Revue de presse américaine

Ambassade de France aux États-Unis
Service de presse et de communication

Liberté • Égalité • Fraternité
RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

Lundi 27 février, réalisation : Josselin Brémaud

FRANCE – EUROPE

CNBC : France election fears ease as polls suggest Macron will beat Le Pen

Silvia Amaro

Chesnot | Getty Images

Concerns over the French presidential election seemed to have eased slightly on Monday with the yields on the 10-year French bond falling.

The yield on the 10-year government bond dropped to 0.881 percent on Monday morning – the lowest level seen in the last month.

"The slight deterioration in exit polls for Marine Le Pen in the run-off ballot helps stabilizing market sentiment," Norbert Wuthe, senior analyst at BayernLB, told CNBC via email.

This is "further supported by the news that the two socialist candidates won't form a coalition," he added.

Until now, investors have been concerned about the growing support for the far-right leader Marine Le Pen and the outcome of the French vote, which takes place over two rounds in April and May.

The fact that the far-left candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon and the socialist runner Benoit Hamon haven't managed to form an alliance reduces the chances that there will be a final round with both far-left and far-right candidates.

"It's all closely linked to the probability of a Marine Le Pen victory in the final two candidate Presidential round. That would be the horror scenario for the markets and the EU given her radical euro-exit policies," Jan Randolph, head of sovereign risk at IHS Markit, told CNBC about Monday's market moves.

Polls released over the weekend have shown that the centrist candidate Emmanuel Macron is well placed to beat Le Pen in the second round and become the next president of France.

A poll published by the newspaper Le Figaro showed Macron winning the second round against Le Pen with 58 percent of the votes. Another poll conducted by Odoxa/Dentsu-Consulting said Macron would beat Le Pen with 61 percent against 39 percent.

The good polling numbers for the independent runner Macron follow the announcement of the centrist Francois Bayrou that he would join forces with the former economy minister. Bayrou is a veteran in French politics, which could help the 39-year-old Macron winning the confidence of some French voters.

Macron announced Monday plans to slash government spending by 60 billion euros ($63.5 billion) and cut 120,000 public-sector jobs. He also unveiled intentions to reduce some taxes and support green energy investments.

"However, we do expect a yield increase in the second half of the week when increased euro zone inflation numbers and duration heavy French supply will weigh on the market," Wuthe added.

Follow CNBC International on Twitter and Facebook.

Bloomberg

Macron Extends Lead Over Fillon, Nears Le Pen in French Race

by Mark Deen @MarkJDeen
More stories by Mark Deen

26 février 2017 à 20:01 UTC−5 27 février 2017 à 03:10 UTC−5

- Independent candidate chalks up three endorsements in week
- Socialist Caresche, Cohn-Bendit back Macron on Le Pen risk

Independent French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron opened up his biggest lead yet over Republican Francois Fillon and began narrowing the gap with National Front leader Marine Le Pen, helped by endorsements and his rivals' legal troubles.

Two polls published on Sunday gave Macron the support of 25 percent of the French electorate going into the first round of the presidential election, two points behind Le Pen. Francois Fillon has 20 percent support according to a Kantar Sofres poll and 19 percent in an Oxoda Dentsu survey. Both surveys show Le Pen losing to either man in the second round.

The 39-year-old Macron won his third and fourth endorsements in less than a week Sunday as Socialist lawmaker Christophe Caresche said that he will abandon his party's nominee in favor of the independent and former European lawmaker Daniel Cohn-Bendit officially declared he will vote for Macron. That follows announcements of support last week from former ecology party lawmaker Francois de Rugy and Francois Bayrou, a centrist politician who ran for president in the past three elections.

"The Bayrou announcement was decisive," Emmanuel Riviere, director of polling at Kantar Public France, said in an interview. "He is a personality with significant weight and he has generated momentum for Macron."

The support has helped Macron recover from gaffes related to France's colonial past and gay marriage that set back his campaign. Macron now has a six-point lead over Fillon according to the Odoxa poll -- greater than he has had at any point in the campaign.

"That's a spectacular increase," Odoxa pollster Gael Sliman said on France 2 television. "Is it sustainable? It remains to be seen. Many things can still happen," he said.

Like Bayrou, Caresche said that Macron's ability to defeat Le Pen was crucial to his decision. He also mentioned Socialist candidate Benoit Hamon's choices on nuclear power as well as environmental and constitutional issues. Cohn-Bendit, a former leader in the green party, said that while he likes some of Hamon's environmental policies, Macron would be the best way to block the anti-euro, anti-immigrant Le Pen.

"This wasn't an easy decision, I owe everything to the Socialist Party starting with my political career," Caresche said in an interview with Le Journal du Dimanche. "For a man of the left, Emmanuel Macron is the only way to effectively counter Marine Le Pen in the second round of the presidential election. The promises of Benoit Hamon are incompatible with a large union of French people against Le Pen. That's a risk that personally I don't want to take."

Macron would defeat Le Pen by a margin of 61 percent to 39 percent in the run-off ballot, compared with 57.5 percent to 42.5 percent for Fillon, according to the Odoxa poll.

"In these elections there is one issue, the risk of electing Marine Le Pen," Cohn-Bendit said Monday on Europe 1 radio. "Today the best rampart against Marine Le Pen is Emmanuel Macron. There are many things I disagree with in Macron's program," but "in the end what counts and it's who will beat Marine Le Pen."

Merkel Meeting

Macron scored another victory this weekend with the announcement that he will meet with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in mid March. He also dined Sunday with Jean-Louis Borloo, a former environment minister under Fillon, in the quest for another endorsement.

Fillon, meanwhile, is struggling to put to rest a scandal about the employment of his wife and children as parliamentary aides over the course of more than three decades in politics.

French prosecutors extended the probe of Fillon, saying further investigation is needed and pushing any conclusion until after the election. Prosecutors said Friday that after the police conducted inquiries they decided to put an investigative judge in charge the preliminary probe "given the longstanding nature of some of the events concerned."

While the latest twist in Fillon's case gives opponents a continued line of attack with just two months to go until the election, the decision also suggests charges won't be brought before voters decide who should be France's next president.

The Republican isn't alone in facing legal issues. Le Pen refused to be interviewed by police last week for an investigation into her use of a European parliamentary allowance to pay for party work in France, said her lawyer, Rodolphe Bosselut. Bosselut urged prosecutors to back off until after the election to avoid interfering with the democratic process.

"We are seeing a sudden rush in the procedure which relates to an old complaint," Bosselut said in a telephone interview. "You have to ask why everything is accelerating and madame has been summoned two months before a major election date."

Bloomberg

Marine le Pen is lashing out as her rivals gain ground

By Josh Lowe On 2/27/17 at 7:12 AM

During a rally in Nantes, the far-right National Front leader attacked the breakaway centrist candidate Emmanuel Macron. She called him a “pro-European fanatic” who could not “hope to be understood by Britain which has voted for Brexit, by Italy who has just said no to the EU by referendum, by the Netherlands which are getting ready for a victory of the nationalists with my friend Geert Wilders,” Euronews reported.

Le Pen’s comments followed continued signs she will struggle to secure the majority support required to win in the French system.

Polls consistently show Le Pen winning the race’s first round, in which all candidates face off against each other, with around 26 percent support.

But new data suggests that Macron, who is standing under the banner of his new party, En Marche!, may come second in that race, pitching he and Le Pen against each other in the second round, where the winner must take more than 50 percent of the vote.

Polls have always shown either Macron or the other likely second-round challenger François Fillon of the Republicans beating Le Pen in the run-off.

But Macron has now extended his second-round lead over Le Pen to 20 points.

Le Pen’s support is rock-solid, with the vast majority of her backers saying they’d be unlikely to vote for anyone else. But she faces a challenge to convince moderate voters to back her party, which hails from France’s far right and whose platform includes radical policies like leaving the euro currency.

Newsweek : Macron would easily beat Le Pen in a runoff for the French presidency, polls show

By Reuters On 2/26/17 at 4:13 PM

French independent candidate Emmanuel Macron would easily beat far-right leader Marine Le Pen in the second round of the country's presidential election in May, two opinion polls showed on Sunday.

The pollsters said Macron has been buoyed by the alliance announced this week with centrist politician Francois Bayrou, which has enabled him to move ahead of conservative candidate Francois Fillon.

A poll by Odoxa/Dentsu-Consulting showed 39-year-old Macron, a former economy minister running without the support of any traditional political party, would beat Le Pen in the runoff with 61 percent of the vote, versus 39 percent for her.

Polls show Emmanuel Macron, left, easily beating Marine Le Pen for the French presidency on the second ballot. Reuters

The election is held in two stages, with about a dozen candidates running in the first round and the two frontrunners from that vote facing each other in the runoff.

Another poll by Figaro/LCI showed Macron winning the runoff by 58 percent to 42 percent for Le Pen.

Le Pen, leader of the anti-immigrant and anti-European Union National Front, would lead in the first round of voting with 27 percent, both polls showed, followed by Macron with 25 percent and Fillon with 19 percent.

A National Front campaign rally in the Atlantic port city of Nantes was marred by two days of violence as left-wing groups seeking to block the event clashed with police. Authorities said 13 gendarmes were injured during skirmishes on Saturday evening.

At the rally, Le Pen accused ex-financier Macron of being backed by banks and media groups, and said the justice system was being used to influence the outcome of the election.

Her chief of staff was put under formal investigation on Wednesday over alleged misuse of EU funds. Another associate was also placed under formal investigation in a separate probe over campaign financing on Saturday.

Le Pen promised to tighten immigration, push for a stronger role of the state in business, and introduce a seven-year non-renewable presidential mandate to replace the current five-year mandate.

Fillon, once seen as a the main challenger to Le Pen and favorite to become France's next president, has been hobbled by a scandal in which he allegedly paid his wife and other family members for fake parliamentary jobs.

The Odoxa poll put ruling Socialist party candidate Benoit Hamon in fourth place in the first round with 13 percent, and hard-left candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon in fifth with 12 percent.

Hamon and Melenchon, who are in talks about a potential alliance, met on Friday evening, a source close to the Socialist candidate told Reuters on Sunday.

Business Insider : Marine Le Pen brutally attacks her French election rivals as protests erupt at Front National rally

Barbara Tasch, Business Insider UKMarine Le Pen in Nantes. REUTERS/Stephane Mahe

Marine Le Pen railed against her rivals and the media as clashes erupted at her rally in Nantes at the weekend.

In a typically fiery speech to 3,500 supporters, the far-right Front National leader said both her rivals, Emanuel Macron and François Fillon, did not believe in France anymore.

"Our two main competitors want to bring the state under control. These people are not free. One is the insurance candidate, the other is the one of the bank and the media," Le Pen said, according to Le Point.

She then cited US President Donald Trump and the Brexit vote in the UK, as evidence that "in this new world that is emerging, I am the best placed to speak in the name of France." She added that her plans were "in tune with the great planetary movement which consists of the awakening of the peoples [and] the return of national frontiers and national pride," according to The Times.

Although she called current President François Hollande "incompetent," her most pointed attacks were against Macron, the independent candidate of the En Marche party he founded. She called him the "candidate of the Rothschild bank," who "promoted immigration" in Berlin and then went to Algeria to "justify a migratory highway between Algiers and Paris."

A new poll published on Sunday shows the gap between Le Pen (27%) and Macron (25%) is narrowing in the first round of the election, while Fillon (19%), The Republicans' presidential candidate, is losing more support amid allegations he paid family members for fake parliamentary assistant jobs.

The French justice is also currently investigating Le Pen over fake jobs allegations, and although she did not specifically refer to the scandal during her rally, Le Pen nevertheless attacked "the magistrates ... [who] are there to apply the law, not to invent it, not to thwart the will of the people, not to replace the legislator."

Much like Trump, Le Pen also lashed out at the media in her speech. She said the press "scream about the freedom of the press as soon as they are criticised and whimper about having lost the confidence of the people who turn to the internet."

Around 2,000 people gathered to demonstrate against Le Pen and her party in Nantes, prompting clashes between riot police and protesters. Protests at Front National rally. REUTERS/Stephane Mahe

According to police, several paramilitary police officers were wounded by projectiles, several shop windows were smashed, and a bus transporting FN supporters was covered in white paint by demonstrators. Police responded by firing tear gas and stun grenades to disperse the crowd, according to Reuters.

Le Pen reacted to the clashes during the rally. "We will never bow to seeing militias of the far left wrecking, burning and attack the physical integrity of the police as yesterday in Nantes with the more or less obvious complicity of the government," she said.

Fillon also reacted to the clashes on Sunday, accusing the government of

not doing enough to curb the violence that has surrounded campaign events, citing a both the clashes at Le Pen's meeting and a Macron event last week that was disrupted by protests.

Fillon said in a statement that just two months before the presidential election, France was witnessing a "quasi-civil war," Reuters reports.

Although most polls still show Macron and Fillon would ultimately beat Marine Le Pen in the second round of the election, the latest polls also show that 83% of Le Pen electors are sure of their choice, while only 75% and 58% are certain about their votes for Fillon and Macron respectively.

Protesters try to stop backers of French far-right candidate

Published February 26, 2017

Marine Le Pen speaks during a press conference on Feb. 21 in Lebanon. (AP)

PARIS – Demonstrators in western France have tried to block buses carrying supporters of far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen to a campaign rally.

The incident Sunday in the city of Nantes came after 11 police officers were injured Saturday in skirmishes with activists opposed to Le Pen's appearance there. No injuries were reported from Sunday's bus protest.

Sebastien Chenu of Le Pen's National Front party said on BFM television that the protesters were "trying to stop us from delivering our message. We will not back down."

Critics allege that Le Pen's anti-immigration, anti-establishment campaign is a cover for a racist, anti-democratic worldview.

Recent polls suggest she could win the first round of the April-May election, but predict she would lose the ensuing runoff vote.

Emons : The Priced-In Risk of Marine Le Pen's Victory

Ben Emons

Markets trade in the probability of certain events happening. In case an event has high risk, a “tail” is priced in. Those tail risks typically show up in certain corners of the markets. Today, tail risks are priced in for a potential unexpected outcome in the French elections. That tail risk is on the rise now that polls of the second round of voting indicate a tight race between center candidate Emmanuel Macron and the far-right candidate Marine Le Pen.

Tail risks can be viewed in a linear way. For example, the German 2-year bond ("Schatze") reached an all-time negative yield of -92 basis points when Le Pen recently gained in the polls. As a result, the German 2-year yield became negatively correlated with the price of French bonds and stocks. A generic view is that German bonds are a reflection of the “tail risk” that Le Pen is victorious. However, there are technical reasons to explain the fall of German 2-year bonds. Those technicalities are a scarcity of German bond collateral in the repurchase market and the European Central Bank's purchase of German bonds yielding less than the deposit rate. This is what makes the 2-year German bond “overvalued” and therefore not as accurate a reflection of the true tail risk in France. There are other areas in markets that provide a better idea of how much of a Le Pen win is priced in.

Tail risks can be seen in currency options. The options market use a measure called “skew.” This is the difference between the implied volatility of puts and calls. A negative skew means currency markets price euro puts with higher implied volatility than the currency's calls. In the case of negative skew, the currency market thinks the risk for depreciation of a currency is large. The skew of the euro currency has been on a steady decline since President Donald Trump was elected in November, as seen in Fig. 1.

On the other hand, the French bond market has seen a surge in yields discounted to the second round of the presidential election, on May 7. Rising yields are a sign of uncertainty about the outcome of the election. Fig. 1 shows how markets are pricing a “tail risk” of an adverse election outcome. And this tail risk seems to be increasing by the day.

Option Skew and Forward Yield

A different way of estimating the tail risk of a French exit is via sovereign credit default swaps. In 2014, the definition of sovereign CDS changed to represent “English law” issued bonds that reflect the “bail-in” rules for European financial institutions. Since then, the sovereign CDS market has seen two versions: the “2014” definition and the “2003” definition. The latter is based on “local law” sovereign bonds. Under local law, a government potentially has more leeway to restructure sovereign debt less favorable to bond holders.

The French government bond market is currently around 2 trillion euros, of which about 1.7 trillion is issued under “French local law.” In the event of a “Frexit” after a sweeping electoral victory by Le Pen’s Front National, restructuring risk of French government bonds may rise significantly. The tail risk of that possibility is shown in Fig. 2 where the spread between 2003 and 2014 definition French sovereign CDS has widened sharply.

France Sovereign CDS

In another segment of the market, spreads on supra/sovereign and agency bonds have moved sharply versus French sovereign bonds. A similar signal of a risk of potentially more financial distress is seen in swap spreads, the difference between German yields and euro swap rates, as shown in Fig. 3. These risk spreads have widened close to levels of 2011 at the height of the euro crisis. The SSA market consists of issuers such as the European Investment Bank. Such institutions are funded by 27 countries in the European Union, including France. A widening of French spreads to the EIB is a signal the market is considering the possibility that France may not be able to provide future funding to the EIB in the event of an exit from the European Monetary Union.

Despite the esoteric tail risks of a “Frexit” in specific segments of European sovereign and derivatives markets, global sentiment has remained fairly optimistic about the outlook. This is the result of a market currently trading between an “upside risk” scenario of U.S. tax reform and fiscal stimulus, and a “downside risk” scenario of different election outcomes in Europe.

In 2007, certain segments of the mortgage derivatives market predicted a big risk event in housing that ultimately led to the 2008 financial crisis. Ten years later, in 2017, the French bond, CDS and currency markets are discounting the possibility of bigger political risk that may eventually lead to what is dubbed the “Frexit.” The difference between the Brexit and Frexit is that the latter is a possible exit of the monetary union. That carries the risk of currency redenomination, default and financial stress. For now sanguine global markets should start paying closer attention to what the tail risks in French markets are saying. If tail risks are to be believed, the risk of Frexit is larger than what is currently assumed.

This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners.

To contact the author of this story: Ben Emons at bemons8@bloomberg.net

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Max Berley at mberley@bloomberg.net

Breitbart : French Left Candidates Fail to Unite Before Election

PARIS (AP) – The two main left-leaning candidates in France’s presidential election won’t join forces after all.

Socialist Benoit Hamon and Jean-Luc Melenchon, a former member of the Socialist Party who is supported by the Communists, both announced over the weekend that they are staying in the race.

Despite opinion polls suggesting that neither one has a chance of reaching the second round, they have shown little appetite for joining forces since Hamon won the Socialist primary last month.

Speaking on France Inter radio on Monday, Hamon said: “I would have preferred a union around my candidacy.”

Melenchon issued a statement saying they could not put aside their differences but agreed on a “mutual respect code” throughout their campaigns.

The New York Times

French Historian Says He Was Threatened With Deportation at Houston Airport

Erin McCann

Henry Rousso, a French historian and one of the most pre-eminent scholars on the Holocaust, said he was detained for more than 10 hours by federal border agents in Houston and told he would not be allowed to enter the United States before lawyers intervened to stop his deportation.

Mr. Rousso said in a telephone interview on Sunday that he arrived at the George Bush Intercontinental Airport around 2 p.m. Wednesday on a flight from France when immigration authorities began to question his visa and his reason for being in the United States.

Mr. Rousso, an expert on France after the First World War, was scheduled to give a keynote address on Friday afternoon at a conference organized by the Hagler Institute for Advanced Study at Texas A&M University in College Station.

“It would be in no means difficult to look up who he is,” said Jason Mills, an immigration lawyer who helped secure Mr. Rousso’s eventual release. “His reasons for being here were nothing but beneficial to the United States. He is a man of experience and age,” Mr. Mills said. “There is plenty of history there on him. I don’t understand why he would have been in for the several hours that he was. It is a little alarming.”

Mr. Rousso said he was interrogated by Customs and Border Protection officers who told him that he was violating immigration law by using a tourist visa to enter the country to attend the academic conference. He said that at first they denied him entry to the United States, and told him he would be put on the next available flight to Paris.

The academics who had invited Mr. Rousso to speak in Texas became concerned when he failed to meet the driver who had been sent to collect him. They scrambled to alert immigration lawyers, the dean of the law school and Michael Young, the president of Texas A&M University.

The issue, Mr. Rousso said, appeared to be an honorarium of $2,000 that he was being paid to participate in the conference. Such payments are allowed for academics visiting the United States, but Mr. Rousso and those involved in securing his release said the customs agents appeared not to realize that at first.

“With a tourist visa, I’m not allowed to work,” Mr. Rousso said. “This is true — except for scholars.”

The agent who was questioning Mr. Rousso was “concerned that he was giving a lecture and was getting a good stipend to do that,” said Richard J. Golsan, a professor at the university who also had planned to have Mr. Rousso speak to his class last week.

Customs and Border Protection did not respond to a telephone message or email requests for comment on Sunday.

Mr. Mills, an immigration lawyer in Fort Worth, said he received a call from the dean of the law school around 9 p.m. Wednesday. “They were in a bit of a panic,” Mr. Mills said.

He set to work contacting immigration authorities at the Houston airport.

It was after 1 a.m. Thursday when Mr. Rousso was given back his passport and cellphone, taken to a public area of the airport and told he was free to go. He said he was told that the agent who originally held him was “inexperienced.”

He took a taxi to an airport hotel, where he was able to telephone Mr. Golsan, and to continue his journey to the university.

He gave his keynote address, “Writing on the Dark Side of the Recent Past,” as planned on Friday. On Sunday morning, a few hours before he was to board a flight to Paris, Mr. Rousso, 62, said in the telephone interview that he was apprehensive about returning to the airport. He has for 30 years been a regular visitor to the United States, and was unsure when he would return, he said.

“I’m a little bit nervous,” he said. “It’s completely irrational, I know.”

Mr. Mills said the treatment Mr. Rousso experienced was unusual, but representative of a shift in how some border agents are approaching their jobs.

“Now they’re looking really hard for reasons to deny, instead of reasons to admit,” he said.

Mr. Rousso and those who helped him said he was lucky to have been able to reach out to leaders at the university.

“If I had not the possibility to call my friend and then to be in touch with the president, probably I would have been in Paris now after a bit of blurry, strange experience,” he said.

In France, where Mr. Rousso is a well-respected academic, his treatment was met with anger.

Emmanuel Macron, a centrist candidate for France’s presidency, condemned the episode on Sunday on Twitter, saying there was “no excuse” for what happened to Mr. Rousso.

Fatma E. Marouf, a law professor and the director of the Immigrant Rights Clinic in Fort Worth, who helped secure Mr. Rousso’s release, said he benefited from the lessons that immigration lawyers learned in January, after an executive order from President Trump led to chaos at the nation’s borders. “During the airport detentions, we had created a really good rapid-response team of attorneys in Houston and where I am in Dallas-Fort Worth,” she said. “There was already a good team in place.”

Since Mr. Trump took office in January, immigration authorities have engaged in several high-profile actions against immigrants. Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary, said on Tuesday that the president wanted to “take the shackles off” of agents who had, under President Barack Obama, been under orders to focus only on serious criminals.

The Washington Post

U.S. detains and nearly deports French Holocaust historian (online)

By James McAuley

PARIS — Henry Rousso is one of France’s most preeminent scholars and public intellectuals. Last week, as the historian attempted to enter the United States to attend an academic symposium, he was detained for more than 10 hours — for no clear reason.

On Wednesday, Rousso arrived at Houston’s George Bush Intercontinental Airport after an 11-hour flight from Paris, en route to Texas A&M University in College Station. There, he was to speak Friday afternoon at the Hagler Institute for Advanced Study.

But things did not go according to plan: Rousso — an Egyptian-born French citizen — was “mistakenly detained” by U.S. immigration authorities, according to Richard Golsan, director of the Glasscock Center for Humanities Research at Texas A&M.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

Please provide a valid email address.

“When he called me with this news two nights ago, he was waiting for customs officials to send him back to Paris as an illegal alien on the first flight out,” Golsan said Friday at the symposium, according to the Eagle, a newspaper that covers the College Station area.

The university then sprang into action, the Eagle reported, with President Michael Young reaching out to law professor Fatma Marouf, who earlier this month had assisted in writing an amicus brief against President Trump’s executive order banning refugees from around the world and travelers from seven Muslim-majority nations.

President Trump has called for "extreme vetting" of refugees seeking to enter the United States. This is the current process that people with refugee status typically go through to get approval into the country. (Claritza Jimenez,Dani Player/The Washington Post)

President Trump has called for "extreme vetting" of refugees seeking to enter the United States. This is the current process that people with refugee status typically go through to get approval into the country. This is the current process that people with refugee status typically go through to get approval into the country. (Claritza Jimenez, Dani Player/The Washington Post)

Marouf quickly and successfully intervened with immigration authorities, and Rousso was released and allowed to deliver his lecture.

After weeks of headlines related to Trump's travel ban, incident drew immediate attention around the world -- especially in a France on the eve of presidential elections this coming April and May.

Emmanuel Macron, the popular centrist candidate for the French presidency, used the Rousso affair to repeat his pitch to U.S. scientists and researchers who he has said would be better off in France rather than in the America of Donald Trump.

"There is no excuse for what happened to Henry Rousso," Macron wrote Sunday on Twitter. "Our country is open to scientists and intellectuals."

For his part, Rousso confirmed the details of his experience Saturday on Twitter: “I have been detained 10 hours at Houston Itl Airport about to be deported. The officer who arrested me was ‘inexperienced.’”

It remains unclear what about Rousso was identified as suspect by immigration authorities.

Egypt — from which Rousso and his family, as Jews, were exiled in 1956, after a slew of anti-Semitic measures imposed by the administration of President Gamal Abdel Nasser, according to the Israeli newspaper Haaretz — was not among the seven nations in the travel ban, which had been suspended by the time he arrived in the United States.

[Who is affected by the travel ban?]

Furthermore, France is a beneficiary of the U.S. visa waiver program, which permits French citizens to enter the United States without a visa. All that is required is an online ESTA application before departure.

For Marouf, Rousso’s ordeal was indicative of a strict new U.S. border control regime: “It seems like there’s much more rigidity and rigor in enforcing these immigration requirements and technicalities of every visa,” she told the Eagle.

Rousso’s scholarship focuses on the memory of the Vichy regime, the darkest chapter in modern French history, when the government of unoccupied France collaborated with Nazi Germany in World War II. Vichy authorities are particularly infamous for assisting the Germans in rounding up and deporting tens of thousands of Jews from France during the Holocaust, which Rousso once called “the past that does not pass.”

He spoke Friday on a similar subject in College Station, in a lecture titled “Writing on the Dark Side of the Recent Past.”

Fellow historians took to social media after news of Rousso's experience, many pointing out what they considered the uncomfortable irony of the arbitrary detention of a Holocaust historian.

Ruth Ben-Ghiat, a historian at New York University, said on Twitter, “His work on cost of forgetting past (Vichy) so relevant.”

“Thank you so much for your reactions,” Rousso posted Saturday evening on Twitter in response. “My situation was nothing compared to some of the people I saw who couldn't be defended as I was.”

“It is now necessary to deal with the utmost arbitrariness and incompetence on the other side of the Atlantic,” Rousso wrote Sunday in the French edition of the Huffington Post. “What I know, in loving this country forever, is that the United States is no longer quite the United States.”

Business Insider : France passed a new advertising transparency law the entire global ad industry should pay attention to

Lara O'ReillyLoi Sapin is changing. Mike Hewitt/Getty Images

Unless you have deep knowledge of the French advertising market and France's legal system, its likely you may not be aware of the region's transparency law, Loi Sapin.

Loi Sapin is an anti-corruption law that was introduced in France in 1993 in order to make the business of media-buying more transparent.

Under the law, media-buying agencies are not allowed to work as both the buyer and seller of advertising for their client. In other words, it means they can't bulk-buy media inventory ahead of time and sell it back to their client at a later date. The law also requires that the agency can only be paid by the advertiser — meaning they can't receive rebates from a publisher or media owner.

Media owners are also required to report directly to the advertiser a month after their advertisements appear, with a rate card and details about the services that were performed.

But for years, there has been a huge question mark over how — or if — the law should apply to the buying of digital media. In January 2015, the French government proposed an amendment to the law to say that it should apply to "any medium whatsoever." But there was still confusion about the vagueness of the wording. The buying and selling of digital media is complex and often sees agencies — through their trading desks — act as both the buyer and the seller.

On February 9, a new Loi Sapin decree was passed, which includes digital advertising services. Specifically, it now covers: "Any medium connected to the internet, such as computers, tablets, mobile phones, televisions, and digital panels."

The decree comes into force in January 2018. Agencies can no longer continue to buy and resell digital media to their clients and media owners will be required to send invoices and detailed information about the services they performed directly to the advertiser.

The French anti-corruption agency can issue a public warning if it finds a company in non-compliance. It also has the power to impose injunctions and fines of up to €1 million.

Most big agency groups have already been preparing for the change and have separated their media planning agencies from their trading desks, which sell digital media that is traded programmatically (using automated systems, in other words). If a media planning agency is advising a client on which resellers to use, they must clearly state whether any of those firms are owned by their parent company.

Stephanie Faber, who heads law firm Squire Patton Boggs' commercial, intellectual property, and data protection groups in Paris, told Business Insider: "It shouldn't be too complicated to explain to a client. You have to say: 'We are advising you to use this and that seller, Seller X is part of my group. But we also use other sellers.' Agency trading desks can still exist and all the companies I know of that do this kind of business have been adapting to the requirement of creating a separate entity."

Havas is one such company that has a separate trading desk — Affiperf — from its media agency, Havas Media.

Sebastien Robin, global programmatic director at Havas Media Group, thinks the new decree is good news and a "step forward for the whole industry."

He told Business Insider: "We expect the decree will restore the trust between advertisers and the group of agencies and clear the doubts that arose across the industry in the past couple of years following the WFA (World Federation of Advertisers) and ANA (Association of National Advertisers) reports issued in the USA, which is a market with a different structure than ours in France."

The ANA report suggested non-transparent business practices were "pervasive" in the US media-buying landscape, while the WFA claimed 90% of advertisers are reviewing their programmatic advertising contracts in order to gain better transparency from their agencies. Last month, the chief marketing officer of the world's biggest advertiser — Marc Pritchard of P&G — gave a landmark speech, calling for the industry to increase transparency around media buying and rid itself of a "media supply chain that is murky at best and fraudulent at worst."

Levels of distrust between advertisers and agencies when it comes to the business of digital media buying are clearly at a worrying high. What happens in France could serve as a model for the entire global advertising industry.

Or it could have the opposite effect. eMarketer/PwC

There is the possibility that programmatic advertising spend in France could decline as a result of the new law coming into play as it will make it more difficult for agencies and ad tech vendors to boost their margins through rebates, inventory markups, and other opaque practices.

Some digital media owners and intermediaries may also find themselves in a tight spot because they may have to rethink the incentives they once offered in order to encourage spend on their platforms — and they will also be required to adapt their workforces and technical solutions in order to handle transparency requests from advertisers.

Programmatic digital ad spending in France grew 53% year-on-year to €639 million ($706.9 million) in 2016, with programmatic's share of digital display spending rising 13 percentage points to 53%, according to PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Industry observers will take great interest in how French programmatic ad spending plays out in 2018.

If it continues its meteoric growth, France could serve as an example that transparency is healthy for every stakeholder in the digital advertising market.

If it shrinks, then that could raise big questions about the real reasons why programmatic ad spend was growing at such a tremendous clip.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

In Europe, Four Main Concerns About Trump

Simon Nixon

Feb. 26, 2017 1:33 p.m. ET

When Donald Trump addresses a joint session of Congress this week, his words will be studied with closer attention than usual in Europe.

Across the Atlantic, Mr. Trump's arrival on the world stage has been met with widespread anxiety. Many fear that his America First rhetoric, skepticism toward multilateral institutions and enthusiasm for Brexit signals a disengagement from the rules-based order that most Europeans consider the bedrock of their prosperity and security.

Yet ironically, the immediate economic impact of Mr. Trump's arrival has been positive for Europe. Last week's eurozone composite Purchasing Managers Index showed the economy expanding at its fastest rate in 6½ years and jobs are being created at the fastest rate in nearly a decade, while the Stoxx Europe 600 index of leading European equities is up 13% since Nov. 8. That may partly reflect an improved global growth picture. But Mr. Trump can take some credit: expectations that his promised tax cuts and deregulation will deliver faster U.S. growth have lifted the eurozone too, not least by halting the appreciation of the euro, down 4% against the dollar since the election.

There may be more good news to come. Mr. Trump may already have indirectly helped deliver progress toward a more durable solution to Greece's debt crisis. International Monetary Fund officials believe that the new administration's skepticism toward multilateral organizations has strengthened their negotiating position in the latest brinkmanship over Greece's bailout.

Whereas the Obama administration used to put pressure on the Fund to soften its demands to accommodate European political interests, the Fund has been emboldened to stand firm with the result that last week both Berlin and Athens appeared to give ground. Similarly, Mr. Trump's insistence that European countries increase their military spending could provide a useful stimulus, particularly if the EU exempts any increased defense spending from the its fiscal rules.

Nonetheless, European policy makers have four major anxieties. The first concerns the Trump administration's policy toward the dollar. So far, China, Japan and Germany have all found themselves in the rhetorical firing line for benefiting from an undervalued currency.

