenda?" Todd asked.

"That's Fox, yeah," Hewitt said.

"My point is that if you're going to define the entire media by what happens in primetime, you know, that's a little, I think that's a little disingenuous," Todd added.

Todd then went back to address Pruitt, referring to him being a "lighting rod" for the media.

"I think Scott Pruitt's a lightning rod," Todd said. "I think on environmental issues, I think you're right. I think that there is an institutional bias on environmental issues towards climate science and things like that, right? So that is perceived as an ideological bias. So I think that there is an institutional bias when it comes to some of these science studies and things like that on the climate."

"So that leads people to go after him?" Hewitt asked.

"That's right. That, I concede. So I think it automatically puts him sort of on the defensive," Todd concluded.

Daily Caller

[HYPERLINK "http://dailycaller.com/2018/03/15/chuck-todd-admits-institutional-bias-pruitt/"]
MSNBC's Chuck Todd Admits There's 'Institutional Bias' Against Scott Pruitt
By Michael Bastasch, 3/15/18

MSNBC anchor Chuck Todd admitted Thursday there's an "institutional bias" in the media against Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) chief Scott Pruitt.

Todd [HYPERLINK "http://www.hughhewitt.com/chuck-todd-on-the-bell-tolling-for-the-gop-in-november-and-thoughts-on-the-shake-up/"] conservative talk show host Hugh Hewitt "there is an institutional bias on environmental issues towards climate science and things like that" regarding Pruitt. He agreed with Hewitt that the "bias" puts reporters on the attack against the EPA head.

"So that is perceived as an ideological bias," Todd said on Thursday morning. "So I think that there is an institutional bias when it comes to some of these science studies and things like that on the climate.

"So I think it automatically puts him sort of on the defensive," Todd told Hewitt, whose son works for Pruitt at EPA.

Pruitt is one of the more controversial Trump administration officials, sparking heavy resistance from Democrats and environmentalists since his nomination. Activists and politicians labelled him "Polluting Pruitt" and the attacks have not ceased since.

More recently, Pruitt's travel and security spending have garnered criticism. A series of reports have [HYPERLINK "http://dailycaller.com/2018/02/14/scott-pruitt-air-travel-media-obsession/"] Pruitt's use of first-class travel over security reasons and purchasing a $43,000 secure phone line to the White House.

Focus on Pruitt's air travel became more intense in the wake of former Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price's frequent use of chartered flights for officials business. EPA's inspector general is investigating Pruitt's air travel. Pruitt recently [HYPERLINK "http://dailycaller.com/2018/03/01/scott-pruitt-epa-security-concerns/"] he would fly coach.

However, Pruitt has been under more intense press scrutiny than his predecessors. Former EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy also [HYPERLINK "http://dailycaller.com/2018/02/19/gina-mccarthy-first-class-flight-overseas/"] on an international flight, but no one in the media seemed to care then.

Here's the entire exchange between Todd and Hewitt regarding Pruitt:

HH: Now let's talk for a second, the big rumor of the morning is Scott Pruitt to Justice. I always tell people he's my friend. My son works at EPA. I want to get that out there. I kind of throw a flag on the media here. Ever since Joy Reid and I were doing the Washington University debate, and a nut menaced her, and I mean, I was going to be the last line of defense, which is no defense at all, because I'm old, slow and not very good. But this nut just got in her face. And it was really scary. And so they fly him in first class. They put in the cybersecurity things they have to do, and the media goes all over him and they say he's on thin ice. But in fact, the President's talking to him about being the AG.

CT: Right.

HH: Do you think that the media has gone so anti-Trump that they're amplifying things like Scott Pruitt's travel?

CT: Hugh, I, here's the thing. It depends on how you're going to define media. I mean, I just get tired of having to answer...

HH: For everyone, yeah.

CT: ...because, you know, exactly. I just sort of, I'm sort of, I throw up my hands at it, and I refuse to do it anymore. And I don't think you can collectively say the media's anything, because you know, who's the most influential media organ on television now? It's Fox News, right? They have the most viewers in the country, so...

HH: Actually, it's Rachel. I think Rachel's winning, isn't she?

CT: Well, Rachel's, well, but my point is who's got influence over the agenda?