Attempts to weaken the dollar, whether through excessively loose monetary policy or by talking it down, pose a risk to the eurozone's recovery. History is hardly reassuring: going back more than 40 years, Republican presidents have presided over a weakening of the dollar with the exception of the first Reagan administration.

Second, Europeans want to know whether America First will evolve into outright protectionism. There is particular alarm in Europe at talk in Washington of a border-adjusted tax, which would oblige companies to pay tax on imports but not on exports.

This would hit hard European exporters such as Germany that would find their goods at a disadvantage to domestic U.S. competitors, damaging the European recovery. Worse, a U.S. border tax would risk retaliatory action, raising the prospect of a damaging trans-Atlantic trade war.

The third concern relates to Mr. Trump's plans for financial deregulation. Some eurozone policy makers would have no problem with a watering down of the Volcker rule—which prohibits banks from trading on their own account—or loosening the rules around securitization.

What they really worry about is a U.S. retreat from the Basel bank capital rules; one top official reckons this would be reckless since loosening capital rules when central banks are running loose monetary policy would replicate the conditions that led to the global financial crisis. It would also create an unlevel playing field between U.S. and European financial institutions, fueling demands for protection. The result would be further damaging fragmentation of the global financial system.

The fourth concern is that Mr. Trump damages Europe economically by deepening its political divisions. Until now, most U.S. conservatives have focused their criticism of Europe on its high welfare spending and rigid product and labor markets which have held back its growth and productivity. Many European policy makers have privately welcomed this criticism since it reinforces their own calls for the bold overhauls needed to make European economies flexible enough to cope with the disciplines of a common currency.

But Mr. Trump and other administration officials have aimed their strongest criticism not at outdated European socialism but the institutions of the EU and the single currency itself. That has played into the hands of euroskeptic parties opposed to any reforms but determined to destroy the EU and single currency.

So far, there is little evidence that the markets share these concerns: Even as measures of political uncertainty have risen, the equity risk premium—the extra return that investors demand for holding stocks—has fallen in Europe, notes Ian Harnett, chief economist of Absolute Strategy Research, an advisory firm. Perhaps that's the right call. After all, veteran European policy makers recall the widespread anxiety when Silvio Berlusconi became prime minister of Italy in 1994.

Yet Italy's domestic institutions were strong enough to restrain Mr. Berlusconi's populist instincts enough to maintain confidence in Italy's ability to continue to service its giant debts. Investors may be betting that U.S. institutions will be strong enough to restrain Mr. Trump too—even if European politicians have yet to be convinced.

Write to Simon Nixon at simon.nixon@wsj.com

FP Foreign Policy

U.S. Allies Are Learning that Trump's America Is Not the 'Indispensable Nation'

Grappling with an unpredictable White House, foreign partners in Europe and Asia are weighing contingency plans and bracing for the worst.

On Saturday night, President Donald Trump dined at his new D.C. hotel with the governor of Florida, Rick Scott, his daughter Ivanka, her husband and powerful senior White House advisor Jared Kushner, and Nigel Farage, the nemesis of the European Union. A few tables away, alone with his wife, sat Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, the man nominally charged with charting America's relations with the rest of the world.

Photos of the president dining with a smiling Farage, the former UKIP leader who has railed against the EU for years, and who led the populist campaign to pull Britain out of Europe, only served to reinforce growing doubts about America's stance toward the European Union and much of the international order forged by U.S. leadership in the years after World War II.

Now, U.S. allies are resigning themselves to the likelihood that Trump's administration will remain unpredictable and often incoherent, if not downright hostile, in its foreign policy. And they are beginning to draw up contingency plans to protect their interests on trade and security, as they adapt to a world where strong American leadership is no longer assured.

"It's dawning on people now that what you see is what you get," said one European diplomat, "and that the uncertainty is not going away."

Trump has of course alarmed transatlantic allies by sending mixed messages about the value of the NATO alliance, both on the campaign trail and once in office. But a much bigger concern for European governments is the White House's apparent desire to reverse more than seven decades of U.S. policy of fostering a strong and united Europe as a bastion of democracy and free trade in order to bolster U.S. security.

The president of the European Commission, former Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, voiced what many senior officials will only say in private when he issued a dire warning in a recent letter to European leaders. Tusk said that Washington is "seeming to put into question" 70 years of American policy, placing the United States alongside Russia, China and terrorism as a source of instability for Europe.

The White House has actively fueled those worries, chiefly through Trump's chief strategist, economic nationalist and anti-globalist Steven Bannon. This month he reportedly told Peter Wittig, Germany's ambassador to Washington, that the EU is a flawed and weak institution**,** a week before Vice President Mike Pence was dispatched to Germany to express America's "steadfast" commitment to the EU. Last week, Bannon in a speech before conservative activists in Washington touted what he calls

"economic nationalism," and said the administration wanted bilateral trade deals with other countries. But in Europe, the EU as a whole would have to negotiate any new trade deals.

Wittig declined to comment on the details of his conversation with Bannon, but said he rejects any attempts to divide the EU or belittle it as a purely economic trading bloc.

"The EU is not just an economic club, but it's a political project," he said. "It has brought us unprecedented security and stability [and] as far as Germany is concerned, we will certainly fight for a coherent and resilient European Union."

The Trump administration's tack is precisely the approach long favored by Moscow, which prefers the leverage that comes with dealing with European nations individually rather than collectively. Russian President Vladimir Putin has sought to divide the EU — and NATO — by fostering divisions within the Western bloc. Hungary and the Czech Republic — both members of the EU and NATO — have moved closer to Moscow in recent years, while Russia continues to support extremist, anti-EU parties in countries like France and Germany.

Trade, as much or more than security, has become the nascent administration's cudgel to attack Europe. Trump's top trade adviser, Peter Navarro, accused Berlin in January of manipulating foreign exchange markets, and Trump has talked of slapping all imports, including potentially those from Europe, with punitive tariffs.

Berlin, however, views free trade as a pillar of its prosperity and the global economy. Robust trade with countries around the world turned Germany into Europe's economic engine. And German officials are clearly dismayed about the Trump administration's threats to slap tariffs on German car manufacturers if they establish plants in Mexico instead of the United States and subsequently seek to export automobiles to the U.S. market.

Wittig suggested such a tariff could violate World Trade Organization rules, raising the possibility of retaliation. "WTO conformity is very important," he said.

A European official said, "Trump and his aides are acting like it's the 1950s or 60s. But U.S. economic power is not what it was. I think they're in for a surprise."

To be sure, German officials stress that U.S. presidential transitions are time-consuming, and while other European countries may see incoherence as a permanent feature of the Trump administration, Berlin expects Washington's message will eventually take form.

The Germans and others, meanwhile, are clinging to reassuring messages delivered by some Trump administration officials. Vice President Pence underscored the U.S. commitment to NATO at a security conference in Munich on Feb. 18, just as Defense Secretary James Mattis has tried to convey the same message to American allies in Asia.

"We received a clear message from Vice President Mike Pence," EU ambassador to the U.S. David O'Sullivan told Foreign Policy. "He told us President Donald Trump had specifically asked him to go to Brussels to express the strong commitment of the United States to continued cooperation and partnership with the European Union. I don't think you can get much clearer than that."

An EU official also pointed to a Trump interview with Reuters published on Friday where the president flippantly seemed to reaffirm longstanding U.S. policy. "The EU, I'm totally in favor of it," said the president, who cheered Brexit and urged more countries to leave the European Union. "If they're happy, I'm in favor of it."

Europe, though, is hedging its bets, especially after a proposed trade deal between the United States and the EU, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, unraveled last year.

EU officials are now looking to Asia, since in one of his first acts in office, Trump withdrew the U.S. from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a vast 12-nation trade deal. The jilted partners and the EU now see an opportunity for new trade arrangements — without the U.S. in the equation — and are already in talks.

Within Asia, the Trump administration has also rattled allies already unnerved by an aggressive China. Trump has repeatedly bashed China over trade, accusing Beijing of taking advantage of the United States, even while attacking longtime ally Japan over trade issues. But the president pulled back from a threat to abandon Washington's "One China" policy, and so far the White House has sidestepped conflict in the contested South China Sea.

The administration's mixed messages have fueled anxiety about whether Washington has a strategy for Asia, and what it might be. China, meanwhile, is forging ahead with its own Asian free trade deal, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which excludes Washington, and deepening ties with many in the region, from Sri Lanka to the Philippines.

"It's clearly wishful thinking that there was a deeper game, a strategy at work. That's just not the case," said Gregory Poling of Center for Strategic and International Studies. Governments are recognizing that "what we're going to get is uncertainty and you just have to live with that."

Even Australia, which has fought alongside the United States in every conflict since World War II, Trump's election is seen by some as a sign that Canberra can no longer count on the United States for economic engagement or security in the Asia-Pacific.

In Canberra, the implications of a Trump presidency cast a long shadow as officials and policy analysts draft their foreign policy strategy in a new white paper. China has long been an economic siren for Australia, sucking up giant quantities of mineral exports, while the United States has for decades been Australia's defense shield.

"The simple fact is that throughout Asia, the balance has been always to look to the U.S. for security and to China for economic benefits," said Kerry Brown, a former British diplomat and now professor of Chinese Studies at King's College in London.

But those calculations are now in flux, especially for Australia's leaders.

"They will have to grapple with Trump as a major variable that imparts a great deal of uncertainty into their own foreign policy," said Mira Rapp-Hooper of the Center for a New American Security. Canberra may have to contemplate the possibility that "the United States may be a less predictable alliance partner in coming years that it has been in the past," she said.

Trump's presidency could accelerate a trend already underway in Canberra to carve out a more active role in Asia, while pulling back from the country's traditionally unwavering support for Washington's military adventures in other parts of the world. If concerns build in Australia over the trajectory of the Trump administration, Canberra probably will look to deepen defense ties with partners in the region, particularly Singapore, experts said.

If the U.S. backs away, said Brown, "Australia will be one of the key players who will have to make sure that there is no security void for China to fill, or, if such a void starts to open up then Australia is there with others before the Chinese get there," he said.

The New York Times

Sweden's Defense and National Security Adviser? 'We Don't Know This Guy'

Liam Stack and Christina Anderson

A man described as a Swedish defense and national security adviser appeared on Fox News last week to defend President Trump's claim that criminal immigrants are wreaking havoc in Sweden. But according to court records and Swedish officials, the man, identified as Nils Bildt, has a criminal record in the United States and no ties to Sweden's security establishment.

In fact, he may not even be named Nils Bildt.

"We don't know this guy," said Mikael Abramsson, a spokesman for the Swedish military. "We have never heard of him in the Swedish armed forces, and he cannot speak on our behalf."

That sentiment was echoed by Rasmus Eljanskog, a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who said no one by the name of Nils Bildt worked there. Magnus Ranstorp, the head of terrorism research at the Swedish Defense University in Stockholm, went one step further. "There isn't any Nils Bildt," he said.

According to public records, Mr. Bildt was born Nils Tolling, the son of the chairman of the Swedish Equestrian Federation, and went by that name as recently as May, when he registered a business, Modus World West, in Montana.

But the Swedish newspaper Aftonbladet reported on Sunday that Mr. Tolling was going by Nils Bildt as early as 2013, when he tried to use that surname — which is also the surname of former Prime Minister Carl Bildt — to start a career as a far-right politician.

Carl Bildt told The Washington Post that he was not related to Nils Bildt and accused him of "trying to use the name to gain favors." Attempts to reach Nils Bildt by email and telephone on Sunday were unsuccessful. It is not clear when or why he changed his name.

Mr. Ranstorp said it was impossible for Mr. Bildt to be a defense and national security adviser in Sweden. "There is no such position in the Swedish hierarchy," he said. "And he's not even on the radar in Swedish security circles. And everyone knows everyone."

Nils Bildt på Bill O'Reilly Factor Fox News Video by Johan H

Mr. Bildt's time in the spotlight began last Thursday, when he appeared on "The O'Reilly Factor" to argue that immigrants were the cause of a violent crime wave in Sweden. Mr. O'Reilly said that claim was based on "hard news facts."

"There is a problem with socially deviant activity. There is a problem with crime. There is a problem with areas or hot spots of crime," Mr. Bildt said. He added, "These things are not being openly and honestly discussed," because Swedish politics is too "liberal."

That argument has been heard on Fox News before, perhaps most famously during a segment on Feb. 17 that inspired President Trump to add a line to his speech at a rally the next day that falsely suggested that there had been a terrorist attack in Sweden the night before.

The president's remark caused an unusual international incident between the United States and a mild-mannered ally. (Carl Bildt mocked Mr. Trump on Twitter the next day, asking, "What has he been smoking?")

Since then, the president has insisted that any report suggesting that immigrants were not causing problems in Sweden was "fake news."

Nils Bildt may not be a Swedish defense and national security adviser, but crime is a topic he may know a thing or two about.

Prosecutors in Virginia charged him in 2014 with public drunkenness and obstruction of justice, both misdemeanors, as well as one felony count of assaulting a police officer, according to court records. He was convicted of misdemeanor assault in November 2014 and sentenced to 12 months in prison, although his sentence was partly suspended. It is not clear how much time he spent in prison, if at all, or where he was held.

David Tabacoff, the executive producer of "The O'Reilly Factor," defended the decision to invite Mr. Bildt on the show.

"Our booker made numerous inquiries and spoke to people who recommended Nils Bildt," he said in a statement, "and after pre-interviewing him and reviewing his bio, we agreed that he would make a good guest for the topic that evening."

Another Swedish newspaper, Dagens Nyheter, reported that Mr. Bildt told the paper he was "unaware" of the criminal charges. He also said the title "Swedish defense and national security adviser" was made up by a Fox News editor. "I had no personal control over what title they chose," he wrote. "I am an independent analyst based in the U.S.A."

Before his turn as a self-styled expert on Swedish immigration, Mr. Bildt pursued a graduate degree in war studies at King's College London before dropping out in the first year, according to Robert Egnell, a classmate who now teaches at the Swedish Defense University.

"I think he started or worked for all kinds of smaller think tanks/security companies," Mr. Egnell wrote in an email. "We quickly lost contact."

Public records indicate that Mr. Bildt registered three companies in Connecticut in 2010. Two of them appeared to be in the field of political intelligence, and one was a gun and sporting goods store that was quickly sued by its former owner. Mr. Bildt was ordered to pay him more than $1.4 million in 2016. That May, as Nils Tolling, he started a company in Montana that also appeared to work in political intelligence.

It is not clear how many of those companies remain active, however. On Saturday the URL for the website for one of his companies in Connecticut, Corporate and Transportation Security Solutions, had been redirected to an English-language article in Dagens Nyheter that described him as a "fake Sweden expert."

INTERNATIONAL

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Islamic State Drones Terrorize Iraqi Forces as Mosul Battle Rages

Ben Kesling in Mosul, Iraq, and Ghassan Adnan in Baghdad

Updated Feb. 26, 2017 5:11 p.m. ET

As they advance into Islamic State's remaining urban stronghold of west Mosul, Iraqi forces are struggling to counter the terror caused by the militant group's drones.

Iraqi forces have grown accustomed to enemy drones flying over the battlefield since Islamic State seized swaths of the country in 2014. They have used rifle fire and high-tech gadgets to counter them, and even have drones of their own.

But the militants have fine-tuned their drone technology. What were once improvised, remote-controlled aircraft resembling model planes are now commercially available quadcopters—drones with four helicopter-like blades—that have been retrofitted to carry grenades that can be dropped over targets.

Islamic State's increased drone usage comes as army officials said Sunday they had retaken their first neighborhood west of the Tigris River, raising the Iraqi flag there. The battle for the west is the final step in the offensive to drive the militant group from Iraq's second-largest city.

The military last week seized the northern city's sprawling international airport, giving it a foothold into Mosul's densely packed western neighborhoods. Over the weekend, troops pushed deeper into those areas, led by special-forces units. The army also said it had seized control of Mosul's main power station.

Islamic State drones have regularly flown over west Mosul during the fight, sending troops running for cover.

Though the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq says Islamic State's increased drone capability won't have a major impact on the state of the battle for Mosul, it allows the group to target civilians and aid workers in east Mosul, giving Islamic State the ability to terrorize people no longer living under its rule and hampering the area's return to normal life.

"The drone issue is worrying," said Iraqi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool. "There is no technical way to [entirely] stop these drones."

While the strikes don't always hit their targets with precision, militants are perfecting their technique.

"There are so many videos and images of bombs being dropped with a surprising degree of accuracy that I believe there are skilled operators who can hit with a consistent degree of accuracy," said Nick Waters, an analyst at research firm Bellingcat, which focuses on open-source information, much of it from social media.

Islamic State typically loads its drones with conventional grenades that detonate on impact, dropping them by remote control as they hover over a target, according to a report this month from Bellingcat.

They often affix plastic tail fins to the grenade to increase its stability and accuracy, the report said. Some bombs employ munitions that Islamic State manufactures itself.

The bombs can be dropped with accuracy from a height of up to 1,000 feet, Bellingcat estimated. Such strikes have also been used by militants to create diversions during suicide attacks, it added.

To counter the drones, Iraq's army is using high-tech gadgets that can target them using radio waves. But devices available to the military are scarce. Troops are often forced to resort to shooting at the small, nearly noiseless drones with rifles.

At at least one remote base near Mosul last fall, U.S. Army sentries manned their posts armed with machine guns and a device called DroneDefender manufactured by Ohio-based research-and-development outfit Battelle Memorial Institute. The U.S. military is supporting Iraqi forces from the air and ground in the fight against Islamic State.

DroneDefenders are rifle-shaped and feature thick antennas that when pointed at drones can scramble GPS or remote-control units up to a quarter of a mile away, causing the drones to fall.

A spokeswoman for Battelle said it had sold more than 100 units to the U.S. Departments of Defense and Homeland Security.

"We have the DroneDefender and it works," said Lt. Col. Arkan Fadhil of the elite Iraqi special forces. He said few were available to Iraqi forces, without elaborating why.

Iraqi and American defense officials said Iraqi forces have such technology but declined to give further details, citing security concerns.

Exporting battlefield supplies from the U.S. to certain countries, like Iraq, requires special licenses.

Devices that emit radio frequencies can be subject to international regulations and red tape.

The Battelle spokeswoman said an export control license is required to ship products to foreign governments, but it doesn't have such a license to export to Iraq. She said the company has recently seen increased interest in the device around the world.

Last week, the U.S. Air Force announced a $15 million contract with ELTA North America Inc., a subsidiary of Israel Aerospace Industries, for 21 counter-drone systems to be delivered in the next few months.

Further details weren't available. The Defense Department didn't respond to request for comment. An ELTA spokeswoman said the company doesn't discuss specific clients. But it recently touted a counter-drone system made expressly to down quadcopter-type machines.

At least one Popular Mobilization Unit, a militia allied with Iraq's army, says it has received counter-drone technology from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

Iran backs a number of Iraq's Shiite Muslim militias and recently developed numerous anti-drone technologies, including a drone-jamming antenna unveiled in December, according to semiofficial Iranian news agencies. Iranian officials haven't said whether these technologies are in use in Iraq.

"Either we get such tactical weapons directly from the Islamic Republic or we make them locally here, but in consultation with our brothers in revolutionary guards," said Jaffar al-Hussaini, spokesman of Hezbollah Battalions, a large militia operating west of Mosul.

Iraqi forces have also been using their own commercial drones for reconnaissance and to help identify Islamic State fighters posing as civilians.

On a recent day in west Mosul, Lt. Col. Fadhil was at an aid station near the front, his foot bandaged after being struck by a drone grenade.

"It's annoying, with someone always tossing a grenade on you," he said.

Meanwhile, in the east, citizens freed from Islamic State occupation now fear their drones. Near the ruins of Mosul University, Mohammed Yasin worked at a falafel stand.

"Every two to three days there's a drone attack," he said, and the army recently stationed a machine gun on the street to fire at the next one.

Aid groups have said drones make it nearly impossible to set up distribution stations as they are easily targeted.

—Asa Fitch, Awadh Altaie and Majd Helobi contributed to this article.

Write to Ben Kesling at benjamin.kesling@wsj.com

Report

U.S. Forces Push Artillery, Rockets, and Helicopters Closer to the Fight in Mosul

Special operations forces, artillery, rockets, and airpower are working overtime to back up thousands of Iraqi troops fighting to eject ISIS from the city.

HAMMAN AL-ALIL, Iraq—Twenty four hours a day, American artillery booms from dug-in positions outside of this small town on the banks of the Tigris River, providing Iraqi troops pushing into western Mosul with accurate firepower within minutes of relaying the request through their American advisors.

The guns, U.S. Army Paladin mobile howitzers, can fire GPS-guided rounds anywhere in Mosul, about twelve miles to the north. Capt. Geoff Ross, who deployed with his battery here earlier this month, said that the targets have included everything from weapons caches pointed out by the Iraqis to specific Islamic State positions.

But the pace of the fighting has surprised his crews, who sleep inside the cramped vehicles each night so they can fire as soon as a call comes in.

"We're firing a lot more than we thought we would be," Ross said, as U.S. Apache helicopters roared overhead on their way to hunt ISIS positions within the city.

The Paladins make up just one piece of what looks to be a growing U.S. presence around Mosul, the scene of a months-long effort by Iraqi forces to wrest control of Iraq's second-biggest city from ISIS.

At the nearby American Qayyara West airfield — long known as Q-West from when it was a much larger U.S. base several years ago — the 2nd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division has settled in behind acres of new blast walls to protect its Apaches and RQ-7 Shadow surveillance drones, which buzz constantly over Mosul and its surrounding villages. Rows of heavily armored vehicles dot the base as hundreds of U.S. troops, part of the 5,000 in Iraq and Syria, construct new buildings and ferry in supplies for themselves and their Iraqi allies, all calling to mind the massive forward operating bases during the height of the American involvement in Iraq.

In a far corner of the base are two platoons of HIMARS guided rockets, which have fired several hundred rounds into Mosul in the past few weeks, said First Lieutenant Mary Floyd, who commands one of the platoons. She touted the rockets' accuracy and minimal collateral damage; the HIMARS have GPS-guided rounds that drop straight down on target.

Meanwhile, U.S. special operations forces have pushed closer to the fight for Mosul in recent weeks, working with small groups of Iraqi soldiers to identify targets and call in air and artillery strikes, all while keeping ground units from getting tangled up with one another.

The two guns Ross commands sit in a muddy, gnat-infested field just behind the Iraqi Federal Police's forward headquarters, where U.S. Central Command chief U.S. Gen. Joseph Votel landed by helicopter on Saturday to huddle with his Iraqi allies. The general received a briefing from commanders of the Iraqi police and Army units who punched their way into the contested western half of the city last week.

One U.S. military official in Iraq said that fighting over the weekend has been "rough," and on Saturday alone, four Iraqi soldiers were killed and 53 others wounded. Earlier in the week, Gen. Votel told a group of American troops he was visiting in the region that the fight to take the eastern half of Mosul cost Iraqi forces 500 dead, with another 3,000 wounded in three months of fighting.

The Iraqis are taking "deliberate, small bites" out of the densely-packed city, said the official, who requested anonymity to discuss the ongoing battle. But he cautioned that the east side of Mosul — declared cleared in January after a three-month battle — remains "fragile and it has to be defended" against counter attack from ISIS fighters.

In Western Mosul, Iraqi forces are making real, if slow, progress. The official said that Gen. Abdul Amir, who was put in charge of wrangling the often parochial interests of the police, army, and counterterrorism forces, is "holding the coalition together" as they attack ISIS positions from multiple fronts.

Backing them up are many of the U.S. soldiers who had been located at other American outposts across the country. Iraq has thrown several elite units into the fight for Mosul, including the 9th Army division and all 14 battalions of U.S.-trained counterterrorism troops, but they need plenty of logistical support. Many U.S. troops are now at Q-West to help ferry ammunition and other supplies needed to keep the Iraqi forces advancing from three different directions.

The plan to push so many troops into the city from several different angles is meant to force ISIS into choosing where it can fight and what positions to abandon, the official said. ISIS "only has so much capacity" to mass fighters, he said, and when they gather in force, American planes, helicopters, and guided rockets strike them.

U.S. Forces Play Crucial Role Against ISIS in Mosul

Michael R. Gordon

HAMAM AL-ALIL, Iraq — One week after Iraqi forces began their push into western Mosul, American firepower is playing an essential role in softening the opposition from the Islamic State.

The thunderous booms from howitzers near Hamam al-Alil, a town along the Tigris River, are just part of the American military's contribution to keeping the Iraqi offensive moving forward.

Capt. Geoffrey Ross, who commands the unit of self-propelled artillery here, said his soldiers had been a lot busier than he had anticipated.

"It's considerably more than we thought we were going to shoot when we left Fort Hood," he said on Saturday, as one of his howitzers hurled another round toward Mosul, 15 miles to the northwest.

At Qayyarah Airfield West, a sprawling Iraq base 40 miles south of Mosul, a United States Army task force fires Himars satellite-guided rockets at targets. Apache attack helicopters, equipped with Hellfire missiles, stand ready to carry out their missions from the base's airfield.

Not to mention the punishing airstrikes by American and allied warplanes and drones. A flurry of attacks were carried out by the American-led coalition in and around Mosul on Saturday, some involving the dropping of multiple bombs.

That firepower, the decision to position American advisers closer to the fighting, and the determined efforts of the Iraqi forces themselves have yielded some notable gains. Iraq's federal police have fully secured the Mosul airport, while Iraq's elite counterterrorism service seized a nearby military base last week.

That ground has been taken at a cost. Four Iraqis were killed in action and 53 wounded on Friday, according to an American official who requested anonymity to discuss the statistics, which have yet to be officially published. That is a small fraction of the approximately 500 dead and 3,000 wounded that Iraqi forces suffered in their push to secure the eastern half of the city during an earlier, 100-day offensive.

But the toughest part of the battle — the house-to-house combat in the narrow streets of the old part of western Mosul — still lies ahead. The Islamic State's military tactics have also added to the challenge.With the encouragement of the Americans, the Iraqi strategy has been to mount an attack on multiple axes to present the militants with more problems than they can handle. But the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, has responded at times by concentrating its firepower on what it believes to be the Iraqis' main line of attack.

In ISIS' version of combined arms warfare, it has sent drones equipped with bombs even as it lobbed mortars and deployed suicide car bombers, whom the militants use as a primitive but often effective way to deliver precision-guided munitions.

Iraqi troops have been spooked by the ISIS drones, which sometimes hover in swarms of three to five. Neither the American nor the Iraqi military has an easy remedy. Trying to jam the drones might interfere with the Iraqis' own communications, and it is not always easy to shoot them out of the sky.

So the United States military has used its firepower to try to mitigate the drone problem, just as it targeted ISIS' car bomb factories, mortar teams and command posts. On Saturday, the American-led command announced that it had struck a "staging area" for launching drones and a cache of the weapons.

Qayyarah West, which was once known as Saddam Airbase and is called Q-West by American soldiers, is a pivotal base for the Mosul offensive. Runways at the air base, captured from the Islamic State in July, have been repaired by American combat engineers, which makes it an important logistics hub and a useful platform for projecting power.

First Lt. Mary Floyd, a 24-year-old officer who was raised in South Carolina, has been focused on doing exactly that. The commander of a platoon that fires Himars rockets, she helped flatten a five-story building the American military says Islamic State militants were using as a command post shortly before the Iraqis began their offensive to take western Mosul.

Over the past week, she said, her platoon launched rockets toward Mosul 10 to 20 times. Military officers have a name for the two platoons that fire Himars that are deployed at the base: Task Force Thor.

Firing rockets into a densely populated city is a tricky proposition. But the rockets' satellite guidance, perpendicular angle of attack and the fact that they can accommodate a relatively small warhead have led the military to turn to it during previous urban fights, including the 2006 battle for Ramadi and the 2007 struggle for the control of Haifa Street in Baghdad.

The United States is not the only nation supporting the Iraqis by firing artillery. French artillery has been active as well.

Hamam al-Alil was taken by Iraqi forces in November, and a mass grave of ISIS victims was later uncovered near an agricultural college there. Now, United States Army crews live and even sleep inside their Paladin artillery units, waiting for orders to fire.

Captain Ross declined to say precisely how many rounds his soldiers had fired. But he said they were ready to shoot day and night and could "range the entire city."

TIME

New Anti-ISIS Strategy May Mean Deeper Involvement in Syria

Robert Burns and Lolita C. Baldor / AP

(WASHINGTON) — A new military strategy to meet President Donald Trump's demand to "obliterate" the Islamic State group is likely to deepen U.S. military involvement in Syria, possibly with more ground troops, even as the current U.S. approach in Iraq appears to be working and will require fewer changes.

Details are sketchy. But recommendations due at the White House on Monday are likely to increase emphasis on nonmilitary elements of the campaign already underway, such as efforts to squeeze IS finances, limit the group's recruiting and counter ISIS propaganda that is credited with inspiring recent violence in the U.S. and Europe. One official with knowledge of the recommendations said the report would present a broad overview of options as a starting point for a more detailed internal discussion. The official wasn't authorized to speak to reporters about the contents of the document and demanded anonymity.

Marine Corps Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Thursday that the emerging strategy will take aim not just at the Islamic State militants but at al-Qaeda and other extremist organizations in the Middle East and beyond, whose goal is to attack the United States. He emphasized that it would not rest mainly on military might.

"This is a political-military plan," he said. "It is not a military plan."

Dunford's comment suggests that Pentagon leaders have a more nuanced view of the ISIS problem than is reflected in Trump's promise to "obliterate" the group, as he put it on Friday. Dunford said the U.S. should be careful that in solving the ISIS problem it does not create others, hinting at the sensitive question of how to deal with Turkey, which is a NATO ally with much at stake in neighboring Syria, and Russia, whose military action in Syria has had the effect of propping up the Syrian regime.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis is giving the White House the ingredients of a strategy, which officials say will be fleshed out once Trump has considered the options. Officials described the Mattis report as a "framework" built on broad concepts and based on advice from the State Department, the CIA and other agencies. Officials have indicated the recommended approaches will echo central elements of the Obama administration's strategy, which was based on the idea that the U.S. military should support local forces rather than do the fighting for them. Mattis already has signaled publicly that he sees no value in having U.S. combat forces take over the ground war.

"I would just tell you that by, with and through our allies is the way this coalition is going against Daesh," Mattis said last week in Baghdad, using an Arabic term for the Islamic State group. "We're going to continue to go after them until we destroy them and any kind of belief in the inevitability of their message."

Trump signed an executive order on Jan. 28 giving Mattis 30 days to present a "preliminary draft" of a plan. He said it should include a comprehensive strategy that would not only deliver a battlefield victory but also "isolate and delegitimize" the group and its radical ideology.

Asked if adding more U.S. troops or arming the Syrian Kurds was under discussion, Mattis said he will "accommodate any request" from his field commanders.

"We owe some degree of confidentiality on exactly how we're going to do that and the sequencing of that fight so that we don't expose to the enemy what it is we have in mind in terms of the timing of the operations," Mattis told reporters. But he said those are "some of the

issues that we'll be dealing with as we go forward, and we'll be addressing each one of them, from intelligence, to tactics, to logistics as we sustain the fight going into this."

Army Gen. Joseph Votel, the commander of U.S. Central Command, which oversees military operations in the Mideast, has said more American troops may be needed to speed up the fight in Syria. The U.S. currently has about 500 special operations forces in Syria helping to organize, advise and assist local forces.

One of the thorniest problems the Trump administration will consider is whether to change the U.S. approach to Russia's military role in Syria. Although Trump has suggested an interest in working with Russia against IS, the Pentagon has been reluctant to go beyond military-to-military contacts aimed at avoiding accidents in the airspace over Syria.

Senior military leaders, including Mattis, seem more confident in the Iraqi military campaign, lending weight to the idea that the options will put a greater emphasis on Syria.

Officials say providing more heavy equipment and arms to the U.S.-backed Syrian Kurds is a likely — but politically sensitive — option.

NATO ally Turkey considers the Kurdish fighters, known as the YPG, a terrorist organization. But the YPG forms the main force to retake Raqqa, the Islamic State militants' self-proclaimed capital and base of operations. Some in the Pentagon have suggested giving the Kurds heavy weapons, including rocket-propelled grenades, machine guns and heavy combat vehicles, but the Obama administration rejected the idea.

Other options include sending more Apache helicopters into the fight, and sending in more U.S. troops to help train Syrian forces.

The options on Iraq may well include decisions on the future U.S. commitment to the country. Both Mattis and Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, said that they believe the U.S. will have an enduring partnership with Iraq.

"I imagine we'll be in this fight for a while, and we'll stand by each other," Mattis said in Baghdad.

Townsend declined to say how long the U.S. will stay in Iraq. But, he said, "I don't anticipate that we'll be asked to leave by the government of Iraq immediately after Mosul," he said, referring to the city that U.S.-backed Iraqi forces are in the midst of retaking.

——

Associated Press writer Bradley Klapper contributed to this report.

The New York Times

First Big Test for Mattis: Pitch Plans to Fight ISIS and Not Alienate Trump

Helene Cooper and Eric Schmitt

WASHINGTON — As Defense Secretary Jim Mattis prepares to submit his first big pitch to his new boss — options for accelerating the fight against the Islamic State — he is balancing the need to rein in President Trump's more extreme impulses without distancing himself too much and losing White House favor.