HH: Yeah. Oh, that's Fox, yeah.

CT: My point is that, my point is that if you're going to define the entire media by what happens in prime time, you know, that's a little, I think that's a little disingenuous.

HH: I'm reacting to the Washington Post this morning.

CT: Again, look, let just, let's go back to, let's go back to Scott Pruitt. I think Scott Pruitt's a lightning rod. I think on environmental issues, I think you're right. I think that there is an institutional bias on environmental issues towards climate science and things like that, right? So that is perceived as an ideological bias. So I think that there is an institutional bias when it comes to some of these science studies and things like that on the climate. So that...

HH: So that leads people to go after him.

CT: That, I concede. Okay, that's right. That, I concede. So I think it automatically puts him sort of on the defensive.

Durango Herald

[HYPERLINK "https://durangoherald.com/articles/213602-epa-orders-sunnyside-gold-to-conduct-pay-for-investigations-in-mine-pollution"]

EPA Orders Sunnyside Gold to Investigate Mine Pollution

By Jonathan Romeo, 3/15/18

The Environmental Protection Agency has ordered Sunnyside Gold Corp., the company that owned Silverton's last operating mine, to investigate the groundwater around one of its mines. The order comes just weeks after the corporation declared further study of mine pollution in the Animas River headwaters would be "wasteful and is not required."

On Thursday, the EPA sent Sunnyside Gold a unilateral administrative order to investigate the groundwater system around Sunnyside Mine, one of the largest mining networks in the area.

The EPA believes previous mining operations have significantly altered the groundwater system, and as a result, have caused other mines to discharge waste and contaminate the headwaters of the Animas River.

Rebecca Thomas, EPA project manager, told The Durango Herald on Thursday the company is being held liable for investigations, as well as the cost, "based on (Sunnyside Gold's) past ownership and actions in the mining district."

Included in the order is a list of actions the EPA wants Sunnyside Gold to perform this summer, including drilling a well into the American Tunnel and monitoring some of the bulkheads in the area.

Depending on the findings of those investigations, the EPA then has the authority to order Sunnyside Gold to conduct further operations, if necessary, to understand the way groundwater works in the upper Cement Creek area.

"Until we can understand how water flows through that system, it will be difficult to put forward a plan to address contamination," Thomas said.

Sunnyside Gold reclamation director Kevin Roach said the company needs to review the administrative order.

Roach said Sunnyside Gold is "not the cause of water quality issues in the Animas River, and its activities in the area, including spending $30 million on reclamation over the past 30 years, have resulted in less metals in the Animas basin than would have otherwise been the case."

"We are hoping that our remaining assets can be efficiently utilized in timely, proven and effective solutions to improve water quality, rather than pointless studies or litigation," he said.

Sunnyside Gold – now owned by international mining conglomerate Kinross Gold Corp. – started mining at the historic Sunnyside Mine in 1985 but shuttered Silverton's last operating mine in 1991.

Over the years, Sunnyside Gold performed millions of dollars worth of cleanup projects. In the 1990s, the company entered an agreement with the state to place three bulkheads to stop mine drainage from the Sunnyside Mine.

The agreement released Sunnyside of its liability for pollution under the Clean Water Act but not responsibilities associated with a Superfund listing, officials have said.

The road to a Superfund listing, long opposed by the community of Silverton, began in earnest on Aug. 5, 2015, when the EPA accidentally triggered a blowout at the Gold King Mine, releasing a torrent of mine waste into the Animas and San Juan rivers.

The impetus for the EPA's work in the first place was because the Gold King Mine, over the past few years, was discharging more waste tainted with potentially toxic heavy metals.

Many people familiar with the region believe Sunnyside Gold's bulkheads backed water up at its mine workings, causing adjacent mines, specifically the Gold King – historically a dry mine – to start discharging wastewater.

The area around the Sunnyside and Gold King mines is considered one of the worst contributors to mine pollution in the Animas River, which has caused degraded water quality and has affected aquatic life.

Sunnyside Gold has adamantly denied these claims.

Recently, Sunnyside released two reports, arguing "further study would be wasteful and is not required" in understanding the mines around Silverton.

Sunnyside Gold spokesman Larry Perino wrote in a March 7 email that the company "is not factually, equitably or legally liable for water quality issues in the area."

Sunnyside was also denied earlier this month in its attempt to reduce the size of the Superfund site, with the U.S. Court of Appeals D.C. Circuit dismissing the company's petition to remove mine sites from the listing.

Thomas said Sunnyside Gold has been identified as a "potentially responsible party" – a term the EPA uses for companies it deems financially responsible in a Superfund cleanup.

Thomas said Sunnyside Gold's consent decree with the state is a completely different matter than orders under a Superfund listing. She said the company has a few days to begin initial negotiations over Thursday's order.

Heartland Institute

[HYPERLINK "https://www.heartland.org/news-opinion/news/epa-review-could-end-californias-vehicle-emissions-waiver"]

EPA Review Could End California's Vehicle Emission's Waiver

By Joe Barnett, 3/16/18

Scott Pruitt, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, testified the agency was reexamining California's waiver to impose stricter vehicle emission standards under the 1970 Clean Air Act than federal requirements.

In testimony before the Senate Committee on the Environment and Public Works, Scott Pruitt, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) said the agency was reexamining California's waiver to impose stricter vehicle emission standards under the 1970 Clean Air Act (CAA) than federal requirements.

"Federalism doesn't mean that one state can dictate to the rest of the country," Scott Pruitt, testified Pruitt on January 30, 2018.

Under CAA EPA sets national standards for vehicle tailpipe emissions of certain pollutants. However, CAA allows EPA to grant states waivers to impose stricter standards than federal law and for nearly 50 years it has allowed California to do so.

EPA also allowed 13 other states and the District of Columbia adopt California's standards, meaning they apply to one-third of the domestic market for automobiles.

Harmonize Federal, State Standards

The California Air Resources Board (CARB) sets the state's standards, which are more stringent than federal standards, and require different testing and compliance schedules. Automobile, truck and heavy equipment manufacturers have longed complained about the expense of meeting separate state and federal standards.

Manufacturers say the conflicting standards require them to design and build different versions of the same vehicles, raising prices for consumers nationwide.

At the Senate hearing, Pruitt said the EPA will work with CARB to harmonize state and federal standards.

"One national program is essential," testified Pruitt.

If the EPA ends the waivers, litigation will likely follow.

Three days after Pruitt's testimony CARB Chair Mary Nichols, speaking at a Bloomberg New Energy Finance conference, reportedly said, "I think there would be a war with many states lining up with California."

California law requires the state to cut human-caused CO2 emissions to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Standards

EPA and CARB regulate emissions of six "criteria" pollutants, carbon monoxide, lead, ground-level ozone, nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter, and sulfur dioxide.

A 2007 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court required the EPA to regulate carbon dioxide if the agency found the emissions endangered public health or welfare. EPA made such a finding in 2009, and in 2012 issued the 2022-25 emissions requirements, including greenhouse gas regulations agreed to by the Obama Administration, manufacturers, and CARB.

EPA is conducting a mid-term review of the economic and technological feasibility of the 2022-25 standards. The review was begun under the Obama administration, but never published in the Federal Register, allowing the Trump administration to reopen the review. The Auto Alliance, representing 12 major manufacturers, claimed the Obama administration cut short its evaluation, and requested the Trump administration to reopen the process in February 2017.

In addition to emissions, the federal government, and CARB, regulate the overall efficiency of vehicles sold by each manufacturer, called Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFÉ). At the federal level, the National Highway Traffic Administration sets CAFÉ standards, while the EPA sets emissions standards.

The 2022-25 emissions and fuel economy standards under review would require expensive technology, yet to be introduced, that would raise the average fuel economy of vehicles to 54.5 miles per gallon. The EPA estimated the cost to comply at $200 billion from 2012 to 2025, a figure the automotive industry says is much too low.

The NTSA is expected to issue its determination regarding CAFÉ standards by March 30, and the EPA plans to issue its determination on emissions standards by April 1.