Mr. Mattis, a retired Marine general, has already assumed an outsize role in the administration — part valued aide to the new president, who has quickly come to adore him, and part reassurer in chief to global leaders, who cling to his every utterance in the hope that he will help keep the White House from undoing decades of national security policy.

Nowhere is this juggling act clearer than in the decisions confronting Mr. Mattis about speeding the fight against the Islamic State. Mr. Trump made that fight a centerpiece of his national security strategy during the campaign, saying he would give his generals 30 days to produce a plan to defeat the group, and he has urged an alliance with Russia to combat the militants in Syria. But such a move is anathema to Mr. Mattis, who has said repeatedly that he does not view Russia as a trustworthy partner.

For all of Mr. Trump's bombast about the fight against the Islamic State — he said as a candidate that he would "bomb the hell" out of the militants, "take out" their families and "take the oil" — Pentagon leaders said they were preparing more nuanced options.

Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, suggested last week that the initial plan may extend beyond the Islamic State strongholds in Iraq and Syria and that it may look at how the militant group rose to power in the first place, and how to fight its ideology.

"This is not about Syria and Iraq," General Dunford said at the Brookings Institution in Washington.

The Islamic State, he noted, at one point numbered 45,000 foreign fighters from more than 100 countries. "Our plan, to be successful, needs to, No. 1, cut the connective tissue between regional groups that now form a transregional threat."

Mr. Mattis will probably present Mr. Trump a range of options that include loosening some battlefield restrictions and allowing American troops to get closer to the fight. He may also recommend putting a limited number of additional troops on the ground in Syria.

But Pentagon officials said there was little appetite in the Defense Department for a full-fledged American military mission in Syria that would include thousands of additional combat troops. Any such move could leave the United States responsible for picking up the pieces after a defeat of the Islamic State.

General Dunford said the Pentagon's goal was to outline the options for dealing with the Islamic State while at the same time making clear "the risks associated with each one."

Mr. Mattis, center, was greeted by Douglas A. Silliman, the ambassador to Iraq, at Baghdad International Airport last Monday. Lolita Baldor/Associated Press

With the firing of Michael T. Flynn as national security adviser and the arrival of Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster in his place, Mr. Mattis's hand has been strengthened in the national security structure. Like Mr. Mattis, General McMaster has no previous links to Mr. Trump and is not seen as being driven by ideology, which could not be said about Mr. Flynn.

A battle-tested veteran of the Persian Gulf war of 1991 and the Iraq war, General McMaster, like Mr. Mattis, is considered to be one of the military's most independent-minded officers.

After Mr. Trump's first choice — Robert S. Harward, a retired vice admiral who is a former Navy SEAL — declined the national security adviser job, Mr. Mattis encouraged General McMaster to take it, turning what could have been a disastrous turn of events for him into a success.

Inside the Pentagon, civilian and military officials appear to be relishing the fact that, so far, Mr. Mattis has protected them from many of the ups and downs coming out of the White House.

During a recent talk with policy officials at the Defense Department, Mr. Mattis told people to stay strong and keep going in the right direction — in many cases, largely the direction that they had already been going, according to a former senior military official who speaks frequently to his former colleagues. The former official said Mr. Mattis appeared to be pushing for greater expertise in the Pentagon and had asked officials not to change jobs so frequently that they are not able to become true experts.

An avid reader, Mr. Mattis also says he wants the Defense Department's regional desks to be able to think the way people in their respective countries would think, officials said. He wants military officials to have read the literature of the country in which they specialize and to really understand the countries, not just the issues that affect bilateral relations with the United States.

At the Pentagon last week, Mr. Mattis showed up unannounced and without aides in the Middle East policy office to ask a question of one of the desk officers.

He has already been on two overseas diplomatic missions in the month since Mr. Trump took power. He went to Asia, where he reassured South Korean and Japanese officials that, contrary to Mr. Trump's campaign musings that they should perhaps develop their own nuclear weapons to save the United States money that it now spends to protect them, the United States was not going to abandon decades of nonproliferation policy.

He went to Europe, where he reassured nations that, contrary to Mr. Trump's postcampaign musings that NATO was "obsolete," the United States still valued the trans-Atlantic alliance.

And he went to Iraq, saying before arriving in Baghdad that, contrary to Mr. Trump's musings, "We're not in Iraq to seize anybody's oil."

Some Defense Department officials privately expressed concern about whether Mr. Mattis, in reassuring American allies, might alienate the White House.

Editorial : Trump is already losing the long-term fight in Iraq

February 26 at 8:30 PM

IRAQI GOVERNMENT forces last week launched a crucial campaign to retake the western side of Mosul, the Islamic State's largest remaining urban stronghold. U.S. planes and special forces were providing critical close-up support for a battle that commanders believe could drag on for months. Victory is not assured and the humanitarian cost, which Iraqi forces managed to minimize in capturing the eastern side of the city, could steeply rise. Yet the biggest challenge looms beyond the immediate battle: whether Mosul and other Sunni-populated areas of Iraq can be stabilized once the jihadists are driven out. Unfortunately, in his first weeks in office President Trump has significantly worsened the chances for success.

The rise of the Islamic State was facilitated by sectarian tensions among Iraq's majority Shiite and minority Sunni and Kurdish populations, and in particular by the discrimination against Sunnis by a Shiite-led Baghdad government backed by Iran. After the fall of Mosul in 2014 the Obama administration helped to engineer the removal of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who fomented the sectarianism, and his replacement by the more moderate Haider al-Abadi, who pledged to build a more inclusive regime. Mr. Abadi's good intentions have mostly been thwarted by sectarian hard-liners, including Iranian-controlled Shiite militia groups.

Consequently, the military offensive to recapture Mosul has gone ahead without accompanying political steps that might strengthen moderate Sunni leaders against militants who will seek to perpetuate an insurgency against the Baghdad government. A report this month from the Institute for Study of War warned, "Early indicators suggest that a post-ISIS Sunni insurgency may be forming in Iraq and al Qaeda (AQ) is trying to gain traction within it." It said, "the U.S.-backed Coalition has been focused only on eliminating ISIS, not other insurgent groups or the conditions that grow them."

While the Obama administration deserves blame for sidestepping Iraq's political challenges, Mr. Trump has quickly exacerbated the trouble. His repeated suggestions that the United States might seize Iraq's oil fields have alienated forces across the political spectrum, notwithstanding a disavowal by Defense Secretary Jim Mattis. Worse, his inclusion of Iraq on a list of majority-Muslim nations from which visitors and immigrants would be banned has prompted Mr. Abadi's opponents to demand that Americans — including the more than 5,000 U.S. troops now operating against the Islamic State — be expelled from the country.

Mr. Abadi managed to resist a parliamentary resolution to that effect after that ban was issued. But if Iraq remains on the list of banned nations in a revised order the White House says it is preparing, he could face another political rebellion that could cause his government to collapse. Tehran's Shiite militias could push to replace U.S. forces in the fight for Mosul; or more likely, Iran's clients could demand that all American forces leave Iraq immediately after the battle. That would virtually ensure the predominance of sectarian elements among both Shiites and Sunnis and open the door to another resurgance by al-Qaeda or other jihadists.

Mr. Mattis discounted that risk during a visit to Baghdad last Monday, saying, "I imagine we'll be in this fight for a while and we'll stand by each other." A reasonable Iraqi might ask: Why should a U.S. administration that bans all Iraqis from setting foot on American soil be regarded as a worthy partner?

Editorial : Who decides on US ground combat in Syria?

The Christian Science Monitor

February 26, 2017 —In coming days, President Trump is expected to decide whether to send thousands of combat troops into Syria to attack Islamic State. A month ago, he asked the Pentagon for options on ways to "accelerate" the defeat of IS in its stronghold. If he does seek to put so many American soldiers on the ground, the commander in chief must first get the approval of Congress, where constitutional authority for war belongs.

For decades, starting during the cold war and later after the 9/11 attacks, Congress has steadily given up much of its responsibility to define the use of violence in the name of the American people. Previous presidents, both Democrats and Republicans, have broadly defined their executive power in conducting military operations in many countries. Yet a democracy must continually set clear parameters for the official use of violence, especially as threats change and weapons evolve.

Lawmakers, and not only a president, should be held accountable for the effects of warfare. Achieving and keeping peace relies on the collective wisdom of knowing when not to fight or knowing what kind of war to wage. If Mr. Trump wants to send soldiers into combat, now is the time to define that wisdom.

Few Americans would disagree with the goal of defeating Islamic State or its related militants around the world. But citizens must also have a say, through a consensus in Congress, on the means and methods as well as the scope of time and geography for such warfare. Congress should also emphasize the nonmilitary ways to help end the threat of terror, such as the work of Muslims to prevent the radicalization of their youth with the peaceful precepts of Islam.

The struggle against both IS and Al Qaeda can often seem too complex for Congress to anticipate all the limits to be set on a president. And it may be difficult to know whether a US attack on a militant group is being done strictly in "self defense." But such issues are not an excuse for lawmakers to give up their constitutional responsibility in declaring war.

Trump is now the third president to rely on an authorization passed by Congress in 2001 to wage war on "Al Qaeda and associated forces." That authority is very out of date. If he plans to put boots on the ground in Syria to directly attack IS, he needs to do what his defense secretary, retired Marine Corps Gen. James Mattis, suggested in 2015 in a blog.

Mr. Mattis said that a new authorization is needed, one supported by a majority of both parties in both houses of Congress. That authority, he stated, "will send an essential message of American steadfastness to our people and to the global audience. Its passage will demonstrate our country's fundamental unity and enable a broader commitment to deal firmly with a real and growing menace."

The recent history of the US role in troubled conflicts, such as Iraq, Yemen, and Libya, calls for restoring full accountability in warmaking. With a new president seeking new military action, Congress can again show its proper leadership in the wise use of force.

Editorial : In Afghanistan, what's the plan?

The Editorial Board , USA TODAY

Army Gen. John Nicholson testifies in the Senate on Feb. 9, 2017.(Photo: J. Scott Applewhite, AP)

The war in Afghanistan is not going well. At best, it's a stalemate. At worst, it's a war seemingly without end — the longest in U.S. history — that is now shifting slowly in favor of the enemy, the Taliban and other Islamic extremists.

Afghan security forces are fighting harder than ever, but an average of 20 police or soldiers are being killed each day. The government in Kabul is barely able to gather enough new recruits to make up for the mounting dead and wounded. Last month, a mother in Kabul lost three sons, all police officers, to a single attack. Territory is slipping from the government's grasp, with just 57% of districts nationwide controlled by Kabul, down 15% from November 2015.

Americans have sacrificed a lot since the war began in 2001 in retaliation for the 9/11 terror attacks plotted by al-Qaeda leaders, who had safe harbor in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Beyond the 2,247 U.S. military deaths and 20,000 wounded, the U.S. has spent more in inflation-adjusted dollars to reconstruct Afghanistan than it did to rebuild Europe after World War II, and the nation remains far from self-sustaining.

The main upside is that the U.S. has successfully prevented Afghanistan from being used as a base for another 9/11-style attack on American soil. "We believe ... that our operations in Afghanistan directly protect the homeland," Army Gen. John Nicholson, commander of the U.S.-led international military force in Afghanistan, told senators this month. Other accomplishments include shrinking territory held by the Islamic State's Afghan affiliate down to a few districts and, in October, killing an al-Qaeda leader who was planning an attack on the United States.

Nicholson concedes the war is a stalemate. He'd like to add perhaps 1,400 U.S. troops to the 8,400 already in Afghanistan, with maybe 2,000 more contributed from NATO and other coalition allies who already have 5,000 on the ground. The additional manpower would improve battlefield surveillance and move trained advisers further down into Afghan forces to bolster leadership.

Nicholson's request for more U.S. troops appears reasonable, but troop levels have to reflect a broader strategy. America needs to know President Trump's position on Afghanistan. More than a month into his administration, there's silence on the issue. Trump has offered conflicting views in the past, arguing against nation-building but telling *Fox News* last year, albeit rather reluctantly, that he'd stay in Afghanistan. Trump has ordered his generals to come up with a plan to defeat radical Islamic terrorism.

President Obama was moving toward a complete withdrawal, which might have successfully pressured Kabul into assuming more responsibilities. But by announcing troops levels well into the future, divorced from the situation on the ground, he also left the Taliban and other terrorist groups to bide their time until the U.S. was gone.

The White House needs to conduct a major policy review of Afghanistan, reach a fundamental decision and then make its case to the American people. The U.S. troops serving valiantly in Afghanistan deserve clarity of purpose.

The choice is whether the U.S. is staying in Afghanistan — with an active counterterrorism role and assisting the government's fight against its enemies — or whether it is leaving. Only when the Taliban realizes that the U.S. commitment is unwavering, and that it cannot retake Kabul, will this longest war come to a resolution.

USA TODAY's editorial opinions are decided by its Editorial Board, separate from the news staff. Most editorials are coupled with an opposing view — a unique USA TODAY feature.

Bacevich : Enough already for Afghanistan: Opposing view

Andrew J. Bacevich Published 2:42 p.m. ET Feb. 26, 2017 | Updated 18 hours ago

U.S. troops inspect the site of a suicide attack in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 2014.(Photo: Massoud Hossaini, AP)

Will sending a “few thousand” additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan spell the difference between victory and defeat in what has become the longest war in all of U.S. history? Not likely.

To understand why, recall what the United States has been doing in that beleaguered country since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. At the cost of more than $1 trillion, 3,500 coalition troops killed and thousands more wounded, the United States and its allies have spent more than 15 years trying to create in Kabul a government commanding the allegiance of the Afghan people and security forces capable of maintaining internal security.

That effort has not succeeded. Today, the Taliban not only persists but controls more territory than at any time since 2001. U.S. efforts to foster create a viable Afghan economy have achieved meager results.

Although Afghanistan has received more American aid than the United States expended to rebuild Western Europe after World War II via the Marshall Plan, the country today has achieved distinction in only two categories: corruption, where it ranks among the world’s worst, and heroin production, which has reached an all-time high.

Pretending that a few thousand troops will turn things around in Afghanistan is like expecting a few hundred additional cops to eliminate gang violence in a city like Chicago. It’s an argument that ignores root causes. Rather than a serious policy proposal, it’s a Band-Aid.

The root causes of Afghan dysfunction are vast and deep. They predate the ongoing war itself. If the security and well-being of the United States do require it to fix the problems afflicting Afghanistan, then doing so is likely to require a few *hundred* thousand troops. To finish the job, those troops will have to stay a few *decades*. Along the way, they will burn through *trillions* of additional taxpayer dollars.

If U.S. policymakers shrink from making any such commitment — as well they might — perhaps it’s time to ask a more fundamental question: Is it not possible that Afghans are better able than we are to solve their own problems?

Andrew J. Bacevich is author of America’s War for the Greater Middle East, *which is just out in paperback.*

Rogin : Selling Trump a new Afghanistan commitment

https://www.facebook.com/josh.rogin

The Trump administration is considering whether to plunge more resources and troops into the United States’ longest war — Afghanistan — as some of the president’s top generals are calling for. The issue pits President Trump’s commitment to end nation-building against his promise to stamp out terrorism in a conflict where a clear U.S. strategy is sorely lacking.

After more than 15 years of U.S. fighting, the war is at a crossroads. The Afghan national security forces are on their heels. The government is asking the United States and its NATO partners to help it go on offense against the Taliban, which has been taking territory with the help of Pakistan, Iran and Russia. The top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, Gen. John W. Nicholson, has publicly testified that he wants “a few thousand” more troops there. He also says there is a need for a more “holistic review” of the mission.

As Defense Secretary Jim Mattis prepares a formal recommendation to the White House, debate has renewed in Washington on whether the United States is throwing good money after bad in Afghanistan. But as far as the Afghan government is concerned, there’s really no safe alternative.

“The Taliban, while they may not be directly planning direct attacks on U.S. territory, they provide the environment for all kinds of terrorist groups to operate,” Hamdullah Mohib, Afghanistan’s ambassador to Washington, told me. “If we allow any terrorist group to succeed, it doesn’t matter what terrorist group, it emboldens all of them.”

There’s an immediate need for equipment and personnel, he said, before the start of the summer fighting season, which is sure to be bloody. If thousands more U.S. troops arrive, they would serve in an advise-and-training role, not direct combat. But the idea is to embed them in Afghan units, placing them closer to the fighting.

The Afghan government is also asking for helicopters, special forces gear and intelligence assistance to fill urgent shortfalls. For example, the Afghan military’s fleet of Russian helicopters is mostly grounded, in part because of a lack of spare parts as a result of U.S. sanctions against Russia.

Mohib is optimistic that Trump’s team is open to the idea of committing more resources to Afghanistan.

“The hesitation that existed in the previous administration is gone,” Mohib said. “The hesitation was that the U.S. didn’t have a good partner to work with in the Afghan government.”

Republican leaders in Congress are cautiously supportive of an Afghanistan troop increase they would be responsible to fund. But they want to make sure the Trump administration doesn’t repeat what they see as President Barack Obama’s mistakes, including setting timelines for withdrawal and failing to bring the American people along.

“Arbitrary political limits make it harder to accomplish the mission,” House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mac Thornberry (R-Tex.) told me. “It is equally important that

the president make the public case for our continued presence in Afghanistan. . . . President Obama never made that case, and our mission suffered for it."

Trump barely mentioned Afghanistan during the campaign, other than to say it was "not going well" or to compare it favorably to Chicago. The lack of campaign rhetoric gives Trump something of a free hand to choose any policy he wants.

The generals supporting the plan could strengthen their case by getting NATO allies to make human and financial commitments up front. That would address Trump's criticism that NATO doesn't do counterterrorism and doesn't pay its fair share. The generals might also argue that Afghanistan is a natural long-term partner for the regional fight against terrorism, which is not going away soon.

Experts mostly agree, though, that surging resources to bolster the Afghan security forces is a stopgap measure at best. Without a comprehensive strategy that deals with Pakistan's insistence on providing support and sanctuary for the Taliban, no gains are sustainable. A new strategy also must include a plausible path to return to negotiations to end the conflict. For now, the Taliban doesn't feel enough pressure to compromise.

"An open-ended commitment with no strategy poses a very high risk of very expensive failure," said Christopher Kolenda, a former senior adviser on Afghanistan and Pakistan at the Pentagon.

Mattis, Nicholson, Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr. and new national security adviser Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster all have deep experience in Afghanistan and understand that the military aspect of the plan is necessary but not sufficient.

Selling a new U.S. commitment to Trump and then to the American people will not be easy. But if the administration is able to tune out the politics, share the burden and follow a clear strategy, the benefits of the deal will outweigh the costs.

Read more from Josh Rogin's archive, follow him on Twitter or subscribe to his updates on Facebook.

The New York Times

General Says U.S. Wants to Resume Major Military Exercise With Egypt

Michael R. Gordon and Declan Walsh

Marine Corps jets flew over the pyramids of Egypt during a military exercise in 1999. Staff Sgt. Jim Varhegyi/United States Air Force

CAIRO — The top commander of American military operations in the Middle East said during a visit here on Sunday that the United States wanted to resume a major military exercise with Egypt that President Barack Obama had canceled in 2013 to protest the killings of hundreds of civilian protesters.

"It is my goal to get that exercise back on track and try to re-establish that as another key part of our military relationship," Gen. Joseph L. Votel, the head of the United States Central Command, told an Egyptian television interviewer.

General Votel's comments were made shortly after he met with President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and top Egyptian military and Defense Ministry officials. It also comes amid a general warming of relations between Mr. Sisi and President Trump, who has hailed the Egyptian president as a "fantastic guy."

Even before Mr. Trump took office, Mr. Obama had agreed to resume the provision of major weapons systems, including F-16 fighter planes, M1A1 Abrams tanks and Harpoon missiles. The delivery of those systems by Mr. Obama had been suspended in 2015 after the Egyptian military ousted Mohamed Morsi, Egypt's first democratically elected president and a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood.

But growing concern over the threat of militants in Sinai, many of whom have pledged loyalty to the Islamic State, as well as Egypt's decision to buy weapons from Russia and France, led the Obama administration to reverse course.

President Trump appears even less inclined to let Egypt's dismal human rights record interfere with the security relationship between the two countries. Egyptian ministers are preparing for a planned visit to the White house in the coming months.

The first joint American and Egyptian exercise began in 1980 and was eventually expanded until it became a major biannual undertaking. The largest Bright Star exercise, as the maneuvers are known, included about 70,000 troops from 11 nations and was held in 1999.

Even if a formal agreement on resuming the exercise is reached soon, it may take 18 months or longer for a new Bright Star to be held because funds need to be included in the Pentagon's future budget requests.

If the exercise is resumed as expected, it is likely to be much smaller than the huge exercise of 1999 and to be focused more on terrorist threats. The urgency of that threat was demonstrated in recent days as dozens of Coptic Christian families fled El Arish, the main town of northern Sinai, after a spate of gun attacks on civilians in the past month that left at least seven people dead.

Egyptian Christians have been broadly supportive of Mr. Sisi, seeing him as a bulwark against repression by Islamist extremists. But many fleeing El Arish were sharply critical of Mr. Sisi's failure to protect them from the growing extremist threat. Already in December, an Islamic State suicide bomber killed about 30 people in an attack on a prominent Cairo church during Sunday Mass.

Though the resumption of Bright Star would send a loud signal that America is preparing to resume its relationship at the pre-2013 level, Egypt's main goal is still the resumption of a military financing program that allows it to finance military purchases worth billions of dollars, by leveraging expected future inflows of American military aid.

The program effectively allows Egypt to leverage the value of annual American aid, currently at $1.3 billion, to several times that amount. It was frozen by Mr. Obama in 2013.

Any concession to Mr. Sisi by Mr. Trump could, however, be tempered by resistance from Congress. Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham, both Republicans, have been sharply critical of Mr. Sisi's continuing crackdown on civil society, in particular a proposed law that would make it nearly impossible for many foreign aid organizations to work in Egypt.

In December, Mr. McCain and Mr. Graham said in a joint statement that if the "draconian" law was passed, they would seek to introduce new restrictions on American aid to Egypt.

"The Egyptians need to understand that Donald Trump can't wave a wand and make all of their problems go away," said Gerald M. Feierstein, a retired American diplomat who recently met with Mr. Sisi as part of a delegation from the Middle East Institute, a policy-research center based in Washington.

Correction: February 27, 2017

An earlier version of this article misstated when President Obama suspended a military financing program to Egypt. It was 2015, not 2013.

Dispatch

FP Foreign Policy

The Road to Power in Ukraine Runs Through Donald Trump

When Kiev can't reliably get hold of the White House, even Miss Universe contestants will start conducting diplomacy.

KIEV and WASHINGTON — A lot of Ukrainian is being heard around Washington these days.

Since the U.S. election in November, Ukrainian officials have descended on the District, but the pace has picked up noticeably since Congress returned to session in January: One recent trip brought more than 70 Ukrainian politicians to Congress at once. And a congressional staffer who works on Ukraine and Russia policy told Foreign Policy that not a day goes by where he doesn't see Ukrainian lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

One reason for this sudden influx is the outsized role played by the United States in Ukrainian domestic politics: Recognition and support from influential Americans can make or break a politician's career. "There is the perception of the U.S. as a kingmaker in Ukraine," said Vasyl Filipchuk, a former diplomat and the current chairman of the International Centre for Policy Studies in Kiev. "So when [Donald] Trump was elected, all groups of influence — the elite — decided that they must establish or re-establish links with the new administration."

But another reason is the lack of clarity about the Trump administration's policy toward Ukraine and about who is responsible for communications between the two countries. And so, lawmakers from across Ukraine are

flooding into Washington, in the hopes that they will be able to take advantage of this policy vacuum and make an impact — or at least get in on the action.

"There has been so much uncertainty and anxiety in Kiev surrounding Trump and what he will change with Russia and Ukraine," said Balazs Jarabik, a nonresident scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "This is creating an opportunity for other politicians to shop their own initiatives."

The transition from Barack Obama's White House to the Trump administration has been tumultuous for countries around the world, thanks to both mixed messages in public and White House staffing issues that have made it impossible to get clarification in private. But nowhere have the messages been more confusing than in Ukraine, where a more than two-year conflict that has killed nearly 10,000 people shows no signs of stopping. The outbreak of intense fighting in late January threatened to break the fragile Minsk II peace agreements, and recent Russian provocations, including recognition of passports from Ukraine's breakaway regions, are deepening tensions.

The Trump administration's contradictory statements on Russia have only increased anxiety in Kiev. Trump has said he wants to pursue more cooperation, particularly on Syria and counterterrorism — but his administration has also said new cooperation isn't currently possible, and key members of his team, including Vice President Mike Pence and Defense Secretary James Mattis, have emphasized the threat posed by the Kremlin. In the absence of a clear line from the White House, Kiev has looked elsewhere to shore up support. Senate Republicans, under pressure from Russia hawks John McCain and Lindsey Graham, have sounded the alarm about the Kremlin in recent days and called for supporting Kiev. But the Ukrainian government is also scrambling to establish a reliable line of communication with the White House, both to ensure it can plead its case and to avoid being undermined by any one of the lawmakers currently looking to capitalize off the uncertainty.

"We want to understand who is responsible for the foreign policy of the United States in the European region," Valeriy Chaly, Ukraine's ambassador to Washington, told FP last week. "Currently, it is not obvious who this person will be."

Meanwhile, the hollowing-out of the upper echelons of U.S. diplomatic institutions has opened the door to amateur — and, in some cases, rogue — diplomacy.

One example of such informal Ukrainian liaising was described last weekend by the *New York Times*. It reported that Andrey Artemenko, a Ukrainian lawmaker representing Oleh Lyashko's Radical Party, took relations with the Trump administration into his own hands, working with Trump's personal lawyer, Michael Cohen, and a longtime Trump business associate, Felix Slater, to deliver a secret "peace plan" to former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn. Artemenko, a marginal but ambitious politician with an affinity for Trump who has ties to the far-right military-political group "Right Sector," seems to have acted without authorization from the Ukrainian government. Ukrainian officials were livid with Artemenko, who has since been kicked out of his political faction in parliament and is being investigated for treason by Ukraine's General Prosecutor. Since the revelation was first reported, Artemenko has denied passing a peace plan to Trump officials and has since threatened to sue the *New York Times* for libel.

In the days that followed, other proposed peace plans for eastern Ukraine have come out of the woodwork. Former President Viktor Yanukovych, who lives in exile in Russia after fleeing Ukraine following the Maidan protests in 2014, spoke with Western journalists on Tuesday and announced a nine-page proposal for ending the war. According to *Der Spiegel* and the *Wall Street Journal*, which interviewed Yanukovych, the former president had sent the plan to Trump and the leaders of Russia, Germany, France, and Poland. On Wednesday, Radio Free Europe reported that Konstantin Kilimnik, a former associate of Paul Manafort, Trump's erstwhile campaign chairman who worked for Yanukovych, has also drawn up a peace plan. What's more, Kilimnik said he briefed Manafort on the plan during the 2016 U.S. election.

Other interventions have been motivated more by electoral considerations than anything: Ukraine has presidential elections slated for 2019, and jostling among top political players is well underway. On Feb. 2, Yulia Tymoshenko, a former prime minister and a vocal opponent of President Petro Poroshenko, met in Washington with both Vice President Pence and Trump, who reportedly assured her that his administration would "not abandon" Ukraine and that it would not lift sanctions on Russia until it withdraws its troops from the country. *Politico* reported that Poroshenko's team was "apoplectic" about the off-the-cuff meeting. Chaly, the Ukrainian ambassador, however, denied having a visceral reaction to the informal meeting and said Tymoshenko and Poroshenko were working toward the same goal together. "They can compete for political influence and ratings in Kiev, but they do not compete when it comes to the defense and security of Ukraine," Chaly said.

But even as it disapproves of these unofficial exchanges, the Ukrainian government itself has also sought to create its own back channels to reach Trump. Kiev is "making use of informal contacts," said Taras Berezovets, a political consultant and director of the Fund for National Strategies, a Ukrainian think tank.

One rumored interlocutor in this relationship is Oleksandra Nikolayenko, a Ukrainian model and former Miss Universe contestant who is married to Phil Ruffin, a close friend of the president. Trump was best man at Ruffin's wedding to Nikolayenko in 2008, and Ruffin has been a faithful supporter of Trump's campaign from the beginning, donating $1 million to Trump's Make America Great Again PAC just two weeks after it was launched. According to one source close to the Ukrainian presidential administration, Nikolayenko told Chaly that she could put him in touch with "anyone in the administration" and that she had already started setting up meetings for him. Chaly told FP that he had met Nikolayenko at an "informal event with the new American leadership" and that she was later invited to the Ukrainian Embassy but denied that she had helped establish any new contacts.

Other unlikely conduits to Trump that have emerged in recent months include the billionaire businessman Victor Pinchuk, who published an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* in December calling on Ukraine to make "painful compromises" in order to resolve the conflict in the east. When it was published, the Poroshenko administration shot back, saying it wouldn't back down from Russian aggression. Less than a month later, however, despite intentionally ignoring an invitation to attend a breakfast hosted by Pinchuk at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Poroshenko took a meeting with former U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates that Pinchuk had personally organized — reportedly through his connections to officials in the Trump administration — in the hope that Gates, though not a part of the Trump White House, might be able to facilitate a relationship with the president's entourage.

Whether through traditional channels of communication, informal ones, or a combination of both, Ukraine has had some successes reaching Trump and his inner circle. Chaly has played a central role in this effort, establishing contact with Trump staffers following his victory and meeting with Trump and other members of his team in person in the days leading up to the president's inauguration. In early February, Poroshenko became one of the first foreign leaders to speak with Trump, shortly after an escalation of fighting along the front lines in Ukraine's eastern regions, which marked an impressive achievement for Ukrainian diplomacy. Filipchuk, the former diplomat and think tank chairman, who has written in favor of making compromises to achieve peace that many in Ukraine have found provocative, said he was surprised and impressed by the extent to which Chaly has been able to establish relationships with the Trump administration.

After a confusing first few weeks, the Poroshenko administration seems to have fallen back on more formal methods of communication. The Ukrainians are in the process of trying to arrange a visit from a delegation led by Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin to rekindle working ties with the new administration. Poroshenko and Pence met at the Munich Security Conference on Feb. 18, and the Ukrainians are hoping to arrange a visit to Washington for Poroshenko in March. But the Trump administration's disorganization has already taken a toll, by fueling domestic political rivalries that could threaten the country's stability.

"There is a gathering domestic political storm in Kiev," said Jarabik, the Carnegie political analyst. "And soon it will hit."

The Washington Post

Don't let Beijing push us around, warns 'frustrated' former ambassador to China

https://www.facebook.com/simon.denyer?fref=ts

BEIJING — The United States needs to stop getting pushed around by China and work out a long-term strategy to deal with the country's rise, former U.S. ambassador Max Baucus said last week.

In an interview more than five weeks after leaving Beijing, Baucus expressed frustration with the Obama administration's lack of strategic vision and its weakness when it came to China. But he also accused President Trump of blundering around without even a basic understanding of the country.

China, Baucus said, has a long-term strategic vision to build up its economic might and global influence. The United States, by contrast, often appears distracted by problems in the Middle East.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

Please provide a valid email address.

"The Washington foreign-policy establishment tends to put China on another shelf, to deal with it later," he said. "We're much too ad hoc. We don't seem to have a long-term strategy, and that's very much to our disadvantage."

Baucus spoke by Skype from his home in Montana on Thursday, looking out over a beautiful valley framed by snowy mountains, where he sits and watches the storms roll in.

Being ambassador to China, he said, was "the best job I ever had," even if his tenure there was abruptly ended by Trump's election victory.

Baucus, who also spent more than three decades as a Senate Democrat, is proud to have visited all of China's mainland provinces during his time there. He said he worked hard to prevent the two nations from falling into what has been called the Thucydides trap, a theory that an established power feels threatened by a rising power, leading to a rivalry that often descends into war.

But making the relationship work takes serious thought in Washington, he said, something that Baucus said did not always happen during his time in the job.

"It was very frustrating," he said. "The White House would make a decision, and we'd roll our eyeballs, and say: 'This isn't going to work, partly because we're backing off, we're being weak. What's the strategy going forward?' "

Among his complaints: that the Obama administration had not done enough to get the Trans-Pacific Partnership ratified by Congress, despite the hard work that U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman put into the 12-nation Asia-Pacific trade pact.

"The administration didn't have the same zeal, the single-minded, mongoose-tenacity to get the thing passed that Mike Froman and several others in the bus had," he said. "The president didn't get involved nearly as much as I thought he could and should."

The United States, Baucus said, did stand up to China over accusations that state-sponsored cyberspies were stealing U.S. trade secrets, but was not firm enough when combating Chinese protectionism — the lack of access to its markets and the growing problems faced by American companies there.

"China has a long-term strategy to build up its own champion industries, for its own benefit and to the detriment of other countries," he said. "The United States should stand up a lot more with respect to China's economic wall, let alone the Internet wall."

Baucus said he saw signs that the new administration was backing away from some of its more controversial threats — such as declaring China a currency manipulator — in favor of more-targeted measures against dumping by state-subsidized companies. "I hope that's where they go, and I tend to think that's the direction," he said.

Even before leaving Beijing, though, he was shocked to see Trump speak by telephone with Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen and publicly question U.S. adherence to the one-China policy.