Washington Post

[HYPERLINK "https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-decides-to-remove-national-security-adviser-and-others-may-follow/2018/03/15/fea2ebae-285c-11e8-bc72-077aa4dab9ef_story.html?utm_term=.bcba46c314bf"]

Trump Decides to Remove National Security Adviser, and Others May Follow

By Ashley Parker, Josh Dawsey, Philip Rucker and Carol D. Leonnig, 3/15/18

President Trump has decided to remove H.R. McMaster as his national security adviser and is actively discussing potential replacements, according to five people with knowledge of the plans, preparing to deliver yet another jolt to the senior ranks of his administration.

Trump is now comfortable with ousting McMaster, with whom he never personally gelled, but is willing to take time executing the move because he wants to ensure both that the three-star Army general is not humiliated and that there is a strong successor lined up, these people said.

The turbulence is part of a broader potential shake-up under consideration by Trump that is likely to include senior officials at the White House, where staffers are gripped by fear and uncertainty as they await the next move from an impulsive president who enjoys stoking conflict.

For all of the evident disorder, Trump feels emboldened, advisers said — buoyed by what he views as triumphant decisions last week to impose tariffs on steel and aluminum and to agree to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. The president is enjoying the process of assessing his team and making changes, tightening his inner circle to those he considers survivors and who respect his unconventional style, one senior White House official said.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders pushed back late Thursday on Twitter: "Just spoke @POTUS and Gen H.R. McMaster. Contrary to reports they have a good working relationship and there are no changes at the NSC."

Before The Washington Post report was published, a White House spokesperson checked with several senior White House officials and did not dispute that the president had made a decision. White House Chief of Staff John F. Kelly — who has personally been eager to see McMaster go —has also told White House staff in recent days that Trump had made up his mind about ousting McMaster.

Just days ago, Trump used Twitter to fire Rex Tillerson, the secretary of state whom he disliked, and moved to install his close ally, CIA Director Mike Pompeo, in the job. On Wednesday, he named conservative TV analyst Larry Kudlow to replace his top economic adviser, Gary Cohn, who quit over trade disagreements.

And on Thursday, Trump signaled that more personnel moves were likely. "There will always be change," the president told reporters. "And I think you want to see change. I want to also see different ideas."

This portrait of the Trump administration in turmoil is based on interviews with 19 presidential advisers and administration officials, many of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity to offer candid perspectives.

The mood inside the White House in recent days has verged on mania, as Trump increasingly keeps his own counsel and senior aides struggle to determine the gradations between rumor and truth. At times, they say, they are anxious and nervous, wondering what each new headline may mean for them personally.

But in other moments, they appear almost as characters in an absurdist farce — openly joking about whose career might end with the next presidential tweet. White House officials have begun betting about which staffer will be ousted next, though few, if any, have much reliable information about what is actually going on.

Many aides were particularly unsettled by the firing of the president's longtime personal aide, John McEntee, who was marched out of the White House on Tuesday after his security clearance was abruptly revoked.

"Everybody fears the perp walk," one senior White House official said. "If it could happen to Johnny, the president's body guy, it could happen to anybody."

Trump recently told Kelly that he wants McMaster out and asked for help weighing replacement options, according to two people familiar with their conversations. The president has complained that McMaster is too rigid and that his briefings go on too long and seem irrelevant.

Several candidates have emerged as possible McMaster replacements, including John Bolton, a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, and Keith Kellogg, the chief of staff of the National Security Council.

Kellogg travels with Trump on many domestic trips, in part because the president likes his company and thinks he is fun. Bolton has met with Trump several times and often agrees with the president's instincts. Trump also thinks Bolton, who regularly praises the president on Fox News Channel, is good on television.

Some in the White House have been reluctant to oust McMaster from his national security perch until he has a promotion to four-star rank or other comfortable landing spot. They are eager to show that someone can serve in the Trump administration without suffering severe damage to their reputation.

There has been a death watch for McMaster for several weeks. After NBC reported on March 1 that Trump was preparing to replace him, the White House dismissed that report as "fake news" — but over the past 48 hours, officials told The Post that Trump has now made a clear decision and the replacement search is more active.

McMaster is not the only senior official on thin ice with the president. Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin has attracted Trump's ire for his spending decisions as well as for general disorder in the senior leadership of his agency.

Others considered at risk for being fired or reprimanded include Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson, who has generated bad headlines for ordering a $31,000 dining room set for his office; Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt, who has been under fire for his first-class travel at taxpayer expense; and Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, whose agency spent $139,000 to renovate his office doors.

Meanwhile, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos drew attention this week when she stumbled through a pair of high-profile television interviews. Kelly watched DeVos's sit-down with Lesley Stahl of CBS's "60 Minutes" with frustration and complained about the secretary's apparent lack of preparation, officials said. Other Trump advisers mocked DeVos's shaky appearance with Savannah Guthrie on NBC's "Today" show.

Kelly's own ouster has been widely speculated about for weeks. But two top officials said Trump on Thursday morning expressed disbelief to Vice President Pence, senior advisers and Kelly himself that Kelly's name was surfacing on media watch lists because his job is secure. Trump and Kelly then laughed about it, the officials said.

But others in the West Wing say Kelly's departure could be imminent, and Mick Mulvaney, director of the Office of Management and Budget, has been mentioned as a possible new chief of staff.

The widespread uncertainty has created power vacuums that could play to the advantage of some administration aides.

Pompeo, who carefully cultivated a personal relationship with the president, had positioned himself as the heir apparent to Tillerson, whom Trump had long disliked.

Similarly, Pruitt has made no secret inside the West Wing of his ambition to become attorney general should Trump decide to fire Jeff Sessions, who he frequently derides for his decision to recuse himself from the investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 election.

White House officials have grown agitated that Pruitt and his allies are privately pushing for the EPA chief to replace Sessions, a job Pruitt has told people he wants. On Wednesday night, Kelly called Pruitt and told him the president was happy with his performance at EPA and that he did not need to worry about the Justice Department, according to two people familiar with the conversation.

With Hope Hicks resigning her post as communications director, the internal jockeying to replace her has been especially intense between Mercedes Schlapp, who oversees the White House's long-term communications planning, and Tony Sayegh, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin's top communications adviser.

Trump enjoys watching his subordinates compete for his approval. Many of the rumors are fueled by Trump himself because he complains to aides and friends about other staffers, or muses about who might make good replacements.

"I like conflict. I like having two people with different points of view," Trump said last week, rapping his fists toward one another to simulate a clash. "I like watching it, I like seeing it, and I think it's the best way to go."

Shulkin, meanwhile, is facing mounting trouble after The Post first reported that he and his wife took a sightseeing-filled trip to Europe on taxpayer funds, including watching tennis at Wimbledon. Shulkin is now facing an insurrection at his own agency, with tensions so high that an armed guard stands outside his office.

Another episode haunting Shulkin was a trip to the Invictus Games in Canada last September with first lady Melania Trump's entourage. Shulkin fought with East Wing aides over his request that his wife accompany him on the trip because he was eager for her to meet Britain's Prince Harry, who founded the games, according to multiple officials familiar with the dispute.

The first lady's office explained there was not room on the plane for Shulkin's wife, and officials said the secretary was unpleasant during the trip.

Shulkin said in an email sent by a spokeswoman: "These allegations are simply untrue. I was honored to attend the Invictus Games with the First Lady and understood fully when I was told that there wasn't any more room for guests to attend."

A leading contender to replace Shulkin is Pete Hegseth, an Iraq War veteran and Fox News personality who is a conservative voice on veterans policy, officials said.

White House officials said there are several reasons Trump has not axed Cabinet members with whom he has grown disenchanted: the absence of consensus picks to replace them; concern that their nominated successors may not get confirmed in the divided Senate; and reluctance to pick allied senators or House members for fear of losing Republican seats in special elections, as happened last year in Alabama.

Also, Trump has sometimes expressed confusion about what agencies and secretaries are in charge of what duties, a senior administration official said. For example, this official said, he has complained to Pruitt about regulatory processes for construction projects, although the EPA is not in charge of the regulations.

Amid the disarray, White House staff are training Cabinet secretaries and their staffs on ethics rules and discussing new processes to prevent mistakes. William J. McGinley, who runs the White House Office of Cabinet Affairs, and Stefan C. Passantino, a deputy White House counsel, have met individually and in groups with Carson, Pruitt, Shulkin, Zinke and other Cabinet secretaries to impress upon them the importance of changing behavior.