That, he said, had been "a major blunder, a huge mistake," by Trump, who was eventually forced to back down in a subsequent phone call with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"It's typical Trump, 'The Art of the Deal,' hit your opponent first to get them off balance. But he has forgotten diplomacy is a lot more complicated than that. He's forgotten Taiwan and one-China is nonnegotiable," he said. "You don't understand China, you don't understand Taiwan, you've not even graduated from high school yet."

Baucus also warned of the dangers of the United States becoming a protectionist "island" under Trump, both economically and in terms of immigration, a direction that would only cede global space and influence to China.

He was not entirely negative about the new administration: Baucus expressed concern about a Washington Post report that the State Department was being sidelined. But he also praised Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.

"When you sit down and talk to him, you'll listen, you don't blow him off," he said. "He knows what he's talking about, he projects confidence and substance, if not gravitas."

Baucus's basic advice for the new administration: Start by formulating a "thoughtful, considered" strategy toward China that includes both engagement and a determination not to be "pushed around."

"One-China is not negotiable to China, Tibet is not negotiable to China. But we have to ask ourselves: 'What are our bottom lines?' " Baucus said. "Where can we be pushed no further?"

Whether it is in economics, the South China Sea or cybersecurity, Baucus said, the United States has to decide where the red lines lie and be prepared to take firm action if those lines are crossed — action that should be measured in "deeds more than words."

"There's no question they're going to test us," he said. "It's an authoritarian government, and they're going to keep pushing."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

O'Hanlon : An Alternative to NATO Expansion That Won't Antagonize Russia

Michael O'Hanlon

Feb. 26, 2017 4:21 p.m. ET

Lost in the brouhaha over whether President Trump and his team are too friendly toward Russian President Vladimir Putin is a more important question. If the Trump administration is serious about its worthy goal of improving U.S. relations with Russia, how exactly can it do so?

Mr. Putin and many of those around him are hard-edged autocrats, and there will be no easy way to put U.S.-Russian relations fully back on track with them in power. But it may be possible to reduce the risks of rivalry and war by addressing what, in Mr. Putin's mind, is likely the fundamental cause of the problem: NATO expansion.

We do not owe the Russian strongman any apologies for the enlargement of the 28-member North Atlantic Treaty Organization to date—it has added 12 members, including three former Soviet republics, since the Cold War. Nor should we abandon democratic friends like Ukraine and Georgia to Russian domination. But we need a better way to help them.

Today we arguably have the worst of all worlds. At its 2008 summit, NATO promised eventual membership to Ukraine and Georgia. But it did so without offering any specificity as to when they would get it. For now these two countries, as well as other Eastern European neutral states, get no protection from NATO. Knowing of our eventual interest in bringing these nations into the alliance, Mr. Putin has every incentive to keep them weak and unstable so they won't become eligible for membership.

Several of them, including Georgia and Ukraine (as well as Armenia and Azerbaijan, largely due to their rivalry), already exceed the NATO target of spending 2% of GDP on their militaries, but most are simply too small and poor to fend off Moscow's meddling. They are also too close to Russia for NATO to protect them, absent the deployment of a large and permanent forward defense. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko is now considering a domestic referendum on possible NATO membership; this further fuels the flames.

It is time that Western nations seek to negotiate a new security architecture for neutral countries in Eastern Europe today. The core concept would be permanent neutrality, at least in terms of formal membership in treaty-based mutual-defense organizations. The countries in question collectively make a broken-up arc from Europe's far north to its south—Finland and Sweden; Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus; Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan; Cyprus plus Serbia, and possibly other Balkan states. The discussion process should begin within NATO, and then include the neutral countries themselves; formal negotiations would then take place with Russia.

The new security architecture would require that Russia, like NATO, commit to uphold the security of Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and other states in the region. Russia would have to withdraw its troops from those countries in a verifiable manner; after that occurred, today's sanctions would be lifted. The Crimea matter could be finessed in various ways, such as refusing to recognize Russian annexation but otherwise putting the matter to the side. The neutral countries would retain their right to participate in multilateral security operations on a scale comparable to what they have done in the past—even operations that might be led by NATO.

The new security order would also guarantee the neutral states the right to choose their form of government, political leadership, diplomatic relations and economic associations. Notably, Russia would acknowledge their prerogative to join the European Union (except for its security-related activities).

NATO has worked hard on its relationship with Russia since the Cold War. It agreed not to station significant foreign combat forces on the territory of any of its new members admitted since the Cold War ended; even today, after years of Russian provocations, it is deploying only 5,000 troops to the Baltic states and Poland. It also created mechanisms such as the North American Cooperation Council and the Partnership for Peace to reach out in collegial and collaborative ways to Russia and other former Soviet Republics.

Yet Russians do not see the situation this way. Whether or not most see NATO as a physical threat, many do see it as an insult—a psychologically and politically imposing former enemy that has approached right up to their borders. Russia's declining population and weak economy when contrasted with those of NATO states—roughly a $1.5 trillion gross domestic product and fewer than 150 million people, versus a combined NATO total of $40 trillion with 900 million—contribute to the mentality of embitterment and perhaps some paranoia.

There is no guarantee that Mr. Putin will prove interested in this idea. He may prefer, for reasons of domestic support and Russian aggrandizement, a contentious relationship with the West.

Nonetheless, the negotiation should be attempted. If Russia refuses to negotiate in good faith, or fails to live up to any deal it might initially support, little will be lost, and options for a toughening of future policy against Russia will remain. But only with an idea this big and bold does Mr. Trump have a realistic chance of putting U.S.-Russian relations on a better course.

Mr. O'Hanlon is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

O'Grady : Mexico's Trade Reply to Trump

Mary Anastasia O'Grady

Feb. 26, 2017 4:20 p.m. ET

Mexico City

Many conservatives who opposed Hillary Clinton are still skeptical of the Trump presidency as well. It may have something to do with recurring whoppers from the administration like White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer's claim last week that "the relationship with Mexico is phenomenal right now."

Bilateral relations with Mexico are on the rocks "big league," and if Mr. Spicer doesn't know that, he should get out more. Declaring otherwise undermines presidential credibility and leaves Trump fence-sitters to wonder what else the press secretary is making up.

Millions of American workers, investors and entrepreneurs who depend on trade with Mexico and Canada under the North American Free Trade Agreement are right to be worried. Unless President Trump finds a way to climb down from his position that Mexico cheats the U.S. under Nafta, their livelihoods are at risk.

Courteousness and formality are signs of good breeding in Mexican society and this often produces, in foreigners, illusions of approval. But when the *extranjeros* are out of earshot, locals can be colorful. It is now fashionable to hold protest marches, beat Trump piñatas, burn effigies with orange hair and even post vulgarities about the U.S. president on public buses. Angry does not begin to describe the popular mood.

A Feb. 23 visit from Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly might have begun the repair process but was undermined by another Trump anti-Mexico rant in Washington the same day.

President Enrique Peña Nieto's government has adopted a diplomatic stance, with a disciplined message that defends Mexican dignity but doesn't give in to the same economic nationalism that defines Mr. Trump's agenda. Ildefonso Guajardo, Mexico's economy minister, is on the front lines. Earlier this month I caught up with him between events at the Sheraton Hotel here and asked what Americans should know about Mexico's position on Nafta.

"First," he said, "I cannot accept the claim that only Mexico has been winning" with Nafta. Rather, "the facts prove that Mexico has been part of the solution for U.S. competitiveness." He reminded me that China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001 triggered "a great competitive challenge for everybody" in manufacturing. Yet U.S. manufacturing from 1997-2015 still experienced real growth of 38% because of production sharing with Mexico.

If you "separate U.S. manufacturing linked with Mexico from U.S. manufacturing not linked to Mexico," he said, the former maintained its output and grew, while the latter declined. This especially benefited the U.S. auto industry, according to the minister, who told me that 74% of investment in the North American auto sector went to the U.S. in 2015-16.

Mr. Guajardo does not reject the possibility of new Nafta talks: "An agreement that is more than 20 years old has room for improvement and modernizing." Both energy and telecommunications, two industries that Mexico has opened to competition in recent years, he noted, could be added to Nafta "explicitly."

But Mexico will proceed with caution. "If we want to be successful, from day one we have to specifically define the objectives of this negotiation. If everything is up for grabs it will be disastrous," Mr. Guajardo said. "If, for example, we reopen the tariff box, there will be an endless line in Washington and Mexico City to ask for protection. So we should not get mixed up with tariffs."

Mexico is open to re-evaluating aspects of the agreement that don't require congressional approval. One example is "rules of origin," which define the percentage of regional content necessary for duty-free treatment inside Nafta. But Mr. Guajardo believes the members ought to focus largely on "how the world is changing" as they "face the digital era and the Industrial Revolution 4.0." He calls it "myopic" to tussle over "700 jobs that may not exist in five years thanks to technological development." Better to "see how we can integrate where the U.S. has tremendous strengths in research and development, innovation and new platforms."

Mr. Trump's proclamations on Nafta are supposed to have an aura of invincibility about them, as if he can dictate new rules for the agreement. Mr. Guajardo sees things differently. Mexico is now a democracy, and like the Americans and the Canadians, he says, he has to respond to domestic interests. Any changes will have to be "win-win-win."

He will use the tools he has to retaliate against U.S. protectionism. But he also emphasized his government's goal, now four years in the making, to diversify Mexican trade by doing more business with Europe, Latin America and Asia. Brazil, he observed, is a strong agricultural producer eager to compete with American farmers in Mexico.

Returning Mr. Trump's rudeness with rudeness is not in the Mexican playbook. But Mexico isn't about to capitulate to this U.S. president either.

Write to O'Grady@wsj.com.

ETATS-UNIS

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

GOP's New Plan to Repeal Obamacare: Dare Fellow Republicans to Block Effort

Louise Radnofsky, Kristina Peterson and Stephanie Armour

Updated Feb. 27, 2017 6:07 a.m. ET

WASHINGTON—Republican leaders are betting that the only way for Congress to repeal the Affordable Care Act is to set a bill in motion and gamble that fellow GOP lawmakers won't dare to block it.

Party leaders are poised to act on the strategy as early as this week, after it has become obvious they can't craft a proposal that will carry an easy majority in either chamber. Lawmakers return to Washington Monday after a week of raucous town halls in their districts that amplified pressure on Republicans to forge ahead with their health-care plans.

Republican leaders pursuing the "now or never" approach see it as their best chance to break through irreconcilable demands by Republican centrists and conservatives over issues ranging from tax credits to the future of Medicaid.

The new strategy means the health-care law could be overhauled in three precarious steps—reflecting the difficulties of concurrently repealing and replacing the law, as President Donald Trump had sought.

Republicans can afford to lose no more than two GOP votes in the Senate and 22 in the House, assuming they get no support from Democrats. That means any GOP faction could torpedo the repeal effort by withholding its support—and members of each have threatened as much.

Advocates of the strategy hope that knife's-edge math will be an asset rather than a liability. They are betting different groups of Republican lawmakers can be pacified with a handful of concessions, then will swallow hard and vote for a longstanding repeal pledge, first in the House, then in the Senate.

"You're a Republican, you've been running to repeal Obamacare, they put a repeal bill in front of you... Are you going to be the Republican senator who prevents Obamacare repeal from being sent to a Republican president who is willing to sign it?" said Doug Badger, a longtime Republican leadership health policy adviser.

Mr. Trump, House Speaker Paul Ryan (R., Wis.) and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) are staking almost everything on this bet, because their entire domestic policy agenda, including a highly prized tax overhaul, rests on the health-care maneuver paying off first.

GOP leaders hope to push through Congress along party lines a bill now being drafted in the House that would repeal major chunks of the health law, according to Republican aides and lawmakers. The move would require use of the "reconciliation" process in the Senate, which lets measures that are generally budget-related pass with a simple majority instead of 60 votes.

The first step also could enact some elements of a new system, such as expanded health savings accounts popular with many Republicans, GOP aides and lawmakers said. It could potentially include alternative forms of financial assistance for people with private coverage and states that want to maintain Medicaid eligibility for low-income residents. It would likely include a transition period designed to prevent people losing coverage abruptly.

Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price could write rules designed to ease the way for members worried that their states' fragile insurance markets could collapse amid, or because of, GOP changes to the health law.

Later, Republicans could look to pass other components of their health-care plan, potentially in a string of bills, which would need 60 votes and bipartisan support in the Senate.

The plan could be torpedoed by everything from Republican divisions to public backlash to Democratic resistance. House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi of California said on ABC's This Week on Sunday morning that she didn't believe Republicans would be able to follow through with their repeal bid.

"They won't be able to do that," she said. "How can they do it? They do not have the votes."

Republican leaders see little alternative but to try, especially since they are already facing criticism for failing to move faster. Some conservative advocacy groups, such as Heritage Action, have said swifter movement could have forestalled the town hall meetings and the polls showing increased support for the ACA that are now rattling some centrist Republicans.

The town halls have also invigorated some conservative lawmakers, who are eager for the fight. "Not everyone is going to get what they want," said Rep. Scott DesJarlais (R., Tenn.). "I've been telling people back home if they don't see major movement on this by Easter, there'll be reason to be concerned."

Republicans still have to overcome significant divisions on central issues.

The House GOP has splintered, for example, over what financial assistance, if any, to offer in place of the ACA's tax credits. Republican leaders are leaning toward including a new tax credit that would be refundable, pegged to consumers' age rather than their income, according to a draft GOP plan released earlier this month.

But some conservatives view that as little better than the ACA subsidies they decry. "It's a long fancy title for an entitlement program," said Rep. Jim Jordan (R., Ohio).

Equally divisive is a battle over Medicaid, the federal-state insurance program for the poor. Republican senators from states that accepted an ACA provision allowing them to use federal funding to expand Medicaid generally want to keep it. Those from states that rejected the expansion are just as determined to see a distribution of federal dollars that doesn't punish them for turning down the enlargement.

Republicans also disagree over how to pay for the plan they settle on. Some are looking at capping how much of employees' health benefits can be shielded from income and payroll taxes—a broad move that would affect as many as 178 million people. Others say such caps would disrupt a system popular among employers trying to recruit top talent and employees who welcome the tax break.

"It's going to be hard for businesses to not continue to use that," said Rep. Phil Roe (R., Tenn.).

Republican leaders said it may ultimately fall to the president's megaphone to quell the intraparty rebellions that show no sign of dimming.

"The president's going to be very pivotal in this," said Rep. Dennis Ross (R., Fla.), a member of the House GOP whip team, which is charged with rounding up votes. "He's got to go into these districts and give air cover to these members who are weak-kneed on some of these issues."

At least one highly experienced Republican warned recently that the outcome is far from certain.

"In the 25 years that I served in the United States Congress, Republicans never, ever, one time agreed on what a health-care proposal should look like," former House Speaker John Boehner (R., Ohio) said at a health-care conference in Florida. "Not once."

Write to Louise Radnofsky at louise.radnofsky@wsj.com, Kristina Peterson at kristina.peterson@wsj.com and Stephanie Armour at stephanie.armour@wsj.com

The Washington Post

Trump faces a pivotal week ahead as he addresses jittery GOP lawmakers

https://www.facebook.com/madebonis

Less than two months into his presidency, Donald Trump faces a pivotal week ahead, with plans to address GOP lawmakers who are jittery about key aspects of his legislative agenda and to roll out a new travel ban in a fashion that will ease doubts about his administration's competence.

President Trump's speech Tuesday to a joint session of Congress comes as fellow Republicans are returning to Washington after raucous town hall meetings where they've faced crowds angered by the lack of a coherent plan to

replace the Affordable Care Act after its promised repeal.

The new president is under growing pressure from his own party to offer specifics on that front as well as on his pledge to provide sweeping tax reform — another issue on which promises of bold action are threatened by divisions among Republicans and a lack of clear direction from Trump.

Trump's prime-time address Tuesday will have ramifications far beyond Capitol Hill: It offers a president with sagging jobapproval numbers an opportunity to recast his agenda for the American people and to change the focus of news coverage that has been dominated in recent days by stories about his campaign's contacts with Russia.

Whether Trump will provide enough direction to satisfy fellow Republicans remains unclear. White House press secretary Sean Spicer said Sunday that his speech will be cast in largely broad strokes, touching on an array of topics including health care, jobs, infrastructure and border security.

[Trump's Cabinet has to work as the cleanup crew]

Trump has said he will offer detailed plans on health care and tax policy around the middle of next month, issues that will be on the agenda Monday when Trump is set to meet jointly with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.).

Many in the party say clarity on such issues needs to come sooner rather than later for Trump to seize the mantle on issues that could go a long way toward determining fate of his presidency.

"On many of these issues, President Trump will be the referee; he'll be the tiebreaker," said Rep. Luke Messer (Ind.), the House Republican Conference's policy chairman. "I do think the sooner he makes clear his preferences the better, because it will help us work through these policy debates within our own party. My guess is some of that will start [Tuesday] night."

On Monday, Trump is expected to direct federal agencies to help him craft a budget that focuses on scaling up the military but also includes "big cuts" to the Environmental Protection Agency and foreign aid, among other targets.

Trump's directive, although not binding in the budget process, suggests a sense of priorities as Trump seeks to look assertive in controlling spending and putting his priorities out front.

Trump's trip to the Capitol on Tuesday is not officially a "State of the Union" address but it will have many of the trappings of such visits. Both Trump and Vice President Mike Pence are planning to travel outside Washington later in the week to reinforce their priorities — something administrations typically do following agenda-setting speeches.

Through a series of executive orders in his first five weeks, Trump has set the framework on several initiatives, including stepped-up immigration enforcement and cutting regulations on businesses. He has also nominated a judge to the Supreme Court with strong conservative credentials.

But Trump can claim no major victories so far in Congress, where he is seeking an array of bold initiatives, including what aides say is a forthcoming infrastructure package.

"Despite some of the spin the White House is putting out about how much progress they've made on their legislative agenda, I'm not sure many Republicans see much progress on two key issues — health care and tax reform — and they're getting a little nervous," said Jim Manley, a lobbyist who was a longtime aide to former Senate minority leader Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.).

[Perspective: President Trump wants to put on a show. Governing matters less.]

Republican lawmakers are now hustling to assemble health-care legislation that addresses dueling concerns within the party. On one hand, they are eager to fulfill seven years of promises to repeal the Affordable Care Act and lessen the federal government's role in health care. On the other hand, many are wary of roiling insurance markets and rolling back the ACA's expansion of Medicaid, a program that covers 76 million Americans.

"I think there are some very conservative Republicans in the House who are going to say, just get rid of the whole thing," Ohio Gov. John Kasich (R) said Sunday on CBS's "Face the Nation." "That's not acceptable when you have 20 million people or 700,000 people in my state, because where do the mentally ill go, where do the drug addicts go?"

Rep. Jim Jordan (Ohio), one of the House Republicans who opposes maintaining the Medicaid expansion or other Obamacare programs, retorted on ABC's "This Week": "We didn't tell the American people we're going to repeal it except we're going to keep the Medicaid expansion. . . We told them we were going to repeal it and replace it with a market-centered, patient-centered plan that actually brings back affordable health insurance."

Asked whether he was confident there were votes in Congress for that, Jordan said, "We better have the votes for that, because that's what we told the people."

['Well, I like this better': Trump sends mixed messages on Obamacare to the GOP]

Trump and his deputies have offered little guidance on specific steps, and he has passed up opportunities to do so. In a January address to a Republican congressional retreat in Philadelphia, Trump offered no new details on what provisions he wants to see.

Any health-care legislation will require making major trade-offs between coverage levels and government spending that will ultimately affect millions of Americans, and Trump has committed to keeping two costly ACA mandates: requiring insurers to cover applicants who have preexisting health conditions, and allowing children younger than 26 to remain on their parents' health plans.

Trump also said repeatedly on the campaign trail that he would not touch Medicaid — a promise that is at odds with the plans of House Republicans.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Sunday during an appearance on ABC's "This Week" that nothing has changed on that front.

At town hall events across the country last week, pro-ACA activists and others pushed GOP lawmakers to explain how their plan would affect those now covered. Without key debates resolved on tax incentives, coverage requirements and the fate of Medicaid, lawmakers have largely responded in generalities.

"Health care can be a very stressful thing," Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.), who faced a furious crowd of more than 2,000 constituents last week, said Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press." "That's why when we repeal Obamacare, we have to get it right."

Trump is facing similarly hard choices on tax reform, where Ryan is pushing a major change to the corporate income tax known as "a border adjustment tax," under which companies' imports would be taxed but their exports would not be.

That concept would appear to be compatible with Trump's preference for hefty border tariffs, and it could also offset the cost of a major reduction in corporate tax rates that Trump has promised. But some economists say it would raise the price of imported goods in the United States and complicate existing free trade agreements.

[Upheaval is now standard operating procedure inside the White House]

Politics newsletter

The big stories and commentary shaping the day.

Please provide a valid email address.

In an interview Thursday with Reuters, Trump said border adjustment "could lead to a lot more jobs in the United States" but did not explicitly endorse it. He had previously told the Wall Street Journal that it was "too complicated."

Ryan has set out an aggressive timeline for passing a tax reform bill, eyeing passage by year's end. Last week, Pence said he and Trump would deliver tax relief "by summertime." But that schedule assumes that Republicans don't get bogged down in health-care legislation over the next six weeks.

In the nearer term, Trump has pledged to issue a new executive order this week in the wake of judges blocking a previous directive that sought to restrict travel to the United States by refugees and people in seven majority-Muslim countries.

The first order was rolled out hastily and led to confusion across the globe. Spicer said last week that the administration is coordinating widely on the second attempt and that it will be "implemented flawlessly."

Ashley Parker contributed to this report.

The Washington Post

A divided White House still offers little guidance on replacing Obamacare

https://www.facebook.com/eilperin

A meeting Friday afternoon between President Trump and Ohio Gov. John Kasich, his former rival in the GOP primaries, had no set agenda. But Kasich came armed with one anyway: his hope to blunt drastic changes to the nation's health-care system envisioned by some conservatives in Washington.

Over the next 45 minutes, according to Kasich and others briefed on the session, the governor made his pitch while the president eagerly called in several top aides and then got Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price on the phone. At one point, senior adviser Jared Kushner reminded his father-in-law that House Republicans are sketching out a different approach to providing access to coverage. "Well, I like this better," Trump replied, according to a Kasich adviser.

The freewheeling session, which concluded with the president instructing Price and Chief of Staff Reince Priebus to meet with Kasich the next day, underscores the unorthodox way the White House is proceeding as Republicans work to dismantle the Affordable Care Act and replace it with something else. The day after Kasich delivered his impromptu tutorial, Trump spent lunch discussing the same topic with two other GOP governors with a very different vision — Scott Walker of Wisconsin and Rick Scott of Florida.

Scott said Sunday that he used the lunch to press for principles he has pushed publicly, such as financial compensation for states that did not expand Medicaid under the ACA and the importance of providing competition and cutting required benefits to allow people to "buy insurance that fits them."

While leaving most of the detail work to lawmakers, top White House aides are divided on how dramatic an overhaul effort the party should pursue. And the biggest wild card remains the president himself, who has devoted only a modest amount of time to the grinding task of mastering health-care policy but has repeatedly suggested that his sweeping new plan is nearly complete.

(Reuters)

Former presidential candidate Gov. John Kasich (R-Ohio) says he's concerned some Republicans in the House want to completely get rid of Obamacare and says that's "not acceptable." Former presidential candidate Gov. John Kasich (R-Ohio) says he's concerned some Republicans in the House want to completely get rid of Obamacare and says that's "not acceptable." (Reuters)

This conundrum will be on full display Monday, when Trump meets at the White House with some of the nation's largest health insurers. The session, which will include top executives from Blue Cross and Blue Shield, Cigna and Humana, is not expected to produce a major policy announcement. But it will provide an opportunity for one more important constituency to lobby the nation's leader on an issue he has said is at the top of his agenda.

Democrats and their allies are already mobilizing supporters to hammer lawmakers about the possible impact of rolling back the ACA, holding more than 100 rallies across the country Saturday. And a new analysis for the National Governors Association that modeled the effect of imposing a cap on Medicaid spending — a key component of House Republicans' strategy — provided Democrats with fresh ammunition because of its finding that the number of insured Americans could fall significantly.

[With Obamacare in peril, activists take to the streets]

Trump, for his part, continues to express confidence about his administration's ostensible plan. He suggested Wednesday that it would be out within a few weeks.

"So we're doing the health care — again, moving along very well — sometime during the month of March, maybe mid- to early March, we'll be submitting something that I think people will be very impressed by," he told reporters during a budget meeting in the Roosevelt Room.

Yet some lawmakers, state leaders and policy experts who have discussed the matter with either Trump or his top aides say the administration is largely delegating the development of an ACA substitute to Capitol Hill. The president, who attended part of a lengthy heath-care policy session his aides held at Mar-a-Lago a week ago, appears more interested in brokering specific questions, such as how to negotiate drug prices, than in steering the plan's drafting.

"The legislative branch, the House first and foremost, is providing the policy," said Rep. Tom Cole (R-Okla.), who noted that the White House lacks "a big policy shop" and that Price and some key principals just recently got in place. Seema Verma, whom Trump has nominated to head the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, should play a key role in any reform effort if she is confirmed.

In the current process, the White House becomes "the political sounding board" in altering Obamacare, as the 2010 law is known, "and the final voice of reason is what the Senate can accept," Cole said.

Within the administration, aides are debating how far and fast Republicans can afford to move when it comes to undoing key aspects of the ACA. White House officials declined to comment for this story.

Several people in Trump's orbit are eager to make bold changes to reduce the government's role in the health-care system. That camp includes Vice President Pence, who told conservative activists last week that "America's Obamacare nightmare is about to end," as well as Domestic Policy Council aides Andrew Bremberg and Katy Talento and National Economic Council aide Brian Blase.

Blase, who most recently worked as a senior research fellow at George Mason University's Mercatus Center, published a paper in December titled "Replacing the Affordable Care Act the Right Way." Its conservative blueprint emphasized the "need to reduce government bias towards comprehensive coverage" for all Americans and a revamping of Medicaid, which was expanded under the ACA and added 11 million Americans to the rolls.

"Medicaid needs fundamental reform with the goals of dramatically reducing the number of people enrolled in the program and providing a higher-quality program for remaining enrollees," Blase wrote.

Other White House advisers, according to multiple individuals who asked for anonymity to describe private discussions, have emphasized the potential political costs to moving aggressively. That group includes Kushner, NEC Director Gary Cohn, senior policy adviser Stephen Miller and chief strategist Stephen K. Bannon.

Asked by George Stephanopoulos, host of ABC's "This Week," whether Trump "won't touch Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid," White House principal deputy press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said, "Look, the president is committed to doing that. . . . And I don't see any reason to start thinking differently."

[The deal the House GOP hopes will resolve one of their biggest ACA headaches]

Where Trump will end up remains unclear, although in both public and private settings he has tended to stress the importance of providing health coverage "for everybody" while lowering its cost. However, Price testified during his recent confirmation hearings that the administration would seek to give Americans access to, not guaranteed, coverage.

The policy proposal Trump has embraced most forcefully, albeit not always consistently, is to pressure pharmaceutical firms to lower their prices by negotiating government drug purchases through Medicare. The idea has considerable support among Democrats and from some Republicans but is currently prohibited under law.

Kasich has proposed paring back some of the ACA's more generous aspects, such as reducing the number of benefits insurers are required to offer and potentially cutting the eligibility level for Medicaid recipients from 138 percent of the poverty level to 100 percent if there is a stable marketplace with adequate subsidies they can join. He also wants states to have more flexibility in how they manage their Medicaid programs, as well as aspects of the private insurance market.

But he has expressed skepticism about turning Medicaid funding into a block grant and opposes any move that would eliminate the coverage many adults in his state now have without a clear path to transition them to new plans.

"Frankly the reason why people are on Medicaid is because they don't have any money," he said Friday**.** "So what are we supposed to say, 'Work harder?' "

Asked to describe Trump's reaction to his overall approach, the Ohio governor replied, "What he said is, he found it interesting. . . . It takes time, so you have to explain it, and explain it again."

Dan Balz contributed to this report.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Higgins : To End ObamaCare, Be Bold

Heather R. Higgins Feb. 26, 2017 4:20 p.m. ET

The current Republican plan for partial repeal of ObamaCare is replete with downsides that make political opportunists on the left salivate. But consider the recent statement by Aetna's CEO that ObamaCare is entering a "death spiral" as higher premiums drive healthier customers from the marketplace. This permits a better approach.

The GOP can't fully repeal ObamaCare because Senate rules requiring 60 votes give Democrats the power to prevent not only the passage of legislation but even its consideration on the floor. Thus Republican leaders have mapped out a plan to repeal the budgetary aspects of the Affordable Care Act under a procedure called "reconciliation," which requires only a simple majority. The political logic is that voters demand action, and partial repeal through reconciliation delivers some.

But reconciliation is limited to matters of taxing and spending. It can't be used to repeal most destructive aspects of ObamaCare—the regulations that stifle competition, cause premiums to skyrocket, make finding a doctor more difficult, and reduce plan options.

It could, however, eliminate the financial incentives for insurers to stay in the exchanges. That would accelerate ObamaCare's collapse, but it would also mean the GOP, not ObamaCare's fundamental flaws, would get blamed for every cancellation and uncovered patient.

The Democrats could then use the 60-vote threshold of the Senate's "motion to proceed to consider" to block full repeal and further reforms. The media would be filled with stories of how GOP "repeal" is to blame for all the cancellations and chaos.

Now that insurers are acknowledging the death spiral, there's an opportunity for bolder action. The House could use regular order, not reconciliation, to pass a bill that not only fully repeals ObamaCare—returning control of the private market to the states—but simultaneously puts into effect at least the core components of reform while including grandfathering and other provisions to smooth the transition to lower-priced options on the free market.

Such a bill could easily pass the House, putting pressure on the Senate. Would Minority Leader Chuck Schumer allow proper consideration of much-needed health-care reform? And with all the evidence that ObamaCare has been a disaster and—untouched by Republicans—is quickly unraveling, would Democrats, 25 of whom are up for re-election next year, vote to defend the status quo?

There would be two Senate filibuster points—the first, to allow consideration; the second, to allow a vote. Thinking through what would happen, the American public and Trump administration would be well served by this exercise of transparent democracy.

Ideally the Democrats would eschew both filibusters, and Americans would be granted the health-care relief they need.

If Democrats blocked consideration of the bill, they would do President Trump a favor by showing the public the parliamentary shenanigans of the anti-deliberation filibuster—call it the "Senatorial Full Employment Through Avoiding Tough Votes" maneuver. Since the 1990s, legislation has routinely passed the House only to die without debate in the Senate. Helping the public understand this game, and exacting a political price for it, would be hugely helpful to passing the rest of Mr. Trump's legislative agenda.

If Democrats refuse to allow debate, Republicans should kill the filibuster against deliberation (as distinct from the filibuster to end debate and hold a vote). They can do so by simple majority vote, as Harry Reid showed when he ended the filibuster against most nominations in 2013. Either way, the Senate can actually have a vote on repealing the Affordable Care Act and reforming health care.

Particularly if Mr. Trump has reversed the still-standing congressional exemption from ObamaCare, and unions want to see the "Cadillac tax" on generous employers plans repealed, there should be enough votes to overcome a filibuster and pass this better approach—which, unlike the present plan, would spare Republicans from having to impose a tax increase down the road to pay for reform. And if Mr. Schumer and his party want to put ideological allegiance to a failing law over the health and well-being of the American people, we need to see that.

The plan to proceed with partial repeal through reconciliation is already well down the road. Human tendency and momentum—along with a desire for certainty, for tax-reform projections if nothing else—will incline congressional Republicans not to change course.

But they should. They would be wise to consider this bold alternative, which could ultimately be the strategic solution—not only for reforming health care but for making the Senate a functioning, deliberative body once again, and thereby enabling the passage of their larger agenda.

Ms. Higgins is CEO of Independent Women's Voice and runs the Repeal & Reform coalition.

POLITICO

Trump inspires encryption boom in leaky D.C.

By Andrew Restuccia and Nancy Cook

Poisonous political divisions have spawned an encryption arms race across the Trump administration, as both the president's advisers and career civil servants scramble to cover their digital tracks in a capital nervous about leaks.

The surge in the use of scrambled-communication technology — enabled by free smartphone apps such as WhatsApp and Signal — could skirt or violate laws that require government records to be preserved and the public's business to be conducted in official channels, several ethics experts say. It may even cloud future generations' knowledge of the full history of Donald Trump's presidency.

Story Continued Below

"The operative word is accountability. You cannot hold an agency or someone accountable if records are not kept and made available," said John Carlin, a former Democratic Kansas governor who served as the archivist of the National Archives from 1995 to 2005. "If there is a hearing or investigation someday and no access to records, there is not much you can do."

White House press secretary Sean Spicer has pointedly warned his staff that using encrypted apps would violate a law requiring the preservation of presidential records, POLITICO reported Sunday.

Conservative advocacy groups also denounce the use of encrypted technologies by career employees, comparing it to Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server when she was secretary of State. The House Science Committee has demanded an inquiry into the use of encryption by employees at the Environmental Protection Agency — although it has shown no similar curiosity about use of encryption in the White House.

"It's stunning that it's still going on in light of the Clinton email scandal," said Judicial Watch President Tom Fitton, who has been critical of the use of encrypted messaging by both civil servants and the White House. "It's no different than what she was doing."

Defenders of federal workers say interest in encryption has skyrocketed as career employees ponder how to respond to an administration they fear will break the law and punish dissent in pursuit of a radical agenda. Jon Brod — the co-founder of Confide, a company that offers an encrypted messaging program of the same name — said the company has seen a surge in use of its app following the election.

People in the government are finding many uses for encryption, including internal conversations and leaks to the news media.

More than 70 workers from several agencies are using encrypted cellphone apps to arrange nighttime and weekend meetings at homes in the D.C. area to discuss their potential resistance to Trump, said Danielle Brian, executive director of the Project on Government Oversight.

She said the employees want to know what to do if they see something illegal happening at their agencies, how to report misdeeds to Congress or inspectors general, and what is protected under whistleblower laws. The demand is so great that POGO plans to hire a full-time employee to train workers across the country on how to report problems, keep their jobs and use encrypted messages to communicate and organize outside of work.

In addition to the EPA, employees at the State Department, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Transportation and other agencies are using encrypted messaging apps, POLITICO has learned.

"We are responding to an increasing level of anxiety in the federal workplace about free speech rights and civil liberties," said POGO's Brian, who has attended three private sessions to offer advice on government workers' legal protections. "This is a whole new world for us."

Federal workers told POLITICO they've adopted encrypted apps because they fear being targeted by Trump's political allies.

"It's very scary," one career civil servant said in an interview, requesting anonymity to avoid possible retaliation. "You don't know who to trust."

Trump has made no secret of his desire to uncover the sources of the many leaks that have roiled the first month of his presidency. "The spotlight has finally been put on the low-life leakers!" he wrote on Twitter earlier this month. "They will be caught!"

The hunt for leaks has swept up the White House communications staff, where Spicer has begun quietly cracking down on the use of encrypted apps. POLITICO reported Sunday that Spicer recently checked White House staffers' phones and warned them against using apps like Confide, which deletes messages as soon as they're read, and Signal, which also has an optional setting to automatically delete messages.

The crackdown came after some political appointees in Trump's White House began using the encrypted apps so they can have covert conversations with journalists and their colleagues. But it remains unclear if top White House officials can completely halt the use of the apps. And at least some staff were still using them as of earlier this month, sources say.

"To my knowledge, no one in the [White House] is using the Confide app or any other similar app and we go to great lengths to preserve all records," a White House official told POLITICO in an email late last week.

However, a BuzzFeed reporter determined that Spicer and White House aide Hope Hicks had once downloaded the Confide app, the site reported this month after using a feature that lets users find contacts who have already signed up. Spicer told BuzzFeed he used Confide only once "months ago."

The White House official told POLITICO that Hicks "does not use the app and deleted it from her phone." The official did not respond to follow-up questions about how the White House knows other staff aren't using the app.

Trump staffers are keenly aware of the risks of their internal communications going public, having faced widespread leaking from their own ranks during the campaign — and having seen the damaging fallout from last year's dumps of hacked emails from Democrats such as Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta.

Yet ethics experts argue that the use of encrypted messaging apps by White House staff for official business would be a clear violation of the law. "At a minimum, the White House ought to explain what record preservation steps it is taking," said Norm Eisen, former ethics czar under ex-President Barack Obama and co-founder of the group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington. "If they refuse to answer those questions, it is fair to assume they are at risk of violating the law."

For both the Trump team and the career employees, encrypted apps like Signal, WhatsApp, Confide and Wickr make it easier to communicate in secret by leaving would-be snoops with unreadable strings of text — thwarting any hackers or government investigators who might get hold of the messages. That's on top of the strong encryption offered by devices such as the latest iPhones, which the FBI has complained it can't crack even in drug or terrorism investigations.

It's unclear whether the career employees are breaking any laws. While it is illegal for federal employees to hold secret discussions to conduct government business, several workers insisted in interviews that they use the apps only for personal communications.

A spokeswoman at the National Archives, which maintains the government's records, said in an email that "personal opinions by and between agency employees, even about senior agency officials, would not likely meet the definition of a federal record" that must be preserved.

But experts say the nature of encryption technology makes it difficult to tell what the employees are discussing. Conservative groups are exploiting that fact to target federal workers who are critical of Trump.

"Any effective regulation of federal employee behavior is heavily predicated on learning that that misconduct has occurred," said Dan Metcalfe, the former director of the Justice Department's Office of Information and Privacy, who spent more than two decades guiding federal agencies on Freedom of Information Act issues. "That's the only way you can regulate it after the fact."

White House staffers are bound by the Presidential Records Act, a post-Watergate law that requires the preservation of official government records. It allows public access to those documents after a waiting period that can stretch from five to 12 years.

Other federal employees must abide by the Federal Records Act, which similarly requires the preservation of government documents. But the law allows more speedy public access to those documents through Freedom of Information Act requests.

The Federal Records Act was amended in 2014 to include all electronic messages, including text messages, voice mails and messaging apps. July 2015 guidance to federal agencies from the National Archives specifically mentions WhatsApp as an example of an application whose messages must be preserved if they pertain to government business.

But even if the technology is new, attempts to skirt federal records laws aren't.

"This is just another variation on the theme," Fitton said about the use of encrypted messaging apps to communicate. "It's not a new issue issue. It's just a new flavor. It doesn't matter the technology because the agencies are required to maintain these records. You can delete text messages and emails too."

Staffers in Republican and Democrat administrations alike often keep sensitive information out of emails, preferring phone conversations, which largely aren't subject to record keeping laws. The Reagan, George H.W. Bush and Clinton administrations strongly resisted calls to preserve their email records (the Reagan White House adopted a rudimentary form of email in the 1980s), resulting in a years-long legal battle.

George W. Bush administration officials faced criticism for using non-government email accounts. And Obama administration officials were caught using alternative email addresses that obscured their identities.

Indeed, resistance to preserving records dates back to the early days of the country. Martha Washington and Thomas Jefferson famously burned their correspondence with their spouses, for example, keeping many of their private thoughts out of reach of later generations.

But the wide availability of encrypted messaging makes secrecy easier than ever.

"It's certainly easier to circumvent public records laws in a written format now than it ever has been," said Mark Rumold, a senior staff attorney at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a nonprofit group that pushes for government transparency.

Republicans in Congress are increasingly frustrated, worrying that career employees are secretly undercutting Trump's policies.

After POLITICO reported this month that several EPA employees were using Signal, House Science Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas) asked the agency's inspector general to look into the issue. Several right-leaning groups have filed FOIA requests seeking EPA employees' communications using Signal.

But Smith and other Republicans have not publicly committed to investigate encryption at the White House. A spokeswoman for Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah), chairman of the House Oversight Committee, declined to comment when asked whether he is looking into the issue.

Some Democrats counter that federal workers should be protected, citing whistleblower laws that shield workers from retribution if they report law-breaking or gross mismanagement.

Reps. Ted Lieu (D-Calif.) and Rep. Don Beyer (D-Va.) even released a guide that underscores federal workers' rights. The guide appears to endorse the use of encrypted apps, calling them a "safe bet."

In an interview, Lieu said, "I just want to make clear to federal employees, Congress passed an entire law protecting whistleblowers."

Tim Starks contributed to this story.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Cracks Show in GOP Opposition to a Trump-Russia Probe

Siobhan Hughes and Alejandro Lazo

Updated Feb. 26, 2017 7:21 p.m. ET

A call by a leading Republican lawmaker for a special counsel to investigate possible Russian interference in 2016 elections highlights the growing pressure facing lawmakers on the issue as they return this week from a recess.

Rep. Darrell Issa (R., Calif.), an early supporter of President Donald Trump's whose district narrowly voted for Hillary Clinton last year, said over the weekend that the

Justice Department should consider appointing a special counsel to probe any links between the Kremlin and Trump associates.

"I would expect that the attorney general will find a career U.S. attorney, appoint him or her to head that up, and to do that job in an independent way," Mr. Issa told reporters on Saturday. "That is historically the right way to deal with something like this."

Mr. Issa's position, which he also aired Friday in an appearance on HBO, was a notable crack in Republican ranks. GOP leaders have said for months that the Senate Intelligence Committee and its House counterpart are equipped to probe allegations of Russian tampering, brushing aside calls for an independent commission, a select congressional committee or a special counsel.

The scope of Senate and House intelligence panel probes has expanded from a look into election meddling to links between Russians and members of Mr. Trump's campaign, along with former national security adviser Mike Flynn's communications with Russia's ambassador.

Questions about the subject in town-hall meetings last week were followed by a Washington Post report that White House officials enlisted the chairmen of the Senate and House intelligence committees, Sen. Richard Burr (R., N.C.) and Rep. Devin Nunes (R., Calif.), to talk to reporters to beat back articles about ties between Trump associates and Russia.

"If Chairman Burr is discussing classified matters with the press and pre-judging the committee's investigation, all at the behest of the White House, it's hard to imagine how he could convince me or the public of his impartiality," said Sen. Ron Wyden (D., Ore.), a member of the intelligence committee.

Sen. Mark Warner (D., Va.), the senior Democrat on the panel, said in a statement that he said that he has called Mr. Burr and Central Intelligence Agency Director Mike Pompeo to express "grave concerns" about the independence of the investigation.

A spokeswoman for Mr. Burr didn't respond to a request for comment. Mr. Burr told the Post that he had spoken both with White House officials and with reporters, and that he has contested allegations of contacts between the Trump team and Russians.

A spokesman for Mr. Nunes said the lawmaker had already been talking to reporters and that when the White House asked him to speak to one more reporter, he agreed.

The Wall Street Journal was among news organizations contacted by Mr. Nunes and other senior officials about allegations of Trump-Russia connections.

White House officials and their allies are trying to hold the line against calls for an independent prosecutor.

"I don't think we're there yet—let's work through this process," said White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders on ABC. "That's not how this works. Typically, you go through a congressional oversight review. We're doing that. Let's not go to the very end of the extreme."

Sen. Tom Cotton (R., Ark.), a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said on NBC that it was "getting way ahead of ourselves" to discuss a special prosecutor or the establishment of new committee to conduct a probe. "That's something that can be decided down the road," he said.

Write to Siobhan Hughes at siobhan.hughes@wsj.com and Alejandro Lazo at alejandro.lazo@wsj.com

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Trump to Propose Significant Increase in Defense Spending

Nick Timiraos and Kristina Peterson

Updated Feb. 26, 2017 10:43 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump's first budget will seek a sizable increase in military funding but won't make changes to the largest future drivers of government spending: Social Security and Medicare.

Work to prepare the president's first budget proposal, expected to be released in mid-March, ramped up last week following the Feb. 16 confirmation of Mick Mulvaney as director of the Office of Management and Budget.

The White House plans to send federal agencies their proposed budget allocations on Monday, a person familiar with the matter said. Mr. Trump will preview some of the budget priorities in his speech to Congress on Tuesday and release a budget outline in mid-March after gathering information from federal agencies.

The budget outline due next month will include only targets for discretionary spending programs and not any new proposals on taxes or mandatory spending programs, such as Medicare and Medicaid, said John Czwartacki, a White House budget office spokesman. The decision to defer the release of part of the budget blueprint is due in part to the delay in Mr. Mulvaney's confirmation, he said, and those additional proposals will be included in Mr. Trump's full budget submission later this year.

"It would be premature for us to comment or anyone to report on the specifics of this internal discussion before its publication," said Mr. Czwartacki.

The president's budget proposal marks the opening of the monthslong process to set funding levels for the following year. Spending bills originate with Congress and need 60 votes to clear procedural hurdles in the Senate.

In his address to Congress, Mr. Trump also is expected to emphasize two of his top legislative priorities: simplifying the tax code and dismantling the Affordable Care Act and replacing it with something else, White House officials said Sunday.

Speaking Sunday on Fox News, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said the budget outline won't include any changes to entitlement spending programs. "We are not touching those now. So don't expect to see that as part of this budget," he said.

Mr. Mnuchin, in an interview last week, said an increase in military spending "is an important priority, and I think it's likely that you'll see that reflected in the president's budget."

By pushing for more military funding and taking entitlement spending changes off the table, the Trump administration also would need to propose funding cuts for nondefense programs to avoid sending deficits much higher.

Mr. Trump, for example, is expected to seek cuts at the Environmental Protection Agency and in other areas of domestic spending.

Congressional Republicans have said they would look to Mr. Trump's speech for hints about the first budget proposal his administration will send to Capitol Hill, expected in mid-March.

Although Mr. Trump repeatedly said on the campaign trail he didn't want to reduce spending on Medicare or Social Security, Mr. Mulvaney has long advocated for sharply lowering federal spending, including on entitlement programs.

Given that Mr. Trump plans to boost military spending and cut taxes, the White House budget plan could leave conservatives in a difficult position if the GOP-led budget does little to curb spending.

"You have got to pay for those things. We've got to pay for those things," Rep. Jim Jordan (R., Ohio), an influential conservative lawmaker, said Sunday on ABC. Conservatives generally want to cut spending on entitlements to offset more military spending.

On Tuesday night, the president is also expected to generally outline his priorities on health policy. He said earlier this year that his goal was to provide "insurance for everybody." White House deputy press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders declined Sunday to guarantee that no one would lose his or her current coverage under the GOP plan.

"I know that the goal is that we make sure that people don't lose their coverage and that we have to put a high priority on people that need it most," Ms. Sanders said on ABC.

Republicans are also split over how to overhaul Medicaid, the federal-state insurance program for the poor, which some states expanded under the 2010 health law.

In Tuesday's speech, Mr. Trump also will likely reiterate his desire to increase border security, his former campaign manager, Corey Lewandowski, said Sunday on Fox.

Mr. Trump campaigned for president promising a full wall along the border with Mexico and continues to talk about building it. But he is running into resistance from some Republicans in Texas.

Write to Nick Timiraos at nick.timiraos@wsj.com and Kristina Peterson at kristina.peterson@wsj.com

Trump to Ask for Sharp Increases in Military Spending, Officials Say

Glenn Thrush, Kate Kelly and Maggie Haberman

WASHINGTON — President Trump will instruct federal agencies on Monday to assemble a budget for the coming fiscal year that includes sharp increases in Defense Department spending and drastic enough cuts to domestic agencies that he can keep his promise to leave Social Security and Medicare alone, according to four senior administration officials.

The budget outline will be the first move in a campaign this week to reset the narrative of Mr. Trump's turmoil-tossed White House.

A day before delivering a high-stakes address on Tuesday to a joint session of Congress, Mr. Trump will demand a budget with tens of billions of dollars in reductions to the Environmental Protection Agency and State Department, according to four senior administration officials with direct knowledge of the plan. Social safety net programs, aside from the big entitlement programs for retirees, would also be hit hard.

Preliminary budget outlines are usually little-noticed administrative exercises, the first step in negotiations between the White House and federal agencies that usually shave the sharpest edges off the initial request.

But this plan — a product of a collaboration between the Office of Management and Budget director, Mick Mulvaney; the National Economic Council director, Gary Cohn; and the White House chief strategist, Stephen K. Bannon — is intended to make a big splash for a president eager to show that he is a man of action.

Mr. Trump's top advisers huddled in the White House this weekend to work on his Tuesday night prime-time address. They focused on a single, often overlooked message amid the chaos of his first weeks in the White House: the assertion that the reality-show candidate is now a president determined to keep audacious campaign promises on immigration, the economy and the budget, no matter how sloppy or disruptive it looks from the outside.

"They might not agree with everything you do, but people will respect you for doing what you said you were going to do," said Jason Miller, a top communications strategist on the Trump campaign who remains close to the White House.

"He's doing something first, and there's time for talk later," Mr. Miller added. "This is ultimately how he's going to get people who didn't vote, or people who didn't vote for him, into the fold. Inside the Beltway and with the media, there's this focus on the palace intrigue. Out in the rest of the country, they are seeing a guy who is focused on jobs and the economy."

The budget plan, a numerical sketch that will probably be substantially altered by House and Senate Republicans — and vociferously opposed by congressional Democrats — will be Mr. Trump's first big step into a legislative fray he has largely avoided during the first 40 days of his administration.

Thus far, instead of legislating, he has focused on a succession of executive orders on immigration and deregulation written by Mr. Bannon's small West Wing team.

Resistance from federal agencies could ease some of the deepest cuts in the initial plan before a final budget request is even sent to Congress. And Capitol Hill will have the last word.

To meet Mr. Trump's defense request, lawmakers in both parties would have to agree to raise or end statutory spending caps on defense and domestic programs that were imposed by the 2011 Budget Control Act.

Mr. Trump is in a highly unusual position at a time when most presidents are finding their footing or confronting crisis. Despite his lament that he was handed "a mess" by President Barack Obama, Mr. Trump inherited a low unemployment rate, a lack of international crises requiring immediate attention and majorities in both houses of Congress.

By contrast, when Mr. Obama took office, the country was losing 700,000 jobs a month, and the global financial system was teetering on the edge of collapse. By the time he stepped up to the rostrum for his first joint congressional address on Feb. 24, 2009, he had already accrued an impressive string of accomplishments, including the passage of a massive stimulus bill through the Democratic-controlled Congress, a gender pay-parity act, a children's health insurance law and executive actions that would ultimately help stabilize the financial and automotive sectors.

With the prospect of a second Great Depression still high, Mr. Obama sought to rally the country, vowing, "We will rebuild, we will recover, and the United States of America will emerge stronger than before."

Mayor Rahm Emanuel of Chicago, who was Mr. Obama's first chief of staff, said in an interview Sunday night that Mr. Trump was trying to create a "sense of urgency, which most people aren't feeling right now, which was a reality to us" in order to generate support for his unspecified economic agenda, including an infrastructure bill and a tax overhaul.

"When it comes to all of these executive orders, the question is, does the public view what he's doing as action or motion?" Mr. Emanuel added. "If you don't have real action, you create a sense of motion, so the public views it as progress."

In putting together their budget plans, White House officials are operating under the assumption that the rate of the United States' economic growth this year will be 2.4 percent, according to one person who has been briefed on the matter. That is slightly ahead of current projections, but it is well below the 3 percent to 4 percent growth that Mr. Trump promised during the campaign.

For next year, the operating assumption is only slightly higher, that person added, a sign that the budget process will not be too out of step with economic reality.

The turmoil that has engulfed Mr. Trump's West Wing is largely of his own devising — part of a calculated effort by Mr. Bannon to move boldly despite his team's lack of experience, and despite the reluctance of many mainstream Republicans to work for a president whom many of them opposed in the party's brutal primaries.

"During his first month in office, President Trump has done exactly what he said he was going to do," said Thomas Barrack Jr., a longtime friend of Mr. Trump's who ran his inaugural committee. "No president has worked harder or accomplished as much, even with tremendous political resistance forcing him to operate with a small team of outsiders possessing little government experience."

Lawmakers in both parties have complained that the president's big words are not yet matched by detailed policy prescriptions or a legislative affairs team capable of executing such undefined promises as repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act or rewriting the tax code.

The budget outline will give Mr. Trump an opportunity to add some specifics to an agenda that has been defined by bellicose speech and the broadest possible policy strokes.

Still, aides said Mr. Trump did not plan to change his style for Tuesday's address. The speech, they said, is likely to have more in common with his clipped inaugural address — in which he declared, "The time for empty talk is over" — than the fine-print litanies of policy proposals favored by President Bill Clinton or the high-flung invocations of national purpose preferred by President George W. Bush and Mr. Obama.

Mr. Trump's team, conscious of his recent reversals and a first-month approval rating that is among the lowest ever recorded, has emphasized his determination to break the partisan gridlock and inaction that has kept congressional approval ratings in the 15 to 30 percent range for years.

At the start of an interview last week with Sean Hannity of Fox News at the Conservative Political Action Conference, Kellyanne Conway, the president's counselor, called him "President Action, President Impact, Donald J. Trump."

In a round-robin of Sunday show interviews, Stephen Miller, Mr. Trump's policy adviser, maintained that the president had accomplished more in his first month than most of his predecessors had in their entire administrations.

In reality, most of Mr. Trump's executive actions have had no more effect on actual policy than news releases. And his nail-in-the-coffin order on the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal came well after the agreement had been put on life support by labor protests and liberal opposition.

One West Wing official, who requested anonymity to speak candidly about strategy, said the administration craved the split-screen television images of Mr. Trump at round-table discussions with business executives every few days on one side, and the vehement protesters of his administration on the other.

But his critics say such photo opportunities are all an act, a not-very-entertaining real-life rendition of "The Apprentice" by an ineffective rookie president.

"This man is not a doer," said Representative Nancy Pelosi, the House minority leader, who will host a Monday "pre-buttal" of Mr. Trump's Tuesday speech. "Oh, please. He has nothing to show for what he's been doing in office for 40 days. It's all been squandered."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

President Trump's Pick for Navy Secretary Withdraws

Paul Sonne

Feb. 26, 2017 8:05 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump's choice for Secretary of the Navy withdrew from consideration on Sunday, citing financial concerns, making him the second of Mr. Trump's three service secretary nominees to bow out.

Philip Bilden, a private-equity investor whom Mr. Trump appointed to the Navy's top civilian post in late January, said in a written statement that the divestment required to comply with Pentagon ethics rules would cause too much of a disruption to his financial interests.

"After an extensive review process, I have determined that I will not be able to satisfy the Office of Government Ethics requirements without undue disruption and materially adverse divestment of my family's private financial interests," Mr. Bilden said.

Mr. Bilden said he informed Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis of his decision to withdraw and vowed to continue supporting the Navy and the Marine Corps outside the Department of the Navy.

"This was a personal decision driven by privacy concerns and significant challenges he faced in separating himself from his business interests," Mr. Mattis said in a written statement. "While I am disappointed, I understand and his respect his decision, and know that he will continue to support our nation in other ways."

The Pentagon has particularly strict rules governing financial divestments for service secretaries to avoid conflicts of interest in multibillion-dollar procurement and acquisition programs.

Mr. Mattis said he would recommend another person in the coming days for Mr. Trump to appoint to the position.

Mr. Bilden's withdrawal comes three weeks after Vincent Viola, the West Point grad and billionaire financial-trading magnate, dropped out of consideration after being selected for Secretary of the Army. Mr. Viola also said that the challenge of separating himself from his businesses became insurmountable.

Mr. Trump's pick for Secretary of Labor, fast-food executive Andy Puzder, withdrew from consideration earlier in February after disclosing that he failed to pay taxes for an undocumented housekeeper. A decades-old spousal abuse allegation, which his ex-wife has since recanted, also resurfaced with a video of her appearing in disguise on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" in 1990.

The Pentagon's three service secretaries—Secretary of the Navy, Secretary of the Army and Secretary of the Air Force—run the branches of the U.S. military as top civilian officials under the Secretary of Defense. They are not members of the cabinet but must receive Senate approval.

Mr. Trump has nominated Heather Wilson, an Air Force veteran and former congresswoman from New Mexico, as his Secretary of the Air Force. The U.S. Senate must approve her nomination for her to begin working in the role.

Write to Paul Sonne at paul.sonne@wsj.com

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Economic Surveys Show Deep Splits in Confidence Along Party Lines

Josh Zumbrun

Updated Feb. 26, 2017 12:03 p.m. ET

There's more to the U.S. economy than the occupant of the Oval Office, but you might not know that looking at confidence surveys.

Since the election of President Donald Trump, consumer confidence and business sentiment surveys have been scrambled like never before along partisan lines. Confidence among Republicans has soared while it has crumbled for Democrats, even though most measures show little change in how the actual economy is behaving.

"When you see how the partisan details have changed in recent months it really makes you question the usefulness of these data," Jim O'Sullivan, chief U.S. economist of High Frequency Economics, said of confidence metrics. "If you're a consumer, your spending depends primarily on your income and your wealth and your credit."

Measures of consumer confidence are widely followed economic indicators, due to their correlation over time with consumer spending and the strength of the economy. Large downturns in confidence tend to coincide with economic downturns, and vice versa. Now, surveys designed to ask about the economy resemble a Rorschach test; people see the president and their view of him in everything.

Gallup's measure of economic confidence among Republicans has increased dramatically since before the election. The difference between those who said they weren't optimistic and those who said they were optimistic was 46% in October. By January that flipped: The optimists outnumbered the pessimists by 27%. That reversal sent the confidence index for Republicans up 73 points. The index for confidence among Democrats dropped 23 points over this period.

Eight years ago, when President Barack Obama had just taken office, the confidence index among Democrats climbed just 13 points in the same three-month window, while Republican confidence fell just 6 points.

Looking back even further is the University of Michigan's survey of consumer sentiment. Republican expectations are at an index reading of 120 this month. Since 1952 the overall sentiment index has never topped 112. Democrats, by contrast, were at 55.5, a level not seen since the worst of the financial crisis, when the economy was shedding more than 2 million jobs per quarter. Thus, by Michigan's measure, Republicans are collectively counting on the best economy in post-World War II history, while Democrats expect something as bad as the worst days of the 2008 financial crisis.

Taken at face value, one would expect heavily Republican areas of the country to strengthen as this confidence leads to a surge in spending and investment, while mostly Democratic areas would weaken for the opposite reasons. Few economists expect such an outcome or see signs that it's emerging.

"If you look at the swings, before and after the election, they're not yet substantiated by many real changes in the economy," said Gregory Daco, head of U.S. economics for Oxford Economics.

Most Americans have their economic fortunes tied to their job, and nearly all workers have the same job now as before the election. Only about 3.5% of Americans switched jobs in November and December and started a new one, according to Labor Department data. Wages have been rising somewhat faster over the past year, but most of those gains have been eaten by also-rising inflation.

Some measures of economic sentiment may be capturing something quite different than in the past.

"Our level of confidence is a function of our perceptions of certainty and control," said Peter Atwater, president of Financial Insyghts, a research firm studying social mood and confidence. Republicans may be responding to a sense of relief that somebody with a worldview similar to their own has control of the White House, and vice versa for Democrats. "It isn't always economic factors that drive our mood," said Mr. Atwater.

Sentiment is especially buoyant at small businesses. An index of small-business optimism from the National Federation of Independent Businesses has climbed 57 points since before the election. Yet the increase in the share of small businesses planning to increase their hiring was more modest, and there's been little increased planning for greater capital investment, according to the survey.

Three big drivers of business enthusiasm have been hopes for corporate tax reform, less regulation and the prospect of major infrastructure spending that could flood manufacturers and construction firms with work. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin has said that tax reform could take until August. Regulations could also take years to roll back. Meantime, the details of an infrastructure package have yet to emerge, and even once enacted such projects take a notoriously long time.

Investors, like Republicans, are inferring in Mr. Trump a high probability of success despite obstacles he faces. The stock market is up more than 10% since the election. Andrew Liveris, chief executive of Dow Chemical Co., participated in a roundtable of

business leaders who met with Mr. Trump last week. Afterward, he said "to have the U.S. government speak the language of business is a completely new experience."

In the end, expectations will need to square up with the economy's real performance.

Write to Josh Zumbrun at Josh.Zumbrun@wsj.com

Trump and the rise of the extreme right

The Christian Science Monitor

February 27, 2017 Atlanta and Ferndale, Mich.—Church Militant makes no apologies. It's goal, after all, is "fighting against evil and trying to restore the palace guard and the Kingship of Christ," it proclaims in a recent video. In such a fight, it adds, "extreme and fringe" is the only place to be.

A nondescript brick building here in the Detroit suburbs is where those videos are produced – the command center of an ultraorthodox Catholic organization that called the recent women's marches a "disgusting scene" and argues that the role of the state is only to protect the civil rights of Catholics.

Church Militant's criticism of Judaism and Islam is such that it is "on the spectrum" of hate groups, according to the Taskforce on Hate and Terrorism in Washington.

But this year, its coffers are fuller than ever, says group leader Michael Voris. As Donald Trump made his way toward the White House, the organization doubled its revenue from $1 million to $2.2 million, marking what Mr. Voris calls "our best year ever."

"The enthusiasm level has really taken off in this last year," he tells the Monitor. "It's really off the chart."

The enthusiasm for Church Militant mirrors a shift in hate-related activity since the start of Mr. Trump's presidential campaign. Hate-related incidents spiked after his election, though inconsistent reporting made it hard to determine the extent of the trend.

More clear has been the rise in the number of hate groups the past two years, with the Southern Poverty Law Center writing on its website that the increase is "in part due to a presidential campaign that flirted heavily with extremist ideas." The number of anti-Muslim hate groups nearly tripled between 2015 and 2016, according to SPLC data.

For his part, Trump has condemned recent threats against Jewish organizations and has visited and extolled the new National Museum of African American History in Washington. He has said his proposed temporary ban on citizens from seven Muslim-majority countries is not based on religion.

But his talk of a Muslim ban during the campaign, combined with his broad characterizations of many undocumented immigrants as violent criminals bears what one scholar calls "a family face resemblance" to ideas supported by hard-right groups. Indeed, a broader surge in hate groups since 2000 has been "driven in part by anger over Latino immigration" and the declining whiteness of the United States, SLPC argues.

In that context, experts are watching to see how this rise in energy and organization on the extreme right plays out. The question is whether some Americans are feeling empowered to use the confrontational stance of the Trump administration to radicalize an emotional and existential debate over America's fundamental character.

"What is novel about the current moment is that these groups … see Trump as someone giving them hope that the state will act on their interests," says Carolyn Gallaher, a political geographer at American University in Washington and author of "On the Fault Line: Race, Class and the American Patriot Movement."

"It'll be interesting to see what happens to memberships in [far-right] groups: Will it only get bigger as they feel they now have a conduit to the White House? Or do people say, 'Now we can just do it on our own, say what we want to say, and enjoy protections for it'? It will depend in large part on what the administration's posture is going forward."

The trend lines

The number of hate groups has risen dramatically during the past two years, marking an abrupt new trend. Before 2015, hate groups had been declining. While their numbers more than doubled from 1999 to 2011 (from 457 to 1,018), they then declined to 784 in 2014. By 2016, they had shot back up to 917.

More recently, the SPLC found more than 1,000 post-election hate-related incidents, though it concluded that some were hoaxes and that the total pace of incidents slowed as the administration transitioned into power.

The reports have created an atmosphere of fear in some communities.

In Kansas, the Federal Bureau of Investigation this week joined an probe into a man who yelled, "Get out of my country" before killing an Indian man and injuring two of his friends after mistaking them for being "Middle Eastern." Last October, the FBI arrested three Kansas men and said they were plotting to blow up an apartment building filled with Somali Muslims.

Earlier this month, a letter sent to mosques by "Americans for a Better Way" suggested that, under Trump, "You Muslims would be wise to pack your bags and get out of Dodge." Over the President's Day weekend, vandals toppled 150 headstones at a Jewish cemetery.

Then there are incidents that don't make national headlines.

The Triad City Beat, a newspaper in Greensboro, N.C., reported on a recent meeting of right-wing groups in Kernerville, N.C., in which one participant noted that, "We need to talk about about we can get things done peacefully [but] be ready for the worst." Another attendee remarked: "I am beyond that point. I'm ready to start taking people out."

Asked about a spike in anti-Semitism, Trump said that under his administration "You're going to see a lot of love. OK?" Vice President Mike Pence helped with the clean-up effort at the Jewish cemetery.

But observers say the increase in incidents and threats is striking.

"One hundred percent, these are the kind of visible threats to the [religious] community that have not been felt in a generation," says Mark Weitzman, director of the Task Force Against Hate and Terrorism at the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

"I'm not sure how you can quantify it, but the reports we're seeing – impressionistic and statistical – all seem to indicate that there's a climate in the country, and a lot of it is fear – fear, frankly, on all sides," he adds. "We're seeing [an increase in attacks on religious adherents] across the country. Part of it is that everything in this age gets recorded and transmitted. But the reality is that there is a sense now that some people feel they can say things that were previously socially unacceptable and get away with it, [fueled by] hostility, resentment, and a lack of accountability."

The view from the far right

For their part, some right-wing groups have questioned whether research and media organizations are overhyping confrontations for a liberal agenda.

Breitbart recently tut-tutted a CNN story on hate crimes that included somebody chalking the words "Trump," "Build Wall," and "[expletive] your safe space" in front of a library.

Derogatory comments are regrettable, but are "a world apart from the wave of 'hate crimes' and violent attacks that many are conjuring up," wrote Reason's Elizabeth Nolan Brown after Trump's election.

By using broad criteria for what constitutes a hate group or hateful incident, groups like the SPLC pad statistics in order to imply, dishonestly, "that there's a Nazi behind every tree in America," says Michael Hill, president of the secessionist League of the South in Killen, Ala., which the SPLC lists as a hate group.

He says he sees open, confrontational speech as beneficial if it's rooted in self-preservation and self-interest – and agrees that Trump has empowered such speech.

"I think it's the good old American way to put your ideas out there and confront people with them," he says. "We've had for so long one side with a muzzle on and one side with an open mouth free to say whatever they want to."

"What you're seeing now is that a lot of people feel more emboldened – because someone like Trump is in the White House – to speak their minds on topics that formerly had been taboo," he adds. "As long as that doesn't break out into any sort of illegal activity, I don't see what the problem with it is. I really see this as kind of healthy."