Simply following the letter of the law is not enough, administration officials said. Trump and Kelly demand that their Cabinet secretaries be mindful of political optics and the bad headlines that come with misbehavior.

"Even if the legal guys sign off on it," one official said, "you still step back and say, 'Does this make sense optically?' "

Associated Press

[HYPERLINK "https://apnews.com/2964ce37e2084ae5b4c13da748b35cff/US-imposes-sanctions-on-Russians-for-US-election-meddling"]

US Gets Tougher on Russia; New Sanctions, Accusations

By Josh Lederman and Matthew Lee, 3/15/18

In its toughest challenge to Russia to date, the Trump administration accused Moscow on Thursday of an elaborate plot to penetrate America's electric grid, factories, water supply and even air travel through cyber hacking. The U.S. also hit targeted Russians with sanctions for alleged election meddling for the first time since President Donald Trump took office.

The list of Russians being punished includes all 13 indicted last month by special counsel Robert Mueller, a tacit acknowledgement by the administration that at least some of Mueller's Russia-related probe has merit.

Trump has repeatedly sought to discredit Mueller's investigation into Russian interference in the presidential election, but the sanctions appeared to rely on the special counsel's legal conclusions in deciding who should be named. The sanctions freeze any assets the individuals may have in U.S. jurisdictions and bar Americans from doing business with them.

The named Russians — 19 in all — are unlikely to have any assets in the United States that would be covered, making the move largely symbolic. But it could help inoculate the president from persistent claims he's afraid or unwilling to stand up to Russian President Vladimir Putin or to fight back against efforts to undermine America's democracy and domestic affairs.

"We're going to be tough on Russia until they decide to change their behavior," said White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders. At the same time, she left open the possibility of better U.S.-Russia cooperation, arguing that "if we can work together to combat world threats on things like North Korea, then we should."

U.S. national security officials said the FBI, Department of Homeland Security and intelligence agencies determined Russian intelligence and others were behind a broad range of cyberattacks starting a year ago. Russian hackers

infiltrated the networks that run the basic services an Americans rely on each day: nuclear, water and manufacturing facilities like factories.

The officials said the hackers chose their targets methodically, obtained access to computer systems, conducted "network reconnaissance" and then attempted to cover their tracks by deleting evidence of the intrusions. The U.S. government has helped the industries expel the Russians from all systems known to have been penetrated, but additional breaches could be discovered, said the officials, who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive national security information.

The officials described Russia's operation as ongoing.

The U.S. accusations and accompanying sanctions mark a stepped-up attempt by Trump's administration to show it's adequately confronting Russia over hacking, election meddling and general efforts to compromise Western democracies and infrastructure. Trump on Thursday also joined the leaders of Britain, France and Germany in blaming Moscow for the poisoning of an ex-Russian spy who was living in England.

The sanctions prompted a swift threat of retaliation from Russia's government, which said a response was already being prepared. Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov suggested the Trump administration had timed the action to taint this weekend's presidential election in Russia, in which President Vladimir Putin is expected to win an overwhelming victory.

"It is tied to U.S. internal disorder, tied of course to our electoral calendar," Ryabkov was quoted as saying by the Russian state news agency Tass.

Altogether, 19 Russians were cited. Also sanctioned were five Russian companies, including the Internet Research Agency, which is accused of orchestrating a mass online disinformation campaign to affect the U.S. presidential election result.

The U.S. Treasury Department announced the sanctions amid withering criticism in the U.S. accusing Trump and his administration of failing to use its congressionally mandated authority to punish Russia. The sanction targets include officials working for the Russian military intelligence agency GRU.

The sanctions are the first use of the new powers that Congress passed last year to punish Moscow for interfering in the election that Trump won over Democrat Hillary Clinton.

Yet Russia hawks in Congress deemed it too little, too late.

"Even more must be done," said Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina. GOP Sen. John McCain of Arizona called the action "overdue."

And Democrats homed in on the fact that the list of Russians hit with sanctions included all of those indicted by Mueller. That shows the administration believes the investigation is legitimate, they argued.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York said the sanctions prove that Mueller's "investigation is not a 'witch hunt' as the president and his allies have claimed." He said, "It's more clear than ever that the president must not interfere with the special counsel's investigation in any way."