Hill and Voris offer a window into the kind of speech that is gaining currency under Trump, and which they insist is not hateful.

Hill says his approach to religious minorities "is a quid pro quo. You stay in your place and I won't do anything but wish you well, but you've got to afford me the same thing."

Voris says his criticism of Islam is not a blanket denunciation of all Muslims. "Is there a threat to the stability of the West? Yes," he says. "Is that largely coming from believers in Islam? Yes. Does that mean that the whole religion and

every person in it is a threat to Western Civilization? No."

At the root of his complaint is that progressive and secular forces are wresting the country away from its Christian roots. The tensions of the Trump era, he says, are tied to a sense that the state is ready to roll back what many Americans have presumed are personal rights in order to safeguard the country.

"Whenever liberals wanted something they just go to the courts and they cry, 'Civil rights! Civil rights!'" says Voris. "Not everything is a civil right.

The New York Times

Borjas : The Immigration Debate We Need

George Borjas

Over the past 30 years, a large fraction of immigrants, nearly a third, were high school dropouts, so the incumbent low-skill work force formed the core group of Americans who paid the price for the influx of millions of workers. Their wages fell as much as 6 percent. Those low-skill Americans included many native-born blacks and Hispanics, as well as earlier waves of immigrants.

But somebody's lower wage is somebody else's higher profit. The increase in the profitability of many employers enlarged the economic pie accruing to the entire native population by about $50 billion. So, as proponents of more immigration point out, immigration can increase the aggregate wealth of Americans. But they don't point out the trade-off involved: Workers in jobs sought by immigrants lose out.

They also don't point out that low-skill immigration has a side effect that reduces that $50 billion increase in wealth. The National Academy of Sciences recently estimated the impact of immigration on government budgets. On a year-to-year basis, immigrant families, mostly because of their relatively low incomes and higher frequency of participating in government programs like subsidized health care, are a fiscal burden. A comparison of taxes paid and government spending on these families showed that immigrants created an annual fiscal shortfall of $43 billion to $299 billion.

Even the most conservative estimate of the fiscal shortfall wipes out much of the $50 billion increase in native wealth. Remarkably, the size of the native economic pie did not change much after immigration increased the number of workers by more than 15 percent. But the split of the pie certainly changed, giving far less to workers and much more to employers.

The immigration debate will also have to address the long-term impact on American society, raising the freighted issue of immigrant assimilation. In recent decades, there has been a noticeable slowdown in the rate at which the economic status of immigrants improves over time. In the 1970s, the typical immigrant could expect a substantial improvement relative to natives over his or her lifetime. Today, the economic progress of the typical immigrant is much more stagnant.

Part of the slowdown is related to the growth of ethnic enclaves. New immigrants who find few ethnic compatriots get value from acquiring skills that allow more social and economic exchanges, such as becoming proficient in English. But new immigrants who find a large and welcoming community of their countrymen have less need to acquire those skills; they already have a large audience that values whatever they brought with them. Put bluntly, mass migration discourages assimilation.

The trade-offs become even more difficult when we think about the long-term integration of the children and grandchildren of today's immigrants. Many look back at the melting pot in 20th-century America and assume that history will repeat itself. That's probably wishful thinking. That melting pot operated in a particular economic, social and political context, and it is doubtful that those conditions can be reproduced today.

Many of the Ellis Island-era immigrants got jobs in manufacturing; Ford's work force was 75 percent foreign-born in 1914. Those manufacturing jobs evolved into well-paid union jobs, creating a private-sector safety net for the immigrants and their descendants. Does anyone seriously believe that the jobs employing low-skill immigrants today will offer the same economic mobility that unionized manufacturing jobs provided?

Similarly, the ideological climate that encouraged assimilation back then, neatly encapsulated by our motto "E pluribus unum" (Out of many, one), is dead and gone. A recent University of California directive shows the radical shift. The university's employees were advised to avoid using phrases that can lead to "microaggressions" toward students and one another. One example is the statement "America is a melting pot," which apparently sends a message to the recipient that they have to "assimilate to the dominant culture."

Europe is already confronting the difficulties produced by the presence of unassimilated populations. If nothing else, the European experience shows that there is no universal law that guarantees integration even after a few generations. We, too, will need to confront the trade-off between short-term economic gains and the long-term costs of a large, unassimilated minority.

Identifying the trade-offs is only a first step toward a more sensible immigration policy. We also need some general principles, combining common sense and compassion.

First and foremost, we must reduce illegal immigration. It has had a corrosive impact, paralyzing discussion on all aspects of immigration reform. A wall along the Mexican border may signal that we are getting serious, but many undocumented immigrants enter the country legally and then overstay their visas. A national electronic system (such as E-Verify) mandating that employers certify new hires, along with fines and criminal penalties for lawbreaking businesses, might go a long way toward stemming the flow.

But what about the 11-million-plus undocumented immigrants already here? A vast majority have led peaceful lives and established deep roots in our communities. Their sudden deportation would not represent the compassionate America that many of us envision.

Perhaps it's time for some benign neglect. Many will eventually qualify for visas because they have married American citizens or have native-born children. Rather than fight over a politically impossible amnesty, we could accelerate the granting of family-preference visas to that population.

We will also need to decide how many immigrants to admit. Economists seldom confess their ignorance, but we truly have no clue about what that number should be. About one million legal immigrants a year entered the country in the past two decades. The political climate suggests that many Americans view that number as too high. History shows that when voters get fed up with immigration, there is no reluctance to cut off the flow altogether. Back in the 1990s, Barbara Jordan's immigration commission recommended an annual target of about 550,000 immigrants. Such a cut would be significant, but it may be preferable to the alternative, which, in this political climate, could mean shutting off the flow.

Finally, we need to choose between highly skilled and less-skilled applicants. High-skill immigrants, who pay higher taxes and receive fewer services and can potentially expand the frontier of knowledge, are more profitable for us. But giving an opportunity to the huddled masses is part of what makes our country exceptional.

Regardless of the allocation, employers should not walk away with all the gains, and workers should not suffer all the losses. We need to ensure a more equitable sharing of the gains and losses among the American people.

No matter where one stands in the ideological divide, President Trump has already answered the fundamental question guiding the design of a more rational policy. In his speech at the Republican National Convention, he described how he would pick among the available choices: "We are going to be considerate and compassionate to everyone," he said. "But my greatest compassion will be for our own struggling citizens."

He added, "We are going to have an immigration system that works, but one that works for the American people."

Many of my colleagues in the academic community — and many of the elite opinion-makers in the news media — recoil when they hear that immigration should serve the interests of Americans. Their reaction is to label such thinking as racist and xenophobic, and to marginalize anyone who agrees.

But those accusations of racism reflect their effort to avoid a serious discussion of the trade-offs. The coming debate would be far more honest and politically transparent if we demanded a simple answer from those who disagree with "America First" proposals: Who are *you* rooting for?

Murguia : The new immigration order: A disaster in the making

By Janet Murguía

By Janet Murguía February 26 at 8:48 PM

The writer is president and chief executive of the National Council of La Raza.

Some of the darkest chapters in U.S. history have involved forcibly relocating minority populations: the slave trade, the Trail of Tears, Operation Wetback and the internment of citizens and noncitizens of Japanese descent during World War II. Each was considered legal and justified in its time. Now they are condemned as assaults on the values that define our nation.

President Trump's first executive order on immigration and the draft enforcement memos signed by Secretary of Homeland Security John F. Kelly promise to similarly tarnish our nation's character. The memos call for expanding the nation's deportation forces by 15,000 to round up, detain and deport the undocumented immigrants living among us. Instead of focusing on criminals, they make all undocumented people priorities for enforcement, and through a process called "expedited removal," they severely reduce due process protections.

The policy is based on falsehoods about the threat and costs of undocumented immigrants. "The surge of immigration at the southern border has overwhelmed federal agencies and resources and has created a significant national security vulnerability to the United States," stated Kelly's memorandum.

Evening Edition newsletter

The day's most important stories.

Please provide a valid email address.

The truth is far less dramatic. The number of undocumented immigrants is down. More people are leaving the United States than are arriving. The only rise in immigration is among women and children fleeing violence in dangerous parts of Central America.

And the cost of the undocumented? Their contributions to the economy far outweigh their burden. According to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, undocumented immigrants pay $11.6 billion in taxes each year. According to the Social Security Administration, undocumented workers contribute $15 billion annually to the fund, but only withdraw an estimated $1 billion.

There's also little evidence that most undocumented immigrants pose a threat to national security. In fact, studies have confirmed that immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than native-born Americans.

No one opposes removing violent criminals from our midst, but unleashing a massive deportation force while cutting back on due process protections is a recipe for disaster. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents recently ran a "routine" raid of immigrants targeting "criminal aliens" that picked up 678 detainees in 12 states. Among them was a woman who turned to the police for a restraining order against her boyfriend only to be abducted. A woman who was a resident of Phoenix for 20 years was also deported, leaving behind her two U.S.-citizen children. They are hardly security threats, but will be "enforcement priorities" under Homeland Security's new policy.

Hard data on the numbers of citizens unlawfully detained by ICE are hard to find, but studies indicate that it's significant. Such "mistakes" are inherent in a process with few safeguards: Unlike criminal courts, those detained by immigration agents aren't granted access to a lawyer.

For Latinos, this is an existential moment. Our government has declared war on our community. Think I exaggerate? Imagine scores of ICE agents sweeping through your neighborhoods, stalking people leaving church or going to the movies. People will be afraid to visit doctors; children will be afraid to go to school; crimes will go unreported. For Latinos, including those who are citizens, stepping outside without papers could be cause for arrest.

For 20 years, Congress has stalled on immigration reform, preferring instead to keep its favorite bogeyman around to exploit on Election Day. In that time, undocumented people have put down roots, married into our families, borne our children, attended our churches and shared our burdens. Tearing them from our lives will be brutal. It will leave no community untouched. More than 5 million U.S. citizens have undocumented parents. Deporting these parents will leave their children parentless, traumatized and often destitute. We would rather see these Americans achieve their potential.

We're deploying every tool we've got to oppose this ill-conceived policy — in the media, in the courts and in peaceful protests in the streets. But we cannot win this battle alone. We urge federal workers who witness potential abuses to resist them, and to report them to independent watchdogs. We call on Congress to deny funds for such policies. We appeal to officials in sanctuary cities to hold fast to their values and refuse to participate in perpetuating a police state. We ask our friends of faith to express their moral outrage and to remember us in their prayers. And we call on our fellow Americans to not let our country's values be trampled in their name.

There are other — better — ways to solve this problem. Congress has come close in recent years to a bipartisan solution. We would be better served if it tried again rather than continue down this dark, shameful path. History, as always, will be watching.

Enriquez : How the New Feminist Resistance Leaves Out American Women

Lauren Enriquez

People on the National Mall for the March for Life rally in Washington. Al Drago/The New York Times

Within days of Donald J. Trump's election, the American left, newly animated in opposition, settled on a rallying cry: "Love trumps hate." Inherent in the slogan is the idea that Mr. Trump stands for division and discrimination, while his opponents stand for love and inclusion. Nowhere was this sentiment more visible than at the Women's March on Washington the day after the inauguration.

Though the march was driven by the left, it claimed to speak for women in general, and indeed women of all ages, races and states poured onto the National Mall. Yet lost in the action, then and since, is any sense of what the movement stands for; ultimately, it settled for a sense of what the movement is against: not just a caricature of Mr. Trump as a misogynist hellbent on sending women back to 1950s America, but anything associated with him as well. Perhaps most pointedly, while the Women's March claimed to stand for love, nonviolence and inclusion, its organizers staunchly refused to extend that "inclusion" to pro-life women.

We cannot overlook the significance of this act, because it reveals a fatal chink in the armor of the new feminist resistance movement: its radical position on abortion. This movement will thus be unable to unite American women because it rejects the position that most American women take on abortion — that it should be completely illegal, or legal but with significant restrictions.

According to the latest Knights of Columbus/Marist Poll, an annual survey of views on abortion, just over half of all women want to see further restrictions on abortion. To millions of women, including young people like myself, this is not just a policy stance; it informs many areas of our lives as women. To us, "resistance" has to include opposition to the lie that freedom can be bought with the blood of our preborn children.

We reject the notion that we need free abortion on demand without apology. We are offended by the news media's belligerent efforts to portray the pro-abortion movement as normal, while turning a blind eye to the millions of us who believe that women deserve something better than abortion. We reject a vitriolic minority claiming to speak on our behalf and excluding us from the "women's movement."

Anti-abortion women reject the version of "feminism" that infers that we cannot be equal to men unless we snuff out what is unique about us as women: our ability to protect, nourish and nurture new life inside of our bodies. We resist the conventional wisdom that women will succeed in school, career and life only if they relegate childbearing to an elusive "ideal" moment in time. We reject the pressure to believe that killing our children and living full lives are mutually inclusive. They're not.

As a woman who has been involved in the pro-life movement for my entire adult life, I want to obliterate the stereotype that the people

working to end abortion hate women. My movement empowers women in tangible ways. At Human Coalition, where I work, we extend tangible, compassionate help to pregnant women who believe that abortion is the best or only option available to them. This is an underserved group, and we are working to stand in the gap for them.

Groups like ours work with each woman to identify the unique circumstances that have made her feel powerless, and then we respond to those needs. That can mean going with her to apply for Medicaid; helping her to secure safe, affordable housing; finding child care solutions; or helping her improve her résumé and find employment. There is no debate: Women face hurdles in pregnancy. But I refuse to accept that peddling death in the face of crisis can ever truly empower a woman.

And it's not just pro-life women who feel this way. The men I work alongside want to end abortion not because they want to control women, but because they agree that requiring the sacrifice of a woman's children in exchange for her success is unimaginable.

The men I work with are creating a culture in which their own wives, daughters and sisters are empowered and supported. They are making abortion unthinkable by extending compassion and hope in a society where men have too often used abortion to oppress and exploit women.

If a movement wants to speak for me as a woman, then it must be broad enough to take my firm beliefs, and accept them as mainstream. Women who defy the abortion movement know that our power is not in a clenched fist or an act of violence against anyone — especially not against our own preborn children. Rather, our power is in upending the abortion status quo by demanding more for ourselves, for our families, and for our children.

Krugman : The Uses of Outrage

Paul Krugman

People demonstrating in New York last Monday. Hiroko Masuike/The New York Times

Are you angry about the white nationalist takeover of the U.S. government? If so, you are definitely not alone. The first few weeks of the Trump administration have been marked by huge protests, furious crowds at congressional town halls, customer boycotts of businesses seen as Trump allies. And Democrats, responding to their base, have taken a hard line against cooperation with the new regime.

But is all this wise? Inevitably, one hears some voices urging everyone to cool it — to wait and see, to try to be constructive, to reach out to Trump supporters, to seek ground for compromise.

Just say no.

Outrage at what's happening to America isn't just justified, it's essential. In fact, it may be our last chance of saving democracy.

Even in narrowly partisan terms, Democrats would be well advised to keep listening to their base. Anyone who claims that being seen as obstructionist will hurt them politically must have slept through the past couple of decades. Were Democrats rewarded for cooperating with George W. Bush? Were Republicans punished for their scorched-earth opposition to President Obama? Get real.

It's true that white working-class voters, the core of Donald Trump's support, don't seem to care about the torrent of scandal: They won't turn on him until they realize that his promises to bring back jobs and protect their health care were lies. But remember, he lost the popular vote, and would have lost the Electoral College if a significant number of college-educated voters hadn't been misled by the media and the F.B.I. into believing that Hillary Clinton was somehow even less ethical than he was. Those voters are now having a rude awakening, and need to be kept awake.

Outrage may be especially significant for the 2018 midterm elections: the districts that will determine whether Democrats can take back the House next year have both relatively well-educated voters and large Hispanic populations, both groups likely to care about Trump malfeasance even if the white working class doesn't (yet).

But there is a much bigger issue here than partisan politics, important as that is, given the evident determination of a Republican Congress to cover up whatever Mr. Trump does. For democracy itself is very much on the line, and an outraged populace may be our last defense.

Mr. Trump is clearly a would-be autocrat, and other Republicans are his willing enablers. Does anyone doubt it? And given this reality, it's completely reasonable to worry that America will go the route of other nations, like Hungary, which remain democracies on paper but have become authoritarian states in practice.

How does this happen? A crucial part of the story is that the emerging autocracy uses the power of the state to intimidate and co-opt civil society — institutions outside the government proper. The media are bullied and bribed into becoming de facto propaganda organs of the ruling clique. Businesses are pressured to reward the clique's friends and punish its enemies. Independent public figures are pushed into collaboration or silence. Sound familiar?

But an outraged populace can and must push back, using the power of disapproval to counter the influence of a corrupted government.

This means supporting news organizations that do their job and shunning those that act as agents of the regime. It means patronizing businesses that defend our values and not those willing to go along with undermining them. It means letting public figures, however nonpolitical their professions, know that people care about the stands they take, or don't. For these are not normal times, and many things that would be acceptable in a less fraught situation aren't O.K. now.

For example, it is not O.K. for newspapers to publish he-said-she-said pieces that paper over administration lies, let alone beat-sweetening puff pieces about Trump allies. It's not O.K. for businesses to supply Mr. Trump with photo ops claiming undeserved credit for job creation — or for business leaders to serve on "advisory" panels that are really just another kind of photo op.

It's not even O.K. to go golfing with the president, saying that it's about showing respect for the office, not the man. Sorry, but when the office is held by someone trying to undermine the Constitution, doing anything that normalizes him and lends him respectability is a political act.

I'm sure many readers would rather live in a nation in which more of life could be separated from politics. So would I! But civil society is under assault from political forces, so that defending it is, necessarily, political. And justified outrage must fuel that defense. When neither the president nor his allies in Congress show any sign of respecting basic American values, an aroused public that's willing to take names is all we have.

Sattler : Time to talk Trump impeachment:

Jason Sattler Published 3:24 p.m. ET Feb. 26, 2017 | Updated 45 minutes ago

House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi and Senate Democratic leader Charles Schumer on Jan. 4, 2017.(Photo: Chip Somodevilla, Getty Images)

At the Constitutional Convention, James Madison imagined impeachment as a relief from a chief executive who "might lose his capacity after his appointment. He might pervert his administration into a scheme of peculation or oppression. He might betray his trust to foreign powers."

President Trump might have won Madison's Triple Crown — in his first few weeks.

This is no exaggeration. The latest but far from only example is the *Washington Post* report that the White House, having failed to get the FBI director and deputy director to publicly rebut reports about contacts between Trump associates and Russian intelligence operatives before the 2016 election, then enlisted Congress and the intelligence community to knock down stories about the alleged connections.

And the goon squad attempting to limit the president's PR damage reportedly includes the man Trump picked to lead the CIA and the chairmen of the House and Senate intelligence committees, who were Trump transition advisers and now are the two men most responsible for investigating Trump's Russia ties.

The pair, Rep. Devin Nunes and Sen. Richard Burr, arguably are already derelict in their duties. They "should have started the investigation in August before the election and showed no interest in

doing so," says national security reporter Marcy Wheeler. Republicans on the House Oversight Committee, meanwhile, instead of investigating what could be the greatest scandal in U.S. history, are focusing on the leaks that led Trump to ask Michael Flynn to step down as national security adviser.

Imagine Watergate with a Congress even more interested than the president in covering up potential high crimes and misdemeanors.

It's time for Democrats to start talking impeachment, even if it less likely to happen under this Congress than the president giving up basic cable to learn Ancient Greek so he can read some Plutarch.

House minority leader Nancy Pelosi has said Democrats should not use the "I" word in reference to Trump until "when and if he breaks the law." This not only misunderstands the Founders' design of the ultimate check and balance, it also ignores that besides his foreign entanglements Trump may already be in violation of the Emoluments Clause of the Constitution.

Most importantly, Pelosi's abeyance all but absolves Republicans of any responsibility to dig into potential Trumpian wrongdoing.

Let's allow that Trump's constant lying — 80 false claims in his first 30 days — and twitchy tweeting indicate that he's at least no more incapacitated than he was during the campaign. Perhaps Trump's possible coordination with Russian President Vladimir Putin, reflected in softened language on Russia in the GOP platform and his campaign's odd associations with pro-Russian forces, merely indicates he's a huge fan of murderous thugs who compliment him.

But the question of whether Trump is engaged in schemes of self-gain at the expense of actual taxpayers demands thorough investigation, at the very least. Instead, House Republicans are acting as his defense lawyers, refusing to ask for his tax returns and burying investigations into his conflicts.

Meanwhile, members of Trump's private Mar-A-Lago resort, where the membership fees recently doubled to $200,000, are enjoying direct access to the president and foreign leaders. And all of Trump's businesses, which are inextricable from Trump's persona, still benefit the Donald J. Trump Revocable Trust — a trust that has been set up for the "exclusive benefit" of our current president.

Ignoring your own party's transgressions is standard politics, but the GOP has made fine art of it.

When Republicans are out of power they conjure scandals — like #Benghazi, a tragedy in search of a crime. Now that they're back in charge at the White House, they're trying to set records for how deeply they can push their heads into the sand.

Ethics watchdogs have already filed dozens of complaints against Trump. If Democrats don't move swiftly, they may find themselves trailing both their base and public opinion, again.

A recent Public Policy Polling poll found 46% in favor of the House calling up the current president on formal charges, a number that Richard Nixon didn't see, according to historian Kevin M. Kruse, until 16 months into the Watergate crisis. In contrast, only 35% of Americans backed the actual impeachment of Bill Clinton, in the days after the House had passed two charges against him.

Democrats have to set the stakes now for the 2018 election. A minority president with a negative mandate under a cloud of inscrutable suspicion is pursuing a largely unpopular agenda with possibly irreparable consequences.

If Republicans won't check him, the voters must.

Jason Sattler, a member of USA TODAY's Board of Contributors, is a columnist for The National Memo. *Follow him on Twitter @LOLGOP*.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Democratic Party Elections Reveal Growing Populist Energy

Reid J. Epstein and Janet Hook

Updated Feb. 26, 2017 4:35 p.m. ET

ATLANTA—The battle over electing new Democratic Party officials has revealed the growing populist energy within the party, which could fuel an electoral turnaround but also risks turning against the establishment.

Former Labor Secretary Tom Perez won a narrow second-ballot victory to become Democratic National Committee chairman over Minnesota Rep. Keith Ellison, disappointing the party's progressive wing that latched on to Sen. Bernie Sanders during last year's primary campaign. Despite Mr. Ellison's defeat, the burgeoning power of the party's left flank was evident on a number of fronts.

Restive activists threatened to support primary challenges to elected Democrats seen as not liberal enough, creating tension reminiscent of the tea-party wave that began targeting Republicans deemed as too moderate beginning in 2009. Liberals also pushed for the party to limit corporate donations to the DNC. Their voices erupted when Mr. Perez won the contested race for DNC chairman and dissidents drowned out the proceedings with chants of, "Party for the people, not big money."

Divisions were so evident throughout the three-day gathering that both Messrs. Perez and Ellison begged their supporters to stick together and with the party to fight their common foe, Republican President Donald Trump.

"When we have these conversations, sometimes difficult, sometimes spirited, that's not a sign of weakness," said Mr. Perez, who moved to appease dissidents by naming Mr. Ellison as DNC deputy chairman. "That's a sign of strength."

Republicans faced a similar reckoning following the 2008 election of Barack Obama. Like the GOP then, Democrats hold no levers of power in the federal government, and the party's progressive wing is trying to flex its muscles and pressing the party to look inward. What ended up as the tea-party movement on the right helped propel the GOP back to control of both houses of Congress, even as it made life uncomfortable for many long-time incumbents and other party leaders.

"What I've heard about Democrats is what I heard about the tea party in its early days: It's, 'Let's get on top of this and control it,' " said Michael Steele, who was GOP chairman when the tea party rose in 2009 and 2010. "Over time I really appreciated that this was not something that you could co-opt, that it wasn't something you could manage."

Nebraska Democratic chairwoman Jane Kleeb, a Sanders supporter last year, said Mr. Ellison's strong showing in the chair's race—he fell short of Mr. Perez on the first round of balloting by just 13 votes—revealed the power of the progressive wing.

"It was so close they can't discount the progressive base as fringe," Ms. Kleeb said.

R.T. Rybak, a DNC member from Minnesota, said progressive dissidents were less likely to mount primary challenges against incumbents at a time when the political threat posed by the Trump administration looms so large.

"There's plenty of talk about primaries, but I think that movement gets momentum at times when there isn't as serious a threat," Mr. Rybak said.

The tension between the grass-roots and the party establishment broke to the surface even before the chairman vote. The DNC voted to shelve the resolution on blocking corporate contributions, disappointing progressive activists.

"We need to give ourselves and the public a fresh start, a sign that we listened to what they said in the elections," said Christine Pelosi, the daughter of House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and a DNC member from California who supported the ban. Opponents of the measure are sending "a message that we don't want too much change," she said.

At a Friday panel discussion, nine leaders of grass-roots organizations delivered a stern message to a room full of DNC members: Cross us at your peril.

Bob Bland, a New York fashion designer who was a national co-chair of the Women's March on Washington, said her group would only support Democrats who agree to back their populist mission.

"Were going to expect 100% buy-in from any candidate that we support," Ms. Bland said.

California Rep. Barbara Lee, who began her political career as an activist in the 1970s, begged the grass-roots leaders to work with elected Democrats. "I would hope that as we move out of here that you can connect with some members of Congress," Ms. Lee said.

The 10-term congresswoman in an interview said some Democrats need to face intraparty challenges from the left. "We shouldn't shy away from primaries for elected officials," she said.

Amanda Litman, who started Run for Something to encourage new activist Democrats to seek office after Mr. Trump's election, said Democrats who aren't sufficiently

attentive to the party's grass-roots base would pay a price in primaries.

"If we have a young dynamic progressive who wants to run and you have a candidate you picked, we're going to mess with you a little bit," Ms. Litman said at the Friday DNC panel discussion.

Multiple DNC members named Missouri Sen. Claire McCaskill as ripe for a Democratic primary challenger from the left. Winston Apple, a Missouri DNC member who backed Mr. Sanders in 2016, has been recruiting possible primary challengers for the 2018 elections. Mr. Apple, a retired high-school teacher from Kansas City, said the centrist two-term Democrat must court the party's grass-roots wing or face opposition from it.

"She is seen by many people as a corporate Democrat," Mr. Apple said here. "It would be a populist Democrat who opposes her."

Ms. McCaskill's aides declined to comment.

A risk for the party is that elected officials, in their eagerness to match the passion of anti-Trump street activists, alienate swing voters. Don Fowler, a DNC member from South Carolina, said the party can't afford to be that cautious at this point in a churning political environment and needs to learn from the political mistakes of the past decade. "We were flying from San Francisco to Washington to New York, and the Republicans were beating the crap out of us in Indiana, Missouri and Kansas," he said.

Democratic officials said their biggest challenge is to persuade millions of activists who have taken to the streets to protest that they also need to help the party win elections.

"It's one thing to protest," said New Mexico Democratic Party chairwoman Debra Haaland. "We need those people to go home, get on the phone, have house parties. We need them to donate $5 a month."

Write to Reid J. Epstein at Reid.Epstein@wsj.com and Janet Hook at janet.hook@wsj.com

POLITICO

The DNC isn't enough: Democrats demand more leadership changes

By Gabriel Debenedetti and Edward-Isaac Dovere

ATLANTA — The race for the Democratic National Committee leadership is over, resolved with a Tom Perez chairmanship and a deputy role for Keith Ellison that momentarily quelled even the angriest Bernie Sanders-wing protesters in the room.

Now restless activists are eager to shake up the rest of the party's leadership.

Story Continued Below

The party-officer elections here over the weekend turned into a mini-convention of up-and-coming politicians, activists, and operatives straining to envision the opening days of Donald Trump's administration and Republican domination of Washington as a moment of Democratic revitalization, not reason to sink further into the party's roiling existential crisis.

Quietly — and pointedly refusing to attach their names to the musings — they talk about starting to look past the all over-70-years-old leadership team of Nancy Pelosi, Steny Hoyer, and Jim Clyburn in the House of Representatives. Some hope, wistfully, the three will step aside before the 2018 midterms to help send a message and generate new ideas. And as much as they like the idea of Chuck Schumer's expanded Senate leadership team, they can't help noticing how few of the body's younger rising stars are included. They're tired of Capitol Hill denizens staking their claim as the only leaders in the party, particularly as Trump's political upheaval continues to echo throughout their ranks.

"We have to prepare a farm team within Congress, in our states, in local races. I don't know when we became the party only of people who have been there for decades," said Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, the 46-year-old running for re-election who flew here to help nominate Perez and two other officer candidates. "We have to be aware of the energy that is all around us right now, not just on Facebook, but on our streets."

Garcetti acknowledges that his own hope for a new era of party leadership is somewhat self-serving: "Look to the cities," he said, as the places where the work of infrastructure, climate change, and immigrant affairs is happening on the ground.

But milling through the hallways of the Atlanta Westin Peachtree Plaza, the party operatives were far more blunt about the need for a broader change in direction.

"Absolutely, the fact that Nancy has held on forever and stifled a younger age group, it's a thing, it's absolutely a thing," said one longtime state party official, pointing to the new crop of elected officials that includes four new vice chairs under the age of 50 as evidence that a new wave is coming. "That's what you're seeing here, it's a new push."

"There's been no movement for 10 years, maybe more," he said. "It's got people frustrated."

"Politics and time have a way of resolving a bunch of issues on their own," added former Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, advocating a turn to leaders with the luxury of years' worth of work ahead of them.

The party's three-day meeting here, accordingly, was a demonstration of the membership's eagerness to move on, not only from an election cycle that saw a 68-year-old candidate defeat a 74-year-old candidate in their presidential primary — only to lose to a 70-year-old Republican — but from an entire era.

Donna Brazile, a veteran of Democratic fights from the 1990s and earlier — and the party's interim chairwoman until Perez took over on Saturday — peppered the proceedings with reminders of how eager she was to get on with the election, insisting it's time for a fresh face and perspective to take the reins.

And few of the party's entrenched leaders showed up in Atlanta: none of the House or Senate leadership team came, and even hometown civil rights legend Rep. John Lewis, 77, was a no-show.

Instead, the weekend belonged to a younger crowd desperate to move beyond the doom and gloom and start talking about winning over new voters skeptical of the Democratic brand.

"Why am I here? Why am I here talking at you when you're probably ready to vote by now? Because I am here to tell you that our party has an incredibly bright future," said former Missouri Secretary of State Jason Kander, 35, in his keynote address on Saturday. "I'm here to tell you that a nightmare that is a Trump presidency is just a speed bump on our journey to liberty and justice as a country."

One day earlier, the session's main speaker was California Attorney General Xavier Becerra, 59-years-old but embarking on a new role as an anti-Trump warrior. The night before that saw Georgia House Minority Leader Stacey Abrams, 43, widely regarded as a big part of the party's future in the state, address the crowd.

Saturday's election was punctuated by the exit from the race of South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg, 35, whose closing message — to a crowd that included a crop of new party chairs from states like Washington, Iowa, Hawaii, and Nebraska, who have swept into power by replacing older rivals in the last few months — was about the imperative of the party to move ahead.

It's not that any of the crop of up-and-comers is secretly plotting to replace Pelosi and Co. anytime soon — especially not after seeing Ohio Rep. Tim Ryan fail in that quest in December. Pelosi — a major fundraiser and veteran of many midterm fights — moved after that challenge to elevate younger faces within the House leadership structure.

Given how many Republicans there are in office, the idea that the party's old leaders need to be replaced in order to give the younger ones power creates a distracting "false choice," said Kasim Reed, the 47-year-old Atlanta mayor who hosted the week's proceedings.

"The facts on the ground are already creating opportunities for anyone who has talent and grit and ambition," he said. "It isn't a decision that these folks need to get out of the way for other folks to get in."

"That conversation has to be predicated on what states actually want, and we have not invested in learning what they actually need," added Abrams.

That sentiment was echoed by former party chair and onetime Vermont Governor Howard Dean, who backed Buttigieg for the chairmanship and who regularly speaks of the need for a new perspective atop the party infrastructure: "I don't think the House and Senate is the problem, I do think the party has been mired in D.C. for eight years and we've got to get out of there."

But many feel the imperative of facilitating the younger wind blowing through the party. It's out with the old ideas that have seen the party sink to its lowest point in decades, and in with the new, even if those ideas aren't yet fully formed.

"At some point we all need to do a gut-check and say, 'Have I been doing this long enough? Is it time for me to turn this position, the reins, over to somebody else with fresh and new ideas, a new energy, a new generation?'" said former New Hampshire Democratic Party chair Kathy Sullivan. "It's hard sometimes, you think you're indispensable, I have things to do that aren't finished."

"It's true whether it's for me, for Nancy Pelosi, for Chuck Schumer, whether it's anybody," she added. "Everyone needs to have that conversation with themselves."

If there's no leadership change, party officials think, they are at risk of missing out on younger voters, who simply aren't responsive to Democrats — or at least Democrats not named Barack Obama. And that would be a massive mistake with the political wind appearing to shift in their direction as Trump's tumultuous opening days barrel along.

"A lot of our base feels we were not embracing our base all the time, and the only way we can really have our voices heard is to be at the table," said Bronx Assemblyman Michael Blake, 35, a new party vice-chairman who noted the wide array of 30-somethings who ran for that position this year. "We can't just talk about it, we have to be present."