The Treasury Department said the GRU and Russia's military both interfered in the 2016 election and were "directly responsible" for the NotPetya cyberattack that hit businesses across Europe in June 2017, causing billions of dollars in damage by disrupting global shipping, trade and medicine production. Treasury said that the attack caused several U.S. hospitals to be unable to create electronic medical records for more than a week.

Among those affected were Yevgeny Prigozhin, who is known as "Putin's chef" and who ran the St. Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency, and 12 of the agency's employees. They were included in Mueller's indictment last month.

The Russian agency "tampered with, altered or caused a misappropriation of information with the purpose or effect of interfering with or undermining election processes and institutions," specifically the 2016 U.S. presidential race, the U.S. said.

Miami Herald

[HYPERLINK "http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article205461214.html"]
Death Toll from FIU Bridge Collapse Up to 6 as Crews Work to Clear the Rubble
By Kelsey Charles Rabin, Rene Rodriguez and Douglas Hanks, 3/16/18

Miami-Dade Fire Rescue workers, homicide detectives, engineers and NTSB workers worked through the slow painstaking process Thursday night of clearing rubble, documenting evidence and trying to remove the dead after a [HYPERLINK "http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/west-miami-dade/article205316174.html" \t "_blank"] Thursday.

At a 5 a.m. briefing Miami-Dade police spokesman Alvaro Zabaleta said six people are now confirmed dead. What wasn't clear: whether some of those dead still remain trapped in vehicles under the collapsed walkway.

"They're using a lot of the heavy equipment," Zabaleta said. "It's a slow process because of the unsteadiness of the structure."

Earlier in the morning police said the search and rescue [HYPERLINK "http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article205458974.html" \t "_blank"]— meaning police no longer believe there are any survivors.

Zabaleta said they were able to determine that most likely through crawling through the chunks of concrete and observing.

"Most likely through visual," Zabaleta said. "Our priority is to get the bodies out."

Still, none of the dead have been named. And Zabaleta said even though homicide detectives are separating evidence from the debris, the priority is getting the bodies out from under the bridge.

Police, who have taken the lead in the investigation, believe there are still eight vehicles trapped under the bridge. In an interview on WIOD 610 AM Friday morning, Juan Perez, director of the Miami-Dade Police Department, [HYPERLINK "http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/west-miami-dade/article205463894.html" \t "_blank"]remain under the bridge, although that number could rise.

Perez also said criminal charges are possible, depending on the results of ongoing investigations by the National Transportation Safety Board and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. State attorney Katherine Fernandez-Rundle is scheduled to visit the scene Friday.

Fire rescue vehicles [HYPERLINK "http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article205411239.html" \t "_blank"] on Thursday, according to the hospital's public relations director Peter Jude.

One of the victims died at the hospital.

Kendall Regional Medical Center director Dr. Mark McKenney [HYPERLINK "http://abcnews.go.com/US/death-toll-florida-bridge-collapse-climbs/story?id=53791946" \t "_blank"]the patients being treated range in age from 20 to 50

and suffered level-one trauma injuries. “One patient arrived in a coma with severe extremity injuries,” McKenney said Thursday night. Eight other patients were admitted with less severe injuries such as broken bones and abrasions.

The engineers on the scene work with Miami-Dade Fire Rescue, not any of the bridges contractors.

While it is still unclear whether the bridge collapse was the result of a design error or something that went wrong during construction, Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Gimenez said that workers [HYPERLINK "http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article205432029.html" \t "_blank"]on the unfinished and vulnerable bridge Thursday.

Overnight, Florida Sen. Marco Rubio — who had just left the site of the bridge collapse —tweeted: “The cables that suspend the #Miami bridge had loosened & the engineering firm ordered that they be tightened. They were being tightened when it collapsed today.”

FIU President Mark B. Rosenberg also used Twitter to express his condolences to the family and loved ones of the people affected by the bridge collapse.

State transportation officials said Thursday that a 10-block stretch of Southwest Eighth Street from 107th to 117th avenues [HYPERLINK "http://www.miamiherald.com/news/traffic/article205397789.html" \t "_blank"]The Eighth Street exit on the Florida Turnpike will also be closed.