"We already have a strong party, they just don't think they're Democrats and they don't show up to elections that aren't interesting to them," said Dean. "We've got a lot of catching up to do."

At least within the party mechanism, that conversation has already started. The question now is whether Washington will follow suit.

"There has been a lot of conversation on younger voters. It's the future of the party. I have written a letter to all the chairs asking them to commit to a budget line item specifically dedicated to millennial outreach and technology," said New York Rep. Grace Meng, 41, who was also elected vice-chair on Saturday and said the new leaders met late on Saturday night to discuss such new ideas.

"I don't know if that would have happened if we had not lost in November."

The Washington Post

Winners and losers from the DNC chairman's race

Perspective Discussion of news topics with a point of view, including narratives by individuals regarding their own experiences

February 26 at 9:22 PM

Democrats chose the new leader of their party in Atlanta on Saturday, with former Obama administration labor secretary Thomas Perez besting Rep. Keith Ellison of Minnesota on a second-ballot vote.

I picked some of the best and the worst from the race for Democratic National Committee chairman. My thoughts are below.

Winners

Thomas Perez: He wasn't the first major candidate in the race (that was Ellison). And he wasn't the most dynamic candidate in the race (that was South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg). But Perez understood something very important: The Democratic establishment still has lots and lots of power within the party committees. Perez was the establishment- (and Obama-) preferred candidate, and that still matters in a group like the DNC. Perez will be one of a handful of Democratic leaders entrusted with rebuilding a party at the state and local level that has been decimated over the past eight years.

Pete Buttigieg: The mayor of South Bend dropped out of the DNC race before any votes were cast Saturday. That was smart. He wasn't likely to come close to either Perez or Ellison, and that might have slowed the momentum and buzz he clearly built in the race. Buttigieg won rave reviews during the contest with his emphasis on middle America and how Democrats can start winning there again. Buttigieg is being talked about as a Senate or gubernatorial candidate in 2020 as a result of his strong performance during the DNC contest.

Jaime Harrison: The chairman of the South Carolina Democratic Party proved that these races aren't always about winning. Harrison dropped out of the chairman's race heading into the weekend and endorsed Perez. With Perez's victory, Harrison will be well positioned to continue to emerge as a national figure for the party.

Losers

National News Alerts

Major national and political news as it breaks.

Please provide a valid email address.

Sens. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren: The two most prominent voices for liberals in Washington made a show of force with very early endorsements of Ellison. The goal was to end the race before it started, discouraging other serious candidates from running. Didn't work. Not only did Perez get into the race, but he also won it. That sequence of events should raise real questions about just how much sway the Sanders-Warren wing of the party has. This was Ellison's race to win. He didn't.

Republican Party: Republicans had been open about their hopes that Ellison would win the DNC chair's race, believing his strongly liberal record and past controversies would give them a useful punching bag for years to come. Perez, while still quite liberal, is not the lightning rod that Ellison would have been. The search continues . . . .

Technology: Interim DNC chair Donna Brazile announced just before the first-ballot vote began at 1:30 p.m. Eastern time that the electronic voting system would have to be scrapped because of spotty WiFi service. Paper ballots were used instead. This is 2017, people! We can't get a WiFi network that 500 or so people can use to cast a vote with their phones?

Ambitious Minnesota Democrats: Ellison had pledged to resign his seat in Congress if elected DNC chairman. Ellison's solidly Democratic district is a seat you can hold for life. Now the line of suitors has to keep waiting until he decides when — and if — he wants to walk away.

My Saturday: The vote was originally scheduled to happen at noonish. It kept getting delayed. My weekend plans went with it. And I was forced to watch the latest Georgetown hoops debacle IN FULL while I waited. Come on, man. What are we even doing out here, man?

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Editorial : The Perez Democrats

Feb. 26, 2017 4:48 p.m. ET 251 COMMENTS

Meet the Donald Trump-era Democrats, same as the Barack Obama Democrats. That's the essential meaning of the election Saturday of Tom Perez, the Obama Labor secretary and man of the left, as the new head of the Democratic National Committee.

Mr. Perez, who supported Hillary Clinton for President, won a close race on the second ballot, 235-200, against Minnesota Congressman Keith Ellison, who was supported by progressive activists and Bernie Sanders. Mr. Perez won because more DNC regulars think he will be better able to rebuild the party for the midterm elections in 2018, and they may be right. Mr. Ellison, with his anti-Israel record, might have alienated some major donors. Mr. Perez also had support, including personal lobbying, from Mr. Obama and Joe Biden.

Messrs. Perez and Ellison agree on most policies, and party mainstays aren't doing any ideological soul-searching. They don't think their defeat in 2016 had much to do with Mr. Obama's policies or record. They view it as an accident of FBI Director James Comey's intervention, Russian hacks, and at worst Mrs. Clinton's campaign mistakes. Mr. Perez, whom Mr. Obama describes as "wicked smart," will make no concessions to the GOP on taxes, health care or military spending.

Mr. Perez quickly made Mr. Ellison his deputy, but some progressive activists who supported Mr. Ellison are grousing that the party establishment shut them out. No less than President Trump piled on by tweeting that "The race for DNC Chairman was, of course, totally 'rigged.' Bernie's guy, like Bernie himself, never had a chance." He added that "I could not be happier for [Mr. Perez], or for the Republican Party!"

He might want to hold the triumphalism. Mr. Trump has failed to enjoy a new President's typical honeymoon, as his low 44% approval rating in the WSJ/NBC News poll suggests. Democratic opposition to Mr. Trump and the polarizing politics of aide Steve Bannon is likely to overwhelm any hard feelings from the DNC fight.

The message for Republicans is that the Democratic strategy going into 2018 will be remobilizing the Obama coalition in total opposition to the Trump Presidency.

Democrats are betting that Mr. Trump will fail to govern successfully, fail to repeal ObamaCare or improve the economy, and so they can prosper without a political rethink.

The test for the Perez Democrats will be whether they can revive the 50 state parties and nominate candidates for Congress who fit their districts. The party's leftward shift and its losses in the Obama years have shrunk the Democratic talent pool. Newcomers inevitably emerge, but to win in swing states and districts they'll need broader appeal than the Democratic candidates in 2014 and 2016. The models are the candidates recruited by Rahm Emanuel in 2006 when Democrats regained the House after a dozen years.

If Mr. Trump can't govern, and Mr. Perez can mediate the party's divisions, Democrats will have a better chance than the President reckons to retake Congress in 2018.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Many Americans Disapprove of Trump but Are Open to His Agenda, Poll Finds

Michael C. Bender

Updated Feb. 26, 2017 7:20 p.m. ET

President Donald Trump remains a historically divisive figure after one month on the job, despite growing optimism about the economy and support from a cross-section of Americans who either opposed his candidacy or backed it reluctantly, according to a new Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll.

The poll found that 44% of Americans approve of Mr. Trump's job performance, while 48% disapprove, making him the first president of the post-World War II era with a net negative approval rating in his first gauge of public opinion.

New presidents traditionally have enjoyed a postelection honeymoon with Americans. It took Barack Obama 32 months in office before his approval fell enough to match Mr. Trump's current net rating of negative four. It was 41 months before George W. Bush's dropped that far.

Mr. Trump's approval rating may have been worse were it not for support from a surprising corner of the electorate. His job performance won positive reviews from 55% of respondents who had voted for a third-party candidate in November, who didn't vote at all or said they supported Mr. Trump mostly to oppose Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton. The Journal/NBC News pollsters called this group "the critical middle" in the nation's partisan warfare and said it accounted for just over one-third of all respondents.

"This is what's holding him together," said Peter Hart, a Democratic pollster who worked on the survey.

Within this group, a majority applauded the president's handling of the economy and said the administration's early missteps were typical of any new White House—a contrast with Americans overall, who saw the problems as unique to Mr. Trump.

Asked to answer in their own words, poll respondents who approved of Mr. Trump's job performance explained their feelings by saying the president was delivering on campaign promises to bring back jobs and close the borders, and that he needed to be given a chance by the media and others instead of rushing to judgment.

Those who disapproved said Mr. Trump lacks the temperament, competency and qualifications to be president.

The negative feelings toward Mr. Trump—47% said they viewed him unfavorably, compared with 43% who held favorable views—marked an extraordinary break from recent history. Just 19% saw Mr. Obama in a negative light at this point in 2009, similar to the 23% who viewed Mr. Bush unfavorably in 2001.

"What we are arguably seeing in this survey is the continued hardening of the partisan lines, with no distinction between the campaign and the non-campaign," said Bill McInturff, a Republican pollster who conducted the survey with Democratic pollster Fred Yang.

Mr. Trump's standing with Americans has improved somewhat since the end of a particularly negative campaign season. The 43% who have a positive view of him was the largest share since the Journal/NBC News poll started asking about Mr. Trump in 1990.

But a series of missteps and scandals in office—from the resignation of the president's national security adviser to a court-ordered halt of his decision to suspend travel from seven Muslim-majority countries due to terrorism concerns—are mostly of his own doing, most Americans believe.

Asked about the source of his early challenges, 52% agreed the troubles were "unique to this administration and suggest real problems,'' while 43% said the growing pains were typical of any new president.

Those misfires may have been priced into Mr. Trump's standing with Americans. Asked how the new president is doing on the job, 57% said it is about what they expected.

"Despite what commentators on both sides of the aisle agree was a rough start, his numbers on key measurements did not drop—from their admittedly mediocre start—since January," Mr. McInturff said.

What's holding Mr. Trump down, to a certain degree, is his own approach to the job. Asked to judge his character and policies, 59% said they don't like him personally. That is higher than for the previous five presidents.

But when asked about policies, the numbers flip. Putting aside their personal feelings about Mr. Trump, 47% said they approve of most of his policies. That is a higher rate than Ronald Reagan recorded in January 1987, or George W. Bush in March 2006. Among three previous Republican presidents, only George H.W. Bush had a higher rating, in October 1991, with 50% approving.

When pollsters tested one of the lines from Mr. Trump's inaugural speech—asking whether a small group in Washington had "reaped the rewards of government, while the people have borne the cost"—an overwhelming majority of 86% said they agreed.

"I thought this would test well, but never thought it would reach 86%," Mr. McInturff said.

He added that while Mr. Trump's speeches are often described as dark and apocalyptic, many individual lines resonate powerfully with many Americans. That may continue with Mr. Trump's address to Congress on Tuesday.

The poll suggested that the public may be sympathetic to some of Mr. Trump's recent attacks on the media. A majority of adults, 51%, said the media has been too critical of the president, while 41% said the press has been fair and objective.

When a similar question was asked in the third year of Mr. Clinton's first term, 45% said news coverage of the president was fairly well balanced, while about one-third said it was biased against Mr. Clinton and 16% said it was biased in his favor.

Aiding Mr. Trump's approval rating was the fact that Americans are slowly becoming more optimistic about the country and the economy. Asked about the course of the country, 40% said the nation is headed in the right direction. That is up from 33% in December, and 18% in July.

A plurality of Americans, 41%, continue to believe that the U.S. economy will improve, a postelection shift that followed three years in which most Americans expected economic prospects to remain stagnant. Among those who are anticipating improvement, 73% credit the expected gains mostly to Mr. Trump's policies, while 20% say it would result from the normal ebb and flow of the business cycle.

Some 60% of Americans now say they're hopeful and optimistic about the future of the country, up 4 percentage points from December. Just 40% are worried and pessimistic, slightly lower than in other recent Journal/NBC News polls.

That optimism is reflected in a sharp change in how Americans view major institutions in the country. For the first time since 2002, a majority of adults, or 52%, say they don't believe the nation's economic and political systems are stacked against them. An improved outlook among Republicans is largely responsible for the change.

"His ratings on the traditional metrics of a president, including job rating, start off in shockingly low terrain, but his voters wanted change," Mr. McInturff said. "He's not another president; he's their president. And Americans overall do view him more positively than negatively on being effective, bringing change to D.C., being firm and decisive, direct and straightforward—and perhaps most importantly, dealing with the economy."

The Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll was based on nationwide telephone interviews of 1,000 adults conducted from Feb. 18-22. Overall, the data's margin of error is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points. The margin of error for subgroups is larger.

Write to Michael C. Bender at Mike.Bender@wsj.com

The Washington Post

These Iowans voted for Trump. Many of them are already disappointed.

https://www.facebook.com/wpjennajohnson

CLINTON, Iowa — Tom Godat, a union electrician who has always voted for Democrats, cast his ballot for Donald Trump last year as "the lesser of two evils" compared to Hillary Clinton.

He's already a little embarrassed about it.

There's a lot that Godat likes about President Trump, especially his pledge to make the country great again by ignoring lobbyists, challenging both political parties and increasing the number of good-paying jobs.

But Godat was surprised by the utter chaos that came with the president's first month. He said it often felt like Trump and his staff were impulsively firing off executive orders instead of really thinking things through.

"I didn't think he would come in blazing like he has," said Godat, 39, who has three kids and works at the same aluminum rolling plant where his father worked. "It seems almost like a dictatorship at times. He's got a lot of controversial stuff going on and rather than thinking it through, I'm afraid that he's jumping into the frying pan with both feet."

Of the six swing states that were key to Trump's unexpected win in November, his margin of victory was the highest in Iowa, where he beat Clinton by 9 percentage points. Yet at the dawn of his presidency, only 42 percent of Iowans approve of the job that he's doing and 49 percent disapprove, according to a Des Moines Register/Mediacom Iowa Poll this month.

That support varies across the state: Here in eastern Iowa, it's in the low 40s. It's highest in northwest Iowa, where 55 percent of Iowans approve of the president's performance thus far, and it's lowest in the southeast corner of the state and the Des Moines area, where only 31 percent of Iowans approve, according to the poll.

A meandering 370-mile drive across the state last week — starting at the Mississippi River in the east on Wednesday and ending at the Missouri River in the west on Saturday — took a Washington Post reporter and photographer through a range of communities that mirror many parts of America. Along the way, more than 100 Iowans explained why so many of them are already disappointed in the new president.

While Iowa is still home to many strong supporters who say it's too early to judge him, there are others who say they voted for Trump simply because he wasn't Clinton. Many Iowans worry Trump might cut support for wind-energy and ethanol programs; that his trade policies could hurt farms that export their crops; that mass deportations would empty the state's factories and meat-packing plants; and that a repeal of the Affordable Care Act would yank health insurance away from thousands. While the hyper-simplicity of Trump's campaign promises helped him win over voters, they are no match for the hyper-complexity of Iowa's economy and values.

As the temperature hit 73 degrees last Wednesday afternoon, Godat took his two sons — ages 3 and 15 — to a playground near the Mississippi. He has lived for most of his life in Clinton, a town of nearly 27,000 that is home to a major corn-processing plant and other manufacturers.

Hillary Clinton won the city by more than 2,000 votes — but Trump won Clinton County, which was one of more than 25 counties in eastern Iowa that flipped from voting for Barack Obama in 2012 to Trump in 2016. That shift here and in other Midwestern states was largely driven by white working-class voters like Godat.

Godat commutes more than 30 miles south to Bettendorf, where he gets paid a base wage of $34 per hour to help prepare aluminum used for airplanes and cars. There's a shortage of trained electricians, and last year Godat said he worked 600 overtime hours, bringing his total pay to about $110,000. His wife provides in-home care for the elderly.

Godat hopes his son will get an apprenticeship at the plant after high school. He is confident that his employer won't lay off workers or shut down the plant because it has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in Iowa and does specialized work that would be difficult to move. He hopes Trump can create more jobs like his across the country.

And that's why he wishes he could tell the president: "Focus on us, on our country, on our issues here."

Just then a train rolled by the playground, carrying coal, scrap metal and corn. Godat turned to his son and told him: "That's the sound of progress."

Lost Nation

On the other end of Clinton County is the tiny town of Lost Nation, where the president received 66 percent of the vote. On Wednesday night, a couple dozen local farmers and union guys gathered to play pool at the Pub Club, situated amid downtown storefronts that once contained a funeral home. (Beer is chilled where bodies were once stored.)

Near the front window, three friends in their early 20s sipped beer. They all voted for Trump because he's an outsider who speaks his mind — and they like what he's doing so far.

"He's doing what he said he was going to do, that's the biggest thing," said Tyler Schurbon, 23, who describes himself as a "progressive Republican" who falls asleep watching Fox News each night. "A lot of people get into the presidency, and they just completely forget what they talked about."

Schurbon trims trees for power companies, a full-time union job that pays $60,000 per year and full benefits. He drives a nice pickup truck and bought a two-story farmhouse for $50,000 last year.

"That's pretty good living for not having a college degree," Schurbon said.

While he doesn't like how politicized unions have become, he's grateful for the wages they negotiated over the years. The Republican-run Iowa Legislature, empowered by Trump's win, voted this month to dramatically scale back the collective bargaining rights of the state's public workers — worrying members of private unions like Schurbon.

While others in the bar insist that Trump supports unions, Schurbon doesn't think so: "Nope, he's completely against them."

Schurbon and his dad farm about 500 acres of soybeans and corn, so he's also worried about the president's promise to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement, which could hurt farmers that export their crops to Canada and Mexico.

"He's really hurting us, even though everybody around here is conservative," Schurbon said, thumping his bottle of Budweiser on the table to emphasize some of his points. "When you cut off trade, that cuts off everything. Where do our crops go? They don't stay here."

But still, Schurbon likes much of what Trump is doing — and he wishes protesters would give him a break. The day before, hundreds descended on an event hosted by Sen. Joni Ernst (R-Iowa) just up the road in Maquoketa.

"Everybody might at least try. At least a little bit. Just try and help," he said. "You don't have to agree with him, but you don't have to just completely block him, everything he's doing."

Newton

About 140 miles southwest of Lost Nation is the much larger town of Newton, which for generations was home to a Maytag factory that once employed one in four residents. The factory closed in 2007, laying off more than 3,000 workers. In 2010, "60 Minutes" profiled the struggling town — catching the attention of Trump, who reached out to some of the residents who were profiled.

Newton has somewhat recovered, although most locals commute out of town for work. Two companies that manufacture wind turbine parts have taken over part of the Maytag factory, creating hundreds of jobs, although they pay less than Maytag did. While Trump claimed on the campaign trail to support wind energy, he has also fought wind projects near his properties, and Iowans worry he could cut subsidies that are vital to the industry.

Nearly a dozen local retirees gathered at a barbershop downtown on Thursday morning, chatting about the cold reception Republican senators were getting at town halls as they ate chili out of plastic foam bowls at 10 a.m.

Nearly all of them voted for Clinton, although Trump won the surrounding county of Jasper.

"I hate to say it, but I voted for Hillary," said Dave Drew, 71, a longtime Democrat who retired from Maytag in the early 1990s after working there for 27 years. "I voted against Trump. We didn't have a choice. I mean, I don't think she was the greatest choice. I don't think he was, either. Joe Biden would have been my choice."

Although this was a room full of Democrats and left-leaning independents, the conversation was far from politically correct. There were jokes about Clinton's health, and a racial slur was used to describe Middle Easterners. The

group mostly agreed that mass deportations of undocumented immigrants would tank the state's economy, although they wondered why immigrants don't learn English before coming to the United States.

Jerry Wylie, 73, praised Latinos for having a strong work ethic and taking low-paying factory and meat-packing plant jobs that most Iowans don't want to work — especially, he said, black Iowans whom he accused of being lazy.

As Wylie told two stereotype-filled stories to back up his claim, another retiree in the barbershop argued that most longtime welfare recipients in the state are rural whites.

At one point, a Trump-supporting 30-year-old truck driver who stopped in for a haircut looked at Wylie and said: "What's your problem?"

The truck driver, who lives in the next town and didn't want to give his name, said he mowed "Trump" into his yard last summer. While the older guys in the barbershop worked during the golden age of manufacturing and retired comfortably with pensions, the truck driver says his annual pay has decreased by $5,000 in the seven years he has worked for a dairy company in Marshalltown. Something has to change, and that's why he supports Trump.

"He went against the grain — took it up as a hobby and asked the questions no one wanted to ask," he said. "I have never heard of a president getting scolded or put down for upholding his promises."

Urbandale

Another 40 miles west of Newton is the Des Moines suburb of Urbandale, a maze of cul-de-sacs and big-box stores. Clinton narrowly won this city of nearly 42,000.

As a light rain fell Thursday afternoon, the corridors of Merle Hay Mall filled with retirees speed-walking and moms pushing strollers — including Steventjie Hasna and her 1-year-old daughter.

Hasna, 24, is a conservative Christian who is deeply opposed to abortion and usually backs Republicans. This election, she decided not to vote.

"The balance between Hillary or Trump — they're both horrible, in my opinion — but Trump outweighed it just because of his racist stance on everything," Hasna said.

Hasna was stunned when Trump won, and her young family has deeply felt the ramifications of the president's first month in office. Her husband, Hosen Hasna, is from Syria and came to the Midwest for college. He later took a job in the small Iowa town where Steventjie Hasna — her first name is Dutch and she took her husband's Arabic last name — grew up. He works as an electrical engineer at a tire factory, while she stays home with their daughter, Nehad.

She continues to practice her Christian faith, while he attends Friday prayers at a local mosque when he can. His parents, who live in Damascus, often visit Iowa for five months at a time — visits that may no longer happen if the president institutes another travel ban, which Hasna said does little to protect the country.

"I don't care what he says, you're attacking Muslims here," she said. "And that's not American at all. We're American. We stand for American values and that's the exact opposite of what he stands for."

Hasna is terrified that her husband's mosque will be attacked or that he will be targeted.

"You don't know what some crazy guy might get in his head," she said. "People are going to do what they are going to do. I'm not going to say that it's Trump's fault. . . . But with him having the hateful stance that he had and then being voted as president, it made people feel like: 'Hey, maybe my racist stance on things isn't wrong.' "

Her husband is in the process of becoming a citizen, and they have discussed what they might do if they need to flee the country. If her husband could vote, he likely would have voted for Clinton.

Hasna's mom and sister skipped voting — but her father cast a ballot for Trump.

"Yeah," Hasna said, drawing out the word and then taking a deep breath, still clearly upset about it. "He didn't want to vote for Hillary, so he voted for Trump. I told him: 'You know, you shouldn't have voted, Dad, if you don't like either one of them.' "

Perry

About 30 miles northwest of Urbandale is Perry, which has been revitalized with the help of thousands of Latinos and other immigrants who moved to the area to work at a meat-packing plant.

The town of about 8,000 has long struggled with racial tensions. A month before Trump launched his presidential campaign, a bilingual kindergarten concert was interrupted by a man shouting: "USA! English only. USA! English only."

The president's threat to quickly deport millions of undocumented immigrants has scared many law-abiding residents of Perry, said Oscar Ramirez, 41, a legal resident who owns the Oasis grocery store downtown and has hired a lawyer to help him become a citizen.

Ramirez moved from rural El Salvador to New York in 1990 when he was 15. After eight years there, he moved to Perry to work at the meat-packing plant because he heard that the Midwest was a crime-free place to raise children. Four years ago, he and his wife opened their store. Lately, Ramirez said people have come to him with their fears of Trump.

"A lot of people are scared," Ramirez said, as he hauled trays of pastries into the shop on Thursday afternoon. "They come to me, and they talk to me, and I say, 'Hey, calm down. Nothing is going to happen, everything is going to be okay. You have to have hope that everything will be okay.' "

Jim George, 68, a retired county engineer who has lived in Perry for 20 years, said he voted for Trump but that his view of immigrants is different. "These are good folks," George said. "This place would not be functioning without the folks that have come in here."

"I voted for the Supreme Court. I didn't want to vote for Trump," said George, who is opposed to abortion. "With Trump, you just hold your nose."

Missouri Valley

Continuing west takes you through the deeply conservative Fourth Congressional District represented by Rep. Steve King (R), who fought for some of Trump's immigration proposals back when they were fringe ideas. Trump won the district by 27 points, while his approval rating in the latest Iowa Poll was 55 percent.

The small town of Missouri Valley sits nestled between the river of the same name and the railroad tracks. Trump received nearly 60 percent of the votes here.

On Saturday morning — the day after a sudden snowstorm closed schools — women ranging in ages and political beliefs ventured to Abundant Moon Yoga.

Owner Rachelle Pfouts, 40, is careful to keep politics out of her studio — although she says compassion is a key tenet of yoga that seems to be lacking in Washington right now.

Pfouts's 8:30 a.m. class included a 48-year-old special education teacher, a 39-year-old mother of three and a 42-year-old administrative assistant who doesn't have children — all of whom voted for Clinton and are gravely worried about the future of public education in their state and across the country.

A 10 a.m. class attracted two retirees from Woodbine who usually vote for Republicans, although they consider themselves independents. Lois Surber, a 67-year-old retired city clerk, said she didn't like either candidate for president but voted for Trump. Libby Ring, a 70-year-old retired nursing assistant, said she didn't vote — and she doesn't approve of Trump's first month.

Neither woman could name a thing the president has done that they liked, but they both said that protests and negative commentary are not helping.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Is the Media Too Tough on Donald Trump? More Than Half of Americans Think So

Jason Bellini

Feb. 26, 2017 9:00 a.m. ET

Just over half of Americans think the media's coverage of President Donald Trump has been too critical, a new Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll finds.

While 51% rate the media as too critical of Mr. Trump since the presidential election, 41% say the coverage has been fair and objective, while 6% say the media hasn't been critical enough.

It isn't clear what role Mr. Trump's barrage of attacks on the fairness and credibility of the press has played in shaping the majority's opinion that coverage of his

administration has been too negative.

A majority of those polled, some 53%, also believes that the news media have exaggerated problems in the Trump administration. Some 45% say that is not the case.

Among those whose primary news source is the conservative-leaning Fox News Channel, 79% agreed with the statement that "the news media and other elites are exaggerating the problems of the Trump administration, because they are uncomfortable and threatened by the kind of change that Trump represents." Even large numbers of more-liberal MSNBC audience, 40%, thought that the media had overstated the problems. Fox News parent 21st Century Fox Inc. and News Corp, which owns The Wall Street Journal, share common ownership.

For the past two decades, the public's overall trust in the media has been on a downward slide.

A survey from last September found that Americans' trust in the mass media dropped to its lowest level in Gallup polling history. Just 32% said they had a great deal or fair amount of trust in the media, compared with 53% in 1997.

Mr. Trump, speaking at the Conservative Political Action Conference on Friday, bashed the media's use of unnamed government sources and called on reporters to stop the common journalistic practice of reporting news gathered from anonymous sources.

Survey respondents offered strong reactions, both positive and negative, to the president's outspoken critiques of the media.

"I think his views about the press being fake news is horrible and I think it is a fascist viewpoint," said one respondent.

Another person said Mr. Trump, in critiques such as calling some mainstream news organizations "fake," is doing what he said he would do during his campaign. After covering President Barack Obama for eight years, the media "don't know what to do with someone who has a different opinion, which is half the country," the respondent said.

The survey of 1,000 adults was conducted Feb. 18-22 and had a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points.

Write to Jason Bellini at jason.bellini@wsj.com

The New York Times

Trump Embraces 'Enemy of the People,' a Phrase With a Fraught History

Andrew Higgins

MOSCOW — The phrase was too toxic even for Nikita Khrushchev, a war-hardened veteran communist not known for squeamishness. As leader of the Soviet Union, he demanded an end to the use of the term "enemy of the people" because "it eliminated the possibility of any kind of ideological fight."

"The formula 'enemy of the people,'" Mr. Khrushchev told the Soviet Communist Party in a 1956 speech denouncing Stalin's cult of personality, "was specifically introduced for the purpose of physically annihilating such individuals" who disagreed with the supreme leader.

It is difficult to know if President Trump is aware of the historic resonance of the term, a label generally associated with despotic communist governments rather than democracies. But his decision to unleash the terminology has left some historians scratching their heads. Why would the elected leader of a democratic nation embrace a label that, after the death of Stalin, even the Soviet Union found to be too freighted with sinister connotations?

Nina Khrushcheva, the great-granddaughter of Mr. Khrushchev and a professor of international affairs at the New School in New York, said the phrase was "shocking to hear in a non-Soviet, moreover non-Stalinist setting." Her great-grandfather, she said, "of course also used Soviet slogans and ideological idioms but still tried to stay away from sweeping denunciations of whole segments of the Soviet population."

In Mr. Trump's case, however, he is branding as enemies a segment of the American population — specifically representatives of what he calls the "fake news" media, including The New York Times.

He has used the phrase more than once, including Friday during an attack on the news media at a conservative gathering in which he said that some reporters were making up unnamed sources to attack him.

"A few days ago, I called the fake news the enemy of the people because they have no sources — they just make it up," the president said, adding that the label applied only to "dishonest" reporters and editors. Hours later, Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary, barred journalists from several news organizations, including The Times, from attending a briefing in his office.

By using the phrase and placing himself in such infamous company, at least in his choice of vocabulary to attack his critics, Mr. Trump has demonstrated, Ms. Khrushcheva said, that the language of "autocracy, of state nationalism is always the same regardless of the country, and no nation is exempt." She added that, in all likelihood, Mr. Trump had not read Lenin, Stalin or Mao Zedong, but the "formulas of insult, humiliation, domination, branding, enemy-forming and name calling are always the same."

The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

The phrase "enemy of the people" first entered the political lexicon in 1789, with the French Revolution. The revolutionaries initially used it as a slogan that was hurled willy-nilly at anybody who opposed them. But, as resistance to the revolution mounted, the term acquired a far more lethal and legalistic meaning with the adoption of a 1794 law that set up a revolutionary tribunal "to punish enemies of the people" and codified political crimes punishable by death. These included "spreading false news to divide or trouble the people."

The concept resurfaced in a more benign form nearly a century later in "An Enemy of the People," an 1882 play by the Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen about an idealistic whistle-blower in a small town at odds with the authorities and locals who, to protect the economy, want to suppress information about water contamination. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 returned the term to the blood-drenched dramas of the French Revolution, with Lenin declaring in Pravda that the Jacobin terror against "enemies of the people" was "instructive" and needed to be revived, so as to rid the Russian people of "landowners and capitalists as a class."

Stalin, who took over as Soviet leader upon Lenin's death in 1924, drastically expanded the scope of those branded as "enemies of the people," targeting not only capitalists but also dedicated communists who had worked alongside Lenin for years, but whom Stalin viewed as rivals.

The Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev at the United Nations in 1960. In a 1956 speech, he demanded an end to the term "enemy of the people." Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

"In essence, it was a label that meant death. It meant you were subhuman and entirely expendable," said Mitchell A. Orenstein, professor of Russian and East European Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. "This is the connotation for anyone who lived in the Soviet Union or knows anything about the Soviet Union, which Donald Trump obviously doesn't — or he doesn't care."

He said that it was hard to figure out whether Mr. Trump was aware of the resonance of the phrase or simply used it because "he knows it riles up people who have a certain degree of knowledge."

"He is only alienating them, and they are the people he wants to alienate anyway," Mr. Orenstein continued. "His base sees comparisons with Stalin as just more evidence of the liberal mainstream media going haywire."

Moreover, by using such a loaded term in such a cavalier fashion, the president "is in the process of rendering it meaningless," Mr. Orenstein said. "It becomes just na-na-na-na-na," he added, because nobody really thinks Mr. Trump will bring back the guillotine.

Philip Short, a British author who has written biographies of Mao and Cambodia's genocidal leader Pol Pot, said Mr. Trump delighted in "shaking things up, and this kind of language does just that."

"We try to analyze it from an establishment point of view, but this leads nowhere," he added. "I don't know if Trump has ever read Stalin, but if he wants to destabilize people, he is doing it perfectly."

William Taubman, the author of a biography of Khrushchev and emeritus professor of political science at Amherst College, said it was "shocking" that Mr. Trump would revive a term that had fallen into disrepute in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death in 1953. "It was so omnipresent, freighted and devastating in its use under Stalin that nobody wanted to touch it," he said. "I have never heard it used in Russia except in reference to history and in jokes."

Ms. Khrushcheva said Mr. Trump had "been using a lot of this kind of political-ideological branding"

favored by revolutionary leaders, deploying terms like "liberal sympathizer" and "language about gloom and doom in America that is much more forcefully negative than that even used by the Russians."

He has also gone one step further than Chinese and Khmer Rouge communists in Cambodia, who generally preferred homegrown insults to those imported from the Soviet Union.

Mr. Short, the Mao and Pol Pot biographer, said Chinese and Cambodian communists, all fiercely nationalistic, rarely if ever used "enemy of the people" in domestic political struggles because it was an alien import. Instead, Pol Pot attacked enemies as "ugly microbes" who would "rot society, rot the party and rot the country from within," while Maoists coined insults like "the stinking ninth category" to denounce experts and intellectuals.

Mao, Mr. Short said, "used Chinese expressions and spoke like a Chinese, not a Russian."

"He did not use the Soviet jargon much," Mr. Short said. "But Mr. Trump does, which is extraordinary."

Mao did on occasion use "enemy of the people," but he directed it not at his domestic foes but at the United States, declaring in 1964 that "U.S. imperialism is the most ferocious enemy of the people of the entire world."

"Politicians normally use phrases that resonate with their own people," Mr. Short said. "Mao and Pol Pot did not just regurgitate Stalinist terms. What is extraordinary about Trump is that he has taken up a Stalinist phrase that is entirely alien to American political culture."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Donald Trump to Skip White House Correspondents' Association Dinner

Peter Nicholas

Updated Feb. 26, 2017 2:50 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—Having denounced several leading news organizations as the "enemy of the people," President Donald Trump on Saturday said he won't mingle with any members of the press at the annual White House Correspondents' Association dinner.

Mr. Trump tweeted that he won't attend the April 29 event, though he didn't give a reason. "Please wish everyone well and have a great evening!" he wrote. Presidents typically speak at the dinner, a major event on the Washington social calendar.

Asked about the president's reason for skipping the dinner, White House press deputy Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Sunday on ABC's "This Week with George Stephanopoulos": "I think it's kind of naive of us to think we can all walk into a room for a couple of hours and pretend that some of that tension isn't there. You know, one of the things we say in the South: 'If a Girl Scout egged your house, would you buy cookies from her?'"

The last president not to appear at the event was Ronald Reagan, who in 1981 was recovering from injuries he received from an assassination attempt. Mr. Reagan addressed the dinner by phone, though.

"If I could give you just one little bit of advice: When somebody tells you to get in a car quick, do it," Mr. Reagan said, referring to John Hinckley Jr.'s attempt to kill him outside the Washington Hilton, the same venue where the press dinner is held.

Mr. Trump seemed to leave open the possibility of participating in future dinners: his tweet notes that he won't be attending "this year."

The correspondents' dinner is an annual Washington ritual that has evolved over the years into an A-list social event complete with pre-parties and after-parties. Hollywood celebrities mix with reporters, members of Congress, White House officials, lobbyists and cabinet secretaries in an evening dubbed the "nerd prom." Gawkers line up at the Washington Hilton to take pictures of arriving guests.

Presidents typically deliver a speech, with guests in formal wear lifting a glass to the commander-in-chief.

While the dinner has drawn complaints about apparent coziness between government officials and the press, it also serves as a forum for awarding scholarships and honoring exceptional journalism.

Mr. Trump's announcement comes at a tense moment in White House-press relations. Speaking at the Conservative Political Action Conference on Friday, Mr. Trump said, "We are fighting the fake news. It's fake—phony, fake."

That same day, the White House held a press briefing and didn't invite several news outlets, including the New York Times and CNN, whom Mr. Trump has singled out for criticism.

A Wall Street Journal reporter attended the briefing, but the publication wasn't aware at the time that other outlets had been excluded.

Dow Jones, which publishes the Journal, said in a statement that "had we known at the time, we would not have participated and we will not participate in such restricted briefings in the future."

In a statement after Mr. Trump's tweet, Jeff Mason, the WHCA president, said the dinner would go forward without Mr. Trump.

"The WHCA takes note of President Donald Trump's announcement on Twitter that he does not plan to attend the dinner, which has been and will continue to be a celebration of the First Amendment and the important role played by an independent news media in a healthy republic," Mr. Mason wrote.

It isn't clear if Vice President Mike Pence plans to attend. Mr. Pence's office didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. Several senior White House officials plan to be there, the White House said.

The Wall Street Journal plans to attend the dinner.

Tensions between the news media and the Trump White House have sparked a debate about whether the dinner should proceed and follow the same format.

Some outlets that routinely attend the dinner have considered backing out or canceling after-parties. Comedian Samantha Bee has said she would host an alternate dinner on the same night at a different venue and donate proceeds to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

One administration aide said there had been internal talk about whether Mr. Trump should attend the dinner. Mr. Trump was in the audience for the WHCA dinner in 2011, when then-President Barack Obama tossed a few barbs his way.

Mr. Obama lampooned Mr. Trump for questioning whether he was born in the U.S. Having released his long-form birth certificate showing he was born in Hawaii, Mr. Obama quipped that Mr. Trump "can finally get back to focusing on issues that matter like: did we fake the moon landing."

Calvin Coolidge was the first president to attend the dinner, showing up in 1924, according to the correspondents' association website. No less a critic of the media than Richard Nixon also appeared at the event.

Write to Peter Nicholas at peter.nicholas@wsj.com

CNN

Jen Psaki: Without free press, democracy dies

Jen Psaki

Story highlights

- Jen Psaki: The administration's approach to the press risks following the model of Russia
- Despite disagreements, the Obama administration never excluded a set of reporters, she writes

Jen Psaki, a CNN political commentator and spring fellow at the Georgetown Institute of Politics and Public Service, served as the White House communications director and State Department spokeswoman during the Obama administration. Follow her: @jrpsaki. The opinions expressed in this commentary are hers.

*(CNN)*Is it typical to target specific media outlets and exclude them from attending a White House briefing? The short answer is no.

I spent almost eight years working for the Obama administration, in the White House as the deputy press secretary, deputy communications director, communications director, and as the spokesperson at the State Department. We were not always perfect about how we handled media relations.

We had our fair share of disagreements with reporters and

even with entire media outlets like Fox News. Even the

reported exclusion of Fox News in 2009

was related to network interviews by Ken Feinberg, an employee of the Treasury Department. It was not related to a briefing for the White House press corps. And in the end, an interview was offered to Fox. President Obama even did a lengthy interview with Chris Wallace during his final year in office.

We also had rough press days when the front page of the newspaper was completely depressing and every story on cable news felt like a punch in the stomach.

We gave exclusive interviews and stories to reporters just as every White House does, but we never excluded a set of targeted reporters or any reporters from attending a briefing. Why? Because the back-and-forth, the arguments in briefings, are all a part of what you do in every White House, Democratic or Republican, to make the work of government accessible to the American people. It is part of democracy.

When I was at the State Department, I was

targeted by the Russian propaganda machine

because I was one of the most visible faces of the United States opposition to Russia's illegal intervention in Crimea. They made up quotes I never said. RT, the international Russian propaganda television station, did entire segments about me on their version of Jimmy Fallon. The Russian government imposed my head on the body of Russian models in straight jackets.

And they made folk heroes out of the toughest reporters at the State Department in Russia.

But I learned some of the most important lessons about the role of the media from these same reporters. Not only is being targeted by the Russian government a badge of honor, it highlighted what we have that they don't. A free press, and briefings in the White House, the State Department and the Department of Defense that are open to reporters from all different backgrounds, beliefs and even political persuasions.

So why did the Trump team exclude targeted reporters from a briefing Friday?

Here is my best educated guess:

I think Trump told them to. He spent a large part of his speech at CPAC

attacking the media

. By most accounts he is obsessed with how he is covered -- from chyrons on cable news to the covers of magazines and tabloids. The President of the United States may be taking it personally when reporters write accurate and factual stories about him. And his reaction is to retaliate.

He and his staff want to distract from the larger and more problematic story about White House Chief of Staff

Reince Priebus attempting to pressure the FBI

to make the coverage of the investigations into the contacts between associates of Trump and Russians go away.

The Trump administration wants to continue to delegitimize institutions like the mainstream media. The more they can confuse the lines between facts and truth, legitimate and illegitimate sources of information, the more they will be able to brainwash the small segment of the public they care about reaching.

Is this the worst thing the Trump administration has done this week? Probably not.

So why does it matter?

Because the way an administration interacts with the free press in the United States, through briefings and access to reporters -- even those who have reported unflattering, harsh and sometimes unfair stories -- sends a message to the rest of the world about how much we value the freedom of the press. And Russia shouldn't be our role model.

The New York Times

Blow : Trump, Archenemy of Truth

Charles M. Blow

The conspiracy theory Bannon posits here is perfectly shaped for the xenophobe: America's media has economic interests that extend well beyond this country's borders, and therefore Trump's "America first" message and policies pose a very real, bottom-line threat to the media's global prosperity. The threat is so urgent that the American media is willfully damaging the only real asset it has — credibility — by inventing falsehoods designed to damage Trump and insulate its own profitability.

As far-fetched as this may sound to any reasonable person, one must always remember that Trump isn't a reasonable person or even a particularly smart one, which makes him the perfect vessel for Bannon's pseudo-intellectual vanities.

The day after Bannon spoke, Trump himself came to CPAC and reaffirmed his commitment to this anti-media crusade, parroting Bannon's language.

First Trump said: "A few days ago I called the fake news the enemy of the people. And they are. They are the enemy of the people."

He continued in a barely coherent diatribe of sentence fragments, incongruous ideas and broken logic. But if you listened closely, you could hear echoes of Bannon. At one point, Trump said: "We have to fight it, folks, we have to fight it. They're very smart, they're very cunning and they're very dishonest." At another he said of the media: "Many of these groups are part of the large media corporations that have their own agenda and it's not your agenda and it's not the country's agenda, it's their own agenda."

Trump is Bannon's puppet, whose one sustaining parlor trick is to deliver incoherence with confidence. Strangely enough, people find comfort in this kind of imperfect parlance.

Maundering is the rhetoric of the middlebrow.

Demagogic language is reductionist language. It draws its power from its lack of proximity to soaring oratory. It can be quaint and even clumsy, all of which can give idiocy, incomprehensibility and untruth a false air of authenticity.

So Trump and Bannon spin their folksy tale of media corruption to give Trump a needed enemy in his perpetual campaign and a needed diversion from the enormity of his disasters. This fits Trump perfectly because not only does he have a gnawing insecurity, he also views the confrontational nature of news as maleficently targeted.

Trump doesn't seem to register that lying — all the time! — is not allowed. He doesn't seem to understand that news, by its very nature, is the publishing of that which those in power would prefer to conceal. He doesn't seem to realize that fawning promotion of politicians' positions is not the exercise of journalism but the promotion of propaganda. Or maybe he does and is enraged at the absence of propaganda.

So Trump lashes out with mindless twaddle, insinuating that the media has fully abandoned the pillars and principles of journalism to join the opposition.

The fact is that Trump simply wants the truth not to be true, so he assaults its quality. He wants the purveyors of truth not to pursue it, so he questions their motives.

And yet, truth stands, rigid and sharp, unforgiving and unafraid. It is our only guard against tyranny and the brave men and women who labor away in its service are nothing short of patriots and heroes.

The press won't pat Trump on his head and give him a gold star for the few things he gets right, and then turn a blind eye to the overwhelming majority of things he gets wrong.

That's not how it works. That's not how it has ever worked. Trump wants to brand the press as the enemy of the American people when the exact opposite is true: A free, fearless, adversarial, in-your-face press is the best friend a democracy can have.

The press is the light that makes the roaches scatter.

Remember this every time you hear Trump attack the press: Only people with something to hide need be afraid of those whose mission is to seek.

The Washington Post

Dionne Jr. : Bannon's dangerous 'deconstruction'

http://www.facebook.com/ejdionne

Just when you despair that only chaos animates the Trump administration, along comes Stephen K. Bannon, the White House ideologue, to offer the Rosetta Stone illuminating what this circus is all about.

And when you realize what Trump & Co. might really be up to, your despair turns to alarm.

There is no way of knowing how much President Trump truly cares about the ideas that Bannon holds close to his heart. Trump seems far more obsessed with attacks on him from many directions — and genuinely worried that investigations of his team's ties to Russia could pose a mortal threat to his power.

Evening Edition newsletter

The day's most important stories.

Please provide a valid email address.

After Bannon had offered his Deep Thoughts on Trumpism at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) on Thursday, there was Trump on Friday morning back to his usual grubby business of using Twitter to denounce his enemies. His target in this case was the FBI. He accused the agency of being "totally unable to stop the national security 'leakers' " and being guilty of leaks of its own.

Trump's anxiety was likely heightened by word that Reince Priebus, his chief of staff, asked the FBI to deny reports that several members of Trump's team had contacts with Russian agents during the 2016 campaign. Priebus' intervention raises serious questions about whether the White House is trying to shut down or influence inquiries that are plainly in the national interest.

White House chief strategist Stephen K. Bannon and White House chief of staff Reince Priebus spoke at the Conservative Political Action Conference, Feb. 23. Bannon said the media is "adamantly opposed to" the president's agenda. White House chief strategist Stephen K. Bannon and White House chief of staff Reince Priebus spoke at the Conservative Political Action Conference, Feb. 23. (Photo: Bill O'Leary/The Washington Post)

(The Washington Post)

Bannon, appearing with Priebus, may have had this in mind when he told the assembled conservatives that "every day, it is going to be a fight" and pushed Team Trump's attacks on the media to a new level. Trump picked up on the theme in his own CPAC remarks on Friday, echoing countless authoritarians in repeating his condemnation of "fake news" outlets as "the enemy of the people." Trump's survival may depend on his supporters ignoring a lot of bad news and inconvenient facts.

But it is Trump's opponents and the not yet committed who need to pay close attention when Bannon, the president's visionary chief strategist, promises an ominous-sounding "new political order." Philip Stephens, a Financial Times columnist, had a nice description of Bannon's job, characterizing him as "the ideologue who informs Mr. Trump's impulses." And Bannon actually made sense of Trump's seemingly bizarre habit of naming people to head up agencies whose missions they openly oppose.

When Bannon listed the administration's central purposes, the first two were unsurprising: "national security and sovereignty" and "economic nationalism." But then came the third: the "deconstruction of the administrative state." Bannon explained that officials who seem to hate what their agencies do — one thinks especially of Scott Pruitt, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency, who has sued it repeatedly to the benefit of oil and gas companies — were "selected for a reason, and that is deconstruction."

Thus did Bannon invoke the trendy lefty term "deconstruct" as a synonym for "destroy."

This is a huge deal. It reflects a long-standing critique on the right not just of the Obama and Clinton years but of the entire thrust of U.S. government since the Progressive Era and the New Deal. Critics of the administrative state — "the vast administrative apparatus that does so much to dictate the way we live now," as Scott Johnson, a conservative lawyer and co-founder of the Power Line blog, put it in 2014 — see it as unconstitutional because regulatory agencies make and enforce rules based on authority they claim was illegitimately ceded by Congress.

That's the theory. In practice, this is a war on a century's worth of work to keep our air and water clean; our food, drugs and workplaces safe; the rights of employees protected; and the marketplace fair and unrigged. It's one thing to make regulations more efficient and no more intrusive than necessary. It's another to say that all the structures of democratic government designed to protect our citizens from the abuses of concentrated private power should be swept away.

It's a very strange moment. Trump and Bannon are happy to expand the reach of the state when it comes to policing, immigration enforcement, executive-branch meddling in the work of investigative agencies, and the browbeating of individual companies that offend the president in one way or another. The parts of government they want to dismantle are those that stand on the side of citizens against powerful interests.

In his CPAC presentation, Bannon accused Trump's foes of being "corporatist." But, in the truest sense of the word, the real corporatists are in the White House.

Read more from E.J. Dionne's archive, follow him on Twitter or subscribe to his updates on Facebook.

The Washington Post

Samuelson : The era of disbelief

By Robert J. Samuelson

We live in an age of disbelief. Many of the ideas and institutions that have underpinned Americans' thinking since the early years after World War II are besieged. There is an intellectual and political vacuum into which rush new figures (Donald Trump) and different ideas (America First). These new ideas and leaders may be no better than the ones they displace — they may, in fact, be worse — but they have the virtue of being new.

Almost everything about the U.S. election defied belief, from Trump's victory to the Russian hacking of Democratic computers, to Trump's numerous falsehoods and smears. Could this really be happening? The campaign recalled humorist Dave Barry's famous line, "I'm not making this up."

To say that this is an era of disbelief means, quite literally, that millions of Americans no longer believe what they once believed. There is a loss of faith in old orthodoxies and the established "experts" who championed them. There are three areas where Trump suggests major departures from existing policies.

Read These Comments

The best conversations on The Washington Post

Please provide a valid email address.

First, the economy. Despite a 4.8 percent unemployment rate, the recovery from the 2007-2009 Great Recession has been middling. The number of payroll jobs, 145.5 million in January, was only 5 percent above the level in January 2008, the peak in the previous economic expansion. Millions of workers have dropped out of the labor force, notes Nicholas Eberstadt of the American Enterprise Institute. Gross domestic product (GDP) — the economy's output — has been growing only about 2 percent annually. The Trump administration believes it can raise that to 3 percent or more through lower tax rates, less regulation and more aggressive trade policies.

Second, the world order. Since the late 1940s, the United States has provided physical and economic security for our allies through alliances (NATO) and trade agreements. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 signaled the success of this strategy and — it was said — marked the beginning of a long period of peace and prosperity, presided over by the United States. Trump is unsympathetic to this global role, which (he argues) burdens us with large costs in both blood and treasure. He wants trade agreements to be more favorable to us, and for our allies to pay for more of their defense.

Third, the welfare state. Here, Trump's plans are fuzziest. He has said he would protect Social Security and Medicare but other anti-poverty programs could face cuts. One way or another, immense sums are involved. Under existing policies, the Congressional Budget Office estimates that all welfare programs, from Social Security to food stamps, will cost $34 trillion from 2018 to 2027; that's two-thirds of federal spending projected over this period. The deficit is already $9 trillion for these years.

To be sure, there are other areas of policy differences from the status quo, immigration and climate change being two examples.

Just what will be proposed and enacted, and the consequences, are unknown. There are plenty of skeptics — including me — who think Trump's agenda is largely impractical or undesirable. To take one example: Since at least John F. Kennedy, presidents have pledged to increase economic growth. What we have learned is that, over meaningful time periods (say, four or five years), they can't control economic growth. It's too complicated to be easily manipulated.

Or consider the United States' relation with the world. I fear that an America in retreat will create a world that is less stable, more fractious and more dangerous. The perception of our weakness would encourage others, possibly Russia, to be more adventurous. It's fine to

ask our allies to spend more on their defense, but it's inconsistent to do so while threatening to weaken their economies by insisting on tough trade concessions. True to his "America First" slogan, Trump minimizes the collective interests we share with many other countries, starting with Mexico.

But I want to make a larger point. The election's unanticipated outcome is of a piece with other events: 9/11; the 2008-2009 financial crisis. These, too, were essentially unimagined and, therefore, unpredicted. Even without Trump's eccentric and questionable behavior, so much is in flux that we're disoriented. Stripped of familiar and reassuring beliefs, we are increasingly governed by disruptive surprises. This is why I call the present moment the age of disbelief.

Read more from Robert Samuelson's archive.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Bond Market Is Flashing Warning Signal on Trump Reflation Trade

Min Zeng

Updated Feb. 27, 2017 8:13 a.m. ET

Stocks and bonds are again moving in tandem after diverging in recent months—a sign some investors may be losing faith in the so-called reflation trade.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average has soared more than 1,000 points so far this year and closed at a record of 20821.76 Friday. Bond prices, too, are rising, driving down the yield on the benchmark 10-year Treasury note to 2.317% Friday, the lowest since late November, from 2.446% at the end of 2016. Yields fall as bond prices rise.

It is a shift from late last year when investors were selling bonds and buying stocks, anticipating that large fiscal stimulus from President Donald Trump would lead to accelerated growth and higher inflation, a bet known as the reflation trade.

The new pattern is generating debate among investors.

Some money managers and traders believe that a rising Treasury bond market, often seen as a haven for investors, is a warning that valuations of riskier assets—such as stocks, corporate bonds and emerging-market assets—may be stretched. The Dow closed at a record for an 11th consecutive session Friday, the longest such streak since 1987.

James Sarni, senior managing partner at asset-management firm Payden & Rygel, is among those who bought Treasurys in recent weeks.

"The bond market is showing a more realistic view on the fiscal policy outlook than the stock market,'' Mr. Sarni said. "The bond market has it right."

Julien Scholnick, portfolio manager at Western Asset Management Co., said he bought Treasurys earlier this year while cutting junk-bond holdings.

"At some point the stock and bond markets need to be reconciled,'' said Mr. Scholnick. He laid out two scenarios for bonds: the 10-year Treasury yield could rise to 2.75% or higher if "everything works out well" with fiscal policy, but the yield could fall to 2% if policy details disappoint.

Other disagree, pointing to factors that remain supportive of riskier assets: improving economic outlooks in the U.S., Europe and China; U.S. corporate earnings rebounding from a recent slump; a gradual approach by the Federal Reserve in raising short-term interest rates and continued bond buying by central banks in the eurozone and Japan.

Mr. Trump is scheduled to speak on Tuesday to a joint session of Congress. Investors will zero in on updates to his proposals for an expansive fiscal policy.

Another sign of caution on the reflation trade is the pullback of the U.S. dollar. The ICE dollar index, which measures the currency's value against counterparts including the euro and the yen, was 101.12 late Friday, down from 103.82 on Jan. 3, the highest since 2002, according to data provider CQG.

Higher prices for stocks and bonds may also simply reflect investors' quest for income in a very low-yield world, mirroring a trend in recent years in which both haven bond markets and riskier assets were boosted by major central banks' unprecedented monetary stimulus.

Treasury yields, the foundation for global finance and a yardstick for valuations of riskier assets, remain relatively high compared with government bonds of Germany and Japan, increasing demand for them.

Money managers say political risk in Europe, skepticism over an imminent rate increase by the Fed and less appealing yields in other major government-bond markets are also stoking demand for Treasurys.

Many investors are not convinced the Fed will act as quickly as once thought given the uncertainty on the U.S. fiscal outlook and elections in France. Investors viewed the Fed's minutes from its Jan 31-Feb 1 meeting, released last week, as a sign that the Fed may wait before moving rates higher again, even though Fed Chairwoman Janet Yellen signaled earlier this month that a rate increase in March was still on the table.

On Friday, the yield on the two-year German government bond hit a record low of minus-0.959%, according to Tradeweb. The yield on the 10-year German bund was 0.188% and the 10-year government bond yield in Japan was 0.06%.

Some investors are still buying risky corporate bonds, or junk debt, where the yield premium above Treasurys dropped last week to the lowest since the summer of 2014. Emerging-market stocks and bonds have strengthened this year.

In addition, investors have reduced their short bets on Treasurys, suggesting some investors returned to the bond market as buyers, causing prices to rise and yields to fall. Wagers betting on lower prices and higher bond yields, or shorts, had sent the 10-year Treasury note's yield higher from the record closing low of 1.366% set in July.

Net wagers on higher bond yields via Treasury futures were $73 billion for the week ended Feb. 21, down from a recent peak of $100.7 billion in January, according to TD Securities.

Jack McIntyre, portfolio manager at Brandywine Global Investment Management, said bond bears risk "getting squeezed" should many dial back shorts at the same time—a scenario that could intensify the upswing in bond prices.

Even in the stock market, there have been signs of skepticism.

Utilities companies in the S&P 500, often considered bondlike because of their dividends, were up 3.7% last week, making them the best performers. Other income-heavy sectors, including telephone and real-estate shares, also posted gains. Meanwhile, financial and industrial companies in the S&P 500 lagged behind, marking a reversal from the days after the election, when investors flooded shares of banks and manufacturers while selling government bonds and their stock-market proxies.

—Akane Otani contributed to this article.

Write to Min Zeng at min.zeng@wsj.com

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Editorial : Ann Ravel's Loud Departure

Feb. 26, 2017 4:47 p.m. ET 60 COMMENTS

Amid the sharp ups and downs of the Trump presidency these days, it is easy to overlook good news, notably the real change inside Washington's vast bureaucracy. The latest example is the loud departure of Ann Ravel from the Federal Election Commission.

An FEC commissioner appointed by President Obama in 2013, Ms. Ravel accomplished little, though not for lack of trying. By statute the FEC is a bipartisan body whose purpose is to enforce campaign-finance law without partisan favor. As a progressive from California, Ms. Ravel tried to implement the Democratic left's agenda of regulating political speech. We hope the Republicans don't duplicate her attempt to ideologize the FEC.

Ms. Ravel tried to force the disclosure of all political contributions, the better to turn conservative donors into public political targets. Her other obsession was redefining contact between conservative individuals and conservative candidates as criminal "coordination." Neither the Constitution nor campaign-finance statutes admit that definition.

When her Republican colleagues refused to support the weaponizing of campaign-finance law, Ms. Ravel turned fire on the FEC itself, railing that the agency is "worse than dysfunctional." Her parting memo, 25 pages on "deadlock" and "crisis" at the agency, plus a lecturing public letter of resignation to President Trump, reflected her FEC record: one long harangue. Ms. Ravel's term was ending in two

months, so the “resignation” letter was more theatrics.

The Republican FEC commissioners deserve credit for standing against this. The question now is whether President Trump and the GOP will resist the temptation to use the FEC as a partisan weapon of their own.

Ms. Ravel’s complaint about gridlock ignores that Congress created the FEC with three Republican and three Democratic commissioners—and prohibited them from taking actions unless four Commissioners agreed. This is a check against one party using the body as a club against opponents.

By tradition, Senate Democrats would pick Ms. Ravel’s replacement, but some Republicans are encouraging the unconventional Mr. Trump to throw that over and appoint his own nominee. That would be a dangerous precedent. Even if a principled conservative supermajority might be trusted to refrain from abusing its powers against left-wing speech, Democrats will never display such self-control when they regain the White House and hold the appointment authority.

Republicans have strong complaints about campaign-finance laws. The more durable solution is to use their new bully pulpit and control of government to make the case for changing the McCain-Feingold law and other restrictions on political speech. Using an FEC supermajority to unilaterally rewrite those laws is not a real fix and mimics the Obama pattern by executive fiat. Mr. Trump can push Democrats to name an appointee who respects the First Amendment. That alone would be an upgrade.

The New York Times

Editorial : Kansas’ Trickle-Down Flood of Red Ink

The Editorial Board

Gov. Sam Brownback, of Kansas, delivering the State of the State address in January. Bo Rader/Wichita Eagle, via Getty Images

It was five years ago that Gov. Sam Brownback proudly engineered the biggest tax cuts in the history of Kansas. He put all his political chips on the trickle-down fantasy that personal and corporate tax cuts for rich business owners would produce higher state revenues.

In the process, he made his state an experimental showcase for the driving philosophy of supply-side theorists like Paul Ryan, the House speaker, who served as a staff acolyte when Mr. Brownback was in the Senate. “See, we’ve got a different way and it works,” Mr. Brownback promised.

Er, not really. The multibillion-dollar cuts have not moved employers to invest and hire more; the state budget is now flooded with red ink. Kansans have become alarmed at years of deep deficits, shrinking state support for education, two downgrades in the state’s credit rating and enough regret among legislators to prompt an extraordinary uprising last week by Statehouse Republicans.

Braced by a dozen newly elected moderates, the Republican Legislature dared to try to reverse the governor’s course, by approving a $1 billion tax increase over two years. An aim was to kill the Brownback exemption that allowed more than 330,000 business owners to pay no state taxes at all on their income.

Far from chastened, the governor was offended that his party would drop his grand experiment, even as the experiment did serious harm. He vetoed the tax increase; the Legislature tried to override his veto. Mr. Brownback lost in the House, shocking his loyalists, and he barely prevailed in the Senate, which fell three votes short of overriding the veto.

The result was less a victory for Mr. Brownback than a rebuke to his leadership, in particular his near-suicidal clinging to his trickle-down obsession when he should be engineering a compromise with the Legislature. Kansas faces a $1.2 billion budget gap across the next two years that must be dealt with. There is talk of further cuts in education, which would deepen the crisis in poorer districts that have already suffered reductions in staff and school days.

Mr. Brownback’s veto may pass as creative politics in Tea Party circles, but the governor can claim only one achievement — one he surely did not wish for. His real-life test of the economic theories so warmly embraced by the likes of Mr. Ryan has provided indisputable proof that no miraculous free lunch will result from his party’s tax-cut delusions.

The fiction remains alluring as a campaign con, and it will undoubtedly be invoked as the Republican Congress and the Trump administration embroider the next federal budget with grand tax-cut schemes. But if they dare to look, there slumps Kansas, a supply-side casualty, bleeding red ink.

The New York Times

Editorial : Mental Illness, Untreated Behind Bars

The Editorial Board

From left, Sheriff Richard Stanek, of Hennepin County, Minn., Sheriff Danny Glick, of Laramie County, Wyo., and Sheriff John Layton, of Marion County, Ind., at a meeting with President Trump at the White House. Pool photo by Andrew Harrer

President Trump has talked quite a bit about cracking down on a nonexistent crime wave. Rarely does he talk about the different kinds of support law enforcement needs or what actually keeps communities safe.

So it might have come as a surprise to him when a member of the National Sheriffs’ Association at a White House meeting earlier this month brought up an urgent problem sheriffs’ offices all face — the mental health crisis that has filled jails to bursting with mentally ill people who would be more effectively dealt with through treatment.

Mr. Trump acknowledged that “prison should not be a substitute for treatment” and said his administration would try to address this challenge. A good start would be to extend the public health system into jails and prisons, which take in the poorest and most illness-prone people in society.

Mental health problems are rampant in local jails, often because the illness was a primary factor in the offensive conduct. The cost of caring for and supervising mentally ill inmates makes them two to three times more expensive to house. Once released, they often stop taking their medications, which lands them in trouble with the law and back behind bars.

Sheriff John Layton of Marion County, Ind., who raised this problem at the White House meeting, noted that often mentally ill people are jailed, not because they pose a threat to public safety, but because their behaviors are annoying to officers and the public. Of the 2,300 inmates in his county, an estimated 40 percent suffer from mental illness. The jail distributes 700 prescriptions a day and spends nearly $8 million a year on care for the mentally ill.

County governments all across the country are struggling to break this cycle. Nationally, more than 325 counties have signed on to the Stepping Up initiative — sponsored by the Council of State Governments Justice Center, the National Association of Counties and the American Psychiatric Association Foundation — which helps local agencies develop methods for diverting mentally ill people who present no public safety risk into treatment.

Last year, Congress passed the Comprehensive Justice and Mental Health Act, which reauthorizes millions of dollars for state and local efforts to reduce the number of imprisoned mentally ill people. It also passed the Mental Health and Safe Communities Act, which supports training that will prepare police officers to recognize signs of untreated mental illness and expands treatment for those returning to society from prison and jail. Congress must now fully fund these programs.

Some states are working to break the recidivism cycle by making sure that inmates are signed up for Medicaid when they are released, so that they can have access to proper medication and care. While that’s important, it’s even more critical that the federal government do away with rules that prevent inmates from receiving Medicaid assistance.

The rules, based on the punitive idea that people who break the law do not deserve public help, essentially cut inmates off from the public health system while forcing cash-strapped corrections systems to pick up the cost of psychiatric care. Denying inmates that care is both inhumane and more costly to taxpayers in the long run.

Editorial : Missing: Donald Trump's Trillion-Dollar Infrastructure Plan

The Editorial Board

Justin Renteria

Which of Donald Trump's many campaign promises would bring real benefits to the economy? Which would almost certainly win support even among people who voted against him? And which seems to have disappeared completely from the White House radar?

The answer to all three questions is Mr. Trump's pledge to put his self-described talents as a builder to work by spending $1 trillion on restoring the country's crumbling bridges, potholed roads, rust-bucket trains and shabby-not-chic airports. More than a month into his presidency, no such plan has emerged, and there are no signs that one is coming anytime soon.

Part of this could be attributed to the less-than-blinding speed with which Mr. Trump has assembled his administration. But evidence suggests that the plan is on hold for the foreseeable future; Republican sources told the news organization Axios last week that the White House wouldn't unveil an infrastructure proposal until 2018. Congress, meanwhile, seems fixated on other issues — rolling back Obamacare, cutting taxes — while its leaders, the House speaker, Paul Ryan, and Mitch McConnell, the Senate majority leader — seem decidedly unenthusiastic about the idea of a huge infrastructure spending proposal. "I hope we avoid a trillion-dollar stimulus," Mr. McConnell said in December.

It was never quite clear what Mr. Trump even meant by a $1 trillion plan. During the campaign he seemed to suggest that the government would spend that much money on fixing roads, railroads and the like. But two important supporters — Wilbur Ross, soon to be secretary of commerce, and Peter Navarro, an economics professor who now heads a trade council for the president — published a white paper in October proposing tax credits to private developers, a plan more likely to provide a windfall for projects that would be built anyway. The credits wouldn't spur needed investment in water systems, mass transit and other infrastructure that are public utilities, not vehicles for private profit.

A big infrastructure package involving direct government spending would, politically and economically, be a slam-dunk compared with other misguided investments and policies, like building a border wall or cutting taxes for the wealthy. Experts say that the United States needs a huge increase in spending on public works after years of neglect and to prepare for the increased threat from climate change. The American Society of Civil Engineers gives the country's infrastructure a grade of D+ and says that $3.6 trillion in spending is required by 2020.

Mr. Trump would also bolster his popularity, something he clearly craves (55 percent of voters disapprove of his job performance, according to a Quinnipiac University poll released last week). Three-quarters of people surveyed by Gallup last year said that they wanted the federal government to increase infrastructure spending. And there would be little political opposition because many Democrats, including liberal stalwarts like Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, are practically begging the president to work with them on this issue. Last month, Democratic senators introduced a detailed $1 trillion plan.

Though the circumstances are not the same, Mr. Trump's indolence and Congress's palpable lack of initiative sit in sharp contrast to the speed with which President Obama and congressional Democrats were able to engineer a nearly $1 trillion economic stimulus bill in 2009, a task completed in less than six weeks. At the current pace, Mr. Trump's American greatness project may never get off the ground, remaining no more than a slogan on red hats, a testament to the emptiness of his populist promises to help the forgotten workers.